

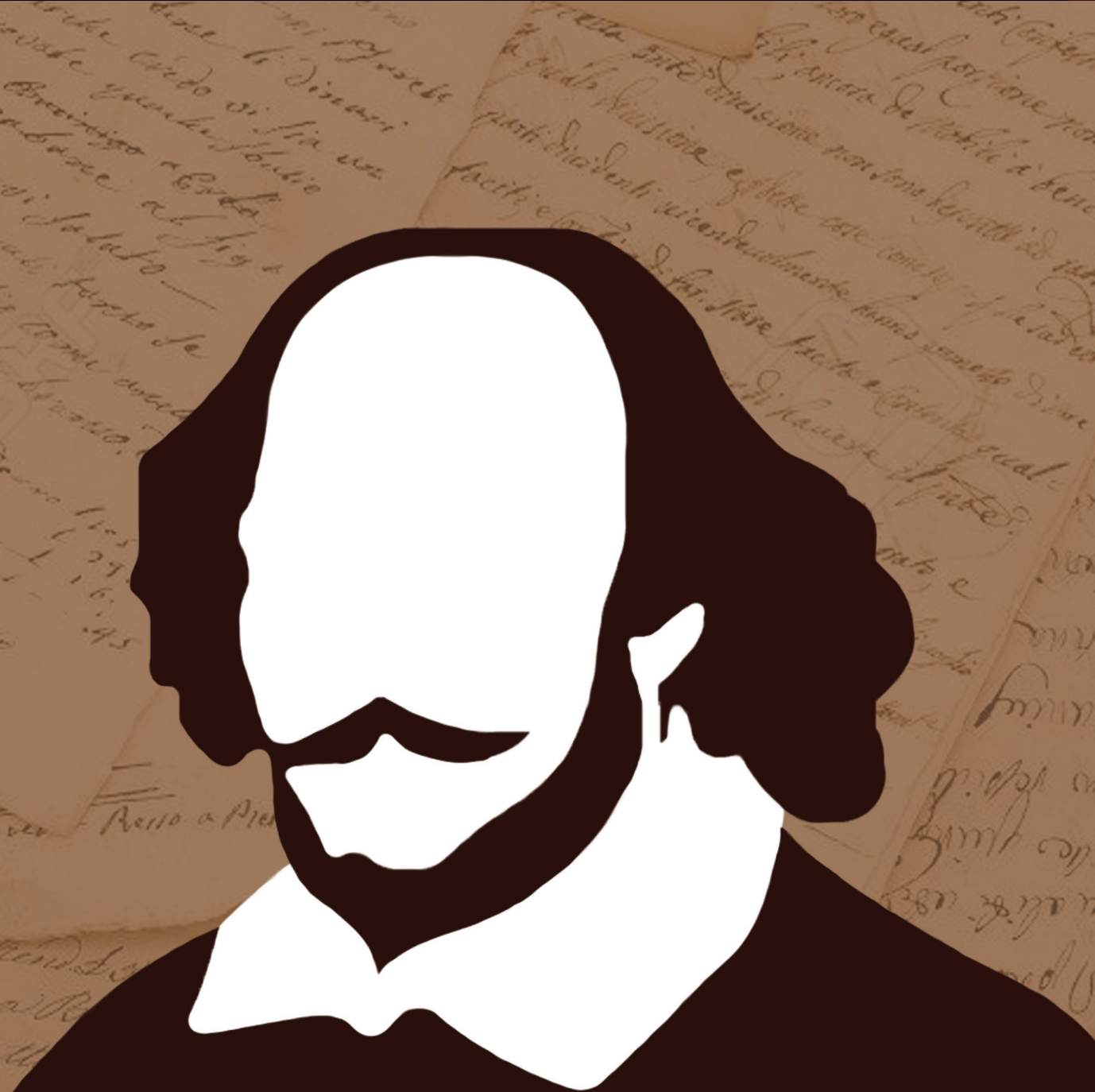
The Book of Will

Written by
Lauren Gunderson

Directed by
Bonnie J. Monte

A Know-the-Show
Audience Guide
researched and written by
the Education Department of

