MEASURE FOR MEASURE

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
Directed by ROBERT FALLS

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Why Measure for Measure?

A once-great city is mired in economic and moral decay, its “strict statutes and biting laws” largely ignored by a populace who would rather explore the raunchier side of urban life. The city’s leader, admitting his own culpability in the overly permissive atmosphere, goes on a personal mission, leaving the job of law enforcement to his pious, ascetic aide—whose response to the crisis is to levy draconian punishments upon a seemingly innocent man, then attempt to exact an unholy settlement from the man’s sister, a young nun who desperately pleads his case. This is the unsettled, chaotic world of Measure for Measure, long one of Shakespeare’s most controversial “problem” plays, a virtuosic blend of low comedy, incipient tragedy and moral ambiguity. First presented in 1604, the play’s classically comic structure (ending, as all good romantic comedies of the era did, with a series of weddings) belied the very serious questions it posed: In a world beset by crisis, what kinds of authority should be given to our political leaders, and what exactly is a “just” punishment? What is the balance between justice and mercy? Between sensuality and rationality? Between duty to God and duty to family? Between religion and government?

This hybrid of dramatic styles was deemed unseemly by generations of critics after Measure for Measure’s premiere; but modern audiences have found the play disturbingly prescient in its questioning of society’s values and the conflicts among them. It is a play that I have read and re-read many times, fascinated and challenged by its juxtaposition of ribald satire, intense tragedy and freewheeling morality—and as our world becomes increasingly polarized both socially and politically, I feel that its themes are more timely than ever. Although set in Vienna, Shakespeare obviously intended the play to reflect conditions in the London of his time, a fact immediately recognizable to his audience. I have chosen to set my production in a time and place that is similarly familiar to many of us: New York City in the 1970s, an era in which economic challenges, urban flight and the sexual revolution transformed what had been arguably the greatest city in the world to one of the most troubled. The images of that time—of 42nd Street grind houses and peep shows, of graffiti-laden walls and garbage-filled streets—provide a visceral backdrop to a tale of corrupting power, moral excess and religious zeal. And a multicultural cast of 25 will bring to life an assortment of Shakespeare’s most vivid dramatic creations.

Frank yet poetic, subtle yet passionate, Measure for Measure remains one of Shakespeare’s most provocative and fascinating works. Its characters neither impossibly good nor unilaterally evil, its most pressing thematic questions tantalizingly unanswered, the play instead presents us with a world not unlike our own: flawed, excessive but always compelling—and inhabited by people who are achingly, vibrantly and recognizably human.

Robert Falls
Artistic Director
Duke or Stage Manager?

BY ELIA MARIA LINTZ

In Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, Duke Vincentio orchestrates the plot while acting as a guide for the characters, prompting them to follow certain paths to achieve their desires. Omniscient and content to do so disguised as a friar, he acts as a liaison between characters, carrying out a variety of tasks and actions. Play stage managers function much in the same capacity. They help guide the trajectory of a performance and act as a liaison among director, artistic team and actors. Thus, Duke Vincentio might be considered a kind of stage manager in the world of *Measure for Measure*.

Often Duke Vincentio’s actions and decisions propel the plot of the play. At the start of the show, the duke places Angelo in charge of Vienna when he decides to “leave” the city for a few days. By placing Angelo in power, the duke sets off a series of events that form the storyline for *Measure for Measure*. His actions position characters so that their subsequent actions drive the plot and move the story forward. Masquerading, he devises a plan for Isabella and Mariana to trade places when Angelo demands Isabella’s virginity for Claudio’s life. Then, he facilitates saving Claudio from execution after Angelo reneges on his promise to Isabella. The duke, through his machinations, cues everyone’s next action. Comparatively, one of a stage manager’s primary duties is “calling” a show (that means announcing to the stage crew, light and sound board operators when specific technical aspects need to be turned on, off or moved). Without these cues, transitions would not occur and the visual picture of a play would not move forward with the plot. As the duke drives the plot of *Measure for Measure* with his actions, so does a stage manager when calling a show. The stage manager’s actions prevent the performance from becoming choppy or flawed, while the duke carries out his plans to maintain the order of his city.

In addition to driving the movement of a story, the duke and stage managers control the situation from behind the scenes. The duke disguises himself as a priest so as to not draw attention to himself and to allow him intimate access into his citizens’ lives. As the ruler of Vienna, he has the ability to ruthlessly control the lives of his citizens, but rather than rule as an absolute monarch, he disguises himself and makes helpful suggestions, nudging the story along while managing the affairs of this city. Just as the citizens of Vienna do not realize the duke influences their decisions, neither does the audience see the stage manager’s influence on a play. During a performance, stage managers reside in the lighting and/or sound booth where they can view the stage and call cues. The goal of a stage manager is to call the cues so smoothly that the audience is never aware that he or she is present. This means the show moves forward without any awkward pauses in the action and there are no technical mishaps. A stage manager’s job is done behind the scenes for the benefit of a production just like the duke resorts behind the scenes to maintain order in Vienna, despite Angelo’s meddling.

Finally, both a stage manager and the duke act as liaisons within their respective societies. They are both aware of everything that is going on with their cast or their citizens. One of a stage manager’s primary jobs during a rehearsal period is acting as a bridge between the director and various designers and cast members. Stage managers make sure that all the people involved with the production are informed of what’s going on so the entire process surrounding the show, from design meetings to rehearsals to performances, is made easy. They know when things are happening, who is involved and how they are progressing. Like a stage manager, the duke is the go-between for certain characters. He makes sure that Isabella and Mariana are both aware of the plan and how to orchestrate it. In some cases, though, the duke blatantly withholds information to steer characters in certain directions, but he is still omniscient and aware of everything that is going on in his city.

The duke possesses many core traits of a good stage manager. Without the duke, the characters of *Measure for Measure* would not experience the outcome they do. Likewise, without a stage manager, a production would not reach its full potential or even move forward. Essentially, both the duke and a stage manager are people managers. Through managing and manipulation, both guide their subjects and production to their outcomes.
BELOW: Actress Amanda Drinkall, ensemble member and understudy Mariana, in rehearsal for Measure for Measure. Photo by Liz Lauren.
If an actor gets sick, the show must go on. Enter, the understudy — the actor who covers the role if the principal actor cannot perform. But often, it's not quite that simple. From casting to contracting to costuming and stage managing, a lot of work goes into making sure an understudy is ready to perform in as little as 15 minute’s notice. Here, we attempt to demystify the world of the understudy at the Goodman.

Understudies in Measure for Measure

Casting
The first step in the understudy process is the same as it would be for any other actor: getting cast. Understudies are generally cast about a month before they start coming to rehearsal; although for musicals or larger productions, they can be cast much earlier. For every actor, the Goodman casting team casts a cover — either an understudy or a swing (for ensemble roles). How this happens, however, can vary quite a bit. Sometimes, an understudy will audition for the principal role, but for whatever reason may not get it. For example, as Goodman casting coordinator Erica Sartini says, “They may be 10 years too young for the role, but we’re really interested in working with them, bringing them into our theater and starting to get to know them as a professional.” In that case, the understudy might be found during auditions for the principal actor.

Sometimes, specific understudy auditions are held. The upcoming Goodman production, The Happiest Song Plays Last, for example, held understudy auditions recently. In these cases, actors audition specifically for the understudy roles. Sometimes, an understudy might cover more than one principal actor. In Teddy Ferrara, the actor who understudied for Gabe, also covered the character Jay.

When casting an understudy, a perfect match to the principal is not always necessary. The most important factor, Erica says, is a similar energy to the principal. Beyond that, it depends on the show. “If it’s a play that’s specifically about race, for instance, then of course we need to pay attention to those sorts of things.” Additionally, an understudy needs to be trustworthy. “There’s a lot of observing, a lot of making sure you’re memorizing the lines on your own, and that you’re ready to go on. Which has to come with a lot of trust,” she says.

In Measure for Measure, there is an ensemble, composed of several actors and actresses with small roles. Many, if not all, of these actors also are covering larger roles as understudies. And in order to cover these roles, swing actors — male and female actors prepared to cover any of the ensemble roles — are cast in case an ensemble member needs to cover a principal. A few of the most important characters have outside understudies who are not ensemble members and who can cover their roles.

Contracting
Casting passes the information about who they’ve cast in understudy roles on to the company manager, Erin Madden, who then takes care of drafting contracts for the understudy actors. Apart from minor details, understudy actors’ contracts with the Goodman are essentially the same as if they were playing a principal, with the start date slightly later because they don’t come into rehearsal right away. Since understudies work hard — sometimes covering two or three roles — and they’re required to be present for every performance as well as some rehearsals, they still get paid, whether or not they go on stage. Usually, understudies are not guaranteed to go on for any shows; however, they are guaranteed a producer’s run. For a producer’s run, the understudy company performs the entire show for Goodman producers and the casting team. Nonequity, or nonunion, actors have slightly different contracts.

Stage Managing
Understudies come into rehearsal two weeks before the show begins previews. They observe the principal actors in their roles, meet with stage management to discuss cues and expectations, and generally get caught up with what has happened in rehearsal so far. Apart from meeting with understudies and actors to discuss cues and blocking, stage managers also organize a chart for who goes on stage in any scenario — which ensemble member covers each principal and which swing goes on for an ensemble member.

If enough notice is given before a performance, a put-in rehearsal might be held. In a put-in rehearsal, the understudy who will perform rehearses with the rest of the principal cast, much like a dress rehearsal. Understudies also have their own rehearsals — with all of the understudies — twice a week during previews.
Costuming
If understudies must be prepared to go on in a moment’s notice, so must their costumes. Since casting doesn’t necessarily look for understudies who are the same size as principal actors, sometimes this can be difficult. Similarly, costume designers for each show do not typically take into account the understudy’s build when conceptualizing and creating a costume for the character. Consequently, the costume shop staff must accommodate the understudy in the event he or she goes on. Sometimes, this involves purchasing or building garments that are close to the original design of the costume, specifically for the understudy.

Often, there are two identical costumes for the actor and the understudy. For example, Deanna Dunagan and her understudy, Jan Radcliff, for Other Desert Cities had two identical outfits. If by chance the actor and the understudy have the same measurements, they will wear the same clothes, except for undergarments.

If enough advance notice is given that an understudy will perform, wardrobe may prepare with the understudy, rehearsing quick costume changes, for example.

To learn more about what it’s like to be an understudy, the Goodman education team sat down with Amanda Drinkall and Luke Michael Grimes, understudies in Measure for Measure and Teddy Ferrara, respectively. Here’s what they have to say.

Amanda Drinkall, ensemble member and understudy Mariana in Measure for Measure

Maria Nelson: Can you explain what you do in rehearsal?
Amanda Drinkall: In rehearsal as an understudy, there’s a lot of watching, and paying attention to what Kate, who is the actress who is playing Mariana, is doing. But since I’m in the ensemble, I get to actually play as well. So it’s kind of double duty, playing your own track [the ensemble role, complete with blocking and props], but also watching what she’s doing and taking notes on both her character development and also simple things like blocking.

MN: Is it hard to keep track of all of those things?
AD: It can be. Now, we’re in the point in rehearsal where things are starting to get solidified, so it’s becoming a lot easier. A week or so ago, there were a lot of changes still happening. They’d do a scene one way, then a couple days later they’d completely redo it. So it’s hard to remember which version they’re doing. But now things are starting to get more solid, so it’s a lot easier to be really specific about how I’m taking notes, and where Kate’s moving and things like that.

MN: Do you come to every rehearsal as an ensemble member?
AD: Yeah. Being in the ensemble I’m here almost every day, maybe not for the whole rehearsal time, but for most of it. The ensemble has been involved in most of the background stuff on stage, so we’ll be in a lot of the scenes just as the background.


MN: How much of being an understudy is mimicking what the principal does vs. creating your own character?
Luke Michael Grimes: It’s complicated. As an actor, my instinct is to create something, but we are often drawn back to the way that principal characters do it, and not in a bad way. It’s about preserving the director’s vision, and we’re supposed to be creating the same play every night, and you kind of have to let go of your ego and give over to what’s already there. You have to do what’s being asked of you, which is to study someone else doing the role, and to do that role.

MN: Do you have your own costume fittings?
LMG: Yes, we did have our own fittings, and surprisingly me and Adam [the actor who plays Drew] are the exact same size. Our pants are the same size, and our shoes. Usually when an understudy is brought into a project, and his size varies a great deal from the actor he’s covering, they’ll either make pieces or buy other pieces that will fit them. But with Teddy Ferrara, almost all of the understudies fit almost all of the principal characters’ costumes.

For original and extended interviews with Amanda and Luke, visit us online!
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Theater Companies Then and Now
BY ELIA MARIA LINTZ

Theater as we know it now is vastly different from the theater that Shakespeare experienced. The attitudes toward theater and the practice of theater have changed drastically over the past centuries.

In Shakespeare’s time, theater was an immensely popular commodity. Despite a high demand for performances, there lacked a permanent space for performances until 1576. This led to the formation of acting troupes. Actors would travel with their troupe to various towns, locations and even the royal court. Traveling in England was difficult at this time because of fear of the bubonic plague, bandits and a general distrust of people. Adding to actor woes was the view that actors were rogues and vagabonds. Even when permanent theaters became the norm, a theater would commission an acting troupe to take up residence only for a performance.

Members of the aristocracy often sponsored acting troupes, with the first troupe being formed in 1572. Shakespeare’s company, arguably the most important troupe in Elizabethan England, was commissioned in 1590 under the name of The Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Its members carried this name for 13 years until they became The King’s Men, when King James I began to sponsor them.

