

Virtuous Passions: Shakespeare and the Culture of Shyness in Early  
Modern England

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## Abstract

The dissertation develops an interdisciplinary account of the psychological and affective state of shyness, and examines representations of the emotion, along with its variant states shame, bashfulness, and modesty, in Shakespeare and in other early English literature. It brings together work from various fields: literature, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, religious studies, classics, and ancient philosophy. It is a literary study, but also considers medical, political, theological, and social tracts. The dissertation begins with an exploration of the classical emotion concept *the fear of shame*, and finds the roots of shyness in the virtue ethics tradition of Aristotle. It then moves on to examine the influence Aristotle's moral philosophy had on early modern conceptions of shyness, especially as a religious passion associated with conscience. In view of the way new modes of courtesy, social humility, and courtly interaction infiltrated the predominantly male world of civil conversation, the dissertation outlines how the cultural status of shyness shifted throughout the period. As I demonstrate, shyness underwent a radical secularization and went from being widely understood as a religious emotion to a pathological condition linked to melancholy.

Chapter one investigates Shakespeare's interest in the gendering of shyness, and argues that the rising prevalence of bashfulness amongst male courtiers contributed to the medicalization of the emotion in the period. The chapter develops an account of Shakespeare's King Henry the Sixth: a figure whose characterization exemplifies the rapid transformation of shyness as it devolved from a virtuous moral and religious passion into one associated with notions of male disease and political immorality. The following chapters, however, reveal a shift in perspective. In *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare questions the early modern pathologization of bashfulness through his endorsement of an Aristotelian account of shyness as a social, ethical, and religious virtue. In these plays the experience of bashfulness operates as a governing emotional force over the advancement of sinful forms of pride and vengeance, and produces a spiritually reformatory and transformative effect within the Christian subject. By calling attention to the moral and religious connotations associated with bashfulness throughout its history, the dissertation seeks to counter the medicalization and denigration of shyness currently taking place in the modern world.

## Résumé

La présente thèse s'inscrit dans le cadre interdisciplinaire d'une étude psychologique et affective de la timidité. Aussi rend-elle compte, chez Shakespeare et autres premiers littérateurs anglais, des représentations de l'émotion dans ses états de honte, d'embarras et de modestie. Elle fait également appel à plusieurs disciplines : littérature (y compris celle des Anciens), psychologie, neuroscience, sociologie, études religieuses. Elle est assurément une étude littéraire, encore qu'elle s'appuie également sur les apports de la médecine, de la politique, de la théologie et de la sociologie. La thèse débute par une étude sur *la crainte de la honte* sous l'angle classique et dans la tradition de l'éthique aristotélicienne. Elle enchaîne sur l'influence exercée par la philosophie morale d'Aristote sur les premières conceptions modernes de la timidité, vue essentiellement comme passion religieuse en étroite liaison avec la conscience. Par ailleurs, à mesure que s'établissait un nouveau code de bienséances (courtoisie, humilité, courtoisie), le monde largement masculin et le comportement qui s'ensuivit en furent affectés. D'où un changement de l'état culturel de la timidité au cours de l'époque. C'est dire que la timidité se vit entièrement sécularisée et devint, d'émotion religieuse qu'elle avait été, une condition pathologique causée par une humeur mélancolique.

Le premier chapitre a, pour objet, l'intérêt porté par Shakespeare pour la différenciation sexuelle de la timidité. Son constat: la prévalence grandissante de la timidité chez les courtisans mâles eut pour effet, à l'époque, la médicalisation de l'émotion. Le chapitre renvoie au roi Henri VI, personnage qui illustre la transformation religieuse et morale de la timidité en une maladie d'homme immoral et politique. Les chapitres suivants, toutefois, font montre d'une perspective nouvelle. Dans *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice* et *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare revient sur son idée initiale. Il met en doute la pathogenèse de la timidité pour reprendre le concept aristotélicien de vertu religieuse, éthique et sociale. Dans les pièces citées, un sentiment de timidité apparaît comme un état émotionnel en pleine force maîtresse plutôt que comme la manifestation d'un péché d'orgueil et de vengeance. Il appelle ainsi à une réformation du cœur et de la spiritualité dans une dogmatique chrétienne. Ainsi, par son retour historique aux diverses connotations morales et religieuses liées à l'embarras, la thèse s'emploie ici, dans un renversement du pour au contre, à démythifier l'actuelle et universelle conception de la timidité, tout ensemble gratuite et dénigrante, comme une source profane de stigmatisation médicale.

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Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

## Introduction

### Historical, Philosophical, and Linguistic Perspectives on Shyness

Representations of modesty, bashfulness, and their close affiliate shamefastness are common in Shakespearean drama and other literature of the early modern period. However, the cognate term “shy” appears only twice throughout the Shakespearean canon and does not appear at all in the works of other English playwrights or major epic poets such as Spenser or Milton. In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare characterizes Duke Vincentio as a “shy fellow,” who loves the people but does not like to be “stage[d]” to “their eyes” (3.1.372, 1.1.68). When Vincentio withdraws from his public political position to become a reclusive friar he makes Angelo his substitute. As Isabella facetiously contends, few men are as “shy, as grave, as just, as absolute, / As Angelo” (5.1.54-5).<sup>1</sup> In the latter case, “shy” is a virtuous attribute linked to other honorable qualities, yet Vincentio offers a striking representation of shyness as a harmful male “malady of the mind.”<sup>2</sup> The Duke’s fear of publicity, his worry over being negatively evaluated by his subjects, his docility, and his retirement from socio-political life are as central to early modern medical approaches to bashfulness as they are to modern understandings of shyness as a disorder characterized by extreme social anxiety.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever (Croatia: Methuen, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, “Of Unseemly and Naughtie Bashfulness,” *Moral Essays*, 7 Vols, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), 166. On early modern medical approaches to bashfulness see also Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), 166-73.

The presence of the word “shy” in *Measure for Measure*, along with its conflicting meanings, suggests a host of questions concerning the emotional culture of shyness in early modernity, which this introduction and the following chapters undertake to answer. Where does the word “shy” come from? How did our modern conception of shyness originate? From which particular emotion scripts and classical sources is it translated? Which early modern social and cultural contexts motivated its development into a pathological disease? How did ideas of gender play into the medicalization of the emotion? Why do Shakespeare’s most complex representations of the emotion focus on male subjects and male social relationships? Why does Shakespeare so often situate shyness within a Christianized psychological and emotional framework? I set out to explore these issues as I trace the historical and conceptual development of shyness, reading current psychological theory on this most perplexing of emotional states in light of classical, medieval, and Renaissance moral philosophy, seventeenth-century theological and political writing, courtesy and conduct tracts for women and gentleman, and medical treatises centered on melancholy, the early modern passions, and the humoral body.

Shakespeare’s drama reflects the various intellectual, historical, and cultural movements that contributed to the transformation of shyness from a religious emotion into a pathological disorder of modernity. Although many of the plays engage with contemporary early modern perceptions of shyness as a harmful and injurious affective state, Shakespeare calls this view into question by recuperating an Aristotelian conception of the emotion as a moral virtue.

Shakespearean representations of bashfulness consistently call attention to the historical translation of Aristotle's founding emotion concept "the fear of shame" as it entered early modernity and was redefined as a religious affect linked to Christian conscience; hence, my critical deployment of the notion of the *shy conscience* throughout this study. The emotional experience and behavioral display of shyness thus regularly signals a movement away from sinful forms of pride and vanity, and affords an opportunity for inducing a kind of social, ethical, as well as spiritual consciousness in the characters who feel it, prompting them to renegotiate their relationship with others and with God. Shy male characters from such diverse plays as *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure* find themselves strengthened in their bonds with other people and with the cultural and religious norms, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that structure their society.

### **I. Understanding Shyness**

Shyness as we recognize and understand it today as a state of fearful social inhibition was not a firmly fixed concept at the start of the seventeenth century. According to the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, the word "shy" derives from the Teutonic root *skeuhw*, meaning to fear or terrify. The earliest examples in the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggest that this word evolved into the Old English terms *scheouh* or *sceoh* which were used in Anglo Saxon poetry to describe horses that were wild, skittish, and easily frightened away. In the *OED* "shy" is defined as "a sudden start aside by a horse when it sees an object that frightens it;



of a horse: skittish, unmanageable; high-mettled.” The words *schey* or *shye* were used throughout the medieval and early modern worlds to connote the same meaning.<sup>3</sup> In Chapman’s 1611 version of Homer’s *Iliad* Aeneas uses the word “shy” to describe his horse’s state of unruliness and disorder: “keepe thou the reines, and guide thy selfe thy horse; / Who with their wonted manager, will better wield the force / Of the impulsive chariot, if we be driven to flie, / Then with a stranger; under whom, they will be much more *shye*... grow restie.”<sup>4</sup> A 1620 translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* likewise uses “shy” to explain the fearful and unsteady quality associated with horses:

After they [the horses] had ridden on . . . they came to a river, over which there was a goodly bridge.... The greater number of them being already passed over, there was one *shie* and skittish mule (belike subject to fearful starting, as oftentimes we see horses have the like ill quality) that would not pass over the bridge by any means.<sup>5</sup>

Later on in the period, in an anonymous 1683 translation of the *Tusculan Disputations*, “shy” is again used specifically to underscore the unruly nature of the horse when Cicero likens his sense of grief to “shy colts” that “admit into their tender mouths the curbed bit.”<sup>6</sup>

Starting in the latter half of the sixteenth century the word “shy,” which had been predominantly used to describe a horse’s state of unruliness when confronted with an object that frightens it, begins to be attributed to human states

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* under the entry of the word “shy.”

<sup>4</sup> Homer, *The Iliad of Homer Prince of Poets*, trans. George Chapman (London: Richard Field for Nathaniel Butter, 1611), 68.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron containing an hundred pleasant novels*, trans. Anonymous (London: Isaac Iaggard, 1620), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Five Days Debate at Cicero’s House in Tusculum between Master and Sophister*, trans. Anonymous (London: Abel Swalle, 1683), 196. See also W. Marshall’s description of “shy, hair-brained: high-mettled, headstrong and wild colts,” *The Rural Economy of Norfolk* (London, 1787), 2.388.

of fear, flight, and withdrawal. Golding's 1567 translation of *The Metamorphoses* reveals this process. Appearing twice throughout the entire text, "shy" is first applied to an equine state of fear and wildness when Hippolytus declares, "My horses setting up theyr eares and snorting wexed *shye*, and being greatly flayghted with the monster in their eye, turned downe to sea.... I striving for too hold them back, layd hand upon the reyne." Although "shy" is used in relation to animalistic behavior and emotion it gets carried over to the human realm when, "Astylos counseled his mates to leave that fray.... He eeke to Nessus (who for fear of wounding seemed *shye*) / Sayd, fly if thou shalt not scape this fray of Heracles bowe to dye."<sup>7</sup> At this time the fearful and unruly flight pattern characteristic of shy horses begins to assume a modern association with aspects of human behavior and socialization. The *OED* cites Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages* published in 1600 as one of the earliest documented sources to describe a state of being "easily frightened away; difficult of approach owing to timidity, caution, or distrust: timidly or cautiously averse to encountering... some specified person; suspicious, distrustful." In his *Voyages*, Hakluyt notes that "certain soldiers... carried away captive certain of the people of the country, which caused the rest of them to be so *shy* and fearful" (*OED* Voy. 3. 191).<sup>8</sup> Four years later in 1604, Shakespeare characterizes Duke Vincentio as a "shy fellow," who loves the people but does not want to be "stage[d]" to "their eyes" (3.1.372, 1.1.68). From among these early references Shakespeare's Duke stands out as a remarkably advanced construction of shyness, primarily because, as Cynthia Lewis observes, he appears

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<sup>7</sup> Ovid, *The XV Books of P. Ovidius Naso, entitled Metamorphosis*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Willyam Seres, 1567), 194, 152.

<sup>8</sup> See the *OED* entry for the word shy.

to be engaged “in the process of overcoming his own fear of being judged as a judge.”<sup>9</sup>

A number of recent clinical and psychological studies describe shyness as an anxiety aroused by “the prospect or presence of interpersonal judgment in real or imagined social settings.”<sup>10</sup> Philip Zimbardo claims that shyness is an “overconcern with being negatively evaluated by others,” while Susie Scott suggests that shy behavior involves “a fear of social ridicule.”<sup>11</sup> *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines shyness as a “persistent fear of one or more social situations in which a person is exposed to possible scrutiny by others and fears that he or she may do something or act in a way that will be humiliating.”<sup>12</sup> In her pioneering article on the subject, Hilde Lewinsky observes that shyness is a purely “social phenomenon, always expressed by behavior and only in relation to others.” It is motivated by a “dependence upon the judgments of others” which can lead to cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral symptoms such as silence, reticence, blushing, gaze aversion, anxiety, and often results in social withdrawal and avoidance. The mental state, as Lewinsky further observes, is described by the individual “as a feeling of inferiority, it is coupled

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<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Lewis, “Dark Deeds Darkly Answered: Duke Vincentio and Judgment in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983), 285.

<sup>10</sup> B.R. Schlenker and Mark R. Leary, “Social Anxiety and Self-Presentation: A Conceptualization and Model,” *Psychological Bulletin* 92 (1982): 642.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Zimbardo, *Shyness: What is it, what to do about it* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1977), 163; Susie Scott, *Shyness and Society: The Illusion of Competence* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 43.

<sup>12</sup> *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1980), 241.

with an inability to say the right thing.... The individual feels over-conscious of himself, of his mental attitudes, and of his appearance” before others.<sup>13</sup>

It is significant to note here that the shy person desires to participate in social life, but an extreme fear of adverse social judgment prohibits this opportunity. Lewinsky therefore suggests that while “a very striking feature of shyness is the wish to avoid company; the desire to be alone is counter-balanced by the ardent wish to make friends, to come into contact with others, ... to be recognized as a member of the group by its members.”<sup>14</sup> Psychologist Mark Leary has suggested that people possess a strong and pervasive need to belong and be accepted. Shyness is triggered when an individual believes that he or she might make an impression that will cause others not to value them. When an individual is confronted by the fear of social rejection shyness is felt as part of a complex human defense mechanism alerting the self to evaluation and potential threats to social acceptance. “Warned that their self presentations may result in relational devaluation, people behave in ways that lower the likelihood of rejection.” They manifest characteristically restrained and inhibited “safety behaviors.” They “talk less, display evidence of disaffiliation such as gaze aversion, a closed body position, and other social distancing behaviors.”<sup>15</sup> The pattern of fear, inhibition, and withdrawal characteristic of shyness works toward preserving the self’s integrity in the social world. By restraining the individual from saying or doing

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<sup>13</sup> Hilde Lewinsky, “The Nature of Shyness,” *British Journal of Psychology* 32.2 (1941), 105-6. On the cognitive and behavioral symptomology of shyness see Ray Crozier, *Understanding Shyness: Psychological Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Lewinsky, “Nature of Shyness,” 106, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Leary, “Shyness and the Self,” In *The International Handbook of Social Anxiety*, eds. Ray Crozier and Lynne Alden (New York: John Wiley, 2001), 219-223.

something that would bring about shame, disesteem, or humiliation, shyness defends the self against unfavorable public assessments.

Although the overstated anti-social features of shyness may seem to indicate the contrary, it is actually a *hypersocial* emotional state in which the self is constantly assessing its own value and limitations in relation to others. Leary further explains how “without a self that allows [people] to imagine potentially problematic social situations in the future, consider abstract threats to the self, and see themselves through the eyes of others, people would be unable to feel socially anxious.”<sup>16</sup> Noting the social orientation of bashful individuals, Charles Darwin thought it peculiar that the inferred opinion of other people could excite such social inhibition in a person.<sup>17</sup> In sociology the idea of the social or public self has been most fully expounded by Erving Goffman in his discussion of the art of impression management. Goffman drew upon the ideas of symbolic interactionism to develop his dramaturgical analysis of social life, where the face-to-face encounters of everyday were conducted like a performance on stage and social actors were careful to monitor the impressions they gave of themselves to others.<sup>18</sup> Susie Scott has drawn upon Goffman’s dramaturgical ideas in order to suggest that the shy person simply does not feel as if he or she is able “to carry off the performance convincingly.” When we act, “we must take into account not only our own motivations but also the view of ourselves as seen by others.” The higher level of “symbolic self-awareness” attributed to humans, which allows us

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 335.

<sup>18</sup> See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

to reflect upon ourselves as others might see us, is a precondition of shyness. The shy person is all the more deeply concerned with how he or she is being perceived by others during the social transaction, and is persistently overcome by the fear of appearing “ill-equipped for the situation” and thereby undergoing shame and embarrassment.<sup>19</sup> Shyness is therefore a distinctively social and cognitive phenomenon founded upon a set of discursive judgments and perceptions about how we appear to other individuals. It enacts a reflective process through which we begin to see ourselves as social objects and analyze ourselves critically from a number of external perspectives. Rather paradoxically, the moment one begins to feel shy and socially inhibited is the moment one starts to recognize oneself as a social being nested in a web of public relations and opinions.

While the fields of sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and classics have recently displayed considerable interest in assessing shyness, its role, interpretations, and relations to other psycho-social phenomena in early modern literature and culture have yet to be fully explored. The lack of attention to shyness within early modern scholarship is largely attributable to the explosion of interest in the closely related affect shame. Currently, there are two book-length studies on shame: Gail Kern Paster’s seminal book, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, and Ewan Fernie’s *Shame in Shakespeare*. Although shame and shyness are interrelated

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<sup>19</sup> Susie Scott, *The Sociological Relevance of Shyness*, [www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/ss216/shysociology.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/ss216/shysociology.html).

emotions, neither study examines the classical moral philosophical concept of the fear of shame through which shyness gains its conceptual import.<sup>20</sup>

The affects of shame, guilt, shyness, and embarrassment are often assessed together as a group comprising the self-conscious emotions. Humans are able to feel these emotions because they have the reflexive capacity to evaluate how their behavior appears to others. All of these emotions therefore share common origins in a concern for what others think of us; but beyond this shared foundation the emotions are easily distinguished from one another. Psychologists today tend to regard shame as a master-emotion, treating embarrassment and shyness as variants based on their temporal relation to it. Shyness, as Rowland Miller explains, is a future-oriented mood state. It involves “anticipatory anxiety” and is rather like a kind of fear of shame characterized by “conscious worry over disapproval that has not yet occurred.” In shyness, shame has not yet been experienced; the subject is simply overcome with the fearful expectation of humiliation. By contrast, shame and embarrassment are involuntary and reactive emotions “arising *after* unwanted events have already occurred ... [and have] suddenly created the real potential for unwanted judgments from others.”<sup>21</sup>

Because embarrassment strikes quickly and without warning, “created by abrupt changes in fortune that cause unanticipated predicaments,” it is generally

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<sup>20</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Fernie does discuss Aristotelian shame but sees it as being unrelated to bashfulness, which he views primarily as a feminine quality related to ideas about love and sexual dishonor, 83ff.

<sup>21</sup> Rowland S. Miller, *Embarrassment: Poise and Peril in Everyday Life* (New York: Guilford, 1996), 18-20. On the distinction between shame, embarrassment, and shyness see Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, Privacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

characterized as a state of “startled flustered abashment and chagrin.”<sup>22</sup> It can cause a feeling of “spiteful disgust for one’s flaws.” Embarrassed people “rue their circumstances and [are] humiliated by the unwanted impressions they feel they have made on others.”<sup>23</sup>

The idea that the feeling of shame manifests itself in shyness as a kind of preconceived fear of disgrace has, however, been largely ignored in recent Shakespeare scholarship, which tends to favor the affiliation of “shame with its somewhat diminished variant – embarrassment.”<sup>24</sup> In conjunction with Norbert Elias’ influential work in *The Civilizing Process*, Gail Kern Paster emphasizes how early modern individuals who could not control their bodily functions in public were shamed and humiliated as part of the process of creating a civilized subject. The heightened level of disgust surrounding the leakiness of the female humoral body increased the level of embarrassment that ensued after the loss of bodily self-control. As Paster argues, the public experience of humiliation served a disciplinary function, gradually advancing an “emergent ideology of bodily refinement and exquisite self-mastery.”<sup>25</sup>

Fernie’s work also treats shame in relation to notions of disgrace and embarrassment. In contrast to Paster, however, Fernie takes a somewhat different

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<sup>22</sup> Rowland Miller, “Embarrassment and Social Behavior,” In *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, eds. June Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer (New York: Guilford, 1995), 246.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Paster, *Shame*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 14. Materialist feminist critics have likewise examined the experience of social disgrace as a disciplinary mechanism in early modern England, especially in terms of the effect it had on the construction of normative femininity. See especially Laura Lunger Knoppers, “(En)gendering Shame: *Measure for Measure* and the Spectacles of Power,” *English Literary History* 23 (1993): 450-471; Lynda E. Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Women’s Unruly Member,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42.2 (1991): 179-213.



approach by viewing the emotion in less disciplinary terms. Rather than being the failure of a societal or external standard, Fernie argues that shame is the affective outcome of the failure of a personal, non-moral ideal and is characterized by “a sense of falling short, of difference from the ideal pattern of what one should be.”<sup>26</sup> Nancy Cluck shares Fernie’s approach to shame as an emotion highly implicated in notions of personal rather than social identity. She describes shame as a self-focused affect through which a person “finds within himself something which does not match his own standards of acceptance. No one else need be present; no other person need witness the exposure, for the central element in shame is the exposure to the self.”<sup>27</sup> In accordance with a more modern, privatized conception of shame, in which the self is continually burdened with thoughts of its own inadequacy, Fernie suggests that the ancient privileging of the social or “public aspect of shame has been exaggerated.”<sup>28</sup> He thus attacks the “slavish [early modern] obedience” to Aristotelian shame as an ideologically derived fear of infamy. Fernie’s lack of attention to the Aristotelian moral tradition on shame leads him to misplace the ethical force of the emotion in an act of personal failure and resultant disgrace. “All tragedy,” he notes, “presents a spectacle of humiliation ... which is more ethically valuable than modesty.”<sup>29</sup> As Fernie contends, “only after the protagonist has experienced the “spiritual death” of disgrace can he be “liberated from the illusions of pride into truth and into a

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<sup>26</sup> Fernie, *Shame*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Cluck, “Shakespearean Studies in Shame,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.2 (1985), 142.

<sup>28</sup> Fernie, *Shame*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 22.

relationship with the world outside of the self.”<sup>30</sup> Because Fernie chooses to focus on shame as an asocial and amoral state, rooted in notions of personal failure, he does not take into consideration the social, ethical, and spiritual implications of classical Aristotelian ideas about shame, and their association with related Renaissance conceptions of bashfulness, shamefastness, and modesty. He thus overlooks the importance of these cognate emotional states and their morally reformative influence upon corresponding notions of pride, vanity, and honor throughout the Shakespearean canon.

Recent scholarship has therefore attended closely to Shakespearean subjects who find themselves shamed, publically disgraced, humiliated, and embarrassed. In this regard, my study on shyness should be considered as a critical counterpart of recent work on shame. Because shyness is an emotion that responds with fear, anticipation, and anxiety to public forms of disgrace and embarrassment, I am less interested in characters who experience shame in its reactive forms than I am in bashful Shakespearean figures who come to experience a kind of preconceived fear of disgrace. Like other “shame critics” I too am interested in the role shame plays in the production and maintenance of socio-cultural ideology; however, I am less concerned with Shakespearean characters who are shamed as part of a process of enculturation than with shy characters who become morally governed and ideologically disciplined through their ethical fear of shame.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1.

## II. The Shy Conscience

Any investigation into the history of shyness must begin with an understanding of the early modern concept of shamefastness from which bashfulness derives its conceptual weight. According to Robert White, shamefastness “stands broadly for the attribute which restrains us through fear of disgrace, from improper or indecorous behavior: shamefast and its variant shamefaced, literally mean held firm by shame.”<sup>31</sup> Aristotle’s moral emotional concept of *aidos* offered the early moderns one of the most comprehensive accounts of the fear of shame, including its social, ethical, and cognitive foundation, and its close relation to other affective phenomena including modesty, humility, and bashfulness.

Aristotle tells us that shame is morally operative. It is, he argues, a “kind of fear of dishonor” which “produces an effect similar to that produced by fear of danger, for people who fear disgrace blush, and those who fear death turn pale.” The emotion, as Aristotle further notes, “is not becoming to every age, but only to youth. Young people [are] prone to shame because they live by passion and therefore commit many errors, but are restrained by shame.” As a socially constructed ethical response, shame presupposes the knowledge of underlying norms of judgment within society. It therefore rises into consciousness when a person considers that certain acts are wrong and can jeopardize one’s honor.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Robert A White, “Shamefastness as *Verecundia* and *Pudicitia* in *The Faerie Queene*,” *Studies in Philology* 78.4 (1981), 391.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. David Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.9.1128a-b12.

Although the sense of shame was believed to be an integral aspect of the virtue of temperance, the degree of restraint it entailed implied the recognition that one could falter into shameful behavior. Still, Aristotle did not disregard the inherently rational dimension of shame, which he upheld as a “quasi-virtue.” Even though “the sense of disgrace is consequent on bad actions,” Aristotle believed it ethically valuable to feel shame rather than feeling none at all.<sup>33</sup> As Carl Schneider notes, shame “recognizes the proper attitude.... It considers what is right and wrong and it comprehends the correct response.”<sup>34</sup> The process of social and moral reflection intrinsic to shame is what gives it its ethical value and sets it apart from its morally deficient opposite of shamelessness, a kind of flagrant disregard for the loss of honor and reputation.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* the sense of shame or “modesty” is understood as a mean situated between morally opposing extremes. As Aristotle notes, “one man is said to be intermediate, and another to exceed, as for instance the bashful man who is ashamed of everything, while he who falls short or is not ashamed of anything at all is shameless, and the intermediate person is modest.”<sup>35</sup> Although an ethical mean, shame, as Aristotle implies, could potentially escalate into an extreme case of “moral shyness.”<sup>36</sup> Spinoza follows Aristotle in his description of a state of excessive bashfulness, which he explains as an anticipatory “fear that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.9.1128b12.

<sup>34</sup> Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, Privacy*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.8.1108a.

<sup>36</sup> I borrow this term from Nathan Rotenstreich, “On Shame,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 19.1 (1965), 57.

shame will occur, and hence a state of mind restraining man from committing an act which may provoke shame.”<sup>37</sup>

Although shame may be properly understood as a state of moral restraint, Aristotle suggests that the feeling may also arise *after* an impudent act has been committed. In the *Rhetoric* he expands his account of the emotion, observing that shame “is a kind of pain in connection with those evils that pertain to disrepute, *whether present, past, or future.*”<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the sense of bashfulness and restraint characterizing Aristotelian *aidos* may arise at different temporal moments in the execution of an action. It may arise before, during, or after the act has occurred. Classicist David Konstan therefore observes that Aristotelian shame is not simply prospective and restraining but retrospective and inhibiting as well.<sup>39</sup>

Although simply the thought of another’s disapproval can evoke the feeling of shame, the conditions for exciting the emotion and its extension into a heightened state of moral shyness are most vehemently approached in certain social situations. As Aristotle notes, “men feel more shame before those who will always be present, whence the proverb about shame dwelling in the eyes:

And since shame is an imagination connected with disrepute, and ... none considers reputation except through those who confer it, one must needs feel shame before those whom one holds in regard; and one has regard for .... Also before those not guilty of the things alleged and those not aware of one’s misdeeds.<sup>40</sup>

As the concept of bashfulness moved into the wider space of human socialization it progressed from a feeling state that could curb unethical behavior into an ethical

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<sup>37</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, ed. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover Press, 1955), 3.Xxxl.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, ed. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (England: Penguin, 1991), 2.6.1383b.

<sup>39</sup> See David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> *The Rhetoric*, 2.6.1384a.

emotional condition characterized by extreme behavioral inhibition felt before an esteemed other. In certain public settings the fear of social dishonor could progress into an excessive case of modesty, or moral shyness, in which the subject defensively attempts to hide his “misdeed” or any sign of “guilt” or wrongdoing from view. As Douglas Cairns observes, *aidos* may “convey inhibition before a generalized group of other people in whose eyes one feels one’s self-image to be vulnerable.”<sup>41</sup> Despite the inhibiting anti-social behavioral symptomology that Aristotelian *aidos* perpetuates, the emotion itself may be understood as being grounded in a profound sense of admiration for another person and in a deep concern to gain and maintain the other’s opinion in the face of impending dishonor. Accordingly, classical shyness was deemed a moral as well as social virtue. As Carlin Barton observes, shyness was understood in antiquity as an “emotion of relatedness” which aided in the formation of social bonds. One had shame before “someone to whom one wished to be bound.... Conversely, a bond or shared identity awakened one’s sense of shame.”<sup>42</sup> Characterized by a sense of social regard and an inordinate fear of disesteem, Aristotelian shame thus anticipates the modern concept of shyness as a state of extreme behavioral inhibition but adds to the socially reflexive excitation of the emotion a specifically moral dimension.

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<sup>41</sup> Douglas Cairns, *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honor in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2. On *Aidos* and shyness in the ancient world see also Robert A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 207; see also Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory,” *Sociological Theory* 18.1 (2000).

On account of its capacity to stimulate cognitive ethical reflection, Aristotelian shame allies itself with other moral affects. David Konstan emphasizes that “Greek shame had a somewhat wider extension so as to include some or all of the modern notion of guilt.”<sup>43</sup> Barton likewise observes that “Roman *pudor* was the guilt, the expiatory suffering, of the transgressor.”<sup>44</sup> In shame the subject’s awareness of wrongdoing, along with the element of remorse felt as he or she reflects upon the baseness of the action, approximates the retrospective function of a guilty conscience.<sup>45</sup> The traditional division between shame and guilt cultures is thus especially relevant to an understanding of Aristotelian *aidos*, primarily because it makes the distinction between the two collapse. In a shame culture the subject is restrained from carrying out a base action purely out of sensitivity to the opinion of others. The primary concern is with the maintenance of one’s reputation, not with the actual fact of wrongdoing. In a guilt culture, however, individuals are committed to norms regardless of the public visibility of their behavior. Stanley Cavell underscores the distinction between the two states, noting that in shame, “as long as no one knows what you have done you are safe,” but in guilt “your conscience will press you to confess and accept punishment.”<sup>46</sup> The social roots of Aristotelian shame stand out in Ruth Benedict’s formulation of a shame culture, which she argues relies “on external sanctions for behavior, not as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized

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<sup>43</sup> Konstan, *Emotions*, 92-3.

<sup>44</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 214. Note also her discussion on the inseparability of shame and guilt in antiquity, p.200-1, and note 5.

<sup>45</sup> See Konstan’s discussion on this idea, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 94.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 278.

conviction of sin.”<sup>47</sup> Yet classical shame is not entirely without an internalized feeling of guilt, which attributes to the emotion a strong ethical dimension. According to Aristotle, a person wouldn’t even fear social dishonor without first having a kind of “antecedent belief,” or inner acknowledgment, that what one has done, or is about to do, is morally reprehensible and therefore entails the danger of infamy.<sup>48</sup> Guilt arises as a result of one’s awareness of wrongdoing, and this idea of the self’s accountability plays a central role in Aristotelian shame and its socio-psychological arousal. As Aristotle notes, “all base actions are the more shameful if they are perceived to occur on one’s own account; for it is all the more a consequence of vice, if one is oneself responsible for what has happened, is happening, or is going to happen.”<sup>49</sup> Although shame is an anxious concern with disrepute, it is the deep-rooted consciousness that what one has done, or will do, is unethical which provokes the subject’s primary fear of disgrace. In shame, conscience weighs upon the self and is inseparable from one’s broader fear of disgrace.

As Barton has argued, the sense of remorse intrinsic to classical notions of shame aided in the formation of the Roman notion of *conscientia*, and, as she further contends, with the advent of Christianity, shame continued to influence the advancement of a guilt culture.<sup>50</sup> Paul Strohm likewise explains how Greco-Roman shame, grounded in external notions of social judgment, powerfully

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<sup>47</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), 323.

<sup>48</sup> On the idea of the antecedent belief and the cognitive basis of Aristotelian emotion see John Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion: A Contribution to Philosophical Psychology, Rhetoric, Poetics, Politics, and Ethics* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, 2.6. 1384a.

<sup>50</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 281.



influenced the Christian moral tradition on conscience as it developed throughout the medieval era. As Strohm claims, “the character of biblical and Christian conscience was mixed at its very inception, combining principles of private ethical discernment with public expectation.”<sup>51</sup> The Augustinian conscience, which tends to speak from what Charles Taylor calls a kind of radically self-reflexive inner position, is, for example, rarely ever dissociated from an extrinsic perspective, as in this passage from *The Confessions*:

The day had come when I should be naked to myself and my conscience [*conscientia mea*] mutter within me ... saying how you would not cast off the burden of vanity for an uncertain truth. Behold, matters are now certain, and you are still burdened. And they are receiving wings on freer shoulders, others who have neither so worn themselves down in seeking nor spent ten years and more thinking about it. Thus I was inwardly gnawed and violently confused with horrible shame.<sup>52</sup>

Overwhelmed by shame, Augustine considers the ethical implications of his own delayed conversion in relation to other pagans who have already converted to Christianity and their alleged perceptions of him. As religious doctrine and evangelical theory advanced throughout the medieval period, and the idea of conscience became reoriented from outward to upward, focusing on the self’s personal relationship with God, there was still an unavoidable emphasis placed on the social identity of the Christian subject. As Augustine further observes, “virtue rests not on other people’s judgments but on the witness of one’s own conscience. But let everyone prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself.”<sup>53</sup> As divine precepts became more strongly internalized in relation to the development

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Strohm, *Conscience: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 131ff

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. P.G. Walsh (Cambridge: Oxbow, 2005), 5.2; mine.

of Christianity, the fear of God's judgment could not, as Augustine clarifies, be entirely dissociated from the idea of the judgments and opinions of others. As the Middle Ages progressed, Aristotelian shame continued to be regarded as a moral emotional state that carried with it the ability to make one deeply conscious of sin. In the *Summa Theologica*, a work that follows the *Nicomachean Ethics* closely, Aquinas deemed shame a praiseworthy passion, defining it as a "recoiling from the disgrace that is contrary to temperance." *Verecundia*, as Aquinas explains, is a heightened force of modesty that constrains one from sinfulness and thereby protects the self against dishonor, as well as against the spiritual frailty which became a universal condition after the fall.<sup>54</sup>

Noting the predominance of shame in the medieval world, Valerie Allen has recently demonstrated how its *signum naturale*, the blush, was central to the act of confession. As she states, "reliance upon spontaneous blushing informs the mood of the confessional and its ideological effect." The immediate fear of moral judgment, felt by the confessor before the priest, compelled a kind of reflexive consciousness of sin that became overtly expressed through the body and then confessed through language.<sup>55</sup> The *Ancrene Wisse* makes explicit the way "the lively redness of the face gives [to] the soul which was pale, and had only the hue of death . . . , the hue of life."<sup>56</sup> As the social orientation of the medieval

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *Aquinas: The Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005), 144.1, p. 130ff.

<sup>55</sup> Valerie Allen, "Waxing Red: Shame and the Body, Shame and the Soul" In *The Representation of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 197-8. Allen provides a good discussion on medieval adaptations of Aristotelian shame in Augustine and Aquinas.

<sup>56</sup> *Ancrene Wisse: The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 160 (fol. 90a, lines 10-12). See also Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 108ff.

confessional reveals, the feeling of shame was a central religious emotion involved in the affective shaping of Christian conscience, engaging the subject in acts of confession, contrition, spiritual conversion, and redemption that led the soul closer to God and immortality.

Strohm has argued that that there was a kind of “reformation of conscience” that emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which depended far less upon notions of social honor than it did upon the subject’s spiritual judgment before God. Early modern Christians, he explains, began to “judge merit in their own conscience rather than relying upon the views of others.”<sup>57</sup> Yet shame and its cognate states are virtually inseparable from notions of conscience throughout the Renaissance. Christopher Tilmouth has recently explored the indubitable presence of a kind of “shame-consciousness” within the early modern world. In his work, he looks to the state of shamefastness so as to recuperate an idea of the Renaissance conscience as a “public,” “open,” socially and affectively motivated operation. Shame, he notes, “takes possession through the medium of visualization.... The subject, suddenly becoming a detached viewer of himself ..., sees that witness looking in upon him and realizes that what it sees is not the ideal figure that he would like it to perceive but rather someone contemptible.” Tilmouth lauds shamefastness as a virtuous religious affect that “worries as much about how the soul will appear in the public eye as about what God will make of it. Man is encouraged to experience his conscience as something exposed, open to

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<sup>57</sup> Strohm, *Introduction*, 24, 16.

public inspection, not as that private book visible only to God.”<sup>58</sup> Although Tilmouth provides an influential exposition of the prevalence of a socially oriented “shame-consciousness” throughout early modernity, his work is altogether less concerned with the attitude of behavioral restraint that shame encourages in those who feel it, a notion central to Aristotelian accounts of the emotion and its extension into shyness. The emergence of the concept of “shyness” within the theological world both reflects the predominance of shame in early modernity and calls attention to the forcefulness with which it continued to develop, throughout the period, into an emotional state capable of arousing heightened states of moral and spiritual consciousness within the Christian subject.

In his 1586 treatise *Upon the Defense of Censure* the theologian William Charke calls attention to “shyness” as a religious affect directly involved in the practice of confession:

Although offences be made in thought, let this judgment be without a witness, let God only see thee making thy confession, God which casteth not thy sins in thy teeth, but to set thy sins for thy shame.... I know a shy conscience cannot abide her own offences: These words a man would think should be plain enough, against the necessity of auricular confession, but Chryst crieth out plainly, that it is not his [God’s] meaning, which requireth the examination to be in thought alone, and the judgment without witness, which cannot be if the priest do hear.

In accordance with medieval notions of confession, Charke emphasizes, with distinct reference to the “shy conscience,” the necessity of shame as an affect that

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<sup>58</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, “Shakespeare’s Open Consciences,” In *The Renaissance Conscience*, eds. Harold Braun and Edward Vallence (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), 69-70. For influential literary treatments dealing with early modern conscience see also Camille Wells Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1990).

could impel the subject's feelings of guilt before the priest and prompt a declaration of sin.<sup>59</sup>

As the early modern period progressed, the state of “shyness” continued to infiltrate the theological world. Isaac Barrow explicitly alludes to the ethical force of bashfulness in his 1694 treatise, *Discourses Upon Repentance*:

By continuance in sin, the chief means of restraining, or reducing us from it is modesty, [which] is a curb from doing ill; Men in their first deflections from virtue are bashful and shy; out of regard of other men's opinion, and tenderness of their own honor they are afraid or ashamed to transgress plain rules of duty ... conscience is a check to beginners in sin, reclaiming them from it, and rating them for it.<sup>60</sup>

Retaining its Aristotelian association with moral action and virtue, early modern shyness developed into a conscience-driven affect that both prevented the Christian subject from engaging in sin, while also causing him to be overly conscious of his transgressions in the presence of others.

Shakespeare was undoubtedly intrigued by the way in which shame could activate the conscience, but he was chiefly interested in the deeper psychological and emotional effects of the “shame-consciousness” and its impact on human action, thought, and behavior. To appreciate the cultural history of shyness and the range of affective religiosity in early modernity one must turn to Shakespeare's plays, which reflect a comprehensive understanding of shame

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<sup>59</sup> William Charke, *A Treatise Against the Defense of Censure* (Cambridge, 1586), 54.

<sup>60</sup> Isaac Barrow, *Practical discourses upon the consideration of our latter end, and the danger and mischief of delaying repentance* (London, 1694), 122-3. For other early modern theological allusions to shyness see for example Thomas Gataker, *The Spiritual watch, or Christs generall watch-word; A meditation on Mark 13.37* (London, 1622): “Wee must shun, saith the Apostle, and be shie of the very shew and shadow of sinne,” p. 42. See also Richard Greenham, *The workes of the reverend and faithful servant of Jesus Christ M. Richard Greenham, minister and preacher of the Word of God collected into one volume* (London, 1612): “For we see, that as the evill men are not the better for the godly, with whom they are ioyned in the same towne or house with them, because they are so shie of goodnes; so, if we be as shie of their wickednesse, wee shall be freed from much ungodlines, 492.

through their account of conscience as an operation experienced through the emotional purview of shyness. Shakespeare's plays repeatedly investigate the notion of the "shy conscience" as an emotional experience through which the Christian subject could turn away from sin and achieve moral and godly enlightenment.

### III. Shakespearean Shyness

The former theological approach to shyness as a virtuous moral emotion integral to the arousal of conscience provides significant revision of recent critical investigations into the inherent viciousness of the early modern passions. Long-held beliefs about the biological basis of emotion find expression in early modern conceptions of the passions, which have been treated as a subset of impulsive, material phenomena grounded in the unstable workings of the humoral body and therefore set apart by their distance from reason, moral judgment, and virtue.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence of the scholarly attention given to materialist approaches to the passions recent criticism has overlooked the more favorable view of emotion espoused by Christian writers of the period, along with the significant impact the religious emotions had on the moral and spiritual life of the Christian subject.

Discernible in the works of Augustine is a vision of mental activity in which knowing and willing are deeply intertwined with feeling. Emotions, as Augustine argues, "are essentially acts of the will." The will, being attracted to, or

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<sup>61</sup> Paster's early work on shame, as well as her book, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), deeply influenced this view of emotion. Older studies dealing with this approach include Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady* (Michigan: U Michigan P, 1965); Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1930).

repelled by certain objects, “changes and turns into *feelings* of various kinds.”<sup>62</sup> Volition, knowledge, and emotion are thus synonymous states and Augustine himself looks to the state of “love” to denote the affective orientation of the self as it wills itself toward the desired object.<sup>63</sup> Love, as Bishop Edward Reynolds explained in his 1640 treatise on the passions, “is grounded on the right knowledge of God; whereby the soul being ravished with apprehension of his infinite goodness, is earnestly drawn ... to desire union, vision, and participation of his glory.”<sup>64</sup> In *The Philosophical Foundations of Sacred Rhetoric*, one of the few studies to treat extensively the nature of religious emotional experience in early modern England, Debora K. Shuger explains how the “noetic quest begins from and is propelled by love, yet we can love only that which, in some sense, we already know. Rather than undermining rational judgment, love wings the mind’s search for God and truth.... Impelled by desire, the quester strives to apprehend what he loves, which achieved, creates the ardent love of full union.” Although love is the *primum mobile* in the affective life of the Christian, Shuger further observes that it gives rise to other passions, including “hope and sometimes faith – the Pauline theological virtues – along with spiritual joy, contrition, and desire,

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<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Martha Nussbaum provides a comprehensive account of religious emotional experience focusing on divine love in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University 2001). Other useful studies on religious emotion include John Corrigan, *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Religious Emotions: Some Philosophical Explorations*, eds. Willem Lemmen and Walter Van Herck (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008); Simo Knuttila, “Remarks on Medieval Discussions of Religious Emotions,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times*, ed. Ghita Holmstrom-Hintikka (Boston: Kluwer, 2000); On the relationship between Augustinianism, will, and emotion in early modernity see William J. Bouwsma, *A Useable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (London 1640), 81, see also page 97.

as well as emotions like shame and anger.”<sup>65</sup> Dependent upon transcendent forms of knowledge for their arousal, religious passions are deeply informed by rational judgments concerning God, and when felt can move the will guiding the individual toward spiritual union and salvation.

The link between emotion and mental activity structuring early modern religious experience is heavily influenced by Aristotle’s cognitivist understanding of the passions. For Aristotle, emotions are “those things that cause people to change their minds in respect of their judgments and are accompanied by pleasure and pain.”<sup>66</sup> Because emotions arise from judgments, they are open to reasoned persuasion, and hence possess a moral relevance which makes them particularly suited to theological approaches to emotion. Emotions are not simply instinctive bodily responses devoid of thought and rationality; rather, because they are situated within a larger context of cultural, social, and religious beliefs, values, and attitudes, their arousal entails specific modes of appraisal and reasoning. As John Corrigan explains, “emotionality plays a key role in shaping a person’s action in social settings where choices must be made, where the agent must negotiate a pathway through various situations by distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil.”<sup>67</sup> Although Aristotle has been influential in shaping the modern view of emotion as cognitive rather than simply biological and instinctual, his theories do not dismiss the corporeal basis of passionate

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<sup>65</sup> Debora Kuller Shuger, “The Philosophical Foundations of Sacred Rhetoric,” In *Religion and Emotion*, 121-3. See her book *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in The English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> On Aristotle’s cognitivist influence on religious understandings of emotion see Shuger, “The Philosophical Foundations,” 123; Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, (2.1.1378a).

<sup>67</sup> Corrigan, *Religion and Emotion*, 14. On the social construction of emotion, and of shame, in particular, see *The Emotions: Social, Cultural, and Biological Dimensions*, eds. Rom Harre and W. Gerrod Parrott (London: Sage 1996).



experience. As William Fortenbaugh explains, Aristotle's thinking is neither reductionist nor dualist. Aristotelian anger, for instance, is "grounded upon and directed by beliefs;" but it does not preclude an explanation as to why "angry men become hot and turn red."<sup>68</sup> Aristotelian shame is, likewise, a cognitive oriented response; but neither does it ignore the significance of blushing and behavioral modes of inhibition and restraint in the generation of moral consciousness and action. In this respect, Aristotle's theory of emotion approximates recent cognitive neuroscientific approaches to affective experience which allow for a connection between the embodiment of emotion and moral reasoning, and also privilege the dynamic interaction between the brain, body, and the external world.<sup>69</sup>

In his influential study, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Antonio Damasio draws upon neurological evidence to support the argument that "feelings are just as cognitive as other precepts." As he explains, "the lower levels in the neural edifice of reason are the same ones that regulate the processing of emotions and feelings," thus situating the body "directly within the chain of operations that generate the highest reaches of reasoning, decision making, and by extension, social behavior and creativity. Emotion, feeling, and biological regulation all play a role in human reason." In moving against a strict Cartesian dualism, Damasio upholds the belief that the "human brain and the rest of the body constitute an indissociable organism," which, as he further observes,

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<sup>68</sup> Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 15-17.

<sup>69</sup>For more on Aristotle's influence on modern neuroscience see Eric LaRock and Konstantinos Kafetsios, "Cognition and Emotion: Aristotelian Affinities With Contemporary Emotion Research," *Theory Psychology* 15 (2005): 639-57. The study also provides a useful history of the debate on emotions as either biological or cognitive, as well as a solid discussion on the neuroscientific view that they are both.

interacts with the environment as an ensemble.”<sup>70</sup> Neurophilosopher John Sutton likewise observes how “dynamic cognitive systems coevolve with the physiological, environmental, and social system in which they are embedded.”<sup>71</sup> Cognitive neuroscience has been especially useful to early modern scholars in their attempts to investigate how the pre-Cartesian psychophysiology of humoral theory affected the lived self-experience of early modern people. In her phenomenological approach to humoral selfhood, Gail Kern Paster draws upon neuroscience to support her understanding of the way the early modern mind, body, and world were always connected through what philosopher Andy Clark describes “as a network of ‘mutually modulatory influences’ in a dynamic action of ‘continuous reciprocal causation.’”<sup>72</sup> Humoralism did not separate the psychological from the physiological realm, nor did it cordon off these spheres of human existence from the external physical environment. In constructing what she terms a premodern ecological model of the passions, Paster explains how emotional and behavioral change, constituted by a shift in one’s bodily humors, was often deemed to be the result of an alteration in the body’s context or circumstance.<sup>73</sup> The physical world was believed to influence the physiology of the body, which in turn affected the operations of mind. Paster thus draws explicitly upon neuroscientific ideas of the extended mind and distributed

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<sup>70</sup> Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), xv, xvi-xviii.

<sup>71</sup> John Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Paster, *Humoring*, 10; quoting Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 163. On neuroscientific approaches to early modern literature see also Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare’s Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>73</sup> See Paster, *Humoring*, 9.

cognition to support an account of the “embodied mind” and the related conception of the early modern passions as material, environmentally manipulable phenomena that could potentially become excessive if not controlled, thereby clouding mental judgment and subverting reason, leading the subject into disease, error and sin.<sup>74</sup>

Although neuroscience provides an intriguing theoretical means for assessing the dynamic, shifting operations characterizing humoral selfhood and emotional experience, very little work has been done on the cognitive neuroscience of religious emotion in the early modern period. As Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead suggest, neurological science can be especially helpful in understanding the “embodied, visceral, and affective dimensions of religious experience,” and in delineating the way in which the Christian subject exists in “an embodied, moral, encultured, self-relation to the world.”<sup>75</sup> Michael L. Spezio likewise notes how “moral philosophy and theology have much to gain from engagement with neuroscience. . . . The neuroscience of emotion and moral action provides strong evidence for the adaptive, integrated function of emotion in reasoned choice.”<sup>76</sup> The well-recognized connection between the changeable mind, body, and world that underpins modern neuroscience and that has been advanced in recent scholarship, cannot therefore be solely limited to humoral-

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<sup>74</sup> Paster, *Humoring*, 6. Michael Schoenfeldt explores this view but focuses on how external environmental factors, such as diet, could be conversely adopted to stabilize the humors, thus promoting health, moral control, and spiritual wellbeing. See *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Donne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, eds. Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5-6.

<sup>76</sup> Michael L. Spezio, “The Neuroscience of Emotion and Reasoning In Social Contexts: Implications for Moral Theology,” In *Faith, Rationality, and the Passions*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Oxford: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012), 223.

based accounts of early modern emotional experience. This cognitive ecological approach is also applicable to the arousal of specific religious emotions and their production of reformatory and transformative states of moral and spiritual consciousness.

In their description of the concept of a “cognitive ecology,” Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton explain how “mental activities spread or smear across the boundaries of skull and skin to include parts of the social and material world. In decision making and acting, ... our complex and structured activities involve many dimensions: neural, affective, kinesthetic, sensory.... Many cognitive states and processes are hybrids, unevenly distributed across the physical, social, and cultural environments as well as bodies and brains.”<sup>77</sup> Tribble and Sutton’s cognitive ecological model is especially relevant to an understanding of early modern shyness. As an externally aroused psycho-physiological emotional state situated within a larger context of ideological norms, shyness necessitates the interaction of the body and mind with the social and cultural world, combining specific modes of external judgment, ethical appraisal and reflection with felt bodily and behavioral response. The cognitive neuroscience of emotion, which argues against a philosophical separation of mind and body, reason and emotion, and which relates embodied agents to the wider social and material surround, thus

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<sup>76</sup> Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton, “Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies,” *Shakespeare Studies* 39 (2011): 94-5. For further discussion on the idea of a cognitive ecology and its relation to Shakespeare see the forthcoming study, *The Early Modern Body-Mind: Cognition and Embodiment in Shakespeare’s Theatre*, eds. John Sutton, Laurence Johnson, and Evelyn Tribble (Routledge, 2013). See also Evelyn Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (New York: Palgrave, 2011); *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: Religion, Education and Memory in Early Modern England*, eds. Evelyn Tribble and Nicholas Keene (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

provides an apt theoretical model for understanding the way religious shyness operates in Shakespeare's plays as a multi-dimensional emotional response productive of moral consciousness and spiritual change. As I demonstrate throughout this study, the arousal of shyness encompasses a dynamic interpenetration amongst the body, mind, and social world to produce within the Christian subject a conversionary state of "noetic transformation" that counteracts the negative and corrupting effects of the humors on the Christian soul, thus turning it away from sin and moving it closer toward salvation.<sup>78</sup>

In support of contemporary theological concerns Shakespeare engages with a religious account of the passions that is freed from the encroachment of materialist explanations. As I demonstrate, many of Shakespeare's characters are governed by an excessive pride and sinful desire for honor that is partly represented throughout the text in materialist terms and thus sacrilegiously exonerated as an uncontrollable effect of the unstable workings of the humoral body. However, generated through the reflexive operation of conscience, the state of shyness contradicts this materialist agenda. Throughout the plays, shyness motivates a transformative process in which mind, body, and social world interact simultaneously to produce a conflicting state of moral consciousness, spiritual purification and reform. As I contend, the state of noetic transformation that shyness provokes within the Christian subject undoes heretical accounts of the

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<sup>78</sup> I use this term to denote a specifically Christian transformation delimiting a spiritualized turning away from sin toward salvation. On the "noetic quest" see Shuger, who brings the theological concept of *noesis* together with ideas about spiritual transformation through a rhetorical appeal to the passions, "The Philosophical Foundations of Sacred Rhetoric," 118, 123ff. *Noesis* refers broadly to the damaging effects of sin upon judgment and intellect. See Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: An Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (New York: Lexington, 2000).

humors as fixed and ungovernable, and the soul as a predetermined, predestined entity.<sup>79</sup>

The reformative relationship between shyness and pride developed throughout the Shakespearean canon relies much on Aristotelian epistemology, which espouses a kind of therapeutic regime in which extreme passions can be moderated and overcome by way of a back and forth movement between opposing passionate states. Although Aristotle notes that the “intermediate is in all things to be praised,” he argued that the virtuous mean is a situational rather than fixed ethic – a response to varying circumstances and a principle relative to each person. It could therefore be achieved more effectively through the fluid interplay between emotional extremes than it could through a strict process of rational tempering. As Aristotle notes, we “must incline sometimes toward the excess, sometimes toward the deficiency; for so shall we most easily hit the mean and what is right.”<sup>80</sup> Despite the prevalence with which early modern conduct writers invoked a purely rational mode of moderation, the Aristotelian view

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<sup>79</sup> For an extended discussion on the idea of humoral predestination see Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 9ff. On the heretical nature of viewing one’s humors as fixed see also Douglas Trevor’s account of “hard-line Galenism.” “Sadness in *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, eds. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, Mary Floyd Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Trevor uses religious sadness in much the same way that I use religious shyness, as an emotion that could engender the purification and transformation of the soul, and which was thus heavily involved in theological attempts to limit the heretical implications of materialist thought. For an extended discussion on the heretical implications of humoralism see also James Redwine, “Beyond Psychology: The Moral Basis of Jonson’s Theory of Humor Characterization,” *English Literary History* 28 (1961): 316-334.

<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.9.1109a-1109b. On Shakespeare’s adaptation of this Aristotelian view of emotion see Unhae Langis, “*Coriolanus*: Inordinate Passions and Powers in Personal and Political Governance,” *Comparative Drama* 44 (2010), 2. See also Christopher Crosbie, “Fixing Moderation: *Titus Andronicus* and the Aristotelian Determination of Value,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.2 (2007): 147-172; Richard Strier, “Against the Rule of Reason: Praise of Passion from Petrarch to Luther to Shakespeare to Herbert,” In *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 23-43.

whereby extreme passions could act as governors appears to have been in wide circulation throughout the period.”<sup>81</sup>

In response to the idea of quelling emotions in the Stoic sense, the editors of *Reading the Early Modern Passions* observe how “many Renaissance writers appealed instead to the classical tradition of controlling affections with other affections. In this way they translated the passivity of Christian suffering, or the passivity of perturbations that act upon the body, into a willful redirection of the very ‘motions’ that constituted the feeling self.”<sup>82</sup> Aristotle’s theory of emotional moderation had a prominent influence upon early modern theologians and writers, like Shakespeare, who appealed to a set of religious emotions in an attempt to counter the heretical implications associated with materialist accounts of the Galenic body.

Shakespeare, I argue, adapts Aristotle’s model of the passions as moral governors as he develops philosophical ideas about the relationship among shyness, humility, and pride. Aristotle understood the fear of shame primarily as a mean state situated between extremes of bashfulness and shamelessness; however, his conception of *the fear of dishonor* develops throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* in conjunction with the opposing state *the desire for honor*. As he explains, “with regard to the desire for honor the mean is proper pride, the excess a sort of empty vanity, and the deficiency is undue humility.” The emotional proximity

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<sup>81</sup> See for example, Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions*: “[The] course taken for the allaying of this vehemencie of our affections . . . is done, either by opposing contrary passions to contrary; which is Aristotle’s rule, who adviseth, in the bringing of passions from an extremity to a mediocrity, to incline and bend them towards the other extreme . . . and that not only by the power of reason, but also by the cautelous admixture of passions amongst themselves, thereby interrupting their free current,” 52.

