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Depictions of Religious in *Measure for Measure***
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**Shakespeare's Medievalism and the Life Removed:
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Unlike *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, both of which contain important minor characters who wear the religious habit, *Measure for Measure* provides a unique opportunity for students to consider Shakespeare's relationship with monasticism, which, at the start of the seventeenth century, existed both as a fundamental institution within England's medieval past and a touchstone that separated Catholics from Reformers in the present. The depiction of religious clergy in the play, which may be described as anomalous when considered next to the work of contemporaries, poses challenging questions, and, in having undergraduates attempt to account for this difference as well as the Duke's adoption of the habit as a disguise, I invite students to investigate critical topics ranging from the long tradition of antifraternal satire to James I's unique notion of kingship articulated in *Basilikon Doron*. These discussion topics, which focus primarily on the play's relationship to England's medieval religious heritage, complement those on authority and the notion of monarchy which arise in our reading of the history plays. In addition to the broader understanding of contemporary attitudes towards this heritage that students gain in considering the play's treatment of monasticism, raising these issues encourages students further to challenge the still pervasive tendency to separate Shakespeare from his medieval cultural heritage.

When *Measure for Measure* was performed for James I at Whitehall on 26 December 1604 as part of the holiday festivities,¹ few in the audience, let alone the realm, would have been able to recall seeing regular clergy firsthand during the last years of Mary's reign.² However, despite their absence from everyday life, religious—the monks, nuns and friars who took vows of a particular religious order—lived on not only in the popular imagination but also on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Much attention has recently been paid to investigating traces of medieval culture in Shakespeare's drama. Two recent collections of essays, both entitled *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*,³ as well as a collection of articles that examines Shakespeare's own relationship to Catholicism, *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, add to current scholarship by Helen Cooper, David Cressy, Stephen Greenblatt, Peter Marshall, and Michael Neill, all of which, in part, draws our attention to the persistence and adaptation of artistic forms and religious practices that predate the Reformation.⁴ Yet while attempts to situate Shakespeare's work more accurately within his own cultural moment, as well as discussions of his own medievalism or reimagining of England's medieval past, are becoming more numerous, a surprisingly small amount of scholarship has examined his

¹ The earliest reference to the play is found in the Revels Accounts for the Christmas entertainments held at court during the winter of 1604-5. See W. R. Streitberger, ed., *Collections Volume XIII: Jacobean and Caroline Revels Accounts, 1603-1642* (Oxford: The Malone Society, 1986), 8.

² On Mary's attempts to restore the religious orders in England, see David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1948-59), 3:422-56.

³ Curtis Perry and John Watkins, ed., *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009); and Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, ed., *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).

⁴ See Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) and *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Arden, 2010); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997); Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), and, with Alec Ryrie, "Introduction: Protestantisms and their Beginnings," in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 1-14; and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

representation of regular clergy, which continues to strike many as unusual, especially when considered next to more commonplace representations of religious on the Elizabethan stage, which tended to ridicule or demonize—quite literally, in some cases—characters wearing habits.

The tendency of Elizabethan playwrights to depict religious negatively is not surprising given that, as Darryl Gless notes, monastic devotion embodied the confessional division between Catholic and Protestant.⁵ For Protestant theologians, such as Luther and Tyndale, regular clergy went against the ideals of Christian living: by adhering to a rigid set of practices outlined in a rule, religious dissociated themselves from the Gospel by giving priority to works over faith.⁶ Accusations of pride, hypocrisy, and lechery—and their attendant social evils—all flow from this theological error and explain why the regular clergy served as a lightning rod for anti-Catholic polemic during the Reformation.⁷ Thus, in the eyes of many Reformers, friars in particular were idle leeches who undermined the moral fabric of society. However, Shakespeare steers clear of the pervasive current of antifraternalism that flooded the stage in the last decades of the sixteenth century and, even more remarkable, I argue, counters dominant attitudes towards religious by foregrounding their commitment to ethical behaviour and their willingness to confront an implacable and compromised secular authority for the benefit of the community. Friar Lawrence marries the children of feuding clans to resolve a lingering strife in *Romeo and Juliet* and Friar Francis devises a plan to restore Hero's honour and repair the rift between the Sicilians and Aragonese in *Much Ado About Nothing*.⁸ But nowhere is this reversal of antifraternal stereotypes more clearly seen than in *Measure for Measure*, in which four habited characters each illustrate a close relationship between personal virtue and the wellbeing of the commonwealth.

