

Shakespeare in Performance

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Edited by

Eric C. Brown and Estelle Rivier

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

ERIC C. BROWN AND ESTELLE RIVIER

The study of Shakespeare's plays in performance has developed considerably over the last decades. Increasing attention has been paid to previously underexamined forms, including Michael Dobson's judicious look at amateur productions in *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance* (work Dobson draws on for his essay in the present collection) and Ayanna Thompson's study of the proliferation of on-line dramatizations in *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*.¹ With the daily multiplication of productions across the world, the partnering of schools and universities with professional and amateur companies, the steady popularity of television and film adaptations, and the global audiences for local productions fostered by social media, Shakespeare's plays have never felt less confined to the page. In the classroom, especially, approaches to Shakespeare have more and more been informed by the theorizing of performance; as James N. Loehlin puts it, performance pedagogy is experiencing a "revitalized presence in the Shakespeare classroom," enriched by "changing institutional, ideological, and methodological environments."² The Folger Shakespeare Library series *Shakespeare Set Free* is but one source for instructors seeking lesson plans directed fully at performance. Works such as Abigail Rokison's *Shakespearean Verse Speaking* offer much needed tools to apprehend the play as a performative entity, and the run of Shakespeare films in the past twenty years has also made a tremendous impact on classroom approaches.³ Students, moreover, can get involved in college weblogs or

¹ Dobson, *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) and Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

² Loehlin, "Teaching through Performance," in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 627-43, 632.

³ Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking: Text and Theatre Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009). On the use of films, see for instance Edward L. Rocklin,

view extracts of plays or take part in virtual and elaborate discussions with artists from all over the world.⁴ Digital databases such as the University of Victoria's "Shakespeare in Performance" site provide a repository for such artifacts as "director's notes, images of stage and costume design, performance stills, posters, information about a particular company or festival and the actors involved in Shakespeare performance, [and] cast and crew listings."⁵ Even greater in scope is the British Universities Film and Video Council's "International Database of Shakespeare on Film, Television, and Radio," with over seven-thousand records dating back well over a century.⁶ There is clearly no shortage of material; the real problem is keeping up with it.

The fourteen essays included in this collection offer a range of contributions to the topic of Shakespeare and performance. From traditional studies of theatrical history and adaptation to explorations of Shakespeare's plays in the circus, musical extravaganzas, the cinema, and drama at large, the collection embraces a number of performance spaces, times, and media. Indeed, *Shakespeare in Performance* includes essays looking not only at sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stagings of the plays in England, but at productions of Shakespeare across time in the United States, France, Italy, Hungary, and Africa. In its approach to the prolific but sometimes peripheral union of Shakespeare and performance, this collection builds on a number of previous studies.⁷ In particular, we

Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2005).

⁴ Student-created sites such as "Shakespeare through Technology," which offers links and suggestions for the integration of technology into the teaching of Shakespeare, are almost infinite in their variety. See

<http://shakespearethroughtechnology.wikispaces.com/>.

⁵ <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Theater/sip/index.html>.

⁶ <http://www.shakespeareinperformance.co.uk/first.html>

⁷ Among the more recent are *The Death of the Actor: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* by Martin Buzacott (Routledge, 2013); Bridget Escolme's *Shakespeare and the Making of Theatre* (Palgrave, 2012); *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Hodgdon and Worthen; *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* by Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster (Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Shakespeare, Language and the Stage*, ed. Lynette Hunter, Peter Lichtenfels (Arden Shakespeare, 2005); *Talking to the Audience/Shakespeare, Performance, Self*, by Bridget Escolme (Routledge, 2005); *Looking at Shakespeare, A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, by Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge University Press, 2001); and *Shakespeare and Modern Theatre: The Performance of Modernity*, ed. Michael

share with such works as Sonia Massai's *World-Wide Shakespeares* an interest in giving the floor to the multiple embodiments and voices of Shakespeare's art and including a wide range of cultural approaches from all kinds of national origins.⁸ Drawn from two international symposiums that took place at the University of Maine, Le Mans (France) in November, 2011, and the University of Maine at Farmington (USA) in May, 2012, the following essays all take on performative contexts, whether panoramic and historical, filmic or operatic, professional or amateur.

The present work is thus occupied with a number of questions generated by the continual iterations of Shakespeare. How can we write and trace what is ephemeral? To what purpose do we maintain the memory of past performances? How does the transmediation of Shakespeare inform the most basic interpretive acts? What motivates Shakespearean theatre across political borders? What kinds of meaning are produced by décor, movement, the actor's virtuosity, the producer's choices, or the audience's response? The various approaches—condensed below—all aim at conveying the memory of major *Shakespeares* in performance that their authors have either witnessed or read about. Each essay thus to some degree describes and voices the now unseen.

