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# PLOTS AND PLOTTERS

Double Agents and Villains in Spy Fictions

Edited by Carmen Concilio

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DARK CORNERS AND DOUBLE BODIES:  
ESPIONAGE AS TRANSGRESSION IN  
*MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

LUCIA FOLENA  
(University of Turin)

By my troth, Isabel, I loved thy brother; if the old fantastical Duke of dark corners had been at home, he had lived.  
(*Measure for Measure*, IV.iii.155–57)<sup>1</sup>

The title of “fantastic” which the dramatis personae of *Measure for Measure* attributes to Lucio identifies him as an erratic, unpredictable character — one whose central trait is his systematic distancing himself from the institutions and codes of the society he lives in.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, he ascribes the selfsame deviance to his ruler, the figure that should be, by definition, the very embodiment and safeguard of those institutions and codes. In the eyes of this reluctant subject of Vincentio’s, the latter wields an utterly arbitrary authority whose lethal potential is fortunately neutralized by a natural penchant for benevolence and *laissez-faire*. Its exercise being so subjective, power as seen by Lucio loses any moral legitimation, turning into a mere ob-

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1 References are to William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. by J. W. Lever (London: Methuen, 1971; hereafter *MfM*).

2 Even though according to the *OED* (B2) the noun “fantastic” may simply, in reference to people, designate extravagant appearance and manners, indicating “One given to fine or showy dress; a fop” (or “An Improvident young Gallant” in Overbury’s 1613 *Characters*), in application to Lucio the principal meaning seems to be that of “One who has fanciful ideas or indulges in wild notions” (B1) — one who thus establishes a significant ideological discrepancy between himself and the rest of the world he belongs in. The adjective “fantastical”, as allotted by Lucio to the Duke, may essentially be taken to convey an analogous set of implications (see *OED*, “fantastical”, 4 a–b). Brian Gibbons stresses that “the epithet ‘fantastic’ for Lucio may be the scribe’s” (*Measure for Measure*, ed. by B. Gibbons, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, 77).

stacle to the free expansion of personalities and the unbounded satisfaction of desires.

Yet, however evidently biased and overly drastic, Lucio's perspective is not completely unrealistic. Vincentio's past administration was weakened by a fundamental flaw — the tolerance he manifested, by and large, vis-à-vis unlawful conducts. His easy-going attitude, which Lucio and others seem to impute merely to an idiosyncratic disregard for established legal procedures, found its theoretical justification in a metaphysical idea of the body politic — precisely what the Duke offers to Angelo in the opening scene as the rationale on which to establish his temporary rule. On divesting himself of the centrality and visibility intrinsic in his political role, he demands that his substitute become a perfect copy of himself, renouncing his own identity for a time in order to be 'possessed' or 'transmuted' through the 'sacrament' of the conveyance of power:

I do bend my speech  
To one that can my part in him advertise:  
Hold therefore, Angelo.  
In our remove be thou at full ourself.  
Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
Live in thy tongue, and heart.  
[...]  
Your scope is as mine own,  
So to enforce or qualify the laws  
As to your soul seems good. (I.i.40–45, 64–66)

Angelo is here asked to *be* the Duke — not just to 'represent' him as the delegate he actually is or 'play' him as an actor plays a part. Indeed, the request appears perfectly consistent with the mystical side of the theory of the king's two bodies, as formulated by Elizabethan jurists, which assumes that whenever a sovereign dies or abandons the crown for any reason, "the Body politic", seen as a permanent metaphysical principle, "is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural" — that of the new monarch, or regent. Such a political transubstantiation takes



place in disregard of any physical, mental or moral blemish attributable to the latter, for the king's

Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.<sup>3</sup>

This is what enables late-medieval and early modern monarchs to deflect from literal applications of pre-existent laws and to “qualify” or adjust them at will. The ensuing haziness and unpredictability of the judicial system's reaction to a misdemeanour, however, must needs result in destabilizing Justice itself, depriving it, in the eyes of the subjects, of the certainty and steadiness which make it one of the founding structures of social existence.

In all likelihood, Vincentio does not believe wholeheartedly what he says to Angelo; more than the expression of a sincere conviction, his presentation of the transmission of power as a sacred ritual of transfiguration seems part of his deceptive strategy.<sup>4</sup> It simply provides him with a valid justification for delegating his public function even to a man whom he already knows, as becomes clear subsequently, to be a downright hypocrite — to

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3 Edmund Plowden, *Commentaries and Reports* (1571), cit. in Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957), 13 and 7.

