



EQUIVOCATION

BY **BILL CAIN**



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SPECIAL NOTE

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EQUIVOCATION was developed at TheatreWorks,
Palo Alto, CA, as part of their New Works Festival
and the Ojai Playwrights Conference, Robert Egan, Artistic Director.

It was originally produced by Oregon Shakespeare Festival;
Bill Rauch, Artistic Director; Paul Nicholson, Executive Director.

It was originally produced in New York City by
Manhattan Theatre Club, on February 10, 2010
(Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer)

This play is dedicated with great love to Kevin Bradt. When, in despair over Equivocation, I'd call him and say, "Nobody is ever going to want to see this play," he always said the same thing — "I want to see it." So I wrote it for him. It was the last play he ever saw. He loved it. So, this is for Kevin.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

EQUIVOCATION is based on an historical event.

It is, in fact, the founding event of modern England. The 5th of November is celebrated with national fireworks and is roughly equivalent to America's 4th of July.

The story has been told for over 400 years and the government's version of the story has become a national myth.

The only thing we know with certainty about the event itself is that it could not possibly have occurred in the way the government claimed.

What follows offers a plausible alternative.

EQUIVOCATION was originally produced by Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Bill Rauch, Artistic Director; Paul Nicholson, Executive Director) in Ashland, Oregon in 2009. It was directed by Bill Rauch; the set was by Christopher Acebo; the costume design was by Deborah M. Dryden; the lighting design was by Christopher Akerlind; the sound design was by Andre Pluess; the stage manager was Randall K. Lum; the assistant stage manager was Mandy Younger; the dramaturg was Lue Douthit; and the verse dramaturgy was by Barry Kraft. The cast was as follows:

SHAG Anthony Heald
RICHARD/FATHER HENRY GARNET Richard Elmore
SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/
THOMAS PERCY Jonathan Haugen
SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/KING JAMES I ... John Tufts
ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
SIR EDWARD COKE Gregory Linington
JUDITH Christine Albright

EQUIVOCATION was subsequently produced in 2009 at The Geffen Playhouse. It was directed by David Esbjornson; the set was by David Esbjornson; the costume design was by Frances Kenny; the lighting design was by Scott Zielinski; the sound design was by Jon Gottlieb; the dramaturg was Amy Levinson; and the production stage manager was Jill Gold. The cast was as follows:

SHAG Joe Spano
RICHARD/FATHER HENRY GARNET Harry Groener
SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/
THOMAS PERCY Connor Trinneer
SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/
KING JAMES I Patrick J. Adams
ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
SIR EDWARD COKE Brian Henderson
JUDITH Troian Bellisario

EQUIVOCATION was originally produced in New York City by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) on February 10, 2010. It was directed by Garry Hynes; the set and costume design were by Francis O'Connor; the lighting design was by David Weiner; the sound design was by David Van Tieghem and Brandon Wolcott; and the production stage manager was David H. Lurie. The cast was as follows:

SHAG John Pankow
RICHARD/FATHER HENRY GARNET Michael Countryman
SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/THOMAS PERCY ... David Pittu
SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/KING JAMES I . David Furr
ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
SIR EDWARD COKE Remy Auberjonois
JUDITH.....Charlotte Parry

THE CAST

The cast of 6 plays many roles. The core roles are the five members of the Globe acting company and Judith. The acting company is made up of:

SHAG

RICHARD

SHARPE

NATE

ARMIN

Shag is Shakespeare — called “Shag” after my favorite contemporary spelling of his name, Shagspeare.

JUDITH

Judith — 19 — is Shag’s daughter.

The doubling is detailed throughout the script. Shag and Judith do not double — though, at one point, Shag stands in for a Witch.

Richard doubles as Garnet.

Nate doubles as Cecil.

Sharpe triples as Tom Wintour and James I.

Armin is the utility player and plays many parts including The First Priest, Catesby, Coke, Lady Macbeth, the Porter and others.

The guards and other roles are as specified in the text.

PLACE

The Globe Theater and other locations in London.

TIME

1606.

SET

The Globe Theater is the basic set. Other places — The Tower, Cecil's office, taverns, etc. — are developed theatrically working from the Globe stage.