<sup>82</sup> *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 12.

between bashfulness and humility is made apparent through Aristotle's theorization of the two states as complementary extremes of the fear of shame, which work concurrently to moderate excessive pride.<sup>83</sup> In accordance with Aristotle's view of the passions as moderators, Shakespeare develops an account of excessive pride as an emotional state that is moderated by the opposing experiences of bashfulness and humility.

Shakespeare thus engages in a radical Christianization of Aristotelian thought in his attempts to illuminate the virtuous aspects of shyness as a conscience-driven affect capable of combating the damaging effects of the sin of pride.<sup>84</sup> However, just as shyness was believed to moderate pride, so pride is often represented as a moderator of excessive humility. As a consequence of the interplay between the two extremes, a number of Shakespeare's most bashful, yielding, and compliant characters can be seen engaging in sinful behavior marked by self-righteous vanity and a desire for personal aggrandizement as they try to overcome the personal limitations associated with their shyness. The corrupt advancement into worldly pride, honor, individualism, and vengeance is, however, never an aspect of the Christian self that Shakespeare endorses, for he

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<sup>83</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.1107b. On the interactive relationship between shyness and pride with reference to Spenser's allegorical representation of Shamefastness and Prayse-desire see White who argues that the temperate soul "controls shamefastness by balancing it with the desire for praise and honor, and vice versa," 395. See also Robert Lanier Reid, "Spenser and Shakespeare: Polarized Approaches to Psychology," In *Shakespeare and Spenser: Attractive Opposites*, ed. J.B. Lethbridge (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> I am moving here against the received critical view, summarized by John Alvis, that Shakespeare "peoples his world with men whose pride accounts for much of their virtue. Diffidence and humility are damaging to the extent that such lowliness acquiesces in depreciating virtue," *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1990), 24. See also Curtis Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 13ff. For related claims, especially in relation to ideas about Shakespeare's questionable approach to Christianity, see Reid, "Attractive Opposites," 111ff; Beatrice Batson, *Shakespeare's Christianity: The Protestant and Catholic Poetics of Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).



represents it as a serious moral flaw subject to extensive critique. More often than not, such proud characters find themselves burdened by the moral and religious force of their own shy consciences and implicated in a paroxysm of shame, guilt, humility, and remorse on account of their egoistic ambition. Although Shakespeare engages with his culture's perception of shyness as a problematic personal trait that individuals should strive to overcome, his plays ultimately question and subvert such a view by upholding an advanced Aristotelian conception of shyness as a social, moral, and religious virtue.

Chapter One, "The Bridle of Shame: The Gendering of Shyness in Early Modern England," complements this introduction and enables a broader understanding of shyness and its relation to notions of humility. The chapter develops an account of the way that these closely related states developed in relation to one another from within the gentlemanly socio-political sphere of civil conversation. Beginning with an investigation of shyness as a feminine quality, I explore how the emotion began to transgress gender boundaries by gaining a notable presence amongst male courtiers. As a result of its increasing manifestation in elite men, shyness underwent a radical de-moralization, medicalization, and secularization, becoming heavily tied to notions of male immorality and disease. The chapter concludes with an account of Shakespeare's King Henry the Sixth, a figure whose characterization reflects the gradual collapse of shyness as the emotion began to lose its religious value and starts to transform into an injurious medical condition. King Henry's humility and shyness

– qualities intrinsic to his Christian subjectivity – are, I argue, represented negatively as problematic traits in a ruler that ultimately cause the breakdown of the play’s political, familial, personal, and social structures.

Although Shakespeare appears to have subscribed early on in his career to developing ideas about shyness as a harmful and limiting male quality that conflicted with secularized notions of self-empowerment and social and political authority, his later works reveal a questioning of this view as well as a corresponding shift in approach. Later plays do not seek to denigrate religious shyness or empty the emotion of its intrinsic value, but rather strive to uphold its ethical and virtuous connotations, treating worldly, self-interested patterns of thought and behavior as sinful, deeply flawed, and in need of spiritual correction through the contrasting emotional experience of moral shyness.

Chapter Two, “Coriolanus’ Blush,” draws specifically on the gentlemanly socio-political background in which ideas about male shyness as a noxious quality were developing, but works toward undermining the negative perception of the emotion circulating within that cultural context. Coriolanus is placed within the public political sphere where he must display his wounds and enact civilizing and deferential displays of humility before the Plebs in order to gain the consulship. The fear of shame, blushing, and bashfulness that the hero evinces as he stands before the populace is, however, revelatory not of vice and male degeneracy but rather discloses his sense of moral and social consciousness, underscoring his awareness that he acted self-interestedly and unethically in battle. Bringing early modern theological discourses on the passions together with cognitive

neuroscientific approaches to emotion, this chapter analyzes Coriolanus' blush as a psycho-physiological moral response that motivates a process of spiritual reform and complexional transformation.

Chapter Three, "'If I Can Catch Him Once Upon the Hip:' Shyness and Emotional Wrestling in *The Merchant of Venice*," continues to explore the former theological meaning of shyness as a virtuous passion productive of a high degree of moral and spiritual insight. At the same time, however, the play also seeks to complicate the religious value of the emotion. Although shame, bashfulness, and humility are delineated throughout the play as religious qualities that have been internalized as guiding, ethical affective principles within the Christian subject, they appear damaging to the extent that they conflict with the element of self-empowerment, self-mastery, and social status that a number of the characters strive to attain. To feel shy in *The Merchant of Venice* is, I argue, to feel oneself bound, or "shy-locked," into a restrictive social relationship or moral obligation to another person, wherein one has little authority. *Merchant* thus reflects the historical devolution of shyness outlined in the first chapter and engages with ideas developed in Plutarch's treatise "Of Naughty Bashfulness" by assessing the destructive and limiting personal effects of shyness upon the self. Accordingly, many of *Merchant's* major figures demonstrate a marked resistance to their shyness and even learn how to overcome its disempowering effects by manipulatively transferring the emotion onto others and cultivating it for their own advantage. The religious value of the emotion is, however, quickly reinstated as a number of characters display a shyness that draws attention to the moral

struggle they experience in reckoning with the power and honor they have achieved. Some even go so far as to recapitulate their abject stance of Christian bashfulness and passivity in an effort to reconfirm their inherent sense of religious virtue and atone for their sins.

Because *Merchant* develops an account of shyness as a distinctively Christian moral emotional state, I further argue that the play establishes racial and religious difference through the affects of shame and modesty. As a consequence of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, Shylock will experience the sense of moral consciousness, restraint, meekness and humility characteristic of Christian shyness. However, his experience of the emotion will be effectively forced upon him by members of the Venetian elite who seek to garner social power by exploiting in others the socially disempowering and submissive aspects of shyness.

The fourth and final chapter, “The Extremest Shore of Modesty: *Measure for Measure* and the Politics of Shyness,” takes up the idea of the bashful ruler from the first chapter. Unlike King Henry, however, Duke Vincentio is able to transform his shyness into a mode of power and thereby overcome its negative political effects. Like the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* he learns how to transfer the emotion on to others and cultivate it for his own magisterial advantage. The chapter offers a complex representation of the Duke as a figure who appropriates religious authority as a means of establishing political rule over his people. In adopting the disguise of friar, the Duke is able to gain access to his subjects’ sinful intents and desires. By manipulating his subjects’ depraved

feelings, along with the morally compromising situations in which they place themselves, and then exposing their faults, the Duke is able to exploit, cultivate, and augment their latent fears of shame and dishonor, thereby producing a highly repressive method of governance and restraint. As part of his political strategy to achieve power by coercing his subjects' shyness, the Duke employs the moral logic of the "judge not that ye be not judged" tenet from *The Sermon on the Mount* from which the play takes its title. In the end, however, he finds that he is himself not entirely immune to the moral insight he inflicts upon his people. As with the figures in *Merchant*, the Duke has a difficult time evading the more serious moral and religious dictates of his own shy conscience. Vincentio's final unmasking constitutes a deliberate attempt to undermine the power and authority he has achieved. His exposure, I argue, operates as a kind of self-inflicted religious tactic through which he implicates himself in a scene of shame, shyness, humility and abjection as a means of atoning for the sinful forms of pride and power he has attained. Like *Merchant*, *Measure* engages in an investigation into the personal, or in this case political limits of shyness, yet the play quickly works toward undermining its own emotional logic by upholding a more affirmative conception of the Duke as a shy, conscience-oriented character whose bashfulness and meekness accounts for much of his moral integrity and religious virtue.

Although these chapters consider the widespread early modern perception of shyness as a harmful, disempowering, and constraining emotional fault, this view is radically destabilized through Shakespeare's representations of the shy conscience. As much as the plays (and the characters themselves) question the

concept of religious shyness and its negative and limiting effects upon the self in an increasingly secular world, they end up undermining this cultural view by endorsing an historical and philosophical view of the emotion as a virtuous moral and religious passion. This dissertation thus aims to illuminate the distinctively ethical patterns of thought, action, and feeling central to a number of Shakespeare's more self-regarding and seemingly shameless characters, thereby revealing their profound sense of ethical consciousness and spiritual aspiration.

## Chapter One

### The Bridle of Shame: The Gendering of Shyness in Early Modern England

In her discussion of women's bashfulness Caroline McManus focuses on the first of two personified abstractions of shamefastness in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Shamefastness, who sits close by Womanhood, never "once did look up from her desse, / as if some blame of evil she did feare, / that in her cheeks made roses oft appeare" (4.10.51-4).<sup>1</sup> According to McManus, Shamefastness' dread of sexual dishonor manifests itself through a "shyness that must be tempered by her opposite *Cheerfulness*. Women must attend both to the ways they look at others and to the appearance they present when others look at them."<sup>2</sup> Like McManus, Patricia McDaniel assumes that "shyness was regarded as a particularly female character trait, ... a protective veil that guarded [women's] virtue." Since men were not considered to be shy by nature, shyness, conceptualized to some degree as fear of others, would have been "at odds with the court culture of the Renaissance which demanded more refined social skills for men," as well as a far greater degree of behavioral and emotional restraint.<sup>3</sup> Conceptions of the former possibilities of shyness thus appear to over-emphasize its connection to female sexuality and to the cultural attributes of modesty, bashfulness, and shamefastness, which aided in the preservation of chastity. The biological determinism of early modern humoral theory further supports the assumption that

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977). All quotes are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Caroline McManus, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 169.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia McDaniel, *Shrinking Violets and Caspar Milquetoasts: Shyness, Power, and Intimacy in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 22-5.

bashfulness was perceived by the early moderns as a specifically feminine affect. Heat produced in the male liver encouraged boldness, whereas the cold complexion of women's bodies aroused their timidity. Yet Shakespeare's characterization of *Measure for Measure's* Duke Vincentio, who is specifically described in the play as a "shy fellow," as well as his treatment of Henry the Sixth, a "bashful" and "shamefaced" king, shows that the trait was not only regarded as a feminine quality.<sup>4</sup>

In order to explain why Shakespeare's representations of shyness focus so closely on male characters and male social relationships, the chapter will explore how early modern medical understandings of bashfulness developed in relation to the bio-cultural formation of masculinity throughout the period. As I argue, shyness evolved out of the gendered early modern concepts shamefastness, modesty, and bashfulness, which were beginning to redefine themselves within the elite gentlemanly social and political world of "civil conversation" in which men competed for office through group interaction and public displays of courtesy. Implemented in court society through what Norbert Elias terms the "civilizing process," ideals of self-control and a new preoccupation with manners and social conduct engrossed the competitive world of civil conversation, and male fears of shame and social disgrace began to intensify.<sup>5</sup> As the result of extreme social pressure, shamefastness and bashfulness began to transgress the norms of stereotypically gender-appropriate behavior, becoming apparently

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<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever (Croatia: Methuen, 1965), 3.2.127. William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Three*, ed. Randall Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.1.41, 4.8.52. All quotes come from these editions.

<sup>5</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, ed. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983).



pathological, and indicating a state of brutishness, mental disease, and emotional unruliness. From within the secular sphere of gentlemanly society the idiom “shy,” often used to describe fearful and unruly horses, now became also an effeminizing and degrading adjective used to describe men who exhibited an excessive level of timidity and inhibition in front of other men, and who finally withdrew themselves from political life out of extreme fears of shame and disgrace.

### I. Shyness and Femininity

The moral connotations attached to Aristotelian notions of shame were readily applied to women throughout the early modern period. Thomas Wright believed that women suffered from a lack of heat that resulted in a “native shamefastness” which made them less prone to sexual shame and incontinency.<sup>6</sup> Shamefastness and bashfulness were deemed feminine attributes rooted in the cold complexion of the humoral body, and intimately related to the maintenance of chastity and sexual honor. Within the humoral economy, women as a group were thought to be moister and colder than men who were hot and dry. Helkiah Crooke claimed that “men are hotter than women . . . in regard of their natural temper, as well as that which is required by diet and the course of life.”<sup>7</sup> Heat was therefore linked to several principles of sex differentiation and contributed to the characterization of gender. As Ian Maclean notes, heat accounted for degrees of

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (London: 1601), 74.

<sup>7</sup> Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (London: 1615), 276. For a longer discussion of heat as a measure of sex difference see Gail Kern Paster, “The Unbearable Coldness of Female Being: Women’s Imperfection in the Humoral Economy,” *English Literary Renaissance* 28.3 (1998): 416-40.

masculine perfection. It was “instrumental in the production of the most perfectly concocted semen from which the male will be born.... He is more robust, broader ... and has mental characteristics which may also be attributed to body heat: courage, liberality, moral strength, honesty. The female, on the other hand, being colder, was characterized by the deprivation or opposite of these features.”<sup>8</sup> The Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius argues, it is “by reason of heat that men be bolder than women be.” Though “old men could turn cold through age, just as children could be moist in youth,” such humors could make “men fearful, timorous, and fainthearted ... which is a thing peculiar to women-kinde.”<sup>9</sup> For Lemnius, heat produced in the male liver encouraged boldness whereas the colder temperament of women’s bodies aroused their timidity, especially in the presence of men.

In *Measure for Measure* the nun Francesca’s fear of sexual dishonor compels her timid withdrawal at the sound of “man’s voice.” Her lack of ease in male company is further evinced as she reminds Isabella when speaking with Lucio, “you must not show your face; / Or if you show your face you must not speak” (1.4.7, 12-3). The presence of men posed a severe threat to female honor and sexual reputation, and as Francesca demonstrates, women’s instinctive response was to restrain themselves as they withdrew in bashful fear and inhibition. As an internalized, affective form of discipline, shamefastness restrained the potentially unruly female from engaging in shameful and

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 32. See also Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions* (London, 1633), 68, 26.

disgracefully wanton behavior. Barnabe Rich claimed that “Nature hath ordained in all virtuous women this affection of shamefastness, which serveth as a restraint to withhold them from those abillimentes that do either smell of vanitie, or breed suspect of honesty. For bashfulness it is that moderates their thoughts, makes them modest in their speches, temperate in their actions, and warie in all their deliberations.”<sup>10</sup> In a society where estates and land titles were in question, the legitimacy of male heirs assumed paramount importance. Notions of female honor, therefore, derived solely from the maintenance of chastity, and as a gendered variant of temperance, chastity was governed and protected by women’s inherent shamefastness. Pierre de la Primaudaye claimed that “shamefastness is sister to continencie, and companion of chastity, yea by means of her societie and fellowship, chastity is in greater safety.” Juan Luis Vives similarly notes that “chastity is kept with shamefastness, nor y<sup>e</sup> one can not be without the other, for shamefastness is it y<sup>e</sup> keepeth the woman.”<sup>11</sup>

Early modern conduct writers were tremendously anxious about women’s sexual purity and sought to cultivate women’s “native shamefastness” in an attempt to preserve chastity during encounters with men. In *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, Vives notes how important it is to discuss “the ordering of the body of a virgin.” He thus counsels parents to “keep their daughters, specially when they begin to grow from child’s state, and hold them from men’s company. For that time they be given to most lust of the body.” Conduct tracts taught young

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<sup>10</sup> Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre de la Primaudaye, “Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor,” In *The French Academy* (London, 1618; New York: George Olm Verlag, 1972), 257; Juan Luis Vives, *The Office and Duty of a Husband*, trans. Thomas Paynell (London: John Cawood, 1555), sig. Riv.

women early on to restrain themselves and their actions in public and in the presence of men. Vives continually explains that “when [a young woman] goeth forth abroad, let her ... hide her face and with scarcely an eye open to see her way withal.... Now when she is in company of people, let her show great soberness, both in countenance and all the gesture of her body, ... let her not behold men much; nor think that they behold her.”<sup>12</sup> Although it was primarily assumed that women’s innate fear of sexual dishonor would have led naturally to an instinctive display of timid and constrained social behavior, authors like Vives, whose main priority was the maintenance of chastity, continued to instill in women the virtue of shamefastness along with the bashful behavioral gestures that accompanied the attribute. In *My Lady’s Looking Glass*, Rich further expounds upon the construction of femininity and its relation to social behavior. A good woman, he states, “openeth her mouth with wisdom, the law of Grace is on her tongue: but a harlot is full of words, she is loud and babbling.... She is bold, she is impudent, she is shameless, she cannot blush: and she that hath lost all these virtues hath lost evidence of honesty; for the ornaments of a good woman are temperance in her mind, silence in her tongue, and bashfulness in her countenance.”<sup>13</sup> The successful maintenance of sexual honor thus depended on the extent to which women governed their social interactions around an instinctual shamefastness that led to bashful displays of visual and bodily inhibition and fearful social withdrawal.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 69-73.

<sup>13</sup> Barnabe Rich, *My Lady’s Looking Glasse* (London, 1616), 44.

As Anne Rosalind Jones notes, “women were consistently the objects of scrutiny and the targets for complex prescriptions for proper behavior.”<sup>14</sup> Women had to fashion their social images according to appropriate and natural displays of fearful behavior or else they would risk the prospect of censure and sexual dishonor. Castiglione suggested that a woman should be “more circumspect and more careful not to give occasion for evil being said of her, and conduct herself so that she may not only escape being sullied by guilt but even by the suspicion of it.”<sup>15</sup> Although such tenets were stringently implanted in the minds of wives and virgins, it was believed that women’s natural fear of dishonor would have brought on bashfulness and restraint. In *The English Gentlewoman*, Richard Brathwaite praises women’s “modest shamefastness,” which for him “consists either in averting your ear ... or withdrawing your presence from dishonest or uncivil discourse.”<sup>16</sup> It was thus expected that most women would stay away from the public arena altogether. According to Vives, maids should be kept at home, and not go abroad: “As oft a maid goeth forth among people, so often she cometh in judgment and extreme peril of her beauty, honesty, demureness, wit, shamefastness, and virtue. For nothing is more tender than is the estimation of women, nor nothing more in danger of wrong.... If a slander once take place in a maid’s name by folks opinion it is in a manner everlasting.”<sup>17</sup> Although women’s innate sense of shame would have compelled them, on their own accord, to

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Rosalind Jones, “Nets and Bridles: early modern conduct books and sixteenth century women’s lyrics,” in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (London: Methuen, 1987), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002), 3.151.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London: 1631), 172.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Aughertson, *Renaissance Women*, 71.

withdraw themselves from the public sphere out of extreme fears of slander and sexual disgrace, male dictation of women's enclosure within the house significantly quelled anxieties about the maintenance of chastity, which was more likely to be jeopardized through public display. Early modern conduct ideology thus relied heavily upon humoral physiology as a way of sustaining a view of women's nature as fearful and timid, and worked toward constructing a naturalized version of femininity founded upon a deep-rooted fear of sexual shame that manifested itself through bashful and inhibited behavioral gestures expressing a profound aversion to publicity.

## II. Women and "Shy Colts:" *The Taming of the Shrew*

Kate Aughertson has suggested that the influx of conduct tracts dictating certain feminine behavior, gestures, and social roles implied "tremendous anxieties about women's transgression of those roles."<sup>18</sup> Although women possessed an innate sense of timidity, their nature embodied a kind of humoral contradiction that was the cause of much male concern. The same lack of heat which predisposed women to feel more fear and shame was also believed to make them sexually unruly, which was why the quality of shamefastness had to be so forcefully inculcated by conduct authors. With less reason to guide her, relative to masculine norms, the early modern woman seemed more vulnerable to governance by her animal passions. Crooke argued that "females are more wanton and petulant than males, we think because of the impotency of their minds: for the imaginations of lustful women are like the imaginations of brute beasts which

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 69.

have no repugnancy or contradiction of reason to restrain them.”<sup>19</sup> Women “were judged by an ambiguous process that swung constantly between two extremes: they were at once condemned for behaving as impulsively and irrationally as an animal, and saved by a timid, animal nature that made them recoil from evil.”<sup>20</sup> As a result of their strong association with irrationality and unruliness, women were perceived to be “closer to, although always different from, animals, and the animal with which they were most frequently aligned was the horse.”<sup>21</sup> Woman is a horse properly trained, wrote Whatley, when “she submits herself with quietness, cheerfully, even as a well-broken horse turns at the least check of the rider’s bridle.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, just as the “curbed bit” was used to restrain “shy colts,” the bridle began to be increasingly applied to women as an image of female restraint and was prominently linked to the quality of shamefastness throughout the period.<sup>23</sup> Woman, notes Barnabe Rich, “should guide herself by the zeale of her honor and the bridle of shamefastness.”<sup>24</sup>

Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew* presents an obvious example of the way the bridle was used as a mechanism of control implemented in women’s socialization into shame. As Joan Hartwig notes, “the wildness of Kate is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>20</sup> Carla Casagrande, “The Protected Woman,” in *A History of Women in the West, Vol.2: The Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christine Klapisich-Zuber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 89.

<sup>21</sup> Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>22</sup> *A Bride Bush* (London, 1617), 36.

<sup>23</sup> I am alluding again to the Cicero quote from the introduction, *The Five Days Debate at Cicero’s House in Tusculum*, 196.

<sup>24</sup> *The Excellency of Good Women*, 21. Influential discussions on the bridle and its links to female unruliness include Lynda Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Women’s Unruly Member,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 179-213; Joan Hartwig, “Horses and Women in *Taming of the Shrew*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 45 (1982): 285-94. Neither of these authors makes an association between women and shy colts, nor links shame with ideas of shyness.

associated more specifically with the horse” than with any other animal mentioned in the play.<sup>25</sup> Petruchio himself aligns Kate with the horse through the image of the bridle when he exclaims how he will “*curb* her mad and headstrong humor.” The bridle, though never materially present in the play, gains narrative possibility through metaphors such as these which Petruchio uses to discipline Kate and change her “from a wild Kate” to one “conformable to other household Kates” (4.1.190, 2.2.278-80).<sup>26</sup> What becomes devastatingly clear by the end of the play is that Kate’s characteristic independence and unruliness have been *curbed* through her metaphoric appropriation of the bridle of shame. In her final speech she admits that she feels a sense of shame in relation to her previous actions: “I am ashamed that women are so simple / To offer war where they should kneel for peace / Or seek for rule ... when they are bound to serve and obey” (5.2.161-4). Whereas her behavior was marked earlier by wild unruliness, her actions are now shadowed over by feminine inhibition, specifically displayed through her willingness to constrain her visual and facial gestures. Kate thus instructs the other women before her to “unknit that threatening unkind brow, / And dart not scornful glances from those eyes” (136-7). In her timidity Kate stands constrained and immovable: “a woman moved is like a fountain troubled, / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty” (142-3). As she enters into the conventional early modern sex-gender system she relinquishes her previous public reputation in favor of a personality appropriately suited to the private, abject space of feminine enclosure and restraint, the only socially available space open to her

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<sup>25</sup> Hartwig, “Horses and Women,” 287.

<sup>26</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. H.J. Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). All quotes are from this edition.



person. She thus reminds the other women, “thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign; one that commits his body to / Painful labor both by sea and land, ... whilst thou liest warm at home secure and safe.... Our bodies [are] soft, weak, and smooth, unapt to toil and trouble in the world” (147-51). Although Petruchio had joked earlier that he had heard of Kate’s “beauty and her wit, / Her affability and bashful modesty,” her inhibited gestures and desire for enclosure signify her successful internalization of the bridle of shamefastness (2.147-8).

Karen Raber and Treva Tucker have recently discussed the importance of horse culture in the early modern world, focusing especially on the way equine imagery, objects, structures, sounds, gestures, texts, and ideas “saturated the metaphoric and proverbial layers of early modern English.”<sup>27</sup> Predominantly associated with horses, the term “shy” was no exception to the English adaptation of horse imagery and language. A kind of linguistic evolution of the word “shy” had begun to develop within early modern England, which inevitably shaped the cultural history of shyness. The term “shy” was often used to describe equine wildness along with the instinctive fear and withdrawal pattern characteristic of horses. However, as the shy colt’s bridle, or curbed bit, came to be increasingly associated with the quality of shamefastness, the word “shy” began to shift from the animal to the human sphere, inevitably replacing the concept of shamefastness in the English lexicon. This anthropomorphic process was itself likely supported by the predominance of humoral thinking in the period. Wright’s well-known

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<sup>27</sup> *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, eds. Karen Raber and Treva Tucker (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 4.

assertion that “those actions which are common with us and beasts, we call passions, and affections, or perturbations of the mind,” has led Gail Kern Paster to suggest that humoralism bridged the gap between humans and animals, and “provided a descriptive vocabulary in which ethical, physical, and psychophysiological discourses intermix.”<sup>28</sup> Because animals shared the same terrain of humors and passions they were thought to possess various humoral complexions similar to their human counterparts. Gervase Markham notes that humans with melancholic cold and dry complexions possessed the same skittish and fearful qualities associated with shy horses.<sup>29</sup> The prevalence of humoral thinking about the body and the passions of the sensitive soul connected the human and the animal and was largely responsible for the way animalistic traits such as shyness entered into the realm of human emotionality.<sup>30</sup> Women’s humoral link with the “shy colt” and its bridle produced the conditions which allowed for the word “shy” to lexically replace the quality of shamefastness and appropriate its conceptual weight. Thus, instead of simply describing an equine state of extreme fear, inhibition, and restraint, the term “shy” evolved throughout the period to convey a feminine attribute comprised of those same qualities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Wright, *The Passions of the Mind*, 13; Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 154.

<sup>29</sup> Gervase Markham, *Cavelarice: or, The English Horseman* (London, 1607), 7.3. On Markham see Paster, *Humoring*, 169.

<sup>30</sup> Galenic thought attributed three souls to human beings. In between the intellective or rational soul and the vegetative soul was the sensitive soul, where the passions were believed to reside. This study, however, pays particular attention to the passions housed in the rational soul, an area currently neglected in early modern emotion research.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or, A discovery of the river Gamba* (London, 1623): “These people had never seen white men before; and the women that came with them were very shy and fearful of us,” 94. It is likely that this linguistic process developed initially in relation to ideas about the animal basis of early modern femininity; however, as the word “shy” came to fruition in relation to notions of shamefastness and restraint its use spread into other

It is significant that Shakespeare never uses the word “shy” to describe any of his female characters. The attribution of the quality to his male characters gestures toward the forceful development of both the word and the concept from within the more male-dominated spheres of early modern society. The belief that displays of unruly and immoderate passion denoted man’s bestial nature appears to have led to the development of horse imagery particularly associated with aspects of male emotional and behavioral discipline. Having been so often linked to the control over female sexuality the bridle of shame was already a prominent image of restraint and came to be increasingly tied to masculine temperance and civility. As I argue in the remaining sections of this chapter, it was from within the context of elite gentlemanly society that the term “shy,” often used to describe timid, skittish and unruly horses, gained a special currency. Within the all-male sphere of civil conversation the word “shy” underwent a radical secularization and demoralization, materializing as an effeminizing and degrading term used to describe men who – like women and “shy colts” – displayed an inordinate level of fear and inhibition in front of other men, and who finally withdrew themselves from socio-political life out of extreme fears of social disgrace, judgment, and slander.<sup>32</sup>

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spheres of society, including the theological sphere and, as we will see, the elite gentlemanly sphere of civility.

<sup>32</sup> As evidence of the way the word “shy” carried over from the female to male sphere of emotionality and behavior I cite Lord Henry’s, *A display of two foreign sects in the East Indies* (London, 1630): “A people presented themselves to mine eye ... somewhat low descending, of a gesture as I may say, maidenly and well nigh effeminate; of a countenance shy and somewhat estranged; yet smiling out of a glossed and bashful familiarity,” sig. B2.

### III. Masculinity and Civil Conversation

According to Anna Bryson, “the world of the late medieval noble household in which lineage and rank were expressed in the preservation of large and highly visible hierarchies of service and in which military values were still predominant, was in gradual decline.... The crown’s pressure to undermine local military power bases and to involve the nobility and the gentry in lucrative and expanding royal patronage networks ... gradually led to a new and quasi-urban way of life in which the code of ‘civility’ was an important means of definition and orientation.”<sup>33</sup> Economic and political change motivated a centralized movement away from the medieval militaristic and aristocratic household in the country toward the court, the center of gentlemanly economic, political, and social life. In *A Survey of London*, the Elizabethan John Stowe notes that, “the court is now a days much greater than in former times, which was wonte to bee contented to remain with a small companie, sometimes at an abbey or priory ... and sometimes at some meane manner of the king’s own, is now for the most parte abiding at London ... that the gentleman of all shires do flie and flock to this city.”<sup>34</sup> The pronounced shift in the aristocracy from a class of violent and impulsive warriors to more civilized courtiers with little military experience led to a transformation in the image of manhood in the Renaissance. Men no longer competed for honor as much through militaristic and chivalric feats. Instead, they

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<sup>33</sup> Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 280.

<sup>34</sup> John Stowe, *A Survey of London*, ed. C. Lethbridge Kingsford (London, 1603; Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), 2.211-12.

also fought for political office, status, and honor in the world of civil conversation.

Taught to an elite male audience through tracts on social conduct and manners, civil conversation was the art of presenting oneself in a courteous fashion in any given social situation. Spenser draws attention to the impact that sociability and manners had on the ambitious world of male civility:

Of court it seemes, men Courtesie do call,  
For that it there most useth to abound;  
And well beseemeth that in Princes hall  
That virtue should be plentifully found,  
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,  
And roote of civil conversation. (6.1.1-6).

There were a number of influential Italian treatises on manners and social conduct circulating in England during the latter sixteenth century such as Erasmus' *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium*, Castiglione's highly popular *Book of the Courtier*, and Della Casa's *Galateo*. However, Stephano Guazzo's manual *La Civil Conversazione* lends itself to the title given to the broader social milieu of competition for prestige and reputation where elite gentleman had to constantly maintain, protect, and enhance their honor through assertive social interaction and public displays of courtesy.

The pacification of warrior emotion and aggressivity, which ultimately led to the formation of a courtier class, was a gradual movement that began in the mid sixteenth century, growing out of what Norbert Elias has termed the "civilizing process." Elias focuses closely on the social origins of psychic repression in different historical eras, arguing that patterns of social constraint and inhibition are all the more pronounced in the psychological structure of individuals during

the shift from the Middle Ages into early modernity. The main hypothesis of *The Civilizing Process* is primarily based on evidence relating to the codification of manners at this time. Beginning in the Renaissance new standards of civility expressed through table manners, repression of bodily functions and emotional impulse, and new forms of social decorum were introduced into court society. The implementation of these new modes of interaction went hand in hand with the psychological dynamic Elias describes as the advance of thresholds of shame, embarrassment, and repugnance. As Elias explains:

What was lacking in the medieval world, or at least had not been developed to the same degree, was the invisible wall of affects which seems now to arise between one human body and another, repelling and separating the wall which is often perceptible today at the mere approach of something that has been in contact with the mouth or hands of someone else, and which manifests itself as embarrassment at the mere sight of the bodily functions of others, and often at their mere mention, or as a feeling of shame when one's own functions are exposed to the gaze of others.

According to Elias, “the social imperative not to offend others becomes more binding” during the Renaissance, and indeed, early modern courtesy writers demonstrate a persistent concern with aspects of bodily propriety as well as social decorum which would not disgrace the self or appear shameful or offensive to others.<sup>35</sup>

The new preoccupation with social offence is put forth by Della Casa, who opens the *Galateo* with a warning to “refrain from such things as be fowle, filthy, loathsome, and nastie.” Della Casa condemns the “illfavored fashion that some men used openly to thrust their hands in what parte of the body they lyst. Lykwise, it is yll to see a gentleman settle himself to do the needes of nature in

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<sup>35</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 1.69-70, 1.80.

presence of men.” The repugnant effluents of the nose and mouth are brought to the fore: “there be some kynde of men, that in coffying or neesing make such noise that they make a man deafe to heare them: other some use in lyke things, so little discretion that they spyt in men’s faces that stand about them: besides these there be some that in yauning crye out like asses ... All these illfavored fashions a man must leave as lothsome to the eare and the eye.”<sup>36</sup> In the Middle Ages such matters were spoken of openly and performed without shame. Then, gradually, from the Renaissance onward there is a greater degree of disgrace and embarrassment attached to the body and its processes.<sup>37</sup>

Changing codes of conduct both expressed and projected the particular legitimacy of the elite and also provided a language of competition within that elite. As Bryson notes, “the increasing scale and ideological pretensions of the English court during the sixteenth century made it ever more a unique social and political world, which encouraged new forms of sociability and social self valuation among the increasing numbers of nobles and gentleman drawn to it.”<sup>38</sup> The court was a highly sought-after and fluid milieu in which a rising class of courtiers was beginning to emerge. Manners were used within gentlemanly society as a kind of socio-political currency that conferred promotion, prestige, esteem, and most importantly, elite status, which became increasingly regarded as

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<sup>36</sup> Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo: A Treatise of the manners it behooveth a man to use and eschew, in his familiar conversation*, trans. Robert Peterson (London: R. Newbery, 1576), 5-7.

<sup>37</sup> The phenomenon of bodily openness was linked especially to the lower class. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). However, with the transition into early modernity, and by virtue of the economic and social shifts taking place at that time, the lower spheres of society had the opportunity to rise on the social scale and were thus subject to new codifications of manners, emotional repression, and behavioral control.

<sup>38</sup> Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 119.

the product of social interaction rather than birth. Courtesy manuals thus appear to reflect a set of concerns grounded in notions of social mobility and political suasion. Della Casa calls explicit attention to the way manners and new modes of social conduct held the capacity to enhance one's status. As he notes, "many have been and stylle be esteemed and made much of for their behavior alone: which hath byn such a helpe and advauncement unto them, that they have gotten greate preferments."<sup>39</sup>

According to Elias, the competition for status produced a number of major developments that were centered on the figure of the courtier. Firstly, the art of dealing with and interacting with other people through gestures, conversation, and manners made externality and formalism key elements in courtly interaction, which in turn led to increased surveillance of the self and others. Coupled with the stigma of shame attached to the body, the competitive attention to externality, observation, and conversation naturally led to new experiences in bodily and emotional self-discipline. As Elias notes, "the competition of court life enforces a curbing of the affects in favor of calculated and finely shaded behavior in dealing with people."<sup>40</sup> In the quest for prestige and esteem there is now a novel emphasis on the courtier's restraint of corporeal and emotional impulse.

In *The Passions of the Mind*, Wright discusses the competitive world of civil conversation and its focus on notions of observation, evaluation, and self-control. During "conversation, every one man may discover his fellows natural inclinations.... No man ought to be employed to any office, act, or exercise

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<sup>39</sup> Della Casa, *Galateo*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, ed. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 104-9, see also 110-13.



contrary to his natural passions and inclination. This rule concerneth all sorts of superiors in the employments of their subjects.”<sup>41</sup> According to Wright, expressions, gestures, behaviors, and manners were signs to be scrutinized, evaluated, and deciphered so as to reveal the true nature of an individual and his capacity to excel in a government position. As Wright further maintains, “too much gesticulation commeth of lightness [but] mediocrity proceedeth from wisdom and gravitie.” Men should abstain from “fiddling about their garments ... in company [because] it seemeth you little attend to what they say.”<sup>42</sup> Silence could have come across as if a man lacked intelligence, as was often the case with “clowns or dull persons, not able to speak in a wise company.” On the other hand, loquacity appeared rash and without discretion or control: “as some men slide into slothfulness, and lingering too much in their words, so others fall into a greater extremitie of rashness and precipitation.” Men that speak excessively “babble out good or bad, right or wrong ... and utter what they conceive without judgment, discourse, or reason.... This, in effect, proceedeth from a bold, hot, and rash affection,” and such men “often change their purposes, and alter their determinations.” In the end, Wright suggests moderation in speech: “few words pithie and leisurely spoken, argue both wisdom, gravity, and magnanimitie.”<sup>43</sup>

In the competitive world of civil conversation men were now involved in a social and political system in which mobility came to be determined through new, civilized bodily techniques and public displays of correct forms of courtesy. As Ruth Kelso has noted, “every office and aspect of life was ordered for the

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<sup>41</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 160, 155.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-14.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-72.

gentleman by the fundamental assumption that he was the example, the leader, the governor of the common people.”<sup>44</sup> Elite gentleman had to rule themselves so that their government of others would be deemed prudent and legitimate. The government of a polity was analogous to the self-government of a man. Thus, any slip or inappropriate display of behavior conveyed a man’s lack of reason and control and called attention to his propensity for immoderate passion which, according to Wright, “impeacheth a grave man’s credit, a great man’s authority, and a civil man’s good conversation.” Wright thus stressed a temperate ideal as the cornerstone of an attractive social image geared toward political preferment. While “in great assemblies, or at such times as most men mark our action, words, and gestures, then if a man have occasion of choler, lust, pride, fear, or such like passion, if he refrain but a little, all those will at least suspect that he permitteth not his passions to wholie overrune him.”<sup>45</sup> As Wright further explains, all men possess a natural humoral constitution which can make them prone to one passion over another, “for cholerike men be subject to anger, melancholy men to sadness, sanguine to pleasure, flegmaticke to sloth and drunkennesse.”<sup>46</sup> The vast majority of male bodies were not free of excessive and unruly impulses and most men needed serious regulation and discipline if they were to aspire to the temperate, moderate ideal demanded of the civil gentleman.

Although women were stereotypically cold and moist, men were privy to a number of different complexions and they could shift their temperament through

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<sup>44</sup> Ruth Kelso, “The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century,” *Illinois University Studies in Language and Literature* 14 (1929), 13.

<sup>45</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 136, 140.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

diet, climate, and exercise to reach the moderate ideal associated with normative masculinity that was so often linked to notions of social privilege and political advancement. As Lemnius explains, “notwithstanding education, institution, and discipline, altereth the usual nature, and ordinary constitutions of every region: for we see the common sort and multitude in behavior and manners gross and unnurtured, whereas the nobles and gentleman (altering their oder and dyet, and digressing from the common fashion of their peazantly country-men) frame themselves to a very commendable order and civil behavior.”<sup>47</sup> In *The Touchstone of Complexions*, Lemnius further notes the marks and tokens of the elite gentleman possessing a “body perfectly temperate:”

His manners and conversation, honest and virtuous, his nature quiet, courteous, subject to no ill affections.... In him plentifully appeareth humanity, gentlenesse, frugality, equity, modesty and a continent moderation of all affections.... He is not brought into fear, but suffereth all the discommodities of life with a mind stouthe, cheerful, and invincible.... And not only in the inward mind of man, do these ornaments and gifts of nature appear, but even in the outward show, shape, and behavior of the body there is evidently perceived a comely grace, and portly dignity.... The head not aslope, ... the port and state of the body bolt upright, the tongue prompt and ready,<sup>48</sup> able to pronounce and deliver out words of gallant utterance.

Perfect humoral temperance characterized by a controlled, bold, and confident external demeanor, evinced especially during conversation, was thought to be a rarity which in turn provided the basis for further elaborations of hierarchies of masculinity based on comparison of different humoral complexions.

After an evenly balanced temperament a hot complexion would have been the most favorable. Hot men were of “stature comely, and of shape and beauty

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<sup>47</sup> Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-8.

agreeable and consonant to manly dignity.” However, as Lemnius goes on to note, “if heat increase in man’s body unmeasurably and above a mediocrity, and that through choleric blood be stirred, and too much enflamed, it oftentimes turneth into mere desperate rage and fury.”<sup>49</sup> Conversely, a cold complexion placed man at the opposite end of the spectrum, “as furthest from that state which is perfectest and best.” Besides living solitary lives “without keeping company with others,” cold melancholic men were stigmatized by weak characters and were often branded with effeminacy. Lemnius observes that such men, who share the colder humoral complexions of women, “have faltering tongues, and nothing ready in utterance, a nice, soft, and womanish voice, weak, and feeble faculties of nature, ill memory, blockish wit, doltish mind, and [for lack of heat are] fearful and timorous.”<sup>50</sup> Men either lacked the heat associated with normative masculinity or controlled it insufficiently. As a consequence of heat variations in the male body, men could experience an array of immoderate passions that needed to be bridled.

#### **IV. Early Modern Courtiers and the Court Culture of Shyness: *Faerie Queene* 2.9.**

Thomas Wright claimed that the “sixth remedy to mortifie passions is to bridle the bodie, that is to chastise it ... and bring it into servitude.” The Platonic image of the horse as appetite or passion and the rider as mind or reason holding the body in control perhaps influenced Wright’s comparison of man’s unruly corporeality to a horse: “For questionless, he that pampereth his bodie, feedeth his enemy ... pamper a horse, and you shall have him too wanton, pamper your flesh,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 61, 68.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 97-99, 104.

and it will over-rule you.”<sup>51</sup> Men who were unable to moderate or “bridle” their passions during civil conversation were no better than beasts:

In many men there is great resemblance and affinity in nature with other beasts, and the furthest that these digress from purity of temperament, the less sway in them beareth reason, judgment, and understanding, willingness to do good, wisdom, and discretion: to be short, they are partakers of all those things that are common to beasts.<sup>52</sup>

According to Bryson, “medieval writers on manners rarely invoked animal imagery to describe grossness or lack of control.”<sup>53</sup> The insistence with which sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century writers related faults of individual behavior to specific qualities of bestiality was novel, and likely grew out of the well known link between human and animal passions. The belief that particular behavioral faults and displays of excessive emotion denoted man’s animal nature appears to have led to the development of horse imagery particularly associated with aspects of male governance. Having been so often linked to the control over female sexuality the bridle of shamefastness was already a prominent image of feminine restraint. However, as notions of civility came to the fore and controls over male conduct became more stringent the metaphoric bridle of shame gained a new association with masculinity.

In *The Governor*, Elyot describes “shamefastness” specifically in relation to men as “a bridle for the continent restraint of wayward appetites.”<sup>54</sup> Lodowick Bryskett likewise notes in his *Discourse of Civil Life* that “shamefastness . . . is

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 128-9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, ed. S.E. Lehmborg (London, 1531; London: Everyman, 1962), 1.9.27: “By Shamefastness, as it were a bridle, they rule as well their deeds and their appetites.”

ever careful to keep all disordinate concupiscences from the mind ... [to] correct us whensoever we go beyond the bounds of reason ... to check us with the bridle of temperance.”<sup>55</sup> Lemnius notes how “violent and unruly these affections be in some ... and how greatly they disturb the rule of reason, and groweth into a disordered outrage [that] is offensive and troublous to others, but chiefly and specially, to the party himself.... The mind therefore must be reyned by reason, and curbed by temperance that it yield not to affections.”<sup>56</sup> The possibility of self-disgrace and of socially offensive behavior became an immediate concern of the civil gentleman who was now taught to “curb” his natural brutishness through the bridle of shame. To his discussion of Aquinas’ eleven principle passions, Wright goes on to add shamefastness which, as he states, “bridelth us of many loose affections.” According to Wright, shamefastness is a vital passion because it aids the “civil gentleman and the prudent politician [in] restraining their inordinate motions [so that he may] winneth a gracious carriage of himself, and rendereth his conversation most grateful to men.”<sup>57</sup> Although women were biologically predisposed to feel more shame and fear than men, such passions were now becoming increasingly linked to notions of masculine behavior and emotionality in the period.

With their sexual reputations consistently in question women in early modernity had always been objects of intense scrutiny and the targets of complex prescriptions of behavior. Yet within the competitive sphere of civility men began

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<sup>55</sup> Lodowick Bryskett, *A discourse of civil life containing the ethike part of morall philosophy, fit for the instructing of a gentleman in the course of a virtuous life* (London, 1606), 140.

<sup>56</sup> Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 48-9.

to evince what Jurgen Habermas has aptly termed “the publicness of representation.”<sup>58</sup> Whereas medieval masculinities appear characterized by spontaneous displays of emotion, uninhibited release of impulse, and a lack of reflection, the Renaissance courtier was intensely concerned with the control over his self-image and he had to be constantly aware of the reactions and judgments of others.<sup>59</sup> As Bryson states, “he must scrutinize himself in the constant awareness of a social audience whom he may offend.”<sup>60</sup> Men, cautioned Wright, “ought to be wonderful warie in their words, and circumspect in their actions, always having themselves suspected.”<sup>61</sup> Castiglione wrote that, “all behaviors, gestures, and manners, beside words and deeds are in a judgment of inclination of him in whom they are seen.”<sup>62</sup> The courtier was like an actor who consciously shaped his image to satisfy the audience that watched him perform. Guazzo himself likened the world of “civil conversation” to a “stage, we the players present the comedie, and the gods, the lookers on.”<sup>63</sup> Stephen Mennell has noted how Goffman’s art of impression management “may seem a universal characteristic of human society ... , but Norbert Elias would argue that the extent to which the sensitivity was developed in court society, and its link to the peculiar form of competitive struggle for prestige with vital interests at stake, was

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<sup>58</sup> *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 7.

<sup>59</sup> See Claire Lees, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>60</sup> Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 111.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 144.

<sup>62</sup> Baldesar Castiglione, *The Booke of the Courtyer*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), Bk.2, sig. Piv. I site from an earlier manuscript but the reference can be found in the Javitch edition on page 71.

<sup>63</sup> Stephano Guazzo, *The Civil Conversation*, trans. George Pettie (London: Richard Watkins, 1581), 2.118. See also Wayne Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978).

exceptional.”<sup>64</sup> In *The Court Society* Elias discusses how preservation of one’s social position under severe competitive and evaluative pressure necessitated a more psychological view of people involving precise observation and reflection of oneself and others. As he goes on to discuss, the subjection to observation and social judgment, integral to the competition for status and esteem, ultimately led to advancing thresholds of shame and embarrassment.

Elias’ interest in shame as a control mechanism has received much critical attention by Gail Kern Paster. In her important book, *The Body Embarrassed*, Paster argues that the humoral body was especially challenged by the self-discipline demanded of the civilizing process. Increased expectations of bodily refinement and physical restraint contrasted with “popular medical practice authorizing experiences of somatic uncontrol in the form of humoral evacuation.” Paster’s interpretation of Elias thus develops in accordance with what she perceives as the heightened level of shame and embarrassment that ensues after the loss of bodily control. The public experience of humiliation necessarily served a disciplinary purpose, gradually advancing an “emergent ideology of bodily refinement and exquisite self-mastery.”<sup>65</sup> As it stands, Paster’s argument emphasizes the way those who could not control their bodily impulses were shamed as part of the process of creating a civilized subject. While Elias demonstrates a profound concern with specific bodily acts that ended in public forms of disgrace and embarrassment he is also interested in the experience of

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: An Introduction* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1992), 85-6.

<sup>65</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 14.



shame as a kind of anxious, preconceived fear of disgrace aroused in the social life of the individual which worked to control behavior and construct civilized subjectivity. A corollary to Elias' interest in shame as an experience of bodily disgrace is the related emotional experience of the fear of shame: an emotion so prevalent in the psychic economy of the early modern subject that it was termed shamefastness and understood as "a kind of *anxiety* which is automatically reproduced in the life of the individual on certain occasions by force of habit."<sup>66</sup> Although Paster's work has influenced much of my own thinking, she tends to overestimate Elias' interest in notions of embarrassment and so fails to provide a comprehensive account of early modern shame.

*The Civilizing Process* suggests that as the courtier's "web of actions" grew more complex through conduct discourse the pressure to present the "correct" social image became regulated by conscious self-control and anticipatory fears of shame and embarrassment. As Mennell explains, the stigma of shame and offence surrounding the body and its unruly passions went hand in hand with a "fear of social degradation; the fear that one's behavior will cause others to express disdain or withdraw their approval."<sup>67</sup> Fears of shame and social dishonor were becoming engrained in the emotional and social life of the courtier as a disciplinary method used to control corporeal and psychic unruliness, maintain public reputation, and prevent social disgrace. However, as the frequent allusions to the metaphoric bridle of shame suggest, such fears appear to have

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<sup>66</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2.292.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; Mennell, *Introduction*, 105.

been escalating to the point that shamefastness – itself a prominent mode of emotional governance and ethical restraint – became excessive and unruly.

Unlike the theological world, which upheld excessive shame to be a virtuous religious passion associated with conscience and reason, the world of civility countenanced a Galenic view of shame as a harmful outgrowth of the humoral body. As the fear of shame advanced throughout the gentlemanly world of civil conversation it underwent a secular transformation and was deemed an irrational “perturbation” of the sensitive soul liable to turn into an injurious case of bashfulness if not properly governed.<sup>68</sup> Like other passions shamefastness itself needed to be strenuously moderated during social interactions lest the courtier’s fear of dishonor progress into an injurious state of shyness. Conduct authors posed continual objections to “over-timidity” and warned the civil gentleman not to be concerned with the opinions of others.<sup>69</sup> In *The School of Good Manners*, Fiston draws attention to the Aristotelian mean, noting “shamefastness is a virtue so as it be moderate; for as to be brazen faced and shameless is a vice; so to be overbashful and ashamed to show his face is a fault also.”<sup>70</sup> Cleland thus advises the courtier “against a foolish shamefastness in hanging down of his head, and blushing at every light word.”<sup>71</sup> Although “shame of evil, serving for a bridle to vice is very commendable,” La Primaudaye cautions his reader “that shame

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<sup>68</sup> For early modern discussions on the distinction between the passions of the rational soul and those of the sensitive soul see Wright, *The Passions*, 56ff. I discuss this more in the following chapter on *Coriolanus*. See also Edward Reynolds who discusses the distinction with regard to shame in his *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (London 1640): “There is a twofold shame, the one virtuous, as Diogenes was wont to say, that blushing was the color of virtue. The other vicious,” 311.

<sup>69</sup> See James Cleland, *Hero Paideia: or, The Institution of a Young Nobleman* (Oxford: 1607), 5.5.177.

<sup>70</sup> William Fiston, *The School of Good Manners* (London, 1609), sig. Br-v.

<sup>71</sup> Cleland, *Hero Paideia*, 5.5.177.

wherein want of prudence and wisdom beareth sway, is evil and very hurtful.”<sup>72</sup> Preoccupied with correct forms of address and gesture, the French conduct author Antoine de Courtin finds social timidity to be grounded in the gentleman’s “immoderate desire of being exact,” which would make him a “slave to ceremony.” Experiencing too great a pressure to present the proper public image, and thus feeling too much shamefastness, he could become “rigid” with the fear of disgrace and appeared “ridiculous to everybody.”<sup>73</sup> Donne himself calls attention to the gentlemanly propensity to experience too much shame and advises men who feel it to be “censure-proof, [and to] not be afraid, nor ashamed, what the world says.”<sup>74</sup>

Virtuous women felt the intensity of shamefastness in the presence of men where fears of slander and sexual dishonor naturally gave way to a bashful external demeanor marked by gestural inhibition and withdrawal. However, with the inception of manners and civility men were now, like women, subject to complex prescriptions of behavior, becoming objects of intense social scrutiny. With his honor on the line and his reputation constantly on display, the courtier’s psyche might become overwhelmed by effeminizing fears of shame. Within the competitive and socially evaluative atmosphere of gentlemanly society the pressure to present an acceptable social image grew increasingly stronger, and with it the metaphoric bridle of shame. Although shamefastness retained its long-

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<sup>72</sup> Pierre de la Primaudaye, “Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor,” in *The French Academy* (London, 1618), 106.

<sup>73</sup> Antoine de Courtin, *The Rules of Civility, or certain ways of deportment observed in France, amongst persons of quality*, trans. Anon (London, 1671), 2.10.

<sup>74</sup> John Donne, *Donne’s Sermons: Selected Passages*, ed. L.P. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919), 84-5.

held moral association with notions of temperance and was often recommended as a mechanism of civilized restraint, the numerous references to “overbashfulness” suggest that the gentleman’s fears of censure and disgrace were beginning to rise to an excessive and dangerous level.

The increasing prevalence of shamefastness within the male world of civil conversation is aptly reflected in the literature of the period, which reveals a major preoccupation with the way bashfulness was developing from a stereotypically feminine attribute into, additionally, an apparently injurious predicament of masculinity. In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser offers two personified abstractions of shamefastness as means of expressing how the quality was beginning to transgress gender boundaries. One of the abstractions is placed in the lap of Womanhood and thus calls attention to shamefastness’ association with a broader spectrum of attributes that made up normative female subjectivity. The other, however, is situated within the “goodly parlour” of Alma’s castle, allegorizing the heart of the temperate body. The courtly setting defining the knight Guyon’s meeting with personified Shamefastness, a maiden, tends to align her with problematic notions of masculine sociability and publicity. As a moral emotion grounded in the virtue of temperance, Shamefastness complements Guyon as the representative of that virtue. As Alma says to him “she is the fountaine of your modestee; / You shamfast are, but *Shamefastnesse* it selfe is shee” (2.9.43). Yet, as Kirby Neill notes, Shamefastness is represented as an extreme. From the beginning of the episode she is “overwhelmed with shame”

and “everywhere her actions are not temperate.”<sup>75</sup> In this regard, her pairing with Guyon is troubling and stands out as a “reflection of [his] own psychomachic propensity to be led astray by wayward passions.”<sup>76</sup> According to Robert White, the confrontation between the knight and the maiden sets up a paradigm in which the “knight’s innermost self is being held up for open inspection.”<sup>77</sup> As an extreme, Shamefastness is reflective of the overbashfulness Guyon could experience were his gentlemanly fears of shame and social disgrace to become excessive. While in Guyon’s company Shamefastness is overcome by a fear of disgraceful behavior, an instinctive “ill to feare,” to such an extent that, “so long as Guyon with her commoned, / Unto the ground she cast her modest eye, / and ever anone with rosie red / The bashful blood her snowy cheeks did dye” (2.9.41). When applied to femininity such bashful behavioral traits like blushing, gaze aversion, and withdrawal were deemed normal and virtuous, but for men socially inhibited behavior signaled an emotionally excessive state that was beginning to be considered pathological. Thus, when Guyon looks at Shamefastness he sees his own propensity to be led astray by shame in highly negative terms; for he notices how “the strong passion *mard* her modest grace” as he “marvayld at her *uncouth cace*” (2.9.40-3; mine).

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<sup>75</sup> Kirby Neill, “Spenser’s Shamefastness, *Faerie Queene*, 2.9.40-44,” *Modern Language Notes* XLIX (1934): 389. See also Robert White, Shamefastness as *Verecundia* and *Pudicitia* in *The Faerie Queene*,” *Studies in Philology* 78.4 (1981), 391

<sup>76</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, *Passions Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66.

<sup>77</sup> White, 396.

## V. Shyness and Humility “Within the Bounds of Courtesy”

Within the courtly world of gentlemanly civility the arena of social deference was one of the major expressions of courtesy to be theorized in relation to a deleterious state of bashfulness. As Bryson has noted, a “newly articulated principle of good manners which appears in sixteenth and seventeenth century courtesy manuals ... is a general obligation to ‘accommodate’ or ‘frame’ the self to the sensitivities and sensibilities of others.” The new “language of deference” and “condescension” was deeply implicated in a symbolism of social power that went hand in hand with the courtier’s desire to gain “worthy praise, estimation and credit,” so that he might advance into a position of political prominence and gain honor within the courtly milieu.<sup>78</sup> As a principal tenet of courtesy, Obadiah Walker thus cites the importance of presenting a humble demeanor which does not express “by actions, or speeches, any injury, disesteem, offence, or undervaluing any other.”<sup>79</sup> Courtin likewise equates “civility” with an ideal of “modesty in preferring the satisfaction and commodity of other people before our own, and so ingeniously that we cannot provoke or disoblige any one without great trouble.”<sup>80</sup> *The Art of Complaisance* was a text devoted exclusively to the practice of social humility, which the author considers to be an “art to regulate our words and behavior, in such a manner as may engage the love and respect of those with whom we converse.” The author of this tract attests to the socio-political advantages that humility could bring to those who express it correctly:

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<sup>78</sup> Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 110-11.

