

Penguin Popular Classics

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



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THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

APPROXIMATE DATE	PLAYS	FIRST PRINTED
<i>Before 1594</i>	HENRY VI <i>three parts</i>	<i>Folio</i> 1623
	RICHARD III	1597
	TITUS ANDRONICUS	1594
	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	1598
	THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA	<i>Folio</i>
	THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	<i>Folio</i>
	THE TAMING OF THE SHREW	<i>Folio</i>
1594-1597	ROMEO AND JULIET (<i>pirated 1597</i>)	1599
	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	1600
	RICHARD II	1597
	KING JOHN	<i>Folio</i>
	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	1600
1597-1600	HENRY IV <i>part i</i>	1598
	HENRY IV <i>part ii</i>	1600
	HENRY V (<i>pirated 1600</i>)	<i>Folio</i>
	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	1600
	MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR (<i>pirated 1602</i>)	<i>Folio</i>
	AS YOU LIKE IT	<i>Folio</i>
	JULIUS CÆSAR	<i>Folio</i>
	TROYLUS AND CRESSIDA	1609
	HAMLET (<i>pirated 1603</i>)	1604
	TWELFTH NIGHT	<i>Folio</i>
1601-1608	MEASURE FOR MEASURE	<i>Folio</i>
	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	<i>Folio</i>
	OTHELLO	1622
	LEAR	1608
	MACBETH	<i>Folio</i>
	TIMON OF ATHENS	<i>Folio</i>
	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	<i>Folio</i>
	CORIOLANUS	<i>Folio</i>
	PERICLES (<i>omitted from the Folio</i>)	1609
	CYMBELINE	<i>Folio</i>
<i>After 1608</i>	THE WINTER'S TALE	<i>Folio</i>
	THE TEMPEST	<i>Folio</i>
	HENRY VIII	<i>Folio</i>

DATES UNKNOWN

POEMS

VENUS AND ADONIS	1593
THE RAPE OF LUCRECE	1594
SONNETS	} 1609
A LOVER'S COMPLAINT	
THE PHŒNIX AND THE TURTLE	1601

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford upon Avon in April, 1564. He was the third child, and eldest son, of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. His father was one of the most prosperous men of Stratford, who held in turn the chief offices in the town. His mother was of gentle birth, the daughter of Robert Arden of Wilmcote. In December, 1582, Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway, daughter of a farmer of Shottery, near Stratford; their first child Susanna was baptized on May 6, 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, on February 22, 1585. Little is known of Shakespeare's early life; but it is unlikely that a writer who dramatized such an incomparable range and variety of human kinds and experiences should have spent his early manhood entirely in placid pursuits in a country town. There is one tradition, not universally accepted, that he fled from Stratford because he was in trouble for deer stealing, and had fallen foul of Sir Thomas Lucy, the local magnate; another that he was for some time a schoolmaster.

From 1592 onwards the records are much fuller. In March, 1592, the Lord Strange's players produced a new play at the Rose Theatre called *Harry the Sixth*, which was very successful, and was probably the *First Part of Henry VI*. In the autumn of 1592 Robert Greene, the best known of the professional writers, as he was dying wrote a letter to three fellow writers in which he warned them against the ingratitude of players in general, and in particular against an 'upstart crow' who 'supposes he is as much able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes Factotum is in his own conceit the only

Shake-scene in a country.' This is the first reference to Shakespeare, and the whole passage suggests that Shakespeare had become suddenly famous as a playwright. At this time Shakespeare was brought into touch with Edward Alleyn the great tragedian, and Christopher Marlowe, whose thundering parts of Tamburlaine, the Jew of Malta, and Dr Faustus Alleyn was acting, as well as Hieronimo, the hero of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the most famous of all Elizabethan plays.

In April, 1593, Shakespeare published his poem *Venus and Adonis*, which was dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton: it was a great and lasting success, and was reprinted nine times in the next few years. In May, 1594, his second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, was also dedicated to Southampton.

There was little playing in 1593, for the theatres were shut during a severe outbreak of the plague; but in the autumn of 1594, when the plague ceased, the playing companies were reorganized, and Shakespeare became a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's company who went to play in the Theatre in Shoreditch. During these months Marlowe and Kyd had died. Shakespeare was thus for a time without a rival. He had already written the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Soon afterwards he wrote the first of his greater plays – *Romeo and Juliet* – and he followed this success in the next three years with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The two parts of *Henry IV*, introducing Falstaff, the most popular of all his comic characters, were written in 1597–8.

