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**Measuring Isabella:
Five Artistic Reinventions of Shakespeare's Heroine**

For most of its history, *Measure for Measure* has not been the darling of the critics and artists that, for example, *Hamlet* has been. In the twentieth century, the constant tug of critical war-horses like F. R. Leavis and the work of scholars like Rosalind Miles managed to resuscitate the status of one of Shakespeare's less liked plays. The text has traversed the normal course of critical touchstones in the modern era, and so become a battleground of differing interpretations and wills. This is especially true in reactions to the play's protagonist, Isabella. Alternately seen as a cold, aloof young woman of the cloth, a feeling, virtuous maid, or any combination thereof, she has elicited mixtures of sympathy and distaste from audiences for centuries. In her extensive discussion of the play in *The Problem of Measure for Measure*, Rosalind Miles outlines the history of critical receptions of the play.ⁱ

Written interpretation and analysis is only one way to "react" to a text, however. An equally viable and much-ignored alternative, like it or not, is illustration. Perhaps it would be better to use more precise language, and classify illustration as a form of adaptation, rather than simply interpretation or analysis. Such adaptations must, though, include the latter two. Illustration obviously requires some knowledge of the text, but it also requires that the artist find a visual vocabulary for the tones, imagery, and other aspects of the play he or she finds most relevant or interesting. It produces a product that dwells in a unique spot; it is dependent upon a text for its inception and for the understanding of its audiences, but breaks free from the strictures of that text through its

determinate evocation of elements latent in that same literary work. (Or at least most illustrators and artists hope, I presume.) Namely, it must forge the ambiguities and gaps in visual imagery left to the imagination in the text into something distinctly palpable. The relationship between the two, text and illustration, is at first symbiotic; an illustration, though, must be understood as a semi-autonomous artistic work. I cannot help pointing out here that I am generalizing, of course. There are always illustrations that depart from the text in ways that are often very vocal, but these departures are the result of choices, conscious or not, on the part of the artist, and are interesting as such. Investigations of the way in which artists go about illustrating texts can illuminate latent aspects of the text itself and aspects of the artist's personality and working habits.

Miles has a short discussion of various frontispieces and illustrations of the play, but her remarks pertain mostly to the relative popularity of the scenes depicted. To be fair, these areas are where her concerns lie, but her treatments of some of the images are blatantly incomplete. For example, she says of the American illustrator Edwin Austin Abbey's images for the play, "A series of engravings by E. A. Abby [sic] of 1885 in the Birmingham Reference Library's *Pearson Collection of Shakespeare Illustrations* (1915), p. 2, deals with less familiar subjects;"ⁱⁱ she goes on to catalog several of the images. This sentence is overly casual in its treatment of its subject in at least two important regards, overlooking the typographical error. First of all, Abbey produced drawings which were then engraved by other artists, rarely by Abbey himself. In their final and most famous form, these images were reproduced through photogravure, a photomechanical process. Second of all, Abbey's illustrations for *Measure for Measure*, while probably physically produced in or around 1185, were first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in

1891, and later published in a four-volume set of Shakespeare's comedies in 1896, and reprinted in 1899.ⁱⁱⁱ The fact that she discusses the images with no reference to their original context would be a small bibliographic oversight were it not for the fact that Abbey's Shakespeare illustrations are arguably the most famous and popular of the second half of the nineteenth century. I don't mean this as an indictment of Miles's methodology. The point is, admittedly, rather minor. However, it is indicative of the secondary status frequently given to illustrations in examination of the varied histories of literary texts. The images are afterthoughts.

I would like, then, to proceed along especially focused channels and examine some of the most famous and, by my estimation, interesting illustrations of *Measure for Measure*, with a particular focus on the character of Isabella. This admittedly narrow view will allow for more intense and in-depth exploration of some of the issues involved in the illustration of literary texts, and this play in particular. The artists in question are Robert Smirke and Thomas Kirk, both late-eighteenth century painters who worked for the famous Boydell Gallery, Heinrich Fuseli, the Anglo-Swiss Romantic, E. A. Abbey himself, and finally, another American illustrator, Rockwell Kent.

For those unfamiliar, I'll rehash the events of the play as briefly as possible. The play takes place in Vienna, and the Duke has recently ceded power to a young upstart, Angelo, while he ostensibly goes abroad. This is a sleight of hand on the Duke's part; he believes that he has been lax in enforcing some of the laws of the city, and is briefly stepping out of power to allow someone with a firmer hand to do the dirty work. Angelo is especially hard on sins of a sexual nature, and, among other things, orders that all houses of prostitution in the suburbs be torn down and that the death penalty already on