4 He concludes his dialogue with Friar Thomas by expressing his primary intention in leaving the dukedom to Angelo as follows: “Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our *seemers* be” (I.iii.53–54; italics added). He thus reintroduces, in the person of the Deputy as the detainer of supreme authority, the distance between appearance and reality which the theory of the king's two bodies strives to annul.

say the least — and far less honourable and even-minded than he strives to appear.<sup>5</sup>

That power in its entirety, within the framework of body-politic metaphysics, migrates from old ruler to new does not automatically result in its making itself entirely visible. Like a divine entity, rather than the fullness of its being, what it usually manifests of itself is just one of its two opposite faces — the implacable or the lenient, that of Old-Testament wrath or that of New-Testament forgiveness. “What figure of us, think you, he will bear?”, the Duke asks Escalus about Angelo, adding:

For you must know, we have with special soul  
Elected him our absence to supply;  
Lent him our terror, drest him with our love,  
And given his deputation all the organs  
Of our own power. (I.i.16–21)

His is no more than a rhetorical question. He knows very well which of the two “figures” his prospective substitute is going to “bear” — Terror, not Love — and this is precisely why he has selected him instead of Escalus.<sup>6</sup> Shortly thereafter, when Isabella

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5 Though he declares to Friar Thomas that Angelo is a “man of stricture and firm abstinence” (I.iii.12), he evidently already knows about his past behaviour to Mariana, as appears in III.i.208–30, which makes his letting such a questionable character wield unchecked sway in the state all the more deceitful.

6 To Friar Thomas he admits the excessive tolerance that has characterized his rule, and his desire to go back to a stricter enforcement of the law. He does not want, however, to incur the general hatred caused by his personally inaugurating an era of repression: “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 th’ambush of my name strike home, / And yet my nature never in the fight / To do in slander” (I.iii.35–43). Apart from the final punishment, his strategy has a striking affinity with that adopted in 1502, according to Machiavelli, in the conquered territory of Romagna by Cesare Borgia (*The Prince*, VII.8). Wishing to impose a strict rule on his new subjects while simultaneously eschewing their hate, the prince designated as his representative in the region Ramiro de Lorqua, a notoriously cruel and reckless man whom he invested with absolute power. After through this delegate the sternness and

entreats Angelo to “show some pity”, the Deputy attempts to reconcile the two extremes of rigour and clemency by presenting the latter as immanent in the former:

I show it most of all when I show justice;  
 For then I pity those I do not know,  
 Which a dismiss'd offence would after gall,  
 And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,  
 Lives not to act another. (II.ii.101–05)

The “justice” of the scaffold thus would paradoxically contain “pity”, but the implication of Angelo’s words is that the reverse would not hold, and that in no case might “pity” be seen as a manifestation of “justice”. This proposition, in its asymmetrical setup, is obviously untenable. Not only is it at odds with the neat antithesis between two declaredly incompatible ruling conducts which structures most of the play, but it is belied by its final scene, where Vincentio’s verdicts suggest that forgiveness and symbolic penalties may very appropriately substitute for capital punishments.

The notion of justice to which Angelo recurrently appeals is as metaphysical in nature as the body-politic theory, and in direct conflict with it. Whereas the latter makes the ruler the ultimate arbiter of the law — the unchallengeable dispenser of acquittals and punishments meted out “as to [his] soul seems good” — the Deputy by invoking the former represents himself as the mere executor of an impersonal, transcendent decree that no human will may alter. To Escalus, who suggests that putting Claudio to death is acceptable only on condition Angelo is absolutely sure

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violence of the law had manifested themselves enough to terrify the populace, Borgia staged a ferocious public spectacle. He had Ramiro’s body, cut in two, exhibited in the piazza at Cesena, so as to distance himself drastically in the community’s eyes from that way of administering justice. The analogy was first pointed out by Norman Holland (“*Measure for Measure: The Duke and the Prince*”, *Comparative Literature* 11 (1959), 16–20). Vincentio’s Machiavellianism is discussed in detail in Zdravko Planinc, “Shakespeare’s Critique of Machiavellian Force, Fraud, and Spectacle in *Measure for Measure*”, *Humanitas* 23 nos. 1–2 (2010), 144–68.

