

SHATTERED SHAKESPEARE

A Play in One Act by Don Grimme

Synopsis

A one-act, eight-composite-character comedy (portrayed by five-actors), which parodies William Shakespeare's tragedies and histories, especially *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* ... with tribute paid to *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III*.

The language is a muddle of Shakespearean and modern colloquial. Familiar quotes from many of his works are used (or mangled) out of context for humorous effect.

A prologue, interlude, and thirteen short scenes transition quickly with announcements and/or brief fades or pauses. The indicated simple staging (two chairs or black boxes) is optional – most action is evident from the dialogue. Suggestions of costume (e.g., wigs) to distinguish the actors' doubled roles would be helpful, but could be accomplished with effective vocal acting.

Setting: Sweden, Verona, Padua, and Venice.

Time: Indeterminate – vaguely 16th century with many anachronisms.

Scenes

Prologue	The cast is assembled and the play introduced	
Scene 1	Five witches pontificate on theatre and life	
Scene 2	Lear's castle in Sweden	Christmastime
Scene 3	Romeo Montague's bedroom in Verona	Exactly 20 years later
Scene 4	The Montague palace court in Verona	The next day
Interlude	The five actors discuss their new roles	
Scene 5	A tavern in Verona	That afternoon
Scene 6	A Verona motel room	That evening
Scene 7	The Capulet residence in Verona	A few days later
Scene 8	A street in Padua	A month later
Scene 9	Juliet Capulet's balcony in Verona	A few days before
Scene 10	Othello's home in Venice	A year later
Scene 11	Romeo's bedroom in Verona	That evening
Scene 12	Rachel and Gertie's bedroom in Verona	Immediately thereafter
Scene 13	Romeo and Juliet's home in Verona	Several months later

Cast of Characters (3M/2W – any ethnicity)

- Actor 1: A heavy-set, 40+ year-old man. Portrays WITCH 1, LEAR, and POLONIUS.
- Actor 2: A 20+ man. Portrays WITCH 2 and ROMEO.
- Actor 3: A 20+ woman. Portrays WITCH 3, GERTIE, and JULIET.
- Actor 4: A 20+ man (ideally dark-skinned). Portrays WITCH 4 and OTHELLO.
- Actor 5: A 20+ "hunchbacked" woman. Portrays WITCH 5, RACHEL, and OPHELIA.

Character Detail and Plot Summary

- LEAR: King of Sweden (Denmark? Britain?). Befuddled old man; ROMEO's father and GERTIE's husband. He is murdered by GERTIE and RACHEL and then haunts ROMEO (Hamlet) to convince him to jilt OPHELIA and to avenge his murder.
- POLONIUS: A Capulet. Fat, middle-aged court jester and hot dog eating contestant. Father to JULIET and OTHELLO. His son ignores his advice. Owes OTHELLO 100 ducats (with the equivalent pounds of flesh as collateral).
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- ROMEO: A Montague. Birth name: Hamlet. LEAR's and GERTIE's son, OPHELIA's half-brother (and boyfriend), OTHELLO's friend, and JULIET's boyfriend. He jilts OPHELIA, hooks up with JULIET, and eventually kills RACHEL and GERTIE.
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- GERTIE: A Montague. ROMEO's and OPHELIA's mother and RACHEL's wife; also LEAR's much younger former wife. She conspires with RACHEL to murder LEAR, then relocates with RACHEL to Verona to raise ROMEO.
- JULIET: A Capulet. POLONIUS' daughter and ROMEO's girlfriend, becoming pregnant by him. She defends POLONIUS against her brother, OTHELLO the Shylock, which prompts OTHELLO to attack her. She dies in the struggle.
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- OTHELLO: A Capulet. POLONIUS' son, ROMEO's friend. He becomes Shylock, Wine Merchant/Loan Shark of Venice, who marries and later kills OPHELIA. He lends his father 100 ducats and later demands his 100 pounds of flesh. He attacks his sister, JULIET, with a dagger and then kills her husband, ROMEO, in a duel.
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- RACHEL: A Montague. Rachel ~~Macbeth~~ The Scottish Play, born Richard III. OPHELIA's transsexual, hunchbacked father (with GERTIE) and ROMEO's step-"father." She kills LEAR, then relocates to Verona as Richard Montague, dressed as a man.
- OPHELIA: Hunchbacked, bastard, and orphaned daughter of GERTIE and RACHEL; ROMEO's half-sister and promiscuous girlfriend, After ROMEO jilts her, she steals their mother's fortune, enters a Padua nunnery (as Sister Desdemona), marries OTHELLO, moves to Venice to be a dentist, and then is killed by him.
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SCRIPT EXTRACT:

Scene 1

SETTING: Same two chairs as Prologue or with a cauldron.

AT RISE: Five witches in a semicircle pontificating.

Double, double.
WITCH 1

Toil and trouble.
WITCH 3

Fire burn.
WITCH 2

And cauldron bubble.
WITCH 5

All the world's a stage.
WITCH 4

And all the men...
WITCH 1

...and women,
WITCH 3

...merely players.
WITCH 2

We few,
WITCH 5

We happy few,
WITCH 4

We band of brothers—
WITCH 1

...and sisters.
WITCH 5

We are such stuff as dreams are made on.
WITCH 2

In my mind's eye.

WITCH 3

In my heart's heart.

WITCH 4

The play's the thing.

WITCH 5

And it begins.

WITCH 1

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: A castle in Sweden. Two chairs on center stage.

AT RISE: LEAR is sitting on a chair.

A castle throne room.
ACTOR 1 (V.O.)

LEAR
Gertrude! My shirt is soiled.

GERTIE
(Enters with a doll and sits.)
Out, damned spot! Out, I say!

LEAR
Washing it might be more effective. Thou hast let thine household duties slide, wife.

GERTIE
Hey, cut me some slack, Lear! I was lost in love and then in labor for days.

LEAR
So! Love's labor lost. And yet another child thou bear me!

GERTIE
Yes! Isn't she beautiful? We'll call her Ophelia.

LEAR
I prefer Cordelia. More fitting for a daughter of the King of Britain.

GERTIE
But you are the King of Sweden.

LEAR
I get bewildered at times.

GERTIE
All too often these days.

LEAR
Whatever her name, I have too many daughters already. *(beat)* Say, whatever happened to Regan and Goneril?

GERTIE
There never was a Goneril. That's just what you called Regan when she got the clap.

LEAR

It seems I've become befuddled in my old age. So what became of Regan?

GERTIE

She went to Hollywood to become a second-rate actor and then got into politics.

LEAR

How about Troilus and Cressida?

GERTIE

Man, you are really out of it! That's another play entirely.

LEAR

Oh! Anyway, after thou finally gave birth to a son, my beloved Hamlet, I told thee I didn't want any more children.

GERTIE

Not my fault. If you prick us, do we not breed?

LEAR

But thou hast not let me prick thine self since I put Hamlet in thee.

GERTIE

Oh, that's right. It seems the game is up. You can come in now, Rachel.

(RACHEL enters with a dagger secreted in her clothing.)

LEAR

The Scotchman Rachel Macbeth!

RACHEL

Don't say that in the theatre! I am The Scottish Play!

LEAR

Scotch, Scottish, whatever. Why art thou here in Denmark?

RACHEL

To see my daughter, Ophelia, here in Sweden.

LEAR

You mean Cordelia.

RACHEL

You say po-tay-to; I say po-tah-to. She is my child.

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LEAR
But I saw her come out of Gertie.

RACHEL
No, I'm the father.

LEAR
How is that possible, woman?

RACHEL
I pricked Gertie before I had my sex change.

LEAR
What?! I banish thee/thou/thine both from my kingdom for this!

GERTIE
I think not, you doddering old man.

LEAR
Oh! Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

GERTIE
(Stands)
We have just the solution. Off with his head, Rachel!

(RACHEL slashes at LEAR's neck with dagger.)

LEAR
Agh!
(Brings his hands to his neck and collapses dead.)

GERTIE
Is this a dagger which I see before me?

RACHEL
How else was I going to cut his head off, Gertie?