Acting companies functioned on a repertory system, meaning the company had multiple shows they could perform simultaneously in their repertoire. Theater was an everyday commodity. An acting company would perform six days a week, only taking religious days off because it was against the law to put on a production. During the six days of performances, the same play was rarely performed two days in a row. The 1592 season of The Lord Strange’s Men, who performed at The Rose, lasted from February to June, illustrating the intensity of an acting company. During that time, the troupe performed 23 different plays. Some were performed only once, and rarely was the same play performed twice in a week. The actors in a company were responsible for learning multiple lines and were expected to be able to perform any role on any given day.

Today’s versions of acting companies and repertory theatre, while founded on the same principle, are vastly different from what Shakespeare encountered. Today there exists two separate types of acting companies: those who tour and those who are considered residents of a permanent theater company.

Travelling actor companies function in a way that is more similar to the theater of Elizabethan England. A traveling company is usually responsible for multiple shows at a time. Its members perform the shows on a rotating repertory basis, much like in Shakespeare’s time. Much like the acting troupes of Elizabethan England, a touring repertory utilizes the same actors for different shows, with the actors responsible for multiple roles.

Stationary repertory theatres also exist in modern theater. These theaters function similarly to the theater of Shakespeare’s time in some capacity. Repertory theaters usually have a resident acting company that will present work from a specified repertoire. These works are performed in a rotation. However, most stationary repertory theaters perform one show for an extended period of time. In some cases, repertory theaters might use the same actors for different productions or they might use an entirely new cast of actors.

Unfortunately, most professional theaters have lost their acting companies in the past two decades. However, some professional theaters retain aspects of acting companies. Here in Chicago, Steppenwolf Theatre Co. functions with an ensemble, which is similar to a resident company. Currently its 43-member ensemble includes a mix of actors, directors and writers. Steppenwolf’s ensemble is quite large and some of its ensemble members don’t live in Chicago. Members of Steppenwolf’s company are not responsible for multiple roles at the same time and there is no requirement for participation in a season at Steppenwolf. Actors have the opportunity to be in multiple plays in a season, depending on the needs of that particular season.

Steppenwolf is not classified as a repertory theater because most repertory theaters have a resident company of actors who perform in a rotation of shows. Productions at Steppenwolf typically run straight through with the exception of two series in the Garage, which its ensemble uses as a traditional repertory theater space. The Garage is devoted to the cultivation of new work.

Can you see any similarities between today’s theater practices and Shakespeare’s?
What would a play be without lights? For one thing, the audience wouldn’t see anything. Neither would the actors. They’d end up stumbling about, tripping over the set, breaking props. The whole show would be a disaster. But looking past its practical aspects, lighting for a show has the ability to transport audiences to mystical places, suggest freezing temperatures without touching a thermostat, reveal a character’s true demeanor, or allow the audience to sympathize with a character’s plight. An intangible visual medium, lighting is able to achieve all this through science.

Lighting for shows was originally natural sunlight. During Shakespeare’s time, performances were held during the day either outside or in theaters that had no ceiling, exposing the actors and audience members to sunlight and the elements. As theaters moved into enclosed spaces, candles were utilized to light performances. As technology progressed, gas lighting became popular. However, both these methods proved hazardous to the health of the actors and audience members. Most early theaters were made of wood and often caught fire, trapping and killing many artists and their patrons. Thankfully, advances in technology and the introduction and popularization of electricity allowed theater companies to continue their craft with fewer casualties. Early lighting technology (read: candles) did leave its mark on the profession. Brightness is measured in “foot candles,” or the amount of light hypothetically emitted from a candle one foot away.

Today, lighting designers use candles or gas lights for specific effects or shows. All other lighting is done electronically. Therefore, lighting designers and technicians need to understand how electricity works. Electricity works in a circuit. There needs to be a source (i.e. the power company), a load (the item that converts the electrical power into mechanical power, i.e. the lighting instrument) and a cable that connects the source to the load. These three things create the circuit that the electrical current flows through, causing the lights to turn on and for the show to go on.

However, lighting technology becomes more complicated when a designer want to be more creative than just turn one light on and off. The more lights you use, the more effects you can create. Usually there will be a set of lights that generally lights the set. A soft illumination, this is called a wash. Washes can be any color, although they are most often a warm white and fill in lighting holes on stage. Designers might specifically highlight areas of a stage that have significant importance to the story or characters who need to be in the forefront of the audience’s mind. However, this can leave dark areas on part of the stage that being used by the cast. The wash helps illuminate these areas. Also, sometimes the script or the director wants the stage to remain mostly dark, only emphasizing an area of the stage or a certain character. This can represent many things: isolation, introspection, etc. Sometimes, designers will need to create certain effects on stage: the shadow of fire on a cave wall, a lightning storm in a forest, a car passing outside a bedroom window, etc. These effects need to occur while the stage remains lit; thus, additional lighting instruments are required.

As Drew Campbell so poignantly puts it in “Technical Theater for Nontechnical People,” “…those metal things hanging up there above the stage are not called lights. Light is what comes out of them.” Rather, they are lighting instruments, comprised of a lamp, the metal casing and the bulb (the glass insert that heats up and produces the light). Theater lighting utilizes a variety of different lighting instruments with different type of lamps. Different instruments concentrate light differently and affect the visualization on stage. The most common instruments are fresnels. Fresnels (pronounced “fur-nell”) produce soft-edged light, as compared to hard-edged light such as from a spotlight. Multiple fresnels can work together, blending into one another, to create a wash. They are a great way to get a lot of light on stage, and you can adjust and focus the size of the light, either directing it on one spot or flooding an area.

Many smaller theaters and storefronts may use PAR (parabolic anodized reflector) cans to light their stage. PAR cans are basically headlights in a metal casing. You can’t focus them; however, they produce an intense, soft-edged light. They are utilized most for rock concerts, although theaters often use them to represent sunlight. For larger areas, many designers use strip lights, which are metal boxes with a row of lamps set into them. They
provide a smooth, unfocused wash of light.

Two more types of instruments are commonly found in theaters: ellipsoidal reflector spotlights and follow spots. Ellipsoidals are versatile in that they can be either hard or soft edged. They also are designed to use a template, or go-between (commonly referred to as a gobo), to create patterns with light. This is most often how designers create the effect of fire or water on a wall. Follow spots sound exactly like their name. They are movable spotlights that follow actors on stage. This type of lighting instrument is more popular in musical theater or opera.

Lighting instruments use a variety of bulbs. Most have incandescent bulbs, which work by sending an electrical current to heat a wire filament, usually made of tungsten, encapsulated in an inert gas. Inert gases, often purified argon or nitrogen, do not chemically react given a certain set of conditions. Exposed to oxygen, the tungsten filament would burn too quickly. Similar to the traditional incandescent bulb, the tungsten-halogen lamp also uses a tungsten filament. However, rather than being suspended in an inert gas, the bulb is filled with a halogen, or chemically active gas. When lit, particles of tungsten released by the filament bind with the halogen gas and are attracted by the filament, lengthening the bulb life.

Fluorescent lamps are less often used in theater, but they will make a striking appearance in Measure for Measure as practical lights — types of lights you would encounter in the real world. Unlike the incandescent bulb, fluorescent lamps work by sending an electrical current through a tube of gas, usually a mixture of argon and mercury. The emitted light corresponds to a specific wavelength of the electrical energy given off by the atoms in the gas. Different gases emit different colors. This is also how neon lights work.

Follow spots often uses arc sources to light sets. They produce a blue-white light by sending an electrical current to jump a gap between two electrodes. In an oxygen-rich environment, the electrodes deteriorate quickly. Follow spots use bulbs that encapsulate the arc in a noncorrosive atmosphere, such as xenon gas or metal halide.

In addition to understanding electrical engineering and chemistry, lightning designers also must have some knowledge of biology and psychology. Lighting works closely with an audience member’s eyes and brain. Different types of light stress and tire out eyes more quickly than others. Most eyes cannot stare at fluorescent lighting for long periods of time. Lighting designers must battle with an audience’s perceptions of the world too. The brain will see what it wants to see, not necessarily what is true. Designer J. Michael Gillette gives the example of a production he worked on that was set in Antarctica. The director wanted to use pure white light to signify the harsh, snowy landscape of the continent. However, the light came out feeling too “warm.” Instead, Gillette added light blue gels — colored plastic filters — to his light and audience members automatically began complaining that the theater was too cold. The brain identified the blue light with the feeling of cold.

Lighting illuminates and highlights the set, costumes and acting on a stage. It automatically ensnares the audience’s attention. Light can be used to manipulate audience members’ views, to suggest to them certain ideas about a character or situation, draw their attention to a specific detail or make them forget. However, without a careful knowledge of the science and engineering behind theater lighting, none of that magic is possible.
Publishing in 17th century England was a time-consuming and expensive field — expensive for both the publisher and the people who would buy the book. Theater was regarded as solely entertainment in Elizabethan England, so no one actually published a play unless it was intended for scholarly study. Most playwrights did not care if their work ever was printed because they wrote with the intention of having the play be seen on stage. Shakespeare never personally published any of his plays in his lifetime, and this has created problems with the validity of Shakespeare’s work. Today, there are many versions and translations of his work, but what are they based on?

During Shakespeare’s time, only one full copy of a play was transcribed; it was called a prompt book. The prompt book was cluttered and filled with stage directions, cues for sound effects, actor names and entrances and exits. The prompt book would be used during the production to make sure the performance ran smoothly.

If only one full copy of the script was transcribed and compiled, how did the actors learn their lines? Playwrights would distribute sections of scripts called “foul papers.” The sheets only would contain certain segments and lines of dialogue. Actors only would receive the “foul papers” that contained dialogue for their characters. This allowed for less transcribing on the playwright’s part but also meant that even the actors did not possess a completed copy of the play. Playwrights were also very leery in publishing anything in writing for fear of other playwrights and companies stealing their work.

Although Shakespeare did not publish any of his plays, half of his works were published in quartos before his death. A quarto is a sheet of paper folded in half and then folded in half again, which created four sections where text could be printed. The back of the paper also was used creating eight sections of text.

Quartos were unauthorized and are generally considered inferior copies of Shakespeare’s work. They contained basic text with minimal stage directions. One of the strongest explanations of why quartos contained fragmented dialogue is that actors would recite the play from memory for a scribe. Actors would not remember the text completely, leading to incomplete and false copies of Shakespeare’s work.

The first authorized publication of Shakespeare’s work occurred seven years after Shakespeare’s death in a folio. A folio is made up of quires, which are six leaves of paper folded in half. Text is written on both sides, meaning there are 12 pages of text that are sewn together. The text on the pages is divided into two columns. The quality of printing is higher in a folio than in it is in a quarto. Folios contain ornamental lettering and ornamental scene and act divisions. A folio is as wide as a modern encyclopedia but 2 to 3 inches taller.

The First Folio, published in 1623, was the first collected edition of all 36 of Shakespeare’s plays and it was compiled by two actors, John Hemminge and Henry Condell, who belonged to Shakespeare’s company, The King’s Men. Hemminge and Condell compiled the folio from prompt books that had been kept by the book-holder of The King’s Men. These versions were proofread by the book-holder, Hemminge and Condell, to ensure a higher quality of writing. The First Folio was the first book ever to be published in England that was devoted exclusively to plays.

Shakespeare’s works were reprinted in subsequent folios in 1632, 1663, 1664 and 1685. During this time, quartos of plays also were being printed. Because of the price to own the complete collection of Shakespeare’s work, many people began to print quartos of single plays. All of Shakespeare’s works were published as single plays in quarto form after the publication of the First Folio, including Measure for Measure, which had never been published in quarto form before its inclusion in the First Folio. The subsequent folios and quartos were all modeled off of the First Folio and did not contain many changes.

Academically, the First Folio is considered to be the most authentic version of Shakespeare’s work. Still, there remain multiple versions of Shakespeare’s work being studied and performed today. What do you think is the real version of Shakespeare’s work? Can there be multiple true versions of a Shakespeare play?
In *Measure for Measure*’s cast list, Lucio is listed as “a fantastic,” or sometimes “a fantastique,” French for “fantastic.” Although Shakespeare seems to have had a certain definition in mind, in the present day it is not altogether clear what he meant by “fantastic.” Nonetheless, here are some ideas on what Shakespeare could have meant.

The Oxford English Dictionary lists two definitions for “fantastic”: 1. Imaginative or fanciful; remote from reality; (of an object) seeming more appropriate to the imagination than to reality, strange or exotic; and 2. Extraordinarily good or attractive. The origins of “fantastic” are similar to what these definitions might suggest. In the late 14th century, it denoted “existing only in imagination,” “imaginary” or “able to imagine.” Its roots include the Greek *phantazein*, “make visible” or *phantazesthai*, “picture to oneself.” The Online Etymology Dictionary notes that the second OED definition, the use of “fantastic” in the trivial sense of “wonderful, marvelous,” did not appear until around 1938, so it is unlikely that Shakespeare would have used that description for Lucio. However, the first definition in itself leaves us much to think about with regard to the mysterious character.

Some critics have characterized Lucio as a fop, or a dandy, such as Mary Beth Rose in “Disorder and the Drama” when she states, “Lucio is called ‘a fantastique’ — meaning, presumably, a fop. Shakespeare uses the adjective fantastic in a corresponding sense: ‘To be fantastic may become a youth’ (Two Gentlemen, II.vii.47).” Other authors, such as Theresa D. Kemp, have simply said that a “fantastic” is a “showy, extravagant young man of fashion and pleasure.” Yet Rose also notes that this description of Lucio may be too simple: “The word may imply a fop, but in Lucio’s case it seems more likely to signify someone with an unbridled fantasy or imagination.”

Marvin Rosenberg suggests that “the fantastic” — a category that might include Lucio’s character as well as Isabella’s and Mariana’s bed trick — is similar to the idea of comic relief: “The running thread of comic mystery, of the fantastic, helps save the play from the ugly imputation that it is a morality, or a sermon.”

