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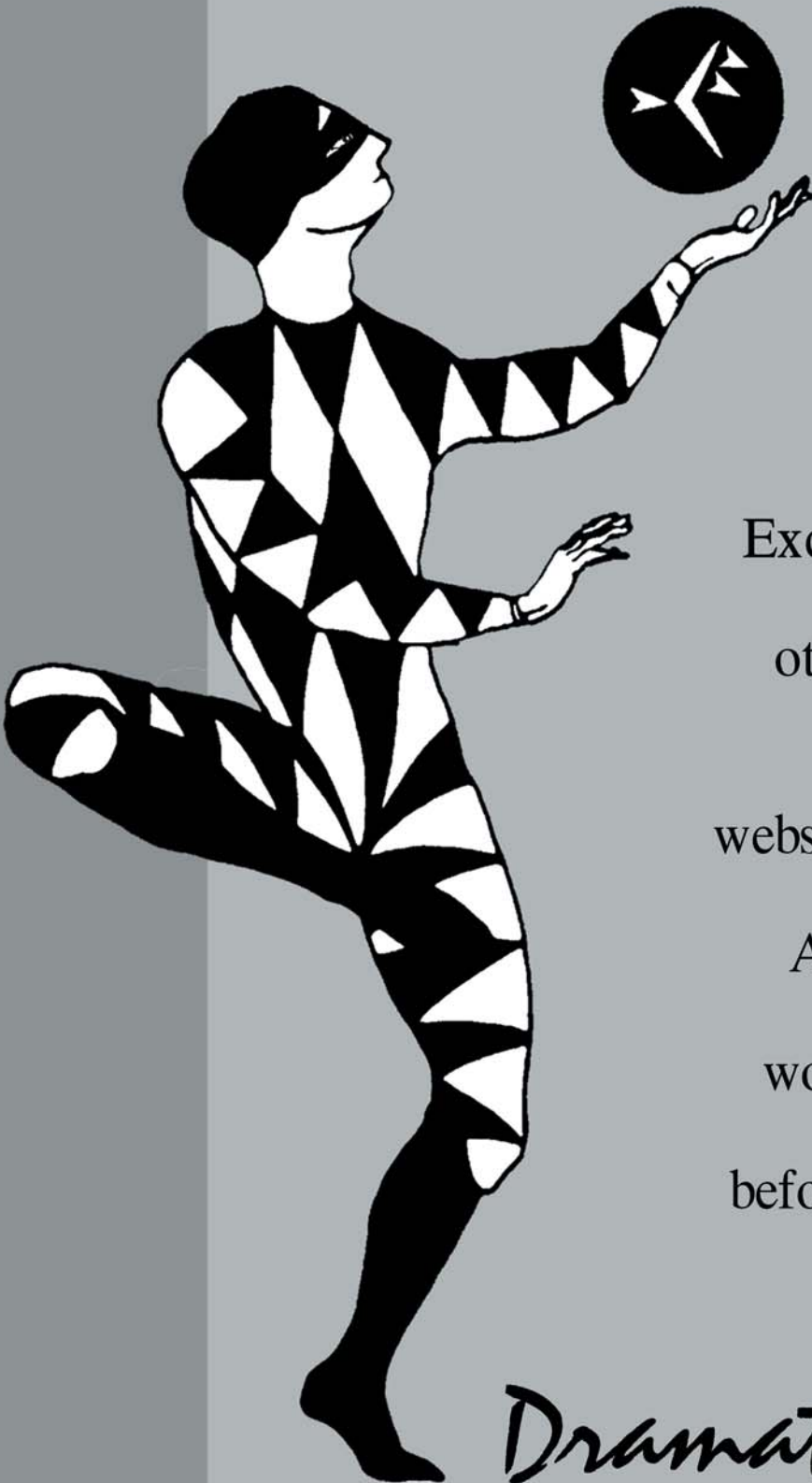
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Dramatic Publishing



SHAME THE DEVIL!

An Audience With Fanny Kemble

(65-minute version)

By

ANNE LUDLUM

Based on the writings of Fanny Kemble



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Anne Ludlum's many years' experience as a professional actress and director includes work at regional theaters (Alliance Theatre, Baltimore Theatre Project, Seattle Repertory Theatre), in films (*Twice in a Lifetime*), on television (*Under One Roof*), on the radio (Globe Radio Theater). As a freelance writer, she has written art reviews and feature articles for *The Seattle Times*, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *The Berkshire Eagle*, *The Caracas Journal*, National Public Radio and the CBC. Her play *Kate and Isabel* is published by Dramatic Publishing.

