



NOW OR LATER

BY CHRISTOPHER SHINN



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



NOW OR LATER
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NOW OR LATER had its world premiere at the Royal Court Theatre (Dominic Cooke, Artistic Director; Lucy Davies, Executive Producer) in London, England, on September 3, 2008. It was directed by Dominic Cooke; the set and costume design were by Hildegarde Bechtler; the lighting design was by Charles Balfour; and the sound design was by Ian Dickinson. The cast was as follows:

JOHN..... Eddie Redmayne
MATT Domhnall Gleeson
MARCAdam James
JESSICA Nancy Crane
TRACY..... Pamela Nomvete
JOHN, SR.....Matthew Marsh

The American premiere of NOW OR LATER was presented by the Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director) in Boston, Massachusetts, opening on October 16, 2012. It was directed by Michael Wilson; the set design was by Jeff Cowie; the costume design was by David C. Woolard; the lighting design was by Russell H. Champa; the sound design was by David Remedios; and the production stage manager was Carola Morrone LaCoste. The cast was as follows:

JOHN..... Grant MacDermott
MATT Michael Goldsmith
MARC Ryan King
JESSICAAlexandra Neil
TRACY..... Adriane Lenox
JOHN, SR..... Tom Nelis

NOW OR LATER was developed in Hartford Stage's 2008 Brand: NEW festival.

CHARACTERS

JOHN, 20, white.

MATT, 20, white.

MARC, 30s, Jewish.

JESSICA, early 50s, white.

TRACY, 40s, black.

JOHN, SR., mid-50s, white.

TIME

Late night, election day.

PLACE

A hotel room in a Southern state.

A NOTE ON THE DESIGN

During the play characters watch television and look at a computer screen. At no time should these images be visible to the audience.

My feeling is that the play will be most effective with a spartan design in all areas.

be bloody, or be nothing

—Hamlet

NOW OR LATER

John reads. Matt's at his laptop. A knock. John hides in the closet.

MARC. Is John around?

MATT. He went to smoke.

MARC. You expect him back?

MATT. Um ... he said he might make some phone calls.

MARC. Did he say where he went?

MATT. Um ...

MARC. Like he went to the stairwell or he went out somewhere?

MATT. I'm not sure. *(Pause.)*

MARC. All right, do me a favor, what's his cell so I can call him.

MATT. I think. I think he left his phone actually.

MARC. He went to make some phone calls and he left his phone.

All right. When he gets back please have him call me. Because I need to speak to him again about the pictures. *(Marc goes.)*

JOHN. I want this to be over!

MATT. Sorry. I thought what if your phone rings from the closet —

JOHN. I already told him I'm not putting out a statement, what does he want? Do a search, see if there's anything new. Let's go Florida! Ohio! Let's get this thing over with already!

MATT. It doesn't seem like it's been picked up. It's still just on those blogs.

JOHN. What would the story be? "Candidate's Son Attends Crazy College Party."

MATT. Maybe they're thinking this could become a big deal.

JOHN. How? It would be one thing if I was, like, a member of the senior staff or a future Cabinet member, then I could see how this might turn into something. But who cares about my going to some ridiculous party, how could that impact my father? I'm a college student, I did what I'm supposed to do on a Friday night, I got hammered and acted like an idiot.

MATT. Remember when I took that class on the modern presidency? One of the big things was how quickly Republicans defined the Democrats in '92, as soon as the election was over — gays in the military, health care. The mid-term elections were a disaster, Republicans controlled the narrative, and that was it, Contract With America, the end of all hope for progressive legislation for over a decade. The lesson was, stay in control of your narrative, if you let the other guys define you —

JOHN. I don't understand, what could anyone say about these pictures that would in any way affect or define my father's narrative? You're talking about how in '92 the Republicans defined the Democrats based on issues, based on the president's and the Party's policy proposals.

MATT. Right ... but that was, like — early '90s, no internet, no viral spread of this whole kind of insubstantial, like — amorphous, gossipy personal stuff that can disproportionately impact the discourse — some stupid thing that starts on a blog and a week later is on the front pages —

JOHN. I understand what you're saying, but not how it applies. We were being jackasses at an off-campus party — it's not like we revealed anything about my father, or state secrets or something. What's the story?

MATT. Yeah ...

MARC. (*Offstage.*) Hey John, it's Marc, you have a minute? Hey buddy. Listen, there's been some more discussion upstairs about these pictures. I know what you said before about your privacy, but we wanted to ask you again if it's all right if we just put out a really under-the-radar statement that says that you regret your choice of costume. Is that cool with you?

JOHN. Marc, what's everyone so nervous about?

MARC. We're just being cautious. It looks like a good night for us, we want to make sure everything's taken care of.

JOHN. What's there to take care of? This is on three blogs no one's ever heard of. The pictures are blurry, you can barely see anything.

MARC. Let me just read it to you —

JOHN. You know my dad's policy is that I have say over any aspect of the campaign that has to do with me —

MARC. That's why we're checking with you —

JOHN. So first I want to know, what's everyone so worried about? You're being really vague. (*Pause.*)

MARC. There's concern that some news organizations who are hostile to your dad might try to use this story to discredit him.