The disparity between the conduct of regular clergy in Shakespeare's plays and the norms of the Elizabethan stage has not gone unnoticed. Drawing attention to the way in which Shakespeare "resists the strong comic and contemptuous overtones" associated with the habit, Rosalind Miles argues that "the most surprising feature" of Duke Vincentio's appropriation of the friar's cowl is that it is empty of any comic intention.⁹ More recently, David Beauregard has challenged claims by Gless and Huston Diehl, who argue that the play satirizes and demystifies religious life,¹⁰ by considering the theological dimensions of *Measure's* depiction of fraternal orders and the sacrament

⁵ Darryl J. Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 66.

⁶ On Luther's criticisms of the principles of monasticism, see Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3:165-66.

⁷ For Luther's discussion of monasticism and pride, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-73), 44:263. On monastic hypocrisy and accusations of lechery, see William Tyndale, "Prologue to the Book of Numbers," *Doctrinal Treatises*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1848), 430.

⁸ The religious present on Shakespeare's stage, slightly comic and far from being exempla themselves, act on ethical principals to heal rifts in the community. Friar Lawrence at once sees the potential of a union between Montague and Capulet that would "turn [their] household's rancour to pure love" (2.2.92). Friar Francis demonstrates a similar commitment to public harmony and shows himself even more willing to confront secular authority if need be. Although not present until Hero and Claudio are to wed, Friar Francis is the first to defend Hero against Don John's machinations and Claudio's accusations. Immediately after Leonato condemns Hero, Francis urges the Governor of Messine, in the imperative voice, to "hear [him] a little" (4.1.156). The stratagem that Francis devises to overcome the obstacles in the way of the lovers is similar to Lawrence's in that both involve a feigned death designed to mend the rifts in society. Unlike Friar Lawrence, however, Francis does not shy away from confronting authority to achieve his aim of restoring public harmony. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005).

⁹ Rosalind Miles, *The Problem of Measure for Measure: A Historical Investigation* (London: Vision Press, 1976), 172-73.

¹⁰ Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*, 90-141; Huston Diehl, "'Infinite Space': Representation and Reformation in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49 (1998): 395.

of penance as well as its inclusion of an inconclusive ending. Although insisting that the play represent “virtues, vices, and passions, not theological mysteries or doctrines,” Beauregard, anticipating recent revisionist scholarship on Shakespeare’s religious affiliations, speculates that the reason for this unusual portrayal of regular clergy may be found by further exploring the possibility that he was a “church papist.”¹¹ Shakespeare’s being a Roman Catholic who conformed outwardly to the Church of England explains, according to Beauregard, “the subversive politics, the theological allusions, the moral complexities, and the strategic ambiguities” which scholars have noted for over a century.¹²

Perhaps a more fruitful avenue for considering Shakespeare’s atypical depiction of regular clergy in *Measure for Measure*, particularly in the classroom, may be found in examining these representations within the specific cultural milieu in which the play was written and first performed—the time immediately after James I’s ascent to the throne in 1603 and less than a year before the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. Indeed, the relationship between private morality and the wellbeing of the commonwealth to which the regular clergy draw attention in *Measure for Measure* is, I believe, tied to Vincentio’s own decision to adopt the friar’s habit. The Duke’s desire to extend his political authority into the spiritual realm and thus manage the moral lives of his subjects is closely linked to James I’s own attitudes towards kingship, outlined in *Basiliakon Doron*, which view monarchy as a distinct category that blends the roles of prince and priest. What unites Shakespeare’s atypical representation of monasticism to his innovation of having the Duke wear the cowl is the friar’s own hybridized status: whereas the Jacobean monarch appropriates responsibilities that once belonged exclusively to the spiritual estate, the friar too appropriates responsibilities of secular clergy in blending elements of a life lived in contemplative withdrawal with one lived in the world ministering to the needs of the community. In this way, the Duke and his religious counterparts in *Measure* serve as pendants for a mode of mixed life which, the play suggests, upholds the ethical wellbeing of the commonwealth.