<sup>79</sup> Obadiah Walker, *Of Education, Especially of a Young Gentleman* (Oxford, 1673), 2.1.11, also quoted in Bryson 110.

<sup>80</sup> Courtin, *The Rules of Civility*, 2.10.

Humility is no less a part of complaisance, and a necessary virtue in court.... Yet in this we must be careful to observe a mediocrity, always demeaning ourselves according to the quality of the person, never debasing us too low, but restraining our humility within the bounds of courtesy and decent affability.... Some persons of a mean descent seeing themselves high advanced in credit in a very short time.<sup>81</sup>

As Bryson further explains, “courtesy is in one sense the whole body of Christian virtues oriented toward sociability rather than directly toward salvation.”<sup>82</sup>

Accordingly, there was an important distinction formed between religious virtue and civility, whereby the latter simply applied certain religious practices to secular forms of social behavior so as to encourage alliances and political promotion. Complaisance and its social display through deferential gestures of hierarchical submission such as curtsyng, kneeling, and bowing – “more or less deeply as the superior status of the person greeted demanded” – were conceived of as an “art” to be performed at court and were therefore grounded in a strictly tempered level of “humility,” “modesty and *pudor*.”<sup>83</sup> Yet the persistent warnings against overbashfulness infiltrating early modern conduct literature indicate that a moderate level of shame or *pudor* was an ideal of civility that was difficult to maintain.

As an Aristotelian extreme of the fear of shame, humility, along with the related notion of reverential awe, gained an intimate association with bashfulness throughout the classical world. Aside from its prominent moral connotation, the state of shyness, as Carlin Barton observes, was often understood in antiquity in relation to notions of social deference. It was held to be “an

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<sup>81</sup> S.C. *The Art of Complaisance, or the means to oblige in conversation* (London, 1673), 2, 26-30.

<sup>82</sup> Bryson, *From Courtesy*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 88; Courtin, *The Rules*, 5.

emotion of relatedness” that delineated the self’s feeling of unworthiness in relation to the infinite value of another. Shyness, as she further notes, was “the fear or respect that caused one to make way for another.”<sup>84</sup> Due to its increasing prevalence within the world of civil conversation, bashfulness began to be overtly theorized in relation to male displays of reverential humility. The physician Timothie Bright offers an explanation of the particular state of male bashfulness as an effect of melancholy, focusing closely on its links to notions of deference:

The melancholic person, through *his* internal mislike, and cause of discouragement, hath little assurance or contentment in his actions whatsoever. . . . Melancholic persons by their complexion, if they come in place of reverend persons will easily blush, not of any fault committed, but of reverence to the parties: nature, as it were, secretly and in respect, condemning her imperfections . . . maketh a kind of comparison.<sup>85</sup>

According to Bright, the pathologically shy individual suffers from an acute “feeling of inferiority” in relation to his social betters. The subject’s low self-estimation, or “internal mislike,” is the result of the unstable workings of the melancholic humor. As excessive “vapors” rise up from the lower regions of the body they influence the operations of the mind, causing within the subject an erroneous set of beliefs about himself, and a corresponding irrational and ungrounded overconcern with being negatively evaluated by others, even though he has done nothing morally blameful. Simply “the aspect of other people’s

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<sup>84</sup> See *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.1107b17. I discuss this relationship in section III of the introduction. On excessive shame as a social virtue see Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 202-3, 207.

<sup>85</sup> Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), 171-3. In addition to this account of shyness as a bodily based medical condition, Bright also offers a contrasting explanation of shame and bashfulness as emotional states linked to the arousal of conscience. The dual view of the emotion reveals Bright’s interest in limiting materialist theories of the passions and the kind of heretical, determinist implications associated with such theories. For more on Bright’s theological agenda and his dual approach to emotion see Douglas Trevor, “Sadness in *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, eds. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, Mary Floyd Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).



superiority” fosters the “expectation of criticism” and leads the bashful person to experience various forms of bodily inhibition and withdrawal as a behavioral tactic used to defend the self against the onset of disgrace or any unfavorable social opinions.<sup>86</sup> Although shyness evinces an obvious anti-social symptomology, Bright conceives of it here as a largely *hypersocial* reaction founded upon an exaggerated principle of reverential humility, in which the self feels the sense of its own insignificance in relation to the superiority of another person whose esteem he greatly values.

Although a tempered display of humility was considered a social virtue, the predominance of “overbashfulness” within the courtly milieu discloses the reality behind the social performance. The gentleman’s fear of shame became psychologically burdensome to the extent that expressions of social humility, grounded as they were in an obvious power structure, were not lacking in emotional extremism. Noting the prevalence of fear and bashfulness accompanying reverential displays of humility within the court, Courtin advises his readers that “having performed our formalities, and paid those respects a person of quality might expect, we are afterwards not to show any *awe* or *timourousness* before him, but speak freely and ingeniously to him.”<sup>87</sup> The idea of the bashful courtier overcome with shame and humility had a profound influence on Shakespeare’s portrayal of shy male characters. A case in point is Lucrece’s timid, stuttering pageboy who “court’sies to her low / And blushing on her with a

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<sup>86</sup> I link Bright’s analysis of shyness with the modern theories it clearly anticipates. I am quoting here from Hilde Lewinsky, “The Nature of Shyness,” *British Journal of Psychology* 32 (1941), 105.

<sup>87</sup> Courtin, *The Rules of Civility*, 18.146-7; emphasis mine.

steadfast eye / Receives the scroll without or yea or no, / And forth with bashful  
innocence doth hie” (1338).<sup>88</sup>

## VI. Plutarch’s Bashful Man: Requests and Compliance

Given the extreme fears of shame plaguing the gentlemanly sphere of civil conversation there was a major effort to establish bashfulness as an injurious male emotional vice throughout the period. The secular world of civility referred to Plutarch’s moral tract, *On Compliancy (De Verecundia)*; a treatise further popularized in England by Philemon Holland who re-titled it *Of Naughty Bashfulness*. Plutarch’s treatise was exceptionally useful in educating male readers about the dangers of “immoderate modesty” so that they might come to know its consequences, its influence upon the personality, and chiefly how to rid themselves of it.<sup>89</sup> As Plutarch suggests, shyness was problematic not so much because it caused men to “flie and shun the smoke of blame” but because, when they did engage themselves, socially bashful men became overly compliant, humble, and submissive toward others.<sup>90</sup> The fear of social dishonor, coupled with the bashful man’s correlative desire to be esteemed by those he greatly reveres, provoked within him an inability to refuse or deny another’s requests. Bashful men, according to Plutarch, do not know how to “pronounce one negative syllable

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<sup>88</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

<sup>89</sup> Plutarch, “Of Unseemly and Naughty Bashfulness,” In *The Moral Essays, Vol. 7*, trans., Philemon Holland (London, 1603), 164. For the original edition see Plutarch, “De Vitiosa Verecundia,” *Moralia VII, Loeb Classical Library*, trans., Philip de Lacy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961). As de Lacy notes in his introduction to the text, Plutarch’s tract underwent several translations throughout Europe. His list of editions includes those by Erasmus, Xylander, Cruserius, and Amyot. La Primaudaye’s “Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor,” in *The French Academy* is not an exact translation but follows Plutarch’s tract closely.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

that is, No,” and so “give place and yield after a base manner to the demands and requests of every man; object[ing] themselves to their will and pleasure, for fear lest one should say of him Lo what a hard man is this.”<sup>91</sup> As Plutarch further notes, such base yielding had the adverse effect of bringing upon the bashful man a worse sense of dishonor and disgrace, since it led him to engage in a host of unethical actions for the sake of other men, thus committing “many times the same faults as they do who are shameless and impudent.” Contemplating the disastrous state of affairs this “naughty bashfulness” could produce, Plutarch questions how it is that “we cannot be masters of ourselves, but suffer virtue to be subverted, and cast at our heels, ... for they who importunately urge our modesty ... for their own reputation or authority.”<sup>92</sup>

What becomes immediately apparent is Plutarch’s characterization of the bashful man as a socially subservient, self-abnegating, and compliant figure, who “sheweth in his countenance a mind too soft, delicate and effeminate.” Lacking a sense of self-worth or, as Plutarch puts it, “self-mastery,” the bashful man should seek remedies to “abridge and cut off the excess which is in such timidity and fear of reproach.”<sup>93</sup> In order for the subject to overcome the personal limitations associated with his shyness he should, as Plutarch suggests, cultivate an oppositional sense of pride and stance of self-assertive confidence. The bashful man should, in effect, learn to desire honor more than he fears shame. Accordingly, he should concern himself with establishing his own social reputation, “honor, credit, and authority,” before another man’s, and he should do

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 164-5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 163, 171.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 163.

so by cultivating a radical self-sufficiency expressed through a harsh aloofness rather than a compliant humility toward others and their importunate requests. This will allow him to deny the demands of those who seek to take advantage of him. For through “such refusals and repulses” the bashful man will be “well defended,” neither “yielding to them that terrifie us nor to those who flatter us.”<sup>94</sup>

## VII. The Early Modern Medicalization of Shyness

Although bashfulness was deemed a virtue in women, and also upheld as a means of spiritual development in the theological world, it suffered a rapid demoralization and secularization as a result of its increasing manifestation in the gentlemanly world of civility. Excessive shame and humility undid humoral ideas about masculine heat and boldness and challenged the supremacy of male reason, thus undermining the temperate, moderate ideal demanded of the courtier. Because shy behavior in men transgressed the norms of gender-appropriate behavior, conflicting with long held essentialist beliefs about sex difference, shyness began to be widely denigrated as an irrational emotional vice that needed to be remedied lest it lead men into error and disgrace, or develop into a pathological mental disease.

Michael Schoenfeldt, who has recently investigated notions of health and well-being in early modernity, notes that “the very restraint and repression necessary to the advancement of civilization produced behavioral pathologies that were extremely dangerous.” According to him, bodily and mental health demanded “not the seamless corporeal enclosure that Bakhtin identifies with the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 171.

classical body but rather the routine excretory processes that he displaces onto lower class festivity.”<sup>95</sup> Like Paster, Schoenfeldt accentuates the leaky and grotesque nature of the early modern body as an entity that could never escape its own effluent humoral; however, rather than regarding bodily uncontrol as shameful and embarrassing, Schoenfeldt interprets it as a necessary facet of good health. In terms of its well-being, the humoral body needed to constantly rid itself of toxic humors expelled through natural bodily functions. As Thomas Venner notes, “the keeping of those ordinary and daily excrements, is often very offensive to the body by reason of the noisome fumes that ascend from them, which of all other parts do chiefly annoy the head; and not these only of the head; but the mind itself is oftentimes hereby disturbed, and melancholically affected.”<sup>96</sup> Although the maintenance of bodily fitness and mental health relied upon “the subject’s willing and unembarrassed adoption of therapies of self-regulation,” the humoral body was increasingly perceived as brutish, degrading, and socially humiliating.<sup>97</sup> Along with its espousal of an ideology of emotional and behavioral control, manners discourse advocated an ideal of corporeal restraint and did not encourage the immediate expression of natural impulse. Early modern medical literature, most of which had a moral agenda, thus revolved around an implicit contradiction. Although medical writers of the period opposed emerging constraints on bodily function they simultaneously advanced the view that

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Donne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17, 22.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Venner, *Via ad Vitam Longam. Or, A Treatise wherein the right way and best manner of living for attaining a long and healthful life, is clearly demonstrated* (London, 1650), 221-22. Also quoted in Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 15.

therapies of excretion could not, in most circumstances, be satisfied at the subject's convenience. Thus, at the same time that the humoral body closed itself off from the risk of shame and embarrassment through civilized methods of control and restraint, it created a host of bodily and mental disorders.

Within the new disciplinary regime advanced by the civilizing process, the humoral body became a locus of social control and was subjected to a completely different bodily self-experience. The social history of the body began to change. The internal orientations of the physical self were rewritten within the socially available discourses of the civilized body. Bourdieu's "external *habitus*," made up of cultural prescriptions of "dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners," is akin to the codification of behavior advanced by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conduct books.<sup>98</sup> The humoral body became exposed to new modes of appearance and techniques of presentation and gained an intimate identification with the Bakhtinian classical body, a closed and impermeable container. The historical shaping of the human body from an impulsive, unrestrained vehicle into a calculating, rationalizing, and repressed entity was a process characterized by the replacement of external restraints upon the body with internal, affective ones. The early modern body now learned how to fight against its own grotesque humortality, causing vast psychological change to take place. Rather than focusing on the way the humoral body conflicted with and continued to be challenged by the dictates of the civilizing process, scholarship must begin to attend to the ways in which the humoral body attempted to conform and adapt itself to an emergent

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<sup>98</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans., Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94-5.

ideology of civilized restraint, along with the possible complications involved in this process.

Humoralism determined the cause of mental illness to be grounded in an imbalance among the four humors. One of the humors, typically melancholy, became excessive and needed to be purged or expelled so as to return to its normal level in the body. Often a functional failure in the spleen produced an overproduction of black bile, leading in turn to the pathological state of excess. According to Lemnius, “if the Splene ... should suffer obstruction, or fall into imbecility and weakness: the melancholic juyce disperseth it selfe into every part of the body.”<sup>99</sup> As Schoenfeldt thus clarifies, “obstruction rather than flow is the cause of illness.”<sup>100</sup> Through the blocking of the expulsive faculty the spleen failed to “discharge itself into those passages, which nature thereto ordained.”<sup>101</sup> An overabundance of the melancholic humor, which was naturally cold and dry, thus inclined the heart and brain to cooler passions producing an excess of fear and sorrow, in turn disordering the faculties of thought and perception. According to Lemnius, an abundance of melancholy in the body caused

Disquietness of mind, ... trembling and beating of the heart, a mind sorrowful, comfortless, perplexed, pensive, and fearful: insomuch that they which be in this sort affected, distrust, and be afraid, as well of their friends, as of their enemies, although there be no cause of any such fear at all.... Insomuch that thereupon they will desire to shift and convey themselves out of company.... By many and sundry ways do men fall into this ill case, who afore were clear and free enough from it. Some by the stopping of their natural purgations,<sup>102</sup> or by the restraint of some ordinary and accustomed issue.

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<sup>99</sup> Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions*, 220.

<sup>100</sup> Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> On this process see Timothy Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy*, 32.

<sup>102</sup> Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions*, 227-8.

The shameful stigma attached to natural bodily functions may well have had the greatest impact on the society of elite gentleman, where an unhealthy level of corporeal and psychic restraint would have been experienced during the competition for honor, prestige and political preferment. From within the context of early modern medical thought the courtier's restraint of certain socially offensive bodily impulses would have led naturally to the dire bodily and mental disturbances associated with melancholy.

As a mental disorder caused through bodily obstruction that led to an overabundance of humor, melancholy principally affected the functioning of the cold and dry passions residing in the heart, causing them to become immoderate and excessive. Bright describes the appearance of the melancholy patient to be “of uncheerfulness of countenance, ... blushing and bashful, ... silent.” According to Bright, fear and sorrow were the common mental symptoms of melancholy; however, a number of melancholics also exhibited related secondary reactions like shyness:

Melancholic persons are much subject to [bashfulness] though they have committed nothing deserving rebuke, or worthy of shame.... Melancholic persons by their complexion, if they come in place of reverend persons will easily blush, not of any fault committed but of reverence to the parties.... The same cause which stirreth blushing in melancholic men, forceth them to avoid assemblies, and publike theatres: and this is common to all melancholics, howsoever they be tempered in their bodies: even the opinion and fancy of some disgrace from others, who are greatly displeased with themselves, and by their erroneous conceit prevent the sentence of others upon themselves, and condemn themselves unjustly, which duely wayed, hath no desert of blame. Thus much for these actions of blushing and bashfulness.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy*, 124, 171-3.



Whereas medical treatises of the period tended to describe melancholy both as a humoral substance of the normal animate body as well as a medical condition, it was clearly understood that the key signs of the disease, including a morose, fearful and withdrawn disposition, and a tendency to seek out solitude, were very similar to the traits which constituted the temperament.<sup>104</sup> What differentiates Bright's account of the disease, however, is the way it begins to account for and pathologize a host of melancholic symptoms, including public withdrawal, as an outcome of one's excessive fear of shame. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* continues to theorize the melancholic's characteristic propensity for solitude as a desire motivated by an acute fear of public disgrace. Alluding to Hippocrates' early assessment of a male patient, Burton pathologizes the melancholic's propensity for isolation in terms of shyness: "through bashfulness, suspicion, and timorousness he will not be seen abroad; loves darkness and cannot endure the light; his hat still in his eyes, he will neither see nor be seen. He dare not come in company for fear he should be disgraced [or] overshoot himself in gesture or speeches, he thinks every man observes him, aims at him owes him malice."<sup>105</sup> Although Hippocrates offers what might be the earliest documented example of social anxiety, it is only in early modernity that bashfulness begins to be extensively theorized as a melancholic condition and understood as a gentlemanly disorder rooted in excessive fears of shame and dishonor.

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<sup>104</sup> See for example Lemnius' discussion of melancholy in his *Touchstone of Complexions*, 215ff.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621; William Tegg, 1854), 253. Hippocrates is also quoted in *The History of Epidemics, in seven books*, trans. Samuel Farr (London: T. Cadell, 1780).

Influenced largely by Aristotelian ideas about the fear of shame as a social and moral response, early modern theorizations of shyness gradually shifted away from an ethical and religious understanding of bashfulness to a bodily-based or humoral model. The shift from a religious conception of shyness to a melancholic one rooted in Galenic thinking about the body has no doubt influenced our modern view of shyness as a biologically based disorder – or chemical imbalance in the brain – characterized by an irrational and ungrounded fear of negative social judgment, that in turn leads to anxious states of behavioral inhibition and withdrawal.<sup>106</sup>

### **VIII. Political Shyness and Melancholic Withdrawal: 3 *Henry VI***

The proliferation of English writers who began to write about melancholy as a disease in the late 1500's conveys a larger political interest in the melancholic's bashful symptomology, including the desire for solitude and its foundation in a more psychologically complex inclination to avoid the civic, active life. Adam Kitzes has recently argued that medical treatises dealing with melancholy in the Renaissance intersected with a fairly complex set of political concerns. As he argues, Elizabethan texts on melancholy “gave rise to questions

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<sup>106</sup> On the historical translation of ancient medical perceptions of bashfulness, their influence on early modern treatments of the subject, and their impact on modern shyness see Isaac M. Marks, *Fears and Phobias* (New York Academic Press, 1969), 152; *Social Anxiety Disorder: A Guide*, eds. John Griest, James Jefferson and David J. Katzelnick (Madison: Madison Institute of Medicine, 1997, rev. 2000), 2-3; Christopher Lane, *Shyness: How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 12-13. On the modern medicalizing of shyness as a bodily based illness grounded in a chemical/hormonal imbalance in the brain and body that can be treated with a pill see Lane as well as Charles Barber, *How Psychiatry is Medicating a Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); Susie Scott, “The Medicalization of Shyness: From social misfits to Social Fitness,” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 28.2 (2006): 133-53. On shyness a genetic disorder associated with notions of biological temperament see Jerome Kagan, *Galen's Prophecy: Temperament in Human Nature* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

about membership within a political community” and intersected with various “questions about the conditions that determined nationhood. These include: who are its members, and based on what qualities, ... and how shall the political body be preserved.”<sup>107</sup> The early modern medicalization of bashfulness as a symptom of melancholy points to the gendered nature of medical knowledge as a reflection of normative standards of gender-appropriate behavior. As male qualities, bashfulness and shamefastness were pathologized simply because they transgressed gender norms and conflicted with early modern beliefs about sex difference as a function of the humoral body. From a political standpoint, however, social timidity and withdrawal in men were especially problematic, posing a major challenge to materialist ideas about male heat which espoused ideals of boldness and reason that were integral to the cultural formation of the civil gentleman and the social practices that motivated his obligations to the state. In view of developing early modern perceptions of shyness as a politically imprudent quality, Shakespeare’s portrayal of King Henry the Sixth is deeply influenced by contemporary efforts to medicalize shyness on the pretense that it was a politically disruptive male condition and a matter of concern for the commonwealth as a whole.

The early moderns adopted the classical view that man was “not a solitary or unsocial creature,” but possessed of a certain “social spirit” which nature implanted out of “respect to justice and a partnership for the common good.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Adam Kitzes, *The Politics of Melancholy from Spenser to Milton* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16.

<sup>108</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Republic*, *Loeb Classical Library*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 41.

Such a view was central to the world of civil conversation, which built itself upon the fundamental assumption that men were by nature social and bold enough to compete successfully for public office through group interaction and public displays of courtesy. Although the bridle of shame entered into court competition by means of its status as a social virtue intended to regulate gentlemanly behavior and accelerate prestige, it quickly lost its value, becoming an excessive emotional extreme that led to an effeminizing and unruly bashfulness underscored by inhibition and political withdrawal. In *The Civil Conversation* Guazzo notes how the competitive subjection to scrutiny and criticism intensified the courtier's fear of social degradation to an excessive and pathological level. Beset by the fear that he might present an undesirable social image and be disgraced in the eyes of those for "whom we have greatest reverence, and of whose estimation and censure we stand most in awe of," the gentleman's moderated level of shamefastness could lose passionate control.<sup>109</sup> The courtier thus felt too much restraint, becoming bashful, visually, linguistically, and behaviorally inhibited and constrained within male company, ultimately withdrawing himself from socio-political life. Guazzo thus opens *The Civil Conversation* by warning his readers not to be like himself, a dejected political aspirant who has withdrawn into country "solitude" complaining that in "the court, to discourse and deal with diverse persons ... is pain and subjection." As he further explains, "it is great travail to my mind to understand other men's talk, to frame fit answers thereto, and to observe such circumstances as the quality of the persons, and mine own honor require." Following in the wake of current medical trends, Guazzo's physician diagnoses his solitude as

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<sup>109</sup> Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy*, 170.

melancholy caused by an overactive fear of shame marked by “distrust of his own doings, and the fear of other men’s judgments,” and advises him never to “take care of the censures and reprehensions which come from the blind communitary.”<sup>110</sup>

Linda Woodbridge has stated that pastoral withdrawal signified an escape from “the miseries of court life,” and that the desire for solitude was grounded in a desire to “evade the world of ambition.”<sup>111</sup> The notion of pastoral withdrawal cannot, however, be simply understood as a willed inclination to leave public life, a personal desire to escape the stressful and frustrating world of courtly ambition for a temporary period of time. Conduct tracts and other medical, moral, and literary works of the period support the view that the courtier’s withdrawal into pastoral solitude was the product of a much more complex form of human action intimately linked to male fears of shame and public disgrace. Shakespeare aptly reflects this notion in his *Two Gentleman of Verona* when Valentine reveals his relief to be in “the unfrequented woods.... Here can I sit alone *unseen* of any” (5.4.2-5; mine).<sup>112</sup>

Men who displayed signs of bashfulness and inhibition early on during courtly competition could, as La Primaudaye explains, cause potentially disruptive political action later on in a government position:

Shame wherein want of prudence beareth sway is evil and hurtful not only to those that are touched therewith, but oftentimes procureth great evils to commonalities and common-wealths....

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<sup>110</sup> Guazzo, *The Civil Conversation*, 2.3, 1.16.

<sup>111</sup> Linda Woodbridge, “Country Matters: As You Like It and the Pastoral Bashing Impulse,” *In Re-visions of Shakespeare*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 197.

<sup>112</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

Governors, Magistrates, and Judges, as of a foolish baseness and cowardliness of mind, either for fear to displease the greatest, or to be blamed and reprov'd of an ignorant multitude, bow and bend to another man's beck against right and equity.<sup>113</sup>

Plutarch similarly emphasizes the detrimental effects bashfulness could have upon the stability and preservation of the state:

It hapeneth unto [those with] excessive bashfulness, which seeming to fly and shun the smoke of blame, casteth itself into the very fire and flame of infamy. For those who be abashed to gainsay and deny them who importune them unreasonably ... [because] they fear some light check or private rebuke, [are] constrained afterwards to bear both shame and blame at their hands. This excessive shamefastness which always overspreadeth and covereth those who are not manly but fainthearted and effeminate, ... surely, would avert judges from doing justice, close up their mouths, that in counsels and consultations should deliver their opinion frankly; yea and cause them both to say and do many things inconsiderately against their mind.... It commeth to pass that this excessive shame ... having no power to withstand and repulse any encounter, nor say a word to the contrarie, yieldeth access to the lewdest designs, acts, passions that be.<sup>114</sup>

Through excessive bashfulness magistrates “fail in that which concerneth law and justice ... and neglect and forget that which they ought to do in the administration of government.”<sup>115</sup> As Plutarch explains in some detail here the bashful ruler's meekness, humility, and fear of reproach resulted in an inability to govern his people appropriately and ultimately had a disastrous effect on the functioning and stability of the commonwealth.

Shakespeare's interest in bashful male characters, especially those tied to the political realm, reflects the advancement of shyness throughout the gentlemanly sphere of civil conversation. The negative political implications of shyness influenced his early portrayal of the “timorous,” “bashful,” and “shamefaced” king Henry the Sixth, whose characterization reflects the gradual

<sup>113</sup> La Primaudaye, “Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor,” 106.

<sup>114</sup> Plutarch, “Of Naughty Bashfulness,” trans. Philemon Holland, 164-8.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

secularization, medicalization, and de-moralization of shyness as it devolved throughout the period from a religious virtue into an affective state linked to notions of male disease, effeminacy, and immorality. Henry's shyness and humility – qualities linked intimately to his Christian subjectivity – are delineated as problematic traits in a ruler and are chiefly responsible for the breakdown of the play's political, familial, and social structures. As Jean Howard notes, "the 'good King Henry' [is] a man disastrously suited to play a monarch's part. Hovering on the periphery of the play's action and killed before its final scene, Henry is gradually transformed into a mere observer of the public world around him.... [His] increasing saintliness neither erases his responsibility for civil war nor solves the immediate problem of secular rule."<sup>116</sup> Thomas Moretti likewise contends that "humility, meekness, and charity, ... the defining qualities of Christian men," are incompatible with kingship, and "Henry's piety bears witness to the irresolvability of Christian rule."<sup>117</sup>

The opening scene introduces the King's characteristic shyness, which is quickly put forth as the motivating factor behind his catastrophic decision to "yield the crown" to Richard Plantaganet. In line with Plutarchian notions of bashfulness, Henry is characterized as a man who is unable to deny a request, and so when Richard, his sons, and followers move into parliament seeking to have "the bashful Henry deposed," he cannot stand up to them, or repulse their demands, appearing instead as "a trembling lamb environed with wolves" (242).

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<sup>116</sup> Jean Howard, "Introduction to *3 Henry 6*," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 297.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas J. Moretti, "Misthinking the King: The Theatrics of Christian Rule in *Henry IV, Part 3*," *Renaissance* 60.4 (2008): 277, 275.

Rather than defending his title he trembles at his own authority and admits his “weak” claim to the throne. When York entices Henry, pledging that he will reign in peace and quietude while he lives if he gives up the crown, the bashful King, overcome with fear and humility, acquiesces with his terms, simply stating, “I am content”: a compliant phrase which, as we will see, repeats itself in the mouths of other shy, acquiescent Shakespearean figures who are unable to resist another’s demands.<sup>118</sup>

The sense of social and moral consciousness implicit in both classical and religious conceptions of shyness is not entirely absent from Henry’s deposition scene. As the King hands over the crown he explains his reasons for doing so:

Here I entail  
The crown to thee and to thine heirs forever,  
Conditionally, that here thou take an oath  
To cease this civil war, and whilst I live,  
To honor me as thy king and sovereign,  
And neither by treason nor hostility  
To seek to put me down and reign thyself. (1.1.194-201)

Henry’s Christian piety, humanity, and gentleness are aligned with a pacifism in war that coincides with his profound concern for the safety of the state. The marked compassion he displays for his subjects is a virtuous quality in a king, yet it cannot be wholly dissociated from the sense of guilt he feels over the misery and death his political incompetence has caused. Earlier confessions to Margaret in part two (“come wife, let’s ... learn to govern better / For yet may England curse my wretched reign”) influence his compliance to the Yorkists in part three (2 *Henry 6*, 4.9.48-9). Devastatingly aware of his own inability to rule, and of England’s “wretched” perception of his troublesome reign, Henry hands over the

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<sup>118</sup> Shylock famously repeats this phrase in *The Merchant of Venice* at 4.1.378.



crown in an attempt to cease the shedding of Christian blood, assuage his afflicted conscience, and regain his honor. However, as Randall Martin notes, Henry's "political insight has not matured in the same way as his moral vision": the ethical concern the King feels for his subjects' well-being and the sense of shame it motivates, which compels him to dispense with his title, leads only to greater disgrace and political instability.<sup>119</sup>

In abdicating the throne – an act that consequently disinherits his son – Henry brings upon himself a worse dishonor. Westmorland proclaims him a "base, fearful, despairing ... faint-hearted and degenerate king, / In whose cold blood no spark of honor bides" (1.1.179, 184-5). The effeminizing state of shyness that underpins Henry's interaction with the Yorkists is now explained as a humoral outcome of his complexional coldness. His "unmanly deed" incenses Margaret who reproaches her husband as a "timourous wretch, / That hast undone thyself, thy son, and me" (234). As if to intensify the King's effeminacy, his state of bashful compliance finds its most compelling critique in the mouths of the women in the play who assert that they would never have given in to such an importunate demand. Had Margaret, who is "only a silly woman," been present during the deposition, she proclaims that the "soldiers should have tossed me on their pikes / Before I would have granted to that act ... for shame.... Were it not pity that this goodly boy / Should lose his birthright by his father's fault" (244-6). In 3.2. when Edward propositions Lady Grey with the ultimatum that he will save her husband's land if she agrees to marry him, she – unlike Henry – boldly stands up to the new king and outright denies his request: "Then *no*, my lord, my suit is

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<sup>119</sup> See Martin's introduction to the play, 41.

at an end” (80; mine). Her tenacity is a quality that associates her with superior notions of male rulership, for as Edward exclaims, “All her perfections challenge sovereignty: One way or other she is for a king” (86-7). Henry’s inept political policy, incited as it is through his “fault” of shyness, is thus subject to various forms of judgment throughout the play, but finds its most explicit critique through the tyranny, vengeance, and pride to which it ultimately gives way.

In an attempt to remedy her husband’s “disgraceful” action and regain her family’s honor, Margaret valiantly readies herself for war and leads an army against the York faction. At the same time, however, the overweening ambition of the Yorkists compels them to break their oath and put an end to the Lancastrian dynasty. Henry’s acceptance of Richard’s obedience, along with his trust in Richard’s vow of peace upon his bestowal of the crown, is filled with political naïvety and ineptitude. For, as Mattie Swayne points out, the good King’s “continued generosity and faith afford Richard the opportunity to plant himself in power and to perfect his plans for rebellion.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, by the end of the first act, Margaret and the rebels have killed Richard in an attempt to regain the throne, a political achievement that only incites the pride and vengeance of the Yorkists once again. Caught in the crossfire of his wife’s compensatory rashness and the anger and ambitions of the sons of York, the bashful King can no longer bear the burden of the destruction and turmoil he has created. In the midst of civil war he attempts to escape the challenges of rulership by retiring to the comfort of a secluded molehill:

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<sup>120</sup> Mattie Swayne, “Shakespeare’s King Henry VI as Pacifist,” *College English* 3.2 (1941), 146.

Here on this molehill will I sit me down...  
 O God, methinks it were a happy life  
 To be no better than a homely swain,  
 To sit upon a hill as I do now,  
 To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,  
 Thereby to see the minutes how they run  
  
 And to conclude, the shepherd's homely curds,  
 His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,  
 His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,  
 All which secure and sweetly he enjoys  
 Is far beyond a prince's delicacies –  
 His viands sparkling in a golden cup,  
 His body couched in curious bed –  
 When care, mistrust, and treason waits on him. (2.5.14, 22-25, 47-54)

The soliloquy, which favors the pleasures of the simple life of the shepherd over the anxieties of the political world, connects Henry to the tradition of early modern courtiers who sought to break away from the problems attendant upon courtly life through pastoral detachment. However, the abrupt and disturbing entry of the two soldiers appears to extinguish the sense of tranquility Henry has achieved, turning his pastoral dream into a nightmare of shame, shyness, and guilt. Henry's impending emotional trauma adds to the relatively common early modern vision of pastoral solitude an aura of psychological complexity that underscores the developing correlation between bashfulness and melancholic withdrawal throughout the early modern period.

The horrendous sight of a son who has unknowingly killed his father in battle, and a father who has killed his son and who now carries his dead body, fills Henry with an overwhelming sorrow as he cries out, "weep wretched man, I'll aid thee tear for tear, / And let our hearts and eyes, like civil war, be blind with tears and break o'ercharged with grief" (75-77). The realities of war are brought devastatingly forth to the King who wishes he could "blind" his eyes with his

tears. Instead, however, the “piteous spectacle” of familial and political devastation hyperbolizes Henry’s sightlines to the point that he begins to view himself through the collective critical gaze of subjects. The son and the father’s lament over the destruction of their family ties rebounds terribly upon the King, who contemplates his fractured dynastic relationship to his own son, along with his severed political bond to his people. He thus asks himself, “how will the country for these woeful chances / *Misthink the King* and not be satisfied” (107-8; mine). The imagination of his subjects’ negative perception of him as an ineffectual king turns inward, inciting Henry’s extreme guilt over the needless warfare and bloodshed his actions have caused. The ethical impact of the King’s shy conscience is too much for him to bear. Overcome by remorse and melancholic despair he can no longer live with the chaos and disorder he has created and wishes for his own death: “O that my death would stay these ruthless deeds.... Was ever king, so grieved for his subjects’ woe? Much is your sorrow, mine ten times so much” (95). His son Edward’s sudden entry and immediate order that Henry should “fly” only seems to call attention to the King’s state of moral shyness, further encouraging his desire to “fly and shun the smoke of blame” by withdrawing farther away from the world.<sup>121</sup>

Whereas in later plays the social and ethical aspects of bashfulness operate productively to moderate sinful forms of pride and vanity, Henry’s shy conscience turns inward upon itself in a destructive way, calling attention to the inherent immorality, violent pride, and political turmoil that that his own sense of shame and humility have in fact incited. When the dying Clifford confronts Henry he

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<sup>121</sup> Plutarch, “Of Naughty Bashfulness,” 164.

does not seek to assuage his guilty conscience but rather provokes it by emphasizing the King's profound consciousness of his own political irresponsibility. Clifford criticizes Henry's shyness, gentleness, and "lenity" as disempowering qualities incompatible with notions of kingship, which incite men, and even women, to boldly empower themselves militaristically and politically, to ambitiously usurp kingdoms and thrones, and to kill others with selfishness and impunity:

Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do  
 Or as thy father and his father did,  
 Giving no ground unto the house of York,  
 They never then had sprung like summer flies,  
 I and ten thousand in this luckless realm  
 Had left no mourning widows for our death,  
 And thou this day hadst kept thy chair in peace.  
 For what doth cherish weeds but gentle air?  
 And what makes robbers bold but too much lenity? (2.6.13-21).

Clifford's rebuke should serve an ethical function here by arousing Henry's sense of shame and exacerbating his shy conscience as he stands before his dying comrade. The King's sense of moral consciousness, generated through the force of Clifford's evaluation of his problematic rule, however, does nothing to alter Henry's political behavior.

Clearly distraught over the events that have transpired, Henry laments that his "scepter" has been taken from him and that his "place is filled, ... [his] balm washed off wherewith [he] wast anointed," yet he makes little attempt to regain his political standing (3.1.15-7). When Clifford urges him to rise to the challenge of war and take back the throne for himself and his son the King reminds him "that things ill got had ever bad success." Violently taking back the throne would feed into the King's greed, vanity, and desire for political honor. Such sinful

incitements would, as Henry later notes, cost him the “creator’s praise” (4.6.44). When Henry finally does regain the crown he delegates his authority to York’s sons Warwick and Clarence in an attempt to secure lasting peace by gaining their indebtedness and obedience (4.6.41-44). Henry’s generosity and political pardons are a kind of lenient policy he has used previously, though to no avail. It is therefore questionable as to why he continues to believe that his giving of courtesies will inspire political loyalty. As Henry declares:

I have not stopp’d my ears to their demands,  
 Nor posed off their suits with slow delays;  
 My pity hath been balm to heal their wounds, ...  
 I have not been desirous of their wealth  
 Nor much oppress’d them with great subsidies  
 Nor forward of revenge, though much they err’d;  
 Then why should they love Edward more than me?

Fully aware that his Christian generosity, mercy, shame, and humility are what created his political problems in the first place, Henry is unable to change his methods as he continues to rule his kingdom with the same naïve trust in others, cowardice, charity and leniency which caused the civil war in the first place. Although Henry clearly realizes the detrimental effect his Christian virtue has upon his rule he repeatedly attempts to reconcile the two facets of his personality, only to find he has failed in the end.

Randall Martin notes that modern actors demonstrate a tendency to convey the “evolution of Henry’s conscience in various ways, but all have tried to show that his awareness of the futility of the Lancastrian and Yorkist feud, and his corresponding embrace of pacifist values, are the result not of weakness or cowardice but of growing emotional and intellectual courage.... David Warner created a painfully shy, physically awkward, but ultimately saintly figure who

passed through agonies of doubt before reaching a Christ-like serenity.”<sup>122</sup>

Henry’s Christianity and his religious shyness allows him to achieve an unprecedented spiritual authority and moral strength, which, at times, calls into question the extreme hypocrisy, ambition, and pride of those around him. Despite the moral significance attributable to Henry’s shy conscience the play makes little effort to represent the religious value attached to the emotion in any redeeming light, emphasizing instead its status as a problematic trait insofar as it conflicts with notions of political rule. The play consistently underscores the contentious nature of Henry’s piety, revealing its accompanying Christian qualities to be the direct cause of political, social, familial, and even personal turmoil and collapse. Henry’s humility and his shyness, though spiritually enlightening, account for much of his own personal breakdown. His shame, despair, and guilt over the chaos he has caused, and which he has been unable to end, become overwhelming emotional aspects of his existence that he neither knows how to cope with nor how to translate into any politically productive use. Martin’s assertion that “in terms of Henry’s personal experience, though his family strife and mental sufferings profoundly transform his attitudes and behavior, they never drive him mad” appears unconvincing.<sup>123</sup> Henry’s moral concern for his subjects’ welfare and his perception of their belief in his irresponsible or “wretched” rule exacerbates his sense of guilt to the point that his afflicted conscience drives him mad with melancholic suffering. Throughout the play he can be seen sublimating his religious capacity for divine and spiritual revelation into otherworldly visions,

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<sup>122</sup> Introduction, 38-9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 43.

delusions of past grandeur, and prophesies suffused with his own shame, dishonor, and remorse. His political impotence leads him to envision Margaret and Warwick pleading relentlessly for aid and support from King Lewis of France. His prediction of the reign of Richmond is likewise born of regret and penitential suffering:

If secret powers  
Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,  
This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.  
His looks are full of peaceful majesty,  
His head by nature framed to wear a crown,  
His hand to wield a scepter, and himself  
Likely in time to bless a regal throne.  
Make much of him, my lords, for this is he  
*Must help you more than you are hurt by me.* (4.6.68-76; mine)

There is nothing constructive about Henry's bashfulness. The moral consciousness it generates, which leads him to understand how inimical bashfulness itself is to kingship, does not influence him in any positive way. He is burdened rather than transformed by his own shy conscience, and throughout the play he evolves into a despairing, melancholic, and pathetic figure whose extreme fears of shame and disgrace compel him to desperately accept any form of worldly withdrawal offered to him.

When the two Gamekeepers find him wandering aimlessly in the forest holding a prayer book and talking aloud to himself, Henry makes little effort to resist their capture. Displaying his characteristic compliance he passively offers himself up to them, proclaiming, "I humbly yield unto [you]" (3.2.100). Only when he is shadowed away from the world's stage is the King psychically at peace. For as he later admits, his "imprisonment [was] a pleasure / Ay, such a pleasure as encaged birds" (4.6.11-12). When those closest to Henry may be seen



fighting for his release and political reestablishment he counterproductively displays a “longing” to “live low where fortune cannot hurt me” (20). His desire for concealment and public retirement is once again granted when Edward the usurper “seize[s] on the shamefaced Henry / And ... proclaim[s] [himself] king of England” (4.8.52-3). Locked away in the tower Henry spends his time wallowing in penitence, pity, and self-regret, reading his prayers and penitently praying for divine pardon for his political transgressions, which have now led to his son’s murder (5.6.1). Henry’s “guilty mind” is made immediately apparent to Richard, whom the King begs to satisfy his lingering death-wish:

So flies the reckless shepherd from the wolf,  
 So first the harmless sheep doth yield his fleece  
 And next his throat unto the butcher’s knife  
 .  
 .  
 .  
 I deadalus, my poor boy Icarus.  
 Thy father Minos that denied our course,  
 The sun that seared the wings of my sweet boy...  
 Ah, kill me with thy weapon, not with words,  
 My breast can better brook thy dagger’s point  
 Than can my ears that tragic history. (5.6.7-9, 21-3, 25-9)

The only gumption Henry shows throughout the entire play is during his final moments when he prophesies Richard’s terrible reign and denounces him as “an indigested and deformed lump” who “brought forth less than a mother’s hope” (5.6.50-1). Yet the boldness the bashful King demonstrates is quickly undermined by the very fact that it is meant to provoke Richard into killing him. It is, as Alan Dessen notes, “a string of insults to goad Richard into murder.”<sup>124</sup> What appears to stand out as a courageous act is actually a hopeless plea for self-inflicted punishment, born of the King’s overwhelming sense of weakness, guilt, and despair. Henry’s characterization thus conforms to contemporary early modern

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<sup>124</sup> Alan C. Dessen, “Oregon Shakespeare Festival,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978), 285.

perceptions of bashfulness as a limiting political fault. His character offers an unflattering portrait of a Christian king whose shyness is politically, socially, and personally damaging, and which devolves throughout the play into a self-destructive and maddening state of religious melancholy. In the end, the King's excessive guilt and despair can only be assuaged through a worldly withdrawal that finds its extreme fulfillment in death.<sup>125</sup>

### IX. Men, "Shy Colts," and The Bridle of Shame

It is a striking feature of *Henry VI* that the word "shy" is never once used to describe the King's character, instead the terms "bashful," "shamefaced," "humble," and "modest" are consistently deployed as descriptive adjectives. The word "shy" makes its Shakespearean debut some ten years later in *Measure for Measure*, a play which also addresses political shyness and the nature of Christian rule. Henry's bashfulness and the Duke's shyness indicate that the idiom "shy" gained widespread social currency from within the gentlemanly socio-political sphere of civil conversation during the early 1600's.

Karen Raber and Treva Tucker have argued that the horse could become a kind of "anti-symbol used to mock rather than celebrate the qualities of the elite.... Because of the horse's associations with the attributes considered

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<sup>125</sup> For more work on religious melancholy in the early modern period see Michael MacDonald, "The Fearful Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England," *The Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992); Jeremy Schmitt, "Melancholy and the Therapeutic Language of Moral Philosophy in Seventeenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004); Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a historical overview of melancholy see Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). These authors offer a morally reformatory, positive, and spiritually constructive account of religious emotional experience that Shakespeare does not appear to develop in this play, but which becomes an especially prominent feature in his later works.

appropriate to those who possessed power, equine imagery also could be deployed to criticize the elite when they failed to uphold and adhere to those attributes.”<sup>126</sup>

The emergence of the concept of shyness is a perfect example of this phenomenon. Originally, shamefastness was meant to control the emotional unruliness of elite gentleman, which was why it was so often linked to the image of the bridle; but when it turned into an emotionally excessive state itself it lost its ties to discipline and control and came to resemble the timid and unruly “shy colt” beneath the curbed bit. Through its metaphoric association with the horse and its bridle, shamefastness, as a state of male fear, apprehension, withdrawal, and animalistic unruliness, was thus easily replaced by the shorter more colloquial term “shy,” which inherited its conceptual weight. Within the masculine sphere of civil conversation, which thrived upon the qualities of boldness, reason, and self-governance, the idiom “shy” began to be exploited as an effeminizing, animalistic, and degrading insult used to ridicule timid and bashful men who displayed unruly and excessive fears of disgrace and reproach, and who finally withdrew themselves from courtly society.

A number of scholars from various fields have recently illuminated the way self-help books and leading drug companies have contributed to the pathological transformation of shyness in the modern world, questioning how current discourses and institutions could so rapidly convert a common and widespread characteristic into problematic personality disorder.<sup>127</sup> Although much

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<sup>126</sup> *The Culture of the Horse*, 12-3.

<sup>127</sup> See especially the aforementioned studies by Lane, *Shyness: How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness*; Barber, *Comfortably Numb*; McDaniel, *Shrinking Violets and Caspar Milquetoasts*. I

influential work has recently been done to assess the modern medicalization of shyness in the fields of psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, current research has not yet looked into the historical development of the emotion throughout the earlier English Renaissance, nor considered the literature of the period as evidence of the way this process actually began over four hundred years ago. Rooted in the virtue ethics tradition of Aristotelian philosophy, shyness was initially understood as a virtuous moral emotion throughout classical antiquity. On account of its praiseworthy status in the ancient world, the shame-state of *aidos* deeply influenced early modern conceptions of shyness as a feminine virtue and also as a religious emotion associated with conscience. In view of the way new modes of courtesy and courtly interaction infiltrated the predominantly male secular world of civil conversation, the cultural status of shyness shifted and the emotion devolved throughout the period from a religious passion into an effeminizing and pathological male condition linked to melancholy.

The pathological status of shyness could thus only come to fruition in the earlier English Renaissance when vast social change was implemented in court society through nascent ideas of civility and manners, which converged with medical-moral thought and long-held assumptions about the humoral body. Men were by nature hotter than women, bolder and more rational creatures. Heat allowed them to succeed in the world of civility, to interact socially, and to maintain the confident and temperate state of external control necessary for political advancement. In terms of humoral thinking, however, men who were

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offer an extended discussion on the modern medicalization of shyness in the conclusion to this study.

unable to sustain the extroverted and controlled external demeanor demanded of the courtier descended into a brutish, unruly, and emotionally excessive psychological and behavioral space. Because shyness transgressed norms of gender appropriate behavior, and also because it was so injurious politically, the early moderns took a major interest in the courtly display of male bashfulness and began to analyze it medically as a serious disorder connected to melancholy. Questions concerning the nature of male shyness, the social, psychological, and corporeal motivations that lay behind it, its complex behavioral and physiological symptomology, and its relationship to other gendered passions were intrinsic to early modern medical thought, which stripped the emotion of its ancient moral and social value, and thus encouraged a more secular conception of shyness as a harmful male condition linked to notions of animal brutishness, immorality, bodily and mental disease. Although shyness no longer carries the kind of pejoratively gendered implications it once did in early modernity, much of the theory and medical thinking about its gendering and its development into a masculine affliction continues to resonate in modern psychological studies and in contemporary perceptions of shyness as the problematic mental disorder we know today as social anxiety.

This chapter has traced the historical progression of shyness as it shifted from being widely understood as a religious and moral virtue into an injurious, limiting, and harmful condition afflicting men. The chapter's concluding analysis of King Henry reflects an understanding of shyness as a Christian emotional virtue that appears to have lost its intrinsic value in the wake of a rapidly

advancing secular world. The following chapter, however, demonstrates a marked shift in approach. In an effort to resist the pathologization of shyness *Coriolanus* advances an affirmative account of the emotion by insisting on its morally and spiritually reformatory effects.

## Chapter Two

### Coriolanus' Blush

Displaying his wounds in the marketplace is a part Coriolanus proclaims he “shall blush in acting” (2.2.142).<sup>1</sup> Why does Shakespeare’s hero feel shame over his wounds and their exposure? Gail Kern Paster argues that the wounds threaten Coriolanus’ heroic male agency through their association with the involuntary bleeding of the woman’s body. Displaying his wounds would, as Paster suggests, implicate Coriolanus in a scene of “shameful feminization.”<sup>2</sup> For Ewan Fernie, the exposure of the wounds would undermine Coriolanus’ heroic self-image by drawing attention to his “fleshly mutability and mortality,” while also reducing his perceived social status. As Fernie claims, in Coriolanus “there is a powerful class shame, of an aristocrat degraded below the common people.”<sup>3</sup> Whether grounded in notions of rank, status, or gender, current work on *Coriolanus* has tended to theorize the hero’s shame as an individualistic and non-moral emotional response aroused through the loss of personal identity. In this essay I want to explore an alternative approach to shame by turning to Aristotle’s account of the emotion as a fear of social dishonor. Aristotelian shame, and its proximity to other affective phenomena including shamefastness, modesty, humility, and shyness, offer a new way of thinking about Coriolanus’ blush as a social and ethical reaction that is deeply informed by the values governing the

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. R.B. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All quotes from the play are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 100.

<sup>3</sup> Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 213, 215. For related claims see Burton Hatlen, “The Noble Thing and The Boy of Tears”: Coriolanus and the Embarrassments of Identity,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997): 393-420.

Republic and its code of civic duty in war. The great hero, I argue, fears that his blush will be read as a sign of moral transgression, disclosing the true meaning of his wounds as tokens of pride and heroic self-interest in battle.

As part of my investigation into the moral nature of Coriolanus' blush I offer an extended historical account of Aristotelian shame, focusing on its translation into early modernity as a religious affect linked to conscience, and prominently involved in theological attempts to address the element of bodily determinism inherent in Galenic theories of temperament. In accordance with this historical approach, the blush may be further conceived of as a psychophysiological response that moderates the hero's pride and calls his choleric nature into question. Elicited through the dynamic shifting reciprocities between self and environment characterizing humoral selfhood and emotional experience, Coriolanus' blush, I argue, motivates a process of moral consciousness and complexional reform through which his soul is purified and begins to operate as a governing influence over his body. By mapping a Christian moral and affective framework onto an ancient Roman world-view, Shakespeare exposes his culture's tendency to regard "hard-line" accounts of Galenic humoralism and the embodied mind as irreligious.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow Douglas Trevor's term "hard-line Galenism" to refer to accounts of the humors and humoral complexion as fixed and irreducible. See his article "Sadness in the *Faerie Queene*," in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 241.



## I. Humoralism, Pride, and Honor

The four humoral fluids, choler, melancholy, blood, and phlegm, were believed to be fundamental to an individual's psychological and emotional condition. As Nancy Siraisi observes, "humoral theory stands out as the single most striking example of the habitual preference in ancient, medieval, and renaissance medicine for materialist explanations of mental and emotional states."<sup>5</sup> Within the Galenic economy, humors travelled through the bloodstream to the heart, the seat of cognition and motion, where they were rarified into spirits that moved through the arteries to the brain, connecting the body's flesh and its immaterial soul. In *Coriolanus*, Menenius draws attention to this organic process as he explains to the Plebs how humors are sent "through the rivers of your blood / Even to the court, the heart, to th'seat of the brain" (1.1.131-2).<sup>6</sup> In the pre-Cartesian Galenic system mental processes were grounded in a dynamic balance of physiological processes. Humoralism, as Gail Kern Paster notes, "accounted for a person's thoughts and deeds in a way that did not distinguish, as we tend to do, between the psychological and the physiological."<sup>7</sup>

As derivatives of the bodily humors the passions were commonly regarded as "liquid forces of nature that swept through the body just as winds and waves

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 106.

<sup>6</sup> On this organic process see Katharine Park, "The Organic Soul," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, and Eckhard Kessler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 483. See also Scott Manning Stevens, "Sacred Heart and Secular Brain" in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Carla Mazzio and David Hillman (New York: Routledge, 1997): 263-84.

<sup>7</sup> Gail Kern Paster, "The Humor of It," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works. Vol 3*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 48.

act in the natural world.”<sup>8</sup> As part of the fabric of the body the passions were believed to reside in the sensitive, non-rational soul that humans shared with the animal kingdom. As Thomas Wright notes, “those actions then which are common with us, and beasts, we call passions, and affections, or perturbations of the mind.”<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Babb explains that the “sensitive soul was endowed with the faculties of feeling and motion. It was capable of perceiving objects other than itself, it evaluates them as pleasing or repellent, and it directs motions of the body calculated to obtain or avoid them. It is seated in the heart.”<sup>10</sup> A passion was held to be an instinctive response from a mental state that communicated its will to the heart through the medium of the vital spirits, causing, in turn, a muscular spasm of the heart. When the reason “sees occasion for emotion . . . the heart responds as directed by expansion or contraction. Coincidentally there is a movement toward the heart of the humor whose qualities will stimulate the proper reaction.” For, as Wright notes, “love will have heat, and sadness cold, fear constringeth, and pleasure dilateth.”<sup>11</sup> Experienced as physiological humoral shifts within the body, the passions were thus capable of altering the body’s complexion. As Babb further notes, “if a passion is very strong or if it continues long, it tends to establish the humor of corresponding qualities as the dominant humor, and the humor in turn may make the passion which produced it habitual.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (London: 1601), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; Wright, *The Passions*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 13.

In *Humoring the Body* Paster expounds upon the embodied emotions and their capacity for change, which she suggests can only be properly understood by allowing for the early modern belief that the body, mind, and world were always connected. Referring to a “premodern ecology of the passions,” Paster observes how the quality and constitution of the air one breathed or the food one took in could shift the balance of humors in the body.<sup>13</sup> In her earlier work on shame, Paster explains that the humoral body was a porous entity “and thus able to be influenced by the immediate environment.... Bodies were always filled with humors, but the quantity of humors not only depended on such variables as age and gender but also differed from day to day as the body took in food and air, processed them and released them.”<sup>14</sup> Noting the body’s permeable relationship to the environment, Thomas Wright notes that “the humors depend upon the heavens, air, sleep and waking, meat and drink, exercise and rest,” and “according to the alterations of these external causes one or other humor doth more or less over-rule the body, and so cause alteration of passions.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, as neurophilosopher John Sutton notes, within “these old physiological systems it was also assumed that the cultural environment was as influential a part of such conspiracies of causes as was the physical world.”<sup>16</sup> Early modern emotional experience was, as Paster maintains, “transactional not only in being a response to a stimulus – whether that stimulus is external or internal – but also in occurring,

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<sup>13</sup> Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Paster, *Drama and the Disciplines of Shame*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 112.

<sup>16</sup> John Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 40.

almost invariably, within a dense cultural and social context.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, just as temperament influences the passions, so the passions – when influenced by a myriad of natural, external, social, and cultural stimuli – may affect the temperament, even cause a permanent change in complexion.

The body’s physiological openness to its environment meant that humoral subjectivity was characterized by a high degree of emotional instability. When impacted by forces in the outside world the humors could rise to an unhealthy excess, causing illness and overtaking reason. As Paster further observes, “humoral physiology ascribes to the workings of the internal organs an aspect of agency, purposiveness, and plenitude to which the subject’s own will is often decidedly irrelevant.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the passions were regarded as unstable, irrational perturbations that corrupted “the judgment and seduc[ed] the will, inducing for the most part to vice, and commonly withdrawing from virtue.”<sup>19</sup> Rational discipline equated with the Aristotelian mean was strongly encouraged as a means of attaining a moderate level of emotion but it was not the sole form of control recommended.<sup>20</sup> Focusing on the humoral body’s permeability with the physical environment, Michael Schoenfeldt has recently investigated the role of food in maintaining health and wellbeing. Through the willing adoption of certain strategies of self-discipline it was possible to modify the body’s “fluid economies for the desired physiological, psychological, and ethical outcome.” If, as

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<sup>17</sup> Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Paster, *Drama and the Disciplines of Shame*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> On the relationship between rational governance and the Aristotelian mean see Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Scodel’s study neglects an important strand of Aristotelian thinking about emotions, which I develop in this essay, as involved in the production of rational consciousness and discipline and, hence, not entirely antithetical to reason.