he would not have committed the same crime had circumstances prompted him to it, he objects:

I not deny  
 The jury passing on the prisoner's life  
 May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two,  
 Guiltier than him they try. What's open made to justice,  
 That justice seizes. What know the laws  
 That thieves do pass on thieves? 'Tis very pregnant,  
 The jewel that we find, we stoop and take't,  
 Because we see it; but what we do not see,  
 We tread upon, and never think of it. (II.i.18–26)

Of course a consistent application of the metaphysical principle would require the judge-thief to begin by sentencing himself: for how could he possibly assert he does not see his own crime? But Angelo is apparently unaware of the incongruity. To Isabella he declares: “It is the law, not I, condemn your brother” (II.ii.80). When she had asked him to condemn the sin rather than the sinner, he had replied thus:

Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?  
 Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done:  
 Mine were the very cipher of a function  
 To fine the faults, whose fine stands in record,  
 And let go by the actor. (II.ii.37–41)

Theoretically, he might have consented, or at least admitted that such meekness was a plausible alternative to inflexibility. It would not, that is, have clashed with his customized view of the impersonality/metaphysics of the Law; if a guilty judge does not punish himself for secretly committing the selfsame crime he censors when visibly perpetrated by another, he is already de-individualizing justice and acquitting a culprit without — formally — absolving his offence. Angelo is thus falling prey to a hopeless contradiction which is gradually amplified by his desire for Isabella, generating an increasing distance between his “tongue” and his “heart” (II.iv.1–7), to the point where he is forced to acknowledge — even though only to himself — that there is something

wrong with a felon sending another felon to death: “Thieves for their robbery have authority, / When judges steal themselves” (II. ii.176–77).

Vienna is in a condition of disorder due to the lack at the head of the state of an authority capable of being at the same time strong and fair. With Angelo’s tenure misrule brought about by excessive slackness gives way to its reversed mirror image — not good rule but misrule generated by unmitigated and largely unmotivated intransigence. Vincentio uses the swing from one extreme to the other to distance his final public image from the previous one, remodelling himself in the concluding scene into the incarnation of equity as reconciliation of compassion and firmness. Most of what happens in *Measure for Measure* — with the exception of unpredictable events such as the Barnardine—Ragozine trade-off — corresponds to his initial scheme or at least to his desires;<sup>7</sup> like Prospero’s in *The Tempest* and, to a lesser extent, Oberon’s in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, his role is that of the actor who doubles as playwright or stage-manager, controlling his fellow-characters and determining their moves. In discarding his ducal garb to don the monastic habit he simply exchanges a manifest authority for a different kind of power — invisible and operating directly on a restricted segment of society, but nonetheless substantial. This he achieves by turning into a spy, or better, a secret agent. Prospero and Oberon also observe others surreptitiously to discover their real natures or ascertain their hidden intentions; when aiming at changing the course of things, however, they do not need to intervene personally but employ their magic to summon spirits ready to serve them. Contrariwise, Vincentio, who of course possesses no superhuman faculties, gets directly involved

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7 Planinc regards him as responsible for the entirety of the plot: “From what follows, it is not difficult to determine that the Duke orders Angelo to enforce the laws against lechery, and in a most effective manner. [...] A single execution should snap the rest of them [the bourgeoisie, as opposed to the lower classes] to attention; and it should also serve well as a spectacle to distract the poor. The Duke likely specifies that the man should be Claudio” (150–51).

in the action and contrives plots and shifts designed to direct it, from his point of view, towards a satisfactory solution.

The disguised-ruler scenario has a long tradition in folktales, historiography and literature and is recurrent in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. In most if not all cases the public figure's reason for taking a feigned identity is fairly straightforward and in effect commendable, modelled as it is on that ascribed to the Roman emperor Severus — observing the people and the officers of the law in order to acquire the information necessary to improve the government or reform the administration.<sup>8</sup> This is for instance how Prince Hal justifies himself for impersonating a young profligate in the *Henry IV* plays.<sup>9</sup> A similar outcome may be envisaged by Vincentio's plan but certainly does not account for it entirely. The Duke's motivations, as has already been suggested, are more complicated and self-referential; his main goal appears to be that of transforming his return to Vienna into the triumphal inauguration of a new era of order and peace, wiping out, as far as possible, all traces of his past failures. What justifies his being regarded as a kind of villain is his Machiavellian tendency to use others in general — not only Angelo — as mere instruments, to the point where he seems prepared to expose them to potentially lethal dangers, as he does with Claudio, if that may contribute in enabling him to attain his objectives. One would be tempted to suppose that even the happy ending, with its transformation of expected bodily punishments into moral lectures and imposed marriages, rather than the consequence of his good-heartedness, is the result of a political calculation and is devised to intensify the glory of his re-entry into visibility and power.

