

THE REVENGERS by William Meadows

based on an idea by William Meadows and James Harrington

Tired of being stuck on a moor in Scotland and not even having been given names, Shakespeare's infamous 'weird sisters' finally decide to take revenge on the man who penned them.

Literary history is turned upside down as the witches take over the complete works of Shakespeare and make their way into the real world ...

CAST

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
ANNE HATHAWAY - his wife
WITCH 1
WITCH 2
WITCH 3
MACBETH
LADY MACBETH
ROMEO
JULIET
HAMLET
OPHELIA
RICHARD III
LADY ANNE
MARK ANTHONY

THE MECHANICALS:

NICK BOTTOM - a weaver
PETER QUINCE - a carpenter
ROBIN STARVELING - a tailor
TOM SNOOT - a tinker
FRANCIS FLUTE - a bellows mender
SNUG - a joiner

THE NARRATOR

Various guards, peasants & spear carriers

EXTRACT ONE:

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Spot comes up on the Narrator in spotlight downstage left. Dominating the rear of the stage is a large cauldron - smoking - and dimly lit around the cauldron stand three cloaked figures. Downstage right is a desk and standing on that is a wine bottle and a candle. Sitting at the desk is the unmistakable figure of William Shakespeare, frozen, quill in hand.

NARRATOR O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A Kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared

On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object:

Bottom walks on stage with measuring tape, starts measuring, making hand signals to the back of the auditorium. Bottom is dressed as stage crew with a walkie talkie, hard hat, etc.

NARRATOR O pardon! Since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
Think when we talk on horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs in the receiving earth

Bottom coughs very loudly and uncouthly wipes his nose on his sleeve. The Narrator tries to maintain composure but is visibly put off.

NARRATOR Excuse me, do you mind. I am trying to start a play here.

EXTRACT 2:

WITCH 1 When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning or in rain?

WITCH 2 When the hurly burly's done
When the battle's lost and won.

WITCH 3 That will be ere the setting of the sun.

WITCH 1 Where the place?

WITCH 2 Upon the heath.

WITCH 3 There to meet with Macbeth.

WITCH 1 I come, Greymalkin.

WITCH 2 Paddock calls.

WITCH 3 Anon.

ALL Fair is foul and foul is fair
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

At this there is a strong blast of smoke from the cauldron and a plume rises, obscuring our view of the witches for a second. Witch 1 starts to cough and splutter. For a moment it seems as if things have genuinely gone wrong.

WITCH 1 No, that's it! I can't do this any more! What does that even mean? I've been standing around and freezing myself to death, up to my arms in pig entrails, for three days now. Sisters, it's no kind of life at all, is it?

WITCH 2 Umm, yeah ... but ... we've sort of got something going on here.

WITCH 1 We stand around, day in day out, waiting for this idiot Macbeth; we give him this prophecy nonsense and he falls for it just like that ... I mean, it's not even a challenge, is it?

WITCH 3 Well, yeah, but ... we've kind of been doing it for four hundred years.

WITCH 1 I tell you who I blame. I blame HIM! Mr High and Mighty over there - **[Gesturing to Shakespeare sitting over at the side of the stage.]** Thirty-seven plays, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two characters and we are the only three that have to hang around in a festering bog in the middle of Scotland all day! We could have ended up anywhere - Verona, Rome, Illyria, The Forest of Arden - but no! We get the bog. ... Is it too much to want to see a little bit of culture? Just an art gallery once in a while? A palace? the Forum in Rome? - even Denmark would be better than this!

WITCH 2 I know - and this climate plays havoc on the skin. All this thunder, lightning

and rain all the time! It's intolerable. Someone even called me a crone the other day. Can you believe it - me, a crone? I'll have you know, I have an extensive beauty regime.

WITCH 3 He can't seriously expect us to sit around here until the end of time, can he? **[Hauls down a copy of the Complete Works.]** I mean - look here. Everyone has it better than us. They're on easy streey. Viola - pah! Henry V - pah! and don't get me started on Antony and Cleopatra! Egypt? Makes you sick.

WITCH 2 There's just nothing to do here but make prophecies and even then no one's impressed. I'd just do anything to meet a man. I mean, a proper good-looking one, Not like these hairy tribesmen. **[Looking through the book.]** Someone charming, handsome and with all their teeth, and a diet that doesn't rely on batter. Oh, look - here's one. R-O-M-E-O. Oh, he sounds nice. **[She goes off into a fantasy flirtation, curtseying and shaking his - imaginary - hand.]** Oh, hello, sir... Well, that's nice of you to say... Oh, yes it is - how nice of you to notice ... the perfume, oh well, thank you for saying. I make it myself out of dandelion and sheep's urine.