Schoenfeldt clarifies, the belief in humoral temperament “appears at once deeply materialist and incorrigibly determinist, in actual practice it was possible to manipulate the humoral fluids and their concomitant behaviors through diet and exercise.”<sup>21</sup> Humoral fluids could be managed in order “to assuage certain characterological flaws, and to exploit similar flaws in others. The choleric man, for example, is angry because he has too much choler. He needs to purge this excess, and/or assimilate substances that are cold and wet to counterbalance the hot and dry qualities of excess choler.”<sup>22</sup> As Schoenfeldt demonstrates, exposure to elements with the converse temperature and constitution could moderate and balance the level of a certain humor. In this regard, however, the ingestion of similar substances could also increase it thereby causing a dangerous surge of passion that could become excessive, destabilize the body’s temperate equilibrium and lead to disease, error, and sin. The proper goal of medical intervention, as Schoenfeldt notes, “was thus to restore each individual’s proper balance, either through ingestion of substances possessing opposite traits, or purgation of excess or both.”<sup>23</sup> John Sutton likewise explains how one’s humors could shift with age and in response to a variety of factors. As he states, “biological temperament was just the dynamic mixture of fluids in different proportions and conditions, changing over time in accordance with external influences as well as the drying or cooling rhythms of the life-cycle.... The departure of internal mixture from its (relative, changing) ‘proper blend’ due to excessive or insufficient environmental

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Donne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

or psychological input was a framework for explaining not only disease but also the varieties of health.”<sup>24</sup> The humoral body was therefore not a rigidly fixed entity physiologically inclined toward certain emotional and mental states. Rather Galenism depicts emotional experience and human nature in perpetual flux, driven by the shifting balances in the body’s fluids all in constant interaction with the world around it.

Coriolanus cannot be fully understood apart from humoral notions of subjectivity and material forms of emotional experience that appear to inform his characterization. In his opening diatribe the great hero refuses the people’s request for corn; insults them through the election of their tribunes, when he tells them that “anyone who would give good words to thee will / Flatter beneath abhorring;” and finally degrades their power in the Republic by discrediting their “opinion” (1.1.62). He seeks the Plebs’ hate with “greater devotion than they can render it him” (2.2.17-8). Through his scorn and repulsion of the Plebs, and his refusal to “flatter” them in any way, the hero constructs himself into the “chief enemy” of the people (1.1.7). Shakespeare thus portrays Coriolanus as a man “so choleric and impatient that he would yield to no living creature.”<sup>25</sup> Through his passionate invective the hero is made into an anti-social force whose choleric complexion engenders the uninhibited expression of pride and anger. Sicinius observes, “was ever man so proud as is this Martius?” To which Brutus responds, “marked you his lip and eyes?” (1.1.250-3). In the humoral economy governing Rome physiognomic signs denote essences, the body is the “transparent signifier

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<sup>24</sup> Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. Thomas North (London: 1579), 237

of one's fundamental being."<sup>26</sup> The tribunes clearly read Coriolanus' downcast gaze as evidence of his "surly nature," but their joking that such a contemptible expression "bemock[s] the modest moon" is ironic, since modesty is a quality that is not as inimical to the hero as it is first made out to be (1.1.255).

According to Coppelia Kahn, Volumnia plays a "powerful part in framing her son's temperament and value system."<sup>27</sup> She is preoccupied with Martius' success as a warrior and hones his ruling passions of pride and anger from an early age so that she can reap the benefits, consequently nurturing within him an "essentialist consciousness."<sup>28</sup> Considering how "honor would become such a person," Volumnia gloats about the time she sent her "tender-bodied" son into a "cruel war" when "a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding" (1.3.6-13). Volumnia valorizes wounds as signs of heroic honor. Blood, she proclaims, more becomes a man than a gilded trophy:

The breasts of Hecuba  
When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier  
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood  
At Grecian sword, condemning. (1.3.39-43)

Like Hector, Coriolanus sucks a kind of "valiantness" from his mother's breast (3.2.131). Volumnia's milk is converted into a liquid force that animates the hero's body in battle, rousing his fury and driving him to pursue violent feats of "deed-achieving honor" (2.1.170). In Coriolanus parental vulnerability and dependence are sublimated into unrestrained aggression but not completely

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<sup>26</sup> Eve R. Sanders, "The Body of the Actor in *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006), 405, 411

<sup>27</sup> Coppelia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 148.

<sup>28</sup> On Coriolanus' essentialism see Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 218.

overcome. “Framed by maternal insufficiency,” Janet Adelman observes that, “Coriolanus can never wean himself from what he has never truly had: thrusting him out, Volumnia binds him to her.”<sup>29</sup>

Although Volumnia declares that she would rather have eleven sons “die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action,” her avowal that she was “pleased to let [Martius] seek danger where he was like to find fame,” complicates the Republic’s militaristic code of self-abnegating civic duty in war (1.3.25-5, 12-3). Volumnia’s idea of Roman *virtus*, which should encompass the integrated values of “love of blood and war, love of country, desire for a brave death and posthumous glory,” appears distorted and self-serving.<sup>30</sup> The citizens themselves believe that Volumnia’s idea of *virtus* is questionable. As one of them explains, “though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country,” Martius acts to “please his mother and to be partly proud – which he is even to the altitude of his virtue” (1.1.34-7). Coriolanus may exhibit a superior degree of valor; however, Rome’s “chiefest virtue” is morally deprecated to the extent that it is unpatriotically exhausted in battle in the interests of his mother’s desire for glory, or his own, or both (2.2.82). The moral quality of Coriolanus’ heroism thus remains in doubt. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore “what services he has done for his country,” and so the citizens excuse his self-interested martial conduct according to the drives of the Galenic body, deeming his pride a “vice” he simply “cannot help in his nature” (1.1.27-8, 39).

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<sup>29</sup> Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins in Shakespeare’s Plays* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 147.

<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 154.



In their effort to exonerate Martius' pride the citizens' endorse the notion of physiological determinism inherent in Galenic theories of temperament. Despite the body's susceptibility to discipline and physiological alteration, humoralism left open the possibility for an individual to acquit himself of sin by claiming that "a person is wholly formed by his or her complexion," or that one's bodily fluids were involuntarily influenced by external factors.<sup>31</sup> Paster identifies the tendency for the early moderns to cite "their humors profligately to excuse lapses in behavior" as they invoked the "undeniable variety and obduracy of the physical body's appetites and their resistance to reason."<sup>32</sup> As Douglas Trevor observes, this kind of "humoral scapegoating" was heretical.<sup>33</sup> Explaining sinful conduct as an effect of the body and its fluids rather than the failure of rational self-control undermined religious notions of moral responsibility and free will, and thus "threatened the divine omnipotence of an electing god."<sup>34</sup> Such deterministically "hard-line" and inflexible accounts of Galenic selfhood also contributed to the limiting and irreligious belief that a particularly "severe form of predestination is manifested in the body," thereby thwarting the soul's journey toward immortality and rendering its corruption materially inescapable.<sup>35</sup>

If the citizens pursue materialist explanations to excuse Coriolanus' unethical yet highly advantageous conduct in war, Martius himself would appear to validate their thinking. Having been raised with an essentialist consciousness

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<sup>31</sup> Trevor, "Sadness," 244.

<sup>32</sup> Gail Kern Paster, "The Humor of It," 50, 52.

<sup>33</sup> Trevor, "Sadness," 241-2. On the irreligious implications of Galenic theory see also James D. Redwine, "Beyond Psychology: The Moral Basis of Jonson's Theory of Humour Characterization," *English Literary History* 28 (1961): 316-334.

<sup>34</sup> Trevor, "Sadness," 241.

<sup>35</sup> "Hard-line" is Trevor's term. He uses it to describe rigid and inflexible accounts of the humors and humoral complexion; Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 9.

and with the belief that his choleric passions are vital to his heroic success, Coriolanus fervently strives to maintain a “constant temper” (5.2.92). Fearful that his complexion will shift through dietary means, and that he will have a “suppler soul” after he has filled his “pipes and these conveyances of our blood with food and drink,” Coriolanus practices “self-starvation” and “persistently regards food as poisonous” (5.1.53-5).<sup>36</sup> When Lartius warns him that his “exercise hath been too violent for a second course of fight,” the hero ignores him and returns to the battlefield. Extended engagement in violent “exercise” offers Coriolanus a means of regenerating his choleric humors, or as Cominius puts it, “requicken[ing] what in flesh was fatigate” (2.2.115).

In view of the early modern formulation of emotions as bodily states that could become immoderate if not governed, overtaking reason and will, Coriolanus’ pride progresses in war into the Aristotelian extreme of vainglory. For, as Aristotle maintains, “with regard to the desire for honor the mean is proper pride, the excess is empty vanity, and the deficiency is undue humility.”<sup>37</sup> The tribunes discern how Martius accedes to the natural increase of his passions, noting how “the present wars devour him. He is grown to proud to be so valiant” (1.1.256). Martius is “overcome with pride, ambitious past all thinking” (4.6.33-4). Because he has “such a nature / Tickled with good success,” during battle his pride can be seen intensifying alongside of his valor; they grow together like “the shadow / Which he treads on at noon” (1.1.257-60).

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<sup>36</sup> Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.7.1107b17.

In combat nothing exists beyond the hero's pursuit of Aufidius, "a lion" he admits he "is *proud* to hunt" (232-3; mine). Proclaiming Aufidius to be "the man of [his] soul's hate," Martius discloses his perception of his soul as an entity influenced by bodily fluids that determine how he feels, thinks, and acts in battle (1.6.10). In a phrase that recalls the passions as liquid forces of nature that could grow to an uncontrollable excess in the body, thus taking over the mind, the hero notes how his disdain for Aufidius materializes into a humoral distillation that makes him "sweat with wrath" (1.4.27). The explicitly corporealized language used to describe Martius in battle, and which he uses to describe his men, underscores his own resolutely materialist habits of thought and perception. If the hero's body, drenched with wrath, stands out as the "luminous sign of a godlike essence," the inherent frailty of his men is, as he states, accurately reflected through their "backs red and faces pale / With flight and auged fear" (1.5.8-9).<sup>38</sup> Driven forward by bodily and emotional forces beyond his reasonable control, Coriolanus is envisaged as an irrational and unrestrained animal akin to a "fawning greyhound" that has "slipped" his "leash" (1.7.38-9). The hero is himself described here in animalistic terms, just as he similarly describes those around him as animals. As he proclaims, Aufidius is "a lion," and, as he further points out, his comrades "bear the shapes of men" yet possess the "souls of geese" (1.5.5-6). Such natural and feral imagery necessarily betrays Coriolanus' understanding of others as individuals overcome, just like himself, by the wild, instinctive, irrational force of their own uncontrollable animalistic passions.

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<sup>38</sup> Sanders, "The Body of the Actor," 405.

While searching for his enemy, the hero witnesses a man taken prisoner, powerless over the strength of his passions; however, Martius demonstrates little control over himself and later regrets that he was unable to help him as “wrath overwhelmed [his] pity” (1.10.86). As if to underscore the hero’s propulsion through battle by the force of his own emotions, which have intensified to a point beyond his reasonable control, he is described as an unconscious “*thing* of blood, whose every motion / Was time’d with dying cries” (2.2.107; mine). Martius is driven forward through war by the ruling direction of his body, metonymically symbolized through the “soldier’s arm,” which functions as an agential force impelling his actions (1.1.113). His sword becomes a material extension of his hand – “where it did mark, it took” (2.2.105).<sup>39</sup> “Reeking over the lives of men,” Martius’ bloody “course will on / The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs / Of more strong link asunder” (2.2.116, 1.1.66-8). As G. Wilson Knight observes, the great hero can neither restrain himself nor slow down. He flows through battle “ungoverned, undirected, murderous,” never stopping to “ease his breast with panting” (2.2.117).<sup>40</sup>

The violence of Martius’ quest compels men like “plants on the sea bottom to give way before a greater mass of a moving warship.”<sup>41</sup> In a stunning Aristotelian metaphor the language of shame and its oppositional extremes of bashfulness and humility become implemented in battle as a means of underscoring the excessive nature of the hero’s pride and desire for honor. The

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<sup>39</sup> On the hand as a condition of agency see Katherine A. Rowe, “Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994): 279-303.

<sup>40</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare’s Tragedies Including the Roman Plays* (London: Methuen, 1958), 171.

<sup>41</sup> Sanders, “The Body of the Actor,” 397.

mixed state of awe and sheer terror forces soldiers to cower and shrink back in fear as Coriolanus passes, just as “weeds before / A vessel under sail so men obeyed and fell below his stem” (2.2.103-5). As Carlin Barton clarifies, in ancient Rome “shyness was the fear or respect that caused one to draw back before another” so that “by withdrawing before a person or god one augmented the portion of that person or god.”<sup>42</sup> In battle Martius’ pride and inborn sense of superiority soar to the heights of a god. He is “Mars” incarnate as if “whatsoever god who leads him / Were slyly crept into his human powers / And gave him graceful posture” (2.1.215-7). In war Martius’ pride and “sovereignty of nature” are aptly reflected through his body’s high posture and validated through the contrasting oppositional imagery of social humility (4.7.35). Coriolanus is a god; he is Jove to whom even “the nobles bended” (2.1.281).

The hero’s possession of a kind of otherworldly power and heroic strength and grandeur become clearly rendered through his unaided entry through the Volscian gate. Impelled by his vainglorious quest for Aufidius, “alone” Martius enters the “mortal gate of the city” (2.2.108-9). In a desperate attempt to seek out his enemy, Martius finds himself “alone to answer all the city,” which he paints “with shunless destiny” (1.5.23). The extremity of the great warrior’s desire for heroic honor is made apparent through his invective against even those who would command him. Consumed by his self-centered pursuit for glory, which makes him impervious to anything else in battle, let alone any strategic militaristic actions that may be implemented, Martius frantically asks his general “where is

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<sup>42</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 203.

the enemy?” When Cominius doesn’t know he self-righteously berates him: “are you lords of the field? / If not, why cease you till you are so?” (1.7.46-7). Finding Cominius in “retire,” however, only fuels the hero’s pride and egotism as he takes his general’s retreat as an occasion to advance his status (50). As the tribunes had earlier predicted, Martius endeavors to rob Cominius of his “demerits” as he orders his general to “directly set [him] / Against Aufidius” (1.2.269).

The unexpected change of leadership and high station affords Martius the opportunity to self-gratifyingly flaunt his wounds and invite approbation from the Roman army. Displaying his wounded body he shouts out. If any

love this painting  
Wherein you see me smeared; if any fear  
Lesser his person than an ill report;  
If any think brave death outweighs bad life,  
And that his country’s dearer than himself  
Let him alone, or so many so minded,  
Wave thus to express his disposition  
And follow Martius. (1.8.69-76)

Coriolanus understands that *virtus* is a heroic attribute that invests martial deeds with social value. The fact that he assigns meaning to his wounds through the patriotic language of Roman *virtus* only reinforces how inordinate his passions have become, causing a “defect of judgment” to the extent that he is unable to perceive the immorality of his actions (4.7.39). Martius’ pride, even if he appears unaware of it, ultimately breaks through his language, which betrays his desire to continue fighting “alone.” The individualist logic underlying Coriolanus’ speech, however, goes undetected as his words goad his men into unified heroic action and they hoist him up in commendation. Overmastered by the internal force of his own pride, Martius vainly shouts, “O me alone! Make you a sword of me” (1.8.77). In words that divulge the self-centered nature of the hero’s pursuit of

Aufidius, Martius proceeds to contradict his earlier call for military support, affirming that none of his men could rival him against his enemy. “Which of you / But is four Volsces?” he rhetorically asks them, “None of you but is / Able to bear against the great Aufidius / A shield as hard as his” (1.8.78-81). The seemingly unconscious individualist stance underpinning what has been described as the hero’s “happiest moment in the play” is made undoubtedly evident when Martius finally confronts Aufidius “alone.”<sup>43</sup> When he finally battles Aufidius the hero continues to boast of his singular defeat, proclaiming, “alone I fought in your Corioles’ walls.... Tis not my blood / Wherein thou seest me masked” (1.10.8-10). The pride “masked” behind the patriotic meaning of blood and wounds Martius alluded to in his previous speech is now uncomfortably revealed as he taunts his enemy with visual reference to his body. Responding to Martius’ display, Aufidius admits that there is nothing he “abhor[s] / More than thy fame and envy” (1.9.45). Disclosing the true meaning of the hero’s bleeding body, Aufidius enviously calls attention to Coriolanus’ wounds as tokens of vainglory, aptly demarcating the “fame” the hero has won through his sole defeat of the enemy.

## II. Blushing and the Shy Conscience

During war Coriolanus courts wounds and engages in situations where he can openly display them as laudable signs of his heroic preeminence. Volumnia had earlier glorified her son’s wounds as tokens of the heroic honor he had

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Goldman, *Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1985), 155.

achieved in battle. As she counts her son's wounds with Menenius she once again clarifies their inherent significance. As she intimates, the more bloody Martius becomes, the more wounds he has accumulated, and the more "cause he has to be proud" (2.1.141). Once off the battlefield, however, any kind of praise is detrimental to the wounds, which "smart / to hear themselves remembered" (1.10.27-8). Likening Cominius' praise to his mother's accolades, Martius distressingly points out that Volumnia, "who has a charter to extol her blood, / When she does praise me grieves me" (1.10.14-5). The hero now finds something deeply problematic in Volumnia's association of wounds and blood as somatic manifestations of his heroic pride and love of glory. To Cominius, Martius is simply being humble. As he notes, the hero's derisive attitude toward praise "would seem but modest" (25). Yet the psycho-physiological nature of Coriolanus' response, "I will go wash, / And when my face is fair you shall perceive whether I *blush* or no," reveals the hero's modesty to be a more complex affective state that gains ethical significance when read alongside Aristotelian accounts of the fear of shame (69; mine).

Aristotle defines shame as a "kind of fear of dishonor" and suggests that the emotional state is morally operative. Because shame or "modesty" is aroused through the knowledge of cultural norms it rises into consciousness in considering that certain acts are wrong to pursue and that engaging in them could jeopardize one's honor. Aristotle tells us that when an individual has transgressed a moral code his fear of social disgrace is exhibited through blushing, as is the case with



Coriolanus.<sup>44</sup> Cominius' proclamation, that Martius "must not be the grave of [his] deserving," for "Rome must know / The value of her own," has the effect of producing the hero's fear of shame and arousing his blush (1.10.20-1). Praise excites negative attention to Coriolanus' martial conduct provoking pain in his wounds (now the alleged signs of corrupt honor), and causes his face to redden with the guilty knowledge that his deeds had not been accomplished for Rome. As G. Wilson Knight observes, Martius is dismissive of Cominius' praise "because he knows his deeds are not done for Rome, or if he does not know it yet, fears he may be forced to know."<sup>45</sup> The hero's rejoinder that Cominius' praises are "sauced with lies" further discloses his developing sense of moral consciousness, thus revealing his blush to be a moral reaction aroused through his awareness of transgression (53). In this regard, the hero's blush has a moderating effect upon his pride and desire for honor. As Barton claims in her study on *Roman Honor*, "in the man or woman who blushed, the very weakness revealed the strength of the social bond; [the blush] was a confession of subordination that cemented society."<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, Coriolanus' blush may be read as a sign that divulges his growing sense of social awareness, along with his developing bond to the Roman people and to the communal and ideological codes shaping the Republic and its ideal of civic duty in war.

Coriolanus' blush thus calls into question the citizens' earlier statement that he is not "soft-conscienced." Although Martius tells Cominius, "I have done

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<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.9.1128b12, 2.8.1108a31. I allude here to my previous discussion on Aristotelian shame in the second part of the introduction.

<sup>45</sup> Knight, *The Imperial Theme*, 169

<sup>46</sup> Barton, 227-8.

what you have done, ... induced as you have been, that's for my country," his patriotic claim is problematized by his following sentiment: "he that has but effected his good will / Hath overta'en mine act" (1.10.15-19). As he invokes his commitment to *virtus* and then contradicts his previous assertion, Coriolanus evinces a heightened state of ethical consciousness surrounding his limited mental condition in battle. In accordance with their "will" other men fought more honorably for Rome and demonstrated a higher degree of moral governance over their martial actions. As he reflects upon his misdeeds, Coriolanus' "soul aches" with pain as it gains insight into the material corruption previously imposed upon it (3.1.110). The hero's fear of shame thus begins to generate a conflicting degree of moral awareness surrounding his choleric temperament and proud actions, allowing him to perceive the inherently vicious nature of his passions as well as their debilitating effect upon the will. In accordance with his developing insight, Coriolanus' experience of shame recalls the emphasis early modern divines placed on the rational passions in their attempts to "limit the consequences of materialist readings of disposition, and in effect repurify a soul that has been ... saturated with humors, blood, and bile."<sup>47</sup>

Dissatisfied with the potential heresies embedded in humoral theory, theologians addressing the relations of the body and soul sought to emphasize man's role as a free agent whose will gave him the capacity to govern his actions.<sup>48</sup> In their writing they also advocated the corresponding view that the

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<sup>47</sup> Trevor, "Sadness," 243.

<sup>48</sup> On the idea of moral determinism and the potential heresies latent in Galenic thought see also Oswei Tempkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University

rational soul was a free and independent entity and, therefore, could not be overmastered or exonerated by the influence of the body's fluids. As Bishop Edward Reynolds observes:

The soul depends not on the body in its operations, but educeth them immediatly from within itself, as is manifest in the reflection of the soul upon its own nature, being an operation separable therefrom, the soul being not only *actus informans*, a form informing for the actuating of a body, but *actus subsistence* to, a form subsisting without any dependence upon matter.<sup>49</sup>

As part of their agenda to free the soul from the determinist implications of humoral embodiment, theologians endorsed specific passions of the reasonable soul lodged in the will, including shame, which were instigated through the reflexive operation of conscience and involved in the re-formation of the subject. In opposition to the passions of the sensitive soul, Wright explains that the passions of the rational soul “are immaterial, spiritual, independent of any corporeal subject.” Reynolds likewise describes the “mental passions” as those “agitations of the supreme part of the understanding, which ... work in the conscience motions of fear, horror, despair.”<sup>50</sup> In privileging shame as a rational or “mental passion,” Reynolds notes that this emotion, which is incited through “conscience of evil and guiltiness of mind, ... makes us ever reflect upon our weakness.” For Reynolds, the blush itself is the “sign of a mind virtuously disposed in rectifying the quick apprehensiveness of our own defects.”<sup>51</sup> Timothie Bright similarly observes that the affection which “moveth blushing is shame

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Press, 1973); F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (London, 1640), 404.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *The Passions*, 59; Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 295, 275, on blushing, 311.

rising upon the conscience of some known offense.”<sup>52</sup> By “acquainting themselves with motions,” such as shame, “whereunto considered their own determinate qualities have an essential reluctance,” Reynolds observes how individuals could undo the “damage and reproach” wrought upon the soul by the body.<sup>53</sup> Coriolanus’ blush, generated through the cognitive operation of conscience, motivates a process of moral consciousness and reform through which his soul is released from its determined place in the body. Purged of the choleric fluids that would corrupt and weigh down its immortal nature, the hero’s soul is free to act in accordance with his will as a governing principle over his body and his body’s actions.

Despite the high level of ethical awareness the hero’s blush reveals, blushing also necessarily stands out as an overt revelation of moral transgression. As Lodowick Bryskett explains, “the minde finding what is to be reprehended in us seeketh to hide the fault committed, and to avoid the reproach thereof, by setting that color on our face as a maske to defend us.”<sup>54</sup> Annibale Pocaterra also explains how the blush functions just like people “roused to defend their town in the middle of the night. Because shame threatens the soul that is revealed to us by means of facial expression, blood rushes to the face to cover it.”<sup>55</sup> In the play Brutus alludes to the defensive quality of the blush when he explains how Roman

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<sup>52</sup> Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), 166.

<sup>53</sup> Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas Wright (San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 176.

<sup>55</sup> Werner Gundersheimer, “Renaissance Concepts of Shame and Pocaterra’s *Dialoghi Della Vergogna*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994), 47; On the moral nature of the blush see also Brian Cummings, “Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World,” in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

women “commit the war of white and damask / In their nicely *guarded* cheeks” (2.1.212-3; mine). Coriolanus cannot ignore the contradictory quality of his own blush as a colorful epidermal border that reveals as much as it conceals. In telling him, “the blood upon your visage dries,” Cominius calls attention to the hardened blood on the hero’s face as a mechanism of concealment which appropriates the defensive function of the blush protecting Martius from dishonor (1.11.94). Once the hero moves into the political realm, however, and traditional militaristic tactics of facial concealment are no longer an option, Coriolanus inevitably finds himself overcome by bashfulness, the only self-protective mechanism available to him.

As discussed in the introduction, in its earliest classical formulation bashfulness was chiefly understood in relation to the inhibition of unethical action. When placed on the Aristotelian scale of the mean between extremes, modesty could escalate into an excessive shamefastness, in which one’s fear of shame could become so overwhelming that it could restrain an individual from engaging in action that would cause disrepute.<sup>56</sup> Spinoza follows Aristotle in his account of bashfulness, which he explains as an extreme “fear that shame will occur, and hence a state of mind restraining man from committing an act which may provoke shame.”<sup>57</sup> However, as the concept of bashfulness moved into the wider space of human socialization it progressed from a state of feeling that could curb unethical behavior into a moral emotional condition characterized by extreme behavioral inhibition. As Aristotle observes, men feel shame most

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<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.8.1108a31, 4.9.1128b12.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, ed. Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 3.31.147

“before those who will always be present,” as well as before “those not aware of one’s misdeeds.”<sup>58</sup> In certain social settings the fear of dishonor could progress into an extreme case of modesty, or “moral shyness,” in which the subject defensively attempts to hide his *misdeed* or any sign of wrongdoing from public view.<sup>59</sup>

As Coriolanus enters the political domain his behavior perfectly reflects the Aristotelian notion that bashfulness is a moral response rising, as Timothie Bright observes, “upon a guiltiness in conceit. This conceit causeth us to hide ourselves, and to withdraw our presence from the society of men, whom we fear do view our faults in beholding us.”<sup>60</sup> The senate of patricians is eager to advance Coriolanus to consul. Through such a promotion they seek to “gratify his noble service that / Hath thus stood for his country.” The patricians are delighted to hear Cominius recount Martius’ seemingly selfless heroic deeds but the moment he begins to do so “Coriolanus rises and offers to go away” (2.2.38-9). That the hero is experiencing an advanced or extreme form of shame – or moral shyness – is made explicit as one senator retorts, “never *shame* to hear / What you have nobly done” (65-6; mine). The socio-ethical thought process intrinsic to shame threatens to reveal itself here through the blush. Burdened by the awareness that he did not act “nobly” on behalf of his country, Coriolanus finds himself overcome by the

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<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Loeb Classical Library, ed. J.H. Freese (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1926), 2.6.1384a. I summarize the discussion in the second part of the introduction.

<sup>59</sup> On the influential concept of “moral shyness” see Nathan Rotenstreich, “On Shame,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 19 (1965), 57.

<sup>60</sup> Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy*, 170.

force of his “shy conscience” and self-defensively withdraws from the room in bashful fear and inhibition.<sup>61</sup>

Although the hero’s fear of dishonor begins to intensify into an extreme state of moral shyness before a public of patricians, it reaches a climax when he is told he must display his wounds to a crowd of plebians in the marketplace so as to prove his worth for consul; yet, Coriolanus refuses to “put on the gown, stand naked and entreat them / For my wounds’ sake.... It is a part I shall blush in acting” (2.2.135-7). Ostensibly the signs of heroic identity, the wounds, as Cynthia Marshall observes, threaten to become devalued through their openness to interpretation.<sup>62</sup> The Plebs can put their “tongues” into “the wounds and speak for them” (2.3.5-7). As Eve Sanders explains, “Coriolanus is disturbed ... by his wounds [because] of the indeterminacy of their meaning in a commercial arena.”<sup>63</sup> Other critics have noted that, instead of stabilizing personal identity, the wounds subject Coriolanus to a certain level of humiliation by virtue of their ability to be misinterpreted as signs of “fleshly vulnerability” or, according to Paster, as the site of the feminine aperture involuntarily leaking blood.<sup>64</sup> Yet Coriolanus is, I would argue, more concerned in this scene with the threat his wounds pose to his social rather than his personal identity. Indeed, the central

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<sup>61</sup> I allude here to the Charke quote discussed in the introduction: “a shy conscience cannot abide her own offences.” *A Treatise Against the Defense of Censure* (Cambridge, 1586), 255. The phrase aptly reflects the moral nature of shame and shyness, as well as the association of shy behavior with the arousal of conscience throughout early modernity.

<sup>62</sup> On the “sliding signification” of the wounds see Cynthia Marshall, “Wound-man: Coriolanus, gender, and the theatrical construction of interiority,” *In Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110ff.

<sup>63</sup> Sanders, “The Body of the Actor,” 390. For related claims see Zvi Jagendorf, “Coriolanus: Body Politic and Private Parts,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.4 (1990): 455-69.

<sup>64</sup> Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, 213; Paster develops this argument in her discussion of the play in *Drama and the Disciplines of Shame*.

purpose surrounding the display of the wounds is to hold them open to the “rectorship of judgment” so that the people can scrutinize the hero’s “marks of merit, wounds received for’s country” (2.3.201, 159). In taking the moral implications of the hero’s martial conduct into consideration, I suggest here that Coriolanus is ashamed of his wounds because he fears they will be negatively interpreted as signs of heroic self-interest and vainglory. According to Marshall, as a “rupturing [of] the bodily surface that houses or contains the mysterious inner self, wounds serve as tokens of that self, even as gateways to it.”<sup>65</sup> Coriolanus’ wounds are problematic because they provide an opening into his body, materially externalizing the excessive pride and choleric fluids breeding about his heart.<sup>66</sup> Focusing on the way in which psychological inwardness held a physical and physiological dimension within the humoral system, David Hillman reminds us that “virtue and sin were imagined as literally inhabiting one’s innards ... and important subjective and moral truths were understood to lie hidden within the body.”<sup>67</sup> In the marketplace the attention to Coriolanus’ “marks of merit,” and their close evaluation, would necessarily lead to the disclosure of his offense, thus arousing his profound sense of shame and causing him to blush. For, as Edward Reynolds observes, among the many “particular causes which are apt to excite this affection of shame ... [are] any notorious external deformities ... , especially if there by anything of our own guilt in them.”<sup>68</sup> Lest there is any doubt upon

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<sup>65</sup> Marshall, “Wound-man,” 100.

<sup>66</sup> Compare with Lear’s wish to “anatomize Regan” so that he can “see what breeds about her heart” (*King Lear* 3.6.66-7).

<sup>67</sup> David Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 18.

<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 304-6.



inspection of the wounds, the hero's red face would publicize his guilt and confirm his transgression, thus jeopardizing his honor in the Republic and causing the consulship to be taken from him.

On account of his immense pride Coriolanus is often figured "alone" as an isolated entity cut off from the social environment. However, by virtue of their paradigmatic openness, Coriolanus' wounds destabilize the sense of sovereignty and enclosure he strives to maintain. Indeed, the very troubling fact that the wounds are open bodily orifices renders Coriolanus subject to a complex affective experience born at the interstices of the self and the world he inhabits. Aroused through the knowledge that the wounds signify his transgression of an ideological code, Coriolanus' blush is itself a socially aroused psycho-physiological response in which mind and body interact with the cultural environment in a dynamic action of "continuous reciprocal causation" to produce moral judgments which become reflexively embodied in emotional experience.<sup>69</sup> The red blush of shame highlights the skin's role as a porous bodily border where the private self intersects with the world around it. As a permeable "somatic marker," Coriolanus' blush parallels the wounds on the surface of his skin, aptly demarcating the distinctive openness of the Galenic self and its capacity for humoral and passional change through its physiological connection to the surrounding environment.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 163.

<sup>70</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994). The blush, according to Damasio, would be a kind of "somatic marker" that assists in cognitive deliberation and rational decision-making, 173. On the blush of shame as a psycho-physiological reaction that combines feeling and ethical evaluation, and thus enhances moral reasoning see Steven M. Parish, "The Sacred Mind: New Cultural Representations of Mental Life and the Production Moral Consciousness," *Ethos* 19 (1991): 313-351. See also see Konstantinos Kafetsios and Eric LaRock, "Cognition and Emotion: Aristotelian Affinities with

As he anticipates blushing in the marketplace and suffering an incriminating moment of exposure and disgrace, Coriolanus envisions his “body as a theatre.”<sup>71</sup> Imagining himself as a denigrated object of spectacular appraisal the hero begins to consider his body from an abstracted perspective. As he reflects upon his misdeeds and how those deeds come to be problematically revealed through his flesh, the hero’s rational soul starts to govern the impulses of his body, as his shy conscience restrains him from engaging in social interaction and corporeal display. In accordance with the historical antecedents Coriolanus’ bashful character is modeled upon, Carlin Barton reminds us that it was “the guilty knowledge of their enormities which stopped the candidates for office from appearing in public.... *Conscientia* was the freezing timidity that made one dread to blush, lest the loss of control that ought to reveal the soul’s transparent innocence betray, instead, its dark secrets.”<sup>72</sup> The state of shyness Coriolanus experiences thus inhibits him from interacting with the plebs as a means of protecting himself from the negative effects of blushing, humiliation, and infamy.

In view of the Aristotelian link between bashfulness and humility (bashfulness being the extreme of *the fear of dishonor*; humility, the deficient opposite of its corresponding state, the *desire for honor*) we might note how the “napless vesture of humility” supports the hero’s state of modesty when he finally

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Contemporary Emotion Research,” *Theory Psychology* 15 (2005): 639-56. These authors suggest that psychological affections are concurrent with physiological reactions which in turn work as a means of “amplification,” strengthening moral response patterns, 651-3.

<sup>71</sup> The abstracted image Coriolanus creates of himself blushing corresponds to Damasio’s intriguing idea of the body as a theatre for the emotions. One needn’t have to experience the effects of an emotion in the body proper, simply the “fainter image of an emotional body state” can have moral import,” *Descartes Error*, 155.

<sup>72</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 247.

does appear in the marketplace.<sup>73</sup> Functioning as a protective covering, the gown acts a means of bodily restraint and control that Coriolanus uses to inhibit his wounds from view in an attempt to prevent his blush from breaking forth. As he tells the plebs, “I have wounds / To show you which shall be yours in private” (2.3.72-3). The plebs, however, continue to stand in doubt. They are overcome with a curious desire to see and judge the hero’s wounds. Before they bestow the consulship on Coriolanus, the plebs wish to ascertain the true meaning of the wounds and to confirm their earlier suspicions that the hero’s martial conduct was unethically motivated by his inborn pride and choler. Although Coriolanus has served his country, protecting the state from invasion, the plebs still question the hero’s morality and *virtus*. As they tell him, “you have deserved nobly of your country, and you have not deserved nobly” (2.3.84-5). Endeavoring to repress the blush that threatens to surface here, Coriolanus contemptuously retorts that he will not “seal” the plebs’ “knowledge with showing” them his wounds (2.3.104). Coriolanus has always held an attitude of pride and “noble carelessness” toward the people; however, as he stands before the plebs veiled by the gown of humility, fully aware that he has transgressed a major civic code, the hero’s state of modesty and his extreme fear of social dishonor reveals that he actually cares about the people’s opinion (2.2.14). The bashfulness and inhibition he experiences in the marketplace discloses the strength of his growing bond to the Roman

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<sup>73</sup> In this sense, bashfulness and humility are developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as parallel extremes of shame that moderate excessive pride or love of honor. On the Aristotelian idea that passions can moderate opposing passions see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.9.1109a30-1109b18. See Reynolds’ description of this view, *A Treatise of the passions*, 52. Also quoted in the introduction.

people and his consideration of their status in the Republic as a party with considerable power.

Believing themselves “mocked,” the plebs misread Coriolanus’ performance as a reflection of his characteristic haughtiness and pride. As the second citizen notes, “he mocked us when he begged our voices.... He used us scornfully. He should have shown us his marks of merit” (2.3.154-62). The tribunes reaffirm the Plebs’ assessment asserting that Coriolanus “wore his humble weeds” with a “proud heart” (2.3.148-9). Emphasizing Coriolanus’ “pride and his old hate unto [them],” Brutus and Sicinius incense the people against the hero, convincing them to revoke the consulship by taking advantage of his choler:

Put him to choler straight. He hath been used  
 Ever to conquer and to have his worth  
 Of contradiction. Being once chafed, he cannot  
 Be reined again to temperance. Then he speaks  
 What’s in his heart, and that is there which looks  
 With us to break his neck. (3.3.25-29)

The tribunes correctly deduce how Coriolanus gives full reign to his passions. Volumnia has instilled within her son a rigid adherence to his temperament. The hero’s choler and ungoverned emotions in battle have been tolerated in view of the safety he provides for the state and excused in accordance with the drives of the Galenic body. However, within the Republic’s socio-political sphere Coriolanus’ pride and his commitment to his nature are no longer tenable. The tribunes thus cleverly endeavor to use Coriolanus’ choler against him, taking advantage of his inborn pride and anger as a means of dissolving the consulship before he is voted into a “power tyrannical” (3.3.65).

As the tribunes had predicted, Coriolanus falls into “a rage with their refusal” of the consulship (2.3.254). Menenius, the “humorous patrician,” begins to fear the disastrous consequences his “choler” will have on his ability to regain the consulship. As he intimates, Coriolanus’ “nature is too noble for the world. / He would not flatter Neptune for his trident.... His heart’s his mouth. / What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent” (3.1.257-60). Menenius realizes that the passions emanating from Coriolanus’ heart will overmaster his mind, drastically undermining his ability to win the people’s favor by conveying a “gentler spirit” (3.1.57). Coriolanus himself attests to this fact as he strives to remain constant to his temper: “choler! Were I as patient as the midnight sleep, / By Jove, t’would be my mind” (3.1.85-6). As Coriolanus intimates, his ruling passions of pride and anger are too strongly ingrained in his nature to ever be altered or subdued. Indeed, pleased by the hero’s violent reaction to the events that have transpired, and doubting his ability to win back the consulship, Sicinius confirms that it simply “isn’t possible that so short a time can alter the condition of a man” like Coriolanus (5.4.9-10).

If he is to have any chance at regaining the consulship Coriolanus must learn how to be “supple and courteous to the people” (2.2.25). In the second act the hero merely wore the gown of humility; here, however, he must truly become “humble as the ripest mulberry” (3.2.81). As Volumnia recognizes, her son’s commitment to his “temper” will get in the way of his reacquisition of the consulship. She must therefore attempt to undo her son’s essentialist stance by cultivating his sense temperance and civility. She thus tells him, “I have a heart as

little apt as yours, / But yet a brain that leads my use of anger to better vantage”

(3.2.30-1). This is a notion that Coriolanus appears to require more aid comprehending, despite the ethical consciousness, inhibition, and restraint he demonstrated in the last act. Remaining constant to his temper, he thus asks Volumnia, why “would you have me false to my nature? / Rather say I play the man I am” (14-6). As Volumnia explains, Coriolanus can dissemble courtesy and humility before the plebs while preserving his own truth. “Go to them,” Volumnia instructs him:

With this bonnet in thy hand,  
And thus far having stretched it – here be with them –  
Thy knee bussing the stones – for in such business  
Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant  
More learned than the ears – waving thy head,  
Which offer thus, correcting thy stout heart,  
Now humble as the ripest mulberry  
That will not hold the handling. (3.2.75-83)

Volumnia’s theory of performance, which echoes Bishop Reynolds’ earlier account of the rational soul as a sovereign entity, is meant to encourage her son’s sense of temperance through its representation of the mind as a governing force functioning independently of the body. As Volumnia explains to her son, in acting the head is not passively influenced by the physiological operations of the heart; rather, it holds a superior degree of control over the body and its fluids, “correcting” the ills of nature.

The plebs seek to bestow honor in recognition of virtuous action in war. However, as Volumnia realizes, their estimation of heroic virtue is bound up with a conception of the body as the guarantor of interior truth. Although, as Carlin Barton observes, “the humility of the candidate was a kind of strategic feint, ... a posture of submission, ... the degree to which a candidate was willing to perform

this strategic and symbolic homage was the degree to which he was willing to be obliged, to be indebted to those he entreated.... The nod, the bow, the doffing of the hat [are the] strategic forms of behavior that could signal concession, defeat, and a broken spirit.”<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, the courtly gestures of humility and social interaction that Volumnia impresses upon her son would thus be perceived by the plebs as an outward expression of virtue, moral uprightness, and social integrity. Kneeling before the plebs in humbleness would express the degree to which Coriolanus is willing to yield himself to them. It would also, by extension, convey the proper motive for action in battle, justifying the hero’s sense of public duty in war and validating the bestowal of the consulship upon him. But because Coriolanus shares the same Galenic view as the people, that outward signs denote essences and that one’s nature is conveyed on the body and its actions, he believes that his nature would be falsified through dissembling, and this belief entails for him a moral dilemma.

Learning to dissemble inevitably involves Coriolanus in an act of self-division that causes him to reflect upon his nature and past actions. If performing humility conveys an intrinsically virtuous nature – that Coriolanus fought on behalf of Rome and is now willing to yield to the people as evidence – his realization that he is playing a role “false to [his] nature” must shed light into his choleric passions and the selfish quest for honor that they motivated. Accordingly, the moral discrepancy underlying dissimulation – to be conscious of complete truthfulness while expressing a lie – has the potential to turn his prospective acting into a scene of shame. Because consciousness of his transgression is a

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<sup>74</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 154.

precondition for arousing the hero's fear of shame, falsely dissembling humility before the plebs "is a part" Coriolanus will "blush in acting." Anthony Corbeill explains how blushing made dissembling in the Roman political order quite easy to perceive. As he notes, "in the electoral form of the late Republic, the face was thought to provide all voters with access to a candidate's interior.... Dissimulation is easily detected. *Pudor*, the sense of shame that governs personal interaction, ... ensures that there does not occur a dissonance between what one says, feels, and outwardly does."<sup>75</sup> Like a bad actor Coriolanus will be unable to dissociate his inner thoughts and feelings from the role he is playing. Envisioning himself dissembling, the hero perceives how his "body's action [will] teach [his] mind / A most inherent baseness" (3.2.122-3). The bow of humility he enacts will excite his sense of shame and its conflicting network of moral assessments will cause him to blush, revealing his offence and destabilizing the rigidity of his choleric nature.

The vision of Coriolanus abasing himself in humility before the plebs recalls the expressions of civility demonstrated by male courtiers as they blushed with shame upon greeting their superiors in the political world of civil conversation. Here the overpowering aspect of social regard inherent in displays of courtly shyness is made especially evident through Coriolanus' impending blush, which would reveal the hero's awareness of his transgression and thus disclose the strength of the social bond that ties him to the Republic, its values, and its people. A blush in the marketplace would thereby add a level of meaning and sincerity to the hero's kinesic discourse in a way that blurs the line between

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<sup>75</sup> Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 148.



art and nature. In feigning humility Coriolanus will blush and actually become humble as the ripest mulberry.

### III. Nature, Transformation, and Change

As Coriolanus contemplates how the socio-ethical thought process shame engenders will give way to the blush, he begins to imagine his immortal soul, now in the process of being purified through his developing moral consciousness, ascending from the corruption of the body and its fluids. Referring to his body from an abstracted perspective, Coriolanus notes how “this mould of Martius” dematerializes, scatters like “dust ... against the wind” (3.1.110, 3.2.105). Since, as Bishop Reynolds notes, the soul’s dependence upon the “body is not so necessary and immutable, but that it may admit of variation and be vindicated from the impression of the body,” Coriolanus further envisages himself undergoing a radical complexional alteration.<sup>76</sup>

Away, my disposition; and possess me  
Some harlot’s spirit! My throat of war be turned,  
Which choired with my drum, into a pipe  
Small as the eunuch or the virgin’s voice  
That babies lull asleep! The smiles of knaves  
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys’ tears take up  
The glasses of my sight! A beggars tongue  
Make motion through my lips, and my armed knees,  
Who bowed but in my stirrup, bend like his  
That hath received an alms. (3.2.114-21)

As an expression of his “variable complexion,” Coriolanus aligns himself with a conglomerate of feminized identities – harlot, eunuch, schoolboy, virgin – either lost to shame or protected by it (2.1.208).

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<sup>76</sup> Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions*, 8.

Forced into the social and political landscape and growing increasingly conscious of his transgression, Coriolanus' fear of shame motivates a process of spiritual and moral reform that is itself augmented by humoral shifts in the body. Threatened with the revelation of his offense through his blush, the hero's bashful, socially inhibiting behavior mimics the retraction of his heart as melancholic humors invade it, causing a "withdrawing of spirit and blood, as in fear, ... so that the necessity being more urgent, the blood and spirit break forth again more vehemently and fill the face [with] that shamefast color."<sup>77</sup> Generated through cognitive assessments and perceptual images of his body, the influx of humors coursing through and displayed on Coriolanus' flesh prompts a productive interaction between body, mind, and world, which join together to produce the recurring feeling state of shyness. The perpetual shift in melancholic humors becomes habitual to the extent that it appears to activate a drastic transformation in Coriolanus' mental, emotional, physical, and complexional condition. For as Babb notes, "passions may modify personality profoundly, even effect a permanent change in complexion."<sup>78</sup> Any irreligious endorsement of the humors as fixed and ungovernable, and the soul as a predetermined, predestined entity, is thus rendered untenable through Coriolanus' experience of shame, which fuses a theological view of the passions as spiritually reformatory and transformative phenomena with a belief in the Galenic self as a variable organism continuously refashioned as the body comes into contact with the external world.

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<sup>77</sup> Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy*, 168.

<sup>78</sup> Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 17.

Though overcome with wounded pride and anger upon his expulsion from Rome, Coriolanus appears to evince a much “gentler spirit” when he arrives in Antium. Submitting himself to the enemy, the hero proclaims that “he cannot live but to thy shame / Unless it be to do thee service” (4.5.100-1). Coriolanus’ fear of dishonor inclines him here to offer his services as a means of nullifying Aufidius’ hateful opinion of him. Detecting the hero’s modesty, Aufidius wraps his arms “about that body where against / My grained ash an hundred times hath broke, / And scarred the *moon* with splinters” (106-9; emphasis mine). The change in Coriolanus’ disposition is more obvious in the Volscian camp where, as Aufidius claims, he:

Watered his new plants with dews of flattery,  
Seducing so my friends; and to this end  
He bowed his nature, never known before  
But to be rough, unswayable, and free. (5.5.22-6)

In his treatise on bashfulness Plutarch suggests that shy men who are sensitive to social opinion often feel compelled to “yield after a base manner to the demands and requests of every man,” and having “no power to withstand and repulse any encounter, nor say a word to the contrary,” conduct themselves in a “servile and flattering manner” so as to gain another’s esteem.<sup>79</sup> Offering to serve Aufidius, and having “flattered [his] Volscians,” Coriolanus demonstrates a striking resemblance to Plutarch’s bashful man. The subsequent use of the word “coy” to describe the hero’s response to Cominius’ supplication to spare his attack on Rome – “he coyed / To hear Cominius speak” – evokes the contradictory mixture of acquiescence, inhibition, and restraint that characterizes playful displays of

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<sup>79</sup> Plutarch, “Of Naughty Bashfulness,” in *The Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: 1603), 164, 166.

feminine modesty and bashfulness. Coriolanus' coyness in the Volscian camp calls further attention to his "bowed" nature and to his uncanny likeness to Plutarch's bashful man – a likeness which is made all the more apparent when the hero complies with his mother's request to spare his attack on Rome (5.6.115).

Although Menenius doubts Volumnia's ability to make Coriolanus relent, believing there is "no more mercy in him than there is milk in a male tiger," Volumnia is able to successfully restrain her son's vengeance by employing the logic of shame both gesturally and rhetorically (5.4.28). She first commands the women to kneel: "down ladies; let us shame him with our knees. / To his surname 'Coriolanus' longs more pride / Than pity to our prayers" (5.3.169-71). Virgilia's curtsy and Volumnia's bow are meant to be expressions of the "fear or respect" inherent in displays of shyness and humility that "caused one to draw back before another," and by doing so, "augmented the portion of that person."<sup>80</sup> However, such inhibiting gestures of social humility appear to work conversely, provoking Coriolanus' fear of shame and consciousness of wrongdoing, hence weakening rather than countenancing his pride. At the mere sight of his family abasing themselves before him, Coriolanus "melts" as he is not of "stronger earth than others" (5.3.28-9). No longer "invulnerable" to "shame," the bashful hero, now overcome by the emotion, withdraws before his family, declaring, "sink, my knee, i'th'earth" (5.3.73, 50). In view of the shame Coriolanus feels and the change that has taken place in his nature, the hero now considers his former conception of his choleric self a mere role; a kind of organic construct he vigorously strove to maintain as if it were immutably fixed within him. As he proclaims, "like a dull

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<sup>80</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 202-3.

actor now / I have forgot my part, and I am out / Even to a full disgrace” (5.3.38-41). The great warrior’s vanquished response to his family brings to mind the opening lines of Shakespeare’s sonnet *A Bashful Lover*, where the speaker compares himself to:

An unperfect actor on the stage,  
Who with his fear is put beside his part,  
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,  
Whose strengths abundance weakens his own heart. (1-4)<sup>81</sup>

Coriolanus’ striking resemblance to the fierceness and rage of this Shakespearean figure, who finds himself overcome with a softening bashfulness upon the sight of his lover, further underscores the inescapability of the emotional alteration that has taken place within him. The state of moral shyness and the extreme fear of dishonor the hero experiences as he kneels before his family, fearful of “disgrace” over his wayward actions, is further evinced when, upon rising, he praises the virgin Valeria by calling attention to the ethical nature of her blush as a mark of feminine virtue. In a recurring image of identification, Coriolanus compliments her as “the *moon* of Rome, chaste as the icicle / That’s candied by the frost from purest snow / And hangs on Diane’s temple” (5.3.65-7; mine).<sup>82</sup> The intrinsic meaning behind the hero’s lyric address is, perhaps, most fully realized through the counter-arousal of Coriolanus’ own blush.

Carlin Barton has observed how “a bond or shared identity awakened one’s sense of shame.”<sup>83</sup> With this in mind, Volumnia endeavors to evoke the

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<sup>81</sup>William Shakespeare, *Poems* (London: T. Cotes, 1640), sig. B5.

<sup>82</sup> The lines may be compared with: “whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow / That lies on Dian’s lap” (*Timon* 4.3.388-9).

<sup>83</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 207.

relational value of shame through her rhetorical appeals to patriotic and familial bonds:

Alas, how can we for our country pray,  
 Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory,  
 Whereto we are bound?  
 . . . . .  
 If I cannot persuade thee  
 Rather to show a noble grace to both parts  
 Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner  
 March to assault thy country than to tread –  
 Trust to't, thou shalt not – on thy mother's womb  
 That brought thee to this world. (5.3.109-11, 123-6)

Coriolanus cannot now ignore the feeling of being bound to the Roman people nor to Volumnia, whose love and approval he constantly seeks. Sensing his mother's disapproval, the hero's fear of dishonor before her intensifies into a heightened state of shyness as he "turns away" his face to shield his blush from view (5.3.169). Coriolanus' reaction is very much like in *Hamlet* when Claudius "stands abruptly to avoid watching a spectacle that pierces his conscience. Here we gauge impact by a spectator's attempt to cover emotion."<sup>84</sup> Describing the bashful man and his tendency to give in to the requests of others, Plutarch emphasizes that "whoever is most importunate, will ever tyrannize and domineer over such a one, forcing by his [or her] impudence the bashfulness of the other."<sup>85</sup> In an extended effort to penetrate her son's shy conscience Volumnia thus overbearingly importunes her son, explaining to him that if he destroys Rome he would lose not only familial but public honor. As she declares, "if thou conquer Rome, the benefit / Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name / Whose repetition will be dogged with curses" (5.3.143-5). Deeply aware of his place

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<sup>84</sup> Sanders, "The Body of the Actor," 407.

<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, "Of Naughty Bashfulness," 165.

within a web of human relations and of the ethical implications of his attack, the hero's fear of shame and dispositional bashfulness function here to "curb the will" of this most noble Roman, restraining his vengeful course of action and prompting him to comply with his mother's request (3.1.41).

Ewan Fernie claims that Coriolanus, in "a great resignation of secure being," shamefully and self-degradingly acquiesces to his mother. Fernie's attention to the personalized aspect of shame as the affective outcome of a devastating failure of a personal ideal compels him to suggest that the hero "is unable to embrace the humility and social responsibility his crisis has brought so close."<sup>86</sup> However, when we consider Aristotle's conception of shame and its extension into corresponding states of bashfulness and humility, which work together throughout the play to moderate the hero's pride, Coriolanus' capitulation to his mother instead appears to be an overt reflection of his social and moral enlightenment, and also of his spiritual and complexional reformation. Virtuously motivated by the social meaning inhering in Roman notions of honor and *virtus*, Coriolanus displays a moderated sense of "proper pride" and restores his fame in the Republic as he mercifully restrains his course of vengeance and selflessly sacrifices himself for the preservation of Rome.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, 220.

<sup>87</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.1107b17.

### Chapter Three

#### **“If I Can Catch Him Once Upon The Hip:” Shyness and Emotional Wrestling in *The Merchant of Venice***

In his 1694 treatise *Discourses Upon Repentance* the theologian Isaac Barrow establishes racial and religious difference through the affective experience of shyness and the related emotions of modesty and shame. “Natural modesty,” Barrow claims, “is a curb from doing ill; Men in their first deflections from virtue are bashful and shy; out of regard to other men’s opinion’s and tenderness of their own honor they are afraid or ashamed to transgress plain rules of duty.” Over time, however, “this disposition [can] wear out,” and as Barrow further explains, without proper governance all Christians can potentially “arrive to that character of the degenerate Jews, whom the prophets call impudent children, . . . who commit sin with an open face, without any mask, without a blush; they defy all censure of others and glory in their shame as an instance of high courage and special gallantry.” In opposition to the Jews, Barrow promotes the inherent Christian capacity to emotionally cultivate “conscience, a check to beginner’s in sin,” as a means of preserving moral virtue.<sup>1</sup> I cite the Barrow quote at length because it seems to hold a particular relevance to *The Merchant of Venice*, especially if one considers the religious implications surrounding the state of shyness and its possible connection to *Shylock*, a figure who allegedly converts from Judaism to Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Barrow, *Practical discourses upon the consideration of our latter end and the danger of delaying repentance* (London, 1694), 122-3.

<sup>2</sup> I am proposing an implicit connection between the state of shyness and the name Shylock in this essay. On the controversy over the origin of the name Shylock see M.A. Lower, “The Name Shylock,” *Notes & Queries* i.1 (1850), thought the name might be a form of Shiloh from Genesis xlix.10, a word for Messiah, 184. Lower also speculates that there is an association with the name



In this chapter I interpret *The Merchant of Venice* through the lens of the Christian emotional virtue of shyness. A reading of this sort—predicated on the ethical and religious significance of the emotion—may appear unconventional, or even counterintuitive, since it ascribes a high level of moral and spiritual value to a play that, according to some critics, “does not celebrate the Christian virtues so much as expose their absence,” and to characters that have been traditionally conceived of as possessing very little internal ethical complexity or religious integrity.<sup>3</sup> It is my belief, however, that shyness is central to the affective life of the play, and that a consideration of its presence will disclose previously unobserved moral and religious patterns of cognition, action, and feeling in a number of characters. By examining the workings of shyness in *Merchant* this chapter aims to offer a refined account of the play’s representation of religious experience, providing in turn an emotional crux through which to rethink the putative terms of Shylock’s conversion.