the books be enforced upon men who engage in relations out of wedlock. On the day the action begins, the protagonist Isabella has just entered the novitiate of the Order of St. Clare. Lucio, a friend of her brother Claudio, arrives to inform her that Claudio has been sentenced to death for getting Juliet, his betrothed, pregnant. Isabella abandons the confines of the convent to plead for Claudio's life before Angelo. Meanwhile, the Duke has arranged to lurk about the city disguised as a friar in order to observe the goings-on. Angelo finds himself moved to lust by Isabella's virtue, and propositions her in exchange for her brother's clemency in their second interview. Isabella rebuffs him and reports the exchange to Claudio, who at first applauds her virtue, and then, upon pondering death, begs her to take him up on the offer. The Duke-as-friar, who has been eavesdropping, steps in at this point and begins orchestrating events. Still in disguise, he urges Isabella to accept Angelo's offer, but arranges a bed-trick. The female who actually shows up in Angelo's garden at the appointed time is Mariana, his former betrothed who he rejected because of the loss of her dowry. Angelo plods along happily, thinking it was Isabella with whom he has rendezvoused. Upon consideration, he orders Claudio's death anyway, since he feels he must enforce the law. The Duke contrives with the Provost of the prison to present Angelo with the head of a recently-executed pirate instead, thus staying Claudio's execution. He also sends word of his "return" to the city, and decrees that all who have grievances may present themselves upon his arrival at the city gates. Isabella, at the Duke-as-friar's urging, appears at the appointed time and accuses Angelo of having used her, as the Duke instructed her to say. Mariana also shows up and corroborates Isabella's story, with the exception that it was *she*, Angelo's betrothed, who had relations with him. Angelo denounces them both, and the Duke leaves and returns once again

disguised as the friar. He is shortly unveiled, however, to Angelo's shock and dismay. The Duke orders that Angelo marry Mariana, eventually reveals to all that Claudio still lives, and asks for Isabella's hand in marriage. She never verbally responds to this proposal, though many scholars think it likely that Shakespeare intended for her to accept it. This synopsis ignores many of the subplots and minor characters of the play.

An analysis of the actual, historical conditions of Isabella's appearance, had she actually existed, should prove useful as a point of comparison to how the artists in question actually ended up presenting her. I will proceed strictly in regards to the text itself and compare it to the rules governing the Order for the sake of clarity, since how much Shakespeare knew of the Order itself is very debatable. First, though, it is necessary to pinpoint Isabella's exact position with regard to the Clares. What follows is something of a catalogue of references in the play. In the first mention made of her in 1.2.167-68, Claudio says, "This day my sister should the cloister enter/ And there receive her approbation,"^{iv} suggesting that Isabella has not yet pledged as a novice. Later, in 1.4.9, Francisca the nun refers to her as "unsworn," which refers to the three vows taken by the Order and thus does not preclude her from being a member of the novitiate. When Lucio arrives at the convent hunting for her in the same scene, he asks to be directed to "Isabella,/ A novice of this place," (18-19). The Provost in 2.2.22-24 introduces her to Angelo with the lines, "Ay, my good lord, a very virtuous maid/ And to be shortly of a sisterhood,/ if not already," leaving her status ambiguous. Isabella says of herself in 5.1.75, "I, in probation of a sisterhood," using formal terminology to describe her status. The various statements about the status of her novitiate indicate that she has begun her year of probation, which will prove important for her dress.

G. K. Hunter first pointed out the importance of the Rule of the Votarists of St. Clare in regard to *Measure for Measure*.^v A London house of Clares existed right outside the walls of the city until it was surrendered to Henry VIII in 1539 during the Dissolution; too early for Shakespeare to have first-hand knowledge of the house, but doubtlessly he could have gleaned much information from local hearsay about the rules and procedures of the sisters. The London house did not follow a rule descended directly from Clare, but instead adhered to the rule of the convent founded at Longchamp by the Blessed Isabella in or around 1254. The English version of the rule was formally known as “The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses Enclosid,” or simply the “Isabella Rule,” lending credence to Hunter’s theory. The extant English version of the Rule and the one followed by the London house was a slightly later version modified by Boniface VIII. (Supposedly, the first Abbess of the London convent was also named Isabella.)^{vi} Since the Isabella Rule was likely the one most familiar to Shakespeare, even if indirectly, it makes the most sense to apply to Isabella the character in retrospect. There were multiple variations of the Rule of St. Clare, but there is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare or any of the artists discussed in this essay, all of whom worked in England or America, had any familiarity with them.

What is at stake here is very simple. Her status as a novice would determine what she was wearing on the day the play begins, and thus the “correct” way to represent her visually. Thankfully, the Early English Texts Society can come to the rescue on this question. Their 1915 publication of the English version of the Rule is an invaluable resource when it comes to questions of historical authenticity and *Measure for Measure*.

At the end of its own short introduction, the fundamentals of the Order are laid out in brief:

Eche womman whiche bi þe grace & gifte of þe holi goste schal be brouht to entre in þis ordre for to nyȝte to god owre lorde Ihesu Criste & to his ful swete moder, after þe cownsayle of þe perfeccioun of þe gospel, Liue alle dayes in obediens, & chastite, wiþowte properte, And for to dwelle alle dayes of her life enclosid as a tresoure kepte to þe souereyne kyng. ^{vii}

This is indeed a severe monastic order Isabella is on the cusp of entering, emphasizing the three typical virtues of Catholic monasticism to the point of the exclusion of the outside world. This forces us to consider her as a liminal figure in the plot; she is compelled back to work in the civic world she was so close to fleeing.