SHAME THE DEVIL!
An Audience With Fanny Kemble

A Play for One Person

PLACE:

Fanny Kemble's rooms. New York City.

TIME:

Late evening, October 1850.

Running time: Approximately 65 minutes.

An early version of *SHAME THE DEVIL! AN AUDIENCE WITH FANNY KEMBLE* was produced in 1980 by The Group, Seattle's Multi-Cultural Theatre. It subsequently toured to Alaska and on the East Coast from Maine to Georgia and was performed at the Berkshire Theatre Festival, the Folger Shakespeare Theatre, the Miniature Theatre and the Piccolo Spoleto Festival.

In 1997, the revised play was presented at the Juneteenth Emancipation Celebration! of the African-American Theatre Project at the University of Louisville and the script was a winner in the Play Reading Project of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education.

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Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

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Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.

Coastal Georgia Historical Society, St. Simon's Island, GA.

Department of Archaeology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Drama Library, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.

Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

Lenox Library, Lenox, MA.

Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Museum of the City of New York, NY.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.

Seattle Public Library, Seattle, WA.

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

PRODUCTION NOTES

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

FANNY KEMBLE is 40 at the time of the play. She is physically strong, energetic, sophisticated, smart and outspoken. In her 20s, she was the most celebrated actress in her native England and in America. She also enjoyed some fame as a writer. After many years of retirement, she is attempting a return to performing. She still has the powerful, trained voice of a professional. And, although she is not a beautiful woman, she can project a dazzling presence when she so chooses. She does not suffer fools gracefully, but she does have a deep sense of humanity. At this moment in her life, she is in desperate need of approval from the public and recognition of her accomplishments—and also, perhaps, the affection of her audience.

THE SET

Fanny Kemble's sitting room is used as a parlor and as a study. It is a pleasant room and the furnishings (pre-Victorian early 19th-century) are tasteful without being ostentatious.

URC is an entrance into the room from a hallway. DR there is a desk and a chair; DL an upholstered chair and a small table. UL there is a wide bookcase filled with books. It's flanked by two straight chairs. There are warm oriental rugs on the floor.

Placed about the room are several vases of autumn flowers—elaborate florists' arrangements, with cards attached.

They are tributes from friends and fans in honor of Fanny's debut this evening.

THE COSTUME

Fanny enters wearing a skirt and matching jacket, hat and gloves and carrying a purse. During the early part of the play, she takes off her hat and gloves; later she removes her jacket. She wears a watch pinned to her waist. A pince-nez, which she uses for reading, is on a chain around her neck; at the start of the play, it is pinned to her jacket.

THE TEXT

The play is an imaginary encounter with a real person, the actress and writer, Fanny Kemble (1809-1894). The text is based on Kemble's own language in her critical writings and in her several autobiographical books, particularly the published journals of her girlhood and youth and her Georgia journal. (See Bibliography.) The Shakespeare passages are adaptations from 19th-century editions. The songs from Butler Island are based on music from the Sea Islands of Georgia and are arranged by Valerie Yockey.

NOTES ON THE SHAKESPEARE QUOTES AND PARAPHRASES

The script of this play is sprinkled with Shakespeare quotes because in her own writings and conversations, Fanny Kemble often quoted from Shakespeare. She claimed she "thought in Shakespeare." The sources of

many of the Shakespeare quotes are mentioned in the text and all are listed below, in order of appearance.

“Reputation...”: *Othello*, II, 3.

“Good name...”: *Othello*, III, 3.

“Virtue...”: *Measure for Measure*, III, 1.

“My dismal...”: *Romeo and Juliet*, IV, 3.

“I have...”: *Romeo and Juliet*, IV, 3.

“Constant...”: *Othello*, II, 1.

“Far more...”: *Othello*, I, 3.

“Farewell, Master...”: *The Tempest*, II, 2.

“Age cannot...”: *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, 2.

“Now my charms...”: *The Tempest*, Epilogue.