The
SHAKESPEARE
Theatre of
New Jersey





In this Guide

- The Life of William Shakespeare2
- Shakespeare’s London3
- About the Playwright: Lauren Gunderson4
- *The Book of Will*: An Introduction.....5
- The Folio: Printing and Publishing in the 17th Century6
- The Actors: The King’s Men7
- Who’s Who9
- Commentary and Criticism.....10
- In This Production11
- Interesting Links and Sources.....12

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The Life Of Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though

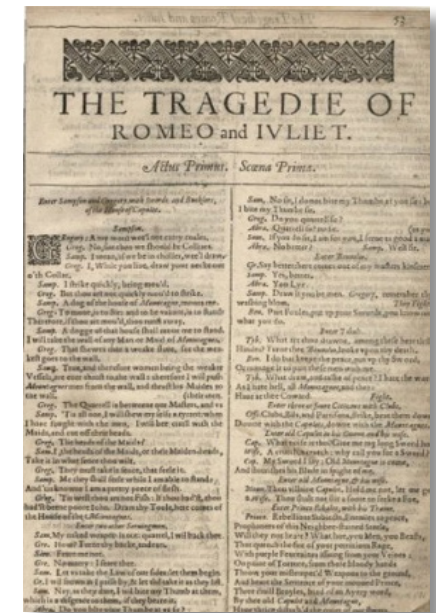


William Shakespeare, represented in a copper engraving by Martin Droeshout.

little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592, he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare's plays were not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608, Shakespeare's involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called quartos, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.

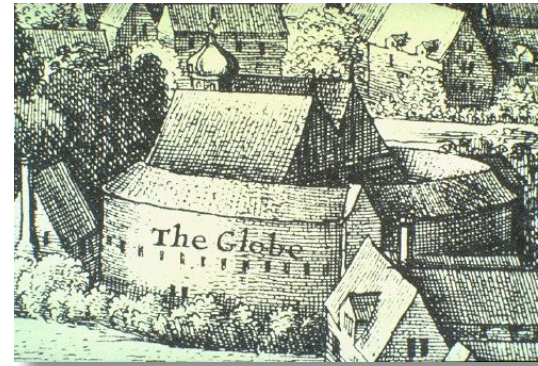


From a copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's London

London, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most life centered around making a living or going to church, one of the main sources of diversion for Londoners was the theatre. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appeasing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare's plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare's day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare's company of actors, was easily accessible to Londoners and proved to be an active social center. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private



The Old Globe theatre in 1642.

homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors were perceived as low status citizens, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade

work. The aristocracy's desire for entertainment, however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron.

Shakespeare's acting company was originally named "Lord Chamberlain's Men" after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later, under the patronage of King James I, they were known as "The King's Men," an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Frequent outbreaks of the Black Plague killed thousands. Theatres, shops, and the government all shut down during these periods in the hopes of preventing further contagion.

THE SONNETS

You may have thought that Shakespeare wrote sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of "stepping stone" to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.

About the Playwright

LAUREN GUNDERSON

Lauren Gunderson was born on February 2nd, 1982 and grew up just outside of Atlanta in Deatur, Georgia. At 10 years old, she found a love for live theatre and began acting professionally in Atlanta. Gunderson quickly discovered the power of being a playwright as opposed to an actor, and she was able to create the hero characters in her own stories. This would lead her to complete a Bachelor of Arts in English and Creative Writing during her undergrad at Emory University, with a focus on Southern Literature and Drama. She continued writing plays, and was awarded a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship to complete a Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing at NYU Tisch. She is currently one of the most produced living playwrights in the United States, having topped American Theatre Magazine's list three times – most recently for the 2022/2023 season. Gunderson is a feminist advocate, and continues to focus much of her writing on historically important female figures in science and literature.