The company left the Theatre in 1597 owing to disputes over a renewal of the ground lease, and went to play at the

Curtain in the same neighbourhood. The disputes continued throughout 1598, and at Christmas the players settled the matter by demolishing the old Theatre and re-erecting a new playhouse on the South bank of the Thames, near Southwark Cathedral. This playhouse was named the Globe. The expenses of the new building were shared by the chief members of the Company, including Shakespeare, who was now a man of some means. In 1596 he had bought New Place, a large house in the centre of Stratford, for £60, and through his father purchased a coat-of-arms from the Heralds, which was the official recognition that he and his family were gentlefolk.

By the summer of 1598 Shakespeare was recognized as the greatest of English dramatists. Booksellers were printing his more popular plays, at times even in pirated or stolen versions, and he received a remarkable tribute from a young writer named Francis Meres, in his book *Palladis Tamia*. In a long catalogue of English authors Meres gave Shakespeare more prominence than any other writer, and mentioned by name twelve of his plays.

Shortly before the Globe was opened, Shakespeare had completed the cycle of plays dealing with the whole story of the Wars of the Roses with *Henry V*. It was followed by *As You Like it*, and *Julius Caesar*, the first of the maturer tragedies. In the next three years he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*.

On March 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died. The company had often performed before her, but they found her successor a far more enthusiastic patron. One of the first acts of King James was to take over the company and to promote them to be his own servants, so that henceforward they were known as the King's Men. They acted now very

frequently at Court, and prospered accordingly. In the early years of the reign Shakespeare wrote the more sombre comedies, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, which were followed by *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. Then he returned to Roman themes with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

Since 1601 Shakespeare had been writing less, and there were now a number of rival dramatists who were introducing new styles of drama, particularly Ben Jonson (whose first successful comedy, *Every Man in his Humour*, was acted by Shakespeare's company in 1598), Chapman, Dekker, Marston, and Beaumont and Fletcher who began to write in 1607. In 1608 the King's Men acquired a second playhouse, an indoor private theatre in the fashionable quarter of the Blackfriars. At private theatres, plays were performed indoors; the prices charged were higher than in the public playhouses, and the audience consequently was more select. Shakespeare seems to have retired from the stage about this time: his name does not occur in the various lists of players after 1607. Henceforward he lived for the most part at Stratford, where he was regarded as one of the most important citizens. He still wrote a few plays, and he tried his hand at the new form of tragi-comedy – a play with tragic incidents but a happy ending – which Beaumont and Fletcher had popularized. He wrote four of these – *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, which was acted at Court in 1611. For the last four years of his life he lived in retirement. His son Hamnet had died in 1596: his two daughters were now married. Shakespeare died at Stratford upon Avon on April 23, 1616, and was buried in the chancel of the church, before the high altar. Shortly afterwards a memorial which still exists, with a portrait bust, was set up on the North wall. His wife survived him.

When Shakespeare died fourteen of his plays had been separately published in Quarto booklets. In 1623 his surviving fellow actors, John Heming and Henry Condell, with the co-operation of a number of printers, published a collected edition of thirty-six plays in one Folio volume, with an engraved portrait, memorial verses by Ben Jonson and others, and an Epistle to the Reader in which Heming and Condell make the interesting note that Shakespeare's 'hand and mind went together, and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers'.

The plays as printed in the Quartos or the Folio differ considerably from the usual modern text. They are often not divided into scenes, and sometimes not even into acts. Nor are there place-headings at the beginning of each scene, because in the Elizabethan theatre there was no scenery. They are carelessly printed and the spelling is erratic.

THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

Although plays of one sort and another had been acted for many generations, no permanent playhouse was erected in England until 1576. In the 1570's the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London and the players were constantly at variance. As a result James Burbage, then the leader of the great Earl of Leicester's players, decided that he would erect a playhouse outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor, where the players would no longer be hindered by the authorities. Accordingly in 1576 he built the Theatre in Shoreditch, at that time a suburb of London. The experiment was successful, and by 1592 there were two

more playhouses in London, the Curtain (also in Shore-ditch), and the Rose on the south bank of the river, near Southwark Cathedral.

Elizabethan players were accustomed to act on a variety of stages; in the great hall of a nobleman's house, or one of the Queen's palaces, in town halls and in yards, as well as their own theatre.

The public playhouse for which most of Shakespeare's plays were written was a small and intimate affair. The outside measurement of the Fortune Theatre, which was built in 1600 to rival the new Globe, was but eighty feet square. Playhouses were usually circular or hexagonal, with three tiers of galleries looking down upon the yard or pit, which was open to the sky. The stage jutted out into the yard so that the actors came forward into the midst of their audience.