But perhaps the most fitting definition of fantastic for Lucio is M. Lindsay Kaplan’s, in “The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England”: a person who has aspects of both a poet and a statesman. Kaplan writes, “The fantastic could therefore be understood both as the ‘faculty of sensuous perception [and] of imagination.’ In other words, it could reveal the truth as well as create an illusion — like Mazzoni’s suggestion that the fantastic ‘many times contains beneath the husk of the fiction the truth of many noble conceptions.’” In the progression of the play, Lucio’s character might serve to reveal some of the other “fantastic” elements of the story that Shakespeare doesn’t want to state upfront. For example, Lucio at one point describes Vincentio as the “fantastical duke of dark corners,” suggesting that the duke may have a history, like Lucio, of sexual exploits and manipulation. In any case, Lucio’s character in *Measure for Measure* seems, indeed, like someone who has influence with the duke, but who also can joke around with the less noble characters.

ABOVE: Jeffrey Carlson (Lucio) with Celeste Cooper (Juliet) in rehearsal for Measure for Measure. Photo by Liz Lauren.
Recognizing Prose vs. Verse on Shakespeare’s Stage

BY MARIA NELSON

Distinguishing between Shakespeare’s prose and verse can be difficult for modern audiences, especially when heard aloud. We often take cues as to the structure of poetry or written work from how it looks on a page, such as whether words are arranged in stanzas or paragraphs. But in Shakespeare’s time, theater was primarily an aural experience built upon a culture of listening. Thus, it might have been easier for Shakespeare’s original audiences to recognize subtle nuances in his language when heard aloud than it is for us today.

Laury Magnus and Walter W. Cannon, editors of “Who Hears in Shakespeare?”, a collection of essays on the culture of listening both in Shakespeare’s time and in his works, write in their introduction, “‘Who’s there?’ This question, strategically placed as Hamlet’s opening line, strongly suggests that Shakespeare thought of his audience primarily as listeners and eavesdroppers.” In fact, the design of the original Globe Theatre was such that hearing was more important than seeing; the most expensive seats often had partial or obstructed view. It wasn’t until after the Restoration era of theater in England in the 18th century that stages were beginning to be redesigned with sight lines in mind. As Magnus and Cannon write, “When post-Restoration stages and theatres developed perspective staging, proscenium arches, and preferred audience seating directly facing the stage, we lost the engagement that the auditory stage and original texts demanded.”

In Shakespeare’s time, verse was associated with high language of important figures, or those pretending to be important. For example, in Measure for Measure, as Magnus and Cannon write, “To some, the [Duke’s] short rhymed lines sound pompous or self-important. But to others, depending on how they are acted or read, the lines may give him an oracular stature that raises him above his human self; he may seem to be a divinely inspired prophet.” Today’s poetry often doesn’t maintain this association between verse and high society, as George T. Wright, author of an essay entitled “An Almost Oral Art,” notes: “A large proportion of contemporary poetry conveys individual experience or insight in relatively undramatic language, and the poetic means on which earlier cultures, oral and literate alike, relied for their significant statements no longer seems appropriate to many poets’ changed purposes.”

In any case, the difference between the aural culture of 17th century England and our own very visual culture, must be taken into account when watching new productions of Shakespeare’s works. As Wright says, “The question of prose and verse language in the theater or in the study is inseparable from questions having to do with the paradoxes, contradictions and confusions that arise when trying to understand the status or nature, within a literate culture, of an oral art such as drama.”
Known for his beautiful verses and iambic pentameter, Shakespeare is credited as one of the greatest masters of the English language. His plays often contain a melding of different styles of writing that span across prose, blank verse and rhymed verse, depending on the characters who are speaking. His writing represents some of the most sophisticated forms of English literature and culture.

Spoken word poetry often is thought of as one of the least sophisticated forms of literature because it is considered to be “street poetry.” However, like Shakespeare’s writing, spoken word shows how poetry can be intentionally written for performance and still remain sophisticated. Shakespeare’s writing was meant to be performed; therefore, his poetry takes on greater depth when it is performed out loud. The presence of body and voice awakens the poetry that is alive in Shakespeare’s work.

Language is often born of both environment and audience. Since his words were written for performances, Shakespeare had to create characters who would speak to his audience. Much like many spoken word poets today, Shakespeare often wrote about topics that reflected his environment and problems in his society. In Measure for Measure, he explores the unfair implementation of law in society. His characters range from dukes and prisoners to friars and nuns. All his characters are distinct in voice, yet they all speak in beautifully crafted language, even when they are using everyday dialogue. For example, there is this part of a brief exchange that takes place on the street in scene two:

FIRST GENTLEMEN: Thou art always figuring diseases in me, but thou art full of error; I am sound.
LUCIO: Nay, not, as one would say, healthy; but so sound as things that are hollow: thy bones are hollow; impiety has made a feast of thee.

The way that Lucio turns this metaphor on its head to insult the gentlemen is a great use of lyrical wordplay. Said in a common street setting, Shakespeare shows how everyday dialogue can take on a poetic and lyrical nature. In Measure for Measure, Shakespeare’s characters are battling through wit and language. We see how Shakespeare’s character’s poetic tendencies coincide with the environment that they live in. Both Lucio and Pompey use language and wordplay to one-up the people to whom they are talking. Additionally, Claudio talks to Isabella about the power of words when he tells her that she “has a prosperous art/when she will play with reason and discourse/and well she can persuade.”

Similarly, contemporary spoken word poets also use a fusion of poetry, performance and wordplay to demonstrate how everyday language and situations can be lyrical. Patricia Smith, a formidable spoken word poet and performer, often sets her poems in stores, on street corners or in taxi cabs. One of her poems, called “Terrell’s Take On Things,” is in the voice of a barber talking to customers in his shop. Her poem is much like Shakespeare’s work in that it takes on the feel of a monologue and its narration is punctuated by beautiful imagery, verse and meter. However, it is done in her own contemporary style. Smith closes the poem with the lines, “This the ’90s, man, black man free now/Superfly done flew/Been doing this 40 years/Bring that head over here.” Her writing is rooted in the everyday, and like Shakespeare, is meant to be performed aloud.

By using poetry and elevated language in everyday contexts, both Shakespeare and spoken word artists such as Patricia Smith show us that poetry and verse are not removed from the language of everyday people; rather, they are intrinsic to them. Similarly, both forms of poetry are written to be read out loud to an audience and are reflective of the environment and issues that the writers found relevant to their environment.

FATIMAH ASGHAR is an award-winning poet, performer and dramaturge who is almost always in-between two places. Her literary work hovers between prose and poetry, examining fact through a lyrical lens. She has won numerous awards for experimental risk-taking in her work, which has appeared in Muzzle magazine, DecomP, Fringe magazine and many others. She is currently a multicultural fellow at the Steppenwolf Theater, where she works in the literary department. She is the co-founder of The Glass City Project, a Chicago-based arts organization that combines poetry, theory and activism.
In 1896, the illustrious scholar F.S. Boas classified three of Shakespeare’s plays—Measure for Measure, All’s Well That Ends Well and Troilus and Cressida—as “problem plays,” to distinguish them from comedies, tragedies and histories. All written around the turn of the seventeenth century, these plays represent a transitional period in Shakespeare’s style, and provoke questions about what we really mean when we designate a piece of art as “comic” or “tragic.” Indeed, the Elizabethans, influenced by Greek and Roman classics, held different ideas about comedy and tragedy than do most twenty-first century Americans. By their definitions, most of Shakespeare’s best-known works can be easily classified as comedy, tragedy or history. But it is the so-called “problem plays,” some of the least-known works in the Shakespearean canon, which reveal Shakespeare as a stylistic chameleon who eludes easy categorization, and mark him as a bold experimenter, a fine technician and an extraordinary poet.

Rather than implying that the plays themselves are problematic, the term “problem plays” refers to a type of drama that was popular at the time of Boas’ writing: the nineteenth century problem play deals with contemporary social issues. One prominent example is Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, in which the protagonist is trapped by the strictures of middle-class life. For Boas, Shakespeare’s problem plays were also characterized by an ambiguity of tone. While comedies like A Midsummer Night’s Dream offer their audiences straight frivolity and fun, and tragedies like Romeo and Juliet focus on the catastrophic trajectories of their characters, the problem plays alternate between comic and tragic elements. Boas writes:

Throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome, even when, as in All’s Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, the complications are outwardly adjusted in the fifth act.

In Measure for Measure, the Duke of Vienna leaves the city temporarily in the hands of Lord Angelo, a stern judge. Angelo persecutes Claudio,
a young man, for fornication with a woman named Juliet. But Claudio and Juliet are nearly married; only a small legal technicality renders Claudio’s act illegal—and given that the city is awash with prostitutes, Angelo’s plan to put Claudio to death is outrageously harsh. A simmering tale ensues, rife with power plays, politics and licentiousness. Chock full of both high-stakes drama and comic relief in the form of clownish policemen and bawdy ladies of the night, Measure for Measure leaves its audiences experiencing neither “simple joy nor pain.” Instead, it paints a complex portrait of a lustful politician, a city in flux, and the conflicting desires that humans experience every day.

As citizens of the twenty-first century, we are accustomed to entertainments which take us to sorrowful depths at one moment and peaks of joy the next. The Goodman’s production of A Christmas Carol exposes us to the societal ills of nineteenth-century England while also delivering hearty humor and hijinks. Countless television shows, from All in the Family to Weeds, balance humor and pathos. And even the most “serious” playwrights of the twentieth century—Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, and the often morose Eugene O’Neill—had funny bones.

But a Shakespearean audience would not have been as accustomed to such genre-blending. For them, a comedy meant a play that ended happily, usually with marriage. In Elizabethan comedies, plots often overshadow characters; the audience delights in keeping up with the story’s twists. They are treated to witty banter, slapstick, deceptions, mix-ups and clever servants. Often, in Elizabethan comedy, young lovers must overcome obstacles placed in their path by their elders. When they finally outwit their parents, they chassé off to their marriage bed to make the next generation: indeed, a happy ending for all. A tragedy, by contrast, ends with death. Many scholars link Elizabethan tragedy with the ancient Greek concept laid out by Aristotle in his treatise on dramatic theory, Poetics. Aristotle writes about the tragic hero, a character with enough admirable traits that the audience will sympathize with him, but who possesses a flaw which brings about his downfall. Elizabethan tragedies, including Shakespeare’s, generally adhere to Aristotle’s concept. Another common genre in Shakespeare’s day was the history play—that is, a play based on historical events that occurred decades or centuries before the playwright’s birth. Sometimes considered a subset of tragedy, the history play has little classical precedence; it was not until Elizabethan times that the genre became commonplace.

One reason Elizabethans conceived their plays in the image of Greek and Roman theater is that few great English playwrights had yet existed. For many years preceding the mid-sixteenth century, England had seen an abundance of morality plays—religious dramas that often lacked thematic heft and literary merit. By the late sixteenth century, even these were out of style. Fortunately, the English Renaissance, a period during which many art forms flourished, was underway. Now, writers like Christopher Marlowe wrote secular tragedies, and authors such as Thomas Dekker and Ben Jonson penned comedies with tightly woven plots. Though few playwrights of the age were university-educated, most had learned the classics in grammar school. Shakespeare, who probably spent most of his school years perfecting his Latin, had almost certainly read Terence, Plautus and Seneca, among many others, and took his cues from these Roman writers.
Shakespeare probably began writing in the 1590s, and for much of that decade alternated between writing comedies (early works include Love’s Labour’s Lost and All’s Well That Ends Well), and history plays (King John, Henry VI Parts I, II, and III, Richard II, Richard III), with the occasional tragedy (Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet). These plays were performed by a troupe of actors called the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, an ensemble that included Shakespeare himself, and which, as its name suggests, excluded women. The men not only acted but also co-owned their company, sharing in all profits and debts. They also relied on the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain; their success, and that of the theater in general, was bolstered by financial support from major political figures. During the first five years of his career as a playwright, Shakespeare’s writing style was decidedly influenced by other writers of his day; many scholars consider his early poetry inferior to his later work, and his plots entirely derivative of other plays. His characters, such as the twin Dromios in The Comedy of Errors, tended toward one-dimensionality. By the middle of the 1590s, however, he had begun to deviate slightly from his source texts, and his voice emerged. In 1595, he wrote A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and in 1600 produced Hamlet; both are now considered among the finest works in the English language.

Though evidence suggests that Measure for Measure premiered on St. Stephen’s Night, December 26, 1604, Shakespeare may have begun writing it in 1603. That year—approximately the midpoint of Shakespeare’s career—represents a pivotal moment in English history. Queen Elizabeth I died after a 44-year reign, ending the monarchical stability the British had enjoyed through the latter half of the sixteenth century. Although the “Virgin Queen” was the last of the Tudor line, her godson, James VI of Scotland, was rapidly appointed James I of England. When James came to power, he offered to patronize Shakespeare’s theater company, which was by then among the most respected and popular companies in London. Accordingly, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men changed their name to The King’s Men. Over the next several years, while enjoying frequent theatrical performances, James settled into his dual role as king of both Scotland and England. Elizabeth’s chief minister, Robert Cecil, advised James through the first years of his reign, and aside from an occasional death plot, the transition went smoothly (especially in comparison to the bloody fights and riots which so often accompanied major political events). Still, it was the only transfer of the crown Shakespeare would see in his lifetime, and it no doubt provoked in him questions about power and politics.