Gunderson says Shakespeare “ignited her ambitions as a playwright” and so she was inspired to write a piece to honor him. She wrote *The Book of Will* as a commission for Denver Center Theatre Company. The piece was scheduled to premiere in 2017, but was added to the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's Summer lineup that same year, before its first

performance in Denver. In 2018, the play won the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/American Critics Association New Play Award, Gunderson's second time winning the award after her critically acclaimed work *I and You* in 2014. The play received its West End London debut last year in a co-production between Octagon Theatre Bolton, Queen's Theatre Hornchurch and Shakespeare North Playhouse. *The Book of Will* continues to be produced across America and internationally.



Lauren Gunderson

In 2023, Lauren Gunderson's new play *anthropology* premiered at the Hampsted Theatre in London, England, and her new play *Artemisia* commissioned by Forward Theater Company in Madison, Wisconsin premiered there in April. Her new musical *The Time Traveller's Wife*, a collaboration based on the novel of the same name and with Grammy Award winning songwriters Joss Stone and Dave Stewart, received its world premiere on the West End at the Apollo Theatre in October 2023. She was most recently awarded The William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theatre Award at The Official Theatre Festival of Kansas in April, where her 2016 play *The Revolutionists* was produced.

The Book of Will

An Introduction

Our play begins 1619 three years after the death of William Shakespeare. In the Globe Tap House (the tavern next to The Globe Theatre), we meet three members of Shakespeare's acting troupe, the King's Men — John Heminges, Henry Condell, and Richard Burbage. The friends sit together at their favorite table while Alice, John's daughter, serves them ale. The three old friends are denouncing a fake version of *Hamlet* put on by another theater who is co-opting Shakespeare's title and name to market their show.

The three relive their glory days, sharing stories of their time onstage. Their reminiscing is interrupted, however, by the false Boy Hamlet from the aforementioned production and an argument quickly breaks out between a barman friend of the young actor and the King's Men. Burbage has the final word (or words) as he recites snippets of famous speech after famous speech to publicly shame the intruders from the rival company.

The next day, we learn that Burbage has tragically died in his sleep, and at the Globe Tap House, his friends all drink to his memory after a short ceremony on The Globe Theatre stage.

WHAT DOES "FOLIO" MEAN?

A folio is a book or pamphlet made up of one or more sheets of paper. Each piece of paper is folded once to make 4 pages. This is much like how our books are printed today. The difference between a quarto, octavo and a folio is how the paper is folded. A folio is folded once and a quarto is folded twice over into fourths, and the octavo folded three times into eighths.

In a final toast between Alice, Henry and John, they realize that Burbage was the only actor who had memorized ALL of Shakespeare's plays. Now, with no real record of Shakespeare's plays, his life's work (and their's) may be lost forever. This sobering realization is interrupted by Henry,

who, in a burst of genius, has the idea to collect all of Shakespeare's plays and to assemble them into a published folio. John is hesitant at first, but the possibility of seeing his old friend's works live on after he is gone is an offer he can't refuse. The next morning, they go to see Ed Knight, the Globe "stage manager," and ask for every manuscript he has. Ed however only has five of Shakespeare's plays. The rest were lost when the original Globe Theatre burned down in 1613. Luckily, after banding together and collecting as many manuscripts, prompt books and actor sides (cue scripts) as they can, the group manages to find a majority of Shakespeare's plays. Just as they begin to celebrate, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's friendly rival and England's first Poet Laureate, storms in. He accuses the group of publishing Will's work without telling him, but it doesn't take long to figure out that William Jaggard has illegally printed false plays under Shakespeare's name. Now, the King's Men must either work with Jaggard or risk losing William Shakespeare's work forever...

The Folio

Printing & Publishing in the 17th Century

Today we can print in a variety of methods and magically have a sheet of paper in our hands. Printing in the 16th century was an arduous, lengthy, and expensive task. The first printing press originated in China around 800 AD. TO create a single printed page, printers would chisel an entire page of text backwards onto a wood block, apply ink, then press the inked block onto paper. This was a labor-intensive project which meant that books were rare and expensive; most being printed or copied by hand by monks and priests primarily for religious texts. In Germany in 1440, the mechanical printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg, and thanks to his invention books became considerably more accessible to the public and reading for leisure, mostly among the educated upper classes, began to be the norm. Reading material other than religious texts became more common. By the mid-fifteenth century, printing had become completely mechanized in Europe.

