

Insights

A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespearean Festival



The Book
of Will

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages. The Study Guide is published by the Utah Shakespeare Festival, 351 West Center Street; Cedar City, UT 84720. Bruce C. Lee, publications manager and editor; Clare Campbell, graphic artist. Copyright © 2019, Utah Shakespeare Festival. Please feel free to download and print The Study Guide, as long as you do not remove any identifying mark of the Utah Shakespeare Festival.

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The Book of Will

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Synopsis: *The Book of Will*

It has been three years since Shakespeare's death, and his closest friends miss him dearly. They have only some of his masterful plays in their possession, and, after hearing a badly-botched version of *Hamlet* at a nearby theatre, they realize that Shakespeare's words are starting to fade into obscurity. They decide all of his original plays need to be found or recreated and published into a book, a definitive collection of his works. "Publish or vanish. That's the choice." So they set out to compile as many of his manuscripts as possible, going head-to-head against a shady publisher, a drunken poet, shrinking resources, and their own mortality.

Characters: *The Book of Will*

Henry Condell: Feisty and hopeful, Henry is forty years old, Shakespeare's friend, and actor in the King's Men.

John Heminges: Reasonable and serious, John is fifty years old, Shakespeare's friend, and financial manager of the King's Men. He is a good man, a gentleman, and owner of the Globe Tap House.

Richard Burbage: A seasoned lion of the stage, loud and proud, Richard is in his fifties and famous across England.

Elizabeth Condell: Savvy and fun, Elizabeth is Condell's wife.

Alice Heminges: John's daughter and alewife, Alice is thirty-five years old, knows everyone, and hangs with the boys.

Rebecca Heminges: John's wife, Rebecca is strong, busy with their grocery business, and a woman who has weathered much but loves her husband, her sons, and God. She is a good wife.

Ben Jonson: Poet laureate of England and friend/rival of Shakespeare, Ben is an amazing drunk, a bear of a man, and surprisingly weepy.

Ed Knight: "Stage manager" for the King's Men, Ed is self-serious and particular.

Ralph Crane: Humble scrivener of the King's Men, Ralph is quick, sure, and quiet.

William Jaggard: Successful if shady publisher of books, plays, and playbills, William is confident in his ability to get what he wants. He is very experienced, very connected, willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done, but an ass.

Isaac Jaggard: William's son, Isaac will inherit the business. He is sensitive, an artist at heart.

Marcus: Printer's apprentice at the Jaggard print shop, twenty-year-old Marcus is nosy but honest.

Composer: Works for Jaggard, young.

Emilia Bassano Lanier: A fiery Italian feminist and poet, Emilia is fifty years old, an independent woman, and a lover of life (and of Shakespeare).

Sir Edward Dering: A book and theatre lover, Edward is sixty years old and the first customer of *The First Folio*.

Anne Hathaway Shakespeare: Shakespeare's now ailing sixty-year-old wife, Anne is strong-willed, a classy lady, a survivor.

Susannah Shakespeare: A good girl and daughter of Shakespeare, Susannah is thirty years old.

Boy Hamlet: A young actor.

Two Barmen: Drunk ruffians.

Crier: A newsboy.

Bernardo, Francisco, Horatio, Marcellus: Actors playing these roles
Fruit Seller

About the Playwright: Lauren Gunderson

By Rachele Hughes

Compelling protagonists (most of them women), modern retellings of history, and science seem to intrigue playwright, screenwriter, and author Lauren Gunderson, and as she starts to spin out stories for the stage, screen, and page, her plot lines and subject matter have created a movement for her work to flood the storytelling world.

At thirty-six years of age, Lauren Gunderson was touted as the most produced living playwright in America for the 2017-2018 season. With over twenty different produced works, her smart blend of science, history, romance, futurism, and intellectual humor has audiences filling theatres across the nation. *American Theatre* magazine ranked Gunderson at the top of the list for 2017-2018 based on her twenty-seven productions. (*American Theatre* excludes any productions of Shakespeare works or of *A Christmas Carol* from its rankings.)

“The stories of discovery, the unfolding of human knowledge, the democracy of method, and the life of scientists. I find deep and thrilling drama in the course of scientific progress and put it onstage as much as possible,” said Gunderson of her sources of inspiration (<http://laurengunderson.com/science-rocks>).

Gunderson was born February 5, 1982 in Atlanta, Georgia. While many playwrights fall into their career after a string of other jobs, Gunderson went into her college years fully committed to the writing life. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, she did refer to a time in her pre-college years when she dreamed of being a physics major; but by the time she enrolled at Emory University she had brought her love of science with her but changed her focus to writing. She earned her bachelor of arts in English/creative writing at Emory University, and her MFA in Dramatic Writing at NYU Tisch, where she was also a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship.

Even before Gunderson earned her BA in 2004, she was receiving attention for her work. Her first produced play, *Parts They Call Deep* (2001), garnered her the winning slot in the 2002 Young Playwrights National Playwriting Competition and was produced off-Broadway by Young Playwrights Inc. as part of the Young Playwrights Festival at the Cherry Lane Theatre.

