



The Skriker

Caryl Churchill

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Premiered at the Royal National Theatre, this extraordinary new play by one of Britain's leading playwrights combines English folk tales with modern urban life. In terms of its language alone, it is as exciting and challenging on the page as on the stage. The play follows the Skriker, 'a shapeshifter and death portent, ancient and damaged,' in its search for love and revenge as it pursues two young women to London, changing its shape at every new encounter. Along with the Skriker come Rawheadandbloodybones, the Kelpie, the Green Lady, Black Dog and more, till the whole country is swarming with enticing and angry creatures that have burst from the underworld.

The Skriker Details

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From Reader Review The Skriker for online ebook

Megan says

What just happened?! Love it.

Carl Erez says

4.5 stars. I really liked a lot of the ideas in this play, such as the shapeshifter appearing as different characters to the protagonists yet looking the same to the audience, the faeries always doing things in the background, and some of the elements of the plot, yet I found the actual quality of the writing itself to be somewhat lackluster, especially when compared to some of Churchill's other works.

Emily Huber says

This play can come off as difficult to read at first. I probably wouldn't have stuck with it for so long if it wasn't assigned reading for one of my classes, to be honest. However, Churchill takes a look at a world constructed on fairytales that attempt to sugar-coat what are truly morbid and horrific stories. Though this play was written over ten years ago, it remains a timely lens through which we can examine the world around us. Try and stick with it, it truly is a thought-provoking and insightful piece.

Réka says

Weirdest thing I've read in my entire life.

Julie says

It's been a while since I read a stageplay, and I found myself deeply wishing I could see this performed in real life — especially because Caryl Churchill's writing is surreal, dreamlike, the characters interrupting each other, her dialogue like madcap frenetic wordplay and poetry. The first several pages are one rambling overwhelming monologue from the eponymous Skriker, and I am just astonished that someone could memorise something like this (for three pages!):

Eating a plum in the enchanted orchard, cherry orchid, chanted orchestra was my undoing my doing my dying my undying love for you. Never eat a fruit or puck luck pluck a flower if you want to get back get your own back get back to your own back to the wall flower.

The Skriker does have moments of more lucidity, particularly when she's speaking to and haunting Josie & Lily. The play is about a predatory fairy stalking two young mothers: one pregnant, the other hospitalised in a mental institution under suspicion of killing her child. The back-and-forth as she tries to lure them away is

dizzying, and you're just sort of along for the ride, particularly with the other characters of myth and folklore just drifting along in the background and accentuating this sense of dreamlike surrealness.

The Skriker is such a powerful character, constantly cropping up again in different disguises, and I just would've loved to see an actress tackle this role. What's also great is that all the major roles in the production are female, which is fitting since it centers a bit on motherhood & madness.

Very short/quick read at about 55 pages. 3.5 stars, rounded up a bit after book club discussion. I still feel like I would've appreciated it better or understood it better if I'd seen it performed, but it was still super evocative — and for being such a batshit bonkers play, was somehow one of the most uniformly enjoyed reads at our book club (which is normally a v. contentious space!)

Megan says

I love this play so much. The Skriker, a sort of British Isles folklore creature, latches onto Josie, and then onto her pregnant sister, Lily, granting their wishes -- sort of -- while trying to get her ancient oomph back. It's a dark, dark play, with the potential to be frightening and richly visual when mounted.

You know how in urban fantasy with elves, authors try to convey a sense that the elves are operating on a totally different moral system, or none at all, and that they're sooo powerful and sooo frightening? Yeah, Churchill does it better than anyone; her fairies are alien and grotesque.

For the fun of it, here's a quick sample of what the Skriker sounds like when she's not pretending to be human:

Don't get this ointment disappointment in your eyes I say to the mortal middlewife but of course she does and the splendored this palace picture palace winter policeman's ball suddenly blurred visionary missionary mishmash potato, and there was a mud hit mad hut and the mother a murder in rag tags and bob's your uncle and the baby a wrinkly crinkly crackerjack of all trading places, because of course it was all a glamour amour amorphous fuss about nothing. But she never lets on so she gets home safe and sound the trumpet. But one day I'm in the market with b and put it in the oven helping myself and she sees me and says how's your wife waif and stray how's the baby? And I say what eye do you seize me with? This eye high diddley, she says. So I point my finger a thing at her and strike her blind alley cat o' nine tails.

Nick K says

I first read this play when I was 17 and I disliked it. I thought it was nonsense and egotistical. But, thought the years, I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. I have it a couple more reads in my mid twenties and now I appreciate it. The beginning speech is still hard for me to comprehend, but maybe that's what she intended. Either way, I now see how creative this work is. I'm glad it suck around for me to give another go!

Athena says

I had to find a synopsis online to find out that Josie and Lily are actually sisters, on the back of the book and in the book they are referred to as "two young."

I love the word Skriker. Just saying it gives me the creeps.

Honestly, I would love to pick up books like this, with all the incoherent jibber jabber, and be able to understand why so many readers rave about its greatness or genius. I just don't get it. I did love the Skriker's monologue at the beginning, but again, there was so much gibberish that I couldn't make sense of, while the rational information didn't create a complete comprehensive story, or half of one for that matter. I will hand it to the author that the puns and rhymes were clever, but wasn't there a purpose to this play?

Acer Pseudoplatanus says

Dark, dense, disturbing and disorienting this nightmarish play is at times difficult to follow and the relationship and dynamics between the girls and their backgrounds could have been better elaborated on (in some decisions their actions seem to be uncalled for or have no apparent motivation other than driving the plot).