Leaving his intent aside, on one level Vincentio acts as a scientist, for his plan is also an experiment in permutation. Like a superior being — or a god — bent on studying the reactions of a lesser world to unforeseen alterations, he repeatedly switches the pawns on his game board and waits to observe the effect of

8 Cf. Lever, Introduction to *MfM*, xlv–xlv; Gibbons, Introduction to *Meas.*, 15 ff.

9 See in particular *1Henry IV*, I.ii.187–209 (ed. Harold Child, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958).

his interference: “Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be”. After trading positions with Angelo he repeats the test by ordering that Barnardine’s head be substituted for Claudio’s, and that Mariana replace Isabella in the Deputy’s bed. All this is preceded by an even more significant exchange, obtained through a reversal of the ordinary syntax of the gaze, in which the plenitude of the monarch’s power is ensured precisely by his/her being constantly under his/her people’s eyes.<sup>10</sup> From an object of collective sight, Vincentio instead reshapes himself into a — or the (quintessential) — subject of vision, which leads him to invent an alternative way of gaining and accruing control over others.

10 “O place and greatness! Millions of false eyes / Are stuck upon thee”, Vincentio complains in IV.i.60–61, after expressing his personal dislike of this exposure by declaring: “I love the people, / But do not like to stage me to their eyes” (I.i.67–68) — which of course does not prevent him from triumphantly ‘staging’ himself in the final act. In the cultural systems of Renaissance and early modern Europe, according to Michel Foucault, a particularly strong link was postulated to exist between power and visibility — actual or symbolic, as inscribed in particular in the spectacle of the scaffold (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. by Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1979, 24–69). Claudio’s words to the Provost, “why dost thou show me thus to th’ world? / Bear me to prison, where I am committed”, and the latter’s reply, “I do it not in evil disposition, / But from Lord Angelo by special charge” (I.ii.108–11), suggest that the Deputy believes in the importance of exhibiting an apprehended culprit publicly as a means of instilling in the populace a sense of the absoluteness and inalterability of their ruler’s decrees. Like most of her contemporary monarchs, Queen Elizabeth made her staging herself to her subjects’ eyes, iconically or directly in pageants and progresses, an essential component of her authority. Conversely, James I’s uneasiness about being under incessant observation is well known. A passage in the *Basilikon Doron* expresses this feeling through the same theatrical metaphor employed by Vincentio, comparing the king to “one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly do behold” (in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. by Charles McIlwain, New York: Russell and Russell, 1965, 43). Once, in March 1604, James had actually attempted to reposition himself as source, rather than target, of the gaze by visiting the Royal Exchange in disguise to watch the merchants and the citizens, but he had been spotted almost instantly and forced to have the stair door closed against the crowd which had assembled — as Angelo would have commented — “in obsequious fondness” to manifest an “untaught love” appearing as “offence” (*MfM*, II.iv.28–30; for the Exchange episode, recounted in Gilbert Dugdale’s 1604 *The Time Triumphant*, see Lever, Introduction to *MfM*, xxxiv; Gibbons, Introduction to *Meas.*, 23).

This is not a panoptical situation. What Vincentio, as Friar Lodowick, does in Vienna has far more to do with the category of espionage than with that of surveillance as delineated by Michel Foucault.<sup>11</sup> Actually, surveillance, before being gradually adopted by 18<sup>th</sup>-century penal systems in the prisons of many parts of Europe as a plausible substitute for capital punishment, was already functioning, along with espionage, as a practice of intrusion into secrets and forms of dissent — whether political, religious, or merely social — implemented by Renaissance authorities to thwart any potential disturbance to the orderly progression of collective existence. Queen Elizabeth, under whose reign the first modern intelligence service was developed,<sup>12</sup> also encouraged the notion that her subjects were under her constant scrutiny, and that nothing of what they might do or say could be imagined to elude her notice. Significantly, this point is made most explicit in one of her portraits, where she is represented wearing a cloak or robe covered with eyes and ears, thus sanctioning the circularity, and simultaneous asymmetry, of the gaze — the monarch empowered by her official icon, inscribed with the manifold signs and symbols of her sovereignty,<sup>13</sup> being displayed before the eyes

