

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

A Full-Length Play

**The Other
Shakespeare**

By
LAURA ANNAWYN SHAMAS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

"Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois"

©MCMLXXXI by
LAURA SHAMAS

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE OTHER SHAKESPEARE)

ISBN 0-87129-762-0

"Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare. Be that as it may, I could not help thinking, as I looked at the works of Shakespeare on the shelf, that the bishop was right at least in this; it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister . . ."

Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own

1928

THE OTHER SHAKESPEARE

A Full-Length Play

For Seven Women and Seven Men*

CASSANDRA SHAKESPEARE a lass of sixteen
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE her older brother
JOAN SHAKESPEARE] youngest sister
FIRST WOMAN
GILBERT SHAKESPEARE] youngest brother
SECOND CUSTOMER
MARY SHAKESPEARE the mother
JOHN SHAKESPEARE] the father
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE]
FULK SANDELLS] a daft farmer
FIRST CUSTOMER]
JOHN RICHARDSON] another daft farmer
PERCY FIELDS]
RACHEL a tavern maid
NICK GREENE a man of the theater
RICHARD BURBAGE a talented actor
LIZ BURBAGE his unhappy wife
SECOND WOMAN a social lass
OLD WOMAN the renter

Time: 1581

Place: Stratford

*Note: Double casting refers characters in the first act to alternate characters in the second act.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

SCENE: A garden outside of the Shakespeare home on Henley Street. CASSANDRA is seated on the bench, with a book, papers, and ink. She holds a pen in her hand. We can see she has been writing.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: CASSIE is talking out loud, trying the sound of her work on her tongue. (Sonnet #17.)

CASSIE.

Who will believe my verse in time to come
If it were filled with your most high desert?
Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life and shows not half your
parts.

If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh number number all your graces,
The age to come would say, "This poet lies,
Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earth-
ly faces."

(A pause.) Ah, but it lacks strength from here.
(She continues.)

"So should my papers, yellowed with their age,
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than
tongue,

And your true rights be termed a poet's rage
And stretched meter of an antique song..."

(A pause.) It lacks one wretched couplet, the
culprit of the sonnet.

(Rustling is heard in the trees, and from behind
the R wall, we see WILLIAM. His head pops

over the edge.)

WILL (imitating her). "One wretched couplet, the culprit of the sonnet." (He ducks.)

CASSIE (turning). Who goes there? (No answer.)
The voice is not unfamiliar.

WILL (from behind the wall). Make the accusation clearer!

CASSIE (laughing). I cannot, sir, please come nearer!

WILL. You want to see this mimic mirror?

CASSIE. 'Tis a fool who hides from the waist up!

WILL (rising above the wall). What a follysome wench who will not shut up!

CASSIE. Brother! You insult your sister in this way? The neighbors will hear and rejoice in our quarrels! (WILL climbs over the wall to join her.)

WILL. I care not what the neighbors think!

CASSIE. They eavesdrop, you know.

WILL. Oh, I know. Nothing entertains them more than to keep up with what the Shakespeares' do. Shall we give them a good show? (He eyes a far wall.)

CASSIE (giggling). What shall we do? Stage a bloody battle?

WILL (hushed). Yes, yes. Only it will be very convincing!

CASSIE (afraid). How convincing?

WILL. Fear not, little sister. You are in no danger! I left my sword in the house!

CASSIE. Fool! You haven't got a sword!

WILL. Aren't we sure of ourselves today!

CASSIE. Do not address me in that way!

WILL (baby talk). You cannot endure a moment of play.

CASSIE. I'll match anything you dare to say!

WILL. Try this! I've just returned from a holiday in London! I've purchased the finest sword on

this side of the Thames! I've just been hired to defend the crown! (He begins a swashbuckling routine with a pretend sword.) I am now one of "Our Lady's Secret Servants!" I come to rescue you from the tiresome task called writing!

CASSIE (shouting). Stop! (A pause.) I do not care to continue with this purposeless banter.

I have writing to do.

WILL (insulting her). You ill-humored, gregarious child!

CASSIE. Gregarious child! How dare you call me gregarious!

WILL (laughing). See there! You do not even know what it means!

CASSIE. What means it then? And how do you come to know it?

WILL. I have been called gregarious myself, by an older woman who knows what it means.

CASSIE (jealously). Ha! You've been over to see Miss Hathaway! That's where you've spent your day!

WILL. A wise lass for only sixteen winters, this Cassie. (A pause.) Come, let's get back to entertaining the neighbors! Here's my plan. You start to scream. I, the gallant, will swoop down out of the trees shouting "Fair Cassandra, your fate is in my hands."

CASSIE (reluctantly). Aye, William. Then what? WILL (running to an opposite wall). Then you shout back, "Hurry, William! They have a horse marked for me and a horseman waiting, dressed in black." Give several convincing shrieks!

CASSIE (caught up in it). Then I say, "Brother Will, pray, what's the delay?" You then get caught in the tree that you were swooping out of, and scream "Cassie, Cassie, my forlorn lassie, all is lost!" You assimilate the sounds of horses in the courtyard. Neigh a few times!

WILL. Nay! That will give us away for sure!

CASSIE. Then cry, "A horse! If only I had a

horse, I could pursue my dear sister! Oh, a horse! Oh, a horse! My garden for a horse!" The neighbors then fall out of their chairs. They decide to bargain with you for a horse.

WILL. Yes! And just when we see them approaching, you appear from the front door, carrying a piece of paper, reading aloud, seemingly acting out a story and nothing more!

CASSIE (laughing). Oh, what a joke!

WILL. It's horrible! Shall we do it?

