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SF PERUSALS

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

BY EMMA WHIPDAY

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Shakespeare's Sister was first performed as a staged reading at the Theatre Royal Haymarket as part of the Theatre Royal Haymarket Masterclass Trust's Pitch Your Play scheme, supported by the Noël Coward Foundation and the Vernon Charitable Trust, September 2015.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE . . . . . Remmie Milner
DOROTHY CLAYTON/SUSANNAH . . . . . Beth Eyre
LUCY MORGAN/HAMNET . . . . . Roseanna Brear
WILLIAM UNDERHILL/PHILIP HENSLOWE/SOLDIER 2 . . . Simon Blake
JOHN SHAKESPEARE/SERGEANT . . . . . Andy Murton
MARY SHAKESPEARE . . . . . Clare Bloomer
NED ALLEYN . . . . . Dino Kelly
DICK BURBAGE . . . . . George Johnston
WILL SHAKESPEARE . . . . . Mike Evans
JOAN HENSLOWE . . . . . Simona Bitmaté
AUGUSTINE PHILLIPS . . . . . Joseph Dawson
THOMAS EGERTON/SOLDIER 1 . . . . . Tim Harker
NARRATOR . . . . . Brian McMahon

Creative team

DIRECTOR . . . . . Asia Osborne
PRODUCER . . . . . James Marsden
LIGHTING . . . . . Andy Peregrine
MUSIC . . . . . Sam Brown

This production was revived for the King's College London Shakespeare Festival, 'What You Will', as part of the Shakespeare400 celebrations, February 2016. James Law joined the original cast as William Underhill/Philip Henslowe/Soldier 2.

To my parents,
with love,

and

in memory of
Emily Stiff.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

"Let me imagine, since the facts are so hard to come by,
what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted
sister, called Judith, let us say."

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

This is not a true story.

The Judith Shakespeare that appears in these pages did not exist. Shakespeare did have a sister, called Joan; she married a hatter, and lived out her life in Stratford-upon-Avon. To our knowledge, she never wrote a play. *Shakespeare's Sister* imagines what might have happened if she had.

When Woolf invented a brief history of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*, she suggested that it would have been impossible for any woman to write the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Woolf's Judith ran away to London, aged sixteen, to write plays, but the men of the theatre laughed in her face. She had an affair with actor-manager Nick Greene, became pregnant by him, and killed herself.

I want to tell a very different tale about Judith Shakespeare. My play does not show that a poet's heart is incompatible with a woman's body, and it does not suggest that for a woman, sex and death must go together. Instead, I explore how it would have been impossible for a woman to write the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare, because of the familial, societal, economic and political pressures that shaped her world. I also want to challenge the isolation of Woolf's female playwright – more than one woman may have wanted to make plays in Elizabethan England, and more than one man may have been willing to help her.

This play reimagines the life of a canonical writer from the perspective of those who were forbidden the roles of actor and writer: the women who lived on the edge of the world of the theatre, but couldn't inhabit it. My play is populated with characters an Elizabethan actor would have recognised: Edward Alleyn, Richard Burbage, Philip Henslowe, his step-daughter Joan, Lucy Morgan, Dorothy Clayton, Augustine Phillips and Thomas Egerton all existed, though I've taken some liberties with dates and circumstances. In peopling Elizabethan London with the names and personalities that walked its streets, I've tried to bring to life the rich, dirty, and astonishing world of early modern theatre-makers. I've also tried to suggest some of the ways in which the challenges they faced resonate with the London we know today: Judith and the players face unemployment and debt in a plague-ridden economic depression, in a sexist society where women are freely objectified and their freedoms are curtailed, under a government battling religious extremism in a climate

of fear and suspicion. The liberties I have taken, and the stories I have told, are my own.

Like Judith, I have found that a play can be dreamed up alone, but it can only come to life with the help of others. Among those others, I must thank Hazel Kerr, Blayne George, Josh Brown and Kezia Newson at Masterclass, along with the Theatre Royal Haymarket, the Noël Coward Foundation and the Vernon Charitable Trust, for making the staged reading of this play possible. I must also thank Asia Osborne and Brian McMahon, for brilliance, encouragement and dreaming with me from the very beginning; James Marsden for joining our pitching team; and all the cast and creative team for being utterly wonderful. Thanks to my colleagues at King's, and particularly Gordon McMullan for including my play in the Shakespeare400 celebrations; to Sarah Wolf and Felicity Barks at Samuel French; to Penny Woolcock *(*and the support of the Arvon Foundation*)* for the advice that shaped this play; to Oskar Cox Jensen, for reading, re-reading and writing by my side; and to my friends and family, too many to name, for their support. A play can only be made together with a community of friends and collaborators, and I have been very lucky in mine.