Women wishing to enter the convent must spend a year in probation, as Isabella says. To refine the question even further, we must ascertain whether she has begun her novitiate in the most technical sense. The Rule has this to say in regards to the initiation of its novices:

And as þey schul be resseyuid wiþ in þe cloyster, abide þey þere, & as sone as þey schullen be schorne, þey schullin leue þe robis of þe worlde. Thanne a wise maystresse & moste deuowte sustre in þe Abbey be ordeyned be I-take to hem for to exite hem to holinesse & to holi vertues & for to speke to hem in feruent deuocioun & also for to teche hem for to abide & bere hem in swetnesses of charite in alle poyntes whoche longin to holi religioun & bisili for to repreue hem of alle þinges whoche been repreueable. ^{viii}

The “wise maystresse” could very likely be Francisca, who Isabella questions in the first scene. Were this the case, then Isabella would already be wearing the garb of a novice and have been “schorne,” which would mean that her head had been shaved, tonsure being a common practice for many monastic orders.

The rules regarding the coming and going of novices in the convent are rather ambiguous in the Isabella Rule, which is to say that they are never outlined. Not having

taken the vow of obedience that a “professid” sister would have, though, they are technically not beholden to the cloister. Isabella evidently feels some sense of duty to the Abbess, and tells Lucio she must inform the “Mother” of her leaving.

It seems likely that Shakespeare’s knowledge of the Rule was reasonably well-informed but incomplete; for example, no reference is ever made to Isabella’s bald head, which would have been the state of her hairstyle had she been following the Rule to a “t.” This seems like a large oversight, especially given the later discussion of head-shaving involving the executed prisoners in the jail in 4.2. It’s reasonable to say, though, that we are supposed to assume within the context of the play that Isabella is indeed a full-fledged novice by the time she makes her appearance on stage.

Finally, this leads to a more pertinent question for visual interpretations of the play: what Isabella would have been wearing. The Isabella Rule gives some details on this matter. After a discussion of the clothing of the nun’s in general, it says, “But oþer seruantes & nouicis schullin haue gerdellis of wolle & white veylis on here hedis.”^{ix} This only defines two articles of clothing the novices would have worn, apparently leaving the bulk of the outfit at the discretion of the abbess. If the novice’s garments were anything like the rest of the nuns’, they likely would have been a dull grey or drab.

A number of paintings can be pointed to for information about the general garb of St. Claire and the Clarisses, or at least for information about artists’ perception of such. Whether these artists had any contact with members of the Order is rather moot, but we can at least examine their presentations. First is a diptych by one of the followers of Guido da Siena painted around 1280 AD, roughly thirty years after the death of St. Claire. A portion of the piece depicts Claire and several of her followers repelling a

Saracen attack. All are dressed in black robes and veils, the latter having white trim. Second is an interesting fresco by Simone Martini located in the transept of St. Martin's Chapel in Assisi, the home of the sainted siblings. The piece is a seated, full-face depiction of St. Claire, clothed in a dull brown robe with a white veil wrapped around her head. (In reproductions, the veil appears rather dingy, but this could just be accumulated debris on the fresco.) Many drawings from throughout the fifteenth century, by contrast, depict Claire in white robes with a black veil. Meanwhile, an Austrian painting by the Master of Heiligenkreuz of Claire's death depicts her wearing an outfit similar to that worn in the 1280 diptych. Perhaps the most remarkable image of Claire is found in an altarpiece from 1476 by Antonio Vivarini, in which she is depicted wearing a grey robe beneath a long grey cape striped with red and a black veil. If the reader hasn't drawn this conclusion yet, there seems to be little artistic unanimity on the depiction of the saint.

This long discussion brings us to an important point: none of the artists in question seem to have any awareness of, or any desire to be aware of (with the possible exception of Abbey) the actual historical dress and circumstances of Isabella's Order, which would have theoretically figured so prominently into shaping her outward appearance. Instead, most of the artists in question are satisfied with depictions of their own personal conceptions of what a novice should look like. This makes Isabella's appearance in the following discussion a litmus test for the individual dispositions and social mores of the artists in question. It means that each artist's Isabella is (almost) free from any retrospective historical contextualization that attempts to place her back in Shakespeare's England or Vienna. She is instead a projection of each artist. Again, Abbey is a slight exception to this, but for reasons that are equally interesting.