In addition to the number of regular clergy who fill the stage in *Measure for Measure*, what is most immediately striking about the play is Shakespeare’s atypical representation of religious on the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century stage. Many of the most familiar criticisms levelled against the mendicant orders have their origin in William of Saint-Amour’s *De periculis novissimorum temporum* (1256), which laid the foundations of antifraternal polemic and influenced generations of poets on both sides of the English Channel. For Saint-Amour, the distinguishing characteristics of those in the fraternal orders were pride, hypocrisy, and lust (5).¹³ These negative traits are distilled in Jean de Meun’s Faus Semblant, who appears in the *Roman de la Rose* as a “holy hermit” and wears the habit only because hypocrisy finds its “safest hiding place ... under the most humble garment” (194).¹⁴ Disguised as a mendicant, Faus Semblant cultivates friendships with elites of both sexes to satiate his desire for worldly luxury, fine foods, and bodily pleasure (194-97). These antifraternal attitudes quickly gained currency in English poetry and appear in the work of Chaucer and Langland. The

¹¹ David Beauregard, “Shakespeare on Monastic Life: Nuns and Friars in *Measure for Measure*,” in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England*, ed. Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard (New York: Fordham UP, 2003), 330.

¹² *Ibid.*, 331.

¹³ William Saint-Amour, *A Brief Tract on the Dangers of the Last Days*, trans. Jonathon Robinson (1632, University of Toronto, 2012), http://individual.utoronto.ca/jwrobinson/translations/wsa_de-periculis.pdf. In his tract, Saint-Amour argues that the appearance of friars are as a sign of the last days and states that the friars’ vices conform exactly to those of the “men who love themselves” that St Paul tells us will herald the coming of the antichrist in 2 Timothy 3:2-7.

¹⁴ Jean de Meun, *The Romance of The Rose*, 3rd ed., trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

avarice of the Friar in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale* strongly resembles Faus Semblant, and Langland's attack on the fraternal orders, especially in his depiction of Frere Flatetere in Passus XX, catalogues the same body of vices that had become familiar in antifraternat satire: pride, hypocrisy, and avarice.

After the Reformation, however, attacks on religious life were broadened as the distinctions between the forms of regular life blurred and monasticism became a focal point for anti-Catholic polemic. Returning to the distinctive habit of regular clergy, English Reformers such as Hugh Latimer vigorously argued that "religion" has nothing to do with the "wearing of a monk's cowl" and that "a religious life [i.e., monastic life]... [is] rather an hypocrisy."¹⁵ Reformers further attacked the religious orders on the grounds that they undermined the Christian faith by promoting false theological principles. For Martin Luther, monastic life led the Christian astray by teaching that salvation is possible through works rather than faith: "vows," argues Luther in *De votis monasticis*, "are against faith" (44:280).¹⁶ Faith, of course, is the critical element of Luther's theological teaching on humanity's salvation, and works, which he aligned with the law—and, in turn, the regular clergy's strict adherence to a rule—fell outside this schema. Gless, who underscores the importance of Luther's doctrine on Protestant attitudes towards religious life as well as Shakespeare's sensitivity to this tradition, notes that for contemporaries monasticism epitomized the belief that salvation could be obtained through works;¹⁷ as a result, this institution more than any other embodied the theological gulf that separated Protestant and Roman Catholic.

Protestant playwrights acted as an effective conduit for popularising these theological attacks against the regular clergy by having monks, friars and nuns embody the vices that their critics had ascribed to them. As Miles notes, Elizabethan dramatists only ever use the habit ironically; an amusing and often contemptible character, the friar "*never* carries associations of power, mystery or divinity."¹⁸ One thread of this critique of regular clergy runs through the numerous plays which adapt the traditional morality play to serve more contemporary polemical ends. Whereas the morality once offered laity basic pastoral instruction on avoiding sins that would jeopardize their salvation, Protestant dramatists shift the plays' concern to avoiding the doctrinal errors of Catholicism which would place the soul in equal if not greater peril. In transforming the morality play, Reformers consistently have the Vice figure, or the character subject to the vice, always identify himself, as Ranier Pineas points out, as an adherent of Catholicism, either through oaths or through the possession of devotional objects.¹⁹ Another, more direct way in which Vice is associated with Catholicism is through his wearing the religious habit.²⁰ Marlowe's use of the friar's garment as a disguise for Mephistopheles in *Doctor Faustus* is typical: "that holy shape," notes Faustus, "becomes a devil best" (1.3.28).²¹ Associating the distinctive dress of religious with wicked and corrupting characters had, however, become quite clichéd by the beginning of the seventeenth century. George

¹⁵ Hugh Latimer, *Sermons*, ed. George Elwes Corrie, Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 1:392.