GERTIE
Oh, yeah. Well, we need to cover our tracks.

RACHEL
We'll claim King Lear died of natural causes.

GERTIE
With his head chopped off?! Better make it a guillotine accident.

RACHEL

You're probably right. We'll change our name to Montague and relocate to gay Verona.

GERTIE

Not so gay really. They don't permit same-sex marriage.

RACHEL

Well, I'll have to dress as a man.

GERTIE

And retake your birth name: Richard The Third.

RACHEL

We should send our bastard daughter, Ophelia, to an orphanage.

GERTIE

I suppose we must. She doesn't look anything like my late husband.

RACHEL

And she has my hunchback.

GERTIE

I'll content myself with raising Romeo.

RACHEL

I thought his name was Hamlet.

GERTIE

That's what Lear insisted on. I prefer Romeo. It's more romantic.

(Brief outer-play interposition.)

ACTOR 2

(Enters.)

That was pretty gory.

ACTOR 4

(Enters.)

I thought it was funny.

ACTOR 1

(Stands up.)

Well, there is more of both – as well as romance, more betrayals, and other strange happenings – in the scenes to come.

Lay on, Macduff!

ACTOR 3

So to speak.

ACTOR 5

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: Twenty years later. ROMEO's bedroom in the Montague palace of Verona. Same two chairs.

AT RISE: ROMEO is sitting. LEAR enters.

LEAR

(To audience.) Twenty years have passed and I am now a ghost. And there is my son, grown to manhood. *(To ROMEO.)* Happy Chanukah, Hamlet!

ROMEO

You talkin' to me? My name is Romeo.

LEAR

No. Thou art my son, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

ROMEO

I am the son of Richard Montague of Verona.

LEAR

That malformed pretender! He is actually the woman, Rachel Macbeth – Whoops! I mean The Scottish Play – and she conspired with thine mother, Gertie, to murder me.

ROMEO

Swounds! Who are you?

LEAR

I am King Lear of Britain and thine true father.

ROMEO

I've heard of Lear. He was my Mom's first husband back in Sweden, who died in a guillotine accident.

LEAR

'Tis I, but 'twas no accident. Thine father-poser cut off my head with a dagger as a Christmas present for Gertie. Murder most foul!

ROMEO

Either way, Lear is dead.

LEAR

And I am his ghost, come to haunt thee on this Kwanzaa of thine twenty-first year.

ROMEO

Oh. The ghost of Saturnalia past. But why should I believe you?

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LEAR

Because I can reveal to thee a secret.

ROMEO

What secret?

LEAR

The young orphan woman thou knowest as Ophelia is thine half-sister, whom I named Cordelia.

ROMEO

Half-sister? What do you mean?

LEAR

She is the daughter of thine mother, Gertie, and the transsexual transvestite, Rachel.

ROMEO

But if Richard/Rachel is really a woman...?

LEAR

It's complicated. The man, Richard III, pricked Gertie, then had an operation to become the woman, Rachel The Scottish Play, and now dresses as the man, Richard Montague.

ROMEO

Whoa! This is not good. Ophelia is my girlfriend.

LEAR

Why dost thou think I chose this time to haunt thee? Now is the winter solstice of our discontent.

ROMEO

Alright. I'll cut her loose.

LEAR

And thou also must avenge me.

ROMEO

Avenge you how?

LEAR

Thou must kill Gertie and Rachel.

ROMEO

Ho boy! That's a tall order. (*Considering*) I don't mind offing my step-father that much.

LEAR

Step-transgender.

ROMEO

Well, her too. I hated it when she locked up my two little brothers in the Tower of London.

LEAR

Half-brothers. But those imprisonments were Rachel's second and third evil deeds.

ROMEO

So that's why he's called Richard the Third.

LEAR

Yeah, he-she is a real meanie.

ROMEO

But Mommy Dearest?! Aye, there's the rub.

LEAR

Thou must!

ROMEO

This is a lot to take in. Let me think about it.

LEAR

Alright. But don't take too long or I'll keep haunting thee.

ROMEO

Well, bye for now, Pop!

(END OF SCENE)

END OF EXTRACT