It is nearly impossible to begin any kind of discussion about illustrations of the works of Shakespeare without mentioning John Boydell's famous Shakespeare Gallery. To this day, the most thorough source on the entrepreneurial and artistic venture is Winifred Friedman's *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*. Put shortly, John Boydell was a well-known businessman, engraver, and one-time Alderman to the City of London who made a mint selling reproductions of various historical paintings to the European public in the eighteenth century. Beginning in 1786, Boydell commissioned many well-known and obscure painters, among them Henry Fuseli and Joshua Reynolds, to create history paintings based upon the works of Shakespeare. He then commissioned engravings of these paintings and sold them in large folio editions between 1791 and 1803. Since the engravings were more widely dispersed and, historically, held a wider spectrum of public attention, I will focus on those in regards to *Measure for Measure*.^x

Two artists produced paintings for Boydell based on the play, the first of whom was Thomas Kirk. Though not as famous as many of his contemporaries, Kirk was relatively well-known and respected. He was born in 1767. The Redgraves' *A Century of British Painters* entry on him is short: "[Kirk] gained an early reputation as designer, miniature painter, and engraver, produced a few pastoral designs, and was noted for the elegance of his female figures. His chief works were for Cook's *Poets*, but his career in art was short yet of much promise. He died of consumption in November 1797."^{xi} Further information on him is scant. We know, at least, that he was a student of the portrait painter Richard Cosway and studied at the Royal Academy, exhibiting there several times.^{xii}

His illustration for *Measure for Measure* (Figure 1) is an energetic rendering of Act 5, Scene 1, depicting the moment when Lucio throws off the Duke's hood to reveal that the supposed friar is, in fact, the lord himself.^{xiii} The text engraved below the image on the plate lists all of the characters present, but out of order. Most of the males are easily identified, however. They are, from left to right, an elderly man, probably Varrius, the Provost, a female figure, the unveiled Duke, Lucio, Escalus, Angelo, another female figure, and Friar Peter. I've avoided making definite identifications on the two females because the point deserves further discussion. They are, of course, Mariana and Isabella, but which is which is a harder question than one might first assume. Neither appears to be wearing anything to mark her off as a novice or otherwise; the female to the right is in eighteenth century contemporary dress, while the one to the left is wearing a collar and sporting a hair style that are distinctly un-nun-like. Neither one betrays any trait or position that definitely marks her as Isabella. I suspect, however, that Kirk intended for the female to the right to be Isabella, for two reasons. The first is simply the prominent way in which she figures into the composition. Isabella is the protagonist and foregrounded during much of the scene in Shakespeare's text. Second is that she stands in such close proximity to Friar Peter, the brother with whom she arrives in the text, and who encourages her to make her entreaty to the Duke at the beginning of the scene. I should emphasize, though, that this identification is uncertain.

It is significant that Kirk does not find any way to set the two females apart more definitely. Perhaps he assumed that his audience would easily make the identification based on the prominence of the one over the other. This seems reasonable, but it reveals the fact that, for Kirk, Isabella's status as a novice was functionally irrelevant when it

came to visually depicting her. Neither female has any markings that could denote her as religious, not even a set of rosary beads. Mariana and Isabella certainly act as foils at points, but here Isabella is as much a part of secular Vienna as Mariana. She is not the liminal figure she is in the text, but rather an integrated citizen, simply petitioning for her brother's life.

If we allow this identification of Isabella, then it also becomes notable how much of a fashion plate Kirk has made of her. She may indeed be "noted for [her] elegance," especially that of her dress. It seems less remarkable, in Kirk's image, that Angelo should have fallen for an eighteenth century model rather than a timid, humbly dressed novice. Kirk has chosen to amplify her femininity, and, by extension, her eligibility in the economics of sexuality at play in the text. This is the very characteristic other illustrators will try to downplay.

Robert Smirke, 1753-1845, was an interesting personality in the coterie that helped pursue Boydell's venture. Smirke was better known as a designer and book illustrator than as a painter. Most of his paintings were executed in order to be later engraved. He did an incredible amount of work for the Boydell gallery, specializing mainly in comic scenes, as with most of his outside work. In 1804 he was nominated as Keeper to the Royal Academy in 1804, but his nomination was blocked by George III, allegedly because of his radical political views.^{xiv} His career bears some similarities to Kirk's, and he was clearly also well-respected by his peers. His forte was, as noted, pronouncedly comic illustrations and paintings. He executed three images for Boydell based on *Measure for Measure*, two dealing with comic characters (Act 2, Scene 1 and Act 4, Scene 2). Both are lighthearted and charming. Smirke was not so much in his

element with more serious concerns, however, as evidenced by his illustration of Act 2, Scene 4, Isabella's second interview with Angelo (Figure 2).^{xv}

Smirke's penchant for caricature becomes clear in his depiction of Angelo, who ogles Isabella with one eyebrow raised and leans forward out of his seat. Isabella stands nearby, his supplicant. It is unclear where in the scene, temporally speaking, this image should be placed. Given Isabella's peaceful demeanor, it is tempting to attribute it to sometime before Angelo's actual intentions become clear. A rather obvious statue of justice dangles a pair of scales on a pedestal between and above the two in the background. Smirke's Isabella is a more obvious novice, wearing white and a long veil that wraps around her right arm and comes down to near her knee. Her costume is not entirely plain, though, given the ornamentation on the sleeves and shoulders of her dress. The cut of her gown does seem a little low for that of a novice. She has the appearance of a rather pious woman, though, but has no more outward markings of her religiosity. To Angelo's right is a book that could possibly be a bible, since the image emblazoned on the front cover looks vaguely like the sacred heart, but this too is uncertain.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Smirke's Isabella is how devoid of character she seems. There is nothing like defiance or self-righteousness to her pose, and her facial features are rather amorphous and bland. She is, as noted, merely a supplicant bowing her head before the regent's power. This is not one of Smirke's finer images by any stretch. Though his handling of drawing is quite adept, the whole of it is marked by plainness and obviousness.