As compared to the rest of the continent, England was slow to implement mechanized printing. The first

recorded instance of mechanized printing in England is dated to 1476. The slow implementation was furthered by Queen Elizabeth's 1586 decision to limit mechanical printing presses only to London, Oxford, and Cambridge. While the Crown acknowledged printing as a prime opportunity for the Church (with widespread printing of the Bible and other religious texts), it was first and

foremost a potential threat to the status quo as well as the Crown's ability to control the flow and sharing of ideas. All print shops and book sellers were required to clear their work with government censors, leaving British publishing effectively stunted.

It was rare for plays to be published and printed; the high cost of printing meant it was a practice reserved for "important" things. When plays were printed, they were generally churned out quickly and as inexpensively as possible. Full manuscripts were rarely kept unless a theater company wanted to revive them in the future. The notion of Intellectual property and copyright did not exist yet, and publishers did not need to pay for the rights to a person's work. Accordingly, multiple versions of the same play, poem, or book could and would be printed by different publishers and circulated at the same time, often with glaring errors and pirated false copy.

WHERE ARE THE FIRST FOLIOS NOW?

Scholars believe that around 750 copies of the First Folio were produced. As of 2016, there were 235 First Folios known to be in existence. 82 of the Folios belong to the Folger Shakespeare Library, an American collection and research center located in Washington, DC. Meisei University in Tokyo, Japan owns the second-most copies with 12, and the New York Public Library has the third-most with 5.



The Actors

The King's Men

The First Folio contains a page following the table of contents that names the twenty-six “Principal Actors” of the plays contained within the First Folio. This list includes editors of the portfolio John Heminges and Henry Condell, as well as actors who had come and gone, like William Kempe (the company’s first clown) and others. The list is not a comprehensive account of every actor who had performed with Shakespeare’s acting company, but rather a tribute to the relationship between Shakespeare and the actors he had written for during his lifetime.

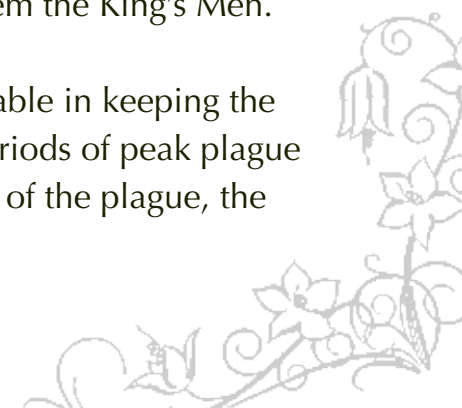
This company of actors did not begin with a King for their patron. The company began under the patronage of Henry Carey, the 1st Lord Hunsdon, and was reportedly known as Hunsdon’s Men from 1564-67. In 1585, Lord Hunsdon inherited the title of Lord Chamberlain, and became the patron for a separate company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Accounts from this year contain the first clear proof of Shakespeare’s role in the company as a stakeholder and trustee. In addition to serving as the central playwright for the company, Shakespeare was also a performer; evidence suggests that Shakespeare may have often played the older characters with smaller roles in his plays, including Flavius

in *Julius Caesar*, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the Ghost in *Hamlet*.

Theatres in London closed from 1592-94 due to the Bubonic Plague, and two years after the reemergence of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1596, Lord Chamberlain died. The company was left to his son George Carey, the second Lord Hunsdon, once again making the company Hunsdon’s Men, until Carey himself became Lord Chamberlain in 1597, making the company the Lord Chamberlain’s Men one final time.

When Queen Elizabeth I died in March of 1603, she was left without a biological heir, and per her request was succeeded by James I. King James had a great interest in literature and the arts. He was tutored earlier in life by George Buchanan, one of Scotland’s most lauded poets, and King James himself published several books and pamphlets on dark magic and witchcraft. In May of 1603, within a month of King James’ ascension to the British throne, he became the new patron for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, rechristening them the King’s Men.