In the first section, "Historicizing Shakespearean Performance," Daniel Salerno centers his study on *Measure for Measure*. He explores the way in which ascetic vows were considered before and after the Reformation and considers Isabella's faithful and unconditional renunciation of a profane existence, focusing especially on the dramatization of her silence at play's end. Salerno states that "Isabella's social and sexual subjugation to the Duke in marriage harmonizes with the bringing to heel of the play's other

Bristol and Kathleen McLuskie (Routledge, 2001). The literature extends back well before this, of course, from John Russell Brown's *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966) to William B. Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸ Massai argues convincingly that "The inclusion of appropriations from familiar localities within the field, such as England and the United States, alongside appropriations from areas which have traditionally been understood as 'liminal', 'peripheral' and, most crucially, 'post-colonial', shows that instability, dissonance and oppositional negotiations over Shakespeare's work are a common phenomenon throughout the field and not only at its margins" (p. 9). See *Worldwide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, ed. Sonia Massai (Routledge, 2006).

outlying elements with the symmetrical construct of state sanctioned marriage, a conclusion reinforced by the generic constraints of comedy.” It is a provocative reading of the ways in which choices of performance—Isabella’s mutable expressions of shock, terror or puzzlement, say—are bound up with the play of history.

Misty Krueger takes up Restoration adaptations of *The Tempest* by William Davenant, John Dryden, and Thomas Duffett. These plays changed Shakespeare’s original play considerably, and as Krueger writes, “the ways in which Restoration playwrights’ appropriations of Shakespearean drama develop caricatures of sex and gender that both exploit late 17th-century conceptions of the body and stage perversions of femininity and masculinity” are essential to understand the purpose of rewriting, even parodying, a Renaissance play only sixty years after its creation. In her thorough study, Krueger traces the implications of such rewritings, explaining for instance that Duffett’s farce staged “a hyperbolic mockery of sexuality that virtually leaves Shakespeare’s play in the dark,” even though, just like Davenant’s and Dryden’s own play, his work “engender[ed] playfulness and mockery as the playwrights [rewrote] the Jacobean romance and pok[ed] fun at Restoration stage practices, women’s bodies, and father-daughter relationships.”

A specialist on the works of Edward Gordon Craig, Patrick Le Boeuf looks closely at Craig’s never-to-be-true project of a production of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Ironically, “Craig wished to stage a play he disliked, in which he just saw the matter for an essentially dream-like and metaphysical spectacle.” The article gives ample details about the way the play—and more precisely the very first scene (as Craig did not write any comment upon the last three acts)—should have been performed (the rhythm of the lines, the music, the dances that should be added, the scenography, etc.) and is supported by sketches Craig had drawn. “In Craig’s view, staging *The Tempest* amounts to conferring visibility to the beauties that await us after death,” Patrick Le Boeuf writes, and bearing in mind the innovative ideas the artist had in mind, it is not surprising to read that major twentieth-century stage and film directors such as Peter Brook, Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway were highly influenced by Craig’s visionary concepts. The article draws a number of fascinating parallels between Craig’s idealized project and some aspects of these higher-profile contemporary versions.

The following section, “Alternative Spaces,” begins with Diana Henderson’s study of Shakespearean musical comedy, putting into

perspective the implications of productions she attended in Boston: Sulayman Al-Bassam's *The Speaker's Progress*, the Actors' Shakespeare Project's more traditional version of *Twelfth Night*, and *The Big Life: The Ska Musical*, script-written by Paul Sirett. The recent tendency towards "radical presentism" and "textual revisionism," which the first two projects mentioned are representative of, raises several questions, one of which being "might we usefully attend to such relationships to temporality or immediacy as a second [...] variable when analyzing the subgenres of Shakespeare's comedies in performance, either discrete from or in relationship to the use of the early modern script?" "The essay also questions the marginalization and racial complications of such comic productions as *The Big Life*, which "defies the UK versus US mode of critique common in discussing Shakespearean musicals." It also "illustrates the generic adaptability of Shakespeare's comedies" not only in the West-End but also abroad and with unexpected casts.

Valerie Clayman Pye proposes a "practical" (and practicable) reading of Shakespearean drama. She demonstrates how the application of heightened somatic awareness can help to make textual sense of Shakespeare's verse and "urge[s] the reader to engage practically with [*Othello* and *Twelfth Night*, the two Shakespearean plays upon which her paper focuses] and follow along with [her] suggestions; speak them aloud to forge a personal connection" and deepen a thorough understanding of the written text. She provides ample evidence on how we can use and serve Shakespeare's text the best way through an oral relationship with it. Anatomizing two particular extracts of the plays mentioned above, she aims at highlighting the discrepancies and connections between the typographic "character" and fully actualized "*Character*." Pointing out the rhythmic variations of the blank verse and the alliterations/assonances that help underscore the character's intentions better, she claims that "the voice responds to subtleties and stimulus in ways that marks on the page cannot" because there, each syllable receives the same diacritical mark being either the sweeping [˘] or the stress [ˈ]. Giving clues to the would-be actor and reader of Shakespeare, this essay innovatively invites a combination of reading and action.