The Romantic giant Heinrich Fuseli also did work for Boydell, but never touched on *Measure for Measure* in that series. Fuseli, 1741-1825, was one of the most intriguing

and influential painters of his period. He was born in Zurich and migrated to England in the 1760s and lived there for the remainder of his life, save an eight year period spent studying in Italy. After completing a long series of paintings for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and executing another series of paintings based on Milton, Fuseli received a commission to illustrate a ten-volume edition of the Shakespeare's plays, published in 1803. One illustration for *Measure for Measure* appears in the second volume (Figure 3).^{xvi}

Fuseli's Isabella is an imposing figure, put lightly. She towers over Claudio, who resides painfully hunched at her feet. It doesn't seem too much of an overstatement to say that it appears as if she's about to step on him. The "fantastical duke of dark corners"—tonsured, strangely enough—meanwhile looks onward from a relegated position in the composition. Fuseli keyed in on the rage underlying her heated exchange with Claudio in Act 3, Scene 1, and amplified it four or five times to produce the dominant figure who takes up an impressive amount of space in this illustration (though, judging by the quotation cited below the illustration, it would be a little early for her to be truly enraged). Further attention is drawn to her by the series of strong verticals framing her, including the rosary beads draped to her left. She wears the most elaborate novice's costume of all those discussed here, with multiple folds and a complicated headpiece.

Miles was somewhat dismissive of this image, but Fuseli has evoked some interesting concepts. The distribution of the figures on the picture plane, for example, reflects their respective amounts of power in this scene. Isabella essentially holds the power to decide Claudio's fate, but slightly above her and working behind the scenes is the Duke, who holds a trump card over everyone in the drama. The interaction between

the brother and sister is perhaps overdramatized, but Fuseli was merely exercising his legitimate artistic license.

More important and interesting, though, is the subtle play of gender and sexuality at work. Most anyone who recalls either of Fuseli's two versions of *The Nightmare* (1781 and 1790) may suspect that his attitudes toward women were complicated, if nothing else. The latter of the two paintings features a supine female dreaming while a hairy incubus perches on her chest and a pale horse thrusts its way through the curtains in the background. This was painted twelve or thirteen years before his *Measure for Measure* illustration, of course. Brian Lukacher noted, though, "[i]n his later private, graphic erotica from about 1810, [...] Fuseli was prone to inverting the terms of sexual domination, the scenario in these drawings often involving a restrained Promethean male being sexually suffocated by a muscular group of ornately coiffed courtesans." In *Eros Revived*, his survey of Enlightenment-era erotica, Peter Wagner also states that Fuseli's drawings from this period, frequently featuring reversal of traditional sexual roles, are "of interest as intensely private productions and expressions of the personal fantasies and obsessions of an artist's dream-world." He notes additionally, though, that private erotic drawings are usual for almost any artist;^{xvii} what makes Fuseli's remarkable is his consistent fascination with female domination.

I don't intend to imply that Fuseli's Isabella is merely the function of a psyche fascinated by female sexual power; that would be reductive. It does force us to reconsider the sexual politics of the situation, however. Claudio, the male, is beholden to the mercy of Isabella, who is marked off from any form of sexual contact by her imposing, even slightly ridiculous, habit. This is an unconscious inversion of the era's typical hierarchy,

unlike the more overt *Nightmare*. Few would be so bold as to consciously imply a sexual subtext between siblings, but the punning of Claudio begging for the “mercy” of Isabella is inescapable. Even Shakespeare’s Isabella points out the queasy sexual implications underscoring the situation: “Is’t not a kind of incest to take life/ from thine own sister’s shame?” (3.1.142-3). As already noted, though, the Duke stills rides highest in the picture plane and holds the most power, even if unseen. He functions, in this image, as both puppet master and voyeur. His own predilections have caused Fuseli to create a unique and charged distribution of power throughout this image.

A jump of almost a century brings us to the work of Edwin Austin Abbey, the famous American painter and illustrator. His importance to Shakespearean culture studies cannot be underrated. From a visual standpoint, he was “a leading interpreter of Shakespeare’s plays for the late Victorian and Edwardian public,” as Lucy Oakley puts it.^{xviii} Abbey accepted a commission to illustrate Shakespeare’s collected Comedies in 1887, and steadily produced them for syndication in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, as discussed. Harper and Brothers first released them alongside the text of Shakespeare’s comedies as a four-volume set in 1896, and a limited edition run of 750 copies in 1899. When finally published in book form, the illustrations were reproduced through photogravure, a process conducive to the grisailles in which three *Measure for Measure* illustrations were initially executed and several others done in gouache. The bulk of his illustrations, though, were drawings in dry media.^{xix}