As noted in the introduction, the word “shy” was used throughout early modernity to describe horses that were fearful, skittish, wild, and high-mettled. The state of shyness was widely understood as “a sudden start aside by a horse

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Richard Shylock found in the document, *Battel Abbey deeds* (Sussex, 1435); a view that likely influenced Stephen Orgel’s recent account of the name in *Imagining Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 144ff. Lower also notes a connection with the English pamphlet entitled *Caleb Shillocke his prophecy, or the Jew’s Prediction* (1607). Another early theory is offered by Sir Israel Gollancz, *A Book of Homage* (Oxford, 1916), 171-2, who suggests the name comes from Joseph Ben Gorion’s *History of the Jews’ Commonwealth* (tr. 1558), where ‘Schiloch’ the Babylonian appears. Gollancz also notes a link with ‘Shallach,’ the Hebrew for cormorant and an Elizabethan synonym for a usurer. Adelman, Shapiro, and Orgel also see a link with the name Jesse or *Ishai*, King David’s father (feminized as Iscah or Jessica, meaning either to look out or ‘wealth’ in Hebrew). See Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 68; James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), 169; Kenneth Gross, *Shylock is Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 151.

<sup>3</sup> A.D. Moody, “An Ironic Comedy,” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Merchant of Venice: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), 101.

when it sees an object that frightens it.”<sup>4</sup> A 1620 translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* uses “shy” precisely in this way to describe “one shy and skittish mule belike ... subject to fearful starting.” In an early modern edition of the *Tusculan Disputations* Cicero likewise compares his sense of grief to the feeling that “shy colts” get when they “admit into their tender mouths the curbed bit.”<sup>5</sup> It is also at this time that the word shy shifts from the animal to the human sphere of emotion, acquiring its modern association with aspects of socialization. Shyness is also described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a state of “being easily frightened away; difficult of approach owing to timidity, caution, or distrust: timidly or cautiously averse to encountering ... some specified person; suspicious, distrustful.” Finally, the *OED* links shyness with notions of human action such that “shy” also conveys a sense of being “fearful of committing oneself to a particular course of action: chary, unwilling, reluctant.”<sup>6</sup> Each of these meanings of shyness were in usage during the late sixteenth century and were interacting closely to produce an interpretation of the emotion as a religious virtue associated, as Barrow points out, with the restraining moral force of Christian conscience. *The Merchant of Venice* is in fact remarkable for the way it reflects the broader historical, conceptual, and even linguistic shifts taking place in early modernity

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<sup>4</sup> See The Oxford English Dictionary entry for the word “shy.”

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* containing an hundred pleasant novels, trans. Anonymous (London: Isaac Iaggard, 1620), 132; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The five days Debate at Cicero’s house in Tusculum between master and sophister*, trans. Anonymous (London: Abel Swalle, 1683), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Each of these meanings is found in the *OED* under the entry for the word “shy.” The *OED* cites Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* published in 1604 as one of the earliest historically documented examples of this form of shyness. In the play Duke Vincentio is described as a “shy fellow” who “loves the people” but does not want to be “stage[d] to their eyes” (3.1.372, 1.1.68). Vincentio offers a striking early representation of shyness; however, it seems as if feelings of “caution, timidity, and distrust” around others apply just as easily to Shylock, *Merchant* being written quite a few years before *Measure*, at some point between 1596 and 1597.

that contributed to the rise as well as the fall of shyness as a pious affect.

Although *Merchant* engages with contemporary early modern perceptions of shyness as a harmful and limiting trait, it follows *Coriolanus* in its valuation of a theologically oriented account of the shy conscience, in which shame, modesty, and bashfulness work together to produce heightened states of moral, spiritual, and social consciousness.

As a Christian quality, shyness is linked throughout the play with related ideals of meekness, charity, and humility; yet, as I will argue, such socio-religious emotional attributes conflict with the element of self-mastery and social status that a number of the Venetians strive to attain. To feel “shy” in Venice is to feel oneself locked into a restrictive social relationship or moral obligation to another individual in which one has little authority. Accordingly, many of the Christian Venetians demonstrate a sense of resistance to their bashfulness, and even learn how to overcome its disempowering effects by manipulatively exploiting the emotion in others for their own advantage. This strategy is central to the motivations of Portia and Antonio, in particular, who seek to overturn their feelings of worthlessness, inferiority and submission by cultivating the shy consciences of Bassanio and Shylock so as to gain social power and dominance. The hierarchical logic behind this affective maneuver reaches a climax in the courtroom where, I will argue, it acts as a coercive tactic instigating Shylock’s conversion. Although there is little textual support for Shylock’s converted state— he virtually disappears after the fourth act— I will claim that the bashful disposition he displays in the public space of the court signifies his acquisition of

the transcendent and transformative forms of Christian affect, behavior, and cognition necessary for salvation. The power Antonio is able to achieve over Shylock, and even over those closest to him, is, however, quickly undermined through his own correlative display of Christian shyness. Antonio's efforts to recapitulate his stance of meekness and abjection in the court may be understood as a self-inflicted religious tactic through which he implicates himself in a scene of shame and humility as a means of atoning for the sinful forms of power and dominance he has attained.

### **I. Antonio Vs. Bassanio**

In the opening act of the play Salarino expounds upon the cause of Antonio's melancholy through the metaphoric language of merchant ships:

Your mind is tossing on the ocean,  
 There where your argosies with portly sail,  
 Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,  
 Or as it were the pageants of the sea,  
 Do overpeer the petty traffickers  
 That curtsy to them, do them reverence,  
 As they fly by them with their woven wings. (1.1.8-14)

The imagery reflects the gestural modes of reverential humility central to Venice's civilized social world, yet there is something deeply unsettling here. The rocking back and forth of the inferior ships in the wake of the superior ships is reminiscent of the "tossing" of Salarino's own mind. As he greets Antonio, Salarino stands out as one of the "petty traffickers" whose courteous bowing belies a profound sense of psychological anxiety in the social transaction. Salarino's extended description of Antonio's "wealthy Andrew docked in sand / Vailing her high top lower than her ribs / To kiss her burial" reinforces the

element of positional inferiority implicit in his initial image. It also, by extension, exposes the latent power structure of hierarchical deference and superiority implicit in Venetian modes of civility along with the affective substratum of fear and bashfulness supporting it.

A troubling aura of shyness and social anxiety underlies the courteous landscape of *The Merchant of Venice*. As Richard Levin notes, “appearances belie the realities of Venetian life, whose courteous and even democratic surface can exist only because an unstated set of rules is observed.” When Bassanio and Lorenzo arrive Salarino and Salario leave Antonio “knowing that if they did not, insult might follow.”<sup>7</sup> Salarino’s fear of disgrace, along with his sense of inferiority in relation to his social betters, is evinced here through his bashful withdrawal as he lets Antonio fare “with better company” and “worthier friends” (1.1.59, 61). A number of the Christian Venetians thus believe themselves to be inherently meek and worthless and therefore politely defer to their superiors for fear of jeopardizing their social standing. The limitations associated with the quality of shyness impel certain characters to overcome its disempowering effects by arousing the feeling in others as a tactic to rise on the social scale and garner the power and status they know they lack. As Levin argues, “petty traffickers” like Salarino and Salario draw attention to Antonio’s sadness because they know “that Antonio, in spite of his apparently privileged position, [is] actually

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Levin, *Love and Society in Shakespearean Drama: A Study of Dramatic Form and Content* (Delaware: University of Delaware P, 1985), 35. Levin’s insights on the characters’ “desire for inclusion and their fear of betrayal and exclusion” were especially useful to me (79). This emotional dynamic is an affective movement that I have reworked with reference to the fear of shame and social dishonor, and its correlative state the desire for honor, which underpins Aristotelian shyness.

vulnerable. Moreover, they act as if they feel themselves at the sidelines socially and wish to project their feelings onto Antonio, making him feel unwanted.”<sup>8</sup>

In view of the social anxieties permeating the Venetian psyche, Antonio’s melancholy may therefore be considered less a product of his homoerotic love-sickness for Bassanio and more so the result of his anxious concern over his standing in Bassanio’s eyes. Aware of Bassanio’s interest in Portia, Antonio’s fear of shame appears to have escalated into a pathological shyness that has led him to withdraw from the social world as part of a defensive effort to avoid the rejection and disgrace he knows he might soon face. His assessment that he feels “sad” upon the world’s stage supports this logic, expressing as it does a feeling of distress over being judged socially as well as being in the public eye more generally (1.1.78-9). It seems apt that the bold and shame-less Graziano, who demonstrates a lack of governance over himself socially and who reveals little concern over his reputation, should correctly deduce that Antonio has “too much care upon the world” and that his melancholic demeanor betrays a “purpose to be dressed in an opinion” (1.1.74, 91). Bassanio’s assertion that Antonio is “the best conditioned . . . in doing courtesies, and one in whom / The ancient Roman honor more appears,” further underscores Antonio’s profound yearning for esteem (3.2.293). Fully aware of Antonio’s social insecurities, Bassanio finds himself in the advantageous position of capitalizing on the Merchant’s fear of shame and his correlative desire for “Roman honor.”

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<sup>8</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 36; On the two Sallies see Lars Engle, *Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of his Time* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1993), 79.

Bassanio is not at all immune to the anxious desire for status and prestige plaguing the Venetians but unlike most of them he does not shy away from the public sphere believing himself inherently worthless and incapable of garnering a high and mighty place upon the world's stage. His exact motives behind his relationship with Antonio, to whom he "owe[s] the most in money and in love," are unclear (1.1.131). However, in approaching Antonio for another loan he betrays the notion that his "love" for him is principally grounded in his "money," which he needs as a means of retaining the social preeminence that is so important a feature of his existence. As he tells Antonio, "it is not unknown to you ... how much I have disabled mine estate / By something showing a more swelling port / Than my faint means would grant continuance" (122-5). Bassanio has been unable to maintain the style of life to which he is accustomed and is having difficulty continuing to project externally the "noble" value with which he "rates" himself. He seeks loans from Antonio as a means of reaffirming his status. It is hardly surprising that Bassanio comprehends that marriage to Portia, a "fair" "lady richly left," would be a socially advantageous move for him (1.1.161). Portia's reputation, and her social and financial "worth" known throughout the "wide world," would help to reflect, sustain, and enhance his own. Relations with Portia would also afford Bassanio an opportunity to "declare unambiguously a heterosexual identity and enter marriage, the *sine qua non* of social acceptance."<sup>9</sup>

The moral implications surrounding Bassanio's betrayal of Antonio— as he attempts to gain access to Antonio's money so that he can use it to court another lover for selfish reasons— do not seem to prevent him from seeking out

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<sup>9</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 38.

the Merchant. When in his immediate presence, however, the gravity of the situation takes hold once Antonio brings up the issue of Portia: “tell me now what lady is the same / To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage, / That you today promised to tell me of” (1.1.119-21). As Miriam Gilbert observes, it is not difficult to “overlook the evasiveness with which Bassanio responds to Antonio’s question.”<sup>10</sup> Without revealing the reason for the loan, Bassanio first sets up an elaborate appeal for it and then beats around the bush by embellishing the appeal with a long-winded narrative comparing the act of loaning money to an archery game in his “school days.” Whatever non-specified event Bassanio requires the money for he makes sure to tell Antonio that it will allow him to “unburden all my plots and purposes / how to get clear of all the debts I owe” (1.1.133-4). Bassanio obviously feels a financial as well as moral sense of indebtedness toward Antonio. His verbal equivocation here is indicative of his consciousness that it is wrong to be violating his obligation to Antonio through his self-interested pursuit of Portia.

Sensing Bassanio’s evasiveness during the encounter a number of critics have suggested that “Bassanio has come to [Antonio] *shamefaced*.”<sup>11</sup> Harry Berger notes that the “crucial exchange . . . delineates the shamefaced roguishness of one speaker and the haplessness of the other.”<sup>12</sup> Bassanio’s unwillingness to

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<sup>10</sup> Miriam Gilbert, *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002), 51.

<sup>11</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Harry Berger, “Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Riches of Embarrassment,” *Renaissance Drama* 38 (2010), 12. Berger has argued that the play is a “drama of embarrassment.” While some of the characters do indeed experience embarrassment, the play, on the whole, seems to be more about shyness as the major figures express a complex tendency to self-defensively protect themselves from experiencing shame, disgrace, and humiliation. The shamefacedness Berger suggests that Bassanio displays is not embarrassment per se but rather the state of shamefastness, which, as we will see, leads into a heightened state of moral shyness around



discuss Portia— so that Antonio has to keep asking him what exactly that he wants the money for—is made “evident on the page.” On the stage, as Gilbert points out, “the actor playing Bassanio normally moves [or shies] away from Antonio, doesn’t look at him directly and searches for words that will convince.”<sup>13</sup> Bassanio’s sense of shame escalates on the stage into a fearful and inhibiting state of moral shyness around Antonio. During the encounter he begins to see himself as he feels Antonio is seeing and judging him, as a morally reprehensible person. Conscious of the immorality of his motives and actions, Bassanio tries to defend himself against Antonio’s disapproving glare. His verbal inhibition mimics his state of bodily inhibition, and his restrained corporeal gestures work toward hiding his sense of error from view in an effort to preserve his honor and integrity in Antonio’s eyes. Detecting Bassanio’s obvious modesty, Antonio endeavors to quell Bassanio’s fear of shame and dishonor by reassuring him that he still stands “within the eye of honor,” and despite the precariousness of whatever he needs the money for he will happily oblige him (1.1.137).

During his encounter with the Merchant, Bassanio’s shy conscience begins to operate as a form of moral governance, inhibiting him from acting upon his self-serving instincts. His shy gestural and verbal inhibition reflects outwardly his sense of wrongdoing. Accordingly, he comes to experience something like a shy-lock in Antonio’s presence. Because Bassanio feels the effects of his shy

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Antonio. For Bassanio to feel disgraced and embarrassed he would have to incur obvious disapproval from Antonio, which he clearly doesn’t. He simply only fears Antonio’s disapproval.  
<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, *The Merchant of Venice*, 51. According to Aristotle, one of the social situations most conducive to the arousal of one’s ethical fear of shame, and the related reaction of bashfulness, involves engaging in the dubious exchange of “asking for a loan” when one really should be “being asked back,” *The Rhetoric*, ed. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (England: Penguin, 1991), 2.6.1383b, p. 157.

conscience before Antonio, he finds himself being emotionally bound, fastened or locked to Antonio. In his study on shame and the social bond psychologist Thomas Scheff notes that “shame... and related feelings of shyness that involve reactions to rejection or feelings of failure” may be signaled as “bodily and/or mental response[s] to the threat of disconnection from the other. Shame ... can occur in response to threats to the bond, but it can also occur in response to actions in the ‘inner theatre,’ in the interior monologue in which we see ourselves from the [disapproving] point of view of the other.”<sup>14</sup> However much Bassanio is contemplating violating his obligation to Antonio through marriage to Portia, the fact that he feels guilty about doing so has the effect of both revealing and strengthening his bond to Antonio. As Scheff further notes, “shame is a social emotion, reaffirming the emotional interdependency of persons... sharing one’s shame with another can strengthen the relationship.”<sup>15</sup> The complex of moral emotions Bassanio feels in Antonio’s presence speaks to his great regard for Antonio as well as the powerful emotional connection he feels toward him, yet feeling this way is necessarily a result of the threat to the bond. When Antonio reassures Bassanio that he still stands within the eye of “honor” and that his “purse,” “person,” and “extremest means” “lie all unlocked to [his] occasions,” he, however, effectively breaks through the shy-lock Bassanio’s conscience imposes upon him, fracturing the feeling of social constraint his sense of shame engenders (1.1.138-9).

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory,” *Sociological Theory* 18.1 (2000), 95-6.

<sup>15</sup> Scheff, 92. Of course this goes along with Aristotle’s insight that we feel shame only before those whom we regard and admire.

Because all of Antonio's money is tied up at sea he advises Bassanio to "try what my credit can in Venice do; / That shall be racked even to the uttermost, / To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia" (1.2.180-2). Why does Antonio agree to fund Bassanio's venture and why does he selflessly assist Bassanio in his plans to leave *him* for Portia? Levin notes that Bassanio "has the upper hand in his relationship with Antonio: Bassanio acts, Antonio reacts."<sup>16</sup> The hierarchical nature of the relationship may be attributable to Antonio's great esteem for Bassanio coupled with his bashful fear of rejection. Antonio's fear of shame engenders his excessive humility toward Bassanio and motivates his inability to deny Bassanio's requests, thus allowing Bassanio to gain control in the relationship. In his treatise on shyness Plutarch discusses several potentially threatening situations in which one's bashfulness may be taken advantage of or "assaulted" by another. The bashful man, "making no resistance" to another's "demands:"

[Lets] all lie unfortified, unbard, and *unlockt*, yielding access and entrance to [those] that will make assault... By means withal of this excessive bashfulness, they oftentimes conquer and get the mastery even of such as are of honest and gentle disposition... This bashfulness hath been the cause in many matters and that of profit and commodity: namely, how many men having not the heart to say nay, have put forth and lent their money even to those whose credit they distrust; have been sureties for such as otherwise they would have been unwilling to engage themselves for ... and how many have come unto their end and died by the means of this foolish quality.<sup>17</sup>

Unable to refuse Bassanio because if he does he fears that he will lose his love and respect, Antonio allows Bassanio to make the "assault" and gain "mastery" over him. Desperate to secure Bassanio's favor, the Merchant agrees to engage in

<sup>16</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Of Unseemly and Naughtie Bashfulness," *Moral Essays*, 7 Vols, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), 165.

the unchristian act of usury with Shylock and stand surety for a loan—an action with mortal consequences.

Although Antonio's fear of disesteem motivates his excessive humility toward Bassanio, such virtuous Christian qualities stand out as limiting dispositional faults, since they appear to engender his stance of compliance and inferiority in the social relationship. However, because Antonio perceives that Bassanio is not entirely without a virtuous sense of shame, he realizes that he may be able to gain the upper hand during the "assault." Because Bassanio exhibits a distinctively shy Christian conscience in Antonio's presence, Antonio will be able to gain not only social honor but also a sense of mastery over him through his giving of himself, his money, and his "doing [of] courtesies."<sup>18</sup> Rather paradoxically then, the more bashful Antonio feels, and the more submissive he is toward Bassanio, the more power he realizes he will be able to acquire over his lover. As Frank Whigham notes, the characters in *Merchant* are notorious for the ways in which they compel "desert by the manipulation of the system of courtesy."<sup>19</sup> Bassanio's state of moral shyness, instigated earlier through his awareness of transgression, aroused within him a kind of emotionally induced submission that bound him to Antonio, and in turn proffered to Antonio the power and social honor he hoped to secure in his relationship with Bassanio. Through his inability to deny Bassanio's demands, Antonio is further able to extend the social bond through the loan garnering an elevated sense of mobility and control.

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<sup>18</sup> On the giving of "courtesies" in the courtly world, along with the sense of indebtedness the act compelled, see Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 123ff.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Whigham, "Ideology and Class Conduct in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, ed. Gary Waller (New York: London, 1991), 120.

Antonio's bashful fears of shame and excessive Christian humility may therefore be seen working to his advantage, slyly shading into a form of "moral usury" that works because Bassanio possesses a shy conscience.<sup>20</sup>

Harry Berger defines moral usury as a kind of manipulative art that consists of "giving more than you take in a manner that makes it possible for you to end up getting more than you gave."<sup>21</sup> In Venice, as Rene Girard explains, "a new form of vassality prevails.... The lack of precise accounting makes personal indebtedness infinite."<sup>22</sup> The more Antonio's bashfulness compels him to yield himself and his money to the shamefaced Bassanio through his giving of courtesies, the more he will be able to indebt, bind, or lock Bassanio to himself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines several meanings of the word "lock" which were in usage in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Of a lock, meaning, "to hold fast, overpower completely," also "a grapple, grip, or trick in wrestling ... to embrace closely; to grapple in combat."<sup>23</sup> The idea of the lock as a wrestling position is most relevant to *The Merchant of Venice*, especially considering the recurrent allusions to the idea of catching another "upon the hip" (1.3.43, 4.1.33). As Oxford editor Jay Halio notes, to catch another "upon the hip" was an early modern "wrestling metaphor" where one fighter had another at a disadvantage.<sup>24</sup> A kind of emotional wrestling appears to take place between Bassanio and Antonio whose feelings of shame and shyness involve them in

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<sup>20</sup> Berger, "Mercifixion," 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Rene Girard, "To Entrap the Wisest," In *William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 93.

<sup>23</sup> See *The Oxford English Dictionary* under the entry for the word "lock."

<sup>24</sup> *The Merchant of Venice*, 120, n. 43.

alternating affective stances of dominance and submission. Antonio, however, gains the upper hand upon his realization that he can intensify his hold over Bassanio by increasing his sense of indebtedness and then arousing his ethical fear of shame over his betrayal.

## II. Shylock Vs. Antonio

Portia's famous question during the trial, "which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" exposes the crucial sense of kindness or similarity between Shylock and Antonio (4.1.171). Richard Halpern suggests that "Shylock is merely the double, or mirror image, of the play's Christian characters, who persecute him because they have projected onto him what they hate in themselves."<sup>25</sup> It is possible to approach Halpern's claim from an emotional perspective when one considers the kind of abject humility and bashful compliance a Christian like Antonio displays in his interactions with others. Antonio despises Shylock because, as a Jew, Shylock reflects Antonio's latent inferiority and his own deepest fears of shame and rejection. As Robert Alter observes, "if the looming sinister other embodies all the hateful qualities that Christian culture would like to think are alien to it, there are also brief but powerful intimations that ... the self may harbor the fearsome attributes it habitually projects on the other."<sup>26</sup> The very word "shy" in Shylock's name thus appears to stand out as a taunting reflection of Antonio's own divisive attribute and the full range of personal and social limitations it engenders. As a means of vanquishing his feelings of worthlessness

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1997), 161.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Alter, "Who Is Shylock?" *Commentary* 96.1 (1993), 34.

and submission, Antonio inflicts the network of base emotions he feels within himself onto his enemy. This kind of projection inevitably results in a harsh anti-semitic vitriol against Shylock, which in turn shapes his inferior, socially rejected Jewish subjectivity.

The affective realities of this malicious process are brought to the fore when Antonio finds himself in the position of having to request a loan from the man he has tormented and publically humiliated. Shylock reminds Antonio of the “shames” he has “stained” him with:

Signor Antonio, many a time and oft  
In the Rialto you have rated me  
About my moneys and my usances.  
Still I have born it with a patient shrug,  
For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe.  
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog  
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine  
And all for use of that which is mine own.  
Well now it appears you need my help....  
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur. (1.3.135, 103-11, 114-15)

In view of Antonio's harsh treatment it wouldn't be out of line to suggest that Shylock suffers from an ever-present fear of shame and public disgrace that tends to manifest itself through a cautious and distrustful shyness around the Christians. Thus, when Bassanio first approaches Shylock on the Rialto he does not appear confident or aggressive, but rather noticeably shy. His broken responses, verbal inhibition, and continuous repetition of the terms of the bond – “for three months. Well... Antonio shall become bound....Well” – reveal a sense of nervousness and cautious reserve borne of his acute fear of shameful disgrace. As Shylock exclaims, his own “hard dealings” have taught him to “suspect the thoughts of others!” (1.3.157-8). Shylock's apprehension about entering into the bond

becomes more evident when he implores Bassanio, “for my love, I pray you *wrong me not*,” a phrase which, according to Halio, is Shylock’s way of saying “do not impute evil motives to me.”<sup>27</sup> When Bassanio importunes him for the loan, Shylock fears that he will somehow be subjected to the same shame and humiliation as he was before, yet it is also clear that he wants to enter into the bond because of the longed for element of power it bestows upon him. If Antonio defaults on the loan Shylock will be granted a rare opportunity to “catch him once upon the hip” and to “feed fat the ancient grudge [he] bear[s] him” (1.3.43-4). At this point, Shylock’s desire for vengeance and power outweighs his fear of shame and he decides to “purse the ducats straight.”

Noting the modicum of power he has been given in this situation, Shylock enters into the bond as a wrestler would into a lock or hold by transforming himself into a parodic reflection of the bashful, yielding and compliant Antonio when he acquiesced to Bassanio’s request for a loan:

Should I not say  
 ‘Hath a dog money? Is it possible  
 A cur can lend three thousand ducats?’ Or  
 Shall I bend low and in a bondman’s key,  
 With bated breath and whisp’ring humbleness,  
 Say this: ‘Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last;  
 You spurned me such a day; another time  
 You called me dog; And for these courtesies  
 I’ll lend you thus much moneys’? (1.3.119-125)

By forgetting the shames Antonio has stained him with and yielding to the Merchant’s request, Shylock appropriates the meekness and humility characteristic of a bashful Christian disposition. In doing so, Antonio compliments him as a “gentle Jew,” and through a mock conversion in which the

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<sup>27</sup> *The Merchant of Venice*, 126, n. 167.



“Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind,” admits him into the courteous world of Christian sociability. Yet the terms of this acceptance seem fraught in view of Shylock’s subsequent provision that he be able to take “an equal pound / Of [Antonio’s] fair flesh” should he not be able to pay back the loan (146). Such a condition undermines Shylock’s display of humility, and has the reverse effect of manipulating the courteous emotional foundation upon which the loan was based. Gail Kern Paster has suggested that “the claim to possession of a humor is at the core of social performativity, the basis for any hope of preeminence, a mark of ‘individuality’ achieved – paradoxically – through imitation.”<sup>28</sup> A master of humoral performativity, Shylock imitates the abjection intrinsic to Christian shyness as a strategy through which he can paradoxically avenge the wrongs he has suffered and claim the honor and preeminence denied to him as a Jew. For, as Frank Whigham observes, by “casting himself in the role of petty trafficker, Shylock suggests his comparative insignificance and the accuracy of the flattering social model earlier proposed for Antonio. Remaining orderly and insignificant in Antonio’s eyes will enable Shylock to reduce him to the status of powerless and trivial tool.”<sup>29</sup> Similar to Antonio, then, Shylock learns how to work from within the confines of Christian bashfulness, subverting the socio-psychological limitations inherent in its affective basis.

The effects of Shylock’s strategy are immediately apparent. Attempting to find ways to bind or lock Bassanio to himself, Antonio incites Shylock to “exact

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<sup>28</sup> *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 270.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Whigham, “Ideology and Class Conduct in *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *Shakespeare’s Comedies*, ed. Gary Waller (New York: London, 1991), 119.

the penalty” (1.3.132). Because Antonio cannot refuse any request when it comes to Bassanio, his fears of shame and rejection motivate his compliance and his yielding to the mortal terms of the agreement. Antonio’s actions not only arouse in Bassanio a deep fear and distrust of Shylock, the “villain with a smiling cheek,” but also appear to have the further intended consequence of arousing his guilty conscience (1.3.97). For, as Bassanio now realizes, he has become all the more indebted to Antonio since he is going to place himself in a position of mortal jeopardy so as to secure the loan on his behalf. Bassanio desperately attempts to prevent Antonio from engaging in the loan with Shylock, declaring, “you shall not seal to such a bond for me.” Such an attempt, however, only serves to reveal Bassanio’s profound sense of shame and wrongdoing, which Antonio can only hope to reinforce through his acquiescence to the deadly terms of the bond.

Antonio may have overturned the personal and social limitations associated with his bashfulness when he complied with Shylock’s request, thereby achieving a greater sense of dominance over Bassanio, but his shyness only gets him so far. Drew Daniel suggests that in entering into the bond with Shylock, Antonio engages in a kind of masochistic “fantasy of subjection.”<sup>30</sup> It is as if Antonio feels wrong about the power he knows he has assumed over Bassanio and enters into the bond with Shylock hoping to find a means of atonement for his actions and an outlet for his displaced homoerotic submission and his correlative stance of Christian passivity and meekness. At the same time as he seeks to transcend the limitations of his bashfulness, Antonio cannot entirely evade his

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<sup>30</sup> Drew Daniel, “Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will”: Melancholy Epistemology and Masochistic Fantasy in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.2 (2010), 209.

own sense of Christian virtue and in fact attempts to recreate its affective conditions. In entering into the bond with Shylock, and agreeing to its deadly terms, Antonio binds himself to Shylock in such a way that he ends up reproducing the abject affective stance of humility and submission that underlies his relationship with Bassanio. He thus yields to Shylock who is able to catch the Merchant “upon the hip,” repositioning him emotionally within the disempowered space of Christian bashfulness and submission. The mastery Shylock achieves over Antonio will, however, become dauntingly physicalized when Antonio defaults on the loan. Honor-bound as a Jew to preserve the dignity of his “sacred nation,” Shylock will revel in wreaking a deathly vengeance upon Antonio, publicly inflicting onto him the same affective network of fear, shame, and oppression that the Merchant previously inflicted upon him (1.3.45).

### III. Jessica Vs. Shylock

When Bassanio importunes Shylock for the loan he extends to him a flattering dinner invitation that Shylock initially declines (1.3.32-35). Shylock is reluctant to go because, as he reveals to Jessica, he “expects” some kind of harsh “reproach” from the Christians (2.5.20-1). In the end, however, Shylock does accept Bassanio’s request, but upon his departure he locks Jessica in the house, restraining her from engaging in any kind of public interaction with the Christians:

Hear you me, Jessica:  
 Lock up my doors, and when you hear the drum  
 And vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,  
 Clamber not you up to the casements then,

Nor thrust your head into the public streets  
 To gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces...  
 By Jacob's staff I swear  
 I have no mind of feasting forth tonight.  
 But I will go. (2.5.27-37)

I am reminded here of psychologist Mark Leary's observation that shy people feel a strong "need to belong" and be accepted by others. When the fear of social rejection sets in shyness and its various forms of behavioral inhibition and withdrawal, are felt as a part of a complex defense mechanism alerting the self to potential threats to acceptance and protecting it from devaluation and dishonor.<sup>31</sup> In what appears to be a defensive attempt to protect himself against the "reproach" he expects at the party, Shylock evades his feelings of shyness by displacing his sense of bashful fear and inhibition onto his daughter as he confines her within the house, forcing her into a state of social withdrawal.

The severity with which Shylock projects his shyness onto Jessica is, as he states, an indication of how he feels as a Jew in a world of "shallow" Christians (2.5.35). Shylock is less of a patriarchal tyrant than other fathers in Shakespeare's comedies. He does not seek to restrict Jessica's choices and range of action because of a socio-economic interest in her chastity. His control over her is a product of the harsh social and religious conditions that encompass his existence. By confining Jessica within the house and forcing her into a state of modest restraint, Shylock stands out as an overprotective father. He displaces his shyness

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Leary, "Shyness and the Self: Attentional, Motivational, and Cognitive Self-Processes in Social Anxiety and Inhibition," in the *International Handbook of Social Anxiety: Concepts, Research, and Interventions Relating to the Self and Shyness*, eds. Ray Crozier and Lynne Alden (New York: John Wiley, 2001), 223; see also Hilde Lewinsky who suggests that, "as far as shyness toward groups is concerned, it appears that the individual wants to be recognized as a member of the group by its members. If actual recognition is not possible on account of internal or external differences, the individual may still wish to be regarded, by those outside or inside the desired group, 'as if' belonging to the group," "The Nature of Shyness," *British Journal of Psychology* 32.2 (1941), 108.

onto Jessica as an affective means of preventing her from interacting with “Christian fools,” thereby shielding her from the shame, humiliation, and rejection he has suffered, and which he fears he might suffer once again at Bassanio’s party. But because Jessica has been sheltered by Shylock from the outside Christian world, and because she has not yet experienced the cruel reality experienced by Jews in racist society, she misunderstands Shylock’s motives and tends to perceive him as tyrannical and oppressive. To Jessica, Shylock is even more of a constraining father because he is a Jew. In her opinion Shylock is a compilation of negative Jewish stereotypes predicated upon greed and thrift, which have the result of converting Jews into the hated, derogated Other. Shylock’s “fast bind, fast find / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind” is a behavioral characteristic that he applies as much to his daughter as he does to his ducats (2.6.54-5). Jessica’s contempt toward Shylock is only intensified by what she perceives as his stifling and restrictive Jewishness, which in turn exacerbates her contempt toward Judaism along with her self-loathing as a Jewess. She is “ashamed” of being a Jew and strives to resist the reviled condition and low status of being one.

Jessica recognizes that marriage to Lorenzo is a socially advantageous move that will grant her entry into the Christian world and aid her in securing the social acceptance she seeks, yet it is evident that she feels emotionally conflicted about her upcoming nuptials:

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be ashamed to be my father’s child!  
But though I am a daughter to his blood,  
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,

If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.16-21)

As a woman converting to Christianity it is essential that Jessica overcome the materialism and irrationality that defines her as a Jew. Jessica is frequently portrayed in these terms, most obviously by her husband when he likens her to a “colt” unable to hear the heavenly music of the spheres, though she also assumes a prominent alignment with other irrational beasts including the monkey she takes as a pet (5.1.71; 3.1.111ff).<sup>32</sup> As a prerequisite of her conversion to Christianity Jessica must demonstrate an ability to experience the network of moral and spiritual passions that will aid her in developing a sense of divine reason and, hence, link her soul to the realm of God. We have already come across Bassanio’s excessive modesty, something he feels his friend Graziano lacks. As a Christian, however, Graziano, a man “too wild, too rude and bold of voice,” nonetheless possesses the “cold drops of modesty” capable of allaying his “skipping spirit.” In Belmont he thus promises to “use all the observance of civility,” put on a “sober habit,” “wear prayer books in [his] pocket, look demurely” “sigh and say Amen” while “grace is saying hood mine eyes” (2.3.178-9; 2.3.184-88). As Graziano explains, this kind of “modesty,” that is in touch with God’s “grace” and which therefore holds the capacity to arouse the conscience, is an affective process available to all rational and civilized Christians but not to Jewish “misbelievers.” Yet Jessica’s developing consciousness that it is a “sin” to feel “ashamed” to be her father’s child replicates the “strife” of conscience experienced by other

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<sup>32</sup> Bruce Bohrer discusses this relation extensively along with Jessica’s animality in “Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet: Thinking Social Exclusion in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50.2 (1999): 152-70.

virtuous Christians involved in transgressive social conduct. The shame she feels over her betrayal delimits her status as a Jewess able to convert to Christianity by virtue of her burgeoning ability to feel the range of religious affects integral to notions of Christian civility and salvation.

In the spirit of Christian “manners” Jessica enacts an uncalled for courtesy and tosses Lorenzo a casket full of Shylock’s ducats in an attempt to secure his love:

Here catch this casket; it is worth the pains.  
I am glad ‘tis night, you do not look on me,  
For I am much ashamed of my exchange.  
But love is blind, and lovers cannot see  
The pretty folies that themselves commit;  
For if they could, Cupid himself would blush  
To see me thus transformed into a boy. (2.6.33-9)

The primary reason Jessica has decided to obscure herself in “the lovely garnish of a boy” is to prevent public “discovery” should anyone see her robbing her father and eloping with a Christian (2.6.41-43). However, the more Jessica tries to conceal herself and her actions through her disguise, the more she ends up disclosing her feelings of guilt over leaving Shylock. Jessica provides an apt example of the way “bashfulness riseth upon a guiltiness in conceit ... this conceit causeth us to hide ourselves ... we being desirous to cover and hide our offense, seek also to be hid and covered, who have deserved the blame.”<sup>33</sup> “Much ashamed” of her actions and “all tokens thereof,” Jessica uses her disguise as a means of modestly hiding, or as she puts it, ‘blinding’ her “shames” from visibility—chiefly her own. Yet the very fact that she adopts such a disguise, refuses to “hold a candle to her *shames*,” and engages in the act of transgression

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<sup>33</sup> Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), 171, see also 168.

during the cover of night, exposes the intensity of her shy conscience and her growing awareness that what she is doing is highly unethical.

Jessica has not fared well in criticism of the play. Her betrayal of Shylock tends to bring out a vulnerability in him that makes it difficult to side with her actions even though, from her perspective, Shylock is a tyrannical father and living in his house is “hell.” John Russell Brown is at least somewhat empathetic toward Jessica. Even though he views her as morally and emotionally shallow he finds her actions justified. As Brown notes, Jessica “escapes with Lorenzo behind the locked doors of Shylock’s house, squanders the wealth she has stolen in joyful celebration, and then finds peace and happiness with her ‘unthrift love’ in the garden of Belmont. If her reckless prodigality is a fault, it is a generous one and an understandable excess after the restriction of her father’s precept ‘fast bind, fast find; / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind.’”<sup>34</sup> However, as Camille Slights notes, most readers tend to ignore the restrictions placed on Jessica by Shylock, as well as the fact that she must use “subterfuge to transcend conventional morality for a more truly moral choice of love and grace.”<sup>35</sup> For example, Arthur Quiller Couch condemns Jessica as “bad and disloyal, a thief; frivolous, greedy, without any more conscience than a cat and without even a cat’s redeeming love of home. Quite without heart, on worse than an animal instinct—pilfering to be carnal—she betrays her father to be a light-of-lucre carefully weighted with her sire’s

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<sup>34</sup> John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Methuen, 1963), 70-1.

<sup>35</sup> Camille Slights, “The Runaway Daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31.3 (1980), 360.



ducats.”<sup>36</sup> Discussing Jessica and Lorenzo, Raymond Waddington likewise contends that the lovers “undergo no tests of character or faith; they are obedient to no bonds; they take all, rather than giving all; they hazard nothing.”<sup>37</sup> The view that Jessica is “obedient to no bonds” and that she appears without “conscience” is, however, an unconvincing one, as is A.D. Moody’s related assertion that the play “confronts us with the triumph of a group of worldly and a-moral characters.” Jessica is not as shameless and unethical as critics have made her out to be, and like other Christians in the play she doesn’t exactly “triumph” in her worldliness.<sup>38</sup> Although a number of the Christians appear especially corrupt, it is possible to understand the shyness they exhibit as a sign of their moral, spiritual, and social integrity. Despite Shylock’s harsh treatment of Jessica, she demonstrates a sense of bashful inhibition during her elopement, which indicates that she struggles deeply with what she is doing.

In view of the way Jessica deflects her emotions onto her boyish disguise it is likely that she is herself blushing. As with Coriolanus, her blush stands out as an ethical response aroused through her “conscience of . . . offense.” As Timothy Bright explains, the countenance being as it were the graven character of the mind, the guilty person feareth lest he be red in his forehead whereof he is guilty in his heart.”<sup>39</sup> As much as Jessica tries to evade and conceal the conflicted affectivity rising into her face, her blush is a manifestation of her guilt and so

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<sup>36</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, *Introduction to The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), xx.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Waddington, “Blind Gods: Fortune, Justice, and Cupid in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *English Literary History* 44 (1977), 474-5.

<sup>38</sup> A.D. Moody, “An Ironic Comedy,” In *Twentieth century interpretations of the Merchant of Venice: a collection of critical essays*, ed. Sylvan Barnett (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970), 105.

<sup>39</sup> Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy*, 166, 171.

works toward strengthening her bond to her father at the very moment her sense of attachment to him is threatened through her elopement. As Barton has noted, “in the man or woman who blushes the very weakness reveals the strength of the social bond.”<sup>40</sup> Jessica’s blush has the effect of binding her to her father even as she transgresses her moral and filial obligation to him. The profound degree of guilt and moral insight Jessica’s shy conscience imposes upon her as she carries out her elopement is further reflected through her inhibition to leave the confines of her father’s home. After she commits the appalling act of tossing Shylock’s ducats out of the window, Jessica forestalls her descent from the balcony such that Lorenzo must repeatedly urge her to “descend, for you must be my torchbearer,” and when she does not he must urge her again to “come at once” (2.6.40, 45). At this late point Jessica is apprehensive about leaving her father’s home and goes back into the house once more to “make fast the doors, and gild myself / With some more ducats, and be with you straight” (49-50). Jessica’s returning to carry out her father’s will and lock the door before she leaves is a revealing moment that reflects the heightened sense of moral consciousness her feelings of shyness impose upon her. Although Jessica is engaged in transgressive action, her state of bashfulness complicates the sinfulness associated with her elopement, impressing upon her a sense of moral restraint. As she returns to lock the door behind her, Jessica’s submissive actions reflect the way in which her affective condition binds her to her father as she dutifully carries out his request.

Janet Adelman has focused closely on the critical tradition which views Jessica as a highly immoral character. In her book, *Blood Relations: Christian*

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<sup>40</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 228.

and Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*, Adelman questions why Lancelot's "decision to leave Shylock's house in 2.2 [is] so much more difficult and fraught with guilt, than Jessica's."<sup>41</sup> Engaged in an imagined dialogue with his own conscience and the fiend, itself representative of the social conditions in which conscience is engendered in the play, Lancelot weighs his options: "Budge, says the fiend. 'Budge not,' says my conscience... To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master who God bless the mark is a kind of devil" (2.2.18-22). Adelman suggests that Lancelot's leaving Shylock's service represents "a kind of mock conversion, as though he were parodying Jessica's conversion before the fact," but "by making his primary convert a daughter and eliding her conversion with her marriage, Shakespeare occludes the [sense of] paternal betrayal inherent in that conversion."<sup>42</sup> I would suggest, however, that Shakespeare does not occlude Jessica's troubling feelings of paternal betrayal. In fact, he makes her sense of shame an integral feature of her conversion to Christianity. Jessica's blush, along with the bashful behavioral inhibition characterizing her elopement, produces a kind of conversionary movement in which mind and body interact with the surrounding social environment. The sense of moral insight and restraint Jessica experiences as she steals Shylock's ducats and elopes with a Christian calls attention to her acquisition of the ethical-affective spectrum of shame, modesty, and guilt integral to her admittance into the rational and civilized world of the Christians.

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<sup>41</sup> Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2008), 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-9.

The heightened sense of ethical consciousness that structures Jessica's conversion, and which becomes reflexively embodied through emotional experience, works toward sustaining the notion that religious conversion in this play is consequent upon the converter's ability to feel the network of rational passions integral to modes of Christian civility and salvation. In this regard, Jessica's conversion offers a way of understanding Shylock's own religious turn from Judaism to Christianity. Although little evidence is presented to confirm whether or not a genuine conversion has taken place in Shylock, it is possible to understand the sense of shame and inhibiting state of moral shyness he displays in the court as revelatory of his acquisition of the transcendent and transformative forms of affect and cognition intrinsic to Christian salvation.

Despite the fear of shame Jessica exhibits during her elopement, her subsequent actions indicate that she has been taken over by an overpowering desire for honor that prompts her to steal more of her father's ducats so as to "buy" Lorenzo's "love." Jessica's display of Christian "manners" during her elopement, along with her display of shame and shyness—emotions central to virtuous modes of Christian conduct and subjectivity—grant her the esteem she seeks and aid her in securing her converted status, redefining her as a "gentile and no Jew" (2.6.51). Once in Portia's Belmont, however, Jessica's reputation amongst the Christians as a "gentle daughter" is called into question (2.4.33). Graziano refers to her as a Jewish "infidel" and in a gesture that underscores her stance of social rejection and disaffiliation he bids Nerissa to "cheer *yon* stranger"

(3.2.216, 235).<sup>43</sup> The guilt and remorse Jessica continues to feel over her “unthrift love” and her wayward actions is aptly reflected through the withdrawn state of melancholic bashfulness she now experiences as a Jewish “stranger” in a what her father once referred to as a world of “shallow” Christians. It comes as no surprise that Jessica is “never merry” in Belmont, and especially not when she hears “sweet music.” Her fearful and despairing affective condition in Belmont further binds her to her father, and is reminiscent of that now comforting moment when Shylock sought to protect Jessica from the shame he had suffered by defensively locking her within the house and shutting out the “vile squeaking of the wry necked fife” (2.5.30).

#### IV. Portia Vs. Bassanio

When we first encounter Portia she is lamenting how the “lott’ry” of her destiny “bars [her] the right” to voluntarily choose her own husband (14-15). Portia’s father, who clearly worries about the fate of his daughter, his ducats, and his estate in death as much as he did in life, has designed an elaborate test for her marriage intended to test each suitor’s moral code. By virtue of the casket test, whichever suitor chooses the correct casket for the correct reasons will win Portia’s hand. As Karen Newman points out, the terms of Portia’s marriage reiterate the early modern patriarchal law of exchange. Denied the “subjecthood” that she would exercise in the matter of choosing a husband, Portia figures “only

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<sup>43</sup> Adelman offers an interesting discussion on the word “yon” and its use as a vehicle to imply Jessica’s isolation, *Blood Relations*, 73ff.

as one of the objects in the exchange not as one of the partners.”<sup>44</sup> “Hedged” in by her father’s “wit” Portia must self-abnegatingly “yield” to her father’s “will,” and as she explains, “yield myself” as “wife to who wins me by that means I told you” (2.1.19-20). The highly publicized and visualized nature of the casket test, in which suitors who have heard of Portia’s worth and renown and have come to “view” and “see” her from “the four corners of the earth,” works toward evoking Portia’s fear of public dishonor as a subtle means of making sure she complies with the tenets of the test (2.7.44, 39). Were Portia to go against her father and choose a husband herself or openly reject a suitor who made the correct choice, her honor and reputation in the “wide world” would be tarnished. The affective conditions sustaining Portia’s adherence to her father’s will appear to have escalated into an unhealthy case of bashfulness accompanied by a sense of melancholic withdrawal, which has, in turn, engendered within her an entrapped and confining feeling of world-weariness and ennui. Portia thus finds herself shy-locked to her father and his will. The compliant nature of Portia’s feminine Christian disposition compels her to “yield” unquestionably with her father’s demands, yet she feels conflicted about doing so. The “strife” of conscience that she exhibits is actuated through the space of social interaction with Nerissa.

The exchange between Portia and Nerissa is playful but it belies a sardonic edge. Nerissa’s aphorisms and her flattering language betray an element of critical judgment that delimits her as an externalized conscience figure evaluating Portia’s conduct. As Halio notes, Portia’s “ennui is immediately mocked by Nerissa” who

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<sup>44</sup> Karen Newman, “Reprise: Gender, Sexuality, and Theories of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Nigel Wood (Edmunds: Edmundsbury Press, 1996), 109.

tells her, “they are sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean happiness, therefore to be seated in the mean: superfluidity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer” (1.2.5-9).<sup>45</sup> Nerissa makes herself out to be a paragon of moderation here and, however insulting, Portia countenances the moral validity of her words as “good sentences and well pronounced” (10). The repartee between the two women may seem innocent but Nerissa’s rejoinders have the effect of intensifying Portia’s fears of shame and, by extension, her guilty conscience. The heightened state of moral shyness Portia experiences in Nerissa’s presence is reflected through her unsuccessful attempts to justify her wayward feelings. As she tells Nerissa:

It is a good divine that follows his own instructions... The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o’er a cold decree: such a hare is madness, the youth, to skip o’er the meshes of good counsel, the cripple. But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O me the word ‘choose’! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father (1.2.14-7).

The materialist language of the humoral body and its uncontrollable passions conveys the strength of Portia’s baser sensual and corporeal energies, as her “blood” and “hot temper” struggle against the “cold decree” of Christian conscience. The bridle of shamefastness is explicitly evoked here as Portia stresses how her impulsive desires are being “curbed” by her ethical sense of shame. The encounter between the two women sustains the socio-psychological conditions intrinsic to the arousal of conscience throughout the play. It also demystifies the struggle between reason and passion experienced by other virtuous Christians involved in the sin of violating a socio-moral obligation to

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<sup>45</sup> Halio, *The Merchant of Venice*, 112.

another individual. Portia's shame is, however, only so potent in its capacity to fully restrain her from disobeying her father. One can sense everywhere in this speech Portia's resistance to shame and its failing power to govern her baser urges. Portia's own worldly "will" can only be "curbed" so much by the "will" of her dead father. Reason itself proves to be the one "yielding basely to the importunities of passion and sense," which is why "good counsel" must be present and continually attempt to exert itself.<sup>46</sup> Portia seeks support and compassion for her oppressed state. She would like Nerissa to tell her that it is acceptable to act upon her desires: "is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one nor refuse none?" Yet Nerissa plays the halting "cripple," curbing Portia's impulses by reinforcing her sense of shame as she reminds her that her "father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations" (1.2.25-8).

The moral dilemma Portia faces regarding her own desires and her inability to deny her father's will ultimately resolves itself through her subtle manipulation of the casket test. In view of Barrow's assessment one could argue that Portia – "bashful and shy out of regard of other men's opinion, and tenderness of her own honor" – is quite obviously "afraid or ashamed to transgress plain rules of duty." Hence, she does not commit sin with an "open face" but rather, like Jessica, defensively hides or disguises her erroneous actions from view so as to protect her social honor.<sup>47</sup> Portia's shy conscience thus impels her to modestly conceal or obscure her behavior deep within the casket test itself. As Levin notes, "Portia honors her father's will and allows both Arragon and

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<sup>46</sup> On the conflict between reason and passion see Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> I allude here to the Barrow quote at the opening of the essay.



Morocco to make their choices. Nevertheless a rebellious spirit sometimes threatens to overcome her inhibitions.”<sup>48</sup> After Arragon and Morocco have chosen incorrectly, Portia, obviously knowing which is the correct casket, aids Bassanio by singing a song in which all the end words rhyme with lead. As she gives rein to her hotter passional impulses, however, Portia cannot fully evade the moral dictates of her shy conscience. Her fear of shame in the eyes of the world locks her to her father compelling her to submissively carry out his will even as she engages in violating it. The heavily spiritualized and transcendent religious language used to describe Portia by her suitors, which transforms her into “a mortal breathing saint,” a “heavenly picture,” and “figure of an angel,” yet one no less “stamped in gold,” exposes the contradictory nature of her actions and underscores the distinctively Christianized struggle between immaterial reason and the passions of the material body driving her self-interested conduct.<sup>49</sup>

Portia’s desire for Bassanio is made immediately apparent upon his arrival in Belmont. As Harry Berger explains, from the start of 3.2. Portia betrays to Bassanio “her love for him by being conspicuously coy; she lets him see her difficulty in maintaining maidenly decorum,” especially when she slips up and tells him: “There’s something tells me – but it is not love – / I would not lose you” (3.2.4-5).<sup>50</sup> Portia’s infatuation with Bassanio compels her to persuade him to “forbear a while” (3.2.3). The thought of Bassanio making the wrong choice is

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<sup>48</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> For an extended discussion on the interaction between material and immaterial forms in the casket test episode see Lawrence Normand, “Reading the Body in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Textual Practice* 5.1 (1991): 55-73.

<sup>50</sup> Harry Berger, “Marriage and Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Casket Scene Revisited,” in *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, eds. Peter Erickson and Harry Berger (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4.

something Portia finds unbearable and so she lets him know that in the interim she could teach him how “to choose aright,” which it is possible that she ends up doing when she sings her song and sins against her father (3.2.27). Portia’s exhilaration upon Bassanio’s choosing the correct casket prompts her to indulge her assigned role of commodity in the marriage market by yielding herself to him as his wife: “One half of me is yours, the other half yours – / Mine own, I would say; but if mine own then yours, / And so all yours” (3.2.16-8). In her long set piece, in which she ratifies her prenuptial contract, Portia conveys her admiration for Bassanio through an extended display of feminine modesty and deferential humility as she engages in a quantifiable analysis of her “worthless self” in comparison to Bassanio’s own immeasurable greatness (2.9.17):

For you  
I would be trebled twenty times myself,  
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,  
That only to stand high in your account  
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends  
Exceed amount. (3.2.152-57)

Lynda Boose suggests that Portia’s speech is a “showpiece demonstration of deferential rhetoric.”<sup>51</sup> Other critics like Karoline Szatek follow Boose’s assertion and likewise explain how “Portia adopts a discourse the early moderns would have perceived as appropriate for a young woman, modest in delivery and submissive in tone and demeanor. To appear timid and self-effacing, Portia deftly employs litotes, sweetly claiming to Bassanio that she wishes herself “much better.”” As Szatek further argues, Portia self-consciously portrays herself as a modest maiden in order “to assert her dominance [and] to capitalize on her

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<sup>51</sup> Lynda Boose, “The Comic Contract and Portia’s Golden Ring,” *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988), 247.

continued role as Belmont's mistress to whom Bassanio is simply one more commodity she has purchased in a carefully designed, commercializing, political deal."<sup>52</sup> Such explanations, however, grossly misinterpret Portia's motives at this early point and also underestimate the reality of her emotional state in suggesting that Bassanio is simply a "commodity" to her and that she merely "appears" bashful and self-effacing as she stands before him.

Despite Portia's own obvious material worth, her perception of herself as "worthless" consistently leads her to assume that she falls short of value in Bassanio's eyes. All along her humility and lack of confidence in herself has prompted her to consider that Bassanio is in Belmont to marry her for the wrong reasons. Her "mistrust" of Bassanio and of his intentions leads her to demand that he "confess what treason there is mingled with [his] love," and also compels her to find ways of testing his love: "If you do love me," she states, "then you will find me out" (41). Portia's distrust of Bassanio is aptly revealed after he chooses the correct casket and she finds herself caught up in an unguarded moment, proclaiming, "how all other passions fleet to air, / As *doubtful thoughts*, and rash embrac'd despair, / And shuddering *fear*, and green-eyed jealousy" (3.2.108-10; mine). Directly following this proclamation, however, Portia catches herself in a moment of moral clarity and, taking Nerissa's advice, exhibits an element of restraint: "O love be moderate! Allay thy ecstasy, / In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess" (3.211-12). As Berger notes, "Portia experiences conflict within

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<sup>52</sup> Karoline Szatek, "The Merchant of Venice and the Politics of Commerce," In *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, ed. John Mahon and Ellen Macleod Mahon (New York: Routledge, 2002), 331.

herself between the claims of desire and those of fear.”<sup>53</sup> She demonstrates an excessive admiration for Bassanio and a yearning for his love and approval, yet her desires are restrained by her distrust of him and her profound fear of rejection. As she stands before Bassanio her doubts and fears are manifested through her fear of shame and corresponding display of feminine modesty. Her shy conscience warns her that Bassanio might take advantage of her and her high position in Belmont, but her desire to marry him and gain honor in his eyes far outweighs her inhibiting fears of shame, compelling her to submit herself to him and then offer him all that she has in an attempt to secure his love and esteem.

But now I was lord  
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,  
Queen o’er myself; and even now, but now,  
This house these servants, and this same myself  
Are yours my lord’s. I give them with this ring... (3.2.166-70).

The deferential modesty and humility Portia expresses before Bassanio works toward confirming his position of power and superiority in the marriage, something that Portia reaffirms when she commits” herself “to be directed as from her lord, her governor, her king,” and converts whatever power she exercises over herself and her father’s estate to Bassanio (3.2.164-5). As Newman observes, “the governing analogy in Portia’s speech is the Renaissance political commonplace that figures marriage and the family as a kingdom in small, a microcosm ruled over by the husband. Portia’s speech figures women as microcosm to man’s macrocosm and as subject to his sovereignty.”<sup>54</sup> The abject emotional-dispositional state Portia exhibits both calls attention to and sustains her inferior

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<sup>53</sup> Berger, *Trifles*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Newman, “Theories of Exchange,” 111.

status in the marital hierarchy. Offering herself and all she possesses to Bassanio, Portia figuratively resembles “a true subject bow[ing]” in subordinate awe, fear, and reverence to “a new-crowned monarch” (3.2.50-1).

Although Portia endeavors to secure Bassanio’s love along with her reputation in his eyes through her humility and her charity, she ultimately finds that her stance of feminine submission places her in even more of a vulnerable position. As Berger observes, Portia now realizes she is “in [Bassanio’s] power for having compromised herself.”<sup>55</sup> Not only has Portia given herself to Bassanio, she has given a man whose love she doubts all of her worldly power and possessions. Her shy conscience continues to tell her that Bassanio “bar[s] her from her rightful ownership of her own person and, by extension, her father’s purse.”<sup>56</sup> Portia’s giving of her ring to Bassanio, which comes conveniently at the end of her long set-piece after she has given most, if not all of herself away, discloses her conflicted position of vulnerability and powerlessness. The ring is, as Newman notes, a material symbol of Portia’s “love and submission” to Bassanio.<sup>57</sup> It is a sign of her obligation and loyalty to Bassanio as his wife; yet, even this is something Portia obviously feels her husband is incapable of bestowing upon her “worthless self.” For she gives the ring to Bassanio expecting him to “part from” it, “lose or give away,” acts that would “presage the ruin of [his] love,” but would nonetheless provide her with an uncharacteristic “vantage to exclaim” on him (3.2.173-5). A bid for self-empowerment that is noticeably lacking in the first half of the speech comes out at the end here; however, I

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<sup>55</sup> Berger, “Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*,” 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Newman, “Theories of Exchange,” 111.

wouldn't go so far as to suggest that this line delimits Portia as a manipulative "economic strategist."<sup>58</sup> If anything her testiness at this point reveals her to be the "unlessoned . . . unschooled, unpracticed" girl she claims herself to be (3.2.159). By the end of the speech Portia has finally realized what she has done—given herself and all of her worldly power away— and she responds to this realization with frustration and resentment toward Bassanio.