In the association between circus and theatre, Doyle Ott observes that "the blending [...] has not always been entirely successful." In his essay, he offers a comprehensive analysis of the apparently unnatural relationship between Shakespeare's verse and a pure physical mode of expression. *Hippodrama*, as the author states, was a kind of primitive form of circus: "[w]hat we now call circus [...] is generally considered to have been

created by Philip Astley in 1768 in Britain as a primarily equestrian form of entertainment.” In the nineteenth century, some clowns such as Dan Rice, Joe Pentland and Pete Conklin became popular with Shakespearean scripts. But during the first part of the twentieth century, the combination of circus and Shakespeare’s plays became scarcer. Ott argues that the interest in this combination only re-emerged in the later twentieth century with “experimental performances that sought to rediscover a theatricality that could reinvigorate a theatre that had become overshadowed by film and television,” and with “the development of the ‘new’ circus and propagation of circus techniques.” If circus provides “popular appeal” and “accessibility to the Shakespearean production,” then “Shakespeare’s name, on the other hand, dispels many of the negative low-culture connotations sometimes associated with circus.” Ott finally concludes that “Shakespeare’s verse is strong enough [...] to support the use of circus, itself a sort of kinesthetic equivalent of poetry,” and that the future should enhance daring productions including both arts and performance.

Concluding the section, Michael Dobson begins with the premise that Shakespeare’s comedies are “particularly invested in discovering and celebrating forms of civic harmony.” He then traces the lively history of the ways in which these plays have proved fundamental in the redevelopment of the voluntary sector. He argues in particular that the civic amateur dramatic societies and outdoor troupes established in Britain in the early twentieth century represented conscious attempts to extend the social relations depicted in such plays as *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into actual community life. Contra the widespread charges against the theater of promoting and, even more directly, modeling vice and scurrility, Dobson points out that the “contagion of the stage” could enact desire in ways conducive to civic virtue. Dobson settles on two examples, beginning with the Private Theatre of Kilkenny, which flourished in the early nineteenth century, before moving to the Stockport Garrick Society, which began in the early twentieth century and continues today. In Kilkenny, Dobson draws out the sometimes uneasy tensions between the sumptuousness of the Theatrical Society’s aristocratic productions and their ostensible mission to alleviate the suffering of the poor. In contrast, the Garrick Society was founded on the idea of a non-commercial municipal theatre and driven, according to Dobson, by “the restoration of the organic society, the return to an imagined collective artisan life of unalienated labor.” The Society not only put on but lived out the plays, a steady current of lectures and themed parties, organized retreats and pastoral picnics, that seemed to underscore

at every turn the ways in which Shakespearean drama could contribute to an engaged and improved social reality.

In the third section, “Shakespearean Cinema,” Eric Brown reads William Wellman’s Western *Yellow Sky* (1948) as an adaptation of *The Tempest*. The insertion of Shakespearean characters or cues in Westerns has an illustrious history—Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech is featured in John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine*, for example—but *Yellow Sky* draws uniquely on Shakespearean Romance as a dramatic backcloth. Brown illuminates numerous parallels between the play and the film in order to show how Western topoi invite us to go back to the Shakespearean text: for instance, the “salt flats down south” referred to in the movie (mostly set in Death Valley) recall the “thousand furlongs of sea” we find in the play (I.i.65). Other evidence showing the twinning between film and play is detailed through characters such as Constance Mae (Anne Baxter) who appears as a composite of three major roles in *The Tempest*: Miranda, Ariel and Sycorax. Brown attends not only to the details of the film but to the codes of the genre (drunkenness and duels, honeymoons and serenity), and invites the reader to (re)assess popular appropriations of Shakespeare in the Western.

Misty Beck explores the resonance of the pastoral form in Kenneth Branagh’s 2006 film version of *As You Like It*, where the use of a “curious camera” enables the director to highlight the green world’s containment in the play. Beck questions the postmodernist interest in underlining this “Cassandra” among genres: does the pastoral concern our urban society? “If Edzard can construct a pastoral setting in the wastes of a London slum, does nature or bucolia have anything to do with renovating the spirit or world today?” she asks. Using his “curious camera,” Branagh, whose adaptation is set in Japan with a British touch, suggests how questions about contemporary pastoral, i.e. its location and its language, might be addressed in the medium of film. With point-of-view shots, high angles and crane shots, spirals, bounces and swoons, his energetic camera performs an essential pastoral function: to show oppositions and invite the viewer’s participation and critical judgment. This study scrutinizes the various scenes where the green world’s attributes are involved in the action and the way in which they impact on the protagonists’ dialogues. According to Beck, Branagh’s curious camera “demonstrat[es] a joy in movement as well as curiosity about the movements of others,” and successfully manages to “show the power of the green world, not only to rejuvenate and reconcile the lovers and other exiles, but also to add its magic to the old pastoral forms.”