Shakespeare set Measure for Measure in Vienna, a city he had not likely visited and which he probably associated with drunkenness and prostitution. Some scholars assert that he actually set the play in Italy, but that the location was changed when the play was first published in 1623—like so much about Shakespeare, the precise facts are lost forever, but what is certain is that the play never took place in London. Regardless of where he set the action, Shakespeare need not have used his extraordinary imagination to write about a city where alcohol and whores were men’s primary pleasures: London’s streets teemed with brothels. The city depicted in Measure for Measure is more likely a fictionalized version of London—the only city Shakespeare ever truly knew—than any distant European city. By placing the action elsewhere, Shakespeare could comment on London’s issues indirectly—and could still invite King James to his opening performance.

While we know that Shakespeare was admired as a writer in his own time, in most cases we have little sense of whether his individual plays were popular successes when they

Shakespeare left us not only great poetry, gripping plots and his bottomless understanding of the human psyche; from him we also inherit a genre—tragicomedy—that dominates much of our entertainment today.
Seventeenth century criticism of Measure for Measure is largely negative, focusing on its uneven tone. English literary critic John Dryden commented in 1672:

Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arriv'd to its vigor and maturity: witness the lameness of their Plots. I suppose I need not name Pericles Prince of Tyre, nor the historical plays of Shakespeare. Besides many of the rest as The Winter's Tale, Love's Labor's Lost, Measure for Measure, which were either grounded on impossibilities, or at least, so meanly written that the comedy neither caus'd your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment.

But many critics in the twentieth century, steeped as they were in the tonally ambiguous entertainments of their era, took a more favorable view. They theorized that Shakespeare was experimenting with style, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to subvert his audience's expectations. By this time, Boas' designation of Measure for Measure as a problem play had become widely accepted in critical circles, and critics approached the play with Boas' theories in mind. In 1931, W.W. Lawrence argued that the three problem plays

...mark one of the most striking developments of Shakespeare's genius...The settings and the plots are still those of romance, but the treatment is in the main serious and realistic.

A few decades later, in 1965, J.W. Lever praised Shakespeare even further:

The form here is a close blend of tragic and comic elements, so carefully patterned as to suggest a conscious experiment in the new medium of tragico-medy. Limited precedents for this treatment were to be found.

Problem play, masterpiece, or both, Measure for Measure represents an important period in Shakespeare's work.

Over the course of his career, the dramatist proved himself equally skilled at writing comedies and tragedies—a rare feat among his peers. But perhaps just as importantly, with his problem plays he proved an agile experimenter, an inventor of form. Shakespeare left us not only great poetry, gripping plots and his bottomless understanding of the human psyche; from him we also inherit a genre—tragicomedy—that dominates much of our entertainment today. When Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare's, referred to him as "not of an age, but a man for all time," he probably didn't count Measure for Measure among Shakespeare's greatest contributions. But 400 years later, we look at Shakespeare through the lens of our own life and times—and from the twenty-first century, the view is different.
Shakespeare’s plays have been adapted for film for more than a century. In 1899, theater manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree directed and starred in the first known film version of a Shakespeare work, a four-minute, silent segment of *King John*. Shakespeare’s works have to this day influenced hundreds of movies and television productions. The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) cites William Shakespeare as the writer for 938 titles. Although the number of feature-length films of Shakespeare’s works is much smaller, there are still many hundreds. Needless to say, Shakespeare’s writing has transcended the realm of live theater in overwhelming proportions.

Perhaps the most all-encompassing film series based on Shakespeare’s works is the 37-volume BBC series “The Shakespeare Collection,” completed in 1988 after beginning taping just 10 years prior. This includes director Desmond Davis’s “Measure for Measure.” Besides these, the most well-known versions today, according to a list on pbs.org, are largely from 1965 or later, although there are a few key productions, such as 1916 versions of “Macbeth” and “Romeo and Juliet” during film’s silent era.

But what does it take to adapt Shakespeare to a screenplay? The answer to this question varies quite a bit amongst scholars.

Lisa Hopkins, author of “Relocating Shakespeare and Austen on Screen,” presents the opinion that film adaptation is difficult and often unsuccessful, especially with the work of a great author such as Shakespeare.

“At the most basic level, [screen adaptation] involves taking a work of art originally conceived for one medium and ‘translating’ it to fit another. If Marshall McLuhan was right in his famous dictum that the medium is the message, this ought to be an impossible task, especially since there is ... a fundamental disjunction between the aesthetic of film and the aesthetic of literary texts, in that one centers on images and the other on the written word.”

Jan Kott, author of “Shakespeare Our Contemporary,” on the other hand, argues that Shakespeare’s plays are in many cases naturally suited for film — moreso than some scripts, thus making adaptation easier:

“Shakespeare’s plays have been divided in the theater into a number of scenes according to the places of action. After the theater had abandoned the Elizabethan convention, it tried in vain to put the scenes together to form some sort of entity. A scenario is not divided into scenes, but into shots and sequences. Shakespeare’s plays are also composed of shots and sequences ... Olivier’s films [for example] have demonstrated the fluency, homogeneity and rapidity of action in Shakespeare’s plays.”

Of course, fundamental differences exist between the medium of film and the medium of theater that might impede the success of Shakespeare on film. As Russell Jackson writes in “The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,” “The most obvious difference between a screenplay and the text of an Elizabethan play is the number of spoken words.” On film, a close-up shot may serve the same purpose as a soliloquy on stage — to get inside a character’s head — in significantly fewer words. In fact, Alfred Hitchcock once commented about this difference, mocking: “The cinema ... has seen stage directions in Shakespeare’s poetry where decades of theatrical craftsmen have seen only words.”

Moreover, both film and theater productions must take into account the constraints of each respective industry; production budgets for film are generally significantly larger than for theater, and films are produced for a much larger audiences. The factor of marketability in the film industry is not negligible, and Shakespeare’s works pose even more challenges for creating a mass-marketable film. As Jackson writes, quoting a fellow scholar, “‘Certain elements we need to market a film successfully ... suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings — mainly happy endings.’ [However] in the academic study of Shakespeare happy endings, together with anything else that might smooth the path of the plays’ characters, have long been out of favor.” This is especially the case for Shakespeare’s not-so-tidy “problem plays,” including *Measure for Measure*.

Today, we arguably rely upon visual cues to interpret art more than anything else, and we are certainly a more
visual culture than the British of Shakespeare’s time. In order to preserve the timelessness of Shakespeare’s works for an audience that demands visual theater, perhaps film-like productions are appropriate. In fact, Michèle Williams, in an essay published in “The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film,” cites criticism of a production of Measure for Measure that called for exactly this film-like quality:

“The wide distribution of [Shakespeare’s works] through video develops a Shakespearean media culture which in turn nurtures an interactive relationship between theatre and film ... Michael Billington’s reaction to Stéphane Braunschweig’s 1997 production of Measure for Measure for the Edinburgh Festival is a case in point: ‘It lacks the cinematic fluency we expect in modern Shakespeare. Rather than melt into each other, scenes are divided up by the onward march of the revolve.’”

Adapting Shakespeare to new media as they emerge goes well with the notion that Shakespeare’s works are constantly evolving, 400 years after his death. As M.M. Bakhtin wrote in 1970, “We can say that neither Shakespeare nor his contemporaries knew that ‘great Shakespeare’ whom we know now. There is no possibility of squeezing our Shakespeare into the Elizabethan epoch ... He has grown because of that which actually has been and continues to be found in his work, but which neither he himself nor his contemporaries could consciously perceive and evaluate in the context of the culture of their epoch.” Perhaps Kenneth S. Rockwell said it best in his “A History of Shakespeare on Screen”: “The history of Shakespeare in the movies has, after all, been the search for the best available means to replace the verbal with the visual imagination, an inevitable development deplored by some but interpreted by others as not so much a limitation on, as an extension of, Shakespeare’s genius into uncharted seas.” And, as an article on pbs.org describing the production process of Shakespeare in Love notes, “The need to emphasize the visual for a 20th century audience was too tempting for them to ignore.”

Of course, the argument about whether adaptation is good or bad — an unnecessary change in medium vs. a natural progression of Shakespeare into the

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**Iconic 1970s films of New York City**

Robert Falls’s Measure for Measure is set in New York City in the late 1970s, which was home to a burgeoning film industry. The list below acknowledges some iconic films that share Measure for Measure’s setting.

- “All That Jazz” (1979), directed by Bob Fosse
- “Blowout” (1981), directed by Brian De Palma
- “The Driller Killer” (1979), directed by Abel Ferrara
- “Dog Day Afternoon” (1975), directed by Sidney Lumet
- “The French Connection” (1971), directed by William Friedkin
- “Manhattan” (1979), directed by Woody Allen
- “Mean Streets” (1973), directed by Martin Scorsese
- “Prince of the City” (1981), directed by Sidney Lumet
- “Saturday Night Fever” (1977), directed by John Badham
- “Serpico” (1973), directed by Sidney Lumet
- “Taxi Driver” (1976), directed by Martin Scorsese
- “The Warriors” (1979), directed by Walter Hill

**What Is Black Comedy?**

Shakespeare was a pioneer when he blended the genres of comedy and tragedy in Measure for Measure, but modern audiences are familiar with the genre. Black comedy takes heavy, controversial or off-limits subject matter and treats it in a comedic way. Black comedies tend to walk the line between shocking audiences and entertaining them, allowing audiences to experience both laughter and discomfort. One of the most popular writers and directors of black comedy today is Quentin Tarantino, who is famous for his subject matter and the controversy surrounding his films. Other famous Black Comedies include:

- “A Clockwork Orange” (1971), directed by Stanley Kubrick
- “Life of Brian” (1978), directed by Terry Jones
- “Pulp Fiction” (1994), directed by Quentin Tarantino
- “Fargo” (1996), directed by Joel Coen
- “The Royal Tenenbaums” (2001), directed by Wes Anderson
- “Shaun of the Dead” (2004), directed by Edgar Wright
- “Little Miss Sunshine” (2006), directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris
- “Django Unchained” (2012), directed by Quentin Tarantino
contemporary era — can be made both ways. But in some cases the answer might even be rooted in the text itself. So let’s look at the case of Measure for Measure.

Measure for Measure seems particularly suited for film. In fact, this is the key argument in H.R. Coursen’s essay “Why Measure for Measure?” Largely, Coursen’s argument is based upon the notion that a problem play is similar to melodrama — “a mode that may seem to raise profound issues but does not pretend to solve them” — a genre that was already known to work well on screen. But furthermore, Coursen argues that the structure of the text of Measure for Measure is even episodic, “a series of vivid one-on-one confrontations.”

In a later essay, Coursen argues that Measure for Measure, for these reasons, is an especially modern play: “The play itself ... presses into the new millennium, seeking new ways of becoming ‘excitingly relevant’ and becoming almost immediately anachronistic, but not irrelevant, since it permits us to reconstruct the history from which it emerged.” Measure for Measure already has the elements that work best on film — short, one-on-one conversations, eavesdropping characters, a non-linear progression — but not those that prevent success on film, such as the need for a large budget or extravagant sets. Andrew Dickson, reacting to the 1978 BBC film version of Measure for Measure directed by Desmond Davis, notes, “The budgetary and creative restrictions that torpedoed others in the series — flimsy sets, tawdry costuming, woeful picture quality — here become kind of a virtue, with gloomy, interior spaces and a down-at-heel feel adding to the play’s subterranean atmosphere.” In keeping with this Shakespeare play’s inherent modernity, producing it on film, or incorporating film-like elements on stage, seems only natural.

Ultimately, it makes the most sense to say that in any modern production of Shakespeare, whether it be on stage or on screen, probably incorporates elements of both film and traditional theater. Russell Jackson writes, “Films made from Shakespeare plays exist at a meeting point between conflicting cultural assumptions, rival theories and practices of performance and — at the most basic level — the uneasy and overlapping systems of theatre and cinema.” And Jackson’s comment seems to apply in reverse — if theater were to emulate film.

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An Abridged List of Shakespeare Film Adaptations
Now that you’ve considered the potential of adapting Shakespeare’s work for the stage, you may want to see some of these attempts in action! Below is an (abridged) list of film adaptations.

Is there one you love that we’ve missed? Tell us on Twitter @GoodmanEd!

- “10 Things I Hate About You” (1999), directed by Gil Junger, based on The Taming of the Shrew, featuring Heath Ledger and Julia Stiles
- “Hamlet” (1996), directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh
- “Henry V” (1989), directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh
- “The Lion King” (1994), directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, based on Hamlet and Macbeth
- “Macbeth” (1971), directed by Roman Polanski
- “Merchant of Venice” (2004), directed by Michael Radford, featuring Al Pacino
- “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (1999), directed by Michael Hoffman, featuring Kevin Kline and Michelle Pfeiffer
- “Much Ado About Nothing” (1993), directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, with Emma Thompson and Keanu Reeves
- “Othello” (1995), directed by Oliver Parker, featuring Laurence Fishburne and Kenneth Branagh
- “Ran” (1985), directed by Akira Kurosawa, based on King Lear
- “Richard III” (1995), directed by Richard Loncraine, featuring Ian McKellen and Annette Bening
- “Romeo & Juliet” (1968), directed by Franco Zeffirelli, featuring Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey
- “Romeo + Juliet” (1996), directed by Baz Luhrmann, featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes
- “She’s the Man” (2006), directed by Andy Fickman, based on Twelfth Night, featuring Amanda Bynes and Channing Tatum
- “The Taming of the Shrew” (1967), directed by Franco Zeffirelli, featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton
- “The Tempest” (2010), directed by Julie Taymor, featuring Helen Mirren, Djimoun Hounsou and Russell Brand
Shakespeare's London to 1970's New York

BY ELIAMARIA LINTZ

Shakespeare often wrote his plays to provide a commentary on what was going on in London. *Measure for Measure* was first performed in 1604, but Shakespeare may have written the play in 1603. During this time frame, England experienced a drastic shift in the political and social climate. Director Robert Falls has set Goodman’s production of *Measure for Measure* in 1970s New York City. How do you set a Shakespearean play in a semi-modern setting? New York City in the 1970s and England in 1603 have many similarities that allow both Shakespeare’s commentary and the artistic vision to mesh seamlessly.