The struggle between selfless, Christian forms of love and marriage, and Portia's claims to self-interest becomes, however, quickly ameliorated once Bassanio reveals his own feelings of bashfulness, insecurity, and humility before his new wife. After Portia's speech, it is Bassanio who more nearly resembles a powerless and socially inhibited "maiden" that "hath no tongue but thought" (3.2.8). He finds himself "bereft of all words" and admits that there is "such confusion in [his] powers." He experiences awe, fear, and reverence before Portia, as if bowing low before a "beloved prince" (3.2.175, 177, 179). Critics who view Portia as a woman "who manipulates her father's marketing scheme for her own personal and financial benefit" tend to misread the outcome of her modest and self-effacing behavior erroneously back into her earlier actions.<sup>59</sup> For instance, Szatek implies that Portia is aware from the very beginning that "Bassanio lacks capital interest . . . he has nothing but borrowed money and himself to offer her. Bassanio must assume the weaker position. . . Portia knows Bassanio must

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<sup>58</sup> See Szatek, "Politics of Commerce," 331; this idea of Portia as a strategist should be contrasted with Shylock. Whereas Portia's bashful behavior is genuine, Shylock is the one who strategically appropriates the affective contours of a distinctively shy and humble Christian disposition as a mechanism of power.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

acquiesce to her.”<sup>60</sup> At this early point in their courtship, however, Bassanio arrives with his hired retinue and his display of wealth and grandeur such that Portia is entirely unaware of the “borrowed” nature of the display. In fact, she only finds out about Bassanio’s financial destitution much later on in the scene when he publically confesses that he misled her when he told her he was “a gentleman” upon his arrival, and that he actually “rates himself at nothing” (3.2.259). Portia could, therefore, in no way anticipate Bassanio’s acquiescence upon her giving of herself away. Her intention is to flatter Bassanio and secure his love through the deferential bestowal of husbandly privileges, not insult him with feelings of debt and worthlessness she doesn’t even believe him to have. Like the other Christians in the play Portia displays an undue sense of Christian virtue and humility toward those she cares for and admires. Although she struggles with the terms of her marriage as they conflict with her claims to self-justification she does not intend to manipulate Bassanio, she simply sees a resolution to her problem when she takes note of Bassanio’s unexpectedly bashful response to the situation. When Portia witnesses Bassanio assume the less-dominant, powerless, and more humble position, she realizes that she has unintentionally caught Bassanio “upon the hip,” and that she has, in fact, bound him hierarchically to her “worthless self,” positioning him into a submissive posture of ingratiated debt. Portia doesn’t intentionally manipulate Bassanio into this abject position, however, she does learn to take advantage of her husband’s emotional weakness upon perceiving it, much like Antonio.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

When Antonio's letter arrives Bassanio reads it and turns pale. Bassanio does not immediately give up the contents of the letter or explain his emotional reaction, which impels Portia to coax a response out of him: "There are some shrewd contents in yon same paper / That steals the color from Bassanio's cheek" (3.2.241-2). The social circumstance in which the letter arrives contributes to the arousal of Bassanio's shamefacedness so that he is forced to confess his "fault" to the others (3.2.300).<sup>61</sup> In the letter, when Antonio reveals that his "ships have all miscarried" and that he will soon die because his "bond to the Jew" is "forfeit," the gravity of Bassanio's self-interest is fully realized. With Antonio's life on the line Bassanio now feels an even stronger sense of guilt over having used him financially and then violating his obligation to the Merchant in favor of a selfish marriage to Portia. In an effort to cleanse his "unquiet soul" Bassanio admits to Portia that he *now* "rates [himself] at nothing," and that besides being previously "engaged" to Antonio, he has engaged his "dear friend.... to his mere enemy / To feed [his] means" (3.2.259-61). Antonio's inclination to clear all of Bassanio's "debts" if he will but see him at the moment of his death only serves to reinforce Bassanio's profound sense of indebtedness to the Merchant. The letter does what it was meant to do. It engenders Bassanio's feelings of shame and guilt to the extent that it locks him more forcefully to Antonio and "persuade[s]" Bassanio of own true feelings of "love" for the Merchant (3.2.318-19).

Bassanio's emotional appeal appears to have an extended effect upon his understanding of his marital obligation to Portia. Upon leaving for Venice, he

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<sup>61</sup> Besides the red face of the blush, paleness was also a sign of shamefacedness: "Be this our wall of bronze, to have no guilt at heart, no wrongdoing to turn us pale," Horace, *Epistulae* 1.1.60-61.



proclaims that “no bed shall e’er be guilty of his stay” (3.2.323). Portia has never been fully convinced of Bassanio’s fidelity, and stands in greater doubt of it after her social merit has been effectively impugned through the publicization of Bassanio’s great affection for Antonio. But, if anything, the entire episode has made Portia all the more aware of Bassanio’s financial destitution and his debts, along with his propensity to feel an immoderate level of guilt and shame over betraying them, which is something she will use to her advantage to retain honor and mastery in her marriage as she continues to offer Bassanio more of her worldly possessions:

Pay [Shylock] six thousand [ducats], and deface the bond.  
 Double six thousand, and then treble that,  
 Before a friend of this description  
 Shall lose a hair through Bassanio’s fault.  
 First go with me to church and call me wife,  
 And then away to Venice to your friend;  
 For never shall you lie by Portia’s side  
 With an unquiet soul. (3.2.298-304)

Portia skillfully calls attention to Bassanio’s “unquiet soul” as means of enhancing his shame over his betrayal of Antonio. In doing so, however, she attempts to outdo Antonio’s hold over her husband as she places herself in the position of savior. By intensifying Bassanio’s guilt and shame, and then offering him an insurmountable amount of her own money to rectify his “fault” and deface the bond, Portia intentionally augments Bassanio’s shy conscience so that she can placate it by offering him a means of saving Antonio. She thus attempts to secure her masterful hold over her husband by further ingratiating him into her debt.

## V. Christian Vs. Jew

When Shylock first endeavors to commit the very offense that has been committed against him he justifies his revenge through recourse to Christian humility:

If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction (3.1.64-9).

In this speech Shylock reveals that he has learned by Christian example how to exploit the oppressive power structure latent within the Christian virtues of shyness and humility. Through the murderous penalty he puts into place as a surety, he is able to subvert the limitations his display of shyness previously engendered, catching “Antonio upon the hip,” and provoking in turn the Merchant’s own abject stance of bashful compliance and submission. Antonio himself calls attention to the deep-rooted shame and “sheepish bashfulness” underlying his gentle Christian disposition when, under the threat of Shylock’s knife, he characterizes himself as a “tainted wether of the flock, / Meetest for death” – a phrase that, according to Janet Adelman and others, discloses his status as a “castrated sheep” and betrays “an already existing shame and sexual taint.”<sup>62</sup> In words that extend his intrinsic worthlessness and sense of subordination, Antonio describes himself as “the weakest kind of fruit / [that] drops earliest to the ground”(4.1.113-15). As we have seen, however, it is characteristic of the Christian’s bashfulness to progress into an oppositional state of self-aggrandizement, power, and honor at the moment in which they display their

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<sup>62</sup> “Sheepish bashfulness” is Plutarch’s apt phrase, “Of Naughty Bashfulness,” 164; Adelman, *Blood Relations*, 112; On Antonio as a castrated sheep see Drew Daniel, “Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will,” 226.

undue humility and declare themselves to be most self-effacing. The “quietness of [Christian] spirit” that Antonio exhibits in the courtroom works in precisely this way, for it has the effect of boosting his power and merit in Bassanio’s eyes (4.1.11). The shame-honor dynamic latent in Antonio’s humility thus implicates him in his longed for religious fantasy of displaced abjection. As Drew Daniel observes, Antonio’s subjection “functions as a discursive switch point that allows it to ‘carry’ any or all of the multiple, overdetermining explanations his behavior solicits . . . Christian heroism, unrequited homoerotic desire, moral masochism.”<sup>63</sup> All three of these explanations appear to be relevant to Antonio’s emotional state in the courtroom. At the same time as Antonio manipulates Bassanio’s feelings of shame and guilt through his murder at Shylock’s hands, he assuages his own feelings of guilt and atones for the sinful forms of pride, power, and dominance he gains over his lover by willfully implicating himself in a scenario that recapitulates, on an extreme level, his virtuous stance of Christian shyness, meekness, and passivity. Antonio may therefore be seen deliberately placing himself in a subdued position as he yields himself unhesitatingly to Shylock, proclaiming, “let me have judgment and the Jew his will,” gaining a kind of perverse religious pleasure or penitential release in his own martyrdom and the exaggerated stance of bashful compliance it yields (4.1.81).

The Duke and others request that Shylock restrain his course of vengeance but he refuses to succumb to the effects of Christian shyness, declaring that he will not “shake the head, relent, sigh, and yield” to the requests of “Christian intercessors” (3.3.14-16). As a Jewish “misbeliever,” however, Shylock cannot in

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<sup>63</sup> Daniel, 216.

fact restrain his vengeance. This is because he believes that he exists on an entirely material-corporeal level and therefore lacks the affective ability to appeal to the higher state of moral and spiritual consciousness necessary to relent. As John E. Joseph notes, “for the Christian believer at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, non believers are in the same spiritual, which is to say mental condition as animals. Their passions and affections cannot be under the control of divine reason, because such reason demands an acceptance of Christ.”<sup>64</sup>

After Jessica’s elopement the two Sallies taunt Shylock, telling him that there is more “difference between [Shylock’s] flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish” (3.1.35-7). Shylock attempts to resist such a degrading plea to racial difference and superiority, proclaiming:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that (3.1.55-63)

Shylock appeals to a common humanity in order justify his revenge against the Christians. Having the same physical and emotional attributes Jew and Christian can be expected to respond in the same way to provocation. Yet, as C.L. Barber clarifies, Shylock’s “pathos is qualified, limited, in a way which is badly falsified by humanitarian renderings.... For Shylock thinks to claim only a part of

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<sup>64</sup> John E. Joseph, “Body, Passions and Race in Classical Theories of Language and Emotion,” In *Emotion in Dialogic Interaction: Advances in the Complex*, ed. Edda Weigand (Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing, 2004), 83.

humanness, the lower part, physical and passionate.”<sup>65</sup> Rendering himself a by-product of bodily forces, Shylock’s major speech in which he seeks to declare his similarity to the Christians rather contradictorily exposes his distinction from them as a Jew. A network of base material drives compels Shylock to enact his revenge against any better sense of moral judgment, conscience, or force of will to stop him, such as that which the Christians experience through the inhibiting state of modesty they exhibit while engaging in sinful conduct.

The animalism associated with Shylock throughout the text, which becomes demoralizingly appropriated by him, is used to reify the irrational and ungovernable nature of his actions. As he tells Antonio, “thou callest me dog before thou hadst a cause, / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs” (3.3.6-7; 4.1.127, 131ff). Despite the currishness of this Jew, and in view of recent arguments asserting that Shakespeare “built up the character of Shylock in terms of caninity,” the inhuman attributes appropriated by Shylock more nearly resemble those associated with the shy colt – a wild, high-mettled, yet instinctively fearful animal requiring restraint through the controlling force of the bridle.<sup>66</sup> Although directed at Jessica, Lorenzo’s more generalized assessment of Jews as a “race” of “wild and wanton” “youthful and unhandled colts” may be equally applicable to Shylock (5.1.72). The high-mettled, vengeful pride and fury he now evinces transforms him into a shy colt, “fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud, which is the hot condition of their blood” (5.1.71-74). The

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<sup>65</sup> C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study in Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), 182.

<sup>66</sup> On Shylock’s caninity see Paul Yachnin, “Shakespeare’s Public Animals,” in *Humankind: The Renaissance and its Anthropologies*, eds. Andreas Høfele and Stephan Laque (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 185.

animal language in the play is coupled with the language of the humoral body and its complex of “hot” uncontrollable passions. The materialism Shylock’s attributes to himself subtly works toward distinguishing him from the more humanized, civilized Christians whose “hot” blood has the capacity to be restrained or “curbed” through a “modest gaze,” or through the “cold decree” of a rationalizing conscience.

Shylock calls explicit attention to the sub-human and materialist basis of his Jewishness at the start of the trial:

You’ll ask me why I rather choose to have  
A weight of carrion flesh than to receive  
Three thousand ducats. I’ll not answer that,  
But say it is my humour...  
Some men there are that love not a gaping pig  
Some that are mad if they behold a cat,  
And others when the bagpipe sings i’ th’ nose  
Cannot contain their urine; for affection,  
Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood  
Of what it likes or loathes. (4.1.38-41)

As Paster notes, Shylock’s appeal to the language of the humoral body “is an effective recognition of humoralism’s status as a discourse of nature to signify the materially unanswerable and to promote an individual’s social resistance.”<sup>67</sup> It is perhaps part of Shylock’s character as a Jew to uphold what Douglas Trevor refers to as a “hard-line” conception of his humors as a means through which he can claim the rights, power and preeminence previously denied to him.<sup>68</sup> For, in explaining his murderous conduct as an uncontrollable effect of the body and its fluids he grossly undermines Christian notions of free will and moral responsibility, and also countenances the limiting and irreligious belief that a

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<sup>67</sup> Paster, *Humoring*, 251.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas Trevor, “Sadness in the *Faerie Queene*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 241.

“severe form of predestination is manifested in the body,” thus rendering the soul’s corruption materially inescapable and “threatening the divine omnipotence of an electing god.”<sup>69</sup> However, since the humors could shift, and as part of the natural body be controlled and manipulated through the subject’s interaction with the external environment, the determinism Shylock endorses here is indefensible. Referring to a “premodern ecology of the passions,” Paster further notes how the quality and constitution of the air one breathed or the food one took in could alter the balance of humors in the body. “Within these old physiological systems” it was also assumed, as John Sutton points out, “that the cultural environment was as an influential a part of such conspiracies of causes as was the physical world.”<sup>70</sup> When influenced by a myriad of stimuli— natural, external, social or cultural—one’s passions could be altered and one’s complexion, as Lawrence Babb suggests, could even be permanently changed.<sup>71</sup> Although Shylock upholds an heretical belief in his humors as fixed and irreducible, the Christians in the courtroom appear to subscribe to the Galenic doctrine of mutual modulation between the self and the environment, believing that the “current of cruelty” coursing through Shylock’s bloodstream and hardening his Jewish heart can be softened or allayed through the humorally moderating effects of a “dram of mercy” (63, 6).

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<sup>69</sup> On humoral predestination see Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9. On the irreligious implications of Galenic theory see Trevor, 241-2.

<sup>70</sup> Paster, *Humoring*, 9. See Schoenfeldt on how “through the willing adoption of certain strategies of self-discipline, like diet and exercise, “it was possible to modify the body’s fluid economies for the desired physiological, psychological, and ethical outcome,” *Bodies and Selves*, 10. Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces*, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady* (East Lansing: Michigan State Press, 1951), 13.

Bassanio himself is unpersuaded by Shylock's claim to materialism, which he feels is simply a kind of "humoral scapegoating" that cannot entirely "excuse the current of [his] cruelty," since he does exhibit an uncharacteristic sense of reason, shame and restraint over his actions.<sup>72</sup> As part of their agenda to free the soul from the determinist implications of humoral embodiment, early modern theologians emphasized man's role as a free agent whose will gave him the capacity to govern his actions, and correspondingly endorsed specific passions of the rational soul lodged in the will, including shame, which were instigated through the cognitive operation of conscience and involved in the re-formation of the subject. Privileging shame as "mental passion," Bishop Edward Reynolds notes that this emotion, incited "through conscience of evil and guiltiness of mind, makes us ever reflect upon our weakness." By "acquainting themselves with motions" such as shame, whereunto their own "determinate qualities have an essential reluctance," Reynolds observes how individuals could undo the "damage and reproach" wrought upon the soul by the body.<sup>73</sup> In the courtroom Shylock becomes a kind of detached observer of himself, revealing a "modest eye" turned inward when he states that he "of force / Must yield to such inevitable shame / As to offend, himself being offended" (4.1.55-7). According to Harold Goddard, Shylock understands that what he is doing is reprehensible. He is driven to pursue his revenge against Antonio, explaining his irrational behavior as a composite of "bodily forces too powerful to oppose even though he feels them driving him –

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<sup>72</sup> On the idea of citing one's humors as an excuse to justify corrupt or sinful behavior see Trevor, 241-2.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (London, 1640), 295, 76.



*against his will* and to his shame.”<sup>74</sup> Standing in the public space of the courtroom full of Christian spectators, and attempting to murder one of them, Shylock cannot help but be overcome by an ethical fear of shame and infamy. He begins to realize, as Levin asserts, that what he is doing is corrupt and that the “action he feels compelled to take will shame him.”<sup>75</sup> His subsequent critique of Venetian slavery calls further attention to his developing state of moral awareness. Owning people as property is blameworthy. According to Shylock, slaves should be “free,” yet the Venetians have “many a purchased slave” amongst them whom they use “in abject and slavish parts,” just as Shylock realizes he is using Antonio. The pound of flesh Shylock demands is, as he states, “dearly bought: ‘tis mine and I will have it” (4.1.89-99). In the courtroom Shylock thus evinces a heightened fear of dishonor that incites his consciousness of wrongdoing and engenders the arousal of his shy conscience. As he looks around he senses the disapproving glare of the assembly and becomes conscious of his actions as morally reprehensible, and that through them he is generating a worse disgrace than he has ever experienced before.

Although Shylock is technically a Jewish “misbeliever,” Portia exploits the social parameters of Shylock’s shame, taking it as an unexpected opportunity to cultivate his sense of governance and restraint through an appeal to the Christian doctrine of mercy, which she explains is:

An attribute to God himself  
And earthly power doth then show likest to God’s  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,

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<sup>74</sup> Harold Goddard, “Portia’s Failure,” in *William Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 78.

Though justice be thy plea, consider this:  
 That in the course of justice none of us  
 Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,  
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
 The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much  
 To mitigate the justice of thy plea,  
 Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice  
 Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there (4.1.192-7).

Because salvation depends on divine mercy, in the hope of gaining God's mercy we ourselves should be merciful. The moral logic embedded in Portia's speech is meant to intensify Shylock's fear of shame, since it demands that he admit wrongdoing and cease his vengeful course of action. Portia's protestations thus work in tandem with her belief that the hardening effects of choler can be reversed and Shylock's hard heart made soft through an appeal to the socio-ethical foundation of shame and its ability to generate an influx of mercy, a liquid passion – a “gentle rain from heaven.” As Paster observes, “Shylock and Portia manipulate different aspects of humoral discourse: Shylock its theoretically undeniable basis in nature, Portia its actual susceptibility to hegemonic redefinition or even displacement through the symbolic complexity of blood.”<sup>76</sup> Any sense of moral consciousness Shylock would achieve, however, becomes strongly “mitigated” by Portia when she justifies his heinous actions through recourse to the law. The last lines of the speech guarantee to Shylock that “Venetian law / Cannot impugn you as you do proceed” (175-6). Because the bond is forfeit “lawfully by this the Jew may claim / A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off / Nearest the merchant's heart” (228-30). As Bassanio hopelessly points out, the law is thus powerless to “curb this cruel devil of his will” (214). Despite Shylock's sense of shame and his inkling that his actions are terribly

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<sup>76</sup> Paster, *Humoring*, 258.

wrong, Portia encourages him to believe that he is “doing no wrong,” and that he is both morally and legally justified to take his pound of flesh (4.1.88). Not surprisingly, he craves “the penalty and forfeit of [his] bond” (204-5). Portia continues to goad Shylock’s revenge as she commands Antonio to “lay bare [his] bosom,” and in a callous attempt to maximize the lovers’ grief, allows Antonio and Bassanio to say a final farewell (249).

Although Antonio clearly struggles with the power he has achieved over Bassanio he continues to strengthen his emotional hold over his lover by arousing within him the network of spiritual emotions that will lock Bassanio to him even in death. As he says goodbye, Antonio thus makes sure to provoke Bassanio’s shy conscience, inciting within him a kind of “lingering penance” by underscoring his sense of personal indebtedness. As he tells Bassanio, “repent but you that you shall lose your friend, / And he repents not that he pays your *debt*” (4.1.263, 268; mine). Furthermore, by raising the issue of his “honorable wife” Antonio subtly excites Bassanio’s sense of shame over his disloyalty (4.1.275-6):

Tell her the process of Antonio’s end.  
Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death.  
And when the tale is told, bid her be the judge  
Whether Bassanio had not once a love. (4.1.270-274).

Standing in the public space of the courtroom, acutely conscious that his own selfish motives have put his most esteemed lover upon the rack, Bassanio’s shy conscience compels him to confess his undying love for Antonio in an attempt to cleanse his “unquiet soul” of its overpowering guilt. He declares that “life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life,” and in an extreme gesture of social humility yields himself to Antonio in a final act of

submission, “I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all / Here to this devil to deliver you” (4.1.280-3). Portia has been encouraging Shylock’s attack against Antonio, but when she perceives how the Merchant’s death has the effect of arousing Bassanio’s love and loyalty she feels threatened and humiliated. Antonio’s death is rapidly turning into a scene of shame. It not only places a far greater hold upon Bassanio’s love, it also has the extended effect of defaming his love for Portia and her reputation before the court. Portia thus realizes she must defend herself from disgrace, and that killing Antonio is not the best strategy to deal with the threat he places upon her reputation and her marriage (4.1.221). If Portia can save Antonio she will rival his hold over her husband, heightening her merit in his, as well as in Antonio’s eyes, and indebting each of them to herself. By saving Antonio, Portia can effectively lock the lovers to herself, arousing their feelings of shame and guilt if ever they intend to betray their moral obligation to her. Accordingly, once Portia witnesses her husband’s declaration of love for Antonio she shifts the terms of the law back in Antonio’s favor.

In her attempt to stop Shylock, Portia offers a literal interpretation of the law in which Shylock is still permitted to take his pound of flesh but if he “tak’st more / Or less than a just pound . . . if the scale do turn in the estimation of a hair, / Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate” (326-8). Rather than putting a strict end to Shylock’s revenge, Portia grants him an opportunity to relent of his own free will. Her interpretation of the law is of a piece with her earlier appeal to mercy, which “shines most clearly when it is exercised by those with the power to inflict harm, by those who have justice on their side and reject it for something

higher.”<sup>77</sup> At the same time that Portia attempts to gain a modicum of power and dominance over Bassanio and his lover, she atones for her sinful conduct by demonstrating an unprecedented level of Christian virtue and charity as she endeavors to save Shylock’s soul, using justice as an impetus toward salvation.

If Portia had earlier negated Shylock’s sense of wrongdoing when she justified his murderous actions with recourse to the law, her abrupt alteration of the terms of the law, along with her amendment of the penalty of death, necessarily forces Shylock to become aware of his own guilt before the court. It is easy to claim that Shylock relents because if he does not he risks death; however, the provision of death also forces Shylock to “yield” to his “inevitable shame.” Through the new terms of law Shylock is made to understand that he has “erred in placing his faith in justice,” and that his actions are so perverse, blameworthy and illegal that he himself will be subjected to the law and killed as punishment.<sup>78</sup> As Levin notes, Shylock is made to “stand guilty before the law ... he senses danger and becomes cautious.”<sup>79</sup> Visible to all, and growing increasingly conscious of the illegal and morally reprehensible nature of his actions, Shylock begins to view himself from the perspective of the Christians, as a murderer. As he looks at the man whose life he was about to take with a “modest gaze,” he experiences a palpable sense of bodily inhibition and bashful restraint, such that Portia must ask him “why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture” (5.1.78, 4.1.331). Aroused through the knowledge that his actions are corrupt, Shylock’s shyness is itself a

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<sup>77</sup> Hugh Grady, “Shylock is Content: A Study in Salvation,” in *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, ed. John Mahon and Ellen Macleod Mahon (New York: Routledge, 2002), 206.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>79</sup> Levin, *Love and Society*, 75.

psycho-physiological response in which elevated modes of cognition, affection, and bodily kinesthetic response interact simultaneously with the social environment to produce moral judgments which become reflexively embodied in action and emotional experience. His feeling of the network of moral and religious passions associated with shame motivates a higher transformative mode of thinking, being, and acting necessary for his transition into humanity and his conversion into Christian personhood.

In his article on the animalistic basis of Shylock's character Paul Yachnin suggests that Shylock gains humanity by virtue of his desire to appear in public and to enact a kind of publicized revenge.<sup>80</sup> I follow Yachnin's claim but suggest that the social space of the courtroom is integral to the arousal of Shylock's publically induced *fear of shame*, a moral emotional state that grants him full humanity through the arousal of his shy conscience and his newfound ability to appeal to transcendent and transformative forms of knowledge and reason. Indeed, the entire episode stands out as a kind of theatricalized paradigm instancing the historical, conceptual, and linguistic formation of shyness as the word "shy" shifted from an animal trait describing wild and ungovernable shy colts through the image of the bridle – and its relation to *the fear of shame* – to become associated with a distinctively human state of moral judgment, insight, and behavioral restraint. The linguistic and conceptual shift resonates here with Shylock's own shift into a higher properly human form of being, as elevated modes of moral cognition, affection, and corporeal-kinesthetic response interact

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<sup>80</sup> See Yachnin's article, "Shakespeare's Public Animals."

with the social environment to produce a conversional movement.<sup>81</sup> The inhibiting behavioral state of moral shyness Shylock experiences in the Venetian court functions, through its engenderment of conscience, as a kind of moral governor soliciting a sense of civilized restraint that is constitutive of his transition into human personhood. At the same time, however, Shylock's appeal to the network of moral and spiritual passions associated with shame implicates him in a kind of noetic transformation. By inhibiting Shylock from engaging in sinful forms of pride and vengeance, shame purifies Shylock's soul, turning it away from sin and necessitating the spiritual, physical and psychological conditions necessary for salvation and for his conversion to Christianity. Any irreligious endorsement of the humors as fixed and irreducible is thus rendered untenable through Shylock's experience of shame, which fuses a theological view of the passions as morally reformatory and spiritually transformative phenomena with a belief in the Galenic self as a variable, shifting organism, continuously refashioned as the body came into contact with the external environment.

After witnessing Shylock's modesty, Portia callously exacerbates it along with his exposure to shame by prohibiting his subsequent withdrawal, exclaiming, "Tarry, Jew, / The law hath yet another hold on you" (333). Strengthening her "hold" over the Jew, she explains to him the law forbidding an alien to take the life of a Christian citizen upon penalty of death. Using the law to unexpectedly catch "the infidel upon the hip," Portia further hyperbolizes Shylock's sense of wrongdoing and his defeated stance of bashfulness as she commands him to

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<sup>81</sup> Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 163

display his humility: “Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke” (330, 359). Shylock is, once again, forced to yield to his shame as he kneels before the all-powerful Duke in an abject low posture designed to exploit his shyness and physically, emotionally and psychologically disempower him. After the Duke grants Shylock his life and stipulates that half of his wealth should go to Antonio and the other half to the state, Shylock responds in a way that contradicts the self-abnegating stance of bashful humility he has been made to display. Defiantly denying the Duke, he will not yield to the demands of this Christian intercessor:

Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that  
 You take my house when you do take the prop  
 That doth sustain my house; you take my life  
 When you do take the means whereby I live (4.1.370-4).

Only the “humbleness” of Antonio may resolve the Duke’s provision (368). Portia thus defers legal right to the Merchant to exact the final terms of Shylock’s punishment: “what mercy can you render him, Antonio?” As Girard asserted some years ago, “the Christian virtue par excellence, *mercy* is the weapon with which Shylock is clubbed over the head.”<sup>82</sup> Having already witnessed, and experienced first hand, Shylock’s display of shyness in the courtroom, Antonio realizes that he may be able to catch the Jew “upon the hip” by taking advantage of his emotional weakness. In the spirit of Christian mercy Antonio proceeds to enact “courtesies” on Shylock’s behalf, yet his seemingly self-effacing attitude of Christian mercy, charity, and forgiveness toward the man who has just attempted to take his life garners him an unwarranted sense of “earthly power.” Antonio renders Shylock mercy, but mercy in this instance is “strained” (181). If Shylock

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<sup>82</sup> Girard, “To Entrap the Wisest,” 100; To Girard’s list of virtues I would add the similarly oppressive Christian affects of shame and shyness.



does not agree to the condition that he give half of his wealth upon his death as a “gift” to Jessica and Lorenzo, and that for this “favor / he presently become a Christian,” he will be subject to death (4.1.382-4). Although Shylock’s conversion appears terribly coerced, what he is, and has been, forced to realize is his feeling of shame, along with the related Christian emotional virtues of shyness and humility fundamental to religious conversion. During the trial Shylock’s sense of shame is manipulated and exploited by Portia and Antonio who emotionally coerce him into experiencing the transcendent forms of conscience, will and restraint intrinsic to Christian shyness, as well as the social virtues of humility and compliance toward others. The emotional, psychological and physical inculcation of the corresponding feeling states of bashfulness and humility becomes recurrent to the extent that Shylock’s choleric disposition becomes radically altered, his hard heart made soft, and his nature subdued. For, as Babb notes, if a passion is very strong it can “establish the humor of corresponding qualities as the dominant humor ... making the passion which produced it habitual.”<sup>83</sup> In accordance with humoral logic, Shylock is now in a position to fully accept Antonio’s merciful proviso of conversion and gain acceptance from a man who has always scorned and disgraced him. Finding himself desirous of Antonio’s esteem, Shylock yields inevitably to his fear of shame and is unable to deny Antonio’s demand. No longer a parodic imitation, Shylock now evinces the abject affective contours of a distinctively bashful Christian disposition, and “bend[ing] low and in a bondman’s key, / With bated breath and whispering humbleness,” compliantly

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<sup>83</sup> Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 13.

submits himself to the request of this Christian intercessor, declaring, “I am content” (3.1.122-3; 389).

Taking the harsher aspects of Shylock’s conversion into account, Frank Whigham has noted how the Christians strive to recall “Shylock to subordination [by] attributing to him the ‘Christian’ qualities of mercy and gentleness.”<sup>84</sup> To Whigham’s list I would also add that the Christians strive to recall Shylock to subordination by attributing to him the related emotional virtues of shame, shyness, and humility. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the religious affective spectrum of shame, humility, and bashfulness, experienced before an esteemed other or group of others, reinforces the shy individual’s relative vulnerability, powerlessness, and inferiority in the social transaction, in turn endorsing the other’s preeminent status, power, and superiority. The extreme fears of shame and bashful humility that Antonio and the other Christians force Shylock to experience allows them gain the upper hand and to catch Shylock “upon the hip.” Because Antonio’s mercy is an unrepayable “gift” granted to Shylock, which allows for his life to be saved in this world and his soul in the next, it operates as a form of moral usury further indebting and locking Shylock to himself. The shame, guilt, and shyness Shylock experiences in Antonio’s presence effectively binds him to the Merchant. The Christians thus project upon Shylock the virtuous affective condition that they pride themselves and their own religious virtue upon, but which they nonetheless seek to overcome in their quest for power, mastery, honor, and esteem. *The Merchant of Venice* upholds a virtuous religious conception of shyness as a moral virtue, yet the terms of Shylock’s conversion

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<sup>84</sup> Whigham, “Ideology and Class Conduct,” 120.

expose the limitations, hypocrisies, and contradictions inherent in the play's representation of Christian emotional experience.

As we see Bassanio succumbing in the final act to the same emotional fate as Shylock, the play leaves us wondering: Is Christian shyness a virtue or a “naughty” vice? For as Bassanio himself reminds us, “there is no vice so simple but assumes / some mark of virtue on its outward parts” (3.2.81-2). In the face of imminent shame and rejection, Portia and Antonio, two of the most bashful and compliant characters in the play may be seen using their shyness and humility to their own advantage, overcoming their own affective limitations and securing power and social worth continuing to exploit in Bassanio the same range of abject religious emotions. When Portia, disguised as Balthasar, demands her husband's wedding ring, Bassanio is quite rightly loath to part with it. His shy conscience is inspired and he fears Portia's disapproval: “I will not shame myself to give you this” (4.1.425). It soon becomes clear that he owes a great deal more to Antonio, especially given the preceding events. In an attempt to reinforce his power over Bassanio, Antonio importunes his lover to give the ring away: “My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be value'd against your wife's commandment” (4.1.445-7). “Beset with shame and courtesy,” and fearing that “ingratitude” will “besmear” his “honour” in Antonio's eyes, Bassanio, finding himself “enforced to send [the ring] after” Bellario, humbly complies to his esteemed lover's request and delivers the ring (5.1.217-9). Such a betrayal, however, inevitably provides Portia with the opportunity to catch not only her husband but also his lover “upon the hip.” By revealing herself to be

the lawyer who saved Antonio's life, Portia appropriates for herself the "vantage to exclaim" on both men by forcing their feelings of shyness and guilt before her and inadvertently questioning their lack of shame and modesty: "what man is there so much unreasonable, / If [he] had pleased to have defended [the ring] / With any terms of zeal, wanted the *modesty* / To urge the thing held as a ceremony?" (5.1.202-6; mine).

The behavior of the Christians toward Shylock and even toward those they love is hypocritical, callous, and inexcusable—no individual should be emotionally coerced into a position of subordination—but in their "naughty world" can they really be faulted for wanting to possess the power, sovereignty, and self-mastery their Christian virtue so often prevents them from achieving? (5.1.91). As the cases of Shylock and Bassanio reveal, fears of shame and protestations of shyness and humility are oftentimes a detriment, allowing others to "conquer and get the mastery even of such as are of honest and gentle disposition."<sup>85</sup> Yet those who seek to rise above their shyness and humility in the play achieve a problematic level of pride and mastery over themselves and others that is revealed to be excessively corrupt, oppressive, and deeply flawed. Despite the Christian characters' secular and worldly aspirations, their shyness cannot be completely overcome. In the end, it proffers to them their inherent sense of religious virtue, holding the power to confirm their spiritual and moral worth, as well as social integrity, and ultimately securing their entry into the kingdom of

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<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, "Of Naughty Bashfulness," 164-5.

God. As the Beatitudes remind us: “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1999).

This excessive shamefastness which always overspreadeth and coverth them, who are not manly but faint-hearted and effeminate, not suffering them once to dare, to deny, to gainsay any thing, surely, would avert and withdraw judges from doing justice.

Plutarch, "Of Naughty Bashfulness," 1603<sup>1</sup>

Shame mollifieth the heart of a judge.... Man may behold an impunity and liberty of vices, and of execrable offences because a simple and bashful king dare not deny a request.

Pierre de la Primaudaye, "Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor," 1618<sup>2</sup>

## Chapter Four

### "The Extremest Shore Of Modesty:" *Measure for Measure* and the Politics of Shyness

In his *Basilikon Doron* King James reveals his oversensitivity to social judgment when he explains to his son that "kings being public persons by reason of their office and duty, are as it were set upon a public stage, [and] in the sight of all people ... setfoorth to the public view of the world.... Consequently, [king's are] subject to every man's censure."<sup>3</sup> With this statement in mind, Josephine Waters Bennett set out nearly fifty years ago to construct a royalist fantasy in which the character of Duke Vincentio, a "shy fellow" who loves the people" but does not like to be "stage[d] ... to their eyes," was "created to please and flatter the King."<sup>4</sup> The Duke, she argues, "invites the King's sympathy and understanding.... [Vincentio's] distaste for 'loud applause and aves vehement'" is

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<sup>1</sup>Plutarch, "Of Unseemly and Naughtie Bashfulness," *Moral Essays*, 7 Vols, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), 164.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre de la Primaudaye, "Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor," In *The French Academy* (London, 1618; New York: George Olm Verlag, 1972), 106-7.

<sup>3</sup>King James I, *Basilikon Doron, or His Majesties Instructions to his Dearest Son, Henry the Prince*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh, 1603). Reprinted in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 5.

<sup>4</sup>William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, The Arden Shakespeare, Ed. J.W. Lever (Croatia: Methuen, 1965). All quotes from the play are from this edition; Josephine Waters Bennett, *Measure for Measure as Royal Entertainment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 81.

a “generalization which establishes this attitude as one proper to rulers.”<sup>5</sup> The notion that Vincentio was conceived by Shakespeare as a means of complimenting James by paying homage to his characteristic social reserve is, however, a nostalgic and fanciful idea that appears overdetermined in light of contemporary early modern thinking about the predominantly negative effects of bashfulness on male political rule. As outlined by Plutarch and La Primaudaye, shyness was a major issue pertaining to ideas about effective rulership. Its disastrous political implications were of keen interest to Shakespeare who deftly explored them in his early portrayal of the “shamefaced Henry;” a weak and effeminate king whose Christian virtues of bashfulness and humility lead catastrophically to civil war, disgrace, tyranny, and eventual death (5.1.52).<sup>6</sup> While not an overt assertion that he was bashful, James’ remark is nevertheless intriguing and relevant and may be understood as a kind of trigger, proffering Shakespeare an extended opportunity to continue his investigation into the particular nuances of political shyness. In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare turns once again to the idea of the religious magistrate who struggles with being shy. Vincentio’s bashfulness is indicative of his Christian virtue but it is also a limiting political quality that holds ruinous outcomes for the state. Unlike King Henry, however, Vincentio demonstrates an ability to transform his shyness into a form of power. Under the auspices of religion, the Duke learns how to transfer the emotion onto others and cultivate it for his own advantage. In fact, Vincentio’s

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>6</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry the 6<sup>th</sup> Part Three*, ed. Randall Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

shyness becomes so potent a tool of government that it begins to operate as a deeply coercive mode of political control.

A striking feature of many of the figures in *Measure for Measure* is the way in which their modesty escalates into an excessive pride. As Gail Kern Paster maintains, “self-love is the essential social defect of the duke’s Vienna.”<sup>7</sup> Vincentio discovers “the city’s primary source of universality in the concentration of its appetites on sexuality in its alienated form – narcissistic self-regard.”<sup>7</sup> By adopting the disguise of friar Vincentio is able to gain insight into the desires and aspirations of his subjects; he realizes that this new knowledge can serve as an instrument of power. When his subjects act upon their urges and place themselves in ethically compromising situations the Duke-as-friar finds himself in the advantageous position of being able to cultivate and exploit their latent but misguided fears of shame, social judgment, and dishonor. As a means of arousing his subjects’ shy consciences Vincentio imparts the social and moral insight of the “judge not that ye be not judged” tenet from the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt. 7:1-2).<sup>8</sup> Although his deployment of scriptural logic produces morally reformatory and spiritually transformative effects within his subjects, the Duke’s pastoral care may also be understood as a coercive political tactic put into effect to disempower his people. Hidden under the guise of religion, the production of shyness the Duke engenders within his subjects operates as a highly repressive mode of discipline and restraint, driving many of them into subservient states of bashful humility and

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<sup>7</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 212, 208.

<sup>8</sup> All references to this quote are taken from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).



compliance. In the end, the play's major figures find themselves forced into social relationships that create chains of indebtedness to one another and, most importantly, to the Duke himself.

*Measure for Measure* therefore continues to replicate the interactional structures of power and dominance inherent in the quality of shyness previously exemplified in *The Merchant of Venice*. Like many of *Merchant's* shy characters the Duke is able to subvert the limitations associated with his own bashfulness, using that state as an inconspicuous means of "conquering" his subjects.<sup>9</sup> Through his characteristically bashful tendencies Vincentio is able to foster a system of government founded upon Christian humility and forgiveness, charitable pardons, and the giving of courtesies, which in turn give way to a kind of moral usury through which he is able to acquire honor, mastery, and power through the creation of constraining relational networks of credit and debt, gratitude and obligation.

The kind of statecraft Vincentio implements, designed to bolster his power and reputation as a ruler, shares affinities with James' own preoccupation with various political tactics through which he could "restrain [his subjects] with a reverent awe," opening "their mouths in the just praise of [his] so well moderated regiment." Although James urges his son to "cherish modesty ... foster humility and repress pride," his political ambition contradicts his penchant for Christian modesty and humility and reveals within him a kind of "filthy proud hypocrisy"

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, the name Vincentio derives from the Latin verb "Vinco/Vincere," which translates into English as "to conquer."

and “deceitful dissimulation.”<sup>10</sup> The potential for Vincentio’s bashfulness to shift into vainglorious, deceitful, and oppressive modes of rulership – though of a piece with James’ political strategy – is, however, especially disconcerting and points to a moral flaw in the Duke’s character. In this respect, Vincentio shares a close affinity with certain bashful Christians from *The Merchant of Venice*, such as Antonio, who learn how to manipulate their shyness and gain control over others yet have a difficult time evading the more serious moral and religious dictates of their own shy conscience. *Measure for Measure* may paint a flattering picture of a magistrate who is able to use his shyness as a means of achieving political authority; however, the level of moral insight attributable to Duke Vincentio’s character subtly exposes James’ religious hypocrisy and works toward critiquing the forms of pride, power, and vanity that modesty could escalate into if not properly governed in a Christian ruler. In view of Bennett’s assertion, Vincentio’s bashful characterization appears to have little in common with Shakespeare’s interest in pleasing the King. It seems rather that James’ dubious political theology provided a convenient occasion for Shakespeare to create Vincentio as a means of engaging in an extended thinking through of the quality of shyness and its deeper implications for Christian rule.

### **I. Duke Vincentio**

“A shy fellow was the Duke; and I believe I know the cause of his withdrawing.” (3.2.127-8)

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<sup>10</sup> James I, *Basilikon*, 27, 33, 18.

Amongst disguised monarchs of the Jacobean stage Shakespeare's duke is unique in adopting a religious disguise that allows him to not only visit his people anonymously and spy into their misdeeds and secret sentiments, but also to visit, as a ghostly father, the inner recesses of their souls. By withdrawing from the political sphere and adopting the particular disguise of friar, Vincentio appropriates the affective power of the confessional as a means of spiritually reforming his people through an appeal to their feelings of shame and guilt. As the early modern divine William Charke reminds us, the immediate goal of the confessional was to use shame as an active participant in the affective shaping of Christian conscience, thereby involving the subject in acts of contrition, spiritual conversion, and redemption:

Although offences be made in thought, let this judgment be without a witness, let God only see thee making thy confession, god which casteth not thy sins in thy teeth, but to set thy sins for thy shame.... I know a shy conscience cannot abide her own offences: These words a man would think should be plain enough, against the necessity of auricular confession, but Chryst crieth out plainly, that it is not his [God's] meaning, which requireth the examination to be in thought alone, and the judgment without witness, which cannot be if the priest do hear.<sup>11</sup>

Through his disguise as priestly confessor the Duke ostensibly engages in a process of arousing his subjects' shy consciences as a means of purifying their souls and bringing them closer to God and immortality.

In his influential introduction to the play J.W. Lever advances a corresponding view of Vincentio as a figure who assumes a benign, constructive, and even god-like status when he puts on his disguise as friar. As Lever explains, *Measure for Measure* "reveals itself as essentially a quest for self-knowledge on

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<sup>11</sup> William Charke, *A Treatise Against the Defense of Censure* (Cambridge, 1586), 54.

the part of individuals who are ... sinners, children of wrath, and in need of mercy.... In the course of the play [the characters'] self-ignorance is fully manifested, and they are subject to a process of moral re-education which would seem to be ... the true purpose of the Duke's experiment." According to Lever, "true virtue, like true authority rests in the Duke.... The ruler of Vienna combines spiritual with secular powers like a sovereign of the reformed Church. His direction of the moral conduct of individuals [and] his activities in his disguise as friar appear neither incongruous nor sacrilegious, ... but [rather] as a fitting manifestation of his dual role as head of Church and state."<sup>12</sup> This benevolent approach to the Duke has, however, been called into question through the wave of new historicist criticism which sees the Duke as a less ethically and spiritually motivated character who uses religion to achieve an unprecedented level of power over his subjects. As Steven Mullaney observes, the "*psychotyranni* of auricular, sacramental confession" was one way in which the Church exercised its power to "sit in the consciences of men."<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Dollimore likewise observes how religion in this play stands out as a "a form of ideological control which work[s] in terms of internalized submission." In his role as friar, Vincentio is able to reinstate patriarchal values more "insidiously for being ostensibly 'caring' rather than openly coercive."<sup>14</sup> My own approach to the Duke falls somewhere in between Lever's spiritually oriented view and the new historicist approach which

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<sup>12</sup> Lever, Introduction, xciv, lxxxii.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Mullaney, "Apprehending Subjects, or the Reformation in the Suburbs," In *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 99, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*," In *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca and Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1994), 82.

rejects it. While it is true that the Duke morally reforms his subjects, it is also the case that the sense of shame and shyness he both cultivates and exploits within them in order to do so operates as a highly repressive mode of governance, control, and restraint. Despite the element of power Vincentio is able to achieve over his people through his manipulation of religious practice, I believe that he cannot be entirely divorced from the inherent sense of spiritual value and genuine Christian feeling that older critics like Lever ascribe to him.<sup>15</sup>

In developing an account of the Duke's reliance on religious practice as a mode of political control new historicist criticism tends to do away with the significance of religion in the play by dissolving it completely into the sphere of politics. Quoting Richard Hooker, Dollimore further notes that religion in *Measure for Measure* is merely "a politic devise."<sup>16</sup> In her book *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England*, Debora K. Shuger offers a contrasting approach by suggesting that the Duke is more "concerned with saving souls, not normalizing behavior."<sup>17</sup> Although Shuger doesn't fully work through Vincentio's motives, and her argument appears simplistic in its undervaluation of the Duke's questionable interest in using religion to discipline his subjects, her appeal to the "prince's moral virtue [as] inseparable from his sacralty" does tend to shed light

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<sup>15</sup>Other older critics who take the same view of the Duke as a genuinely benevolent and divine figure include G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 74; Roy Battenhouse, "Measure for Measure and the Christian Doctrine of Atonement," *PMLA* 61.4 (1946), 1032; Elizabeth M. Pope, "The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Survey* 2 (1949): 66-82; Nevill Coghill, "Comic Form in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Survey* 8 (1955): 14-27; Arthur Kirsch, "The Integrity of *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975): 89-103.

<sup>16</sup>Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance," 81.

<sup>17</sup>Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 136. Shuger's work appears to reflect much older criticism that sees the Duke as a genuinely benevolent and divine figure.

on the way historicist arguments neglect the Duke's intrinsic sense of ethical integrity and Christian virtue. While I follow new historicist thought, to a certain extent, I do depart from it in considering what Shuger refers to as the Duke's "profound religious aura," which seems to me to be reflected in the contradictory way Vincentio orchestrates the arousal of his own shy conscience, turning the same religious practices he impresses upon his subjects back upon himself.<sup>18</sup>

Mullaney notes that in the final act "when the Duke stages his return, he does not relinquish the power he has enjoyed as confessor . . . but rather translates that power into a new form and forum."<sup>19</sup> I would argue, however, that the power Vincentio assumes over his subjects through his confessional attempts to cultivate their shyness becomes compromised by the fact that he deliberately implicates himself in a scene of public shame. By unmasking himself as friar and exposing his own sins of pride and lust to his people, Vincentio endeavors to recapitulate his stance of Christian virtue, bashfulness, and humility as a means of spiritually atoning for the coercive forms of power and dominance he has achieved over his people.

The central movement that new historicist critics trace in the play, from externalized aggressive modes of political power into the more inconspicuous yet controlling sphere of religion, is of a piece with the Duke's bashfulness; a Christian emotional virtue that negatively impacts his ability to rule his people with the level of force necessary to adequately control them. As Vincentio points out to the friar, Vienna is normally governed through "strict statutes and most

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<sup>18</sup> Shuger, *Political Theologies*, 62, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Mullaney, "Apprehending Subjects," 104.

biting laws, / The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades, / Which for this fourteen years we have let slip” (1.3.19-22). Discipline and restraint should be inculcated through the fear of violent punishment; however, Vincentio’s shyness is the reason he has been unable to enforce the series of harsh punishments that would lead to the reformation of the state:

Sith ‘twas my fault to give the people scope,  
 ‘Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them  
 For what I bid them do: for we bid this be done,  
 When evil deeds have their permissive pass,  
 And not the punishment. Therefore indeed, my father,  
 I have on Angelo impos’d the office;  
 Who may in the ambush of my name strike home,  
 And yet my nature never in the fight to do in slander. (1.3.34-41).

As Cynthia Lewis explains, Vincentio is in “the process of overcoming his own fear of being judged as a judge.”<sup>20</sup> Because of his fear of being criticized by his people as a harsh and tyrannical ruler, the Duke has “neglected that which he ought to do in the administration of government, in passing of judgments, and in other actions.”<sup>21</sup> As La Primaudaye reminds us, “shame mollifieth the heart of a judge ... so that shame, wherein want of prudence is very evil and very hurtful, not only to those that are touched therewith, but often procureth great evils to Communalities and Common-wealths.... Governors, Magistrates, and Judges, as of a foolish baseness and cowardliness of mind, for fear to be blamed and reproved by the ignorant multitude bow and bend to another man’s beck against right and equity ... [such] that man may behold an impunity and liberty of vices and of execrable offences.”<sup>22</sup> In accordance with early modern views of shyness

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<sup>20</sup> Cynthia Lewis, “‘Dark Deeds Darkly Answered’: Duke Vincentio and Judgment in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983), 285.

<sup>21</sup> Plutarch, “Of Naughty Bashfulness,” 171.

<sup>22</sup> La Primaudaye, “Of Shame, Shamefastness, and Dishonor,” 106-7.

as a political fault, Vincentio's bashfulness has contributed to his own failure as a ruler. The Duke's shyness, born of his "love" for the people and his consequent oversensitivity to their "slander," has caused an inability to punish his subjects, which has in turn led to the disorder of the state. Unable to govern his people with the necessary force, the Duke has unwittingly caused the near moral and spiritual bankruptcy of his subjects. Bereft of any sense of self-restraint, the people of Vienna have, "like disobedient children, taken advantage of their fond father," giving themselves over to their appetites and animalistic impulses.<sup>23</sup>

As Cynthia Lewis notes, the Duke's perception of himself as a "shy fellow" who is incapable of inflicting punishment on his people out of a bashful fear of being reproached by them has compelled him to acknowledge a "taint in his manner of ruling," and by extension, a need to appoint a deputy severe enough to carry out the law in his stead.<sup>24</sup> He thus recognizes the urgency of deputizing Angelo, a "man of stricture and firm abstinence" (1.3.12). Unlike the Duke, Angelo will be a strong magistrate who will "put transgression to't" because he prides himself on his "gravity" and on his ability to "rebate" softer "motions of the sense" that would incline him to charitable leniency (1.4.57-61). Graham Bradshaw has suggested that Vincentio realizes he is "a negligent governor who believes that he must confront, but still wants to evade, a problem which he has helped to create."<sup>25</sup> While it is easy to read the Duke's election of Angelo and his retirement from public life as simply an *evasion*, a number of his statements appear to qualify his withdrawal from socio-political life, so that what appears to

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<sup>23</sup> Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance," 77.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, "Dark Deeds," 275.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 166-7.



be a “common case of shyness” is perhaps, as Lewis notes, a far more calculated political response. The Duke’s withdrawal and his appointment of Angelo may be read as another way to reform his subjects and to strengthen his own political position. His friar’s habit allows him to govern his people “without risking his ‘name’ or fully accepting the responsibilities of his office.”<sup>26</sup> The Duke turns to religion, adopting the role of friar as a way of transforming his bashfulness into a mode of political authority. Vincentio’s description of his subjects as “headstrong jades” underscores his understanding of them as a group of wild, irrational and unrestrained “shy colts” who have not yet taken into their mouths the “curbed bit” of shame.<sup>27</sup> By appropriating the affective and self-reflexive powers of the confessional, Vincentio overcomes the negative political consequences associated with his shyness. His religious disguise allows him to develop a powerful and effective form of rule by exploiting his subjects’ deepest fears of shame and disgrace for his own magisterial advantage.

Although the Duke stands out in this respect as a self-interested Machiavellian manipulator, a kind of “pious fraud” or “substitute priest” who sacrilegiously assumes and abuses religious power for his own political advancement, he does evince a genuine sense of religious virtue that is itself supported by a deep moral complexity.<sup>28</sup> I think Harry Berger is correct in noting the way new historicist critics like Dollimore tend to “demonize [the Duke]” by

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<sup>26</sup> Lewis, “Dark Deeds,” 276-77.

<sup>27</sup> I am referring here to the Cicero quote in which he likens his sense of grief to “shy colts” who “admit into their tender mouths the curbed bit,” *The Five Days Debate at Cicero’s House in Tusculum*, trans. Anonymous (London: Abel Swalle, 1863), 196.

<sup>28</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 366; Alexander Leggatt, “Substitution in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.3 (1988), 357.

suppressing the “odd mixture of unruliness, irresponsibility, and tender conscience, of bumptiousness and diffidence that characterizes his negotiations with his subjects.” According to Berger, Vincentio tends to obscure his corrupt designs and intents through the erroneous knowledge that he is a benevolent friar who is simply “wield[ing] one’s power for good rather than evil.” The Duke’s pastoral concern for his subjects, however, fails to operate as a means of exoneration throughout the play and, as Berger further notes, he finds himself prone to troubling moments of self-apprehension and “pricklings of bad conscience.” Berger’s persuasive reading of Vincentio leads him to “premise moral competence in the Duke, such that he could be expected to be as anxious about his behavior as the critics are. Whether he is, and, if so, how the anxiety manifests itself, remains to be seen.”<sup>29</sup>

In response to Berger’s query, I suggest that the Duke displays a marked sense of social “anxiety” around his subjects. Although he attempts to evade the dictates of his own shy conscience for the sake of achieving an unprecedented level of political authority, Vincentio is unable to withstand his own inherent sense of morality and Christian virtue. At the same time as the Duke seeks to solidify political power, he arranges his own exposure and deliberately places himself within the abject emotional space of shame and humility a means of transforming himself into what James Knapp calls a “penitent ethical subject.”<sup>30</sup>

The penitential process through which Vincentio seeks to reinstate his stance of

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<sup>29</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 337-339, 354.

<sup>30</sup> James A. Knapp, “Penitential Ethics in *Measure for Measure*,” in *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 259.

Christian shyness challenges new historicist overestimations of the Duke's spiritual corruption and distances religion from the sphere of power and politics.

## II. Angelo

"Tis not impossible  
But one, the wicked'st caitiff on the ground,  
May seem as shy, as grave, as just, as absolute,  
As Angelo" (5.1.55-58)

The Duke's interaction with Mariana, though coming later on in the play, reveals that he has been engaged in priestly activity since before the play began (4.1.7-10). Vincentio has been a source of great "comfort" to Mariana, but his visits with her have also allowed him to become familiar with the questionable moral background of the man he will make his replacement. Angelo was previously "affianced" to Mariana but ended the marriage contract when he found out her brother lost her dowry at sea, wherein he "swallowed his vows whole, pretending in her discoveries of dishonor . . . and he a marble to her tears, is washed with them, but relents not" (3.1.226-30). The situation points to Angelo's ability to "blunt his natural edge" and his inability to "relent," however, his capacity for emotional restraint is undermined by the fact that he could easily reject Mariana because he loved her dowry more than her person. Angelo's conduct toward Mariana reveals him to be a man of exceptional "stricture" who "never feels / The wanton stings and motions of the sense," yet it also discloses his sins of avarice and pride. Angelo's questionable history, coupled with his severity, suggest that the Duke's election of him is part of a preconceived political agenda. Vincentio thus reveals to the Friar a specious ulterior motive underlying

his election of Angelo, which is to “see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be” (1.4.52-3). One can only agree with David Bevington that the Duke appoints Angelo because he “obviously expects Angelo to fall.”<sup>31</sup> Angelo’s anticipated fall will provide the Duke with the opportunity to implicate him in a process of moral and spiritual edification. The Deputy’s severity will also promote the absent Duke’s reputation for leniency, and will thus offset as well as augment the disciplinary measures concealed within his religious practice.