CASSIE (after the laughter subsides). Dear brother, I must remind you! I'm in the middle of my versifying! (She pauses.) Will, can you keep a secret?

WILL. Of course, fair sister!

CASSIE. I am going to take this sonnet to the players! For bargaining!

WILL (in disbelief). What?

CASSIE. This one. (She holds up the paper.) I know it wants improving, especially the last couplet. But surely it's not too bad. I think a player would buy it to perform!

WILL. Let's hear it! I'm sure I could improve it!

CASSIE. You'll take this sonnet straight to your dear lady!

WILL. I would not try such a prank! Think you to be your brother's equal? My writing is far superior to yours.

CASSIE. You do have a few years on me, and some schooling. But, all telling, I write quite well. I notice you are eager enough to hear my recent scribblings.

WILL. You write well for a lass! Let me see this! (He grabs the paper from her, and begins to read it out loud, in a quick way.)

Who will believe my verse in time to come
If it were filled with your most high desert?
Though heaven knows it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life and shows not half

your parts.

(He laughs.) Not displeasing to the ear, dear sister. But pray tell, does not "desert" line-up with "parts?" Is that your rhyme?

CASSIE. It's near enough, is it not?

WILL (smirking). You show your youth with such liberties! You must strive to be disciplined! I'll continue.

If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh number number all your graces,
The age to come would say "This poet lies,
Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly
faces."

What wit! The poet reprimands himself! Only a novice could take such license!

CASSIE. It's charming! It's endearing!

WILL. It's telling! Now child, be a good sister and tell me who this sonnet is written to!

CASSIE (shyly) Will!

WILL. Come on, Cassie lass. Who is this suitor?

CASSIE. An imaginary one!

WILL. The imagery is clear! Tell me who he is!

CASSIE. I shall not!

WILL. I'll not have my sister out in the bushes with an eager lad of sixteen!

CASSIE. You should not speak on such matters!

WILL. Our parents will know if you'll not relent!

CASSIE. All right, I'll tell. (Lying.) It's Richard Quiney.

WILL. Richard Quiney?

CASSIE. Of course.

WILL. You've never been this fond of him! Your sonnet has deep passion in it -- I think you wrote it for a player!

CASSIE. No! It's for Richard, I tell you.

WILL. He's hardly worthy of such a poem! What a waste! I'd better read the rest of the sonnet. So should my papers, yellowed with their age, Be scorned, like an old man of less truth than tongue,

And your true rights be termed a poet's rage
And stretched meter of an antique song..."

CASSIE. I cannot find a satisfactory ending!

WILL. Let me try. How to match your style and
your boring subject matter, that is the question.
Richard Quiney? (He smirks.) My writing
style is far superior to yours, so the couplet
will stand out as different, you know.

CASSIE. You are at liberty to suggest, dear
brother. I cannot say I'll keep it.

WILL. It lacks an image that binds each age
together. You allude to ages to come and ages
of old. You must combine the two to conclude
the thought. Like this: (He clears his throat.)

'But were some child of yours alive that time

You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme.'

CASSIE. Where's the power in that?

WILL. The child! The child! It changes all! In
a child you preserve for posterity.

CASSIE. Only in writing can you preserve for
posterity! I have given it great thought.

WILL. Nay, nay, fair sister. Fair, naive sister!
You'll learn. For a woman, it's childbearing.

For a man, it's the child, the lad, the son!

CASSIE. I think your thoughts are overly ripe
with the process in which it occurs!

WILL. Cassie!

CASSIE. You are obsessed with a woman!

WILL. So?

CASSIE. My advice is that you are too young to
marry!

WILL. I'm the one to be giving advice here, not
you. And my advice about your writing is this: Burn it!

CASSIE. What?

WILL. You must burn it! Take it to fire!

CASSIE. Will, it weren't that ill-rhymed!

WILL. Weren't the rhyming, girl! Think about
what you are to do! Are you hoping to write
for a living? Work with the players?

CASSIE. I've given it little thought.

WILL. As your brother, it's my duty to guide you.

You'll not be writing poetry as a wife and mother.

You'd best be spending your youth learning to cook and mend. You'd better know how to suckle a child and comfort a husband. Times are hard!

He'll never want to read your frivolous work, even if he knows how to read!

CASSIE. I love to write!

WILL. Dearest Cassie, you must listen to me!

Now, stop spending your energies on it. If

Father finds out, he'll whip you fair and square!

CASSIE. He would not!

WILL. What's he want with an unskilled daughter?

Your dowry isn't much at all!

CASSIE. I'm young!

WILL. You should be married already! Look, I'll

take the pages you've been working on this

afternoon. Burn the rest.

CASSIE (near tears). I cannot. I will not.

WILL. Then here. (He grabs the pages.) I'll do it for you.

CASSIE. No! Must you?

(JOAN enters, running.)

JOAN. Aye! Here you are! Cassie, you must be mad today! Have you forgotten your stew again?

CASSIE (frustrated). Is it burning?

JOAN. I tended it, but you'd best be with it when Father comes home.

CASSIE. Thanks, sweet Joan.

WILL. It's exactly as I said with you. Your mind is where it should not be. What if the stew burns? Then what?

CASSIE. We go hungry?

WILL. No, silly! I wish you would listen to reason!

Your family wants what is best!

JOAN. You'd best hurry! Mother is distraught!

CASSIE. But, Will! The papers!

WILL. We'll talk more after dinner.

CASSIE. Give your solemn promise!

WILL. Have faith, little sister!

JOAN (dragging CASSIE). The stew's on fire!

I can smell it from here! (The two girls
exit, and WILL remains a moment looking at
the papers.)

LIGHTS DOWN