

RELAXED PERFORMANCE

Character Guide

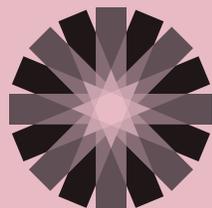
Shakespeare in Love

BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY
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People's
Light

Character Guide

Some of the characters in *Shakespeare in Love* were real (historical) people. Some are made up. Historical people are marked with a ★



William Shakespeare (Will) ★

Will is an actor, playwright, and poet. He lived in England in the 1500s and wrote many plays including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Twelfth Night*. In *Shakespeare in Love* he is trying to write *Romeo and Juliet*. He has a romantic affair with Viola de Lesseps. He is friends with Kit Marlowe, a fellow playwright.



Christopher Marlowe (Kit) ★

Kit is London's most famous playwright and poet. He helps Will come up with ideas for his poems. They are friends.



Philip Henslowe ★

Henslowe owns a London theatre called The Rose. He produces plays, and so he is always looking for wonderful new scripts. He needs to sell lots of tickets, because it is his job to pay for everything it takes to make a play and still make a profit. He worries about money because he owes debts to many people, including Mr. Fennyman.



Hugh Fennyman

Fennyman says about himself, “I am the money.” That is because he cooperates with Henslowe to pay for Will’s new play. If the play is a hit, Fennyman will receive a big payment Henslowe owes him. At first it seems like Fennyman only cares about money. Later he becomes very excited about Will’s play, and even gets to join the cast as the “Apothecary.” (That is an old job like a pharmacist is today: someone who mixes medicines and potions.)



Ned Alleyn ★

Ned is one of the most famous actors in London and everyone loves him. He is out of town when Will starts his play, but comes back just in time to join the cast. Ned likes to always play the starring role. Will lies to Ned when he says that his part, “Mercutio,” will be the star of his play so that Ned will agree to help.



Richard Burbage ★

Burbage is one of the other most famous actors in London. He produces plays at his own theatre called The Curtain, and so he also wants Will to write him a play that will be a big success. He gets angry when Will gives his play to Fennyman instead.



Sam

Sam is an actor who has the specialty of playing women’s parts, because women were not allowed to be actors at this point in history. In Will’s new play Sam’s role is “Juliet.”



Wabash

Wabash is a tailor. Henslowe wants Wabash to be an actor in Will's play so that Wabash won't be angry about money Henslowe owes him. Wabash sometimes speaks with a stutter and works very hard to present the speech at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet*.



John Webster ★

You will not hear anyone call Webster by his name until the very end of the play. He is a boy who wants to be part of making theatre like the adults, but everyone ignores him. His favorite plays are about blood and violence. (In real history John Webster grew up to write plays full of revenge and death.)



Queen Elizabeth ★

Queen Elizabeth is the ruler of England. Men usually had more power than women, but the Queen never married and rules her empire for 45 years. She enjoys theatre and loves dogs. (England's current Queen Elizabeth II is a distant relative of the Queen Elizabeth in this play.)



Edmund Tilney ★

Tilney has a job called "Master of the Revels." He works for the Queen and has power over all the theatres. He can close a theatre if there is something bad in a play (maybe something the Queen does not like) or something illegal (like a woman acting, since only men were allowed to be actors).



Viola de Lesseps

Viola is a young woman who loves plays and poetry, and she dreams of being an actor, even though women are not allowed on stage. She disguises herself as a young man named “Thomas Kent” so that she can audition for Will’s new play. Viola is supposed to marry Lord Wessex, but she falls in love with Will instead. When Viola is pretending to be “Thomas Kent,” she tries to hide her feelings about Will.



Sir Robert de Lesseps

Sir Robert is Viola’s father and a very rich man. He wants his daughter to marry a Lord, because Lords and Ladies were very powerful in this period of history. He promises Lord Wessex that he can marry Viola and receive a large amount of money.



Lord Wessex

Lord Wessex has a powerful title but not very much money. He makes a deal with Sir Robert to marry Viola and receive more money. He expects that Viola will do everything he wants.



The Nurse

The nurse is a friend and a caregiver to Viola. In wealthy families it was common to have a nurse help to take care of children. Viola loves and trusts the Nurse since she was a little girl, and the nurse helps to keep Viola’s secrets.



Most of the actors also take turns playing other characters. For example, they portray other actors working on Will's play, guests at a tavern, dancers at the ball at the de Lessep's home, and lords and ladies at Queen Elizabeth's court. Some of the actors also play musical instruments and sing.