WITCH 1 **rolling her eyes** Oh, please ... hold on. What's that you've got there?

WITCH 3 It's the Complete Works.

WITCH 1 Complete Works of what? **[Gesturing to Witch 2, who is still in the midst of her fantasy flirtation.]** Look - stop that, will you.

WITCH 2 **stops and looks embarrassed** Sorry.

WITCH 3 Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Him over there. **[Points Stage Right.]** The one that wrote us. You know - him that you're always complaining about.

WITCH 2 I'd forgotten we even had that. Is it any good?

They all look at the book. Lots of 'hmm', 'oh yeah,' 'well I never,', 'He did what?' etc.

WITCH 3 Over-rated if you ask me. **[She is about to throw the book into the cauldron.]**

WITCH 1 Hold on. Wait! Don't do that! **[Catching Witch 3 just before she dumps the book.]** I've got an idea. All this time prophesising and we never thought out of the box. Oh, sisters, this is brilliant! Listen carefully. If we could cast a spell on Shakespeare - **[Gestures to where he is sitting.]** - we could appear anywhere in all these plays. **[Other witches look confused.]** All these places we have only dreamed about - we could visit them. The world of Shakespeare is contained in these pages. Every place he ever dreamed of, every character he ever thought up. They're all here sitting in black and white, in the words right in front of us. Who's to say that, with a bit of magic, this couldn't all be changed. No more rainy moor in Scotland. No more Macbeth. Who's that young fancy man you were just talking about?

WITCH 2 **very excited.** Romeo! **[Hand on heart.]**

WITCH 1 Yes - we could go and see him. We could go and visit any of them. Flick to a page, sister. - Any page, any page at all. We can go there. Go on - do it!

WITCH 3 **flicks to a page, reads** Oooh! How about dinner at Titus Andronicus's house?

.....

EXTRACT 3:

Witch 2 is continuing to torment the Narrator, who is still sitting tied to the throne.

WITCH 2 And there he is - Romeo! Oh, snatched in his prime. We were going to be so happy together. He was going to leave Juliet and run away with me. She never made him happy you see.

NARRATOR And you think you would have made him happy? Have you smelled yourself lately?

WITCH 2 What do you know about it? You're just a Narrator. What could you possibly know about Romance? I have ...

She is interrupted by a lot of noise and confusion as Witches 1 and 3 enter with Richard the Third. He is shouting at, and leading, a motley collection of spear-carriers, guards, peasants etc. Someone raises the projection screen as this is happening.

RICHARD Come on! Come on! Left right ... Left right ... and Halt! Attention!

WITCH 1 Very good, Richard. We appoint you General of our Armies.

RICHARD An honour, my lady. Would you care to inspect the troops?

The troops are now lined up along the stage. They do not look impressive. Some are trying over hard to stand to attention, some are incapable of it.

WITCH 1 I would indeed. [**Approaching one of the assembled soldiers.**] Now, you there! [**The soldier looks shocked.**] Yes, YOU - I'm talking to you. Who are you?

3RD SPEAR CARRIER **formally and as per an US Marine, shouting** I am Third Spear-Carrier to the right! Sir!

WITCH 1 Ah - very good! Very good. And what is it that you do?

3RD SPEARCARRIER I carry a spear just towards the right-hand side of the stage.

WITCH 1 I see. And what have you got against Shakespeare?

3RD SPEAR CARRIER I just stand around. For hours and hours and hours. I never do anything. I'm what you call set-dressing. It's boring. I don't want to do it any more.

WITCH 1 **pointing to another** And you? What do you do?

GUARD **with pride** I am a guard, sir.

WITCH 1 Very good. And what is it, exactly, that you guard?

GUARD Um ... well, I ... um... don't know. No one has ever bothered to ask me before.

WITCH 1 Moving on. And you there. We've met before. [**Pointing to the Peasant and his Wife, who are standing with vacant expressions on their faces.**] Tell me what are you?

PEASANT I'm a peasant.

WITCH 1 And are you happy being a peasant?

PEASANT Oh yes, very much so. [**Gesturing to his side.**] This is my wife. She's a peasant too.

PEASANT'S WIFE **curtsies** Hello.

WITCH 1 What are you doing here? What are you angry with Shakespeare about?

PEASANT Well - we don't have names, you see. He couldn't be bothered to give us names. We are not deemed important enough. We want to have proper names. Like Howard.

PEASANT'S WIFE And Wendy.

RICHARD **interrupting. Proudly** There you are, ladies. Your army.

WITCH 3 They're not exactly a crack team, are they?

