

Shakespeare Sells Out

A skit by Dwayne Yancey

Selected from his collection, "Skits 24/7"

Cast: 3 m, 3 w, 1 flexible or 7 m, 6 w, 4 flexible

Length: 11 pages of dialogue (1908 words)

Performance time: About 10 minutes

The Story

Shakespeare is a guest on a TV talk show to promote his updated classics: no more archaic references to fishmongers and codpieces. Instead, as various scenes are acted out, we see product placement now plays a huge part. There's a soft drink logo on Yorick's skull in "Hamlet"; the Weather Channel is plugged by the three witches in "Macbeth"; and a GPS device helps keep tab on Romeo. Where will it all end?!

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SHAKESPEARE SELLS OUT

(The set of a live TV talk show. It's nearing the end of a commercial break. The HOST is behind his desk, and the CAMERA OPERATOR is counting down the seconds until the show is live again.)

CAMERA OPERATOR: Three, two, one – *(Gives the action signal.)*

HOST: And welcome back to tonight's edition of "Late Night Literature," where we give you the opportunity to meet some of literature's most famous figures. I'm your host, Nome De Plume. Our next guest really needs no introduction, so we won't give him one. Ladies and gentlemen, let's give it up for that famous English playwright, William Shakespeare!

(SHAKESPEARE enters grandly, in shades, perhaps with gold chains. HOST greets him. Throughout his entrance, peppy music plays, as is typical on a talk show when a guest enters.)

HOST: Welcome, Will!

SHAKESPEARE: *(Grandly.)* "If music be the food of love, play on!"

HOST: Ah, I know that one – "Twelfth Night," Act 1, Scene 1.

SHAKESPEARE: "Ah, the play's the thing!"

HOST: Wait, wait, don't tell me – "Hamlet," Act 2, Scene 2.

SHAKESPEARE: "Thou art a scholar, Horatio!"

HOST: Uh, more "Hamlet." Except my name's not really Horatio.

SHAKESPEARE: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

HOST: Right. "Romeo and Juliet." So, Will, can I call you Will? -- I understand you've come out with new versions of all your classics -- updated them, re-written them, in fact. What's with this?

SHAKESPEARE: Ay, "there's method in my madness."

HOST: Ah, "Hamlet," Act 1, Scene 3.

SHAKESPEARE: That and the revenue stream.

HOST: Uh, you've stumped me there, Will. I'm not familiar with that line.

SHAKESPEARE: Oh that's not an old line. That's a new line. At first I just wanted to tweak some of my works to modernize them a bit -- no more archaic references to fishmongers and codpieces and that sort of thing. Maybe turn "Romeo and Juliet" into an online dating piece. But the more I got into it, the more I realized there were other opportunities as well, if you catch my drift. *(HE rubs his fingers together to signify money.)*

HOST: Ah, "Hamlet," Act 2, Scene 1.

SHAKESPEARE: Also, "Henry IV," Part 3, Act 2, Scene 2. You get a good line, you like to get all the mileage you can out of it. After all, you can never have "too much of a good thing."

HOST: I see -- "As You Like It," Act 4, Scene 1. Well, we've all seen singers recycle old hits in a greatest hits format, throw in a few new songs, and move some product that way. So, let's take a look. What have we got here first?

SHAKESPEARE: I believe this will be the graveyard scene from “Hamlet.”

HOST: Ah yes, the famous scene with the skull, one of your signature pieces. We’ll be curious to see what you’ve done with this.

(The scene plays out elsewhere on the stage -- or on video, if desired. The GRAVEDIGGER produces a skull from an open grave.)

GRAVEDIGGER: “Here’s a skull now hath lain you in the earth three and twenty years.”

HAMLET: “Whose was it?”

HOST: Now scholars have debated for years what the skull really represents in this scene. Can you shed any light on that?

SHAKESPEARE: Oh, quite a bit, actually. You’ll see.

GRAVEDIGGER: “A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! He poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick’s skull, the king’s jester.”

HAMLET: “This?” *(HAMLET takes the skull.)*

GRAVEDIGGER: “E’en that.”

SHAKESPEARE: Ah, now watch this -- here it comes.

HAMLET: “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.”

(HAMLET turns the skull so that the audience can now see it bears a very recognizable product logo of a soft drink company.)

HAMLET: And a soda drinker, too.

HOST: You've put a corporate logo on Yorick's skull?

(HAMLET and GRAVEDIGGER exit.)

SHAKESPEARE: The ultimate product placement, wouldn't you say? Of course, I prefer to think of it as supporting the arts. Or at least supporting the artist.

HOST: And you don't think this kind of corporate sponsorship undermines the artistic strength of your work?

SHAKESPEARE: Art schmart. You want art, go look at a painting. I'm in this for the money. That and the girls.

HOST: I see. Well, uh, I believe next we're going to see your re-write of the opening of "Richard III," one of the theatre's most famous villains. He's still a villain, right?

SHAKESPEARE: Oh yes.

(RICHARD III enters.)

RICHARD III: "Now is the winter of our discontent
made glorious summer by this son of York
and all the dark clouds that lower'd upon our house
in the deep bosom of the ocean buried,"
according to the Weather Channel's five-day forecast.

(RICHARD III exits.)

SHAKESPEARE: I hit the Weather Channel up for a whole package of spots. Then there's the opening of "Macbeth," of course.

(The THREE WITCHES enter.)

WITCH ONE: "When shall we three meet again?
in thunder, lightning or in rain?"

WITCH TWO: "When the hurley-burley's done,
when the battle's lost and won."

WITCH THREE: "That will be ere the set of the sun."

WITCH TWO: And the Weather Channel says tonight we can expect an evening that is both fair and foul.

ALL THREE WITCHES: "Fair is foul, foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air."

WITCH THREE: Speaking of filthy air, today's pollution index has a high of 73; we recommend asthma sufferers and those allergic to strange prophecies about the murder of kings to stay indoors.

(The THREE WITCHES exit.)

SHAKESPEARE: And just wait until you see what this does to "The Tempest." Before it was just some silly fantasy about a shipwreck on an enchanted island; now it's a morality play about the hazards of inaccurate forecasting --

End of Freeview

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