From the moment her first play was produced, Gunderson has never lost momentum. The past fourteen years have been prolific for Gunderson as she has continued to earn recognition and accolades for her work and her collaborations. Her most recent awards include the Lanford Wilson Award from the Dramatists Guild of America in 2016 and the prestigious 2014 Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for her play, *I and You* (2014). Theatre companies have been keeping her busy with commissions to bring her unique brand of plays to life. She has received commissions from South Coast Repertory (four times), Denver Theatre Company, Crowded Fire Theater, the Alliance Theatre’s Collision Project, Marin Theatre Company, Actor’s Express, Dad’s Garage Theatre, Theatrical Outfit, City University of New York, and

Synchronicity.

Gunderson continues to be in demand because she has a style and writes plots that readers and theatre goers find compelling. Her latest three works give a glimpse into the breadth of her subjects. The characters in her plays include the sisters from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (2017), coauthored with Margot Melcon; women from the French Revolution in the brutal comedy *The Revolutionists* (2017); and the wives and daughters of the Bard's acting troupe in *The Book of Will* (2017).

Gunderson described her own inspiration for her subject matter in a 2016 interview with *The New York Times* writer Rob Weinert-Kendt, "I kind of have three veins: plays about history with a kind of feminist understanding or reinvestigation of history and science; wilder, comedic modern plays, sometimes leaning into farce, often with a thread of Shakespeare in them; and the outliers, which *I and You* certainly is. I don't do a lot of straight naturalism" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/theater/lauren-gunderson-on-i-and-you-a-play-with-an-explosive-twist.html>).

Theatre is not the only venue that has seen Gunderson success. She has worked with MTV, had poetry and scripts published in anthologies and journals, and recently released a children's book based on her first musical *The Amazing Adventures of Dr. Wonderful and Her Dog!*, titled *Dr. Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon*. Highly in demand as a national and international speaker, she covers the "intersection of science, theatre, and arts activism" according to her website, laurengunderson.com. She is currently a playwright in residence at the Playwrights Foundation and a member of Dramatists Guild of America member. She keeps her writing gift honed by contributing to *The Huffington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. She is also in the process of working on several more plays from her home base in San Francisco where she lives with her husband.

Gunderson's star is clearly on the rise with no sign of slowing down. Perhaps, that is in part because, as theatre critic Nelson Pressley has said, "Her plays are an education, reveling in knowledge and detail" (https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/the-book-on-lauren-gunderson-topping-us-theater-charts/2017/12/11/fea557a2-dcf0-11e7-a841-2066faf731ef_story.html?utm_term=.b718fd7475c9).

“Words, Words, Words”

Hamlet, 2.2.192

By David G. Anderson

Imagine if a collection of notoriously sloshed seventeenth-century thespians with their coterie of zany friends and family were to conjure up a scheme that would change the course of, not just literature, but history itself. These inebriated players were known as the King’s Men and had trod the boards with their heralded late friend and playwright, William Shakespeare. Holding nightly court, post-show, in the Globe Tap House, they lament and are aggrieved by the piracy and bastardization of one of the era’s greatest wordsmiths. “To be or not to be... / Aye there’s the point” (Lauren Gunderson, Dramatists Play Service, Inc., *The Book of Will*, 1.1.1–2). The world hadn’t yet invented artistic property, intellectual, or copyright attorneys. The first copyright law didn’t exist until the Statute of Anne in 1709. These friends were also acutely aware that Shakespeare had been woefully derelict in fostering any legacy by assembling any reliable manuscripts.

In the early 1620s, after Richard Burbage’s death, Henry Condell and John Heminges were not only the last of the King’s Men, but also the residual two of what you might call a literary tontine. They decided to undertake the Everest-task of gathering and publishing in a single volume all of Shakespeare’s plays. “Just to have them all together, so we know they’re safe” (Gunderson, 1.5.125–26), pipes Condell in Lauren Gunderson’s excellent play, *The Book of Will*. Gunderson’s brilliant pen is on full display as she carefully weaves lackluster historical facts, imagination with anachronistic flashes, and reflective epiphanies unveiling earnest human emotion into a dramady of—can we with modest hyperbolizing say—“Shakespearean” proportions.

Imagine Gunderson, the most produced living playwright of the last few years, writing a play that not only captures Shakespeare’s artistic acumen, but also the ephemeral/transformational capacity of theatre itself. Her shrewd allusions to many “inside” references to passages from his plays add an additional portion of theatrical crème de la crème.

Heminges, Condell, and Burbage were more than artistic colleagues. As Paul Collins points out, “When William Shakespeare died in 1616, his will included a proviso directing ‘to my fellows John Hemings, Richard Burbage, and Henry Condell, 26s. 8d. a piece to buy them rings,’” (*The Book of William*, Bloomsbury USA, p.14). Globe documents revealed all three being shareholders from the onset of the theatre. The last decade Heminges’s name appears first, designating him the largest shareholder and principal.