It is well known that Abbey preferred to work from historical models; an abundance of detail grounds otherwise fantastical flights like his Arthurian murals at the Boston Public Library. In the case of his illustrations for *Measure for Measure*, it is

known that Abbey obtained historical costumes from his friend Henry Irving's famed production of Marlowe's *Faust*.^{xx} Irving was renowned for being equally scrupulous with historical detail when he so desired, and the costumes were purportedly German Renaissance-style pieces. This is the case in the 1886 illustrated souvenir book designed to go along with Irving's production; several of the costumes appear similar to ones seen in Abbey's illustrations (many of the gentry in the backgrounds of his second and last illustrations for the play, for example), but there does not appear there a direct precedent for Isabella's costume.^{xxi} Abbey frequently worked from and then proceeded to idealize live models, so the equally interesting question of who may have modeled for Isabella is also moot.

She appears in four out of the eight illustrations he produced to accompany *Measure for Measure*,^{xxii} clad in an incredibly long white robe with a hood overtop that obscures any sense of her figure. Only her face and hands are visible to the viewer. She is a ghostly character, and the stark eccentricity of her dress set against the rest of Abbey's compositions highlights her in such a way that she becomes the center of attention in all four of the images in which she appears, even one so crowded as her suit before the Duke in Act 5. She is perfectly virginal in Abbey's conception, revealing her youth only through the smooth contours of her face. His presentation of her marks her off from the rest of the visual world she inhabits.

To proceed through the illustrations in order, after three illustrations of Mariana, Claudio and Lucio, and the Duke and Friar Thomas, we have a vignette of Isabella alone against a black background (Figure 4). Of all Abbey's illustrations for the play, this one seems the closest to a sketch, with its open network of marks that surround and follow the

form Isabella. She is pensive, and given the placement of the image is probably contemplating the news of her brother's imminent death. The contrast between the values in this image is striking, Isabella being presented as a stake of light in a way that foregrounds her innocence.

Abbey's next illustration is drawn from Act 2 Scene 4, in which Angelo propositions Isabella (Figure 5). Here Angelo appears older than the text would seem to indicate, with an exaggerated nose and an unpleasant leer. The image is especially interesting because of the way in which it places Angelo's offer within a legal context. He leans across what is presumably his judicial pulpit with a set of books to his right (our left), while Isabella stares shocked out of a chair immediately next to him. The furniture is arranged in such a way that it cannot help but call a courtroom to mind, and indeed probably is. Angelo's subversion of the law and hypocrisy are heavily underscored by the context in which they take place. Abbey was an intelligent and perceptive reader, and this arrangement is probably purposeful. Likewise, Isabella's religiosity is alluded to by the rosary beads that hang prominently from her waist, also perhaps aggravating a juxtaposition between the (corrupt) law and religion in a nearly allegorical sense. Again, here Angelo's predominant color scheme is dark, whereas the figure of Isabella contains the lightest values in the image.

The next of Abbey's illustrations to feature Isabella comes from her famous interview with Claudio in Act 3, Scene 1 (Figure 6). Claudio, with his right ankle chained, bends over in a pained position while clutching the bottom of Isabella's robe. Her expression is also pained as she looks downward upon her brother. As in Fuseli's illustration, the arrangement of the characters emphasizes Isabella's power over Claudio,

but Abbey's Isabella possesses none of the former's indignation. Her rosary dangles from her waist again, the cross at a level with Claudio's head, while yet another cross is suspended above her and slightly to her right on the wall of the prison cell. The composition, tone, and material handling marry perfectly here, making this Abbey's most accomplished illustration for *Measure for Measure*.

Abbey's final image illustrates Act 5 of the play, probably toward the end of the single scene (Figure 7). In the middle of a composition packed with figures and strong verticals, Isabella kneels before the unveiled Duke, who appears to be asking for her hand in marriage. She stares modestly at the ground, away from the Duke and all other characters. Isabella is closest to being dead center in the composition, and Abbey appears to be foregrounding the weight of the choice she faces. She is the center of attention once again, both within the context of the scene, with the vast array of figures peering at her, and from the vantage point of the viewer. To the left are the recently married Angelo and Mariana, but Isabella gazes away from them as well. The attitude of Abbey's Isabella is ultimately ambiguous, and thus, by the logic of Abbey's images, she never abandons the purity connoted by her appearance. These images are static, and cannot exist in a temporal continuum in which Isabella either accepts or rejects the Duke's proposal. Abbey's very Victorian Isabella stays a perpetual virgin.

Rockwell Kent probably didn't consider his companion illustrations to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* to be among his most important works; the commission receives scant notice in his 1955 autobiography.^{xxiii} Much more famous are his illustrations for the enormously popular 1930 edition of *Moby Dick*, and his subsequent work for *The Canterbury Tales* and *Candide* also receive more acclaim. Regardless of

source his material, Kent was one of the most important illustrators of his day. After a spotty history traveling in the circles of some of the more prominent American modernists, the “New York print media enthusiastically embraced him,” said Jake Milgram Wien in his catalogue essay for the 2005 Kent retrospective.^{xxiv}

Kent’s paintings are informed by a schooling in the more realistically inclined branches of American modernism; he was a student of William Merritt Chase, among others. They present flattened chunks of form in bright color, especially in his many paintings of Arctic scenes. More famous, though, is his illustrative style, which translates these simplified forms into areas of stark black and white. His human figures are indebted to Blake in many ways, especially in the logic of their minor contortions, which are more beholden to the overall compositions than to actual human proportions. Likewise, they possess a similar statuesque stiffness which emphasizes their structural functions. His steady concern with light as a force for transfiguration in mystical, mythic terms also owes much to Blake.

