

In addition to the tangible bodily characteristics, a woman's speech and the manner of her speech also denote her sexuality. In describing the arrangement for Mariana's assignation with Angelo, Isabella indicates that: There have I made my promise, upon the Heavy middle of the night to call upon him. ... only a repair i'th' dark, And that I have possessed him my most stay Can be but brief, ... Little have [Mariana] to say When [Mariana] depart from him, but, soft and low, 'Remember now my brother.' (4.1. 31-32, 40-43, 70-72)

The darkness and the short stay are stock situations in a bed-trick, but Isabella indicates that Mariana should plead for Claudio's life as she leaves, even going so far as specifying that the voice she uses should be "soft and low," conjuring up a submissive and silenced female image who "yield[s] up [her] body to [Angelo]'s will. (2.4.173).

ANGELO: I will bethink me. Come again tomorrow. ISABELLA: Hark how I'll bribe you: good my lord, turn back. ANGELO: How? Bribe me? ISABELLA: Ay, with such gifts that heaven shall share with you. (2.2.169-73) Isabella means that if Angelo exonerates Claudio, she would "bribe" him "[n]ot with fond sicles of the tested gold, / Or stones whose rates are either rich or poor/ As fancy values them, but with true prayers" (2.2.175-77). However, Angelo takes her offer literally. The morally charged word "bribe" complicates Isabella's initial purpose of "pleading," thereby commercializing and sexualizing her plea which in turn reverses the power structure between her and Angelo. When she pleads for Angelo's mercy, she is vulnerable to his authority because her brother's life entirely depends on Angelo's decision. Once she offers Angelo a bribe, however, she is entitled to negotiate with a sexual transaction, because he is "that way going to temptation, / Where prayers cross" (2.2.186-87). In this regard, Isabella's offer of a (sexual) "bribe" transforms the public relationship between her and Angelo from petitioner-judge to a private relationship between woman-man. In this sense, she purchases her private bond by the economic transaction of her body, which she later identifies as the "gift of [her] chaste body" (5.1.112). Isabella's speech opens into provocative territory, touching on the relationship between gifts (true prayer), bribes (female's virginity), and power in the realm of public (legal) and private (illicit) forms of payment and reciprocity.

Measure exposes the challenge for both Viennese citizen and the rulers to perpetually obey temperance, acting on the principle of moderation. Female sexuality in Measure is denounced as "almost entirely negative, as a source of disease and illegitimacy, carried on in brothels and slums that are to be torn down as a danger to the public, a temptation that corrupts public officials and oppresses innocence" (Magedanz 321). Punishing illicit sex is for authorities an essential imperative in law enforcement, promotion of morality, and restoration of public order.

After gaining the Duke's "absolute power and place here in Vienna" (1.4.14), Angelo determines to enforce the stricture of the law: We must not make a scarecrow of the law, Setting it up to fear the birds of prey, And let it keep one shape, till custom make it Their