11 *Discipline and Punish*, 135–228. Many scholars, notably J. Dollimore in his fundamental “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*” (in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985, 72–87), establish no specific distinction between the two categories. See also Sébastien Lefait, “‘Millions of False Eyes / Are Stuck upon Thee’: The Scope of Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*”, *Sillages critiques*, 15/2013, <http://sillagescritiques.revues.org/2594> (acc. Aug. 25, 2015).

12 By her secretary of state, Sir Francis Walsingham. See Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth [1925–27]*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967); Stephen Budiansky, *Her Majesty’s Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham and the Birth of Modern Espionage* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005); John M. Archer, *Sovereignty and Intelligence: Spying and Court Culture in the English Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1993).

13 Rather than her Body Natural, what her portraits typically exhibit — in the luxurious, heavily semanticized geometries of apparel and ornament by which her physical being is reduced to a face and two hands — is, as it were, an avatar of the Body Politic as transfused in a female head of state. See Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977, 52–54); Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames



of observers whose subjection is doubled through their seeing themselves, in turn, observed and judged by it.<sup>14</sup> The goddess watching humans from on high is far from being *abscondita* but graciously manifests herself to her people. An illusion of visibility is paired with a fiction of omniscience.

Contrariwise, if surveillance ‘proper’ does have a role in *Measure for Measure*, it is as a projection onto the future. The final epiphany of Duke Vincentio, with the literal revelation of the spy’s real face to the public assembled at the city gate, turns the returning superno into a potential universal supervisor. Knowing that their private lives and actions have been under the close searching look of their ruler, people in Vienna now know this may happen again henceforth, and such an awareness is precisely one of the basic principles on which the practice of surveillance rests. For even though, as is often the case, the origin of this form of gaze may be hidden, it is imperative that its objects be enabled to recognize the existence and operation of the gaze itself, so as to internalize the principle of control it presupposes, turning it into a super-ego of sorts: ‘I am being watched by an entity that has some authority over me, therefore I am not free to behave as I like, but I must watch myself’. Surveillance generates collaboration between its agents and its recipients in the repression of

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and Hudson, 1987, 156–61). See also Louis Montrose, “Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the Picturing of Elizabeth”, *Representations* 68 (1999), 108–61; Louis Montrose, “Elizabeth through the Looking-glass: Picturing the Queen’s Two Bodies”, in *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500–2000*, ed. by Regina Schulte (New York—Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 61–87.

14 I am grateful to Mariangela Mosca for reminding me of the plausibility of interpreting the eye-and-ear-robe in the Rainbow Portrait in terms of surveillance. This is how many scholars, including Herbert Norris (*Tudor Costume and Fashion*, Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997, 608), see it: “the eyes and ears on the orange drapery or lining of the fawn outer robe imply that Her Majesty saw and heard everything”. Frances Yates proposes a far more sophisticated reading, based primarily on Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, where the symbolism of the portrait associates it with the allegories of Fame and Intelligence or Wisdom, while at the same time suggesting a further rendering of the Ovidian figure of Astraea (“Allegorical Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I at Hatfield House” [1952], rpt. as Appendix to *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* [1975], London: Routledge, 1999, 215–19).



The *Rainbow Portrait*, c. 1600–1603, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger or Isaac Oliver (Hatfield House, Hertfordshire)

what a given cultural context identifies as transgressive conducts. It is precisely through this kind of mechanism that a subject becomes fully such — submitted to a higher power (*suddito*) and simultaneously invested with the freedom to choose and to act (*soggetto*). Once again, as in the Renaissance body-politic theory, religious analogies are evident. God may be invisible, but the good Christian never forgets the presence of this scrutinizing eye — this “Judicious sharp spectator [...] / That sits and marks still who doth act amisse”<sup>15</sup> — and behaves consequently. Obviously, on the other hand, espionage has a primary interest in being as concealed and imperceptible as possible.