Douglas Lanier's essay on the implications of *Othello* in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* gracefully outlines the ways Shakespeare's tale reverberates in the French cinema of the forties. The "resonance, parallels, echoes and analogues of *Othello* suffuse *Les Enfants du paradis*, far beyond the few scenes in which the play is specifically referenced," Lanier writes. Accounting for the various scenes where *Othello* is either alluded to or staged, he shows how, for instance, jealousy is progressively instilled in the character of Frédérick (Pierre Brasseur), and how the performance of the Moor eventually purges him from this defect. But if Shakespeare's narrative seems dispersed in the scenario, it is because it is more a "product" than a "source" of Carné's film. Although Shakespeare's play is deeply present in *Les Enfants du paradis*, the art of pantomime nostalgically celebrated by Carné through Baptiste's bright performance of Pierrot, i.e. "l'homme blanc," prevails over the art of the legitimate theatre, emblematically referenced as "l'homme noir" (the black man/Othello).

The last section, "Shakespeare without Borders," begins with Benaouda Lebdaï's panoramic approach to Shakespeare in Africa. The essay measures the influence—mainly political—that Shakespeare's tragedies have had on the evolution of contemporary African society. Shakespeare has been vividly illustrated on this continent over the past decades, often serving as a tool for people to claim their rights or, on the contrary, for dictators to justify their views. "When asked why [African authors] chose and concentrated on Shakespeare's plays," Lebdaï writes, "the translators' arguments were telling as they did insist on their need to show that African languages possessed a rich and colorful vocabulary capable of expressing Shakespeare's subtleties and literary complexities, which African audiences understood and appreciated." Major works such as *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *The Tempest* (seen and served as a rather "tragic" form) have been performed in Kiswahili, Juba, Arabic, Kikuyu and Somali (East and North Africa), in Krio, Wolof, Bambara, Yoruba, French or Pidgin English (West Africa), in Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa and Ndebele (South Africa). *King Lear* was a favorite play for instance as it is an open criticism of corrupt political systems. "When King Lear breaks down under the storm," Lebdaï notes, "it implies that the old feudal order and the old conception of nature can collapse thanks to the new bourgeois conception of [them]." The essay concludes on the assertion that African people appropriated Shakespeare's repertoire so as to prove their "humanity" and demonstrate their own "universality."

The next trip abroad is offered by Martin Andrucki, whose work entitled "Theater and National Identity: Shakespeare in Hungary, 1790-

1990” comments upon the various causes that have preserved the Hungarian identity, among which we find Shakespeare’s drama. In the 1950s, his plays in performance became for many Hungarians “important expressions of moral independence in the face of Soviet-inspired autocracy.” It is not surprising if Shakespeare is deeply present in Hungary “at exactly the time when Hungarians were working energetically to preserve their language and their identity,” writes Andrucki. When a national theatre could produce Shakespeare in the national language, it became indeed a symbol of national legitimacy. Before the 1950s, in 1947 —precisely when the Communists began taking power— the reception of Elizabethan plays was politically biased: *Richard III* for instance “was praised . . . for depicting the triumph of socialism over the Fascist rule.” Eight years later, the play was viewed differently for “Richard III had morphed from Hitler to Stalin”! Thus, Shakespeare was revealed as a weapon that could be used against those currently in power. Andrucki goes on detailing various productions of this play to exemplify the mirror-effect that such a play produced. Many artists of the time saw in *Hamlet*’s Claudius “a figure not unlike János Kádár who had betrayed to the Russians his close friend and mentor, Imre Nagy, one of the leaders of the revolution.” Likewise, problem plays were frequently staged to criticize the Kádár regime, though implicitly. After the communist regime, more entertaining plays found their way onto the Hungarian stage. But they were also meant to question the political power: *The Tempest* directed by Alföldi in 1999 raised the following question: “where was the social and economic redemption that was supposed to follow the overthrow of Communism and the installation of a new system of government?” Over the past decades, it seems that Shakespearean productions have nonetheless shifted in Hungary, which leads Andrucki to conclude: “[In] the absence of the Hapsburgs or the Communists, Shakespeare and the theater aren’t what they used to be: the cultural weapons of choice.”

Estelle Rivier’s critical analysis of *Macbeth* proposes a re-composition of the work in process of a French production directed by Pascale Nandillon. With the help of technical devices such as cinematographic encoding, micro casts, interchangeable costumes and use of masks, superimposition of images and historical short-cuts, the myth of *Macbeth* is retold. Three major aesthetical and performing aspects are taken into account in this study: first, the text conceived as a musical partition and an echo of primitive texts; second, the scenic space, said to be “paranoiac” as it carries out the images of the past, i.e. the memory of former *Macbeths* (Carmelo Bene, Kurosawa, Orson Welles) together with Francis Bacon’s paintings, images of Haitian carnival and African rituals; finally the choral

effect since the play's cast includes only five actors. "Is *Macbeth* appropriate to highlight the sterility of current politics and its inevitable failure when the body of the State is infected?" asks Rivier, who shows how deeply theatrical practice and textual analysis mutually inform each other.