As Shakespeare was writing *Measure for Measure*, England was undergoing its first transition in monarchy in 44 years. Queen Elizabeth I had died and her godson, James VI of Scotland, inherited the crown, becoming James I of England. Although this transition of power was relatively smooth, most Brits had never witnessed a transfer of power before. This could have influenced him to write *Measure for Measure* as a cautionary tale for James I, who was the patron of Shakespeare’s theater company.

Fast forward almost 400 years and New York City was experiencing its own transition of power. After years of the city being in financial disrepair, Ed Koch was elected mayor. His predecessor, Abraham Beame, had made severe budget reductions and workforce cuts to prevent bankruptcy. The unhappiness of New Yorkers and the disparity of the city caused for a contentious mayoral race and a demand for political change.

Both London and New York City were dirty, dangerous and violent cities. A police force did not exist in London so the military policed the city. The military personnel were more concerned with military matters and were often invisible in the city. Its members also were fairly benign and disregarded anything but violent crimes. The aloofness of the patrolling force in London caused a rise in pickpockets and minor crime. Shakespeare uses the character of Elbow, an ambivalent and rather clueless constable, to illustrate the attitude of the police in London. Elbow is ignorant to the true state of the law in Vienna, much like police in London were ignorant of the situation in London.

In New York City, the budget cuts resulted in a deficit of police officers. Low numbers of police added to the danger of a city at the end of its rope. The end of 1976 brought an outbreak of murders by serial killer Son of Sam. A major blackout in 1977 resulted in looting and riots. Not to mention, New York City also experienced heavy drug use and trafficking, theft, assaults and other crimes that were out of the control of the police.

Along with being dangerous, London and New York City were both dirty. Both cities were overpopulated and overcrowded, respectively creating an excess of waste. In London, garbage and waste were simply thrown into the street or the River Thames. Londoners lacked a perception of hygiene, and dirt and grime created a permanent smell to the city. The lack of sanitation bred rats that carried the bubonic plague. Not quite different, New York City of the 1970s also teemed with garbage. The financial situation of New York in 1975 caused more than 3,000 sanitation workers to be laid off. Outraged, the city’s employed sanitation workers decided to strike and walk out on the job. The three-week strike resulted in garbage being abandoned in piles on streets, increasing New York’s already formidable rat population.

The rampant presence of prostitution only added to the seediness of our respective cities. Each had areas notorious for its brothels and prostitutes: Southwark in London and Times Square in New York. Both Southwark and Times Square were considered the entertainment district of their respective city. Authorities often turned a blind eye to prostitution in both cities; poverty levels contributed to the frequency of trade. Prostitutes were usually women who had no other means of supporting themselves.

If Shakespeare would have visited 1970s New York City, he most certainly would have recognized some of the same social issues. Despite being almost 400 years apart, the same problems plague these cities. Shakespeare used his plays as commentary on the prevalent social issues he was privy, but what he encountered has since reoccurred, making his work relevant to different eras and locations.
When I finished Naval basic training in Florida in 1974, I immediately headed for New York City. A Texas girl who had plotted her escape from the sticks for years, I returned to home just long enough to pick up my civvies and hop a plane headed east.

Four of my college roommates had moved to Manhattan that summer after graduation. It had been our plan since meeting our freshman year. Joel, Danny, Armancio, Susan and I would get an apartment, split the rent and do odd jobs until we got our breaks. Susan and Joel would be supernumeraries at the Metropolitan Opera until Plácido Domingo overheard them singing in the cafeteria and demanded they give them leads. Armancio figured he could hawk his drawings on the street. Danny, an organist, actually had a job offer from First Presbyterian. The only nonartist in the group (I was a journalism major), I would be a stringer until the Village Voice hired me full time. My detour to the Navy (part of my grand plan to be a foreign correspondent but driven by an “invitation” not to return to the University of Texas before I could graduate) meant I would be there on weekends since I was stationed in D.C. for the next four years.

The New York we lived in was nothing like it is now, a Disney-fied temple of consumerism. It was dirty, squalid, dangerous, edgy and wondrous. It was a ruin in the making. If the grime and crime didn’t destroy it, the rats most certainly would. My roomies had found a marvelous Upper West Side apartment in a once — and future — glorious building: the Ansonia, home to the Continental Baths, a gay bathhouse where Bette Midler performed. Now one of the most coveted addresses in New York, we had a seven-room wonder in an architectural jewel for $500 a month (maintenance fees alone in that building are 10 times that now). Our apartment was furnished exclusively through scavenging through trash. When old people died without wills or heirs, the landlords would clean the apartments, taking whatever they wanted for themselves and setting the rest of the deceased’s belongings out on the sidewalk. That was cheaper than hiring a removal van. We would go through the boxes and help ourselves. Pickings were especially good on the Upper East Side, a mere stroll through Central Park. We were comfortable because we could live on very little, a minimalist style that became an aesthetic. Our military-styled field jackets, mine the only one actually issued, were in thrift store abundance as Vietnam wound down, cost about $3 and were very warm. Made chic by Robert De Niro in “Taxi Driver,” they were battle dress in a city under siege.

To the backdrop of the continuing Vietnam war — and the Four Dead in Ohio, Watergate and Nixon’s resignation, a looming energy crisis and a decidedly more militant struggle for racial justice — sexual progressiveness begat political backlash and social liberation for women, Blacks and gays. Manhattan was ground zero, and as the city crumbled into ruin under mismanagement and financial collapse, people lost themselves in sexual abandon and a drug-fueled haze.

The city was broke. So were we.

Aside from the high-intensity blocks of Midtown and the financial district, the city was inhabited principally by hustlers, panhandlers, flea baggers, immigrants, dreamers and artists. For those of us who had romanced the free city from afar, this was not an issue. Manhattan felt depopulated even in daylight. We thought of the place as a free city of intrigue and licentiousness like the eponymous “Casablanca.”

By 1975, the light through our floor-to-ceiling French windows on the Upper West Side was often the glow of trash fires in Harlem. A sanitation strike was in progress, and mounds of refuse, reeking in the heat, decorated the curbs of every neighborhood. But instead of being double-bagged in plastic as they are now, they were simply set on fire every night. The spectacle achieved the transition from apocalyptic to dully normal in a matter of days.

New York is home to Ellis Island and so has always been home to large immigrant populations. The immigration reforms of 1968 flooded the city with smells and sounds from all over the globe. African Americans, European Jews, the Chinese and the Irish had already staked out territory across Manhattan. Squeezed into already overcrowded tenements came Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Salvadorians. Racial tensions, often checked by geography, sweltered in the stench of summer heat and unleashed fire that hydrants couldn’t rinse away.
New York in 1976 was a cesspool of corrupt officials and raging racial tensions. Conditions in Harlem and Bed-Stuy and the Bronx were horrendous. Abandoned buildings were held together by graffiti. There was widespread poverty and pornography. Muggers, rapists and prostitutes ruled with impunity. David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, was beginning his reign of terror, randomly shooting victims around the city, further terrorizing already traumatized communities. The subways were toilets, unsafe and unreliable at best. And the entire infrastructure of the city was collapsing. And yet....

A Chorus Line was running on Broadway; Carl Perkins and disco was the soundtrack of the city, paving the way for Donna Summer, the Bee Gees and KC and the Sunshine Band; Live from Lincoln Center was debuting on PBS; Jimmy Carter accepted the nomination for president at the Javitz Center during the Democratic National Convention, which saw Barbara Jordan become the first Black woman ever to speak at a national political convention. The city was preparing for the country’s bicentennial.

It was the worst of times. It was the best of times. It was New York City.

The title for this article is taken from one of my favorite songs about New York, “Walk on the Wild Side.”

Lou Reed’s seminal 1972 recording captures everything there was about that time – my time – in the city, the filth, the sex, the drugs, the hustle. Produced by David Bowie it featured as backup singers one of the most evocatively-named groups ever, The Thunderthighs.

Marinated with a double bass back beat driving a searing jazz sax played by the guy who taught Bowie to blow, it appeared on Reed’s LP Transformers. The title for the track, as Reed tells it, was an homage to “A Walk on the Wild Side,” Nelson Algren’s 1956 novel which is most often quoted for Algren’s “three rules of life”: “Never play cards with a man called Doc. Never eat at a place called Mom’s. Never sleep with a woman whose troubles are worse than your own.” Algren noted, “The book asks why lost people sometimes develop into greater human beings than those who have never been lost in their whole lives.” And in the mid-1970’s, New York was all about being lost.

New York – and when we say New York it ALWAYS means the city, not the state – has inspired hundreds of writers, artists, playwrights, filmmakers and composers. “Empire State of Mind,” the brilliant track from Jay-Z’s The Blueprint with a searing chorus and piano loop by Alicia Keys, is near and dear to my heart, making me homesick for Katz’s corned beef and the jaded streets of Brooklyn every time I hear it.

For more songs about New York, check out our website. There you can find a link to TimeOut New York’s list of “The 100 Best Songs about New York” and listen to both of my favorites and discover one of your own.
The term “religion” makes only one direct appearance in the original Constitution, and although implied, the term “separation of church and state” never makes an appearance in federal documents. Why then is the intersection of religion and politics such a contentious topic today? What role does religion have in government when the founders of this country wished to lay down a wall between the two? Obviously, religion influences a person’s morals, which go on to influence their opinion and standing on certain issues. However, according to the foundation of the U.S., religion has no business affecting laws or governing over the country.

Religion makes its sole presence in the original Constitution through Article 6: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” The founders possessed a rational view when it came to establish the foundation for the U.S. and that dictated that religious conceptions were solely the property of private thought. The founding fathers were attempting to further themselves from England, which at the time possessed a monarchy founded in the Divine Right — the monarch is not subject to “earthly” authority and the right to rule was given by God. They believed that government arose through the agreement of the governed and not from divine intervention in human affairs.

Ensuring that religion wasn’t a part of government was especially important for the founders of the U.S. because they came from different religious backgrounds. In the group approving the Constitution were two Catholics, Protestants who came from various different sects of Protestantism, and deists, who believed in a divine power that set the universe in motion but then stepped back. The founders wanted to ensure that no one sect of religion could ever take control of the government and create a theocracy — a government in which a deity is recognized as the official civil leader or in which officials are regarded as divinely guided.

When most people quote the term “separation of church and state,” they are making reference to the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. The amendment states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The committee that created the Bill of Rights also upheld the founders’ belief that the government should not become enmeshed in religion. The Bill of Rights was not added to the Constitution until 1791 — four years after the Constitution was adopted.

Even though “separation of church and state” doesn’t directly appear in either the Constitution or Bill of Rights, Thomas Jefferson coined the term in a letter written in 1802 to the Danbury Baptist Association:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his god, the people in the First Amendment declared that their Legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.”

Thomas Jefferson was president at the time this was written but had no doubt voiced that same opinion during the creation of the Constitution and subsequently the creation of the Bill of Rights. He voiced the underlying meaning of what was put in the Constitution, but he did it in an easily understood metaphor.

If the founding literature of the U.S. went to such lengths to prevent the combination of church and state, why is there such an issue about the topic? Cases regarding the issues of religion and politics were seen as early as 1815 regarding church lands. The issue of religion and politics came to a head in the 20th century with more than 50 cases reaching the Supreme Court. One case that further showed the federal government upholding the premise of separation of church and state occurred in 1971 with Lemon v. Kurtzman. The case dealt with the reimbursement of nonpublic schools, most of which were Catholic. The court ruled that the state reimbursing nonsecular schools was unconstitutional. As a result of the court’s ruling, the “Lemon Test,” which is used to examine a law to see if it has the effect of establishing a religion or religious aspect, was established.

Perhaps a more notable and recent example of the intersection of religion and politics is the controversy surrounding Alabama Supreme Court judge, Roy Moore. The first incident occurred in 1995 when Moore was sued by the American Civil Liberties Union for holding a presession prayer and displaying a wooden plaque of the Ten Commandments. The case was thrown out for technicalities. Moore again caused controversy in
2001 when he installed a large, granite monument of the Ten Commandments to be put in front of the courthouse. Once again Moore was sued. This time, the court ruled against Moore, stating that the installation of the monument failed the “Lemon Test.” The case never reached the Supreme Court but was handled in local federal courts in Alabama.

In the vast majority of cases heard regarding religion and politics, the decision has upheld the notion of separation of church and state. However, despite the rulings, the national motto of the U.S. — “In God we trust” and “one nation under God”— is present in the Pledge of Allegiance. Why does a country that is based on not establishing a country reference a deity? Isn’t this the very thing the founders of the U.S. were trying to prevent?

The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892, a century after the Constitution and Bill of Rights were written. The document was in response to the American Civil War to promote unity of the entire country. The pledge was written by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister, and recited by schoolchildren on Columbus Day. The original pledge read: “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

In 1923 the phrase “flag of the United States of America” was added. The salute of the flag was changed as well during WWII because it closely resembled the Nazi salute. Through all of these changes, “under God” still was not included in the national pledge. It wasn’t until 1954 that they were integrated, in a response to the threat of communism by President Dwight Eisenhower.

Eisenhower also was responsible for the declaration that “In God we trust” should be printed on all coin and paper money and that it would be the U.S. national motto. Before Eisenhower, “In God we trust” had been printed occasionally on some coins in specific states but not nationally. Again in a response to the fear of communism, Eisenhower signed a bill in 1955 making in mandatory that all coins and paper money would have the phrase printed on them. Eisenhower took it a step further in 1956 by instituting the phrase as the national motto.