¹⁶ In *De votis monasticis*, Luther also draws on earlier attacks against the institution of monasticism, particularly those raised by Wyclif, which claimed that religious persons go against the ideals of Christian living by sequestering themselves away from the world and adhering to a rigid set of practices outlined in a rule that is dissociated from the Gospel. For a more complete discussion of Luther's criticisms of the principles of monasticism, see Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3:165-66.

¹⁷ Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*, 76

¹⁸ Miles, *The Problem of Measure for Measure*, 170.

¹⁹ Ranier Pineas, "The English Morality Play as a Weapon of Religious Controversy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 2, no. 2 (1962): 169-70.

²⁰ Pineas notes several examples of Vice figures disguised as clergy. See "The English Morality Play," 166, 168-174.

²¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (London: Norton, 1967).

Chapman's 1611 *May-Day* succinctly conveys just how commonplace the habit, and the negative associations which it carried, had become. As the old lover in Chapman's play contemplates disguising himself as a friar to enter Franceschina's house, his servant Angelo quickly reprimands him: "Out upon't, that disguise is worn threadbare upon every stage, and so much villainy committed under that habit that 'tis grown as suspicious as the vilest" (2.1.475-77).²² Despite the well-known nexus of ideas that had become attached to the habit, Shakespeare nevertheless ignores the harshest strains of this deeply entrenched satirical tradition by representing regular clergy in a positive manner and by using the friar's cowl as an expedient for the protagonist to work his machinations for virtue rather than vice.

Much of Shakespeare's response to commonplace depictions of religious consists, rather provocatively, of completely reversing popular stereotypes which had filtered onto the stage that had been reinforced for centuries in antifraternal literature. Shakespeare's conscious rewriting of this onstage satirical tradition, which portrays friars as "duplicitous, immoral, and satanic,"²³ is even more remarkable when one considers the complete absence of regular clergy from his principal source material.²⁴ George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, which provided much of the inspiration for *Measure for Measure*, is focused primarily on the application of justice throughout all levels of society: Whetstone's play does not simply contain, as Geoffrey Bullough notes, a corrupt magistrate who refuses to control the officials who serve him but a range of civil servants who love mutton, protect prostitutes for favours, patronize pimps, and encourage others to act unjustly.²⁵ Whereas Whetstone focuses primarily on the abuses of justice, Shakespeare infuses the play's theme of the proper application of justice and mercy with a spiritual dimension that is absent in his predecessors and signalled by its title—an allusion to Christ's Sermon on the Mount.²⁶ Yet, the presence of so many regular clergy onstage does more than simply show the playwright as an *anima naturaliter Christiana*.²⁷ To be sure, the friars and nuns in *Measure*, whose representations respond to familiar attacks against their sexual morality and their lack of social engagement, act in ways that specifically undermine these enduring stereotypes. Instead of a profligate clergy, Shakespeare populates his stage with friars

²² George Chapman, *May-Day*, in *The Plays of George Chapman Volume I: The Comedies*, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1961).

²³ Paul Voss, "The Antifraternal Tradition in English Renaissance Drama," *Cithara* 33 (1993): 5.

²⁴ Gianbattista Giraldo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565), which was later transformed into the tragicomedy *Epitia* (1583) concerns a brother and sister—Vico and Epitia—who fall prey to the machinations of Juriste, the governor of Innsbruck appointed by the Emperor Maximilian. Epitia agrees to surrender herself to Juriste, who promises to release Vico, recently condemned to death for raping a woman. In Cinthio's tale, the Emperor is far more remote and only becomes involved when Epitia journeys to Villaco to plead their case. The thematic focus of Cinthio's tale is on the tension between mercy and justice. George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), which was certainly known to Shakespeare and which provided the greatest amount of source material for *Measure for Measure*, also concerns justice and mercy. As in Cinthio's tale, a chaste sister, Cassandra, must plead for clemency to a corrupt magistrate, Promos, on behalf of a brother whose sexual conduct infringes on the law. In *Promos and Cassandra*, however, more attention is paid to the difficulty of regulating sexual behaviour and the increased rule of the sovereign in directly managing justice within his realm. In Whetstone's text, order is restored to the polity through the marriage of the Cassandra which encourages Corvinus, King of Hungary, to temper his judgement with mercy. For editions of Shakespeare's source material, with comprehensive introductions, see Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 2 *The Comedies 1597-1603* (New York: Columbia UP, 1968).

²⁵ Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 413.