Emma Whipday
February 2016

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Emma Whipday is a Teaching Fellow in Shakespeare and Early Modern English Literature at King's College London. She is also a Globe Education Lecturer at Shakespeare's Globe. Emma studied English at Oxford, and has received an MA and PhD in Shakespeare from University College London (UCL). She has taught at UCL; Brasenose College, Oxford; and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Emma is a winner of the Masterclass 2015 'Pitch Your Play' competition. She is an Associate Writer for Oxford-based theatre company Reverend Productions, which has staged her adaptations of classic novels at the Edinburgh Fringe and various Oxford colleges and gardens. Her short plays have been performed in the Old Vic Tunnels and at an Old Vic New Voices Showcase. *Shakespeare's Sister* is Emma's first original full-length play.

Emma has directed "practice as research" productions of Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and "The Tragedy of Merry" from *Two Lamentable Tragedies* at UCL. She has run workshops on early modern drama at the Wellcome Collection, the London Renaissance Seminar, the Huntington Library in California and the Shakespeare400 Festival at King's College London; and has given public lectures at Shakespeare's Globe, Knole House for the National Trust, TEDx at Goodenough College, Somerville College Chapel and UCL. Emma has spoken about her research on BBC Radio Oxford, and has published articles in academic journals and essay collections on: Elizabethan domestic murder; domestic tragedy; 'practice as research'; and the RSC 2014 'Roaring Girls' season.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE, 19
Judith is bright, talented, impetuous and intense.

SUSANNAH SHAKESPEARE, 9
Susannah is precocious and affectionate
(can be doubled with Dorothy).

HAMNET SHAKESPEARE, 6
Hamnet is sweet and naïve (can be doubled with Lucy).

AUGUSTINE PHILLIPS ('PHIL'), mid 20s
Phil is laddish, calculating and self-interested.

EDWARD ALLEYN ('NED'), 26
Ned is a charismatic and successful actor.

WILLIAM UNDERHILL, early 40s
William is steady, successful and well off. Warwickshire burr.

JOHN SHAKESPEARE, 50s
John is husband to Mary and father to Judith and Will; he is a handsome, popular, confident man gone to seed.

MARY SHAKESPEARE, 50s
Mary is wife to John and mother to Judith and Will; she is an intelligent and affectionate woman, but poverty and loss of stability have worn her down.

RICHARD BURBAGE ('DICK'), early 20s
Richard is talented and engaging, but with a teenage rebelliousness. Cockney accent.

WILL SHAKESPEARE, 26
Will is ambitious and brilliant, but has not yet achieved the success or recognition he dreams of.

PHILLIP HENSLOWE ('HENSLOWE'), early 40s
Henslowe is a theatre manager, brothel owner and impresario, and a prosperous and canny man. Cockney accent.

JOAN HENSLOWE, early 20s
Joan is Henslowe's daughter; she is reserved and sharp, but passionate and protective. Cockney accent.

LUCY MORGAN, late teens
Lucy is affectionate, vain, sweet and seems very young. Cockney accent.

DOROTHY CLAYTON, early 30s
Dorothy is a cross-dressing woman with charisma and physical power. Cockney accent.

SERGEANT
A self-important petty thug (can be doubled with John). Cockney accent.

SOLDIER 1
Taciturn and violent (can be doubled with Egerton). Cockney accent.

SOLDIER 2
A complacent bully (can be doubled with Henslowe).

THOMAS EGERTON ('EGERTON'), 40s
Chivalrous, powerful, secret, a gentleman.

JAILOR
Dutiful and compassionate (can be doubled with Ned). Cockney accent.

ACT ONE

Early Summer, 1592. **JOHN SHAKESPEARE***'s house, Stratford.*

It is a substantial house, but with the faded and makeshift air of gradual poverty. We are in a room at the front of the house. Upstage, a door and window open to the street beyond.

The furniture is sparse, but all is neat and clean. A pot hangs in the fireplace, stage right.

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE *sits on the floor, an inkpot and a pile of ink-splattered pages at her side, more pages resting in her lap. She scribbles with energy.*

JUDITH *(in a low voice)* Must I go alone? No – would you send me there alone? I will, my child – no – I must.

A face appears at the window. It is **SUSANNAH**.

SUSANNAH What are you writing?

JUDITH *moves to cover the pages, but knocks the inkpot with her hand.*

JUDITH Oh!

She rights it almost instantly, but the damage is done – her hands are stained, and her dress is spotted. She dabs with her handkerchief.

The face at the window disappears. Enter **SUSANNAH**, *contrite, through the front door.*

SUSANNAH Oh, Aunt Judith – it will wash clean, I am sure!

JUDITH Susannah, my sweet, you must try not to surprise so –

SUSANNAH Oh, do not preach, Aunty, I have enough of that from Mama. Are you writing to Father?

JUDITH I have no need. The players passed through Canterbury Thursday last, your Grandpa said – they should be here by the morrow.