It is vitally important to note that playwrights through the seventeenth centuries did not own their work. The scripts were owned by the company of players that performed the plays. “Plays neither interested nor rewarded publishers: a play was an event, and the money was in the staging, in the receipts at the door. On a good night, the Globe Theatre could handle an audience of three thousand, paying anywhere from a penny to a sixpence, and would have taken in far more than the paltry two pounds the King’s Men stood to earn from permanently selling a play manuscript to a publisher. . . . His company didn’t fuss much over the preservation or publication of his plays for the simple reason that it was scarcely worth their time” (Collins, p.17–18).

Imagine the obstacles facing our protagonists: first, money; secondly, the gathering of plays that were in quarto editions, some legally owned by other parties; thirdly, the patching together of plays like *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Lear* through prompt books, stage directions, and fading memories, along with other unsanctioned counterfeits from imprecise sycophantic plagiarists. Lastly, they needed a printer, one with massive capability.

Imagine the most improbable real estate for printers, book hawkers, and pubs. All three insti-

tutions lined the courtyard, “around St. Paul’s making it the absolute center of the British book trade. This was by design, as having printers close at hand made it easy for the crown to control the country’s literature and thus . . . its thinking—a vital power in a dangerously heretical era of vying Catholic and Protestant ideas. All printers had to clear their works with a government censor. A 1596 decree by Queen Elizabeth also limited the operation of printing presses to London” (Collins, p.10). With so much time-consuming censorship, the British book industry was sorely curtailed and a severely oppressed industry.

Now imagine the most improbable printer/publisher for the First Folio.

William Jaggard was somewhat unique in that he had perspective from both sides of the book industry, selling and printing. He began hawking books in the shadow of St. Paul’s Cathedral in 1580. Having his thumb on the pulse of British book sales primed him for opening his own print shop in 1595. “Jaggard scored a hit with his very first title: *The Booke of Secrets of Albertus Magnus*. It was a book of occult alchemy” (Collins, p.10). Sounds perfect for a wizard like Harry Potter doesn’t it? Circumventing the censors, the shrewd Jaggard employed the caveat, “For Entertainment Purposes Only: ‘Use this booke for thy recreation (as thou art wont to use the book of Fortune) for there is assuredly nothing herein promised but to further thy delight” (Collins, p. 10).

Greed must have enticed and motivated Jaggard when soon after he discovered a manuscript, or at minimum a single orphan sheet, “bearing two unpublished sonnets by a popular local playwright. The first sonnet was a perfectly serviceable example of the genre, but the second was another matter altogether: *When my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her though I know she lies. . . .* The sonnets were written for a patron several years earlier, when [Shakespeare’s] burgeoning career was on hiatus due to a three-season closure of London theaters by bubonic plague. These sonnets had never been meant for publication and had, indeed, never been registered or sold to any printer. . . . By interspersing the two genuine sonnets with three more lyrics lifted from another newly pirated play by the same playwright. . . . and in turn, mixed in with fifteen other poems, stripped of attribution, by other poets who sounded rather similar in style . . . clap some fancy leather covers on, and you have, just barely, a ‘book’ . . . *The Passionate Pilgrime: By W. Shakespeare,*” (Collins, p.11-12). Jaggard printed and reprinted this book several times. Each time the sound of clinking coins in the coffer reverberating in his ears. The dodgy gamble paid off. This and a multitude of other books made him the “Barnes and Noble” of his era.

Shakespeare, either not having enough time or money to deal with the grubby-handed rip-off, let it be. But, “William Jaggard bears the curious distinction . . . [as] . . . the only man in the world that we know Shakespeare disliked,” (Collins, p.13). So, it must have been with pinched noses that Heminges and Condell crossed Jaggard’s sleazy threshold, where not surprisingly, they found an enterprising printing operation. Noteworthy—Jaggard died three weeks before the printing was complete—poetic justice?

At that time there was no “First Folio,” it was simply, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies*, printed in folio. Condell and Heminges inserted into Shakespeare’s scripts *actus and scaena*, acts and scenes, that resembled chapters where a reader might reasonably pause. They, “transmuted handwritten actor’s sheaves into typeset literature. They transformed a couple of hours of dialogue at the Globe Theatre into something that could be read (studied) for days or even weeks,” (Collins, p.28).

A First Folio was recently auctioned at Sotheby’s in London for \$5.2 million, making it worth fifty-five times its weight in gold. Peter Selley, the English-Literature expert/auctioneer at Sotheby’s flatly stated, “It’s the most important work in English literature, and indeed, the most important secular work of all time,” (Collins, p.8).

The Book of Will might appear at first to be frothy entertainment, but the reward is a spectacular showing of what the works of Shakespeare meant to those that knew him best. Their labors exemplified extreme “Will” power and could easily be celebrated as the most decisive cultural undertaking in history. Their remarkable stage accomplishments pale in comparison.

What to think of a world where, “Mark Antony would neither praise nor bury, for we would have no *Julius Caesar*, and as *Twelfth Night* would ever arrive, none would be born to greatness, nor achieve it, nor have it thrust upon them. *Macbeth*, *the Tempest*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Comedy of Errors* would be mere stage words—and all the world not be a stage,” (Collins, p.32). All those “words, words, words” unprinted, it’s unimaginable!