PROPERTY LIST

On Stage

Desk
Desk chair
Upholstered chair
Bookcase
2 Straight chairs
Wastebasket
Small table
Oriental rugs
Several large formal arrangements of autumn flowers
(with notes attached)

On desk:

Pen and ink
Lamp
Several recently opened notes
Pile of newspaper clippings

In desk drawer:

Divorce document (filed away)

On small table next to upholstered chair:

Lamp
Framed pencil drawing: Fan and Sally Butler at four and seven years of age

On bookcase:

Many books, *objets d'art*
Fanny Kemble's journal (a ledger-like notebook with extra sheets of paper stuck in it)

In wastebasket near the desk:
Crumbled newspaper clipping

On walls:

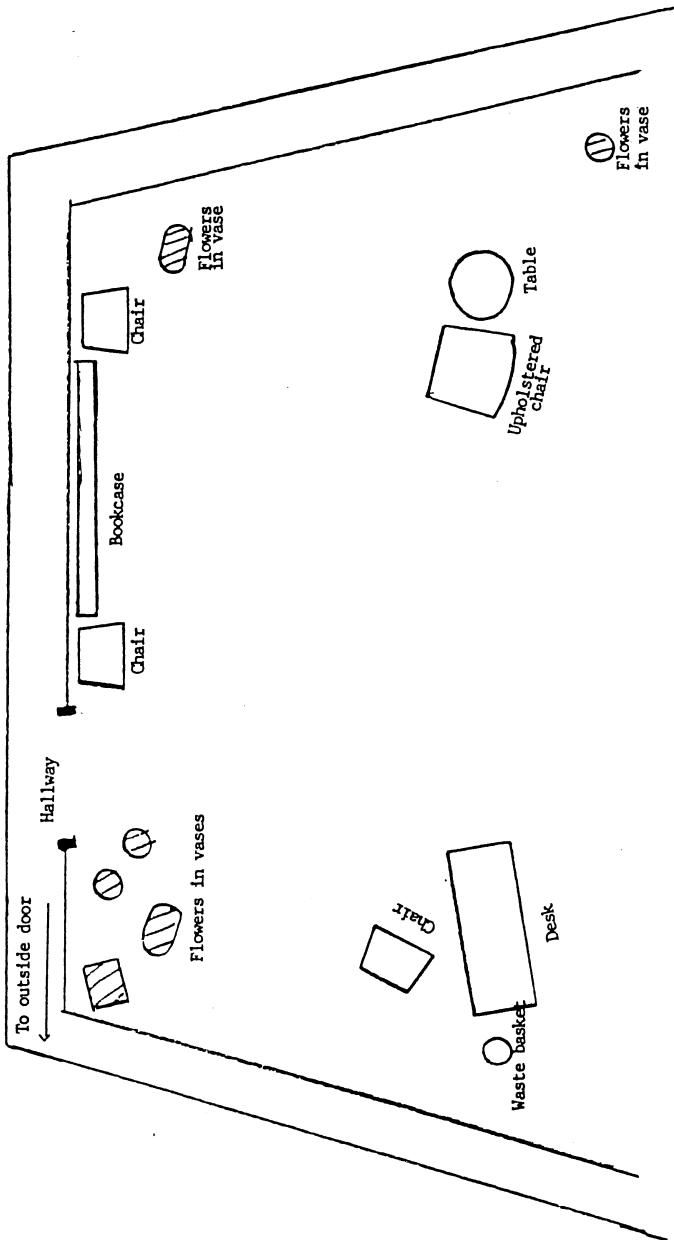
Large oil painting of the Alps
Water color of the Massachusetts Berk shire Hills
Print of portrait of Kemble-Siddons family in *Henry VIII*
Print of Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Sarah Siddons
as "The Tragic Muse"
Picture of Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth
Colored etching of Fanny Kemble's parents in
The Taming of the Shrew (stage L)
Etching of Covent Garden Theatre in the early 19th
century (stage R)

On wall or tucked away in bookcase:

Small copy of Sir Thomas Lawrence's drawing of
Fanny Kemble

Personal (brought in by Fanny Kemble)

1 pamphlet
3 new newspapers including *The Examiner*
(with review on page 1) and *The Tribune*



SHAME THE DEVIL!

An Audience With Fanny Kemble

AT RISE: *There are sounds from offstage R: a street door opening and closing, a woman speaking softly. Then comes the powerful voice of FANNY KEMBLE. She is furious.*

Reputation! Reputation! Reputation!
I have lost my reputation!

(FANNY KEMBLE storms in from the hallway, UR. She wears street clothes and carries a purse in one hand. In the other, she brandishes a paper-bound pamphlet.)