Finally, Mariangela Tempera traces the uneasy link between stage and screen in studying Giorgio Strehler's *Tempesta* in both arts. The production by the famous Italian director had a resounding success while resorting to daring technical tricks that Maurizio Nichetti later highlighted in his comic screen version. "By suggesting that Nichetti should dwell on the technical aspects of *La tempesta*," writes Tempera, "Strehler allowed the film spectators to share the professionals' knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes, thus making them, for once, more aware of the artifice of spectacle than a theatre audience." Her essay offers a thorough account of the various metatheatrical steps that carried these performances of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

PART I:
HISTORICIZING SHAKESPEAREAN
PERFORMANCE

CHAPTER ONE

ISABELLA'S SILENCE: STAGING ASCETICISM IN *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

DANIEL SALERNO

Measure for Measure ends with one of Shakespeare's most notorious performative challenges. The final scene presents to the audience a strange mutation of the comedic happy ending required by formula; four soon to be married couples occupy the stage, yet only one, Juliet and Claudio, is the product of mutual desire. Two others—the forced marriages of Lucio to Kate Keep-down and Angelo to Mariana—function as what one critic calls “punishments woven into the penitential investigations of the play,” the logical outcome of a plot that began with the Duke's program of general moral correction.¹ And while these two unions do not satisfy generic expectations for connubial bliss, they may at least be offered up to the audience as acts of justice, comeuppance, though strangely guised, for the bawdy slanderer and the cruel hypocrite. The exact nature of the fourth couple, however, remains opaque. When the Duke proposes to Isabella, a novice nun who has expressed no desire to renounce the ascetic life and, in fact, who has struggled fiercely through the play to preserve her virginity, the strangeness of the moment is only heightened by her response: a silence that, as Sarah Beckwith writes, many modern actors render as “shock or horror.”² One of the more famous examples of such an interpretation came in a Jonathan Miller directed production in the early 1970s in which Isabella, thoroughly disgusted, wretched off stage.³ Almost as striking was a 1994 RSC production that saw Isabella, played by Stella

¹ Sarah Beckwith. *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 57.

² *Ibid.*

³ Grace Ioppolo. Introduction to *Measure for Measure: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 2010), xviii.

Gonet, meet the Duke's proposal with a smack to the face (a thoroughly anachronistic bit of insubordination that nevertheless succeeded in establishing an equivalency between the Duke's proposition and Angelo's).⁴ There is, of course, room for other interpretations, Barbara Baines reminds us that many productions opt for Isabella's "happy compliance" with the Duke's proposal. Of these we could point to countless examples, perhaps none so well documented as a 1983 RSC production starring Daniel Massey as the Duke and Juliet Stevenson as Isabella. This production not only featured a "little miracle of acceptance" by Stevenson, but prepared the audience for the moment by working in numerous flirtatious and potentially romantic non-verbal exchanges between the Duke and Isabella throughout.⁵ Ultimately, the interpretive variety we see in such stagings reinforces Philip McGuire's observation that Isabella's silence offers directors and actors a stark choice between "'mute, accepting wonder," and "a resistance that wordlessly but effectively drives home" the Duke's wholly unerotic autocracy.⁶

The ambiguity is a challenge for scholars as well as actors. Many critics, including Charles Lyons and Amy Lechter-Siegel, have understood Isabella's silence as a necessary part of the play's reestablishment of patriarchal order with the Duke's return: in other words, a necessary prerequisite of a Jacobean happy ending.⁷ Barbara Baines, meanwhile, sees in Isabella's silence a resistance analogous to Iago's in the final scene of *Othello*; Isabella, Baines writes, "is not silenced but, instead, chooses silence as a form of resistance to the patriarchal authority."⁸ Such a perspective itself rebuts another strain of criticism which sees Isabella in

⁴ Pascale Aebischer, "Silence, Rape, and Politics in *Measure for Measure*: Close Readings in Theater History," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26.4 (Winter 2008): 19.

⁵ See Daniel Massey, "The Duke in *Measure for Measure*," *Players of Shakespeare 2: Further Essays in Shakespearean Performance with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13-32.

⁶ Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 69.

⁷ See Charles Lyons, "Silent Women and Shrews: *Epicoene* and *Measure for Measure*," *Comparative Drama* 23.2 (Summer 1989): 123-40, and Amy Lechter-Siegel, "Isabella's Silence: The Consolidation of Power in *Measure for Measure*," in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, edited by Mario A. Di Cesare, (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 371-380.