²⁶ The title of the play, recalling Christ's Sermon on the Mount, cautions one to temper justice with mercy: "Judge not, that ye be not judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2).

²⁷ Bullough quotes this phrase when advancing this argument after surveying a range of critical opinions offered by W.W. Lawrence, Roy Battenhouse, G. Wilson Knight, E.M. Pope, M.C. Braddock, and C. Leech that offer Christian readings of the play. See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 415-17.

and nuns who both reinforce the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and the community by opposing the unjust use of political authority.

Although still a postulant among the Poor Clare's, Isabella demonstrates her commitment to the ideals of religious life, particularly chastity, and it is this pledge that enables her to resist an unjust secular authority. The coupling of these traits is neatly conveyed in her first words in the play, which question the disciplinary rigour of the community: "And have you nuns no further privileges?" (1.4.1). Assuming that Isabella is inquiring after departures from the rule, Sister Francisca's (and the audience's) expectations are overturned when the young postulant states that, in fact, she wishes "a more strict restraint" (1.4.4). The familiar laxity associated with those entering religious orders is thus upset by a novice seeking more stringent regulation. Isabella's dedication to chaste living, a corollary of her religious discipline, also overturns commonplace attitudes toward religious clergy. Pleading before Angelo on behalf of her brother, imprisoned for transgressing against Vienna's laws governing sexual morality, Isabella describes fornication as the "vice that most I do abhor" (2.2.29). When tested by Angelo's offer to exchange Claudio's release for sexual favours, Isabella shows herself unwilling to compromise her chastity, whether to save herself or her brother:

Sir, believe this,
I had rather give my body than my soul...
Better it were a brother died at once
Than that a sister by redeeming him
Should die forever. (2.4.56-6; 107-9)

Drawing attention to the importance of maintaining one's belief and of carefully regulating one's body, these lines further emphasize the relationship between personal morality and the ethical wellbeing of the community. Isabella's remarks highlight the dangers of an amoral desire for self-preservation by noting that, to achieve a desired end, such an outcome entails implicating others. The young postulant thus refuses to barter her body and soul in order to facilitate Angelo's corruption of justice. When Angelo attacks her for being "as cruel as the sentence / That [she] slandered so" (2.4.110-11), Isabella responds pointedly by asserting that

Ignomy in ransom and free pardon
Are of two houses; lawful mercy
Is nothing kin to foul redemption. (2.4.112-14)

Viewing the opposition between a shameful sacrifice and a problematic pardon on the one hand, and magnanimity and mercy on the other, in terms of familial bonds, Isabella notes their irreconcilability and further points to the connection between private and public virtue by refusing to implicate others who would gain a "foul redemption" through her deeds. This resolve contrasts sharply with Claudio's willingness to compromise his attitudes towards Angelo's abuse of office: "Sure it is no sin, / Or of the deadly seven it is the least" (3.1.112-13). That we should be critical of Claudio's urging Isabella to accept Angelo's offer is further emphasized by his vision of death in which only the corpse remains a "kneaded clod... [left] to rot" (3.1.122-24). In the absence of traditional Christian attitudes towards death as a destination or culmination of one's pilgrimage on earth, Claudio abandons any moral considerations and presses his sister to surrender her own ideals and yield to the tyrannical magistrate, Angelo. This absence of private ethics is shown to have wider consequences that impinge of the lives of others and undermine justice within the commonwealth:

Claudio's single-minded focus on personal advantage is placed before personal integrity, and thus makes him an accomplice to Angelo's abuse of authority.

Isabella is not, of course, the only character who, motivated by private virtue, challenges authority: each of the friars resists secular authority in the face of injustice. Indeed, the resolve of the friars to combat injustice in *Measure for Measure* contrasts strongly with the antifraternal stereotype of religious clergy who, withdrawing from the world in contemplation, live ethically inert lives devoted solely to their own spiritedly wellbeing.²⁸ Friar Thomas's open challenge to the Duke's political decisions anticipates Isabella's bold opposition to injustice as well as her determination to confront Vincentio upon his return to "discover his government" (3.1.196-97). In order to obtain the habit and instruction on behaving in a convincing manner, the Duke must assure Friar Thomas that his actions will benefit the state (1.3.44) and not some covert liaison (1.3.2-6). Vincentio must also answer the Friar's additional concerns over policy. After the Duke reveals his plan to curb the increasingly lax application of the law, Friar Thomas questions the wisdom of delegating to Angelo the responsibility of restoring the vigour of the law (1.3.32-35). Each concern that Friar Thomas raises is motivated by virtues that, in antifraternal polemic, were seen as wholly alien to these religious orders: chastity and the moral courage to uphold public virtue. As with Isabella, the friar's personal virtue is thus enabling and prompts him to safeguard the moral integrity of the commonwealth.

