

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
Measure for Measure

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AUTHOR NOTES

It is easy to locate a comprehensive overview of William Shakespeare's life, including a range of conspiracy theories; it is important, however, to know that much of what is believed to be common knowledge about Shakespeare, is belief rather than fact.

Personal Information

When it comes to the known facts about Shakespeare's life, there is very little known information which is, indeed, factual. The exact date of Shakespeare's birth is unknown, though records show he was baptised on April 26, 1564. Little is known about his early life beyond his middle class origins. He was married to Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582, whom he had three children with. His successful career in London began sometime between 1585 and 1592 where he was an actor, writer and a part owner of a company originally called Lord Chamberlain's Men. At the age of 49, he retired to his birthplace, Stratford, where he died three years later.

Writing Career

Most of the beliefs surrounding Shakespeare revolve around his writing career. He is considered to be the greatest English writer and the national poet of England. Most of his plays were produced between 1589 and 1613. Earlier in his career, he predominantly produced comedies and histories and progressed further into tragedies towards the end of his writing. Many of his plays were published in varying degrees and condition during his lifetime. The *First Folio* was the posthumous collection of works published by friends that are now recognised around the world; constantly being studied, performed and reinterpreted.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

London

In the 1550's, London was a rapidly growing and thriving metropolis. As an important port, alongside the river Thames, London was a major thoroughfare and home to many artisans. This allowed the theatre to grow as an important form of entertainment and societal functions with all of the social classes. During Shakespeare's career, the booming industry built new play houses to allow for the increasing demand for plays.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), England was emerging as the leading naval and commercial power in Europe. The world was being circumnavigated and exploration parties were being sent out in search of new and profitable places to build colonies. The culture in London was expanding and being introduced to a range of experiences as immigrants from other countries began arriving on their shores. The population grew by 400% and the expansion of the city led to the development of a merchant middle class who were booming financially. Shakespeare regularly made comment on the social circumstances of the time. Many academics believe that he used Vienna as a metaphor of London, especially for the outer areas that fell outside of London's jurisdiction.

Elizabethan Theatre

All of Shakespeare's plays were performed outdoors, in all weather. Commoners would crowd the ground, standing and engaging in the play. Those with the money and status would occupy the tiered, circular seating surrounding the stage. Often there was little in the way of sets and the tiered nature of the theatre allowed for balcony scenes and the heavens to be included in the plays. All actors at the time were male, with women played by the younger boys whose voices were yet to mature.