⁸ Barbara Baines, "Assaying the Power of Chastity in *Measure for Measure*," *Studies in English Literature* 30.2 (1990): 288.

the plays final moments as a subdued female victim, finally ground down to inarticulate silence by the forces of patriarchal domination.⁹

But any understanding of Isabella's silence which views her potential marriage as uniquely significant to the play's conclusion is incomplete, for the Duke's proposal is merely one part of an array of normalizing moves that make up the play's traditional comic conclusion. Isabella's engagement to the Duke can be understood as carrying a social purpose analogous to the play's other three marriages, as each, after a fashion, allows sexually dissident characters to reenter the world of lawful social interrelation through marriage. The lecherous Lucio, Kate the whore, Claudio and Juliet the scofflaws, Angelo the rapist, and Mariana the despairing maid each leave behind a previously worn mantle of abnormal or unlawful sexuality to take a place in the symmetrical construct of state sanctioned marriage. Isabella, I assert, is yet another sexual rebel whose instincts must be tamed by matrimony, for as surely as Lucio's philandering subverts social propriety, so too does the votaress's celibacy function as a threat to patriarchal authority. Such an assertion perhaps seems strange given the familiar Renaissance reverence for female chastity; as one critic argues, Isabella's values are "representative, not eccentric," and reinforce the fetishization of chastity both in the play's Vienna and Jacobean England.¹⁰ But such a claim ignores the fact that, unlike Catholic celibacy, Protestant chastity is meant to function as a prerequisite, rather than a substitution, for marriage. On stage, Isabella's habit marks her for Shakespeare's audience as a character to be reformed rather than revered, and this interpretation is consistent with the general place of nuns in literary and popular consciousness of seventeenth-century England.

The nun, of course, has a long and varied history as a literary and dramatic figure. To some extent, the way the nun has been depicted in literature has reflected the larger religious and social context of its production. That is to say, depictions of the nun in the Middle Ages tend to be, if not always completely humorless, at least serious about the office and its attendant vows. Depictions from England during and after the reformation are, as we might expect, more scurrilous and more irreverent, and, perhaps just as important, more imaginative: after the 1530s, the

⁹ See Marcia Riefer, "'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member': The Constriction of Female Power in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984):157-169.

¹⁰ Baines, 284

nun's absence from the religious landscape of England freed (or forced) writers to exercise more creativity in their descriptions, as the real nun was replaced by a wholly imaginative figure with only a tenuous connection to reality.

Such broad generalizations about the shifting attitude toward nuns in the post-reformation world are not the least bit surprising. Indeed, they match our expectations. But it is important to understand and acknowledge that these *are* generalizations. Indeed, despite the orthodoxy of conventual and monastic vows in the Middle Ages, writers seem to have been just as conscious of the practical difficulties and problematic nature of ascetic vows as we are in the secular present. Put briefly, depictions of nuns or female ascetics in pre-Reformation literature do *not* universally treat the nun as an unquestioned object of reverence, nor do they all look upon the taking of religious vows or the renunciation of the world as a positive. While the religious status of the nun was never seriously questioned in medieval poetry and song, the nun figure is more complex. In one strain of the popular tradition, for instance, nuns are often depicted as tormented by a desire for love and sexual fulfillment:

Plangit nonna fletibus
 Inenarrabilibus,
 Condolens gemitibus
 Dicens consocialibus
 Heu misella!
 Nihil est deterius
 Tali vita,
 Cum enim sim petulans
 Et lasciva.
 Pernoctando vigilo
 Cum non vellem
 Invenem aplecterer
 Quam libenter!¹¹

(The nun is weeping indescribable tears. She is crying with groans and saying to her sisters: woe is me! "Nothing is worse than such a life, when I am wanton and amorous.")

Poems such as these remind us that the medieval individual did not necessarily treat all acts of religious devotion with uncritical reverence. Countless other poems and songs like it, in which the nun is depicted as

¹¹ Anonymous lyric, found in Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 504-505. Translation mine.

gay, lovelorn, and seemingly bound to her vows more or less against her will, place their sympathies with the realities of human nature, rather than the exalted ideals of Christian asceticism and hagiography. People knew that nuns had sexual feelings and this did not automatically make them evil or targets for moralization. In fact, as the convents and monasteries were predominantly open only to members of the aristocracy or other privileged classes, it should come as no surprise that we see such skepticism in popular song, where, in fact, the cloister is often envisioned “as a prison and a grave.”¹²

“Serious” writers such as Chaucer and Lydgate represent, or at least contain, a more aristocratic, more dogmatic literary strain. Although we may think first of the Wife of Bath’s shrewd comment that not every vessel in a great lord’s house is made of gold (in other words, though virginity is superior to marriage, it is not and can not be expected of all), and her old testament exempla of righteous polygamy, Chaucer maintains a healthy religious appreciation for female (*particularly* female) asceticism. The most famous (and for modern readers, troubling) example of Christian patience and self-denial in the tales is probably Griselda: no nun, certainly, but sufficiently devoted to obedience and patience to evoke conventual discipline. But while *The Clerk’s Tale* provokes at best ambivalent feelings towards self-sacrifice, elsewhere in the *Tales* Chaucer is more direct. *The Second Nun’s Tale*, a story about a female ascetic—St. Cecilia—told by a female ascetic (although one never described in the General Prologue), is one of two hagiographies in the work, and the one that carries the strongest, most uncritical reverence for asceticism. Its prologue begins, as we might expect from a tale told by a nun, with an invocation of the Virgin Mary, who is so pure—the nun calls her “virgin wemmeless” (47), mayden pure” (48), and “flour of holy virgines alle” (29)—that her body itself is a “cloistre” (43).¹³ The nun goes on to excoriate the sin of idleness and praise the doctrine of works (“feith is deed withouten werkis”) by way of entreating Mary to aid her in her tale-telling. The doctrine of works, of course, is the fundamental justification for ascetic practice itself, so in highlighting it, the nun is not simply asking Mary to endorse her industriousness, but paving the theological way, so to