I would like to point out that the Globe is not a modern theater. There is nothing black box-y about it. It is an open air place of light. In this world, everything seems well. You have to look behind the scenes to find the darkness.

COSTUMES

I have seen *EQUIVOCATION* performed both in period and modern dress. It works better in period costume.

EQUIVOCATION

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Military drums bring us into the scene.

A spacious office — mid-meeting — bright morning.

Two men. On the table between them — a manuscript.

Shag — a writer — stands on the power-deficit side of a desk.

Robert Cecil — in spite of a permanently bent body and short stature — sits on the power-surplus side of the desk. And why not? He is the Prime Minister of England.

SHAG. *Why me?*

CECIL. It wasn't that others weren't considered.

SHAG. I can't make the decision.

CECIL. Why not?

SHAG. We're a cooperative venture.

CECIL. Who's in charge?

SHAG. We all share equally in the income and responsibilities of the theater. We're a *cooperative* venture. *(Cecil takes that in. Then —)*

CECIL. Who's in charge?

SHAG. *(An admission.)* Richard.

So much for the illusion of "cooperative venture."

CECIL. This — (*A money bag.*) will take care of Richard. You have one week to turn this book into a play.

As Cecil exits, we see he walks with a noticeable limp. He does nothing to hide it and it certainly does not slow him down. When excited, he almost skips.

SHAG. (*Impossible!*) One?

CECIL. (*Stopping.*) He said/she said. Enter/exit. Drums/trumpets. How long can it take? You have one week to “dialogue” this.

SHAG. We’re already working on a new play.

CECIL. About?

SHAG. A king.

CECIL. How does this one die?

SHAG. What makes you think he dies?

CECIL. You’ve killed more kings than any man alive. Your brain is a graveyard for royalty.

SHAG. This one dies of a broken heart. (*This amuses Cecil.*) Before he dies, he is stripped of everything he owns down to his underwear. (*A threat.*) We are all broken in the end.

CECIL. Two weeks then. No more.

End of discussion. Cecil exits.

SHAG. I don’t even know the story.

CECIL. Actually, you do. Everyone does. (*Returns.*) Read. I’ll wait.

Shag reads. And goes pale.

SHAG. Who wrote this?

CECIL. The King.

Shag reads on. Closes the manuscript. Places it on desk. Steps back.

SHAG. No.

CECIL. Be careful what you say to me. I speak for the King. And he has absolutely no experience of cooperative ventures.

SHAG. We don’t do current events. We do histories. True Histo-

EQUIVOCATION

by Bill Cain

5M, 1W (doubling)

England, 1605: A terrorist plot to assassinate King James I and blow Parliament to kingdom come with 36 barrels of devilish gunpowder! Shagspeare (after a contemporary spelling of the Bard's name) is commissioned by Robert Cecil, the prime minister, to write the "true historie" of the plot. And it must have witches! The King wants witches! But as Shag and the acting company of the Globe, under the direction of the great Richard Burbage, investigate the plot, they discover that the King's version of the story might, in fact, be a cover-up. Shag and his actors are confronted with the ultimate moral and artistic dilemma. Speak truth to power — and perhaps lose their heads? Or take the money and lie? Is there a third option — equivocation? A high-stakes political thriller with contemporary resonances, EQUIVOCATION gallops from the great Globe to the Tower of London to the halls of Parliament to the heart of Judith, Shag's younger daughter, who finds herself unexpectedly at the very heart of the political, dramatic and — ultimately — human mystery.

"In the fascinating play EQUIVOCATION, Bill Cain fashions one of the most thoughtful, provocative and entertaining speculations about Shakespeare in relation to his era — and ours." —**The Seattle Times**

"No need to equivocate: Bill Cain's EQUIVOCATION ... is one of the most bracingly intelligent, sizzingly theatrical American plays in a decade ... it's an experience no serious theatergoer will want to miss ... the text is destined for a long life in professional venues and elsewhere." —**Variety**

Also by Bill Cain
9 CIRCLES

ISBN 978-0-8222-2591-1



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