Taken to an extreme, surveillance may be a simple narrative of surveillance, recounting the legend of an apparatus of supervision which has not actually been implemented but is generally believed to be at work. In the *panopticon* it is not indispensable for someone to be sitting in the central tower, but it is indispensable to have the inmates convinced that someone is actually there. Surveillance does not need to exist but it needs to be *thought* to exist. Conversely, espionage (in the perspective of the spies and their controlling powers) should erase the traces of its operation, and even of its possibility, as completely as it can, making its objects utterly unaware of itself. It needs to exist, but it also needs to be thought *not* to exist — not to be active there and then.

Furthermore, surveillance comes from within a community, developing its net from above. It trickles down from the top of the political and social pyramid — from the detainers of authority and command through their representatives and delegates onto their subordinates and subjects/*sudditi*. By virtue of the collaborative dynamics it calls into existence, its action, seen optimistically, should result in strengthening the bonds among individuals

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15 Sir Walter Raleigh, “On the Life of Man”, 5–6, in *The Anchor Anthology of Sixteenth-Century Verse*, ed. by Richard S. Sylvester (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), 341. In *Measure for Measure* the exact point of transition between the notion of espionage and that of surveillance — with the awareness the latter implies — may perhaps be located in Angelo’s final address to a divinized Duke: “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” (V.i.364–68).

and subgroups inside the community itself, turning the latter into a single body by annihilating those centrifugal drives and disintegrating forces which impede its cohesion. Instead of a principle of unity, on the other hand, by its intrinsic secrecy espionage — no matter whether foreign, domestic or conducted at the expense of a more restricted collective entity, such as a commercial enterprise, an industrial concern, and so forth — inevitably introduces a pattern of division, generating an irreparable fracture between two groups in conflict, each of which is compelled to do all it can to protect itself from being discovered or laid bare before the eyes of the other.

Last but not least, ethical implications need to be considered. From the vantage point of a given legal context, surveillance, when contained within definite boundaries so as not to turn into nightmarish oppression,<sup>16</sup> may to a certain extent be regarded as legitimate, aimed as it proclaims to be at reaching a general goal of collective well-being and peace<sup>17</sup> by pre-empting criminal assaults on the order of things or by hindering deviant behaviours from throwing society into chaos. Espionage is more problematic. Each of the two groups it creates tends to invest itself with a positive moral connotation and to ‘demonize’ the other, positing its proceedings as unjustifiable, if for no other reason at least because they are surreptitious and tempt their executors into turning any findings to their own advantage. If the traditional disguised ruler’s scheme finds its justification in the pursuit of the common good, it is only insofar as it, too, remains limited to the acquisition of essential information without trespassing more than is strictly necessary onto the private spheres of individual existences.

16 Queen Elizabeth is reported as declaring, “I would not open windows into men’s souls”, to stress that surveillance, no matter how legitimate, has definite limits and should never amount to encroaching on the private beliefs of citizens. See “Elizabeth I”, no. 17, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*, ed. by Antony Jay (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).

17 If the eye-and-ear robe in the Rainbow Portrait alludes to the monarch being in a position to know all about her subjects, then the rainbow she is holding under the inscription *NON SINE SOLE IRIS* may be there to suggest that internal peace depends upon surveillance.

Now trespass is, etymologically, one and the same thing with transgression, and in fact Duke Vincentio counters his citizens' disregard for the rules and laws designed by him or his predecessors to govern sexuality in Vienna<sup>18</sup> with a comparable contempt for some of the principles that a head of state, no matter how absolute, should abide by — integrity and truthfulness, among others, but first and foremost the tacit, all-important pact established between sovereign and subjects by the very fact of the former being invested with the representation of the Body Politic. If he is to retain the trust and the 'love' of his subordinates, the prince must be understood to agree in restricting the potentially unlimited leeway he enjoys in the use of his power by a unilateral renunciation of a portion of his 'divine' prerogative. Opening windows into souls, making oneself indiscernible in order to gain access to the invisible fields of human minds and feelings — as opposed to seizing only "what's open made to justice" — is utterly inexcusable, all the more so if it is done through usurping the persona of one who belongs in the only category authorized to enter such fields, that is, a friar and a confessor.<sup>19</sup>