This new royal patronage was invaluable in keeping the company afloat, especially during periods of peak plague transmission. During these outbreaks of the plague, the



company traditionally would go on tour to the countryside in an attempt to evade the crowded city of London. They continued to do so most summers and autumns from 1603 onwards, however, they also had the ability to perform before the royal court. These court performances paid handsomely and increased their reputation with the nobility. When not on tour or performing at court, they would otherwise perform at the Globe Theatre in Southwark, which was became company's home beginning in 1599.

Shakespeare retired to his home in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, but the company continued to exist and enjoy success until 1642, when Parliament was moved to close all London at the beginning of the English Civil War. Theatre companies did not return to the city until the Restoration eighteen years after their closure in 1642. The new "King's Company", established in 1660, bore little resemblance to the company that had been shut down eighteen years prior.



TOP: Preliminary design sketch for the "Tap House" by Sarah Beth Hall for the 2024 STNJ production of *The Book of Will*.

BOTTOM: A photo (l to r) of Heminges (Tony Marble), Condell (Michael Steward Allen), and Burbage (Brent Harris) in the Tap House. photo by Avery Brunkus

The Book of Will

Who's Who

THE KING'S MEN

HENRY CONDELL - feisty, loyal and optimistic friend and actor

JOHN HEMINGES - owner of The Globe Tap House, former actor and manager of The King's Men

RICHARD BURBAGE - seasoned "lion" of the stage, famous across England

KING'S MEN FAMILY & FRIENDS

ALICE HEMINGES - John's daughter and alewife of the Globe Tap House.

BEN JONSON - The Poet Laureate of England, friend and rival of Shakespeare.

ELIZABETH CONDELL - Henry's wife

REBECCA HEMINGES - John's wife

ED KNIGHT - The "stage manager" for the King's Men.

RALPH CRANE - A scrivener of the King's Men.

JAGGARD PRINT SHOP

WILLIAM JAGGARD - A successful, cutthroat publisher of books. Owns his own prominent print shop.

ISAAC JAGGARD - William's son, set to inherit the business.

MARCUS - The lead compositor for Jaggard's Print Shop.

OTHERS

EMILIA BASSANO LANIER - an Italian poet; formerly Shakespeare's lover and the first published female poet in England.

ANNE HATHAWAY SHAKESPEARE - Shakespeare's ailing widow

SUSANNAH SHAKESPEARE - Shakespeare's eldest daughter

SIR EDWARD DERING - a wealthy patron of theatre and literature

BOY HAMLET - a young actor



Costume design renderings (left to right) for John Heminges, Emilia Bassano, and Isaac Jaggard created by Hugh Hanson for the 2024 STNJ production of *The Book of Will*.



Commentary & Criticism

THE PLAYWRIGHT ON SHAKESPEARE:

"Shakespeare is a soul explorer as well as a merriment maker. It's the highs and lows that keep me coming back to Shakespeare's work. The incredible high art of his rich philosophy and grippingly human characters, as well as the silliness and spectacle and revelry that satisfies me on a giddy level."

-LAUREN GUNDERSON, CU PRESENTS (2022)

THE BOOK OF WILL AND THE ARTS:

"*The Book of Will* joyfully celebrates the passion of these group of people to keep the words of Shakespeare alive and is a celebration of the importance of the arts in one's lives. These characters know in the core of their beings what the words written by Shakespeare stir within them, and not having his plays preserved would be a tragedy."

-BILL CHOY, THE SISKIYOU DAILY NEWS (2018)

THE BOOK OF WILL AND EDUCATING:

"What Gunderson brings isn't some tired history lesson. It sparks the type of ambition we've all felt while trying to keep something around."