The inclusion of religion into federal politics in the U.S. has only been seen in the past 60 years but it has been found in state government for much longer. Because the U.S. is a democratic republic, states have their own government and unique laws pertaining to only the people who live in that state. The state laws are the laws that most people deal with on a day-to-day basis. Each state possesses its own constitution. Whereas the U.S. Constitution states that there will be no religious requirement to obtain office, there are six states that prohibit those who do not acknowledge the existence of an “Almighty power” from holding office or testifying in a state court.

The founders of the U.S. explicitly stated that religion and government should not be mixed, but through the years religion has undoubtedly bled into government. The issue of religion intersecting with politics has always been a hot topic and will continue to be one. The inclusion of religion into government is a relatively young practice. What has driven the U.S. to include religion? Is there any way to return to the vision the founders had for this country?

What do you think? What should the boundaries be between religion and government?
A very, very long time ago (about three or four years), I took a certain secure and righteous pleasure in saying the things that women are supposed to say.

I remember with pain –

“My work won’t interfere with marriage. After all, I can always keep my typewriter at home.” Or:

“I don’t want to write about women’s stuff. I want to write about foreign policy.” Or:

“Black families were forced into matriarchy, so I see why black women have to step back and let their men get ahead.” Or:

“I know we’re helping Chicano groups that are tough on women, but that’s their culture.” Or:

“Who would want to join a women’s group? I’ve never been a joiner, have you?” Or (when bragging):

“He says I write about abstract ideas like a man.”

I suppose it’s obvious from the kinds of statements I chose that I was secretly non-conforming. (I wasn’t married. I was earning a living at a profession I cared about, and I had basically – if quietly – opted out of the “feminine” role.) But that made it all the more necessary to repeat some Conventional Wisdom, even to look as conventional as I could manage, if I was to avoid the punishments reserved by society for women who don’t do as society says. I therefore learned to Uncle Tom with subtlety, logic, and humor. Sometimes, I even believed it myself.

If it weren’t for the Women’s Movement, I might still be dissembling away. But the ideas of this great sea-change in women’s view of ourselves are contagious and irresistible. They hit women like a revelation, as if we had left a small dark room and walked into the sun.

At first my discoveries seemed complex and personal. In fact, they were the same ones so many millions of women have made and are making. Greatly simplified, they went like this: Women are human beings first, with minor differences from men that apply largely to the act of reproduction. We share the dreams, capabilities, and weaknesses of all human beings, but our occasional pregnancies and other visible differences have been used – even more pervasively, if less brutally, than racial differences have been used – to mark us for an elaborate division of labor that may once have been practical but has since become cruel and false. The division is continued for clear reason, consciously or not: the economic and social profit of men as a group.

Once this feminist realization dawned, I reacted in what turned out to be predictable ways. First, I was amazed at the simplicity and obviousness of a realization that made sense, at last, of my life experience: I couldn’t figure out why I hadn’t seen it before. Second, I realized, painfully, how far that new vision of life was from the system around us, and how tough it would be to explain the feminist realization at all, much less to get people (especially, though not only, men) to accept so drastic a change.

But I tried to explain. God knows (she knows) that women try. We make analogies with other groups that have been marked for subservient roles in order to assist blocked imaginations. We supply endless facts and statistics of injustice, reeling them off until we feel like human information-retrieval machines. We lean heavily on the device of reversal. (If there is a male reader to whom all my pre-realization statements seem perfectly logical, for instance, let him substitute “men” for “women” or himself for me in each sentence, and see how he feels. “My work won’t interfere with marriage....” “...Chicana groups are tough on men....” You get the idea.)

We even use logic. If a woman spends a year bearing and nursing a child, for instance, she is supposed to have the primary responsibility for raising that child to adulthood. That’s logic by the male definition, but it often makes women feel children are their only function or discourages them from being mothers at all. Wouldn’t it be just as logical to say that the child has two parents, both equally responsible for child-rearing, and that therefore the father should compensate for that extra year by spending more than his half of the time with the child? Now that’s logic.

Occasionally, these efforts at explaining succeed. More often, I get the feeling that we are speaking Urdu and the men are speaking Pali. As for logic, it’s in the eye of the logician.
Painful or not, both stages of reaction to our discovery have a great reward. They give birth to sisterhood.

First, we share with each other the exhilaration of growth and self-discovery, the sensation of having the scales fall from our eyes. Whether we are giving other women this new knowledge or receiving it from them, the pleasure for all concerned is enormous. And very moving.

In the second stage, when we’re exhausted from dredging up facts and arguments for the men whom we had previously thought advanced and intelligent, we make another simple discovery. Women understand. We may share experiences, make jokes, paint pictures, and describe humiliations that mean nothing to men, but women understand.

The odd thing about these deep and personal connections of women is that they often ignore barriers of age, economics, worldly experience, race, culture – all the barriers that, in male or mixed society, had seemed so difficult to cross.

I remember meeting with a group of women in Missouri who, because they had come in equal numbers from the small town and from its nearby campus, seemed to be split between wives with white gloves welded to their wrists and students with boots who talked about “imperialism” and “oppression.” Planning for a child care center had brought them together, but the meeting seemed hopeless until three of the booted young women began to argue among themselves about a young male professor, the leader of the radicals on campus, who accused all women unwilling to run mimeograph machines of not being sufficiently devoted to the cause. As for child care centers, he felt their effect of allowing women to compete with men for jobs was part of the “feminization” of the American male and American culture.

“He sounds just like my husband,” said one of the white-gloved women, “only he wants me to have bake-sales and collect door-to-door for his Republican Party.”

The young women had sense enough to take it from there. What did boots or white gloves matter if they were all getting treated like servants and children? Before they broke up, they were discussing the myth of the vaginal orgasm and planning to meet every week. “Men think we’re whatever it is we do for men,” explained one of the housewives. “It’s only by getting together with other women that we’ll ever find out who we are.”

Even racial differences become a little less hopeless once we discover this mutuality of our life experiences as women. At a meeting run by black women domestics who had formed a job cooperative in Alabama, a white housewife asked me about the consciousness-raising sessions or “rap groups” that are the basic unit of the Women’s Movement. I explained that while men, even minority men, usually had someplace where they could get together every day and be themselves, women were isolated in their houses; isolated from each other. We had no street corners, no bars, no offices, no territory that was recognized as ours. Rap groups were an effort to create that free place: an occasional chance for total honesty and support from our sisters.

As I talked about isolation, the feeling that there must be something wrong with us if we weren’t content to be housekeepers and mothers, tears began to stream down the cheeks of this dignified woman – clearly as much of a surprise to her as to us. For the black women, some barrier was broken down by seeing her cry.

“He does it to us both, honey,” said the black woman next to her, putting an arm around her shoulders. “If it’s your own kitchen or somebody else’s, you still don’t get treated like people. Women’s work just doesn’t count.”

The meeting ended with the housewife organizing a support group of white women who would extract from their husbands a living wage for domestic workers and help them fight the local hierarchy: a support group without which the domestic workers felt their small and brave cooperative could not survive.

As for the “matriarchal” argument that I swallowed in pre-feminist days, I now understand why many black women resent it and feel that it’s the white sociologist’s way of encouraging the black community to imitate a white suburban life style. (“If I end up cooking grits for revolutionaries,” explained a black woman poet from Chicago, “it isn’t my revolution. Black men and women need to work together for partnership, not patriarchy. You can’t have liberation for half a race.”) In fact, some black women wonder if criticism of the strength they
were forced to develop isn’t a way to keep half the black community working at lowered capacity and lowered pay, as well as to attribute some of black men’s sufferings to black women, instead of to their real source – white racism. I wonder with them.

Looking back at all those male-approved things I used to say, the basic hang-up seems clear: a lack of esteem for women – black women, Chicana women, white women – and for myself.

This is the most tragic punishment that society inflicts on any second-class group. Ultimately, the brainwashing works, and we ourselves come to believe our group is inferior. Even if we achieve a little success in the world and think of ourselves as “different,” we don’t want to associate with our group. We want to identify up, not down) clearly my problem in not wanting to write about women, and not wanting to join women’s groups). We want to be the only woman in the office, or the only black family on the block, or the only Jew in the club.

The pain of looking back at wasted, imitative years is enormous. Trying to write like men. Valuing myself and other women according to the degree of our acceptance by men – socially, in politics, and in our professions. It’s as painful as it is now to hear two grown-up female human beings competing with each other on the basis of women, and not wanting to join women’s groups). We want to be the only woman in the office, or the only black family on the block, or the only Jew in the club.

And this lack of esteem that makes us put each other down is still the major enemy of sisterhood. Women who are conforming to society’s expectations view the non-conformists with justifiable alarm. “Those noisy, unfeminine women,” they say to themselves. “They will only make trouble for us all.” Women who are quietly non-conforming, hoping nobody will notice, are even more alarmed because they have more to lose. And that makes sense, too.

Because the status quo protects itself by punishing all challengers, especially women whose rebellion strikes at the most fundamental social organization: the sex roles that convince half the population its identity depends on being first in work or in war, and the other half that it must serve as docile (“feminine”) unpaid or underpaid labor. There seems to be no punishment inside the white male club that quite equals the ridicule and personal viciousness reserved for women who rebel. Attractive or young women who act forcefully are assumed to be male-controlled. If they succeed, it could only have been sexually, through men. Old women or women considered unattractive by male standards are accused of acting only out of bitterness, because they could not get a man. Any woman who chooses to behave like a full human being should be warned that the armies of the status quo will treat her as something of a dirty joke; that’s their natural and first weapon. She will need sisterhood.

All of that is meant to be a warning but not a discouragement. There are so many more rewards than punishments.

For myself, I can now admit anger, and use it constructively, where once I would have submerged it and let it fester into guilt or collect for some destructive explosion.

I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them, and with a courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond the words to express it.

I no longer think that I do not exist, which was my version of that lack of self-esteem afflicting many women. (If male standards weren’t natural to me, and they were the only standards, how could I exist?) This means that I am less likely to need male values to identify myself with and am less vulnerable to classic arguments (“If you don’t like me, you’re not a Real Woman” – said by a man who is Coming On. “If you don’t like me, you are not a Real Person, and you can’t relate to other people” – said by anyone who understands blackmail as an art).

I can sometimes deal with mean as equals and therefore can afford to like them for the first time.

I have discovered politics that are not intellectual or superimposed. They are organic, because I finally understand why I for years inexplicably identified with “out” groups. I belong to one, too. It will take a coalition of such groups to achieve a society in which, at a minimum, no one is born into a second-class role because of visible difference, because of race or of sex.
I no longer feel strange by myself, or with a group of
women in public. I feel just fine.
I am continually moved to discover I have sisters.
I am beginning, just beginning, to find out who I am.

Who is Gloria?

Gloria Steinem is a writer, lecturer, editor, and feminist
activist. She travels in this and other countries as
an organizer and lecturer and is a frequent media
spokeswoman on issues of equality. She is particularly
interested in the shared origins of sex and race caste
systems, gender roles and child abuse as roots of
violence, non-violent conflict resolution, the cultures of
indigenous peoples, and organizing across boundaries
for peace and justice. She now lives in New York City.

In 1972, she co-founded Ms. magazine, and remained
one of its editors for fifteen years. She continues to serve
as a consulting editor for Ms., and was instrumental in
the magazine’s move to join and be published by the
Feminist Majority Foundation. In 1968, she had helped
to found New York magazine, where she was a political
columnist and wrote feature articles.

As a writer, Ms. Steinem has received the Penney-
Missouri Journalism Award, the Front Page and Clarion
awards, National Magazine awards, an Emmy Citation
for excellence in television writing, the Women’s
Sports Journalism Award, the Lifetime Achievement
in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional
Journalists, the Society of Writers Award from the United
Nations, and most recently, the University of Missouri
School of Journalism Award for Distinguished Service in
Journalism.

Ms. Steinem graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Smith
College in 1956, and then spent two years in India
on a Chester Bowles Fellowship. She wrote for Indian
publications, and was influenced by Gandhian activism.
She also received the first Doctorate of Human Justice
awarded by Simmons College, the Bill of Rights Award
from the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern
California, the National Gay Rights Advocates Award,
the Liberty award of the Lambda Legal Defense and
Education Fund, the Ceres Medal from the United
Nations, and a number of honorary degrees. Parenting
magazine selected her for its Lifetime Achievement
Award in 1995 for her work in promoting girls’ self-
esteeem, and Biography magazine listed her as one of
the 25 most influential women in America. In 1993, she
was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in
Seneca Falls, New York.
Was Shakespeare a Feminist?
BY SUSAN JONAS

The term feminism, coined in the late 19th century, simply means the belief that men and women are equally capable and deserving, and should have political, economic and social equality. To most of us that probably seems self-evident. Although even today there are still significant disparities between men and women in access, opportunity, compensation and representation, parity is an explicit and attainable goal in this country. This is not the case in many other countries where the status of women is similar — even far worse — than what it was in Shakespeare’s time.

In 1604, when Measure for Measure was first performed, the very concept of equality between the sexes was generally inconceivable. There were those who advocated for greater rights for women — for example, that women receive some education, and that wife-beating, which was protected under the law, be administered with some restraint. But the idea that men and women were equal was unthinkable except to a very few philosophers. Women were considered physically and mentally weak — incapable of reason but also morally weak, fundamentally sinful. Wives were the legal property of their fathers until they became the property of their husbands. They could not choose whom to marry or if and when to have children. They were not permitted to go to school, although in aristocratic families they were permitted some education with private tutors. Elizabeth I was called The Virgin Queen because she never married; she refused to do so because she would have lost her power as a monarch and would have had to defer to her husband. During her reign, women made some modest gains, but by the time Measure for Measure was written, she had died and Catholic James I had ascended to the throne. He was far less liberal than Elizabeth in his views about marriage and women, and there are clear parallels between Angelo and King James in their extreme prudery, hypocrisy and power abuse. In fact, the play references the writings of James I.