Seen from the spy's point of view, this is the best imaginable disguise, of course, enabling its bearer to avail himself of the privileges enjoyed by church members in regard to the accumulation of confidential information, but also, more practically, allowing him to be admitted almost anywhere without being suspected

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18 Both lower- and upper-class forms of deviance are here emblemized by sexual misbehaviour, which thus becomes a general figure of disobedience to authority, incorporating political insubordination, religious dissent and social discontent. See Dollimore, 73–80; David Sundelson, "Misogyny and Rule in *Measure for Measure*", *Women's Studies* 9 no. 1 (1981), 83–91; Leonard Tenenhouse, "Representing Power: *Measure for Measure* in Its Time", in *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (Norman: Pilgrim, 1982), 139–56.

19 The verb "confess" and its derivatives ("confessor", "confession") are remarkably frequent in the play (16 occurrences), and used in most cases to refer to religious, rather than judicial, avowals. At the very end of the last scene (where the repetition of these terms becomes almost obsessive, with as many as nine occurrences) Vincentio, as Duke, still superposes his two identities by describing Mariana in these terms to Angelo: "I have confess'd her, and I know her virtue" (V.i.524).

or examined closely and endowing his opinions and desires with the authoritativeness of commands.<sup>20</sup> It is thanks to his habit that the *soi-disant* Friar Lodowick enters the prison whenever he chooses and treats the Provost as an inferior at his beck and call. Moreover, the frock has a hood which, besides conveniently hiding his face throughout the action and thus providing the closest viable approximation to invisibility, has evidently been devised from the outset to make the final *coup de théâtre* possible before the eyes of an astounded Viennese audience:

*Lucio.* Come, sir! Come, sir! Come, sir! Foh, sir! Why, you bald-pated, lying rascal! — You must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! Will't not off?

[Pulls off the friar's hood and discovers the Duke]

*Vincenzio.* Thou art the first knave that e'er mad'st a duke. (V.i.349–54)

Finally, the befittingness of this sham identity is confirmed by its symbolic significance. Just as sexuality has incorporated all forms of transgression, the deficiencies of the state's political and administrative institutions have made it possible for religion – or a figment thereof – to appropriate the principle of authority and to control the repressive apparatus in their place. Vincenzio's political use of the sacred is another manifestation of his Machiavellian nature, for it is in perfect keeping with the behaviour *The Prince* recommends to a head of state.<sup>21</sup> It is paralleled not only

20 In the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as well as in the early Jacobean context England swarmed with actual (Roman Catholic) priests and affiliates to religious orders who acted as secret agents, generally for the papacy and its allies. Most of the plots against the English monarchy uncovered during that historical phase were ascribed, wholly or in part, to their machinations. Someone who presented himself as a Catholic priest, however, presumably worked as a spy for Walsingham from within the French embassy in London from 1583 to 1585; see Lucia Folena, “*Gardez mon secret: Giordano Bruno and the Historian's Spy Story*”, in *Spy Fiction: un genere per grandi autori*, ed. by Paolo Bertinetti (Torino: Trauben, 2014), 147–61.

21 Taking the appearances of virtue – mercifulness, trustworthiness, benevolence, integrity and religiosity – but being ready to act contrariwise when necessary (XVIII.4). The most indispensable of these five components is a con-

by Angelo's hypocritical Puritanism but by Isabella's comparably questionable monastic calling.<sup>22</sup> All three characters thus play roles that establish a greater-than-usual distance between their private persons and their public façades; all three are 'double bodies', fallible selves clothed in robes of sanctity, thus reminiscent, though in a more down-to-earth manner, of the monarch's twofold constitution in the body-politic theory. Others also occasionally perform as actors under the Duke's direction, in particular Mariana when she is made to impersonate Isabella in the bed trick. Vincentio, Angelo and Isabella, however, are the only ones who, for their own separate reasons, keep their masks throughout the action, until the final *mise en scène* strips them bare of their mendacious coverings and reveals their 'real' beings, exposing the Deputy's wrongdoings along with the fictitious quality of the would-be nun's vocation, which seems to melt away instantly like belated snow in the sun of her ruler's marriage proposal.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, the play-within-the-play coincides in extension with the play itself and ends in the further doubling offered by the theatrical production put on by the Duke in Act V – a third-level performance. Such a staged conclusion, besides reuniting the two audiences – the informed spectators of *Measure for Measure* and the unaware ones of the second-level show – through lighting dark corners and disclosing secrets, calls upon internal actors to relinquish their costumes and get into 'truer' identities once and for all.