In 1936, The Garden City Publishing Company released *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* with an amiable preface by Christopher Morley and illustrations by Kent. The images are unmistakably his, though not quite of the same caliber as his work for *Moby Dick*. In general, the contrasts in the Shakespeare images are more diffuse and less striking than those for the latter, but several are still noteworthy, among them a dark, rage-driven Othello and a stark, contemplative Hamlet. The image coupled with *Measure for Measure* is actually a notable departure from the others in question here for the very important reason that the character illustrated is actually Marianna, albeit in the guise of Isabella (Figure 8). It would be easy to mistake her for the latter, since she sports a rather

interesting novice's get-up. I find her to be worthy of examination along with images of Isabella, though, for reasons which will become clear.^{xxv}

Mariana's garb is presumably Isabella's novice outfit, though the text of the play never explicitly mentions her borrowing it for the purposes of the bed trick. She wears a small cross necklace, and given the lighting, the outfit seems to be entirely white. The character cuts a severe figure, however, her gaze directed downward while she broods. The lines on the verso of the image come from Mariana, in 5.1.215: "And did supply thee at thy garden house/ In her imagin'd person." The scene captured, though, seems to be one that never takes place on-stage but is only alluded to in the play, namely, Mariana's earlier conjugal visit to Angelo in the place of Isabella. She stands poised with her hand on the gate of the garden and shrubbery framing her. Either she is in the act of going forward to meet or departing from Angelo; the former seems more likely, given her pensive attitude.

There's an odd sense of potential energy to the image, since she is simultaneously contained by the geometric structure of the frame but seems to almost supersede it simply by the compositional force of her presence. Her position is paused; her left foot comes forward but her weight rests on her right, as though a thought stopped her mid-step. There are points toward the edges of the frame, like the upper left and mid-right, where shafts of light fracture the leaves in an almost Cubist fashion. In fact, the handling of the play of light along the border of the illustrations is wonderfully erratic, and grants it a peculiar appeal.

It's hard to avoid sexual metaphors for this passage in the play. Mariana has been given the key to Angelo's gate, and she is paused just after the act of entering. She travels

in the guise of Isabella's purity, and so functions as a sort of meta-character, a conflation appearing to Angelo *as* Isabella and to the audience as Mariana in disguise. It is her assumption of Isabella's purity and virtue, the aspects of the novice attractive to Angelo, which allow Mariana access to his gate and garden house. It's worth re-emphasizing that the audience of *Measure for Measure* would never have seen this particular portion of the plot; Kent has chosen to concretize a part of the play that otherwise only would have existed in the reader or audience's imagination. The choice is an intriguing for Kent's sole image for this play—the two female characters, scorned betrothed and recent novice, merged into one.

It's difficult to avoid the temptation of a full-blown psychological analysis of this convergence. Besides the quotation from Mariana on the verso of the page, which it is impossible to determine if Kent himself chose, there is very little contextualizing imagery to suggest which of the two females is present. It has been suggested by some critics that the bed-trick allows a sort of quasi-sublimation for Angelo, and perhaps the audience, through the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, the unattainable. Here Kent unconsciously performs a similar maneuver. Because the female is, at a glance, indistinguishable, Isabella becomes a sexualized object through her mergence with Mariana in her tight, form-fitting outfit.

Traditionally, literary critics perform two activities: interpretation and evaluation. The illustrator does both of these at a very basic level. Surveys of illustrations that treat them as inarticulate criticism of texts, as Miles does, fail to notice the third and most important element involved in any illustration of a text: adaptation. As noted at the beginning, an illustrator is forced to concretize details that may have been nonexistent in

the text for the sake of the image, along with articulating those elements he or she finds important in the text. This process, while partially a synergy between the first two elements, also requires that the artist use his or her own mental inclinations to create a work that is finally and irreparably separate from the text. In some cases, the image may have irreconcilable differences with the text it supposedly proceeds from, such as the tonsure of Fuseli's Duke. The illustration is not beholden to any objective truths yielded by examination of the text, and is more a product of the artist than a simplified visual extension of the literary text.

Kirk was so taken with female dress and form that he produced a refined Isabella who doesn't remotely appear to play the novice. Smirke could not help but indulge his love for caricature, even in a scene as serious as Act 2 Scene 4. Fuseli amplified the notes of Isabella's rage to turn her into a desexualized dominatrix, and Abbey mystified Isabella's femininity by making her completely unattainable, in conformance with both Victorian mores and his own dispositions. Finally, Kent presented a more complicated merging of Mariana and Isabella that is more problematic than illuminating. Each illustration is completely a product of its author, not Shakespeare. Perhaps it is in their digressive responsiveness to less pronounced, latent aspects of the play, and even on occasion their inattentiveness to the text, that these illustrations have their real analytical value.