Is Isabella a feminist heroine because she resists Angelo and refuses to sacrifice her virtue? Certainly she is outlandishly brave, standing up to corrupt authority, and does not conform to the prescription for female behavior, which is to be, above all, submissive and silent. But she does seem a little in love with the idea of being a martyr. The impression of keen whips I’d wear as rubies, And strip myself to death, as to a bed That longing have been sick for, ere I’d yield My body up to shame.

To borrow from another play: “Methinks the lady doth protest too much.” Her horror of sex seems rather extreme, the squeamish response of a schoolgirl.

And consider her behavior toward her brother. He is clearly terrified by the prospect of death and begs: “Sweet sister, let me live....” What is her response? “O you beast! O faithless coward! ... Die, perish! ... No word to save thee.” Hardly the compassion or comfort we expect from a loving sister or would-be nun! Isabella’s most famous line, “More than our brother is our honor,” should not be taken at face value; it’s virtuous but chillingly inhumane.

It’s too easy to see Angelo as evil oppressor and Isabella as virtuous victim, and Shakespeare doesn’t do easy. Both are complex characters, with strengths and weaknesses. Both believe in the absolute repression of unruly sexual feelings, which is unrealistic. Both will learn they are vulnerable to desire; they are human.

The movement of pure comedy is toward justice and normalcy. Goodness is rewarded and the wicked are punished — appropriately, or measure for measure. SPOILER ALERT: So it is fitting that Angelo is sentenced to death and Lucio to whipping and hanging. But the spirit of comedy is very forgiving, and ending with an execution would not be festive. Both sentences are commuted to marriage: Angelo to the fiancée he jilted and Lucio to the prostitute he impregnated. Claudio is finally officially wed to Juliet. Who is left unmatched?

Comedies of this type always end with a wedding. Or two. Here, four. The duke does not ask Isabella for her hand; he says “Give me your hand and say you will be mine.” Is this an order? He does not allow her to reply. Why does Isabella, never at a loss for words, not say one word after the proposal? Is she happy or horrified? After all, she has been protesting her chastity for five acts, and now it is plucked from her by someone she can’t easily refuse. If we think about the play within the contexts of the time and the genre, it seems clear that for this to be a happy ending, comic logic suggests she is delighted. For all her
protestations of chastity and celibacy, in the end she is a red-blooded girl. In one production she tears off her habit and slaps on a bridal veil.

Modern productions of the play have staged the ending very differently. During the ‘60s and ‘70s, when marriage was perceived by many women as oppressive, Isabella was understood to have lost her voice and autonomy and compelled to submit to the will of someone who, because of his gender and class, has greater power. That’s not a happy ending. In one production Isabella walks resolutely off the stage. Such a take is a feminist revision, which imagines that Isabella has the option to dictate her own fate. Within the context of that time, that is a happier ending because it allows Isabella choices, which was valued more than marriage. In Shakespeare’s time, the only alternative to marriage was joining a convent, and although many did so out of sincere religious convictions, many did so too because it was the only way to get an education. And in avoiding marriage, a woman also avoided the great possibility of dying in childbirth. In this unequal world, Isabella’s choices are limited; she may have none at all.

When we stand back and consider all of the heroines in Shakespeare’s comedies, we see a roster of women who have agency, which is to say they do not wait for things to happen to them; they take action. Often they are the architects of elaborate plots about which their lovers know nothing until the last moment of the play. Rosalind in *As You Like It* dresses as a boy and convinces the man she loves to practice making love to “him.” Portia in *Merchant of Venice* disguises herself as a lawyer to rescue her fiancé’s best friend. Shakespeare’s Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*, sharp-tongued Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing* and Viola in *Twelfth Night* — all are intelligent, witty, quick-thinking and extremely articulate — as much as any male character, and often more so. Clearly Shakespeare was able to see women as complex and capable, as fully human, and in that way he saw men and women as equals. This could not be said of many of the playwrights who preceded or followed him.

However, every single one of these women ends up marrying; they are, according to comic logic, happy to relinquish their adventurousness and independence and submit to their husbands’ authority. Shakespeare could not have envisioned gender equality or a happy ending for a woman other than marriage. He could not have predicted first wave feminism, which won women the right to vote less than a century ago, nor second wave feminism and the women’s movement in the ’60s and ’70s, when women organized themselves to demand equal pay and opportunity, the right to decide whether or not to have children and the right not to marry or remain single. Such things were unimaginable, even to the playwright with the most expansive imagination of all time. We might call him a protofeminist, meaning he anticipated and laid the groundwork for what was to come. And though we can’t call him a feminist, we can certainly call him a humanist.

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Currently, Susan is co-producer of *On Her Shoulders*, a monthly play reading series at New York’s the New School of Drama that features a play written by a classic female playwright. *On Her Shoulders* aims to restore women playwrights place in the history of theatre, by reminding us that they exist and empowering us to build on their success. Susan is also the founder/director of *The Legacy Project* and co-founder of 50/50 in 2020.
Shakespeare in the Bush
BY LAURA BOHANNAN

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An American anthropologist set out to study the Tiv of West Africa and was taught the true meaning of Hamlet.

Just before I left Oxford for the Tiv in West Africa, conversation turned to the season at Stratford. “You Americans,” said a friend, “often have difficulty with Shakespeare. He was, after all, a very English poet, and one can easily misinterpret the universal by misunderstanding the particular.”

I protested that human nature is pretty much the same the whole world over; at least the general plot and motivation of the greater tragedies would always be clear—everywhere—although some details of custom might have to be explained and difficulties of translation might produce other slight changes. To end an argument we could not conclude, my friend gave me a copy of Hamlet to study in the African bush: it would, he hoped, lift my mind above its primitive surroundings, and possibly I might, by prolonged meditation, achieve the grace of correct interpretation.

It was my second field trip to that African tribe, and I thought myself ready to live in one of its remote sections—an area difficult to cross even on foot. I eventually settled on the hillock of a very knowledgeable old man, the head of a homestead of some hundred and forty people, all of whom were either his close relatives or their wives and children. Like the other elders of the vicinity, the old man spent most of his time performing ceremonies seldom seen these days in the more accessible parts of the tribe. I was delighted. Soon there would be three months of enforced isolation and leisure, between the harvest that takes place just before the rising of the swamps and the clearing of new farms when the water goes down. Then, I thought, they would have even more time to perform ceremonies and explain them to me.

I was quite mistaken. Most of the ceremonies demanded the presence of elders from several homesteads. As the swamps rose, the old men found it too difficult to walk from one homestead to the next, and the ceremonies gradually ceased. As the swamps rose even higher, all activities but one came to an end. The women brewed beer from maize and millet. Men, women, and children sat on their hillocks and drank it.

People began to drink at dawn. By midmorning the whole homestead was singing, dancing, and drumming. When it rained, people had to sit inside their huts: there they drank and sang or they drank and told stories. In any case, by noon or before, I either had to join the party or retire to my own hut and my books. “One does not discuss serious matters when there is beer. Come, drink with us.” Since I lacked their capacity for the thick native beer, I spent more and more time with Hamlet. Before the end of the second month, grace descended on me. I was quite sure that Hamlet had only one possible interpretation, and that one universally obvious.

Early every morning, in the hope of having some serious talk before the beer party, I used to call on the old man at his reception hut—a circle of posts supporting a thatched roof above a low mud wall to keep out wind and rain. One day I crawled through the low doorway and found most of the men of the homestead huddled in their ragged cloths on stools, low plank beds, and reclining chairs, warming themselves against the chill of the rain around a smoky fire. In the center were three pots of beer. The party had started.

The old man greeted me cordially. “Sit down and drink.” I accepted a large calabash full of beer, poured some into a small drinking gourd, and tossed it down. Then I poured some more into the same gourd for the man second in seniority to my host before I handed my calabash over to a young man for further distribution. Important people shouldn’t ladle beer themselves.

“It is better like this,” the old man said, looking at me approvingly and plucking at the thatch that had caught in my hair. “You should sit and drink with us more often. Your servants tell me that when you are not with us, you sit inside your hut looking at a paper.”

The old man was acquainted with four kinds of “papers”: tax receipts, bride price receipts, court fee receipts, and letters. The messenger who brought him letters from the chief used them mainly as a badge of office, for he always knew what was in them and told the old man.
Personal letters for the few who had relatives in the government or mission stations were kept until someone went to a large market where there was a letter writer and reader. Since my arrival, letters were brought to me to be read. A few men also brought me bride price receipts, privately, with requests to change the figures to a higher sum. I found moral arguments were of no avail, since in-laws are fair game, and the technical hazards of forgery difficult to explain to an illiterate people. I did not wish them to think me silly enough to look at any such papers for days on end, and I hastily explained that my “paper” was one of the “things of long ago” of my country.

“Ah,” said the old man. “Tell us.” I protested that I was not a storyteller. Storytelling is a skilled art among them; their standards are high, and the audiences critical—and vocal in their criticism. I protested in vain. This morning they wanted to hear a story while they drank. They threatened to tell me no more stories until I told them one of mine. Finally, the old man promised that no one would criticize my style, “for we know you are struggling with our language.” “But,” put in one of the elders, “you must explain what we do not understand, as we do when we tell you our stories.” Realizing that here was my chance to prove Hamlet universally intelligible, I agreed.

The old man handed me some more beer to help me on with my storytelling. Men filled their long wooden pipes and knocked coals from the fire to place in the pipe bowls; then, puffing contentedly, they sat back to listen. I began in the proper style, “Not yesterday, not yesterday, but long ago, a thing occurred. One night three men were keeping watch outside the homestead of the great chief, when suddenly they saw the former chief approach them.”

“He was dead,” I explained. “That is why they were troubled and afraid when they saw him.”

“Impossible,” began one of the elders, handing his pipe on to his neighbor, who interrupted, “Of course it wasn’t the dead chief. It was an omen sent by a witch.”

Slightly shaken, I continued. “One of these three was a man who knew things”—the closest translation for scholar, but unfortunately it also meant witch. The second elder looked triumphantly at the first. “So he spoke to the dead chief saying, ‘Tell us what we must do so you may rest in your grave,’ but the dead chief did not answer. He vanished, and they could see him no more.

Then the man who knew things—his name was Horatio—said this event was the affair of the dead chief’s son, Hamlet.”

There was a general shaking of heads round the circle. “Had the dead chief no living brothers? Or was this son the chief?”

“No,” I replied. “That is, he had one living brother who became the chief when the elder brother died.”

The old men muttered: such omens were matters for chiefs and elders, not for youngsters; no good could come of going behind a chief’s back; clearly Horatio was not a man who knew things.

“Yes, he was,” I insisted, shooing a chicken away from my beer. “In our country the son is next to the father. The dead chief’s younger brother had become the great chief. He had also married his elder brother’s widow only about a month after the funeral.”

“He did well,” the old man beamed and announced to the others, “I told you that if we knew more about Europeans, we would find they really were very like us. In our country also,” he added to me, “the younger brother marries the elder brother’s widow and becomes the father of his children. Now, if your uncle, who married your widowed mother, is your father’s full brother, then he will be a real father to you. Did Hamlet’s father and uncle have one mother?”

His question barely penetrated my mind; I was too upset and thrown too far off-balance by having one of the most important elements of Hamlet knocked straight out of the picture. Rather uncertainly I said that I thought they had the same mother, but I wasn’t sure—the story didn’t say. The old man told me severely that these genealogical details made all the difference and that when I got home I must ask the elders about it. He shouted out the door to one of his younger wives to bring his goatskin bag.
Determined to save what I could of the mother motif, I took a deep breath and began again. “The son Hamlet was very sad because his mother had married again so quickly. There was no need for her to do so, and it is our custom for a widow not to go to her next husband until she has mourned for two years.”

“Two years is too long,” objected the wife, who had appeared with the old man’s battered goatskin bag. “Who will hoe your farms for you while you have no husband?”

“Hamlet,” I retorted, without thinking, “was old enough to hoe his mother’s farms himself. There was no need for her to remarry.” No one looked convinced. I gave up. “His mother and the great chief told Hamlet not to be sad, for the great chief himself would be a father to Hamlet. Furthermore, Hamlet would be the next chief: therefore he must stay to learn the things of a chief. Hamlet agreed to remain, and all the rest went off to drink beer.”

While I paused, perplexed at how to render Hamlet’s disgusted soliloquy to an audience convinced that Claudius and Gertrude had behaved in the best possible manner, one of the younger men asked me who had married the other wives of the dead chief.

“He had no other wives,” I told him.

“But a chief must have many wives! How else can he brew beer and prepare food for all his guests?”

I said firmly that in our country even chiefs had only one wife, that they had servants to do their work, and that they paid them from tax money.

It was better, they returned, for a chief to have many wives and sons who would help him hoe his farms and feed his people; then everyone loved the chief who gave much and took nothing—taxes were a bad thing.

I agreed with the last comment, but for the rest fell back on their favorite way of fobbing off my questions: “That is the way it is done, so that is how we do it.”

I decided to skip the soliloquy. Even if Claudius was here thought quite right to marry his brother’s widow, there remained the poison motif, and I knew they would disapprove of fratricide. More hopefully I resumed, “That night Hamlet kept watch with the three who had seen his dead father. The dead chief again appeared, and although the others were afraid, Hamlet followed his dead father off to one side. When they were alone, Hamlet’s dead father spoke.”

“Omens can’t talk!” The old man was emphatic. “Hamlet’s dead father wasn’t an omen. Seeing him might have been an omen, but he was not.” My audience looked as confused as I sounded. “It was Hamlet’s dead father. It was a thing we call a ‘ghost.’” I had to use the English word, for unlike many of the neighboring tribes, these people didn’t believe in the survival after death of any individuating part of the personality.