Good name in woman, dear my lords and ladies,
Is the immediate jewel of our souls;
Who steals my purse steals trash—

(FANNY flings her purse onto the upholstered chair and criss-crosses the stage.)

But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.

My reputation! My reputation!

(FANNY finishes this speech, arms upraised in a dramatic posture. She takes a pause. Then in a strong but controlled tone, she addresses the audience directly.)

Whenever I am taken by strong emotion, I resort to Shakespeare. How ironic that it is lines from *Othello* which come to me now!

Have you seen this?

(FANNY holds out the pamphlet as if it were an old and very dead fish.)

Mr. Pierce Butler's "Private Statement" about our marriage. "Private" indeed! It was being hawked to the general public this very evening outside the Broadway Performance Hall—even as I performed for you there!

(FANNY pulls back the pamphlet.)

You needn't read it. I can tell you its salient points.

(FANNY props up the pamphlet so it stands on her desk.)

On page one, Mr. Butler accuses me of having a "peculiar view" of marriage, citing my belief that "marriage is a companionship in which at no time does one partner have the right to control the other."

(FANNY is taking off her gloves.)

Later he says that I suffer from “a sense of imagined oppression” and that I have “an unyielding spirit.”

(FANNY crosses U and puts her gloves on chair left of bookcase.)

(FANNY suddenly realizes something; she goes to the desk R, speaking as she crosses.)

Ah! Of course! This explains that nasty little item in this afternoon’s *News Courier*.

(FANNY pulls a crumpled newspaper out of the wastebasket and reads from it.)

Tonight New York City curiosity seekers will crowd the Broadway Performance Hall to see and hear Fanny Kemble—that ingenue of many, many, many decades past whose eventful private life freely feeds the current appetite for gossip.

The “current appetite for gossip” is not nourished by any action of mine!

(FANNY crosses to above the desk and drops the newspaper page into the waste basket.)

Oh, no! That appetite for gossip is fed by the liberal distribution of Mr. Pierce Butler’s insidious booklet.

(FANNY turns away from the audience momentarily.)

And how am I to answer his attacks?

(FANNY faces the audience again.)

Why, "Virtue is bold and goodness never fearful." I will tell the naked truth and shame the devil!

(FANNY crosses D.)

Ladies and gentlemen, may I prevail upon you to be an audience for *Fanny Kemble's* "Private Statement"?

You have already consented to stay with me this late evening, awaiting with me the verdict of those arbiters of my professional endeavours, the New York critics. And I am most appreciative of your company during this vigil.

Within the hour, we shall have the final editions of the local newspapers with their critiques of my debut as a solo reader of Shakespeare plays. May we pass the time 'til then with a recital of my adventures in this motley world, that you, too, may sit in judgment—not on my work—but on my character?

I am most grateful.

(FANNY crosses U as she removes her hat, which she puts on the chair with her gloves. Then she makes a sweeping cross D and curtsies. As she gives her family history, she is intent on making it clear that she comes from a long line of professional men and women who have achieved great distinction in the arts—and occa-

sional financial success—and whose opinions merit attention. She is establishing her credibility as a person of moral rectitude and intellectual weight. FANNY is also trying to make evident the degree to which she herself, rather than being “an unyielding spirit,” is a woman who acquiesces to the desires and needs of family and of colleagues.)

I am Fanny Kemble—London-born—the most English of English women—from the most English of English theatrical families, the Kemble-Siddons family.

(FANNY indicates the print of Sarah Siddons as “The Tragic Muse.”)

My late aunt Sarah Siddons—the splendid Mrs. Siddons—is still acclaimed as the greatest female interpreter of Shakespeare to ever grace our stage.

My dear father is Charles Kemble, to me the most accomplished actor of this century.

*(FANNY indicates the picture of her mother and father in *The Taming of the Shrew*.)*

My beautiful mother, Marie-Thérèse de Camp, sang, danced and acted from her childhood—both in England and on the Continent. She was much praised for her roles in comedy—particularly for Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Oh, but I assure you, she was a shrew *on* the stage only.

As you can see, my family relishes artistic endeavours. And we also enjoy something which few foreign artists ever know—a uniquely English element in artistic life—respectability.

(FANNY crosses to desk R.)