Supposing, one is tempted to add, that such a *reductio ad unum* is at all viable in a context where human existence in most of its ramifications is by definition double, as the enormous recurrence of the *theatrum mundi* image in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centu-

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stant outward show of religiosity (XVIII.5). Those in power should regard the beliefs shared by their subjects as a fundamental *instrumentum regni* (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, I.11–15).

22 Planinc puts it thus: "Isabella is as much a novice as the Duke is a friar" (154).

23 "Give me your hand and say you will be mine" (V.i.490; cf. 531–34). Her remaining silent is in all likelihood a manifestation of her consent, which suddenly 'normalizes' her, annulling the otherness she pursued in seeking the cloister as a space where to separate herself from both the male world and the common lot of women, as wives and mothers.

ries suggests.<sup>24</sup> In fact, by setting and codifying specific standards of demeanour to which gentlemen and gentle ladies are asked to conform constantly, treatises like Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, the secular bible of the Elizabethan upper class,<sup>25</sup> prescribe 'acting' and dissimulation in all aspects of life. Courtiers seem to be offered no alternative to a clear-cut division of their selves into two – the public face worn for social interaction and the private one, or 'true I', which must remain invariably hidden to others.<sup>26</sup> The phenomenon must have been so evident to contemporaries that it led George Puttenham, writing his handbook on poetry in 1589, to associate high rank with the most contrived of tropes – allegory:

The Courtly figure *Allegoria* [...] is when we speake of one thing and thinke another, and that our wordes and our meanings meete not. The use of this figure is so large, and his virtue of so great efficacie [...] that] not onely every common Courtier, but also the gravest Counsellour; yea, and the most noble and wisest Prince of them all are many times enforced to use it, by example (say they) of the great Emperour who had it usually in his mouth to say, *Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*. [...] [T]his figure [...] for his duplicitie we call the figure of *false semblant or dissimulation* [...].

[T]he figure *Allegoria* [...] not impertinently we call the Courtier or figure of faire semblant [...].<sup>27</sup>

If courtiers are permanent actors, so are spies, even when they, unlike Vincentio, dissimulate their machinations under the cloaks

24 One finds many obvious examples of this kind of representation in the dramatic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but the same metaphor is also a favourite one in poetry. See for instance Raleigh's "On the Life of Man" (above and n. 15), or Edmund Spenser's Sonnet 54 in *Amoretti* ("Of this world's theatre in which we stay").

25 Especially in Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation, *The Book of the Courtier*.

26 This is a central theme in Stephen Greenblatt's indispensable *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

27 George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, facs. of the 1906 rpt., intro. by Baxter Hathaway (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1970), 196–97 and 305; italics in the text.



of their original identities. A comparable split characterizes the conducts of the two categories; a far more drastic distance than is presupposed to exist in the rest of humankind separates their public and private sides – their masks and their visages. What distinguishes the spy’s acting from the histrionics of the aristocrat intent on staging a show of *sprezzatura*, Platonic love and social superiority is once again a matter of vision and visibility. In order to see what is concealed spies must conceal themselves; they need to make themselves absolutely indiscernible (as spies). Courtiers, like actual actors, are *known* by those who surround them to be clothed in borrowed robes, impersonating characters that do not necessarily have anything in common with their ‘true’ selves. By their simple *Dasein*, and identifiability as role-players, they signal their not being what they represent, in the same way in which a painting or a statue ‘signifies’ its not being that which it ‘stands for’. Spies, instead, anxious to delete all marks of their doings, attempt to simplify their ‘double bodies’ by coinciding as entirely as possible with the ‘costumes’ they wear. Their intrusions into others’ *secreta* – interior spaces fenced off precisely to discourage potential trespassers – depend on their making their own *secreta* not only inaccessible, but, insofar as possible, utterly non-existent. They turn appearance into sub-stance and transfigure sign into body, as in a reversal of the general revelation at the end of *Measure for Measure*, or as in a parody of body-politic transfiguration and its theological undertones.

But after all what really counts in society is what is outside – performance, not ‘truth’. As Angelo acknowledges, stage finery and “false semblants” are enough to impress the most judicious:

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! (II.iv.12–15)