-CHRIS ARNESON, BROADWAYWORLD (2017)

THE BOOK OF WILL AND ACTING:

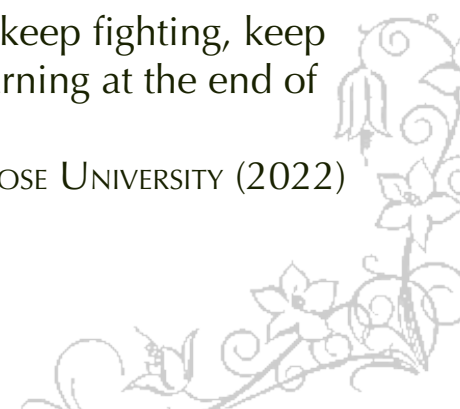
"[Lauren Gunderson] gives a real feel for theater life and what it means to be an actor; you sense this is a work of both scholarship and love... [*The Book of Will*] serves as homage to those who sacrificed to make the First Folio happen and to Shakespeare's magnificent words."

-JULIET WITTMAN, WESTWORD (2017)

THE PLAYWRIGHT ON WRITING:

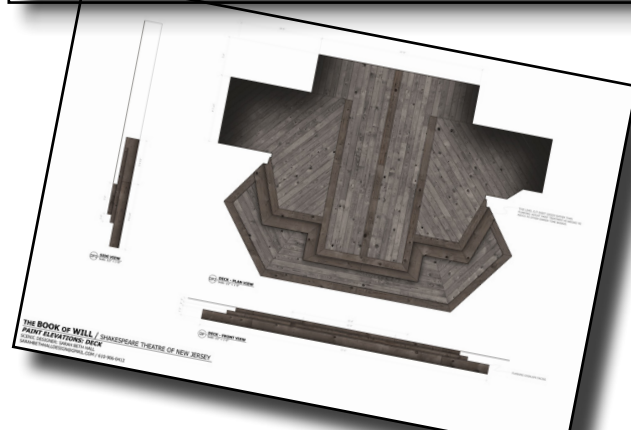
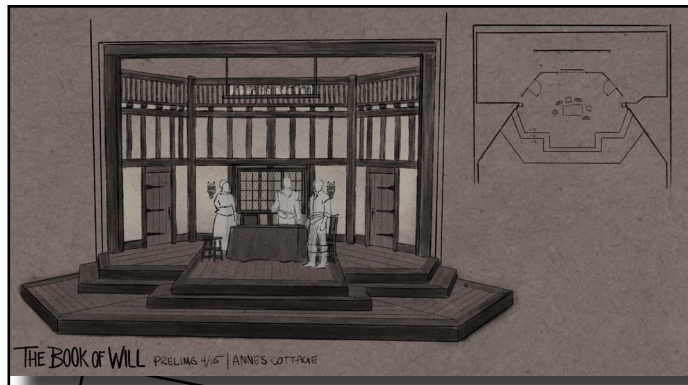
"... I don't end plays with violence, depression, or darkness. There's always some hope. Now it's not the cheesy, "everyone wins" kind of hope. It is a hard kind of hope. But it makes the characters and hopefully the audience want to keep fighting, keep going, keep living, and keep learning at the end of the play."

-LAUREN GUNDERSON, ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY (2022)



In This Production

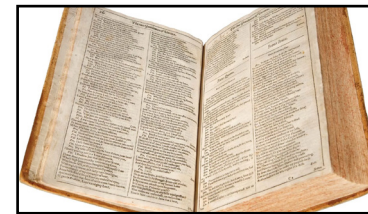
Scenic sketches and renderings by Sarah Beth Hall, Scenic Designer, and selected costume renderings by Hugh Hanson, Costume Designer, for the 2024 Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey production of *The Book of Will* directed by Bonnie J. Monte.



Interesting Links & Sources

A DIY Guide to printing folios and quartos from our friends at
The Folger Shakespeare Library:

www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeare-in-print/diy-quarto/



That Shakespeare Life, "How was the First Folio Physically
Made?". A podcast on the making of the First Folio
www.cassidycash.com/what-was-the-first-folio-made-from-adrian-edwards-ep-287



Lauren Gunderson's Website
www.laurengunderson.com