ⁱ Rosalind Miles, The Problem of *Measure for Measure*: A Historical Investigation (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976).

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 118.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the magazine publication, see Andrew Lang, ill. E. A. Abbey, "Measure for Measure," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, vo. 84 (Dec. 1891 to May 1892): 62-77. My reproductions of Abbey's illustrations are taken from the reprinted 1899 edition limited edition of the text: The Comedies of William Shakespeare with Many Drawings by Edwin A. Abbey, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1899).

- ^{iv} William Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, ed. Robert Miola, et. al. (Baltimore: Apprentice House, 2008). From hereafter, all citations from the play will come from this particular edition.
- ^v G. K. Hunter, "Six Notes on *Measure for Measure*," Shakespeare Quarterly 15, no. 3 (1964): 167-169.
- ^{vi} Walter M. Seton, "Introduction: The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses enclosid," in A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book and Two Franciscan Rules, Early English Text Society, no. 148 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1914), 69.
- ^{vii} "The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses enclosid," in A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book and Two Franciscan Rules, Early English Text Society, no. 148 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1914), 82.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, 83.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, 85.
- ^x The most comprehensive account and analysis of Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery is Winifred H. Friedman, Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1976).
- ^{xi} Richard and Samuel Redgrave, A Century of British Painters (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Cornell Paperbacks, 1981), 187.
- ^{xii} Ellis Waterhouse, British 18th Century Painters in Oils and Crayons, vol. 2 of Dictionary of British Art, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1981), 237.
- ^{xiii} Thomas Kirk, Measure for Measure. Act 5, Scene 1, in John and Josiah Boydell, Collection of Prints, from Pictures Painted for the Purpose of Illustrating the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare, by the Artist of Great Britain, vol. 1, (London: Shakespeare Gallery, Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1803). The illustrations in this volume are listed according to the play they concern, and page numbers are not included.
- ^{xiv} Waterhouse, 368.
- ^{xv} Smirke's illustration for 4.2 can be found in the 1803 edition of Boydell (See note 10). The other two images he created for *Measure for Measure*, however, were only officially published in serialized numbers to subscribers of the series; all of the numbers were issued between 1791 and 1803, the two in question engraved as having been published in September of 1797. To my knowledge, these two images, along with many other engravings from the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, were never formally collected and published in book form by anyone originally associated with the Boydell project. However, the rare book collection of Johns Hopkins University contains a volume without a title page that contains these two illustrations along with many others from the Boydell series. I suspect that these engravings were those originally issued as numbers, and then collected, bound, and eventually donated to Johns Hopkins. The reproduction of Smirke's illustration for 2.4 comes from this volume. It can also be found reproduced in John and Josiah Boydell, Boydell's Shakespeare Prints: 90 Engravings (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2004), 18.
- ^{xvi} William Shakespeare, The Plays of William Shakespeare. Accurately Printed from the Text of the Corrected Copy Left by the Late George Steevens, Esq. with a Series of Engravings, from Original Designs of Henry Fuseli, Esq., R.A. Professor of Painting and a Selection of Explanatory and Historical Notes from the Most Eminent Commentators. A History of the Stage, a Life of Shakespeare, Etc., by Alexander Chalmers, A.M. vol. 2 (London: printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, 1805).
- ^{xvii} Peter Wagner, Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), 289-91.
- ^{xviii} "Edwin Austin Abbey's Shakespearean Paintings, Illustrations, and Costume Designs, 1888-1909" (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1995), abstract.
- ^{xix} Lucy Oakley, Unfaded Pageant: Edwin Austin Abbey's Shakespearean Subjects, from the Yale University Art Gallery and Other Collections (New York: Miriam and Irad Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University in the City of New York, 1994), 29-39.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*, 32.
- ^{xxi} Joseph Hatton, The Lyceum Faust with Illustrations from Drawings by W. Telkin, W. H. Margetson, Hawes Craven, J. Bernard Partridge, and Helen H. Hatton, reprinted from The Art Journal (London: J. S. Virtue and Co., Ltd., 1886). It would be unfair to say that there is *no* precedent for Isabella's costume in the Lyceum *Faust*'s collective wardrobe; I have been unable to find a complete set of costume designs for the production. It seems unlikely that there is one, though, since no character in *Faust* would have reason to be dressed exactly as Isabella is.

^{xxii} See note 3 for information on specific publications of Abbey's illustrations.

^{xxiii} Rockwell Kent, It's Me O Lord (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1955).

^{xxiv} Jake Milgram Wien, Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern (Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 2005), 26.

^{xxv} William Shakespeare, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. William Aldis Wright, ill. Rockwell Kent (New York: Garden City, 1936). The illustrations of Hamlet, Mariana, and Othello can be found on pages 733, 901, and 937, respectively.