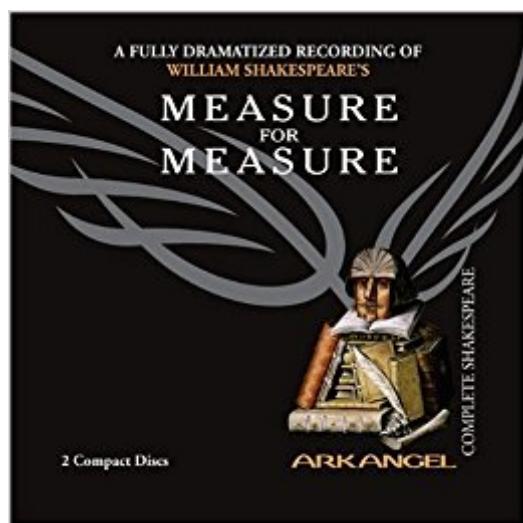


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Measure For Measure (Arkangel Shakespeare)



Synopsis

[Full-Cast Audio Theater Dramatization. Roger Allam plays the duke and Simon Russell Beale is Angelo. Isabella is played by Stella Gonet.] Telling his followers he is leaving the city on affairs of state, the Duke of Vienna appoints the puritanical Angelo to govern in his absence. Will Angelo prove as virtuous as he seems once power is in his hands? Roaming the city disguised as a friar, the duke looks on as Angelo's lust for the virtuous Isabella sweeps him into the corruption he has so sternly condemned in others. The duke's manipulation at last produces a happy ending for this dark comedy, with its brilliant exploration of the themes of justice and mercy.

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Customer Reviews

Designed for school districts, educators, and students seeking to maximize performance on standardized tests, Webster's paperbacks take advantage of the fact that classics are frequently assigned readings in English courses. By using a running thesaurus at the bottom of each page, this edition of Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare was edited for students who are actively building their vocabularies in anticipation of taking PSAT®, SAT®, AP® (Advanced Placement®), GRE®, LSAT®, GMAT® or similar examinations. PSAT® is a registered trademark of the College Entrance Examination Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation neither of which sponsors or endorses this book; SAT® is a registered trademark of the College Board which neither sponsors nor endorses this book; GRE®, AP® and Advanced Placement® are registered trademarks of the Educational Testing Service which neither sponsors nor endorses this book, GMAT® is a registered trademark of the Graduate Management

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William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English poet and dramatist of the Elizabethan and early Jacobean period, is the most widely known author in all of English literature and often considered the greatest. He was an active member of a theater company for at least twenty years, during which time he wrote many great plays. Plays were not prized as literature at the time, and Shakespeare was not widely read until the middle of the eighteenth century, when a great upsurge of interest in his works began that continues today.

Written amidst Shakespeare's tragedies, "Measure For Measure" is the Bard's last comedy and perhaps his darkest. In all Shakespearean comedy, conflict, villainy, or immorality disrupt the moral order, but harmony ultimately prevails. Not so with this comedy. As one critic has it, "Measure" leaves playgoers with many questions and few answers. Or does it? More about that in a moment. First, about the title. It's from the Bible. In the Old Testament there's "breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24). And, from the New Testament, "what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Mathew 5). It's the theme of the play, but, as we shall see, it never gets the results hoped for, until the very end, when, to quote from another of Shakespeare's plays, "mercy seasons justice." The good Duke of Vienna, Vincentio, is concerned with the morals of his city. He enacts a number of reforms, then takes a sabbatical, and tells his deputy governor, Angelo, to see that the reforms are enforced. But Angelo goes too far: he enforces the law to the letter and shows no mercy for violators. Claudio is a victim of Angelo's strict enforcement policy. He's betrothed to Juliet, who is pregnant with his child. Because they are not yet married, he's arrested for fornication and sentenced to death by decapitation. Enter Isabella, Claudio's sister and the play's heroine. She's a young novice preparing to become a nun on the very day of his execution, and makes an appeal to Angelo for leniency. Her plea is reminiscent of Portia's words to Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice." "Merciful heaven, / Thou rather with thy sharp and sulfurous bolt / Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak / Than the soft myrtle; but man, proud man, / Dressed in a little brief authority, / Most ignorant of what he's most assured / His glassy essence, like an angry ape / Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven / As makes the angels weep." As with Shylock, Angelo is unmoved. Rather, he offers to release Claudio in exchange for sex. Isabella refuses, even though it means her brother's death. "Better it were a brother died at once, than that a sister, by redeeming