Now respectability is not to be equated with financial security. All during my lifetime, my family's income has been subject to the varying fortunes of the Covent Garden Theatre. My father and my uncles are proprietors there—managers, you in America would say. The theatre seats three thousand spectators and the weekly payroll is for over seven hundred people—more at Christmas season.

Two decades ago—in 1829—Covent Garden Theatre had fallen into enormous debt. All of the employees—including my parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers—were to be set adrift. I had just returned to England from France, where I had completed boarding school. Authorship and scholarship appealed to me. One evening I asked my parents to allow me to seek employment as a governess.

But at the breakfast table the next morning, my father said—I can remember his very words—he said,

(FANNY pulls out the desk chair and sits on it; she imitates her father's voice and manner.)

“There is a fine fortune to be made just now, by any young lady of decent talent, on the stage.”

The financial disarray of Covent Garden had led me to believe that a “fine fortune” was to be made almost anywhere *except* “on the stage.”

(FANNY rises and returns chair to behind desk.)

Nevertheless, my mother requested that I learn the portion speech of Juliet and early the next morning, my father took me to the deserted Covent Garden to “try my voice.”

(FANNY crosses to UR.)

I had no audience in the house, no Romeo on the stage. “My dismal scene I needs must act alone.”

(FANNY starts the following speech U, speaking in a barely audible whisper. Gradually she works her way into an adolescent’s hysterical frenzy, screaming and gesturing wildly.)

I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life.
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? There’s a fearful point!
Shall I not then be stifled in the vault,
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?

Well, my voice did carry. My father determined to “bring me out” at once. Exactly three weeks later, I made my theatrical debut as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

I had to be pushed bodily onto the stage. And, would you believe, not a word I uttered in the first two scenes was audible? Then in the third scene, the balcony scene, the inspiration of the play washed over me and I was completely carried away.

At the end of the performance, there was tumultuous applause. Whole bouquets were thrown upon the stage. My parents rejoiced and embraced me. They congratulated me and gave me a watch.

(FANNY touches the watch pinned to her jacket.)

In short, I was a great success. I had saved Covent Garden from bankruptcy and my professional life was determined.

You will please note that although my own desire was for a quiet life of study, I accommodated my family by appearing on the stage. “Unyielding spirit” indeed!

I came out in other roles that first season. I did Bianca in *Fazio* and Lady Teazel in *The School for Scandal*. Oh, and my favorite, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Every night I played, regardless of the role, the house was full.

(FANNY crosses to behind upholstered chair left and leans on the back of it.)

And off the stage I was acclaimed the new young lioness of British society. The Prime Minister rode with me in Hyde

Park. Lord Russell himself explained his great reform bill to me. I was waited on by Sir Walter Scott.

(During the following speech, FANNY waltzes across the room from left to right.)

I attended balls and danced 'til dawn. I had holidays in lovely country homes. I was even invited to the coronation and given peers' tickets.

(Suddenly FANNY stops dancing.)

Oh, but, you are curious about my coming here, to America. Of course.

(FANNY sits in the desk chair.)

In 1832, an epidemic of cholera swept through the Continent, and Great Britain. The theatre trade fell off precipitously. My father was about to declare himself insolvent, when it was decided that he and I should cross that great dividing ditch—the Atlantic Ocean. We were to come to America for a tour of the Northern cities.

I was wretched at the thought of parting from my mother and my brothers—and from some particular admirers, also.

But again I bowed to the wishes of others.

(FANNY stands and crosses D.)

On the first of August of 1832, my father and I set sail from Liverpool on one of the fastest sail-ships of that time; we made New York harbor in just thirty-six days.

(FANNY moves to C.)

I came out in *Fazio*. *The New York Evening Post* said that I was “perfection” and *The Tribune* that my presence in this country would “raise and refine the American art.”

(FANNY turns U and she is laughing when she again faces the audiences.)

Puffery. Puffery. But I was twenty-two and I believed it all.

(FANNY stops laughing.)

Now I don’t believe any of it.

(FANNY crosses to above desk.)

Of course, I did know we hadn’t come here to “raise and refine the American art.” We had come here to earn money. And this we proceeded to do—by working very hard.

In England we had rehearsed four mornings a week and acted three nights a week. Here we rehearsed every day—excepting the Sabbath—and performed six nights running. I was concerned for my father’s health—and for my own happiness—but every night we did not work was a certain loss out of my father’s pocket, so I did not make any objection.