Friar Peter's support of the Duke's stratagem to expose Angelo and assist Isabella and Mariana to bring their case before Vincentio further demonstrates the active role that religious play in maintaining public virtue. Not only does the Duke entrust Peter with the task of conveying sensitive information (4.5.1-9), he also relies on the friar to position Mariana and Isabella strategically among the crowd and then to prompt them to denounce Angelo (5.1.20). Although working quietly—at times, literally behind the scenes—to support the Duke's efforts, Friar Peter nevertheless plays a critical role in orchestrating the Duke's stratagem to reveal Angelo's deceit and injustice. This commitment to principals traditionally esteemed by religious clergy that Shakespeare's friars demonstrate stand, then, in strong opposition to more familiar representations of friars and nuns as lecherous, self-serving hypocrites who exploit their position within the community to its detriment.

Whereas religious clergy show themselves as vigilant against the excesses of unjust authority, the roles of secular ruler and spiritual counsellor converge in the figure of the Duke, who adopts the habit and the office of friar to observe the application of justice in Vienna during his absence. The reaction that would have been provoked in an audience viewing the play's protagonist, along with its lead female role and two other regular clergy, on a single stage is worth considering. Having four characters wearing the habit for much of the play would have, according to Gless, created the "most striking visual effect."²⁹ This effect would have been especially powerful for *Measure's* original audiences, even though the first recorded performance of the play occurred nearly one year before the Gunpowder Plot. Indeed, James I's accession to the throne had stirred the hopes of many Catholics who believed that he was in favour of greater toleration, partly, as Alison Shell observes,

²⁸ Gless, citing Francis Bacon's criticisms of monastic withdrawal, notes the popular condemnation of the "ethical inertia" associated with religious clergy. See *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*, 83.

²⁹ Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*, 64.

because James encouraged this belief.³⁰ The relief that many felt upon the coronation of the new king may, in part, explain the play's openness in its depiction of regular clergy.

In addition to donning the cowl, Vincentio, unlike his analogues in Shakespeare's sources, concerns himself directly with the spiritual wellbeing of his subjects. As Debra Kuller Shugar notes, the Duke plays an active role in "superintend[ing] the moral and spiritual well-being of individual subjects,"³¹ and it is the religious habit that facilitates his offering of spiritual advice, urging of repentance, and assisting the condemned so that they might die contrite and in a state of grace. As Shugar further points out, "the sacred [in Whetstone's play] is not concentrated in the person of the ruler but ... exists at the margins and interstices of the state."³² Corvinus appears only in the second part of *Promos and Cassandra* to restore justice and ensure the wellbeing of the commonwealth and even reflects on his distance from his subjects' lives when he laments that "fewe tales are tould the King" concerning the abuses of authority (1.8.485). Corvinus goes on to observe that the "power" tied to his office "keeps [those] in awe" whose responsibility it is to inform the king of injustice (1.8.485). In contrast, *Measure* minimizes the distance between sovereign and subject by having Vincentio take on the burden of his citizens' spiritual health as well as the state's through the proper application of justice.

This portrait of a ruler who attends to the spiritual and secular concerns of his realm is unique to Shakespeare and may reflect the model of kingship that James I sought to embody upon his succession to the English throne. For some time, scholars have drawn parallels between Vincentio and James by associating different elements of the Duke's behaviour and personality with the English monarch's. N. W. Bawcutt, for example, notes two characteristics that each ruler shares that go beyond the typical set of qualities ascribed to an ideal monarch: a sensitivity toward slander and calumny as well as a dislike of popular acclaim.³³ Shakespeare may have invited his audience to draw this connection between James, who had faced slander on account of the legitimacy of his claim to both the Scottish and English crowns, and Vincentio, who opines after hearing Lucio's bitter criticism of his rule: "What king so strong / Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?" (3.1.444-45).³⁴ Vincentio also shares James's reticence towards the public. "I love the people," remarks the Duke, "[b]ut do not like to stage me to their eyes" (1.1.68-9). It comes as little surprise, then, when he informs Friar Thomas that he has "ever loved the life removed" (1.2.8). Drawn to the religious life, Vincentio is able, through the disguise, to perform simultaneously the roles of secular ruler and ghostly minister.