¹² Power, 504. Power quotes the following medieval French lyric: “Mariez-vous, les filles / Avec ces bons drilles, / Et n’allez ja, les filles / Pourrir derrier les grilles.” (“Get married, girls, with good men, and don’t go, girls, to rot behind bars,” translation mine.)

¹³ All excerpts from Chaucer taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

speak, for the proper appreciation of Cecilia's renunciations. As for Cecilia herself, the tale goes on to tell us that she wore a hair shirt, renounced sexuality on the night of her wedding, and faced execution with such stout-hearted patience that she was able to preach for three days with her head half-way cut off (the strokes of the axe are called a "penaunce" by the nun, though one that no man should have to endure). The ending of the tale betrays no skepticism, no ambiguity, no room for potentially subversive or unorthodox readings:

Seynt Urban, with his dekenes privily
 The body took and buried it by nighte
 Among his other seyntes honestly.
 Her hous the chirch of seynt Cecily yet highte;
 Seynt Urban hallowed it, as he wel mighte;
 In which into this day in noble wyse
 Men do to Crist and to his seint servise.
 (*The Second Nun's Tale*, 547-553)

Like *The Parson's Tale*, the *Second Nun's Tale* demonstrates the moral and didactic side of Chaucer. It discomfits critics who would see him as subversive, and it supports the notion that in a work as heterogeneous and generically complex as the *Canterbury Tales*, there need be no mutual exclusivity between healthy (and orthodox) religious skepticism (*The Friar's Tale*, *The Summoner's Tale*) and serious moral instruction.

The sin of idleness and the doctrine of works lead us conveniently to the Renaissance, where, of course, the orthodoxy of the former and the heresy of the latter both were part of the theological justification for rejecting asceticism. Ironically, the second nun's claims of industriousness highlight the very thing that Lutherans and Calvinists found lacking in religious orders. The sloth of nuns and monks was a traditional part of anti-monastic complaint, as were, in something close to a contradiction, their heretical reliance on good works to achieve salvation. In 1519, Luther had written a tract against asceticism in which he compared Monks, with their adherence to a highly ceremonial life, to Jews, and in which he implored nuns and monks to abandon the ascetic life and reenter the world (Luther's own wife was a former nun whom he had convinced to abandon the convent). In Lutheran or Calvinist theology, asceticism is seen as a form of idolatry even more odious and presumptuous than the veneration of icons, relics, and saints that typically bore the brunt of protestant disdain, for the renunciant's self-imposed suffering turns the human body itself into an object of religious wonder. In the Catholic Middle Ages, such self-abnegation was embraced as *imitatio Christi*—

achieving spiritual fulfillment by imitating the sufferings of Christ—and was codified as such in a popular fifteenth-century manual for ascetic living by Thomas a Kempis.¹⁴ In both Calvinist and Lutheran theology, such presumptions about the possibility of attaining Christ-like grace through ascetic works are rejected in favor of an exclusive focus on scripture and on a belief in the uncontestable sufficiency Christ's redemptive sacrifice: i.e., He suffered so that we need not.¹⁵ In a 1523 letter exhorting his sister, a nun in the Katherine Convent of Augsburg, to abandon the monastic life, Lutheran nobleman Bernhart Rem employs this very argument:

I would rather be counted as carnal with the open sinners in the temple than be religious with you and those like you. Nevertheless, I wish you for once the correct knowledge of Jesus Christ, that the spirit that brings life would write in your hearts the overflowing good works of Christ, so that you know why he in human nature was fastened to the cross. When you know that, your little human discoveries and trust in your own works, habits, convent, fasting, and such things will soon fall away. It will be looked upon as very serious, for one does not presume to buy God's grace with spiritual simony. Who has ears to hear, let them hear...Such presumption, that always presumes one is more facile than God and can achieve God's grace through one's own work...but I will say nothing about the convents, where many different types of work—all of it self chosen—are practiced with the fine glitter of holiness. And it is worthless straw, whatever one makes of it.¹⁶

Rem's focus on the presumptuousness and quasi-idolatry of ascetic practice is drawn directly from standard anti-Catholic theological arguments about the inefficacy of works and the Judaizing ritualism of Catholic religious traditions. It is an objection based in scripture—

¹⁴ See Eric Marchand, "Monastic *Imitatio Christi*," *Artibus et Historiae* 24.47 (2003): 31-50.

