

Dramaturg's note



II. iv.

ISABELLA

*Assign me a present pardon for my brother,
Or with an outstretch'd throat I'll tell the world aloud
What man thou art.*

ANGELO

Who will believe thee, Isabel?

*My unsoil'd name, the austereness of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i' the state,
Will so your accusation overweigh...*

The cultural zeitgeist was irreparably altered with the rise of the #MeToo movement. While the use of the hashtag #MeToo was used on social media platforms as early as 2006, it rose to prominence in 2017 when a selection of Hollywood's leading ladies brought forth allegations against notable film producer Harvey Weinstein. In the six years following Alyssa Milano's tweet addressing the undercurrent of sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry, questions have and continue to be posed surrounding the presence of consent in a range of public-facing professions.

While the resurgence of the #MeToo movement focused on misconduct in the entertainment industry, the manipulation of power dynamics to assuage carnal desires is as old as the first patriarchal society. Countless narratives throughout history have employed sex as either a weapon or a salve, a means of coming together or the punctuation of a tumultuous relationship. It is now nearly impossible to separate discussions of sexual behavior as a dramatic device from those of consent in a post-MeToo world. It begs those examining dramatic portrayals of sexual misconduct to ask an updated series of questions: How did the difference in status between characters influence this given moment? If the power dynamics were any different, would this moment have even been possible? Why did the playwright choose a form of violation that is so vulnerable and undeniably personal?

All these questions came to mind when deciphering *Measure for Measure*. I admit that I had not read the piece prior to my work as this production's dramaturg, and the only things I knew going in were a loose understanding of the characters and that it met the traditional definition of a Shakespearean comedy. While the content of Shakespeare's comedies varies greatly between plays, the universal dramatic convention between them is a wedding at the end. Said wedding is typically accompanied by music, dancing, and the implication of a "happily ever after."

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While *Measure for Measure* ends with talk of marriage, it hardly has the undertones of running off into the sunset with one's true love. This has led scholars of Shakespeare to classify the piece as a "problem play," containing the technical parts of a comedy despite its discussion of traditionally dramatic subject matter. *Measure for Measure* is a perpetual "gray area" in Shakespeare's canon, despite the piece's discussion of hot-button topics that beg to be classified within the binary of "black or white."

As spectators of this piece, audience members will be challenged to navigate the "gray areas" of capital punishment and quid-pro-quo alongside the characters. While it is human nature to craft narratives that relieve oneself of overwhelming moral responsibility, I challenge you instead to let the hard questions remain. It can be difficult to determine who to believe and who to dismiss when actions occur under ambiguous circumstances. Now you have the chance to see every moment, every word, and every piece of context between the characters Isabella and Angelo. You'll know exactly what to say when someone asks if she "asked for it."

Right?

Sheridan Schreyer
Dramaturg