Vincentio’s knowledge of Angelo’s moral character and his troubling expectations for him become more apparent upon his official election, whereupon the Duke offers his substitute some practical magisterial advice:

There is a kind of character in thy life  
That to th’observer doth thy history  
Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
Thyself on thy virtues, they on thee.  
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, ‘twere all alike  
As if we had them not.” (1.1.27-35)

As Vincentio implies, Angelo must not presume to think that he, his past “history,” or his future actions as magistrate are “undiscernible” (5.1.366). Rather, Angelo should come to realize that his actions are open to “observation,” and hence, always subject to the critical gaze of others. In his new role as deputy, Angelo must be virtuous because his public visibility leaves him open to scrutiny and censure. Although the lines are directed at the Deputy they tend to shed light into the Duke’s own profound sense of moral consciousness. According to Jonathan Goldberg, the Duke’s words “bifurcate into a complex set of

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<sup>31</sup> David Bevington, Introduction to *Measure for Measure*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig and David Bevington (Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1973), 834.

relationships between self-perception and other-perception,” which dramatized in the Jacobean period a conflict “conveniently housed in a single word, ‘conscience,’ a word that contains both the idea of knowledge of the self and the knowledge of others.”<sup>32</sup> In view of the social arousal of conscience that Goldberg elucidates, we might note how the self/other dynamic embedded in the Duke’s advice gives way to a theory of the shy conscience as an operation that sustains Vincentio’s moral virtue. The Duke’s visibility, coupled with his excessive fear of shame and negative social judgment, restrains him from engaging immoral and sinful conduct and ensures the proper illumination of his “virtue.”

Angelo is apprehensive about taking Vincentio’s place. He implores the Duke to reconsider: “let there be some more test made of my metal, / Before so noble and so great a figure / Be stamp’d upon it” (1.1.49-51). The monetary language Angelo adopts here is significant and makes an extended appearance in the Duke’s prolonged speech regarding the transparency of Angelo’s “virtues:”

Spirits are not finely touch’d  
 But to fine issues; nor nature never lends  
 The smallest scruple of her excellence  
 But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
 Herself the glory of a creditor  
 Both thanks and use. (1.1.35-40)

Lever suggests that *Measure for Measure* is primarily “concerned with the broader humanist problem of coordinating the spiritual and natural forces of personality for the welfare of man upon earth.” As he further notes, “Christianity taught that man as a spiritual being was endowed with the divine gift of grace, which he might store for his soul’s salvation, exercise in his dealings with his

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 115.

fellow men, or decline from sin through his own free will. At the same time, he was also a part of the natural world, moved by the same urges and endowed with the same functions as other creatures.”<sup>33</sup> In view of Lever’s comments one can note how the Duke’s lines conflate the fiscal, material language of coins and usury with the grace-nature or corresponding soul-body relationship. Angelo himself picks up on the Duke’s mercantile language and, doubting his own capacity for virtue and restraint, begins to view himself as a flawed soul or impure coin. In this regard, however, Angelo’s assessment of himself as imperfect “metal” has the effect of undermining the Duke’s virtue and credibility by presenting him as a kind of “thrifty creditor” who lends Angelo his power and authority and puts him into circulation in the social world so that he may be repaid through the “use” of “nature” with “glory” and “thanks.”<sup>34</sup>

Angelo immediately seizes the absolute power he was given and proceeds to enforce the law with severity by invoking the statute that makes fornication a capital offense (1.1.65). Claudio and Juliet are the first victims of this edict. Their unbridled lust for one another prompted the “stealth of their most mutual entertainment.” However, as Claudio makes sure to clarify, he slept with Juliet upon a “true contract.” Juliet, he notes, “is fast my wife / Save that we do the denunciation lack / Of outward order” (1.2.134-7). According to English marriage law, all that was required for a marriage to be valid was the declared consent of

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<sup>33</sup> Lever, Introduction, lxxiii, lxxii.

<sup>34</sup> Berger also discusses the Duke’s usurious practices, questioning how “Angelo’s fall will restore – pay back with interest – excellence and glory to his thrifty creditor,” *Making Trifles of Terrors*, 345.

both parties.<sup>35</sup> However, as Ernest Schanzer explains, in order to prevent “the obvious evils to which such laws were bound to give rise, the Church inveighed vehemently against the consummation of clandestine marriages before they had been publicly solemnized,” an act which it regarded as fornication and a deadly sin.<sup>36</sup> Claudio and Juliet’s actions thus reveal something of a moral contradiction. Even though they consider one another man and “wife,” and haven’t technically done anything wrong, they find themselves guilty of having contracted a secret marriage and of having consummated it, which is crime punishable by death under the law against fornication that Angelo has revived.

Angelo’s harsh implementation of the law against premarital fornication thus has the effect of heightening the sinfulness of Juliet’s pregnancy, and provides a starting point through which the duke-as-friar can begin manufacturing her shy conscience. Inside the prison the Duke contrives to teach Juliet how to “arraign her conscience,” first by condemning her “blister’d report,” and then by making her understand the moral gravity of her transgression through the shame and dishonor she has incurred:

‘Tis meet so daughter; but lest you do repent,  
As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,  
Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven  
Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it  
But as we stand in fear. (2.3.29-34)

As the Duke explains, the “sorrow” that comes from an ill report may be a beneficial experience, since consciousness of sin and repentance are produced through the weight of social judgment. The friar clearly succeeds in appealing to

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<sup>35</sup> On this matter see Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 145.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1963), 76.

Juliet's spiritual and moral sense, for according to Christopher Tilmouth, she begins to develop the social perspective necessary to feel shame and begins to worry "as much about how [her] soul will appear in the public eye as about what God will make of it."<sup>37</sup> Having learned her lesson, Juliet confesses, "I do repent me as it is an evil / And take the shame with joy" (35-6). The entire process may begin to preclude future trouble, whereupon Juliet's shame, like a kind of "prophet," will allow her to "look in a glass that shows what future evils ... so in progress to be hatch'd and born, / Are now to have no successive degrees, / But ere they live, to end" (2.2.95-100). Juliet's experience of shame has a morally and spiritually reformatory quality; however, it is also a disciplinary mechanism aiding in the production of the quality of shamefastness or shyness and allowing her to develop a prospective fear of disgrace that will restrain her from engaging in sinful acts in the future. Under the terms of the law, Vincentio is thus able to turn Juliet's sexuality into a mortal sin and thereby construct within her the metaphoric "bridle of shame" as a means of governing this "headstrong jade."

The Duke's more private and internalized mode of discipline may be contrasted with Angelo's method of governing in the old theatre of punishment. Under the revived fornication law Claudio's impulses have lapsed into the conditioned response of animal instinct. As he admits to Lucio, "our natures do pursue / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil: and when we drink, we die" (1.2.120-3). Unable to decline from sin of his own free will, and having given himself over to his own animalistic urges, Claudio continues to think

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<sup>37</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences," In *The Renaissance Conscience*, ed. Harold Braun and Edward Vailence (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 70.



of himself in animalistic terms as a “horse whereon the governor doth ride” (1.2.149). By violently penalizing Claudio and imposing the “needful bits and curbs” on his “headstrong jade” through sentence of death, Angelo believes that the people of Vienna will come to fear punishment to the extent that they will restrain themselves from committing the same act in the future. As he explains, the subjects of Vienna will refrain from engaging in “evil” once they witness how Claudio “ha[s] answer’d for his deed” (2.2.92-4).

When we first see Claudio, he is being carted through the streets. Clearly suffering from a paroxysm of shame, he asks the Provost, “Why dost thou show me thus to th’world?” and begs to be hidden away, “bear me to prison, where I am committed” (1.2.108-9). As Laura Knoppers observes, however, such a humiliating display and the threatened draconian punishment of death do not stigmatize nor reform Claudio, who is widely viewed as ‘a young man / More fit to do another such offense / Than die for this’” (2.4.179). Claudio’s lack of guilt is emphasized by Lucio when he points out that the remorse generated through the “moralizing of people under arrest has never been convincingly defended” (115).<sup>38</sup> As Lucio states, “I had as lief have the foppery of freedom as the morality of imprisonment” (1.2.125-6). Moreover, Claudio’s sense of sin is called into question by his condemnation of Angelo as proud and tyrannous:

Whether the tyranny be in his place,  
Or in his eminence that fills it up,  
I stagger in – but this new governor...  
Now puts the drowsy and neglected act  
Freshly on me; ’tis surely for a name. (1.2.152-4, 158-60)

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<sup>38</sup> Laura Lunger Knoppers, “(En)gendering Shame: *Measure for Measure* and the Spectacles of Power,” *English Literary History* 23 (1993), 462.

In the face of unbridled power, Claudio's sense of shame continues to prove inherently weak as he begins to see himself as the only nominally guilty victim of a tyrannical ruler. Yet, however accurate Claudio's accusation against Angelo may be, it does appear to be complicated by his subsequent consideration of "the words of heaven," and by his conclusion that his punishment "is just." As much as Claudio believes himself to be morally blameless, the severity of the law against fornication does have an effect on him, for he begins to fathom an afterlife for his soul and perceive that his actions have led to the "death of the spirit wrought when one abandons oneself to unrelieved natural impulse."<sup>39</sup>

As second-in-command Escalus requests that Angelo "be keen and rather cut a little" than send Claudio to death merely for a "name" (2.1. 5-6). His goal is to pacify Angelo's tyrannical pride and attempt to gain Claudio's pardon by "labor[ing] for the poor gentleman to the extremest shore of [his] modesty" (3.2.245-6):

Let your honor know –  
 Whom I believe to be most straight in virtue  
 That in the working of your own affections,  
 Had time coher'd with place, or place with wishing,  
 Or that the resolute acting of your blood  
 Could have attain'd th'effect of your own purpose,  
 Whether you had not some time in your life  
 Err'd in this point, which now you censure him,  
 And pull'd the law upon you. (2.1.8-16)

The lines summarize the principle of universal judgment adumbrated in *The Sermon on the Mount* from which the play takes its title: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what

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<sup>39</sup> Darryl Gless, *Measure for Measure: The Law and the Convent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 239.

measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7: 1-2).<sup>40</sup> According to the passage, it would be unfair and hypocritical of a judge to punish another for a fault of which he is himself guilty. The lines, as Julia Reinhard Lupton notes, condition moral self-knowledge by “insisting that the magistrate examine himself before judging others,” an operation that is itself nested in a social sphere. For the magistrate only comes to judge his own actions through the weight of counter judgment – “with what measure ye judge, *ye shall be judged.*” The prospective fear of how he will be judged guides the judge toward “acknowledging [his] own guilt,” which is, as Lupton further explains, “a conscience of sin as much inherited as performed, and directed towards desires and deeds.” Having been externally accessed, the judge’s “conscience of sin,” as Lupton notes, ultimately leads him to grant “mercy and forgiveness toward others.”<sup>41</sup> In considering the circular nature of judgment intrinsic to *The Sermon on the Mount*, the scriptural passage thus appears to encapsulate a theory of the shy conscience in which one’s externalized fear of shame and negative social judgment gives way to a heightened state of moral consciousness. Here, Escalus attempts to incline Angelo to charitable mercy by provoking his state of moral shyness. If Angelo judges Claudio harshly and Angelo is guilty of the same crime, he must necessarily consider that he will be judged in the same way if his sinful desires and deeds ever come to light.

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<sup>40</sup> *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

<sup>41</sup> Julia Reinhardt Lupton, “Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography in *Measure for Measure*,” *Exemplaria* 2.2. (1990): 386.

Shakespeare therefore appears to be developing an important link between the “judge not” tenet and an early modern conception of shyness. The connection between the two is made especially obvious in a passage from a 1577 pamphlet entitled *Master George Sanders, a worshipful citizen of London*. The tract, which recounts the detection and execution of a woman who conspired with her lover to murder her husband, concludes with this *moralitas*:

We be all made of the same mould, printed with the same stamp, and imbued with the same nature that the offenders are.... That they are fallen, it was of frailty, wherefrom we be no more privileged than they.... Their faults came into the open Theatre, and therefore seemed the greater to our eyes, and surely they were great indeed; neither are ours the less, because they lie hidden in the covert of our heart. God the searcher of all secrets seeth them.... I say not this as a cloaker of offenses... but to repress our hasty judgments and uncharitable speeches, that we might both detest wickedness with perfect hatred and rue the persons with Christian modesty, knowing that with what measure we mete unto others, with the same it shall be moten to us again.<sup>42</sup>

The idea that *The Sermon on the Mount* lends itself to an early conceptualization of shyness is evinced in the quote’s concluding scriptural tag where the circular pattern of social judgment is explained in terms of what the pamphlet calls “Christian modesty.” In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare develops this association through a number of social encounters similar to that which takes place between Escalus and Angelo, where the judge’s *shy conscience* is aroused – or rather there is an attempt to arouse it – through another’s appeal to the principle of universal judgment. The moral insight generated through the workings of the “judge not that ye be not judged” principle is meant to engender the judge’s sense of “Christian modesty.” Modesty leads to one’s capitulation to another’s request

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<sup>42</sup> Arthur Golding, *A Brief Discourse of the Late Murther of Master George Sanders, a Worshipfull Citizen of London* (London, 1577), B4r-B6v; mine. Also quoted in Shuger, *Political Theologies*, 126.

for pardon, and it results in charitable mercy. In these and similar interactions, bashfulness may be seen working in its dual manifestations as an agent of both morality and compliance, as one state gives way to the other.

At this point, however, the fear of social judgment Escalus intends to arouse through his appeal to *The Sermon on the Mount* does little to influence Angelo's decision to execute Claudio. As a man who "scarce confesses that his blood flows," Angelo finds it especially easy to repudiate Escalus' argument, making a virtual "scarecrow" of the "law" of universal judgment (2.1.1). Angelo does not "deny" that "the jury passing on the prisoner's life / May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two, / Guiltier than him they try," but even if he is "tempted" and "falls" it is, as he explains, only "what's open made to justice, that Justice seizes. / What knows the laws / That thieves do pass on thieves" (1.2.18-23). Despite the Duke's warnings about the necessity for the ruler to act publicly, Angelo believes that his power over the state exempts him from surveillance and judgment. Furthermore, his reputation for moral restraint – explicitly described in the play with reference to his "shyness," "gravity," and "justice" – restrains him from engaging in transgressive behavior and, in the unlikely event of its occurrence, to its public acknowledgement (5.1.55-58). Believing himself to be morally "precise," Angelo denies Escalus' request for leniency, and in his state of moral arrogance invites upon himself the same sentence he harshly imposes upon Claudio: "When I that censure him do so offend, / Let mine own judgment pattern out my death / And nothing come in partial" (29-31).

Whereas Escalus fails to arouse Angelo's shy conscience Isabella appears to succeed. The meeting between Isabella and Angelo replicates the interview between him and Escalus and sets off a series of interactions in which certain characters "labor" through "the extremest shore of [their] modesty" to make those they confront yield to their requests through the provocation of their bashfulness. The social dynamic inherent in shyness reflects the power structure latent in the emotion whereby, as Plutarch explains, "whosoever is most importunate, will ever tyrannize and domineer over such a one, forcing by his impudence the bashfulness of the other." As Plutarch further notes, shy individuals who are desirous of social honor and esteem have "not the heart to refuse and deny any thing" and therefore end up complying with another's unreasonable demands and allowing the other person to "conquer and get the mastery of such as are of gentle disposition." Because bashful men do not know how to "pronounce one negative syllable that is, No," they oftentimes "give place and yield . . . to the demands and requests of everie man; object[ing] themselves to their will and pleasure for fear lest one should say of him Lo what a hard man is this."<sup>43</sup> In her attempts to "force" the shy consciences of both Angelo and her brother, Isabella, in particular, stands out as a remarkably bold, "importunate," and domineering figure. Isabella thus shares a remarkable similarity to the Duke, for like him she attempts to transform her shyness into a form of power through an appeal to the scriptural logic of the "judge not tenet."

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<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, "Of Naughty Bashfulness," 164-5.

### III. Isabella

“Can it be  
That modesty more betrays our sense  
Than women’s lightness.” (2.2.168-71)

Initially, Isabella stands out as a model of dutiful femininity, following the prescriptions of cultural authority and the emphasis it placed on the related qualities of modesty, shamefastness, and bashfulness in its effort to preserve blood lineage through women’s chastity. Isabella fanatically “guide[s] herself by the zeale of her honor and the bridle of shamefastness.”<sup>44</sup> It was believed that women were innately timid due to their colder humoral complexions; however, despite their possession of a “native shamefastness,” bashfulness continued to be stringently enforced by conduct writers as a means of maintaining women’s sexual purity.<sup>45</sup> In *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, Vives advises that when a young girl “goeth forth abroad [she should] hide her face ... with scarcely an eye open to see her way withal.... Now when she is in the company of people, let her show great soberness, both in countenance and all the gesture of her body, ... let her not behold *men* much; nor think that they behold her.”<sup>46</sup> The emotional experience and display of bashfulness in the presence of men was meant to restrain women from acting upon incontinent impulses.

In *Measure for Measure* the nun Francesca acts as a mouthpiece for contemporary conduct literature ventriloquizing authors like Vives. As soon as Lucio approaches the convent, Francesca’s fear of sexual shame compels her

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<sup>44</sup> Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1613), 21.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (London: 1601), 74; on women’s coldness and its presumed contradictions refer to my discussion of the topic in chapter 1.

<sup>46</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (London, 1585). Reprinted in *Renaissance Women a Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England*, ed. Kate Aughterson (New York: Routledge, 1996), 72-3.

timid withdrawal at the sound of “a man’s voice” (1.4.6). Her anxiety in male company is projected onto Isabella, and when Lucio arrives she counsels her “not [to] show your face; / Or if you show your face, you must not speak” (1.4.12-3). The nuns in the convent demonstrate a “strict restraint” in the presence of men that Isabella wishes to cultivate at an even deeper level than she currently experiences. According to Vives, when young girls “begin to grow from child’s state [they are] given unto most lust of the body.”<sup>47</sup> In view of Vives’ assertion, Isabella’s wish for a “more strict restraint” reflects the underlying notion that her sexual urges have begun to increase. The play itself draws out this paradox through the contradictory way in which the quality of feminine modesty – though meant to curb and conceal female sexuality – appears instead to both arouse and reveal it.

The imprisoned Claudio enlists Lucio to ask Isabella to meet with Angelo.

For Claudio knows that Isabella possesses:

A prone and speechless dialect  
Such as move men: Beside, she hath prosperous art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade. (1.3.172-5)

Although the silence and timidity Isabella’s modesty yields is as an obvious expression of her sense of virtue and reason, her feminine reticence and restraint paradoxically “moves” the men around her. As Claudio implies, there is a kind of sexuality at the core of Isabel’s personality that may be registered through her ability to “play” with “discourse.” As Linda Boose notes, “the talkative woman is frequently imagined as synonymous with the sexually available woman, her open

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 69.



mouth the signifier for invited entrance elsewhere.”<sup>48</sup> Isabella’s verbal dilation necessarily bespeaks a kind of sexual dilation capable of overpowering her own sense of rational control, hence, her need for a “more strict restraint.”

Though doubtful about her own ability, Isabella is moved by the bond she feels for her brother and agrees to plead with Angelo (1.4.76-7). According to Josephine Bennett, when Isabella first approaches the Deputy she appears “yielding, submissive, feminine, and youthful,” all of which are related qualities that speak to her maidenly fear of shame and sexual dishonor.<sup>49</sup> Preoccupied with her sexual reputation, Isabella’s modesty is registered through her verbal inhibition and her inability to speak frankly about Claudio’s fornication:

There is a vice that most I do abhor,  
And most desire should meet the blow of justice  
For which I would not plead, but that I must,  
For which I must not plead, but that I am  
At war’ twixt will and will not. (29-33)

Isabella is especially conscious of her standing in Angelo’s eyes and is therefore unable to mention Claudio’s sexual misconduct for fear that it will attract attention to her own burgeoning sexuality and infringe upon her honor. Her fear of shame before the Deputy gives way to an awkward case of shyness, fostering a kind of “speechless dialect” through which she offers a series of riddling statements that repeat one another but never quite state the point. Her bashful inhibition is obvious and, as Bennett further notes, Angelo “himself is forced by

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Women’s Unruly Member,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991), 196; for additional work on women’s garrulity and its link to feminine sexuality see Peter Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Bennett, *Measure as Royal Entertainment*, 65.

her timidity to encourage her” as he continuously asks her “Well: what’s your suit?” ... “Well: the matter?” (28, 32).<sup>50</sup> She finally raises the issue: “I have a brother is condemn’d to die; / I do beseech you, let it be his fault, / And not my brother,” but Angelo rejects her request (34-6). As if relieved, she compliantly acquiesces, proclaiming the law to be “just but severe” and abruptly attempts to leave.

Fortunately, Lucio is on hand to encourage Isabella during her encounter:

Give’t not o’er so. – To him again,  
entreat him,  
Kneel down before him, hang upon his gown;  
You are too cold. If you should need a pin,  
You could not with a more tame tongue desire it. (2.2.43-6)

Through careful blocking of Isabella’s movements, Lucio attempts to embellish her demonstration of modesty so as to draw attention to the underlying sense of sexual unruliness her bashfulness is meant to restrain. As Knoppers observes, “Isabella’s kneeling and asking forgiveness for fornication – albeit her brother’s fornication – is in its cultural context both expiatory and erotic.”<sup>51</sup>

When Angelo rejects Isabella’s request to pardon Claudio, Isabella, incited by Lucio, endeavors to incline him to charitable mercy as Escalus did through an appeal to universal judgment:

How would you be  
If He, which is the top of judgment, should  
But judge you as you are? O think on that,  
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
Like man new made. (75-9)

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>51</sup> Knoppers, “Engendering Shame,” 463.

Lucio finds Isabella's argument shrewd and effective. He goads her on: "Ay, touch him: there's the vein; He will relent; / He's coming: I perceive it," (2.2.70, 125-6). Lucio is incapable of combining sexuality with either moral principle or emotional involvement. As Richard Wheeler suggests, Lucio's having gotten Kate Keepdown with child and then abandoning both reveals his tendency to "trivialize sexuality and morality [so as] to keep at a distance anxieties that go with the effort to integrate instinctual and moral obligations."<sup>52</sup> As Isabella's confrontation with Angelo continues, Lucio persists in trivializing Isabella's modesty through a series of indirect sexual puns that arouse her repressed natural impulses thereby transforming verbal pleading into a quasi-sexual encounter. Despite her display of shyness and humility, Isabella's sense of virtue and restraint thus appears to dissolve through Lucio's urging as her "tongue" becomes metaphorically "untamed" or unbridled. Overcome by the force of her natural impulses, Isabella begins to grow exceedingly bold and her recuperated capacity for persuasive discourse becomes, as Boose would say, "fraught with cultural signs resonating with a distinctly sexual kind of shame." Lucio's comments thus work in the context of the social encounter to arouse Isabella's repressed sexual energy, which is in turn sublimated into her scolding tongue; her "open mouth" connotes to Angelo her willingness for "invited entrance elsewhere."<sup>53</sup>

With her natural appetites released, Isabella is now in a position to confront the issue of Claudio's sexuality with more confidence and, in a highly

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 103.

<sup>53</sup> Boose, "Scolding Brides," 196.

effective manner, is able to project the same sin of lust onto Angelo. She thus boldly orders him:

Go to your bosom,  
 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
 That's like my brother's fault. If it confess  
 A natural guiltiness, such as is his,  
 Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue  
 Against my brother's life. (137-41)

Isabella's argument is so potent and so successful in large part because at the same time as she urges the law of universal judgment, asking Angelo to acknowledge his own guilt, she inspires his "natural guiltiness." The mixture of Isabella's bashful, yet highly sexualized modes of language and gesture has an extraordinary influence upon Angelo. In the end, he cannot understand how his appetite has been so violently "moved" by Isabella's "modesty.

As a man who has never felt "the wanton stings and motions of the sense," Angelo once again finds it especially easy to repudiate the notion of universal judgment inherent in *The Sermon on the Mount* (3.2.108). He thus tells Isabella it "is the law, not I, condemn your brother; / Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son, / It should be thus with him. He must die tomorrow" (80-3). However, as numerous of the play's commentators observe, no man is exempt from the taint of original sin, let alone the saint-like Angelo whose attempts to eradicate fornication in Vienna, and by extension within his own self, are fruitless. As Lucio notes, human sexuality is "impossible to extirp . . . till eating and drinking be put down" (3.2.98-99). Isabella seems to be of the same opinion, finding it difficult to believe that Angelo is a "motion unregenerative" completely immune to the "dribbling dart of love." She therefore accuses Angelo of pride and

tyranny, implying that he thrives on the power of punishing Claudio for the same sins of the flesh for which he claims to be exempt:

O, it is excellent  
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant.

But man, proud man,  
Dress'd in a little brief authority  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd –  
His glassy essence... (2.2.108-10, 118-121)

Isabella's condemnation of Angelo as a tyrannical ruler who condemns Claudio "for faults of his own liking" allows the Deputy to see his own sins of lust and pride clearly. He thus finds himself forced to confess that Isabella "speaks, and 'tis such sense / That my sense breeds with it" (44-5). Through Isabella's vituperation Angelo is turned into a kind of detached viewer of himself, looking into his own "glassy essence" through Isabella's eyes. Caught within her critical gaze, Angelo starts to perceive himself externally through what Christopher Tilmouth refers to as the objectifying perspective of a "shame-consciousness."<sup>54</sup> In realizing his newfound attraction to Isabella, and his corresponding desire to gain her opinion, Angelo is forced to acknowledge – through his burgeoning fear of shame – the inherent truthfulness of her accusation along with the immorality of his actions.

In an ironic reversal, Isabella's "modesty" arouses Angelo's state of moral shyness:

Can it be  
That modesty may more betray our sense  
Than women's lightness? ...  
O let her brother live!  
Thieves for their robbery have authority  
When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,

<sup>54</sup> Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences," 70.

That I desire to hear her speak again?  
And feast upon her eyes? (2.3.168-70, 175-79)

The weight of Isabella's negative judgment provokes Angelo's shy conscience, forcing him to become conscious of his guilt. The moral self-knowledge his bashfulness incites begins to moderate his pride and compel his mercy. He now appropriates rather than rejects the insight of *The Sermon on the Mount*, referring to the metaphor of the guilty thief from his previous meeting with Escalus as means through which to express the ineradicable consciousness of his own lust. Following the moral principle intrinsic in the "judge not that ye be not judged" tenet, Angelo starts to relent. Impelled by the force of "Christian modesty," he contemplates yielding to Isabella's request to pardon Claudio. Such is the power of Isabella's modesty, for through it she incites Angelo's own, subjugating him to her will and gaining a sense of mastery over him. As Angelo proclaims, "never could the "strumpet / With all her double vigor, art and nature, / Once stir my temper: but this virtuous maid / *Subdues me quite*" (2.2.183-85; mine).

When we next see Angelo in 2.4 he appears to be in the same state of mind as he was when we left him in 2.2, caught within an intensely moral struggle incited through the dictates of his shy conscience:

The state whereon I studied  
Is, like a good thing being often read,  
Grown sere and tedious; yea, my gravity,  
Wherein – *let no man hear me* – I take pride,  
Could I with boot change for an idle plume  
Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,  
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,  
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls  
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood.  
Let's write good angel on the devil's horn –  
'Tis not the devil's crest. (2.4.107-117; mine)

As Knoppers observes, Angelo “has gained his power from his reputation, from always being surrounded by people less chaste than himself.”<sup>55</sup> However, in coming to acknowledge that his “blood flows,” Angelo now begins to fear that his authority and reputation for moral “stricture” will suffer if the people of Vienna come to know of his lust for Isabella. The psychotyranny of his shy conscience takes over his mind. As he “thinks and prays” even to himself he is overly sensitive of the fact that other people may be overhearing his moral dilemma. Assailed by the prospect of social dishonor, Angelo’s fear of shame turns back upon himself “arraigning” his sense of ethical and spiritual consciousness: “Heaven hath my empty words, / Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue, / Anchors on Isabel” (2.4.2-4). Angelo’s state of moral shyness links his soul to “heaven,” to the realm of God. His shy conscience is meant to operate as a mechanism through which he is able to restrain from sin of his own free will; yet, the capacity for moral restraint that his modesty inspires proves too weak to curb his lust.

As Angelo admits, his prayers are useless: “Heaven in my mouth, as if I did but only chew his name, / And in my heart the strong and swelling evil of my conception” (5-7). Janet Adelman finds Angelo “immobilized in this instance by the discovery that he has a body.” Taking Adelman’s claim further we may see that Angelo’s consequent “awareness of his bodily self – his tongue, his mouth, his heart”<sup>56</sup> – enables his perception of himself as an embodied being. At the start of his downfall Angelo is imbued with a proper sense of moral responsibility. As

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<sup>55</sup> Knoppers, “Engendering Shame,” 463.

<sup>56</sup> Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s plays* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 93.

he contemplates his emotional state, he questions, “What’s this? Is it her fault or mine? / The tempter or the tempted, who sins most? / Not she; nor doth she tempt; *but it is I*” (2.2.163-5; mine). Lying by this shrinking “violet in the sun,” Angelo self-accusingly admits that he has done “as the “carrion does, ... corrupt with virtuous season” (166-7). He therefore believes strongly in the failure of his own reason and free will; however, in his state of moral dislocation he turns to what Douglas Trevor refers to as a kind of “humoral scapegoating,”<sup>57</sup> becoming increasingly reliant upon materialist explanations of the Galenic body to justify his uncontrollable passion. As his carnal appetite intensifies, overtaking his reason, Angelo’s perception of himself as a free agent is replaced by the belief that his sinful lust is an effect of his body and its fluids. “Blood, thou art blood,” he proclaims, as he continues to explain how his desire for Isabella is literally felt as a kind of physical bodily fluctuation, as hotter humors or spirits invade the blood and rush toward the “heart” causing it to “conceive” or grow bigger. As Adelman explains, the uncontrollable cardiovascular motion metaphorically parallels “the swelling of phallic potency and pregnancy.” In his own “embodiedness ... idealized and bodiless male presence is lost to [Angelo] as he becomes ... pregnant with his own sexuality.”<sup>58</sup> He is no longer able to view himself as an “immortal spirit” or “saint,” and instead envisages his corrupt and

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<sup>57</sup> Douglas Trevor, “Sadness in the *Faerie Queene*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 242; Note also Paster’s identification of the tendency for the early moderns to cite “their humors profligately to excuse lapses in behavior” as they invoked the “undeniably variety and obduracy of the physical body’s appetites and their resistance to reason,” “The Humor of It,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works. Vol 3*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 48. This, as I have explained, is an heretical view that undermined critical religious notions of free will and moral responsibility.

<sup>58</sup> Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 92-3.



putrefied soul as a grotesque maggot stirring in “carrion” flesh (2.2.167). Any consciousness of sin or sense of personal moral responsibility Angelo’s shyness would generate becomes subsumed, along with his immortal soul, within the fluids of the Galenic body.

In his reliance upon humoral conceptions of selfhood and experience, Angelo continues to ask himself:

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart:  
 Making both it unable for itself  
 And dispossessing all my other parts  
 Of necessary fitness?  
 So play the foolish throngs with one that swounds,  
 Come all to help him, and so stop the air  
 By which he should revive; and even so  
 The general subject to a well-wish’d king  
 Quit their own part and in obsequious fondness  
 Crowd to his presence, where their untaught love  
 Must needs appear offense. (20-29)

With all of the intensity of an epic simile, Angelo elucidates the torment of his inner moral struggle by fusing the language of shyness and social anxiety with that of the Galenic body. The opposing forces of “liberty” and “restraint” fight against one another as he compares the physiological process of blood “mustering to his heart” with the painful experience of a hoard of people crowding around a “well-wished king.” His desire for Isabella is rapidly turning into a foul and degrading lust, but his fear of shame arouses his guilty conscience and inhibits him from acting upon his baser impulses. Finally, however, the uncontrollable perturbations of the body take over his judgment and seduce his will, “dispossessing” his shy conscience of its “necessary fitness.” No longer able to be internally and affectively governed by the bridle of shame, Angelo gives his “sensual race the reign” (2.4.159).

Angelo's limited experience of "Christian modesty" is reflected in his decision to yield to Isabella's request to pardon Claudio, but only if she yields to his demand first. Isabella may, as Angelo explains, "redeem [her] brother / By yielding up [her] body to [his] will" (2.4.161-3). In an extended effort to arouse Angelo's shy conscience and make him aware of the immorality of the ultimatum he has just proposed, Isabella threatens him with shame and dishonor:

Seeming, seeming!  
I will proclaim thee, Angelo, look for't.  
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,  
Or with an outstretched throat I'll tell the world aloud  
What man thou art. (2.4.149-53)

Angelo's pride and his excessive confidence in his own social, moral, and political standing influence his response to Isabella. As he tells her, "Who will believe thee Isabel? / My unsoil'd name, the austereness of my life, / My vouch against you" (153-5). However unfazed by Isabella's threats Angelo may appear, his arrogance belies his own latent sensitivity to shame, which becomes increasingly obvious as he callously projects his fear of public dishonor back onto Isabel. In an effort to protect himself from the dishonor he realizes he may incur, Angelo endeavors to restrain Isabella from publicly denouncing him by reminding her that his unblemished reputation for moral austerity will so her "accusation outweigh." If ever Isabella were to bring his dark deeds to light she would "stifle in her own report, / And smell of calumny" (155-7).

In what appears to be a reversal of their previous meeting it is now Angelo who seeks to force Isabella's shy conscience with the intention that she will compliantly yield to his request and "give up [her] body" to his "will" (2.4.53). In order to drive Isabella into a state of bashful compliance Angelo

attempts to excite her sense of modesty by calling attention to the shyness she exhibits before him. He thus commands her to “lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes / That banish what they sue for” (2.4.159-163). As Brian Cummings observes, a woman’s blush “announces at once a scandalous confession and yet also a balancing reassertion of modesty, [blushing] is a self-defeating openness to fault which nonetheless triumphs by gaining simultaneous credit for moral honesty.”<sup>59</sup> The blush, as Cummings implies, is a mechanism of temperance that provokes and reveals – at the same time as it counteracts – feminine sexuality in the presence of men. By calling attention to Isabella’s blush, Angelo seeks to arouse the underlying sexuality that her modesty is meant to restrain. Richard Wheeler explains that Angelo’s “assault on Isabella’s virtue includes a vindictive attack upon the moral temperament that has suddenly failed him.”<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the more Angelo strives to arouse Isabella’s shy conscience the more he will provoke her sense of sexual desire and fracture her modesty. The breakdown of Isabella’s modesty will parallel the failure of his own state of moral shyness to act as a curb or restraint upon his lust.

Angelo nearly succeeds in achieving his goal when Isabella, in an extension of the recurrent monetary motif, likens herself to a false coin, proclaiming, “women are frail:”

As the glasses whereon they view themselves,  
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.  
Women? – Help, heaven! Men their creation mar

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<sup>59</sup> Brian Cummings, “Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World,” in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 31; see also Lever’s gloss on the blush as a “form of modesty that provoke[s] desire,” Introduction, 63.

<sup>60</sup> Wheeler, *Shakespeare’s Development*, 97.

In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;  
 For we are soft as our complexions are,  
 And credulous to false prints. (2.4.123-128)

As she envisions herself in a cracked mirror, Isabella's self-objectifying gaze betrays the narcissism that is so much a part of her nature. Her sexuality is augmented by the flattering knowledge that Angelo desires to sleep with her. Accordingly, the Deputy attempts to secure the deal by provoking Isabella's apparent vanity as he reminds her that her "credit with the judge" would be greatly enhanced if she were to "lay down the treasures of [her] body," an act through which she would be able to "fetch [her] brother from the manacles of the all-binding law" (2.4.90-94). Angelo has appealed to Isabella's modesty paradoxically arousing her sense of lust, and now he further attempts to make her yield to his will by heightening her bashful fear of dishonor. It is Angelo's intention that Isabella will be unable to refuse his sexual proposition due to her fear of losing honor and "credit with the judge." In Isabella, as in so many of the other characters, "erotic potential is deflected into narcissistic passion."<sup>61</sup> Like another impure coin circulating in what Robert N. Watson terms Vienna's "usurious biological economy," Isabella contemplates gaining the Deputy's "credit" and saving her brother by indulging her natural appetite and "giving up her body" to Angelo's will.<sup>62</sup>

Angelo's plan is to arouse Isabella's bashfulness as a means of unbridling her lust is especially cunning, however, it inevitably backfires. Isabella's modesty

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>62</sup> Robert N. Watson, "False Immorality in *Measure for Measure*: Comic Means, Tragic Ends," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990), 418.

does not rupture as he hoped it would, but rather escalates into a “more strict restraint:”

As much for my poor brother as myself;  
That is, were I under the terms of death  
Th’impression of keen whips I’d wear as rubies  
And strip myself to death as to a bed  
That longing have been sick for, ere I yield  
My body up to shame. (2.4.99-104)

The highly sexed language Isabella uses here reveals the potency of her lust; yet, as she goes on to declare, her sense of “longing” is tempered – and her chastity and honor maintained – through her fear of “shame” and sexual dishonor.

Although many critics have noted that Isabella’s modesty stands out as a testament to her moral righteousness, Lever argues persuasively that her “dread of shame has corrupted her virtue.” In Isabella “excessive zeal is corrupted to pride, and cloistered holiness subordinates charity to chastity.” As Lever further explains, “‘shame’ not sin, ‘honor’ not charity, are seen as the all-important considerations.”<sup>63</sup> Isabella’s excessive fear of shame proves the extent of her moral rigor, yet her virtue is itself immature and narrow in scope. Her dread of dishonor may prevent her from engaging in the sin of lust but it fails to make her conscious of her descent into the sin of pride, into which her modesty apparently devolves.<sup>64</sup> To quote Isabella’s words exactly, her “virtue hath a license in’t, / which seems a little fouler than it is” (2.4.144-5). Once Angelo threatens Isabella’s chastity, her self-interested concern for her sexual honor overwhelms all bonds of loyalty to her brother. As Lever argues, she is unable to “overcome [her]

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<sup>63</sup> Lever, Introduction, lxxxii, lxxiv, lxxix.

<sup>64</sup> For further commentary on the way women’s desire for sexual honor could turn into an extreme form of pride see John Alvis, *Shakespeare’s Understanding of Honor* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1990), 8.

fear of disgrace in the world's eyes and manifest true grace by a sacrifice made in self-oblivious charity."<sup>65</sup>

Isabella's vainglorious concern for her honor is apparent to Angelo, who exploits it in an extended attempt to seduce her by inciting her shy conscience. In realizing that acquiescing to Angelo's demand would lead to the eternal damnation of her soul, Isabella selfishly declares, "better it were a brother died at once, / Than a sister, by redeeming him, / should die forever" (2.4.106-8). According to Angelo such a proclamation renders Isabella guilty of murder, and so, just as she had slandered Angelo for his murderous, hypocritical, and unethical actions, Angelo now incites Isabella's shame and guilt by condemning her actions in the same way. He criticizes her reputation for virtue by alleging that she is just as merciless and as harsh as he: "were you not then as cruel as the sentence / That you have slander'd so?" (2.4.108-9). Critics have noted Isabella's lack of moral struggle at this point. Ernest Schanzer observes that "she is shown free from all inner conflict and doubt."<sup>66</sup> It simply never occurs to Isabel that the severity with which she upholds her honor may be more monstrous a sin than having sex with Angelo to save her brother's life. However, it does seem that Angelo's condemnation of her actions has succeeded in arousing Isabella's shy conscience. For she does alter her view of sleeping with the Deputy to save Claudio, perceiving it less as an act that would lead to the eternal damnation of her soul and more as a kind of "charity in sin" which she believes would be "kin to *foul redemption*" (112; mine). By considering that it would be a gross

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<sup>65</sup> Lever, Introduction, lxxvii.

<sup>66</sup> Schanzer, *The Problem Plays*, 107.

“perversion of justice for God to sentence her to eternal damnation for saving a brother’s life by an act that has nothing whatever in common with the deadly sin of lechery than its outward form,” Isabella’s shy conscience prompts her to contemplate the ethical and spiritual basis of her actions and to envision a spiritual afterlife for her immortal soul.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, however, her corrupt desire for worldly honor overpowers the state of ethical and spiritual awareness she experiences. In an expression of uncontrollable pride she proclaims, “more than our brother is our chastity” (184-6). Although Angelo is able to appeal to Isabella’s “Christian modesty,” her fear of shame does not translate into the bashful compliance he had hoped for, but rather continues to pervert into a sinful desire for honor that undermines any sense of ethical awareness or movement toward charitable mercy.

As Harriett Hawkins points out, “Angelo [and] Isabella (in turn) convince us that Angelo would, without doubt, take Isabella and dishonor her in spite of his own horrified conscience; that Isabella would never yield to Angelo, even to save her brother’s life.”<sup>68</sup> Were Isabella able to sustain the realization granted through the dictates of her shy conscience – that her selfish commitment to her honor is potentially unethical, and that sleeping with Angelo might be the right thing to do – her bond to her brother would have been significantly reinforced. Similarly, had Angelo agreed to pardon Claudio he would have been able to hierarchically bind Isabella to himself. With their shy consciences overmastered through their vanity and self-interested aspirations, the characters in

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>68</sup> Harriett Hawkins, *Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 55.

*Measure for Measure* therefore fail to experience any redeeming sense of social humility or charitable mercy through which they could “shy-lock” another person to themselves. Out of all of the characters in the play only the Duke is familiar with the forms of power and social cohesion shyness can grant through its production of the “charity that wounds.”<sup>69</sup> By successfully manipulating the scriptural logic inherent in the “judge not that ye be not judged” tenet the Duke is able to augment his subjects’ latent but misguided fears of shame, thereby provoking their underlying sense of “Christian modesty” in an effort to bind them to one another and to himself in socially and politically advantageous ways.

#### IV. Claudio

“Why give you me this shame” (3.1.80)

Richard Wheeler has noted that the counsel the Duke offers Claudio “does not reflect the Christian context suggested by his disguise as friar.”<sup>70</sup> Nested within the friar-duke’s sermon, which is meant to prepare Claudio for death by instilling within him a disgust for life, is an heretical view of the self as a humoral being whose immortal soul is “servile to all the skyey influences / That doth this habitation where thou keep’st / hourly afflict” (3.1.9-11). As Lever notes, Vincentio’s description of the individual “eliminates its spiritual aspect and is

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<sup>69</sup> I refer here to Berger’s appropriation of Marcel Mauss’ phrase. See *Making Trifles of Terrors*, 364. Berger re-terms Mauss’ insights as a form of “Mercifixion,” and further explains how the gift of mercy that binds another person to oneself hierarchically fosters a kind of “moral usury.” See his article in the same book, “Marriage and Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Casket Scene Revisited.” *Measure* and *Merchant* are plays that complement one another in their development of this theme in relation to shyness, an emotional state that underlies and provokes passive modes of Christian charity, mercy, and humility toward others.

<sup>70</sup> Wheeler, *Shakespeare’s Development*, 116.



essentially materialist and pagan.”<sup>71</sup> His understanding of human nature as subject to vast physiological and environmental changes, including “weather, vegetation, and the tides,” and his corresponding belief in the notion of “complexion” as that which “shifts to strange effects / after the moon,” supports what Douglas Trevor terms a “hard-line” Galenic conception of the self as a permeable entity governed by external forces liable to alter its humors involuntarily, compelling an individual to engage in sinful conduct against his own will.<sup>72</sup> In this sense, the Duke would appear to undermine the Christian notion of free will by regarding sin as an effect of the humoral body rather than the failure of man’s reason. The Duke’s homily should not, however, be read as a reflection of his own point of view but rather as an expression of Claudio’s own limited understanding of himself as a sinner who, like Angelo, “hath fall’n by prompture of the blood” (2.4.177).

As with Angelo, Claudio tends to distance himself from any sense of personal moral responsibility that would account for his transgression. Given the status of the *sponsalia per verba de praesenti* marital contract under which he consummated his marriage, Claudio evades the belief that he has committed any kind of crime, let alone one punishable by death. In his state of arrest and imminent execution he does appear to develop a sense of moral and religious consciousness; however, his awareness of sin is compromised through his materialist understanding of himself as a humoral entity comprised of ungovernable animalistic passions he cannot control. As he explains to Lucio,

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<sup>71</sup> Lever, Introduction, lxxxvii.

<sup>72</sup> Trevor, “Sadness in the *Faerie Queene*,” 241.

“our natures do pursue, / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil; and when we drink we die” (1.2.120-3). Just as rats are devoid of an “instinct which warns them that the food they covet is poisoned, so man, according to Claudio, is devoid of the instinct which warns him that the free indulgence of sexual appetite leads to his destruction.”<sup>73</sup> Claudio’s appeal to the drives of the Galenic body, along with his dismissal of any notion of divine reason, will, or restraint “threatens the divine omnipotence of an electing God by providing [a] sinner [like himself] with too convenient an opportunity to blame [his] failings on bodily fluids over which [he has] little control.”<sup>74</sup>

Claudio’s exoneration of himself and his actions in this way, in fact, allows him to feel an unwarranted degree of hope. As he tells the Duke, “the miserable have no other medicine / But only hope: / I have hope to live, and am prepared to die” (3.1.2-4). In excusing his misdeeds through recourse to the unstable workings of the body, Claudio has hope that his soul will be saved by virtue of God’s inability to judge him appropriately. As Bishop Edward Reynolds maintains, Christian hope typically signaled an apprehension of sin. All men, he observes, “have room for hope to enjoy God their last good, though not a hope of confidence, assurance, and expectation.”<sup>75</sup> Although Claudio’s hope is indicative of his inkling that he has done something wrong, it also relies too much on an exculpatory materialist understanding of the passions and the soul and so fails to produce any sense of spiritual reform. It is therefore a kind of “empty and

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<sup>73</sup> Schanzer, *Problem Plays*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Trevor, “Sadness,” 241.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (London 1640), 241.

ungrounded hope ... whence ariseth a sluggish and careless security, blindly reposing itself upon [God's] helps, without endeavoring to procure them unto ourselves.”<sup>76</sup> In an attempt to overturn Claudio's limited conception of himself and “fit [his] mind to death, for his soul's rest,” the Duke manipulates the traditional *contemplatio mortis*. Indeed, the main goal of the Duke's sermon isn't merely to persuade Claudio to embrace the chance to escape from a life of which the natural conditions make it not worth living, but rather to purify Claudio's soul by compelling him to achieve a sense of disgust with his own embodiment. By drawing upon the conditions of humoral embodiment and associating them with the shameful and grotesque conditions of human existence, Vincentio attempts to impress upon Claudio some kind of insight into the flawed nature of his own corrupt materialism. The ensuing exchange between Isabella and Claudio illuminates Claudio's developing insight into his own base corporeality.

Having moved from a state of bashfulness into one of ungoverned pride and vanity, Isabella sets out to manipulate Claudio into a crisis of moral shyness in the hopes that he will comply with her decision to sacrifice himself for the sake of her honor. As with her previous meeting with Angelo, Isabella's interaction with her brother replicates the pattern whereby she endeavors to force the shy conscience of another so as to make that person yield to her demands. Without revealing the details surrounding Angelo's proposal, Isabella tells her brother that there is a “devilish mercy in the judge,” however, if Claudio were to agree with Angelo's condition – that he be saved on account of his sister's incontinence – his life would be freed though he would live in a state of perpetual “durance” and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 238.

“restraint” (65-8). As Isabella explains, Claudio’s acceptance of Angelo’s proposition would be a highly immoral act that would cause him immense public dishonor. As she notes, “consenting to’t / Would bark your honor from that trunk you bear, / And leave you naked” (70-2). The shame to which Claudio would be subject would generate within him a constraining feeling of moral shyness and sense of social inhibition. Even though he would have “all the world’s vastity,” Claudio would live within it paralyzed by a “determine’d scope,” never wanting to venture into the public realm out of a constant fear of moral judgment and disapproval. Clearly feeling the emotional effects his sister intended, Claudio asks Isabella, “why give you me this shame?” With his shy conscience enforced, Claudio’s fear of shame compels him to yield compliantly to Isabella’s request, as he declares, “If I must die / I will encounter darkness as a bride / And hug it in my arms” (83-5).

However genuine Claudio’s humility appears, it is short-lived. Claudio’s fear of shame is quickly nullified by his overpowering dread of death, which, according to Lever, “springs from the deeper fear of an unresolved soul confronted with all the uncertainties of the world to come.”<sup>77</sup> The spiritual impact of the Duke’s manipulation of the *contemplatio mortis* appears to take hold, breeding within Claudio a remarkable sense of terror and doubt. In view of the Duke’s description of the self as an embodied entity subject to the unavoidable fluxes of the environment and overwhelmed by its own unmasterable fluids, Claudio begins to comprehend himself as a “sensible warm motion,” a “kneaded clod,” whose “delighted spirit” will never achieve immortality but rather suffer

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<sup>77</sup> Lever, Introduction, lxxx.

eternal death and affliction, “bath[ing] in fiery floods,” or lodged “in thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice, ... imprison’d in the viewless winds / And blown with restless violence round about / The pendant world” (3.1.120-4). Claudio’s sense of hope is rapidly disintegrating into a state of unrelenting religious despair. His guilty conscience weighs upon him compelling him to apprehend himself as a sinner whose own base embodiment has driven him into a state of unpardonable hopelessness and utter damnation. The extreme suffering Claudio experiences is, as Michael MacDonald explains, like the terror “that seizes a ‘poor polluted wretch’ when he suddenly realizes that his sinful behavior has angered God.... The state of agony is amplified ... by ‘fained horrors, ghastly aspirations, and imaginary hells ... They flood in on his imagination and torture his heart.’”<sup>78</sup> Despite Claudio’s perception of everlasting hell, he appears to be experiencing what the Duke refers to as “heavenly comforts of despair” (4.3.109). In his nightmare of despair Claudio exemplifies what MacDonald further describes as “the state of the wakened, but not yet converted sinner.”<sup>79</sup> Although grounded in an abandonment of faith, the feeling of religious despair necessitates the recognition of sin. By enlarging “the faculty of imagination, the power that enabled men to picture the future, vastly intensifying the emotional experience of reprobation, so that they were in a kind of hell,” the feeling of despair “could also lead to a sincere renunciation of sin and prepare the way for salvation.”<sup>80</sup> This is

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<sup>78</sup> Michael MacDonald, “The Fearful Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England,” *The Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992), 48; on the idea of religious despair as a spiritually reformatory emotion see also Clark Lawlor’s recent historical study of sadness, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

the Duke's main intention; to save Claudio's soul by transforming his misguided hope into a state of conscience driven despair.

The Duke's benevolent intentions are, however, quickly thwarted by Isabella's selfish motivations. Her self-interested compulsion to secure her own honor and chastity undermines the moral and spiritual impact of Claudio's despair. For, in the face of Isabella's obstinate pride Claudio's extreme fear of death does not lead to the affective conditions that would generate his own remorse and repentance, but rather intensifies into a damnable and egotistical desire to save his own life rather than sacrificing it in an act of self-oblivious charity. Aware in desperation that his sister could save him if she would, he invokes the natural bond of kinship:

Sweet sister, let me live.  
 What sin you do to save a brother's life,  
 Nature dispenses with the deed so far  
 That it becomes a virtue. (132-5)

Angelo's earlier argument concerning a kind of "charity in sin" is complemented here by Claudio's plea, which seems largely intended to provoke Isabella's own shy conscience in an attempt to compel her extended contemplation of the moral and spiritual implications of her actions. Claudio, however, appears inexperienced in the art of coercing another's shyness. The aspect of social judgment and denunciation that would arouse Isabella's Christian modesty is noticeably absent as Claudio endeavors to spark his sister's conscience through a kind of humble supplication rather than harsh invective. The flattering and deferential epithet "sweet sister" implies Isabella's superiority in the filial relationship and gestures toward the notion that her reputation in her brother's eyes has been upheld rather

than tarnished, even though she would selfishly allow him to die for the sake of her honor. Claudio's lack of reproach over her decision prevents Isabella from being able to fully realize the immorality of her actions. Unable to experience the sense of shame and wrongdoing that would have been generated through Claudio's critical gaze, Isabella fails to weigh the social, ethical, and spiritual value involved in enacting a kind of "foul redemption."

Claudio's utter lack of resentment toward his sister may be contrasted with the extreme fierceness of Isabella's near hysterical response to her brother's request:

O, you beast!  
 O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
 Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?  
 Is't not a kind of incest, to take life  
 From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?  
 Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair:  
 For such a warped slip of wilderness  
 Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance,  
 Die, perish! Might but my bending down  
 Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed/  
 I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;  
 No word to save thee. (3.1.135-45)

As self-regarding as he may be, Claudio's request that his sister sacrifice her honor to save his life pales in comparison to Isabella's reaction, which is clearly supported by the "pitiless, unimaginative, self-absorbed virtue which sustains her."<sup>81</sup> Claudio's wish that Isabella "yield her body up to shame" to save him renders him her honorable father's unnatural son, who would incestuously save his own life out of his sister's disgrace. With Claudio's shy conscience suffering a rapid breakdown Isabella uses what leverage she knows she possesses – her high reputation in her brother's eyes – as a desperate attempt to re-arouse Claudio's

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<sup>81</sup> Una Ellis Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (London: Methuen, 1961), 226.

state of moral shyness. According to psychologist Thomas Scheff, “shame . . . and related feelings of shyness that involve reactions to rejection” can signal the threat of “disconnection from the other.” Shame, as Scheff further notes, “can occur in response to threats to the bond.” Because shame is a social emotion, it reaffirms “the emotional interdependency of persons.”<sup>82</sup> As Claudio’s “sweet sister” Isabella knows that her brother holds her in exceptionally high esteem. By reproaching Claudio and overtly threatening her sense of filial attachment to him, Isabella hopes to excite her brother’s fear of shame and dishonor. If Claudio senses that Isabella disapproves of him, his fear of shame will strengthen his bond to her and compel him to yield to her request in an attempt to earn her respect. Isabella’s arousal of Claudio’s shy conscience does not, however, engender the state of bashful compliance she hoped it would; rather, his fear of death continues to overpower his fear of shame preventing him from acquiescing to his sister’s demand.

#### V. Vincentio: The Conqueror?

“I love the people,  
But do not like to stage me to their eyes” (1.2.67-8)

Although the Duke endeavors to reform Claudio, thereby saving his soul, it is questionable as to whether or not his pastoral care is an unadulterated reflection of the “love [he has] in doing good,” or corrupted by his self-interested desire to gain power and precedence over the state (3.1.197). According to Shuger, the Duke’s meeting with Claudio reflects the widespread early modern

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Scheff, “Shame and the Social Bond,” *Sociological Theory* 18.1 (2000), 92, 95.



understanding of the “king as accountable to God for his subjects’ salvation.”<sup>83</sup> As she further suggests, Vincentio’s “desire that Claudio not die unprepared, attests to an overriding concern for the moral and spiritual good of individuals. He makes windows into men’s souls, extending the gaze of authority into private, interior, and ultimate moral actualities – holiness and sin, guilt and repentance, heaven and hell – matters not usually thought of, now, ... as the business of the state and its rulers.”<sup>84</sup> Berger, on the other hand, finds “a concern for moral solvency detectable in the Duke’s performance of the friar.” His pastoral visits are “at best a project for atonement and reparation;” a way for him to offset his malevolent political motives by reaffirming his status as a kind of “all seeing deity” generating genuinely redemptive effects in his subjects.<sup>85</sup> The purity of the Duke’s intentions appears to be corroborated by the notion that when he initially sets out to visit Claudio he does not yet know of Angelo’s treachery. His extended eavesdropping on the meeting between Claudio and Isabel, however, apprises him of the Deputy’s moral hypocrisy, as well as both Claudio and Isabella’s egotism. Once privy to the intents and desires of his subjects, the knowledge he gains of them threatens to disturb the purity of his religious intentions, turning them more overtly into a ploy for political authority and accelerating his desire to achieve it.