SUSANNAH They did not come last summer.

JUDITH Last summer there was no plague. This year the players are driven from the city, your father with them – driven to us! He will come soon, little one.

A face appears at the window. It is **HAMNET**.

SUSANNAH Is that your play?

JUDITH Hush! Do not speak of it so loud.

SUSANNAH But is it?

HAMNET *(from the window)* Mama says plays are unmoral.

JUDITH Hamnet, my dear, you must not –

Enter **HAMNET**, *not at all contrite, through the front door.*

HAMNET Why are all plays unmoral?

JUDITH *(gathering up her pages)* It's immoral, Hamnet.

HAMNET Aunt Judith, what's immoral?

JUDITH It means something God does not like.

HAMNET Then God does not like plays.

JUDITH Of course he does –

HAMNET But they are unmoral –

SUSANNAH Immoral, Hamnet –

HAMNET You didn't know that –

SUSANNAH I did indeed –

HAMNET You didn't once correct me –

JUDITH Come, come, you two!

HAMNET But she –

SUSANNAH But I –

JUDITH Shall I tell your papa you are ill-mannered when he comes?

HAMNET Papa?

JUDITH *eases up a floorboard, and hides the quill, ink, and papers beneath.*

SUSANNAH I did not know of that.

JUDITH And if you would continue not to know, Susannah, I should be greatly obliged.

HAMNET Truly – Papa?

SUSANNAH Yes, Hamnet. Oh, I do like a secret –

HAMNET I do not believe in Papa.

SUSANNAH Don't be silly, Hamnet.

JUDITH Why not, chuck?

HAMNET I have never seen him.

SUSANNAH Of course you have.

JUDITH Do you not recall? It is two summers since – but he stayed for above a month. He would dandle you upon his knee –

HAMNET I do not believe it.

SUSANNAH Well, you shall, Hamnet, for you shall see him.

JUDITH He should be crossing the hills as we speak, in a cart full of players.

HAMNET Truly?

JUDITH Truly.

Trumpets sound, from afar.

Did you hear that?

SUSANNAH Is it the players? Have they come?

Trumpets again, and drums.

He is here! He is here!

The children dash to the door. Exit **SUSANNAH** *and* **HAMNET**.

JUDITH *runs to the window, and leans out.*

JUDITH Do you see them, Susannah? Do you see them?

SUSANNAH *(off)* They are coming! Oh, the colours! They are throwing their hats!

Trumpets and drums, even louder.

PHIL *(off)* Lord Strange's Men are here! Bid a Stratford welcome to the players of Lord Strange!

JUDITH Is he with them? Has he come?

SUSANNAH *(off)* I cannot see him –

HAMNET *(off)* Papa? Papa?

JUDITH *leans from the window.*

JUDITH Sirs! Excuse me, sirs! Is my brother with you?

NED *(off)* Who is your brother, fair one?

JUDITH William Shakespeare.

NED *(off)* In London!

JUDITH *climbs slowly down from the window, and sits.*

Enter **SUSANNAH** *and* **HAMNET**, *crestfallen.*

SUSANNAH You said he would come.

HAMNET I do not care if I see him.

SUSANNAH Nor do I. I do not care in the slightest.

JUDITH I am sure he has sent word – I will ask the players myself. Go tell your mama that.

SUSANNAH Must we go?

JUDITH Yes, Susannah, you must. But if you care to, meet me at the townhouse after – the players play this afternoon, and the first performance will be the Mayor's treat.

HAMNET May I come, too? Please may I?

JUDITH Ask your mama. Home, now.

SUSANNAH I thought he would come.

JUDITH As did I. See you at the townhouse, chucks.

Exit **SUSANNAH** *and* **HAMNET**. **JUDITH**, *troubled, tidies her hair and fetches her shawl.*

A knock at the door. **JUDITH** *goes to it.*

WILLIAM UNDERHIILL *is at the door.*

WILLIAM Good afternoon, mistress –

JUDITH Oh. William. Good afternoon. I'm just heading out, I'm afraid –

WILLIAM Could you stop a moment? Your father was good enough to invite me to supper –

JUDITH Was he, indeed? Well, I'm afraid there's little enough – it seems he was not good enough to inform me –

WILLIAM I've a brace of pheasants with me. It would give me pleasure to offer them for your table.

JUDITH That's very good of you, William. Now, if you'll excuse me –

WILLIAM Perhaps I might keep you a little longer – will you let me come in a moment?

JUDITH I am alone in the house.

WILLIAM Your father said I might join you.

JUDITH Oh indeed?

WILLIAM I suppose he thought, as an old friend of the family –

JUDITH Well, come in, come in. We must not expose ourselves to gossip on the doorstep.

Enter **WILLIAM**, *with his pheasants.*

WILLIAM I rather hoped that might not be a problem.