him, should die forever."The good Duke, meanwhile, has not taken a sabbatical after all, but has been masquerading as a friar. But for what purpose? To determine if Angelo will do the right thing? Shakespeare doesn't say. He advises Isabella to trick Angelo by agreeing to meet with him and then sending another woman in her place. Enter Mariana. She was once betrothed to Angelo, until Angelo learned her dowry was lost at sea, at which point he called off the engagement. Mariana agrees to assume Isabella's identity and sleep with Angelo to secure Claudio's release. The bed trick goes as planned, but Angelo reneges on his promise and orders the immediate execution of Claudio. The Duke intervenes and Claudio is spared, but neither Angelo nor Isabella know this; they think Claudio is dead. The Duke then informs the deputy that he is returning home. Angelo and court officials greet the Duke at the city gates. Isabella and Mariana are also there, and call upon the Duke to redress their wrongs. Instead, the Duke has Isabella arrested and orders Angelo to marry Mariana. Once they are married, he sentences Angelo to death for the murder of Claudio. At this point, Shakespeare takes some liberties that many think makes for an implausible and unsatisfactory ending. In his succinct and compelling book, "Shakespeare and Forgiveness," Professor William H. Matchett makes sense of the play's incongruities, as we shall see in a moment. Isabella is released. Upon hearing of Angelo's death sentence, she goes before the Duke to plea for mercy. But instead of telling Isabella her brother is alive, the Duke proposes marriage. Nothing has prepared the audience for this. Matchett suggests: "The point is that Isabella must consider Claudio dead if Shakespeare is not to lose his big scene: her true saintliness is only shown in her forgiving Angelo despite her thinking he has killed Claudio. The Duke must remain an almost inhuman manipulator to keep her in this position. And so he does." Isabella (kneeling): "Most bounteous sir, / Look, if it please you, on this man condemned, / As if my brother lived. I partly think / A due sincerity governed his deeds, / Till he did look on me. Since this is so, / Let him not die. My brother had but justice, / In that he did the thing for which he died. / For Angelo, / His act did not overtake his bad intent, / And must be buried but as an intent / That perished by the way. Thoughts are not subjects, / Intents but merely thoughts." The Duke pardons Angelo, and once again proposes marriage. Isabella answers with silence. Comments Matchett: "Shakespeare has staged a most dramatic forgiveness scene at the climax of his play, but at the cost of establishing Isabella's moral integrity by damaging the Duke's. It throws the whole mutuality of their marriage into doubt." He adds: "Perhaps we should accept the created image without worrying about the Duke's character. . . . One has to admit, however, that the Duke's proposal--`I have a motion much imports your good'--is about as arrogantly self-centered as they come, while the silence with which Isabella meets it, Shakespeare having provided her with no response, has allowed many modern

productions to substitute denial for consent. This no doubt violates the assumption of Shakespeare's play, but it allows recognition of the discomfort created by the forgiveness scene." The play ends with Isabella learning her brother is alive and well, but the question of her marrying the Duke is a matter of interpretation. However, in the final analysis, the full measure of forgiveness outweighs Angelo's measure of misdeeds, and trumps the play's defects.

O but to die,/ and go we know not where,/ to lie in cold obstruction--and to rot. The fate of us all.
What a line!

As others have mentioned, the Kindle formatting for this play is atrocious. The words are not centered on the page and so not all the words are visible and a character's name is not next to his lines. Skip this version until corrections are made. The play itself gets five stars.

Speeches from characters on death, sin, virtue, and hypocrisy. Like the Scarlet Letter, the sin is obsolete but the other topics are relevant. They read like the book of psalms, Ecclesiastes or Job. If the actual plot moved me more I would say 5 stars. Would a feminist interpret the sister not banging to save her brother as just deserts to the male gender?

I was looking for an inexpensive copy of "Measure for Measure" to read before seeing the play. I could have walked down to the local bookstore and pick one up, but since I was on anyways I just ordered one. This particular version looks like an 'InstaBook', or whatever you call something printed out just before shipping. The text of the play is all there, no complaints there, but it is all in Courier font and looks like a typewritten manuscript. There are some arcane notes to the text relating to differences in folios, etc, but no notes explaining period phrases, etc. There are better online copies I could have printed out for myself. If you want a cheap copy on letter size paper you don't intend to save, say for making notes on or learning your lines, this copy is OK. Otherwise, pick up a Folgers or other version.

It's Shakespeare. Come on.

Who doesn't like Will? The stories he wrote still ring true today. I can't seem to get enough of this fabulous and famous author!

The Arden versions are my favorite Shakespeare adaptations, because they're just so easily accessible. The language is beautiful, and there are helpful footnotes at the bottom to help you. Measure for Measure has become one of my favorite plays to date!

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