JOHN. Discredit him how?

MARC. Ivy League school, president-elect's son goes to a Halloween party dressed up as Muhammad, his friend dressed up like Pastor Bob —

JOHN. I told you, it wasn't a Halloween party — that makes me like a xenophobe —

MARC. I know what you told me — but in terms of us how we handle this, we think it's better if we just say it's a Halloween party —

JOHN. Wait — this is me, this isn't something for you to say any way at all.

MARC. If you — I understand that. What I meant was, if you feel like — we're just trying to come up with a way to deflect this in case —

JOHN. What you mean is, you've all already decided that in fact I don't have a choice about this, and you're going to put out a statement from me.

MARC. If you — yes, we want to put out a really simple, basic statement that will put this thing to bed, if you'll agree to it.

JOHN. I don't understand what would wake it up.

MARC. It's woken up, John. No disrespect but — you have anti-Muslim stuff, anti-Christian, elitism — obviously we don't know what will happen, but we're planning for the worst.

JOHN. Which is ...

MARC. You're a Democrat, right?

JOHN. It makes me cringe to admit it, but — yeah.

MARC. Well, apart from this thing taking on a life of its own and becoming a distraction because of the nature of the internet — we think whoever put these pictures out there has an agenda. Meaning, this is not some prank, this is a high-up, Republican Party dirty trick to sabotage your dad, to get in the way of his first few days of press — which are really important in terms of laying the foundation to get future legislation passed.

JOHN. How could the Republican Party — how could they use this to further their agenda? “The president's son went to a party, therefore we refuse to pass the president's economic stimulus package”?

MARC. It's more than a party. There's a pretty big back-story to all this, right?

JOHN. To what?

MARC. To your feelings about Muslims.

JOHN. Uh ... not that I'm aware of.

MARC. Well — I don't know the whole story, but I guess you wrote an anti-Muslim editorial for your school paper in September —

JOHN. Anti-Muslim? No. What happened was, cartoons depicting Muhammad were put up around campus anonymously, and the Muslim Student Association tried to use that to change the university's freedom of speech policy, so whoever did it could be expelled. I wrote an op-ed defending the school's current policy — I didn't defend the content of the cartoons, that was beside the point. I just focused on the right to freedom of expression, regardless of whether people find the expression offensive or not. A couple of blogs linked to it, my mom called and asked me to not write any more op-eds till after the election — and that was it. The end.

MARC. Somebody upstairs found an editorial responding to your editorial that made it seem like a lot of the Muslim students thought that what you wrote was anti-Muslim.

JOHN. The Muslim Student Association wanted to consider the cartoons hate speech, they argued that they would lead directly to violence against Muslims. I wrote that a link like that couldn't be proven and so shouldn't be used to curtail or redefine freedom of speech — which some people took as my saying that I advocated violence against Muslims, since I was supporting the kind of speech that they said causes it.

MARC. Well, these pictures are out there, there's a record of you and this Muslim controversy — you know what the press is like, I mean —

JOHN. It's an Ivy League kerfuffle, I don't see how it could become more than that. Of all the possible things to write about tomorrow ... Is there something you're not telling me? *(Pause.)*

MARC. The thing is — I think this has reached a point where we were coming to you out of respect but — the decision's already been made to put out an apology.

JOHN. Already been made. Who made that decision? *(Pause.)* Does my father know about this?

MARC. I don't have access to your father.

JOHN. Well, tell whoever is making this decision about me and my words that this is not their decision to make. *(Marc goes.)* What are they so paranoid about? This is like a campaign-induced psychosis —

NOW OR LATER

by Christopher Shinn

4M, 2W

On election night, the son of a presidential candidate sends his father's political team into crisis mode when controversial photos of him at a college party spread over the internet, potentially sparking an international incident. Smart and timely, Christopher Shinn's searching play examines religion, freedom of expression, and personal responsibility.

"NOW OR LATER is as potent as David Mamet's Oleanna in its exposure of how liberal creeds can — one way or another — be murkily tied in with intolerance. Shinn reworks diverse real-life headlines into a gripping dramatic knot."

—**The Independent (London)**

"Its brilliance lies in the way Shinn marries ideological debate to psychological complexity, shedding light, laser-bright and precise, on the way in which political discourse informs and shapes individual experience."

—**The Times (London)**

"A complex father-son relationship lies at the heart of Shinn's nuanced and thought-provoking drama about freedom of speech ... It's a heady and provocative brew, and it's over too soon."

—**The Boston Globe**

"These debates will keep your brain cells shifting wildly from left to right, since all of these characters — political staffers as well as college students in the thick of poli-sci textbooks — have the gift of eloquence. [By] the play's end, the story has been pared down to a chilling simplicity: a father and son, and the deep, lifelong scars their relationship has suffered."

—**The Boston Phoenix**

Also by Christopher Shinn

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