It is only after the Duke overhears the meeting between Claudio and Isabella, and thus comes to know of Angelo’s duplicity, that he is able to augment Claudio’s despair and adequately “fit his mind to death, for his soul’s rest.” As

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<sup>83</sup> Shuger, *Political Theologies*, 110.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 385, 342. There seems to be an implicit connection here with Portia who attempts to save Shylock’s soul as a means of atoning for the power and dominance she knows she will gain over Antonio and Bassanio by getting Shylock to desist.

Vincentio explains, “Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt [Isabella]; only he hath made an assay of her virtue, to practice his judgments with the disposition of natures. She, having the truth of honor in her, hath made him gracious denial which he is most glad to receive” (3.1.160-5). By upholding Isabella’s virtue and making her intentions appear ethically grounded, the Duke places the weight of moral judgment upon Claudio, thereby inciting his sense of guilt and moderating his pride. His lie has the effect of making Claudio feel especially wrong in requesting that his sister sacrifice her “honor” to save his life. Accordingly, it also makes him feel guilty about not yielding to her demand that he sacrifice himself to save her honor. Beginning to see his erroneous values clearly, Claudio gains insight into the extreme anger Isabella must necessarily feel toward him. His guilt, along with his fear of shame, triggers his sense of atonement. Upon Vincentio’s demand, “go to your knees, and make ready,” Claudio enacts the gestural language of shyness and social humility as he begs the Duke, “let me ask my sister pardon; I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be rid of it” (170-1). By lying to Claudio the Duke is able to fully manipulate the *contemplatio mortis* so that it can be fully realized by him. His despair over his sexual sinfulness is made worse through the guilt and shame he is made to feel with respect to his own unbridled selfishness and arrogance. His guilt compels his desire to beg his sister for mercy and end his own life on her behalf. By invoking Claudio’s sense of shame and guilt through the lie, the Duke is able to drive him into the state of bashful humility that his self-interest previously impeded. Claudio’s yielding to death here corresponds to the charity and compliance he should have

demonstrated in his earlier interaction with his sister, thus restoring his bond to her.

Having incited Claudio's bashfulness, Vincentio next endeavors to induce Isabella's compliance as a means of reestablishing her filial bond to her brother. After witnessing her excessive desire for honor during her meeting with Claudio, the Duke craftily goads Isabella's vanity as a means of subverting her pride through his implementation of the bed-trick. Substituting Mariana for Isabella in Angelo's bed is a complex and contradictory act. On the one hand, it offers Isabella an opportunity to save her brother's life without physically staining her sexual honor; however, it does not entirely solve the moral contradictions inherent in Angelo's proposition, since it requires Isabella to save Claudio by exposing herself to shame – her greatest fear – for the purpose of seeing the “corrupt deputy scaled.” As Mullaney explains, the Duke persuades Isabella to play in public “the role she did not play in private, not only to accuse Angelo of the crime he did not commit but also to shame herself twice over, both by lying and by tarnishing her chaste image.”<sup>86</sup> Isabella's revelation of Angelo's corruption will “please the absent duke” as much as it will please Isabella herself, offering her a means of redress against the man who assaulted her virtue. The prospect of gaining the Duke's favor and witnessing Angelo suffer the burden of shame is now more important to Isabella than protecting her honor, which is inevitably compromised through her compliance with the Duke's “will” that she “answer [Angelo's] requiring with a plausible obedience; [and] agree with his demands to the point” (3.2.255-6; 3.1.243-5). The Duke thus appeals to Isabella's vengeful

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<sup>86</sup> Mullaney, “Apprehending Subjects,” 109-110.

anger toward Angelo and her narcissism in an effort to spiritually reform her and engender within her the sense of shame, *caritas*, and humility she should have demonstrated toward her brother in the first place.

Despite the way in which the Duke's lies and stratagems have a positive, morally reformatory impact on his subjects, they are deceptive and coercive tactics through which he will be able to cultivate his subjects' disciplinary sense of shame and bind them to one another and to himself in socially and politically advantageous ways. His Christian ethic and his "good" intentions are compromised through their inherent capacity to increase his power, control, and reputation as a ruler. It is thus hardly surprising that constable Elbow's denunciation of Pompey the bawd, a man who must "needs buy and sell men and women like beasts," and the discussion of the "two usuries" – money-lending and prostitution – should follow the friar-duke's arrangement of the bed-trick (3.2.1-2, 6). The scene strategically calls attention to Vincentio's production of a kind of "usurious biological economy," in which he encourages his subjects' sinful desires and inclinations so as to coax them into ethically questionable situations as a means of capitalizing off of nature and obtaining "the glory of a creditor." By inciting Isabella's unbridled pride and anger toward Angelo, Vincentio is able to garner her consent to the bed trick, an act that will bind her to her brother while also indebting them both to himself, since he will have saved Claudio's life as well as Isabella's physical honor in the process. Accordingly, by saving Claudio's life, the despair the Duke cultivates within him now gains an especially useful disciplinary function, providing him with "a sense of the hell that await[s] him if

he [happens] to slid[e] back” into sin.<sup>87</sup> The bed-trick, which is itself predicated upon Angelo’s uncontrollable sexuality, will also indebt Isabella to Mariana for carrying out the deed in her stead, and it will also bind Mariana to the Duke, since his implementation of it brings her together with her fiancé and provides her with a means of satisfying her “violent and unruly” lust for him (2.1.242). The bed-trick thus provides a glimpse into the way the Duke’s disguise as friar offers him a means of roaming freely amongst his fallen subjects, allowing him to invest his bashful disposition in both social and political reformation without risking his name or his reputation – or does it?

In describing the Duke as “a shy fellow,” Lucio calls attention to Vincentio’s over-sensitivity to slander. Lucio’s insight into the Duke’s bashful disposition and his related assumption that he has “usurp[ed] the beggary he was never born to,” while not an overt assertion of his knowledge that Vincentio is the friar, nevertheless holds a strange suggestiveness that calls attention to the Duke’s earlier appeal to the obligation of acting publicly and the consequences that may arise if one does not. The Duke’s withdrawal from public life necessarily prevents his “virtues” from actively going “forth,” thus providing his subjects with an opportunity to make judgments about his moral character. For example, upon Vincentio’s departure from office, the friar speculates that the absent duke is involved in an illicit affair (1.3.1-5). If the Duke tends to obscure the knowledge of his own corrupt political aspirations under the guise of benevolent friar, he is made to question the moral purity of his “dark deeds” and his religious sanctity through the resultant slanders and suspicions of his subjects. According to Lucio,

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<sup>87</sup> On the disciplinary “function” of despair see MacDonald, “Fearful Estate of Francis Spira,” 50.

it is unfeasible to think that a Duke who has let corruption prosper could be entirely immune to the human frailty he now seeks to control. In appropriating the principle of universal judgment from *The Sermon on the Mount* Lucio further describes the Duke as a lenient ruler who is unable to punish the sins of his subjects because he is given over to the same vices (3.2.171). The Duke, as Lucio explains, is a “drunk” and a womanizer, “ere he would have hanged a man for the getting of a hundred bastards, [he] would have paid for the nursing of a thousand. He had some feeling of the sport; he knew the service; and that instructed him to mercy” (3.2. 121,112-6). The Duke’s bashful oversensitivity to negative social judgment is devastatingly realized through Lucio’s arousal of his shy conscience. As Vincentio exclaims:

No might nor greatness in mortality  
 Can censure ’scape. Back-wounding calumny  
 The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong  
 Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue? (3.2.179-3)

According to Berger, Lucio’s slanders arise as if from an “echo chamber within [the Duke’s] own conscience,” forcing him to question his apparent “virtue.”<sup>88</sup> The feeling of social anxiety Vincentio experiences here is produced less from the fact that he believes his acts and intents have simply been misunderstood by his subjects, and more so from his realization that he is “being understood all too well and wishes a philosophical means to invalidate correct but potentially seditious perception.”<sup>89</sup> Vincentio’s extreme fear of shame thus infiltrates his desperate efforts to defend his moral integrity as he strives to uphold the Duke’s reputation as “a gentleman of all temperance,” and refers to him as a “scholar, a statesman,

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<sup>88</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 417.

<sup>89</sup> Goldberg, *The Politics of Literature*, 115.

and a soldier” (231, 142). Such blatant measures of self-justification, however, only seem to call attention to the moral crisis he is experiencing and to his subsequent need to quell it.

Vincenzio’s attempts to validate his reputation and justify his actions as he engineers the bed-trick, (asking Mariana, “do you persuade yourself that *I respect you?*”) further reflect the sense of moral consciousness and anxiety he continues to feel over his actions (4.1.53; mine). Mariana clearly holds the Duke in high esteem, as she responds, “Good friar, I know you do.... I am always bound to you.” Yet the sense of modesty and social inhibition Vincenzio exhibits before her discloses his understanding that what he is about to implicate her in could threaten his standing in her eyes (54, 25). In justifying the bed-trick through his “love of doing good,” the Duke had previously explained to Isabella how “the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof” (2.1.258-9). Here, however, his inability to confront Mariana directly indicates his concern over the more serious ethical implications her exchange with Isabella entails. Asking Isabella to go over the details of Mariana’s substitution with her, even though he had previously agreed to do it, is a manifestation of the Duke’s shy conscience and reflects his awareness of and his participation in the kind of sinful behavior Lucio had earlier attributed to him (see 2.1.256-7). Overcome by the moral force of his bashfulness, the Duke shies away from Mariana because he fears that that she will come to see her substitution less as a kind of “benefit” that brings her together with her estranged fiancé, and more so as act that implicates her in mortal sin.

Consequently, he begins to view the bed-trick as an operation that could threaten rather than augment his reputation amongst his subjects:

O place and greatness! Millions of false eyes  
 Are stuck upon thee: Volumes of report  
 Run with these false, and contrarious quest  
 Upon thy doings: thousand escapes of wit  
 Make thee the father of their idle dream  
 And rack thee in their fancies. (4.1.60-64)

In an extended response to Lucio's slanders – which have now proven to be more true than false – Vincentio's fear of shame ignites his guilty conscience. In his state of relative obscurity the Duke finds himself increasingly and inescapably subject to the judgment, surveillance, and slanders of his subjects. Anxiously envisaging himself trapped in a web of scrutiny and censure, he fears that his reputation and esteem in the Viennese community will be compromised through the knowledge of his direct involvement in sin.

Although the shyness Vincentio exhibits is indicative of his developing sense of moral consciousness, his fear of shame does little to restrain his behavior or moderate his inordinate desire for honor as he continues to cultivate the sins of others for his own aggrandizement. Impelled by bodily forces beyond his reasonable control, the Duke appears at this point, like many of his subjects, resistant to the moral dictates of his shy conscience. In his refusal to “know himself” he indeed proves to be “a very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow” (3.2.226, 135). His major soliloquy, which aptly follows the two smaller ones elucidating his fear of shame, reveals his resistance to the moral self-knowledge his shyness provokes:

He who the sword of heaven will bear  
 Should be as holy as severe:  
 Pattern in himself to know,



Grace to stand, and virtue, go:  
 More nor less to others paying  
 Than by self-offences weighing.  
 Shame to him whose cruel striking  
 Kills for faults of his own liking?  
 Twice treble shame on Angelo.  
 To weed my vice, and let his grow! (3.2.254-63)

Initially proposed to him through Lucio's hermeneutic of slander, the principle of universal judgment Vincentio appropriates here betrays his perception of himself as an *ideal* ruler who is unable to punish his subjects for the same offences for which he is guilty. Hence, in castigating Angelo and discrediting him as a flawed and hypocritical magistrate who penalizes his subjects for "faults of his own liking," the Duke reveals an element of his own moral self-knowledge. At the same time, however, he exhibits a striking inability to "weigh" his own "self-offences." In order to "shame" Angelo and thereby bolster his own political standing, Vincentio will cultivate the pride, deceit, and sexual corruption implicit in the bed-trick, applying "craft against vice" so as to "pay with falsehood *false exacting*, / And perform an old contracting" (274-5; mine). Evading his own sense of moral self-consciousness, however, the Duke next seeks to justify his own "falsehood" through an appeal to the apparent sanctity of his actions as he reminds Mariana (as much as himself) that Angelo "is your husband on a pre-contract: / To bring you thus together 'tis no sin.... The justice of your title to him / Doth flourish the deceit" (4.2.70-4).

Having satisfied his lust in the bed-trick, Angelo cannot now ignore Isabella's previous threat that she will "tell the world aloud" of his corruption:

This deed unshaped me quite; makes me unpregnant  
 And dull to all proceedings. A deflower'd maid;  
 And by an eminent body, that enforc'd  
 The law against it! But that her tender shame

Will not proclaim against her maiden loss,  
How might she tongue me! (4.4.18-23)

As before, Angelo attempts to quell his shame with the notion that his gravity and power over the state make him “indiscernible.” He reasons with himself that Isabella wouldn’t testify against him because it would rebound negatively upon her own reputation. As he proclaims, his “authority bears so credent bulk / That no particular scandal once can touch, / But it confounds the breather” (24-6). Yet, however much Angelo endeavors to pacify his fear of dishonor, it becomes obvious that he has a difficult time evading it. His anxiety over Isabella’s censure is deflected onto Claudio, who “might in the times to come have ta’en revenge / By so receiving a dishonor’d life / With ransom of such shame” (28-30). The persistent dread of shame that Angelo appears to experience continues to fail as a means of ethical knowledge and restraint, compelling him instead to enact more heinous and tyrannical crimes. In order to save his honor he decides to enforce Claudio’s execution, albeit for the same sin of pre-martial fornication for which he now finds himself guilty through his participation in the bed-trick.

The prospect of Claudio’s imminent death poses a major problem for the Duke, compromising what Harry Berger terms his “payoff” – his chances at gaining both personal and political affirmation.<sup>90</sup> He is so desperate to make the bed-trick work so that he can save Claudio and triumph over his subjects, especially the exposed Angelo, that he implements the head-trick. His questionable motives are once again made obvious through the sacrilegious behavior he exemplifies while disguised as friar. As Bradshaw notes, Vincentio is

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<sup>90</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 386.

so “determined to get his substitute head ... that he gives the ‘damnable’ order to ‘transport’ [Barnardine] a ‘creature unpre-par’d, unmeet for death.’”<sup>91</sup> Despite the lengths the Duke goes to in order to rescue Claudio, substituting his head with the dead Ragozine’s – “an accident that heaven provides” – he inevitably finds that it would be more profitable if he were to continue in his falsehood and develop a lie about Claudio’s death (4.3.76). As Isabella approaches, the Duke decides to “keep her ignorant of her good,” so as to “make her heavenly comforts of despair / When it is least expected” (4.3.106-10). As David Sundelson suggests, when Claudio refused to sacrifice himself to save her honor “Isabella wished for her brother’s death.... The lie punishes her for that wish, in fairy tale fashion, by pretending to grant it.”<sup>92</sup> In this regard, the lie works toward cultivating Isabella’s sense of guilt for having wished her brother dead, thus continuing to reform her pride and restore her filial bond to her brother.

When Isabella finds out about Claudio’s apparent execution she responds violently, proclaiming that she will go to Angelo and “pluck out his eyes” (119). Her rage against Angelo is intensified as a result of his unwarranted execution of Claudio. As Isabella’s boldness and anger toward Angelo escalate, her state of vengeance fosters a deeper sense of attachment to her brother, which is itself augmented through her performance of the defiled maiden:

I now begin with grief and shame to utter.  
 He would not, but by gift of my chaste body  
 To his concupiscible intemperate lust,  
 Release my brother; and after much debatement  
 My sisterly remorse confutes mine honor,  
 And I did yield to him. But the next morn betimes,

<sup>91</sup> Bradshaw, *Shakespeare’s Scepticism*, 167.

<sup>92</sup> David Sundelson, *Shakespeare’s Restorations of the Father* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 95.

His purpose surfeiting, he sends a warrant  
For my poor brother's head. (5.1.99-105)

In exposing Angelo and avenging Claudio's death Isabella deliberately situates herself within the abject emotive space of shame and dishonor. Her performance, however, also necessarily engenders within her the subjectivity of shyness, since through it she portrays herself as a sister who would compliantly "yield" to Claudio as well as Angelo's request that she compromise her honor to save her brother's life. The performance – gesturally enhanced through Isabella's kneeling – is itself a "remorseful" and guilt-ridden reaction imbued with shame and humility which, as Isabella comes to realize, she probably should have demonstrated in the first place now that she believes Claudio to be dead. The Duke's extended attempts to uphold Angelo's honor by slandering Isabella and accusing her of madness, along with his subsequent imprisonment of her, surely work in this instance as a kind of "spiritual physic," or "heavenly comfort of despair," meant to pacify her soaring pride by exacerbating her feelings of guilt and shame.

As Angelo had predicted, Isabella's slanderous tongue brings upon her a more devastating disgrace. However, it soon becomes apparent that her accusations are fraught with a kind of validity, thus posing an implicit threat to Angelo's honor. Noting Isabella's inherent rationality, Vincentio exclaims how "many that are not mad / Have ... more lack of reason" (71). Isabella's riddling proclamation that she will "make the truth appear where it seems hid, / And hide the false seems true," possesses an intrinsic value which the Duke cannot ignore, so that while he denounces her as mad he explains that "her madness hath the

oddest frame of sense” (64). As he said he would, Vincentio makes an attempt to maintain Isabella’s “general honor” by undermining the falsity of her accusations and projecting their inherent “truth” and “reason” back onto Angelo as a subtle means of exciting his shy conscience. The end result of this strategy comes to fruition through the Duke’s orchestration of the public trial against the Deputy that leads to the friar’s unmasking.

“Be you judge / Of your own cause,” the Duke exclaims to Angelo just as Mariana is about to reveal both herself and the details of the bed-trick:

This is the hand, which, with a vow’d contract,  
Was fast belock’d in thine: this is the body  
That took away the match from Isabel  
And did supply thee at thy garden house,  
In her imagin’d person. (206-211)

Although Mariana’s testimony is meant to “disprove” Isabella’s accusations, it does little to defend Angelo’s honor, further threatening his reputation by exposing his corrupt intentions and rendering him guilty of the same crime of pre-marital fornication for which he had Claudio executed. At this point, Angelo’s fear of disgrace appears to be sufficiently aroused through Mariana’s deposition and he admits that “[he] did but smile till now” (233). The escalating trepidation the Deputy feels over what could become an impending assault on his honor prompts his declaration that the women are “instruments” that have been “set on” by the friar (236). Vincentio’s persistent denunciation of the women as “slanderers,” and his own rather curious but truthful discrediting of the “foolish friar” as that “more mightier member” that “sets [the women] on,” offers Angelo’s intensifying fear of dishonor some respite and continues to provide for him his own mask of honor and moral integrity to hide behind. However, in view

of what follows there is the underlying notion that by encouraging Angelo's pride and moral arrogance to reach an extreme the Duke means to render his already agitated sense of shame even more overwhelming.

Vincento's discrediting of the friar – though meant to amplify Angelo's sense of indiscernibility – also provides an opportune moment for the friar to expose himself as the Duke in a kind of “theatrical economy of awe and apprehension.”<sup>93</sup> For it is only upon witnessing the friar reveal himself as the Duke, and after hearing him explain how he was “a looker-on in Vienna,” that Angelo's shy conscience finally implodes compelling him to “judge” himself and confess his sins and transgressions:

O my dread lord,  
 I should be guiltier that my guiltiness  
 To think I can be undiscernible,  
 When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,  
 Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,  
 No longer session hold upon my shame,  
 But let my trial be mine own confession.  
 Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death  
 Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.364-71)

Angelo has always to some extent conducted his existence under the burden of shame, but his fears of dishonor have been continually overmastered by his own base desires and then quelled by his excessive pride in his reputation for moral austerity. The Duke's unmasking, however, prompts Angelo to realize how “discernible” he truly is and has been all along. The mask of moral arrogance he has hidden behind is, as Mullaney notes, quickly “fractured and displaced when he is induced to view himself and what's past, present, and to come through the

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<sup>93</sup> Mullaney, “Apprehending Subjects,” 104.

eyes of an Other.”<sup>94</sup> Seeing himself through the Duke’s critical gaze and according to the weight of his judgment excites Angelo’s fear of shame, which turns inward “arraigning” his sense of guilt and moral consciousness. It is, according to Darryl Gless, at this moment that Angelo abandons his “Barnardine-like principle of treading on things unseen, and acknowledging his depravity, feels the bitterness of true repentance.”<sup>95</sup> As the Deputy declares, “so deep sticks it in my penitent heart / That I crave death more willingly than mercy; ‘Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.” Angelo’s longing for death here is reminiscent of Claudio’s earlier nihilism and generates a similar feeling of religious despair, the moral implications of which link his soul to the realm of God leading him toward spiritual conversion and salvation. As the Duke observes, “by this Lord Angelo perceives he’s safe; / Methinks I see a quickening in his eye” (492-3). In his despair Angelo is unable to see himself as deserving of mercy and importunes the Duke to punish him in accordance with the law against fornication, as he invites upon himself the same sentence of death he imposed upon Claudio. In view of his previous exclamation – “When I that censure him do so offend, / Let mine own judgment pattern out my death / And nothing come in partial” – Angelo now yields to the moral insight of *The Sermon on the Mount* and judges himself as he has judged others (1.2.29-31).

The Duke’s rigorous condemnation of Angelo, as he demands that the Deputy be brought to the “very block / Where Claudio stoop’d to death,” along with his subsequent proclamation, “the very mercy of the law cries out . . . An

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 110; for a similar interpretation see Huston Diehl, “Infinite Space: Representation and Reformation in *Measure for Measure*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.4 (1998), 395ff.

<sup>95</sup> Gless, *The Law and the Convent*, 229.

Angelo for Claudio; death for death. / Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure,” seems entirely just. However, it is a surprising series of admonitions, especially considering the Duke’s former leniency and his inability to punish his subjects out of his bashful fear of being reproached as harsh and tyrannical. One might then understand Vincentio’s political rigor as a kind of show or ploy to incite fear and apprehension in the minds and hearts of his subjects, enabling him to assert his new-found political power over them in such a way as to safeguard and even glorify his “name” along with his reputation for diffidence and humility. For the bashful duke does not really want Angelo to die, and his manipulation of the situation in fact leads him to believe that Angelo will be pardoned through Isabella’s mercy.

Isabella had initially demanded that Angelo receive strict “justice, justice, justice,” but she is made to reconsider her plea through the Duke’s calculated actions, which work toward exposing Angelo’s subjection to punishment for a crime he did not actually commit. In his union with Mariana, Angelo has technically committed fornication and is as much subject to the death penalty under the law which he revived as Claudio had been. However, in arranging the public betrothal of Mariana and Angelo before condemning Angelo to the block, (asking him, “wast thou e’er contracted to this woman? ... I was, my Lord ... take her hence, and marry her instantly”) the Duke nullifies the severity of the law of fornication (5.1.372-77). Angelo, as the Duke explains, is “criminal in double violation / Of sacred chastity and promise breach,” he has merely “wronged [Isabella’s] well defended honor.” As Isabella comes to realize, Angelo has not



committed any actual crime, only his “intents” are criminal (450). Thus, at the same time as the Duke validates and even goads Isabella’s revenge against Angelo, he takes precautions to undermine the terms surrounding the viability of the vengeance she seeks, in turn making his demand that Isabella “*must pardon* [this “new married man”] for Mariana’s sake” a much easier request to yield to (400-1; mine).

Mariana quickly grasps the possibility of Angelo’s pardon, begging Isabel to kneel beside her and “take [her] part.” As she further exclaims, “lend me your knees, and I’ll my life to come / I’ll lend you all my life to do you service” (428-31). A bond of fealty between the two women was first initiated when Mariana played Isabella’s “part” during the bed-trick. With the prospect of Angelo’s imminent death, however, Mariana takes advantage of Isabella’s sense of indebtedness and asks that she put herself in her position, return the favor, and save Angelo just as she had previously put herself in Isabella’s position to save her honor and her brother. Detecting Isabella’s selfless desire to reciprocate Mariana’s “service” to her, the Duke curiously attempts to undermine her leniency by exacerbating her pride and eliciting her need to avenge Claudio’s death. As he exclaims, “should she kneel down in mercy of this fact, / Her brother’s ghost his paved bed would break, / And take her hence in horror” (431-3). The Duke’s enticements to vengeance are, however, tempered through Isabella’s burgeoning fear of shame.

Most bounteous sir:  
 Look, if it please you, on this man condemn’d  
 As if my brother lived. I partly think  
 A due sincerity govern’d his deeds

Till he did look on me. Since it is so,  
Let him not die.

Steven Mullaney argues that Isabella comes to “view herself through Angelo’s eyes, to incorporate and turn upon herself the gaze of an Other for whom virtue is a temptation to and a site for lustful desire. . . . Isabella is responsible for Angelo’s lust . . . since her ‘exhibiting herself occasioned Angelo’s propositioning.’ When she ‘takes [Mariana’s] part,’ it is not to forward the lie of her coerced seduction but to project this tarnished *persona* back into the past, to incorporate Angelo’s lust into her reformed sense of herself.”<sup>96</sup> Mullaney’s idea of Isabella’s “reformed” sense of self is notable, however, since Angelo is also a bona fide sinner it is not certain that her ability to see herself through his eyes, and according to the weight of his judgment, is what gives rise to her sense of moral consciousness and spiritual edification. It seems more probable to suggest that the hypersocial, externalized perception of herself that Isabella evinces as she stands before Angelo is a consequence of her first seeing herself through the Duke’s critical gaze and according to the weight of *his* judgment.

Although Angelo is the character who is most obviously influenced by Vincentio’s efforts to bring dark deeds to light, the revelatory process is not entirely lost on Isabella whose own sins are equally as subject to the Duke’s purview. The sense of exposure and dishonor that Isabella experiences during the trial excites her feelings of shame and guilt and compels her desire to be pardoned by the Duke directly after he unveils himself. She thus beseeches him, “O give me pardon, / That I your vassal, have employ’d and pained / Your unknown

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<sup>96</sup> Mullaney, “Apprehending Subjects,” 109.

sovereignty” (382-4). Keenly aware that the Duke has “looked upon [her] passes” – Isabella’s vanity and excessive desire for honor, as well as her callous treatment of her brother, her burgeoning sexuality, and her part in the bed-trick – now make it especially difficult for her to punish Angelo for the same sins of pride and lust for which she has come to realize she is also guilty.

In view of the “judge not that ye be not judged” tenet, Cynthia Lewis explains how throughout the course of the play “the act of judging openly leaves the judge vulnerable to counter-judgment,” a notion prominently exemplified through the behavior of the “shy” duke. Engaged in “the process of overcoming his own fear of being judged as a judge [Vincentio] is quite capable of arousing in us our own fear of finding ourselves in the same situation.”<sup>97</sup> By virtue of his unmasking, the Duke self-consciously places Isabella in that same situation, coercing her shy conscience and forcing her into a state of bashful yielding and compliance. Judging Angelo for the same sins of pride and lechery for which she is guilty, and for which she knows that the Duke knows she is guilty, makes Isabella liable to negative counter-judgment. As she contemplates whether or not to exact vengeance upon Angelo, Isabella’s externalized fear of dishonor in the eyes of the Duke, and the others, incites her shy conscience and forces her to acknowledge and confess her sins. Overcome with shame and guilt over her trespasses, Isabel now begins to view herself through Angelo’s perspective and, recognizing herself as the sexualized object of the male gaze, comes to acknowledge the transgressive force of her own sexuality and its incitement of lust in the Deputy.

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<sup>97</sup> Lewis, “Dark Deeds,” 285.

Mind, body, and external social world thus come together here in what neuroscientist Andy Clark describes as a network of “mutually modulatory influences” involved in a dynamic action of “continuous reciprocal causation.” The interaction amongst these three spheres is entirely productive of a conversionary state of “Christian modesty,” which becomes reflexively embodied as Isabella drops to her knees beside Mariana and yields to her demand, as well as to the Duke’s demand, for Angelo’s forgiveness (5.1.442).<sup>98</sup> Appropriating the moral insight from *The Sermon on the Mount*, Isabella distinguishes sin from actual crime and judges Angelo as she herself has been judged – through the act of pardon – proclaiming that her brother, in opposition to himself:

Had but justice  
 In that he did the thing for which he died:  
 For Angelo,  
 His act did not overtake his bad intent,  
 And must be buried but as an intent  
 That perish’d by the way. Thoughts are no subjects;  
 Intents but merely thoughts. (445-52)

In view of the Duke’s legal arguments Isabella restrains her vengeance. Her state of moral shyness – generated through her experience of the circular pattern of social judgment attributable to the “judge not” tenet – motivates her to temper her initial plea for justice with mercy.<sup>99</sup>

Following the pattern implicit throughout the play, Isabella’s “Christian modesty,” characterized by a display of bashful humility and compliance, results

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<sup>98</sup> Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 163.

<sup>99</sup> Critics have noted that Isabella abandons the strain of mercy latent in the law of universal judgment with which she pleaded for her brother’s life in Act 2, moving instead toward the domain of harsh, inflexible legalism. According to Schanzer, she pleads for “a judicial pardon, and not on the grounds of the need to show mercy, as she does so eloquently in her first interview with Angelo,” *Problem Plays*, 102. However, the law of universal judgment from *The Sermon on the Mount* is not entirely absent from Isabella’s merciful response here; for, she is subjected to its workings through the shyness she experiences before the duke and the onstage spectators.

in a bestowal of charitable mercy that is, however, strained. Although Isabella's pardon of Angelo in the fifth act appears to be a "free gift that breaks through cycles of exchange and rises above them," Marc Shell observes that "her pardon smacks of the kind of economic and sexual commerce that has plagued Vienna from the beginning of the play."<sup>100</sup> As she repays her debt to Mariana, Isabella seems unintentionally to bind, or to borrow a phrase from *Merchant*, to "shy-lock" Mariana to herself, obtaining her life-long "service" and gaining a sense of dominance over her, as well as Angelo whose life she has just saved. Critics who find Isabella's pardon of Angelo to be a gesture exemplifying her submission to the patriarchal order thus fail to notice the way in which her forgiveness of him grants her a modicum of power. Yet the sense of empowerment Isabella is able to achieve is ultimately complicated through the Duke's extended efforts to further manipulate her emotional state, thereby coercing her inevitable acquiescence to the bonds of patriarchy through his offer of marriage.

Isabella's demonstration of Christian modesty before Angelo is, as Knoppers observes, "ironically enough, a position which doubles her pleading for Claudio earlier and with disturbingly similar results." As Knoppers further suggests, "the kneeling woman, who now not only pleads for forgiveness for a sexual offense but implicates herself in some vague way, finds herself once again the object of male desire." This time, however, it is Vincentio rather than Angelo

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<sup>100</sup> Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship: Measure for Measure, Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 149.

who is “moved” by Isabella’s “modesty.” As with Angelo, the Duke “offers Isabella her brother’s life in exchange for her chastity.”<sup>101</sup>

If he be like your brother, for his sake  
Is he pardon’d, and for your sake  
Give me your hand and say you will be mine.  
He is my brother too.

Dear Isabel,  
I have a motion much imports your good;  
Whereto if you’ll a willing ear incline,  
What’s mine is yours, and what’s yours is mine. (489-91, 531-6)

Marc Shell asks the important question here of whether or not “the Duke’s giving Claudio to Isabella depends on Isabella’s first giving herself to the duke? Does it depend on the duke’s hope that she will give herself out of gratitude?”<sup>102</sup> There is the implicit notion that this is, to some extent, Vincentio’s expectation. His earlier lie about Claudio’s death served a moral purpose in that it both excavated and intensified Isabella’s virtuous feelings of shame, shyness, and despair over her vain and callous treatment of her brother with the expectation that her surprise reunion with him would generate a profound sense of gratefulness and emotional relief. However, the Duke’s miracle of resurrecting Claudio from the dead undermines the purity of his religious motives in its creation of a socio-political atmosphere founded upon moral usury. When one considers how the Duke rescued Claudio and then pardoned him for his transgressions, while also saving Isabella’s physical and social honor, and then pardoning her for her transgressions, it is easy to understand Isabella’s silence as a reflection of her compliance toward the Duke and her yielding to his marriage request. Although Vincentio’s pardons are of a piece with his bashfulness and his meek and

<sup>101</sup> Knoppers, “Engendering Shame,” 468-9.

<sup>102</sup> Shell, *End of Kinship*, 151.

submissive Christian ethic, his political theology may be understood as a highly coercive practice that “establishes control and defines a hierarchy [of] patron and debtor.”<sup>103</sup> The Duke confers miraculous, unexpected, and unrepayable pardons or “outward courtesies” upon his subjects in exchange for their gratitude, humility, and subservience (15).

The aura of reverential awe, apprehension, fear, and control that the Duke’s political theology necessitates is thus remarkably amplified through the way in which he harshly condemns his subjects for their sins and then diffuses his “religio-political power of pardon” upon them.<sup>104</sup> There is no doubt that this pattern dramatizes the Duke’s “new acquisition of the ruler’s art of dispensing justice before mercy, showing severity before lenity.” However, as Berger maintains, the political authority the Duke achieves through such a strategy is compromised through his own sense of moral self-knowledge. It is, he argues, as if the Duke’s “flow of benefactions makes up for the malefactions he alone is privy to.”<sup>105</sup> The element of ethical consciousness Berger detects can best be understood in relation to the notion of Christian modesty and its link to the importance of the “judge not” tenet we have been tracing throughout the play. When read in this context it becomes apparent that the Duke’s rain of pardons and charitable mercy is directly linked to the moral apprehension his shy conscience generates.

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<sup>103</sup> Sundelson, *Restorations of the Father*, 151.

<sup>104</sup> For a discussion of James’ similar political strategy see Richard Wilson, “The Quality of Mercy: Discipline and Punishment in Shakespearean Comedy,” in *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

<sup>105</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 393-4.

While the Duke's exposure plot operates as a political ploy to reform his subjects while also gaining power over them, unveiling himself necessarily discloses his awareness of "complicity in the series of dirty tricks that culminate in the cozening of Isabella."<sup>106</sup> From the first time he spoke to Isabella as the friar, Marc Shell observes, that the Duke "has in a sense been requesting that she give ... him 'satisfaction,' or sexual gratification" (3.1.155). The Duke's interference in the brother-sister plot and his orchestration of the bed-trick is "not mere manipulation," as Shell further notes, "he takes over from Angelo the wooing of Isabella." His marriage proposal "makes explicit the sexual meaning hidden in the Duke's earlier words: he is in a sense asking Isabella to yield him a satisfying reward for saving her brother."<sup>107</sup> Thus, when the Duke demands Isabella's hand in marriage it might suddenly occur to the audience that Lucio's slanders and his insinuations about the Duke's lechery may hold an air of truth. Although Vincentio initially condemns Angelo to death, the "apt remission" that takes place in himself, which forces him to argue on behalf of Angelo's "intents" and also compels his final pardon of the Deputy, may be read as a direct result of his excessive shyness and his fears of shame and reproach.

Having publically exposed Angelo and the sinful acts in which he engaged, the Duke anticipates that he will have the opportunity to assert his new-found power to punish the Deputy. However, when the time finally comes to do so Vincentio realizes that he cannot exact justice because it would be too overtly tyrannical and unjust of him to harshly penalize Angelo for the same sins of pride

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>107</sup> Shell, *End of Kinship*, 152.



and lust for which he has also necessarily revealed himself to be guilty (5.1.298). As he exclaims, were he “meal’d with that / Which he corrects, then, were he tyrannous” (4.2.81-2). An ideal ruler, as Vincentio previously noted, “should be as holy as severe / Pattern in himself to know / Grace to stand, and virtue, go: / More nor less to others paying / Than by self offenses weighing.” “Shame,” as the Duke knows, “is brought to “him whose cruel striking / Kills for faults of his own liking” (3.2.255-61). Vincentio’s greatest fears of shame and being reproached as a harsh and tyrannical ruler spark his shy conscience. As he looks around the open space, exposed and staged to the people’s eyes, he internalizes his subjects’ judgmental and condemnatory gazes which make him more fully aware of his own direct involvement in sin, along with his involvement in the sins of others. Having deliberately staged himself to the people and consequently coerced his own state of moral shyness, the Duke now finds himself overcome with the force of Christian modesty. His shyness compels him to yield to both Mariana and Isabella’s requests to pardon Angelo, which he does because he cannot penalize the Deputy for the same vices for which he knows – and which he knows that the others know – that he is guilty. The heightened state of moral consciousness that compels the Duke’s pardon of Angelo also compels him to yield to each of the other sinners’ requests for pardons. He even condemns and then pardons Lucio, in large part because he realizes that his slanders are actually not slanders at all but truth.

The pinnacle of self-knowledge that the Duke achieves in the final act of the play has led Gail Kern Paster to perceptively argue that his pardons work as

a mode of “self-abnegation” and “atonement.” The climactic moment when the Duke unveils himself “reveals his share of responsibility for Angelo’s crime, which is the theological meaning of vicariousness and the true morality of theatre.” The “apt remission” that he subsequently feels does not, therefore, “diminish his unique authority but gives it the clear humanity it had hitherto lacked.”<sup>108</sup> The notion of the Duke’s “humanity” and spiritual atonement is, however, complicated by his rain of charitable pardons. Although aroused through the virtuous force of his shy conscience, his pardons, as I have attempted to demonstrate, create a sense of loyalty in his subjects that strengthens his political power over them. In this regard, the Duke’s bashful leniency and merciful pardons stand out as a kind of hidden power through which he is able to bind, indebt, or lock his subjects to himself, conquering them and vainly obtaining the “glory of a creditor” (5.1.390). For, as Escalus reminds us, “mercy is not itself that oft looks so; / pardon is still the nurse of second woe” (2.1.280-1). We glimpse in the fifth act a novel political strategy wherein the Duke appears to successfully manipulate the limitations inherent in his own bashfulness. In accordance with Christian virtue, he “rules by forgiving,” hence “mak[ing] mercy swear and / play the tyrant” (3.2.188-9).<sup>109</sup> At the same time, however, the Duke’s deliberate plan to turn his own religious practices back upon himself, by orchestrating his exposure and the consequent arousal of his own shy conscience, seems like a deliberate attempt to face rather than to evade the more corrupt political outcomes his use of religious disguise yielded.

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<sup>108</sup> Paster, *The Idea of the City*, 218.

<sup>109</sup> For an extended discussion of this strategy see Sundelson, *Restorations of the Father*, 99.

The Duke has played upon his subjects' appetites and has tempted them into sin and transgression. For he knows, as well as Mariana does, that the best of men are "moulded out of faults / And, for the most, become much more the better / For being a little bad" (5.1.437-9). Cultivating the sins of pride and lust through his chicanery with the bed-trick and his strategy of substitutions provides the longed for opportunity for the Duke to threaten the unruly group of "headstrong jades" he has mislead into temptation with shame and exposure. The acute fear of disgrace that he imposes upon his subjects through his own theatricalized and public revelation heightens their bashfulness and compels each of them to acknowledge the presence of others and the weight of their judgment, and hence succumb to the moral insight of *The Sermon on the Mount* required of every good Christian. The kind of socio-ethical reflexivity generated through the public gaze in turn "arraigns" their shy consciences and elicits guilt-ridden and remorseful confessions overridden with shame and dishonor. The "heavenly comforts of despair" the Duke showers upon his people provokes the moral self-knowledge necessary for motivating a spiritually transformative and reformatory process through which pride is placated as it impels modes of Christian humility and charitable mercy. The Duke thus utilizes the feeling states of shame and shyness as religious emotions productive of conscience, apprehension, conversion, and salvation. Yet, at the same time, one cannot ignore the affective power of shame as a highly coerced means of socialization, as well as mechanism of disempowerment and disciplinary control.

In abandoning the reputational backlash that comes from external, violent modes of discipline and punishment, the Duke is able to implement a more privatized mode of moral consciousness, restraint, and internalized submission within his subjects by inconspicuously engendering within them the bridle of shame. By situating his subjects within the open space of publicity Vincentio is able to intensify the sense of disgrace and discernibility through which their bashfulness is provoked, to the extent that they will be impelled to inhibit themselves from engaging in sinful conduct in the future. Vincentio has exposed his subjects and shamed them for their faults, and then he unexpectedly pardons them. Yet what appears to be born of Christian modesty feeds into the Duke's desire for political power, dominance, glory, and esteem. His pardons operate as a way in which he can bind his subjects to himself and be upheld as "the savior of the city, its moral and judicial arbiter, the holy bearer of heaven's sword and torch, the font of mercy."<sup>110</sup> It is, however, the case that the more troubling aspects associated with the Duke's deployment of religious practice seem in the end to be complicated by the way in which he turns his own use of religion back upon himself, stage-managing his exposure as a means of arousing his own shy conscience and developing the insight generated through the principle of universal judgment.

Indeed, several critics have noted the paradoxical way in which the "shy" Duke who withdrew from publicity at the start of the play ends it by implicating himself in what can only be a horrifying nightmare of public display and exposure. As Sundelson notes, the Duke's "furtiveness does not preclude attention

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<sup>110</sup> Berger, *Making Trifles*, 403.

– quite the contrary, in fact, ‘I love the people, / But do not like to stage me to their eyes, the duke declares at the start of the play, but provides an audience for his return to the city and arranges a second, even more dramatic appearance from beneath his friar’s hood. The Duke arranges one *coup de theatre* [sic] after another when Mariana removes her veil and Claudio is produced alive, but he himself is his own best exhibit.”<sup>111</sup> Public exposure is a horrifying gambit for the shy self; Vincentio appears nowhere more shy in the play than when he deliberately reveals himself and his series of contemptible tricks to the populace, but his shyness is a self-defeating tactic. Just as it is manipulated into an emboldened state of power, aggrandizement, and political conquest, the Duke’s bashfulness overturns the personal and political status he has achieved, situating him once again within the abject, disempowering affective space of shame, compliance, and social humility. Although he is able to transcend the political limitations inherent in his bashfulness, the Duke, however, cannot entirely evade his own sense of Christian virtue and in fact attempts to atone for the sinful forms of pride, vanity, and dominance he has achieved by recreating its affective conditions. If Vincentio’s exposure to shame lends him an aura of magisterial power, his newfound authority is also simultaneously undermined through his unmasking. For his public revelation has the effect of recapitulating, on an extreme level, his stance of Christian shyness, meekness, and humility.

Lucio’s rather un-bashful denial of the Duke’s request to marry Kate Keepdown in the final moments of the play alarms us to the intensity of the

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<sup>111</sup> Sundelson, *Restorations of the Father*, 98.

others' silence and to the pressure their feelings of shame and shyness exert upon their will, impelling them into states of compliance and dutiful subjection as they kneel before one another and the all-powerful Duke locked together in forced states of matrimony and friendship (3.1.158). But then, none of Vincentio's subjects (other than Lucio) really has any right to speak out or criticize him for the same sinful pride and desire for honor for which they have each come to find themselves guilty. In the end, we cannot ignore Lucio's resistance nor his incessant slanders any more than the Duke. They "stick" like a "kind of burr" gnawing at the Duke's conscience, bringing his dark deeds devastatingly to light and augmenting his guilt and his felt need for spiritual atonement (4.4.177).

## Conclusion

### Shakespeare's "Modest Gaze:" Rethinking Social Anxiety Disorder

With the advent of the civilizing process, and in the wake of an expanding social world, early modern bashfulness transgressed gender boundaries making a problematic appearance in men. The challenge that shyness posed to prescribed gender roles contributed to the first historically documented pathologization of the emotion, and reflects the insidious way in which psychiatric and medical knowledge “serve the social function of prescribing normative codes of behavior.”<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's representations of shyness, however, seek to expose and counteract the role cultural ideology plays in distorting specific emotions and in discursively reframing their social value and historical viability. Although an early work like *King Henry the Sixth* reveals Shakespeare's considerable interest in the cultural formation of shyness and a tendency to uphold a view of the emotion as a dangerous pathology, Shakespeare's later plays reveal a shift in perception as if, at some point, his “savage eyes turned to a modest gaze” (*The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.78). As I have shown in this study, Shakespeare's attitude toward shyness alters dramatically in the latter stages of his career. *Coriolanus* itself marks a profound transformation in Shakespeare's thinking about shyness and underscores his inability to subscribe to the same negative cultural views of the emotion he once did.

*Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice* are two plays in particular that engage in a complex investigation into the problematic status of

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, “The Medicalisation of Shyness: From Social Misfits to Social Fitness,” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 28.2 (2006), 135.

early modern shyness. On the one hand, they develop bashful Christian characters who find their shyness and sense of religious humility deeply limiting in a rapidly advancing secular world. Antonio, Portia, Shylock, and Duke Vincentio recognize the threat that their shyness poses to notions of personal, social, and political advancement. These characters strive to overcome their shyness, eventually gaining a modicum of power and control by learning how to exploit the emotion in others and how to cultivate it for their own advantage. Shakespeare could have easily ended in his construction of characters predicated upon a well-recognized, culturally disparaging model of bashfulness that is coherently reflected through the characters' persistent attempts to manipulate and transcend their shyness so as to move into a space of dominance, as well as social and political authority. Instead, however, he endeavors to problematize and challenge the stigmatization of the emotion taking place in his society. Although Shakespeare's bashful characters mirror negative perceptions of shyness prevalent in his culture, it is more important to notice how their shy characterizations destabilize, question, and work toward rethinking such views through their conveyance of a more affirmative, theologically and philosophically oriented interpretation of the emotion.

The great appeal of Shakespeare's representations of shyness may be attributed to the fact that he ascribes the trait to devout Christian characters who come to find that they can never quite escape the aura of moral consciousness and humility their religious bashfulness provokes, even though they strive to do so. *Coriolanus* is especially relevant here because it brings out Shakespeare's interest



in the ethical and philosophical roots of bashfulness through an in-depth exploration of the great hero's fear of blushing. Despite the increasing denigration of shyness taking place in early modernity, the play calls attention to the way in which the state continued to develop historically as a complex psycho-physiological and embodied moral response linked to notions of conscience and spiritual conversion. It also points to the status of shyness as a highly privileged religious emotion integrally involved in theological attempts to limit the consequences of materialist readings of the humoral body and the soul.

The religious value inherent in shyness underlies and shapes the subjectivities of characters in other plays whose bashfulness accounts for much of their moral complexity and spiritual virtue. Once analyzed in relation to their display of bashfulness, Bassanio and Portia appear to possess a profound degree of humility and religious sensibility that complicates their more self-interested actions. A seemingly shameless character like Jessica, for example, is also redeemed through her inhibiting fear of shame and her bashful modesty. The restraint she feels when she elopes and escapes from Shylock's house gestures toward an underlying sense of ethical depth, social concern, and moral awareness. The strong Christian bias of *The Merchant of Venice* significantly influences the development of Shylock's character to such an extent that "the Jew" in fact achieves a remarkable level of humanity, social feeling, moral density, and spiritual complexity through his experience of shyness and humility in the courtroom. Indeed, *Merchant's* major figures may be able to manipulate their shyness into a restrictive and hierarchical "shy-lock," so to speak, but not without

engaging in a religious and moral struggle over their actions. Despite the sense of self-empowerment that a character like Antonio is able to achieve over himself and others, his flagrant attempts to recapitulate his abject stance of humility, shame, and subjection are indicative of the workings of his own shy conscience and stand out as a reflection of his ethical integrity and religious aspiration.

The same pattern of religious inspiration is reflected in Duke Vincentio. Like a number of other Shakespearean characters, the Duke seeks to escape and overcome the limitations his shyness imposes upon him politically. By playing upon his subjects' bashful Christian dispositions the Duke is able to transfer the emotion onto them and to cultivate it for his own magisterial advantage. In the end, however, Vincentio finds it difficult to come to terms with the sinful forms of vanity and authority he has attained. Although able to transform his shyness into a mode of power, the Duke seeks to counteract this achievement. Over the course of the play he endeavors to turn the same religious processes he previously inflicted onto his subjects oppressively back upon himself. In the final act he subjects himself to the same abject emotional spectrum of shame, compliance, and humility, and coerces his own shy conscience as mode of spiritual atonement.

Shakespeare's plays thus involve a radical countermovement in terms of their representation of shyness. At the same time as the plays reflect a secular view of shyness as a harmful and limiting trait, they overturn their own affective logic by upholding the ethical and virtuous connotations of the emotion and treat worldly, self-interested patterns of thought and behavior as sinful, deeply flawed,

and in need of spiritual correction through the contrasting emotional experience of shame.

The religious approach to shyness that Shakespeare's plays endorse is akin to what we would call today "shy pride." Over the last couple of decades shyness, a relatively normal emotional state, has been transformed into an unhealthy state of mind for individuals living in contemporary Western societies. Its anti-social behavioral symptomology regularly signals a failure to uphold certain cultural values, such as assertiveness, confidence, boldness, and loquacious vocality. Accordingly, it has been increasingly defined as an "insidious cultural epidemic" in need of a vast range of clinical treatments, and called "one of the worst neglected disorders of our time."<sup>2</sup> Linda Crawford, director of the *London Shyness Centre*, asserts that shyness is "the crippling ... hidden emotion of the century."<sup>3</sup> According to Patricia McDaniel, psychologists are now "unanimous in their assessment that shyness [has] a largely negative impact on the person who experience[s] it and on those around him or her." Today, there are over two hundred negative outcomes associated with shyness in contemporary social psychological literature, including "perceived unattractiveness and incompetence, low self-esteem, alienation, loneliness, conformity, submission." Given the negative, as well as anti-social effects of shyness, the personality trait has now been attached to a host of socially deviant personalities: "murderers, pedophiles, and child neglectors [are] more likely to be defined by others as shy." Current

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<sup>2</sup> Susie Scott, "The Medicalisation of Shyness: From Social Misfits to Social Fitness," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 28.2 (2006): 133-53. See Barry Wolfe, "Disorder of the Decade," *Psychology Today* 26.4 (1993), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Crawford, London Shyness Centre <http://www.shyness.co.uk>.

research also links shyness to “bulimia and other health problems as well as to alcohol and drug abuse.”<sup>4</sup>

McDaniel has remarked upon the way modern society’s valuation of “outgoing, gregarious, and assertive” people has reduced tolerance for those individuals who do not measure up to this personality ideal. Christopher Lane similarly notes how today “psychiatrists and doctors assert that those who aren’t sufficiently outgoing may be mentally ill.”<sup>5</sup> The increasing demand for extroversion in our culture has transformed shyness into a clinical disorder that obstructs our goals. The world is a social environment made up of social pressures, wherein we have to meet and interact with other people, “impress the boss,” make friends, get married. Courtship, marriage, friendship, and business success are the social arrangements that define modern society and our place within it. How can an individual succeed in the modern world if he or she persistently suffers from “nervousness in social encounters, reluctance to engage in social interactions, failure to participate appropriately in social situations, fear of negative evaluation, slow speech patterns, silence, lack of eye contact and blushing?”<sup>6</sup> As Lane, McDaniel, and others have shown, a host of drugs, self-help books, and shyness clinics have entered the medical marketplace to aid

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia McDaniel, *Shrinking Violets and Caspar Milquetoasts: Shyness, Power, and Intimacy in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>5</sup> McDaniel, *Shrinking Violets*, 8; Lane, *Shyness*, 2. Note also the proliferation of recent magazine and newspaper articles that both call attention to shyness as a sickness and respond to this view. See Brian Walsh, “The Power of Shyness” and “The Upside of Being an Introvert (And Why Extroverts are Overrated),” *Time Magazine* (February 2012); Erin Anderson, “How Shy Is Too Shy,” *The Globe and Mail* (January 2013); Colby Cash, “You’re Not Shy, You’re Sick,” *The Report* (June 2000); Robert Langreth, “Drugs: Depression Pill May Help Treat the Acutely Shy,” *The Wall Street Journal* (May 1999).

<sup>6</sup> McDaniel, *Shrinking Violets*, 5.

individuals in coping with their fear of others.<sup>7</sup> Yet the new wave of psychiatric research and drug therapies has done little to alleviate the globalized perception of shyness as a harmful mental disorder, fostering instead its alleged status as the “psychosocial problem of our age.”<sup>8</sup>

Recently, there have been attempts to both expose and resist this detrimental process. In the case of shyness there has been a surge of what Susie Scott terms “shy pride,” characterized by a movement to emphasize the positive connotations of the emotion, such as modesty, sensitivity, and self-awareness. The *Shy and Free* website, for example, talks about methods of “transforming shyness” into a powerful mode of self-realization essential for “finding the real you.”<sup>9</sup> As Scott notes, “the idea that we can achieve personal growth by surviving psychological distress reminds us [of] influential remarks about schizophrenia as a voyage of self-discovery, and suggests that shyness represents a more ‘authentic’ mode of being.”<sup>10</sup> Today, a number of psychiatrists working in the field of “social anxiety” treat the problem through a process of de-medicalization by reminding patients that their behavior is relatively benign as they endeavor to bring out the more positive aspects of shyness. According to Montreal psychiatrist Dr. Norman Hoffman, shy people are shy because they are overwhelmed socially. In this regard, shyness indicates an extraordinary sensitivity toward others and a greater awareness of and sensitivity to their feelings. Extroverts, on the other hand, tend to lack consciousness of those around them and be more self-centered.

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<sup>7</sup> See also Susie Scott, “The Medicalisation of Shyness,” 133-53.

<sup>8</sup> Lane, *Shyness*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.shyandfree.com>

<sup>10</sup> Scott, “The Medicalisation of Shyness,” 148.

Despite its current pathologization, shyness has positive and useful functions, for it can often neutralize the egocentricity of extroverted behavior, speak to the social needs of the group, and thus foster a deeper sense of human connection.<sup>11</sup>

The current movement to medicalize shyness has not only tended to denigrate a personal attribute integral to the maintenance of a healthy society, but also, as Christopher Lane notes, contributed to an “unrecoverable loss of emotional range, an impoverishment of human experience.” In previous decades bashfulness conveyed “bookishness, reserve and a yen for solitude.... Not so long ago, the reclusive Emily Dickinson could write eloquently about what ensues after great pain.... Nathaniel Hawthorne could transform his reticence into a new way of engaging with the world, ... and Henry David Thoreau could press for solitude by living in a hut some miles from town.”<sup>12</sup> However, in the twenty first-century the anti-social behavioral symptoms of shyness have infringed upon the emotion’s previously more positive connotations.

A central goal of this study has thus been to reconsider shyness by illuminating Shakespeare’s interest in it as a virtuous passion. In the midst of a rapidly advancing “shyness epidemic,” Shakespeare offers a kind of counterattack by reminding early modern audiences and readers that bashfulness – especially in men – is not a negative, crippling, and painfully debilitating emotional affliction that individuals should strive relentlessly to overcome. Rather, as the plays

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<sup>11</sup> These illuminating and relevant ideas came up several times in discussions with Dr. Norman Hoffman, and should be firmly attributed to him and his research. The evolutionary approach to shyness is best reflected today in a group work setting, where a number of people work together on one project. As Dr. Hoffman notes, the group wouldn’t get very far if it was made up entirely of extroverts fighting for dominance and attention.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9. See also Clark Davis, *Hawthorne’s shyness: Ethics, Politics, and the Question of Engagement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

convey, shyness has a long and complex history of its own as a virtuous emotion. *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure* effectively delineate the philosophical, conceptual, and linguistic history of shyness, and work toward illuminating its display in early modern individuals as an affirmative reflection of one's moral, spiritual, and religious integrity, capacity for self-apprehension, and selfless forms of social humility. Just as some are making efforts today to call attention to the positive aspects of shyness as a mental and affective state productive of a high level of intuition, intellectual thought, social value, and self-consciousness, so Shakespeare drew attention to these facets of the emotion by indicating its venerated connection to moral and religious modes of thought, action, and existence. Against the modern vilification of shyness I offer Shakespeare's representations of the emotion "that to believing souls" gives "light in darkness, comfort in despair."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Two*, ed. Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.1.64-5

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