Like the Duke who rules Vienna while attending to the moral and spiritual wellbeing of his subjects, James I's notion of kingship collapsed the roles of prince and priest. In *Basilikon Doron*, a treatise on government written for his son Prince Henry in 1599, James defines the king as a *mixta persona*, a ruler invested with quasi-sacerdotal authority. Addressing his own son on the ruler's hybrid identity, James stresses that the monarch is "mixed ... betwixt the ecclesiastical and civil estate: for a king is not *mere laicus*, as both the Papists and Anabaptists would have him, to which error also the Puritans

³⁰ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 142. In the summer of 1604, James was also involved in efforts to negotiate a peace treaty with Spain, which was signed on 18 August 1604.

³¹ Debra Kuller Shugar, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 51.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Oxford Shakespeare: Measure for Measure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 4.

³⁴ Ernest Schanzer also makes these observations. See *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1963), 125.

incline” (52).³⁵ James’s vision of kingship thus combines civil and ecclesiastical offices, and it is one in which the ruler is, like Vincentio, directly involved in the lives of his subjects. In *Basilikon Doron*, James admonishes his son to “embrace the quarrel of the poor and distressed as your own particular ... [and] neither spare ye any pains in your own person to see their wrongs redressed” (24). Such attention to the spiritual wellbeing of his subjects is reflected in the manner of rule exemplified by the Duke, who embodies the *mixta persona* elaborated by James. The Duke’s concern for his subjects is demonstrated in a number of ways: the pastoral counsel that Vincentio offers Claudio on his imminent execution, which is meant to prepare him to make a good death (3.1.5-41); his advice to Isabella, who he identifies as a “poor wronged lady” (3.1.203); and his repeated visits to Mariana, which “hath often stilled [her] brawling discontent” (4.1.9). Adding to this blurring of roles, Beauregard further notes three instances that he describes as “obvious representations of Catholic sacramental practice” in which Vincentio adopts the role of confessor to Julietta, Mariana, and Bernardine (2.3; 4.1; and 4.3, respectively).³⁶ While the extent to which we can view this behaviour as conforming to Catholic ritual may be argued, Beauregard’s comments point to the length to which the Duke appropriates the role of the cleric to achieve his ideal of a sovereign who, according to James, “procure[s] the weale of both soules and bodies... that are committed to his charge” (55). The evolving role of kingship in the Stuart polity adds a significant dimension to the Duke’s willingness to dawn the cowl: rather than viewing this act as a provocation of Protestant sensibilities, Vincentio’s wearing and subsequent removal of the habit diffuses any controversy that would have attracted the censor’s eye.³⁷ Although he might long for “the life removed,” Vincentio’s duty is to the commonwealth, and it is in wearing the cowl that he is able to fulfill and visually represent the dual roles of the monarch. In this particular instance, the habit makes the king.

Nevertheless, the Franciscan habit is an entirely apt choice for the Duke given the friars’ own distinctive form of mixed life. Unlike traditional monastic orders which retreated from the world and dedicated themselves wholly to contemplation, the Franciscans observed what was known as a *vita mixta*.³⁸ This form of mixed life blended the routines of prayer and meditative withdrawal which were fostered within enclosed orders with an obligation to minister to the laity as preachers and confessors as well as through works of charity. To be sure, the dual nature of the Franciscans’ vocation was recognized almost immediately from its inception. At the Council of Lyon in 1274, a little over sixty years since Francis obtained Innocent III’s approval of the first rule, Gregory X invoked this notion of the mixed life to defend the order from accusations by numerous bishops that the friars had involved themselves too much in the spiritual wellbeing of the laity by appropriating roles that had traditionally belonged to the secular clergy: “They perform, at the same

³⁵ James I, *Basilikon Doron*, in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1965), 52. James’s attitudes echo much of contemporary, protestant political theory that invests the king with an element of sacral authority. Shugar provides an excellent discussion of James’s use of the phrase “*mixta persona*” and its implications on his notion of kingship. See *Political Theologies*, 59, 73.

³⁶ Beauregard, “Shakespeare on Monastic Life,” 325.