Over the stage there was a roof, and on either side doors by which the characters entered or disappeared. Over the back of the stage ran a gallery or upper stage which was used whenever an upper scene was needed, as when Romeo climbs up to Juliet's bedroom, or the citizens of Angiers address King John from the walls. The space beneath this upper stage was known as the tiring house; it was concealed from the audience by a curtain which could be drawn back to reveal an inner stage, for such scenes as the witches' cave in *Macbeth*, Prospero's cell, or Juliet's tomb.

There was no general curtain concealing the whole stage, so that all scenes on the main stage began with an entrance and ended with an exit. Thus in tragedies the dead must be carried away. There was no scenery, and therefore no limit to the number of scenes, for a scene came to an end when the characters left the stage. When it was necessary for the exact locality of a scene to be known, then Shakespeare



THE GLOBE THEATRE

Wood-engraving by R. J. Beedham after a reconstruction by J. C. Adams

indicated it in the dialogue; otherwise a simple property or a garment was sufficient; a chair or stool showed an indoor scene, a man wearing riding boots was a messenger, a king wearing armour was on the battlefield, or the like. Such simplicity was on the whole an advantage; the spectator was not distracted by the setting and Shakespeare was able to use as many scenes as he wished. The action passed by very quickly: a play of 2500 lines of verse could be acted in two hours. Moreover, since the actor was so close to his audience, the slightest subtlety of voice and gesture was easily appreciated.

The company was a 'Fellowship of Players', who were all partners and sharers. There were usually ten to fifteen full members, with three or four boys, and some paid servants. Shakespeare had therefore to write for his team. The chief actor in the company was Richard Burbage, who first distinguished himself as Richard III; for him Shakespeare wrote his great tragic parts. An important member of the company was the clown or low comedian. From 1594 to 1600 the company's clown was Will Kemp; he was succeeded by Robert Armin. No women were allowed to appear on the stage, and all women's parts were taken by boys.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The earliest record of *Measure for Measure* is an entry in 'The Accompte of the Office of the Reuelles of the whole yerres Charge in An° 1604 vntell the last of October 1605.' The account notes in three columns the company of players, the date of performance and the play, and the author of each play. The entry reads: *By his Mat^a plaiers / On St Stiuens night [December 26] in the Hall A play caled Mesur for Mesur / Shaxberd.* During the months covered by the account the King's Men also played 'The Moor of Venis', 'the Merry wiues of winsor', 'the plaie of Errors', 'A play of Loues Labours Lost', 'Henry the fift', 'Euery on out of his vmor', 'Euery on In his vmor', 'the Marchant of Venis', 'the Spanish maz'. As some of these plays were at least ten years old, the entry gives no more than a latest possible date for the writing of *Measure for Measure*.

Apart from this mention there is no other contemporary record, nor does the play itself contain any certain topical allusion which can be accurately dated. The dislike of Duke Vincentio for the loud applause and 'aves vehement' of his people would have reminded the original spectators of the similar dislike of King James I for the cheers of Londoners, but this trait in his character was noted from the earliest weeks of the new reign. *Measure for Measure* can thus be dated only from the evidence of the style which would seem to place it between *Othello* (c.1602) and *Lear* (1606).

The play was first printed in the first Folio of 1623 where the text has its peculiarities. It contains a number of short lines; several exits and entrances, especially of minor char-

acters who come and go while their betters are speaking, are omitted; verse is occasionally printed as prose and prose as verse – an easy mistake at a period when poets were not accustomed to use a capital letter at the beginning of a line of verse; and the division of the verse lines is at times not acceptable to modern editors. As a whole, however, the Folio text is quite good and offers few serious difficulties of reading.

The peculiarities of the Folio text are not of great significance, nor are they necessarily signs of a corrupt text, nor do they justify elaborate theories of tampering, revision, rewriting or collaboration. Shakespeare was always experimenting, and in his later plays short lines of verse, and lines which do not follow the norm of five stresses, are common and intentional. If *Measure for Measure* was indeed written in 1604, marked differences of style would not be surprising. From the early summer of 1603 until the end of 1604 there was no playing in London because of a bad outbreak of plague. There was therefore no demand for new plays. *Measure for Measure* may thus be the first play which Shakespeare had written for more than a year; and this fact may well account for some of its peculiarities. Indeed, when read against the background of the later months of 1604, it does reflect the mood of the times quite closely.

The nearest parallel to the story of the play in Elizabethan times occurs in a dramatic piece called *Promos and Cassandra* written by George Whetstone and published in 1578. Four years later Whetstone published a prose version of the story in a collection called *The Heptameron of Civil Discourses*. The outline of the story is as follows:

In Julio in Hungary, Lord Promos revived an old law by which incontinence was punished by the death of the man