RICHARD They're all right. Most of them can handle a sword or a spear. Except for him [**Gesturing to the Peasant.**]

PEASANT Hello.

RICHARD **gesturing to his wife** And her.

PEASANT'S WIFE Hello.

RICHARD I don't know what they're doing here. But - the more the merrier, that's what I say!

WITCH 1 It'll have to do. It's time to get narrated into the real world.

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES, TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS

The intentions are very much as stated by the playwright. William Meadows is passionate about Shakespeare but frustrated by many students' fear of the language. By weaving a fun story around many famous scenes and characters, he aims to demystify Shakespeare to some extent and encourage students to see the accessibility of the language through performing sections of it in an amusing way.

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE - not in this play treated with the greatest respect, Shakespeare is a harried and largely comical character, given to wild enthusiasms and nagged by his wife, who is far cleverer than he is! There is a running joke throughout that he cannot spell [and of course in those days, spelling hadn't been set in stone, so, for example, Shakespeare's own name was spelt in a variety of ways. It was Dr Johnson who fixed spelling as late as the eighteenth century, in his famous Dictionary.] Of course, much of the fun made of Shakespeare is because quite early in the play the Witches have taken over his story-lines and made a nonsense of them. So it is not his fault. It would be good if there are moments when the actor playing this part shows in some way that he is 'not himself' - that something is dictating his writing - that he is literally possessed.

ANNE HATHAWAY - the cleverer of the two. Only she appears educated and has a sound grasp of plot, character and appropriateness! And of course she can spell!

WITCH 1 - very much boss witch. Power-hungry and sharp. She gets worse - meaner and more forceful as the play goes on, especially after she has fallen for Richard III.

WITCH 2 - flirty, with illusions of her own beauty. She could be the youngest. She certainly fancies herself - but she is no beauty. Rather dizzy and impulsive. Perhaps a breathless way of speaking.

WITCH 3 - dismissive, hasty, often cynical, but also more philosophical and educated than the other two. She is not unmoved by Shakespeare's language and is excited by the places they are visiting.

Since the Witches are the main characters, it is important to have them clearly distinguished from the audience point of view. They could have different hair colours, or builds, or styles of dress - as well as their quite separate characters - through which one must always bear in mind that all three of them are evil!

MACBETH - dazzled by the Witches' promises, but a shuffling loon when faced with the scorn of his wife [Not dissimilar from the original in this!]

LADY MACBETH - scathing in her scorn and disbelieving.

ROMEO never quite breaks away from the expected 'lover', though cracks are showing in his courtliness by the end.

JULIET changes from the expected young girl mooning over Romeo to a modern and lippy teenager

HAMLET changes from the 'real' Hamlet to a hurt child, blubbing in foetal position.

OPHELIA - as the original

RICHARD III - the epitome of evil, as Shakespeare rather than history intended.

LADY ANNE - beautiful and proud. Just as she is beginning to be worn down by Richard, as Shakespeare intended [think rabbit in headlights] she is pushed aside by Witch 1.

MARK ANTHONY - typical politician, dare I say, glib and personable and after his own ends.

NICK BOTTOM All the Mechanicals need strong regional accents. Bottom is bossy,

boastful and loud.

PETER QUINCE brighter and better-spoken than the rest. Quietly organised. Takes control at the end.

ROBIN STARVELING - always complaining

TOM SNOOT - almost as slow and educationally challenged as Snug, which is why his poem is such a shock! There is a humility about him in the end, though, that is endearing.

FRANCIS FLUTE - shy with rather girlish mannerisms, vague and rather dappy. He always gets things wrong and is very forgetful.

SNUG - not very bright. Unassuming and there's something loveable about him. Easily pleased by the promise of tea and digestives.

Like for the Witches, a cast needs to find ways of distinguishing between these characters, giving each a stance, a manner of speaking, a mannerism, since by what they say alone there is not enough to build clear separate characters. I suggest reading the Mechanicals scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* too, to help further with characteristics.

THE NARRATOR - could be played by a boy or a girl. Tries to hold everything together, despite all the odds being against her. Courageous.

GUARDS, PEASANTS, SPEAR-CARRIERS ETC. These characters too need to show their lower rank by using regional accents - especially, of course, the Peasant and his Wife, who are not bright, to say the least.

THE SETTING

Setting must be permanent, and allow, as in Shakespeare's time the flow of the action to take place without too much scenic encumbrance. The action takes place at times in the auditorium, so some way of lighting these moments will be necessary. It may be possible just to bring the houselights up here, if you do not have access to follow-spots.

Shakespeare's study needs to be permanently set...