³⁷ In May 1559, a royal proclamation was issued that forbade stage plays to touch on “either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the common weale.” This law entailed, as Gynne Wickham notes, the prevention of “direct treatment in plays of current public issues or the representation of important living persons.” See *Early English Stages*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958-81), 1:75.

³⁸ For further discussion on the Franciscan vocation as a form of mixed life, see Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 49-52; Jacobus Heerneck OFM, “Vita active et vita contemplative secundum S. Antonium Patavinum,” *Apostolicum* 1 (1932): 7; Mary Elizabeth Mason, *Active Life and Contemplative Life: A Study of the Concepts from Plato to the Present* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1961); and Ronald Mrozinski, *Franciscan Prayer Life: The Franciscan Active-Contemplative Synthesis and the Role of Centres of Prayer* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981).

time, the roles of Mary and Martha. Like Mary they sit at the feet of the Lord, and like Martha they do everything to serve him” (quoted in Moorman 1968).³⁹ Nearly two centuries later, Bernardino of Siena would reiterate the value of the mixed life practiced by the Franciscans in the fifteenth century. “Having first the knowledge of nature through the active life,” remarks Bernardino, “comes the knowledge of glory through the contemplative life; from these two lives comes a third, that is to say the mixed life [*vita mixta*] which embraces both God and man” (1056).⁴⁰ While the extent to which Shakespeare was aware of the way in which the Franciscans articulated their vocation must remain a matter for conjecture, the friar’s mixed identity, his dedication to a private, meditative withdrawal from the world while remaining firmly rooted in the world by ministering to the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the community, is entirely appropriate for a Duke who embodies a model of kingship in which the sovereign himself is a *mixta persona*. The regular clergy who populate the stage in *Measure* not only share his concerns for the personal wellbeing of the Viennese and practical health of the state but also mirror his distinctive form of mixed life—in other words, the life that the friars embody serves as a pendant to the Duke’s distinctive role as sovereign.

This nexus of ideas and images that link the Duke to religious life and to the distinctly Catholic institution of monasticism invites those who study Shakespeare to consider further the playwright’s relationship with England’s medieval past. Certainly the history plays demonstrate his willingness to mine recent history for material that responds to more contemporary concerns, such as royal succession and the threat of civil war. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Pericles*, further illustrate his willingness to respond to and engage with two of England’s greatest medieval poets—Chaucer and Gower. Concerning Shakespeare’s relationship to England’s medieval heritage, Eamon Duffy’s compelling reading of Sonnet 73 argues Shakespeare’s ambivalence towards the “cultural revolution which had shaped the Elizabethan settlement.”⁴¹ While such a reading accounts in part for the favourable depiction of religious clergy, I have attempted to show that other factors may be at play. A consideration of Shakespeare’s attitudes towards the new monarch may be equally productive. Like many of his contemporaries, Shakespeare appears to have embraced James I’s apparent move towards greater toleration,⁴² and the on-stage presence of so many religious may reflect a relaxation in attitudes towards Catholicism that occurred at the start of James’s reign.

Measure for Measure is thus an excellent vehicle for encouraging students to consider Shakespeare’s relationship to a fundamental institution of England’s medieval past that became emblematic of the divide, which is not always easy to identify, that separated Catholics from Protestants. Shakespeare need not have been a church papist to feel some nostalgia for monasticism: indeed, it is entirely possible for him to have been a conformist and, like many Protestants, uncomfortable with pillaging of England’s religious landscapes, particularly under Edward VI.⁴³ Such concerns over the playwright’s religious identity occlude other, more interesting questions that may be raised when

³⁹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 178.

⁴⁰ Bernardo da Siena, “Sermone XLIV,” in *Le Prediche Volgari*, ed. Piero Bargellini (Milan: Rizzoli, 1936).

⁴¹ Eamon Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare’s England,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (New York: Manchester UP, 2003), 41.

⁴² On the difficulty of defining James I’s attitudes towards Catholicism, see John Watkins, “‘Out of her Ashes May a Second Phoenix Rise’: James I and the Legacy of Elizabethan Anti-Catholicism,” in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999), 116-136.

⁴³ For example, Michael Sherbrook, the Anglican rector of Wickersley in Yorkshire, wrote a treatise in 1591 entitled *The Fall of Religious Houses*, in which he defended the institution of monasticism by lauding the benefit of these houses to the wellbeing of the community.

considering Shakespeare's unusual depiction of regular clergy in *Measure for Measure* and that may offer students an opportunity to explore just how present England's medieval past is to its greatest playwright.