“What is a ‘ghost?’ An omen?”

“No, a ‘ghost’ is someone who is dead but who walks around and can talk, and people can hear him and see him but not touch him.”

They objected. “One can touch zombis.”

“No, no! It was not a dead body the witches had animated to sacrifice and eat. No one else made Hamlet’s dead father walk. He did it himself.”

“Dead men can’t walk,” protested my audience as one man.

I was quite willing to compromise.

“A ‘ghost’ is the dead man’s shadow.”

But again they objected. “Dead men cast no shadows.”

“They do in my country,” I snapped.

The old man quelled the babble of disbelief that arose immediately and told me with that insincere, but courteous, agreement one extends to the fancies of the young, ignorant, and superstitious, “No doubt in your country the dead can also walk without being zombis.” From the depths of his bag he produced a withered fragment of kola nut, bit off one end to show it wasn’t poisoned, and handed me the rest as a peace offering.

“Anyhow,” I resumed, “Hamlet’s dead father said that his own brother, the one who became chief, had poisoned him. He wanted Hamlet to avenge him. Hamlet believed
this in his heart, for he did not like his father’s brother.” I
took another swallow of beer. “In the country of the great
chief, living in the same homestead, for it was a very
large one, was an important elder who was often with
the chief to advise and help him. His name was Polonius.
Hamlet was courting his daughter, but her father and her
brother . . . [I cast hastily about for some tribal analogy]
warned her not to let Hamlet visit her when she was
alone on her farm, for he would be a great chief and so
could not marry her.”

“Why not?” asked the wife, who had settled down on the
edge of the old man’s chair. He frowned at her for asking
stupid questions and growled, “They lived in the same
homestead.”

“That was not the reason,” I informed them. “Polonius
was a stranger who lived in the homestead because he
helped the chief, not because he was a relative.”

“Then why couldn’t Hamlet marry her?”

“He could have,” I explained, “but Polonius didn’t
think he would. After all, Hamlet was a man of great
importance who ought to marry a chief’s daughter, for
in his country a man could have only one wife. Polonius
was afraid that if Hamlet made love to his daughter, then
no one else would give a high price for her.”

“That might be true,” remarked one of the shrewder
elders, “but a chief’s son would give his mistress’s father
enough presents and patronage to more than make up
the difference. Polonius sounds like a fool to me.”

“Many people think he was,” I agreed. “Meanwhile
Polonius sent his son Laertes off to Paris to learn the
things of that country, for it was the homestead of a very
great chief indeed. Because he was afraid that Laertes
might waste a lot of money on beer and women and
gambling, or get into trouble by fighting, he sent one of
his servants to Paris secretly, to spy out what Laertes
was doing. One day Hamlet came upon Polonius’s
daughter Ophelia. He behaved so oddly he frightened
her. Indeed”—I was fumbling for words to express the
dubious quality of Hamlet’s madness—“the chief and
many others had also noticed that when Hamlet talked
one could understand the words but not what they
meant. Many people thought that he had become mad.”

My audience suddenly became much more attentive.

“The great chief wanted to know what was wrong with
Hamlet, so he sent for two of Hamlet’s age mates [school
friends would have taken a long explanation] to talk to
Hamlet and find out what troubled his heart. Hamlet,
seeing that they had been bribed by the chief to betray
him, told them nothing. Polonius, however, insisted that
Hamlet was mad because he had been forbidden to see
Ophelia, whom he loved.”

“Why,” inquired a bewildered voice, “should anyone
bewitch Hamlet on that account?”

“Bewitch him?”

“Yes, only witchcraft can make anyone mad, unless, of
course, one sees the beings that lurk in the forest.”

I stopped being a storyteller and took out my notebook
and demanded to be told more about these two causes
of madness. Even while they spoke and I jotted notes,
I tried to calculate the effect of this new factor on the
plot. Hamlet had not been exposed to the beings that
lurk in the forests. Only his relatives in the male line
could bewitch him. Barring relatives not mentioned by
Shakespeare, it had to be Claudius who was attempting
to harm him. And, of course, it was.

For the moment I staved off questions by saying that
the great chief also refused to believe that Hamlet was
mad for the love of Ophelia and nothing else. “He was
sure that something much more important was troubling
Hamlet’s heart.”

“Now Hamlet’s age mates,” I continued, “had brought
with them a famous storyteller. Hamlet decided to have
this man tell the chief and all his homestead a story
about a man who had poisoned his brother because he
desired his brother’s wife and wished to be chief himself.
Hamlet was sure the great chief could not hear the story
without making a sign if he was indeed guilty, and then
he would discover whether his dead father had told him
the truth.”

The old man interrupted, with deep cunning, “Why
should a father lie to his son?” he asked.

I hedged: “Hamlet wasn’t sure that it really was his
dead father. It was impossible to say anything, in that
language, about devil-inspired visions.
“You mean,” he said, “it actually was an omen, and he knew witches sometimes send false ones. Hamlet was a fool not to go to one skilled in reading omens and divining the truth in the first place. A man-who-sees-the-truth could have told him how his father died, if he really had been poisoned, and if there was witchcraft in it; then Hamlet could have called the elders to settle the matter.”

The shrewd elder ventured to disagree. “Because his father’s brother was a great chief, a one-who-sees-the-truth might therefore have been afraid to tell it. I think it was for that reason that a friend of Hamlet’s father—a witch and an elder—sent an omen so his friend’s son would know. Was the omen true?”

“Yes,” I said, abandoning ghosts and the devil; a witch-sent omen it would have to be. “It was true, for when the storyteller was telling his tale before all the homestead, the great chief rose in fear. Afraid that Hamlet knew his secret he planned to have him killed.”

The stage set of the next bit presented some difficulties of translation. I began cautiously. “The great chief told Hamlet’s mother to find out from her son what he knew. But because a woman’s children are always first in her heart, he had the important elder Polonius hide behind a cloth that hung against the wall of Hamlet’s mother’s sleeping hut. Hamlet started to scold his mother for what she had done.”

There was a shocked murmur from everyone. A man should never scold his mother.

“She called out in fear, and Polonius moved behind the cloth. Shouting, ‘A rat!’ Hamlet took his machete and slashed through the cloth.” I paused for dramatic effect. “He had killed Polonius.”

The old men looked at each other in supreme disgust. “That Polonius truly was a fool and a man who knew nothing! What child would not know enough to shout, ‘It’s me!’” With a pang, I remembered that these people are ardent hunters, always armed with bow, arrow, and machete; at the first rustle in the grass an arrow is aimed and ready, and the hunter shouts “Game!” If no human voice answers immediately, the arrow speeds on its way. Like a good hunter, Hamlet had shouted, “A rat!” I rushed in to save Polonius’s reputation. “Polonius did speak. Hamlet heard him. But he thought it was the chief and wished to kill him to avenge his father. He had meant to kill him earlier that evening....” I broke down, unable to describe to these pagans, who had no belief in individual afterlife, the difference between dying at one’s prayers and dying “unhousell’d, disappointed, unaneled.”

This time I had shocked my audience seriously. “For a man to raise his hand against his father’s brother and the one who has become his father—that is a terrible thing. The elders ought to let such a man be bewitched.”

I nibbled at my kola nut in some perplexity, then pointed out that after all the man had killed Hamlet’s father.

“No,” pronounced the old man, speaking less to me than to the young men sitting behind the elders. “If your father’s brother has killed your father, you must appeal to your father’s age mates: they may avenge him. No man may use violence against his senior relatives.” Another thought struck him. “But if his father’s brother had indeed been wicked enough to bewitch Hamlet and make him mad that would be a good story indeed, for it would be his fault that Hamlet, being mad, no longer had any sense and thus was ready to kill his father’s brother.”

There was a murmur of applause. Hamlet was again a good story to them, but it no longer seemed quite the same story to me. As I thought over the coming complications of plot and motive, I lost courage and decided to skim over dangerous ground quickly.

“The great chief,” I went on, “was not sorry that Hamlet had killed Polonius. It gave him a reason to send Hamlet away, with his two treacherous age mates, with letters to a chief of a far country, saying that Hamlet should be killed. But Hamlet changed the writing on their papers, so that the chief killed his age mates instead.” I encountered a reproachful glare from one of the men whom I had told undetectable forgery was not merely immoral but beyond human skill. I looked the other way.

“Before Hamlet could return, Laertes came back for his father’s funeral. The great chief told him Hamlet had killed Polonius. Laertes swore to kill Hamlet because of this, and because his sister Ophelia, hearing her father
had been killed by the man she loved, went mad and drowned in the river."

“Have you already forgotten what we told you?” The old man was reproachful. “One cannot take vengeance on a madman; Hamlet killed Polonius in his madness. As for the girl, she not only went mad, she was drowned. Only witches can make people drown. Water itself can’t hurt anything. It is merely something one drinks and bathes in.”

I began to get cross. “If you don’t like the story, I’ll stop.”

The old man made soothing noises and himself poured me some more beer. “You tell the story well, and we are listening. But it is clear that the elders of your country have never told you what the story really means. No, don’t interrupt! We believe you when you say your marriage customs are different, or your clothes and weapons. But people are the same everywhere; therefore, there are always witches and it is we, the elders, who know how witches work. We told you it was the great chief who wished to kill Hamlet, and now your own words have proved us right. Who were Ophelia’s male relatives?”

“There were only her father and her brother.” Hamlet was clearly out of my hands.

“There must have been many more; this also you must ask of your elders when you get back to your country. From what you tell us, since Polonius was dead, it must have been Laertes who killed Ophelia, although I do not see the reason for it.”

We had emptied one pot of beer, and the old men argued the point with slightly tipsy interest. Finally one of them demanded of me, “What did the servant of Polonius say on his return?”

With difficulty I recollected Reynaldo and his mission. “I don’t think he did return before Polonius was killed.”

“Listen,” said the elder, “and I will tell you how it was and how your story will go, then you may tell me if I am right. Polonius knew his son would get into trouble, and so he did. He had many fines to pay for fighting, and debts from gambling. But he had only two ways of getting money quickly. One was to marry off his sister at once, but it is difficult to find a man who will marry a woman desired by the son of a chief. For if the chief’s heir commits adultery with your wife, what can you do? Only a fool calls a case against a man who will someday be his judge. Therefore Laertes had to take the second way: he killed his sister by witchcraft, drowning her so he could secretly sell her body to the witches.”

I raised an objection. “They found her body and buried it. Indeed Laertes jumped into the grave to see his sister once more—so, you see, the body was truly there. Hamlet, who had just come back, jumped in after him.”

“What did I tell you?” The elder appealed to the others. “Laertes was up to no good with his sister’s body. Hamlet prevented him, because the chief’s heir, like a chief, does not wish any other man to grow rich and powerful. Laertes would be angry, because he would have killed his sister without benefit to himself. In our country he would try to kill Hamlet for that reason. Is this not what happened?”

“More or less,” I admitted. “When the great chief found Hamlet was still alive, he encouraged Laertes to try to kill Hamlet and arranged a fight with machetes between them. In the fight both the young men were wounded to death. Hamlet’s mother drank the poisoned beer that the chief meant for Hamlet in case he won the fight. When he saw his mother die of poison, Hamlet, dying, managed to kill his father’s brother with his machete.”

“You see, I was right!” exclaimed the elder.

“That was a very good story,” added the old man, “and you told it with very few mistakes.” There was just one more error, at the very end. The poison Hamlet’s mother drank was obviously meant for the survivor of the fight, whichever it was. If Laertes had won, the great chief would have poisoned him, for no one would know that he arranged Hamlet’s death. Then, too, he need not fear Laertes’ witchcraft; it takes a strong heart to kill one’s only sister by witchcraft.

“Sometime,” concluded the old man, gathering his ragged toga about him, “you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom.”
What should I wear?

Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

What should I bring?

Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don’t bring anything you don’t need.

(Please remember):

No smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theatre.

What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?

Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

Have respect for other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. (For your safety and others’!)
How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don’t laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feed back but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors for having given it a try.

What to do during intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times; that is your cue to get back to your seat because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that’s on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.

What to do before the show:

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance.

If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program.

Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:

Theatre artists are paid professionals. When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect yours.

Enjoy the Show!
As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is a seating chart—a map of all the seats in the Albert Theater—and an explanation of how to read your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!

This will guide you to the lobby door closest to your seat—aisle numbers are on plaques that hang above the doors to the theater.

The section of the theatre you will be sitting in: Main Floor or Mezzanine

This is your seat number, located on the edge of the bottom seat cushion

The row where your seat is located, noted in a letter on the side of the end seat of each row

Day and date of performance

Curtain time

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**Goodman’s Albert Theatre**

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**Goodman’s Albert Theatre**
After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with Measure for Measure whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer, the playwright or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Send us your letter within one month of seeing the show, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

Important information to include:

• Your name, age and school
• Your mailing address (where a response may be sent)
• Any questions or special observations you want to share with the artists!

Send your letters to:
Education and Community Engagement
Goodman Theatre
170 North Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60601

Or email us at:
education@goodmantheatre.org

Here is a great student letter we received in response to Animal Crackers:

Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of Animal Crackers, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of Animal Crackers very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of Animal Crackers proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director’s vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of “The Flash.” I though the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give Animal Crackers two thumbs up.

Sincerely,
A CPS student

Goodman Theatre Education & Community Engagement is also online!

Check us out on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/goodmaned

Or Twitter:
http://twitter.com/GoodmanEd

We love hearing your thoughts, so don’t be afraid to drop us a line, comment, tag us in a note, @reply, or retweet us. Also check out our online educational resources for more information regarding the play you’ve seen, or anything else you’d like to know about how our programs (and theatre) work!

Keep checking in for updates online!