¹⁵ Of course, the attitudes toward *imitatio Christi* varied among different stripes of Protestant, with later, more conservative (Anglican) Protestants more likely to be optimistic about man's Christ-like potential. This ambivalence is illustrated by the 1580 English edition of Kempis' manual by Thomas Rogers, a Protestant reworking more than a translation, which acknowledges the value in seeing Christ as a model of behavior, but which in two introductory epistles sternly cautions the reader against too rigorous and presumptuous an imitation of Christ's physical suffering.¹⁵ See Elizabeth K. Hudson, "Protestants and the *Imitatio Christi*: 1580-1620," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19.4 (Winter, 1988): 541-58.

¹⁶ Merry Wisner-Hanks (ed.), *Convents Confront the Reformation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1988), 36-37

particularly Ephesians 2:8, 9—and one that follows closely Luther's own writings about monasticism. Calvin is somewhat less radical than Luther in his treatment of monasticism: he allows, for instance, that strict renunciation may be of practical use to those who are "prone to a certain vice," but he insists that such actions are a matter of personal choice and circumstance, not an "invariable law" or even in and of themselves "holy."¹⁷ He offers dire warnings about excessive fasting and self-denial, calling the belief that such activities bring one closer to God "superstition."¹⁸ About institutional monasticism, Calvin is as harsh as Luther, dismissing pretensions towards monastic perfection as "vain arrogance," "intolerable trifling," and "fictitious worship."¹⁹

Beyond the theological issues, the moral reputation of nuns in the popular consciousness declined precipitously in direct proportion to the success of the Reformation. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, printed accounts of nuns tended to focus on their sexual debauchery, usually in consort with priests, monks, or other male renunciant clergy. Such scandalous material relies not on complex theological arguments, but on the ancient conflict between self-denial and self-indulgence. Some Protestant authors clearly took pleasure in deconstructing the nun's ascetic mystique by subjecting her to sexual debasement.

Francis Dolan's examination of such material provides valuable insight into the Elizabethan "horizon of expectations" for how nuns should or might behave. As mentioned above, after the dissolution of the monasteries, the representation of nuns in literature became increasingly fictive and fantastic, as English writers lost any sense of the reality of living, practicing nuns. Nuns, Dolan writes, are often ridiculed or scandalized in seventeenth-century popular depictions, shown succumbing to seductions by priests, engaging in homoerotic dalliances with other nuns, or otherwise being led by "Nature" rather than unnatural vows.²⁰ For instance, in the 1590 pamphlet *A Subtill Practise* (not mentioned specifically by Dolan), a sexually willing and "sweet skind" nun becomes an object of competitive discord between two Friars, eventually resulting in catastrophe.²¹ In an even more brazen work, an expose of a monastery

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 4.13.5-6

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 4.1.11

²⁰ Francis Dolan, "Why Are Nuns Funny?" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.4 (2007): 510-511.

²¹ Anon., *A Subtill Practiss*, Early English Books Online (London: 1590).

for English nuns in Portugal reveals presumably shocking sexual transgressions.²² This trope reached beyond the polemical tract to the stage, as one can see in Ithamore's needling of Abigail in *The Jew of Malta*:

Ithamore: I pray mistress, will you answer me to one question.

Abigail: Well, sirrah, what is't.

Ithamore: A very feeling one. Have not the nuns fine sport with the friars now and then?

(3.3.33-35)

These titillating depictions were reassuring, Dolan argues, for they exposed to ridicule the extremes of Catholic asceticism that Protestants viewed as self-indulgent and slothful.²³ Valerie Traub, meanwhile, argues that the need for such pornographic debasement of nuns had a socio-economic basis: marriage and reproduction was at the center of the Protestant social fabric, and biological propagation went hand in hand with financial enrichment and security.²⁴ Thus, for early moderns, Dolan argues, "[a]s a woman who withholds herself from sexual circulation, the nun reinforces the imperative that women surrender to their own exchange."²⁵

While Dolan does not consider Shakespeare at length, she does briefly give attention to *Twelfth Night*, particularly Valentine's description of the love-stricken Olivia as walking "veiled" like a "cloistress." This figuring of Olivia, along with Viola's insistence that she not leave "her graces to the grave," reflect the Renaissance (and modern) belief that a beautiful nun is a "waste" of a gift bestowed by god. But what about plays that deal specifically with the question of female resistance to sexuality? *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are two plays that prominently feature female ascetics. In both plays, these renunciant figures face challenges to their celibacy, but these challenges do not result in debauchment or scandal of the type found in the polemical tradition examined by Dolan. Rather, both plays present a rather ambivalent picture of life as a votaress. Doubtless, in approaching Isabella in *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, it is important to consider that a Protestant audience, while they would not necessarily have thought of

²² Dolan, 517.

²³ Dolan, 518.

²⁴ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2002), 181.

²⁵ Dolan, 511.