JUDITH Whatever do you mean? I mean no offence by my hurry, it's simply that –

WILLIAM *(clasping her hand)* No offence, Judith. Quite the opposite, in fact. Oh, I did not mean to come to it so quickly – I had hoped to make it elegant –

JUDITH Master Underhill, you forget yourself.

She tries to extricate her hand, but he holds it fast.

WILLIAM Indeed, I do not. I have been wanting to ask you this long while – and I have your father's permission –

JUDITH *(icy)* Permission to do what, exactly?

WILLIAM To take you as my wife.

JUDITH I see.

WILLIAM Oh dear, I have put it clumsily, I know.

JUDITH Well, Master Underhill, you may have my father's permission to take me as your wife, but unfortunately, that will not answer, for you do not have mine.

WILLIAM Let me begin again –

JUDITH It seems to me quite clear. You wish to marry me. My father wishes you to marry me. I, however, do not wish you to marry me, and so we come to an end. Now, I must go about my errands –

She makes for the door. He slams his arm against it so she cannot open it, and bars her way with his body.

WILLIAM Your errands can wait, Judith.

JUDITH Master Underhill –

WILLIAM I am offering you my heart, my body, and my wealth. My fortune may not be great, but I am willing to give you all I have. Your father's debts to me are considerable, and they have crippled him – have crippled you all. I offer to cancel them. I will forget your pitiful marriage portion –

JUDITH You think that this is the way to my heart?

WILLIAM You love your family, girl – do you not? I will provide for them, and for you, Judith. You will never want. We will work hard, but we will eat well and sleep without worry.

JUDITH You would do better with a girl with a portion and no debts behind her, to secure such a future. I cannot think why you have chosen me to share in this happy fate.

WILLIAM Can you not, Judith? I have cared for you ever since you skipped into my orchard to steal my apples.

JUDITH I did not go to steal –

WILLIAM I have not forgot it, Judith. I have waited, and now I am come to ask for your hand. Will you give it me, for friendship?

JUDITH I will give no man my hand for friendship. The good Lord ordained marriage for love, and I will give my hand when love asks for it.

WILLIAM Our Lord ordained marriage for help, for comfort, and for children, Judith, and all those I offer. I am not as ready with the words as you young folk are, but I admit I have a certain – fondness for you. *(Taking her hand again)* Come, I will say the word if you bid me –

JUDITH *(gentler now)* No, William. I would not have you say it. You have said enough, and I am thankful for the offer, truly I am. You are a good man. But my answer must still be no, and now, I bid you good day.

WILLIAM Your father will expect you to await his coming, Miss Shakespeare. It is not only your own fate you answer for here.

JUDITH Indeed it is not. What do your children say to the match? Do they seek a new mother? What of your late wife?

WILLIAM My wife, God rest her soul, is dead and buried, and I've a duty to wed again. My children need no new mother, for they're near enough grown, but a woman's touch never did a household harm. Let us sit and await your father, my dear.

JUDITH It is a good while until supper time, Master Underhill. I suggest you wait elsewhere.

Enter **JOHN SHAKESPEARE**, *to see* **WILLIAM** *still grasping* **JUDITH***'s hand.*

JOHN Ah! Just as I'd hoped. The love birds are cooing together pleasantly, I see?

WILLIAM *drops her hand.*

WILLIAM Not so, Goodman Shakespeare. Your daughter has refused me.

JOHN My Judith? My girl refuse *you*, Master Underhill? Come, you must be mistaken –

JUDITH He is not, Father. I have refused him.

JOHN Now, girl, do not disgrace me –

JUDITH I intend no disgrace, Father. But I cannot accept him.

JOHN Is William not rich enough for you? Not sure enough? Is he not a good man?

JUDITH A good man, and a kind one. You know that I respect him –

JOHN You can show your respect, girl, by wedding him! Do you care nothing for this family? For poor Anne and the chicks your brother has all but abandoned? Must all my children go against me, and bring disgrace to our name?

JUDITH I would not go against you, Father.

JOHN Then obey me in this. Accept Master Underhill. I command you.

JUDITH *(very softly)* No.

WILLIAM I will hear no more of this. I am a proud man, Goodman Shakespeare, as you know, and this is beyond –

Enter **MARY SHAKESPEARE**.

MARY Why, what is the matter here? Good day to you, Master Underhill. Husband, are you well?

JOHN Wife, we are bereft. We have no children.

MARY Fie, John, you embarrass Master Underhill. Will you join us for supper, sir?

WILLIAM Forgive me, Goodwife Shakespeare.

MARY What a pity! But I hope we may meet again soon.

WILLIAM I do not think so. I pray I may never enter this house again – no, not if no others were open to me. Good day to you all.

Exit **WILLIAM**, *slamming the door behind him.*

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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