Still, there is much to the play; Similarly to works by Martin McDonagh it is gripping and hypnotic, leaving one with the initial reaction of "Well, that was fucked up.", soon to be followed by realizations that the play actually had considerable depth. [there is, however, no humour, black or otherwise, here. The tense and dark atmosphere is omnipresent].

There seem to be many allegorical aspects and even though I have given it much thought, I have not yet come to a clear interpretation of certain aspects of it.

The surreal "ramblings" of the Skriker -whether one thinks them shamanistic or delirious- are hypnotic, almost musical and often poetic in tone, working quite well by creating associations and operating mostly through rhetorical devices and chunks of phrases and sayings (from nursery rhyme to high literature). Those are in fact some of my favourite parts in this play and have tremendous potential for performance; the actress could whisper, scream, growl or speak smoothly and softly, slowly or hysterically fast or use any colour,tempo or dynamic in between to emphasize, de-emphasize and communicate. (Reading is definitely recommended, given that some puns or references would be invisible to the ear).

I really enjoyed the way fairy-tales are pulled into our modern world, with all the morbidity, cruelty, twisted reasoning, grotesque and horror that the initial tales had, how they serve as a link to as something more primal and how the fairies' cruelty is not responsible for the darkness alone (war and the destruction of the earth by human hands one one hand and uncontrollable phenomena like natural catastrophes and mental illness are shown to cast shadows and cause grief and destruction as well).

Therefore the biblical references seemed out of place to me, yet those, as well as a couple literary references seem to be used in order of connecting the Skriker to the subconscious of British and/or Western society, which would fit the Skriker's theme of "shape-shifting" and acting whilst being the same on the inside rather well, especially in connection with the juxtaposition of "modern" and "ancient".

Juxtaposition seems to be another theme of the play, given that it can be found in characters, worlds and

roles.

Another main theme would be femininity and what is demanded of women (it is no coincidence that the Skriker never appears an equal; either she is an old figure demanding respect and care, a child demanding a mother or a man demanding a lover. Even when it appears as a nurse it is far from nurturing and more of an authority figure, when appearing as an old friend as an “inferior”, begging and pleading) and the fact that so much is connected to birth and fertility (to the possibility alone and potential of the child) and that most of the dramatis personae is female underlines this theme even more.

And still, there is a pitiful aspects of the Skriker, besides the cruelty, possessiveness, lust for blood and revenge and egocentricity; a being broken and in need of love that goes beyond the roles it plays.

Environmentalism, similarly to neglect, is another key-aspect here, even though it is not given a central part, and it is more actual today than when the Skriker was first published.

George says

Brilliant. It's like a love story as told by a schizophrenic. It was bizarre how much I related to Josie. Should I be scared?

I read it all in one sitting late last night when I couldn't sleep. And it was amazing. But also horrifying and funny and sad all in a unique voice.

If Lewis Carroll had an actual psychotic break, he'd think like this.

"I wish Josie wasn't mad."

Daniel says

Some of Churchill's finest wordplay. Ghoulish and ghastly, the monsters in the Skriker stalk and shapeshift in words and form and would be a lot of tense fun to watch.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 3 - Drama on 3:

'Long before that, long before England was an idea, a country of snow and wolves where trees sang and birds talked and people knew we mattered...'

In a broken world, two sisters Lily and Josie meet an extraordinary creature. The Skriker is a shapeshifter, an ancient fairy. She can be an old woman, a child, a man, a death portent. She has come from the Underworld to pursue seduce and entrap them, through time and space, through this world and her own.

Whilst speaking English in its human incarnations, the Skriker's own language consists of broken and fragmented word play. Blending naturalism, horror and magical realism, it is a story of love, loss and revenge.

Choir Master Stuart Overington

The Hag Jessica Walker

Choir Alaka Proddhan, Charlie Green, Charlotte Beale, Elizabeth Barry, Joanne Griffiths, Justina Aina, Olivia Avouris and Rebekah Davies

The Skriker by Caryl Churchill was produced by The Royal Exchange Theatre as part of the 2015 Manchester International Festival, directed by Sarah Frankcom. It was adapted for radio by Caryl Churchill, directed by Sarah Frankcom and produced by Sue Roberts.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07454g5>

Bunny says

Good. Like Earl and Fairy if everyone they met wanted to kill and eat them.

Betty? says

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07454g5>

Description: *'Long before that, long before England was an idea, a country of snow and wolves where trees sang and birds talked and people knew we mattered...'*

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If you like word-plays intertwined with nursery-rhymes, book titles that result in an adult fairytale, this is for

you.

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Emrys says

Self-trust, jealousy, persistence of: memory, superstitions, feelings, beliefs, regret.

This play was brilliant if for nothing else than the language. Even as it was too much of itself, it was still breath-taking, brow-scrunching and full of intrigue. Caryl Churchill does not ease her readers into the play's madness but instead plows through a four-page monologue of nonsense for her script's opening. I got little more than a general sense of mood and style from all of that, but as time went on and she spoke in shorter segments I could use context to crack what she was saying, comments or stories or what have you.

Also by the end I felt pity and a mental outreach of motherly care for the Skriker. She was after all a pathetic creature, broken and in need of love. She wanted to be a child, be loved, be cared for, which is something that a lot of us want at our weak points. She is also ancient and doesn't fit into our world in the same way that she used to. She used to be big and important and now she is desperate and hollow and alone.

All-in-all I would say The Skriker was disturbing and elusive. Also I have no CLUE how some of these stage directions were actually put into practice. But still, I would love to see it performed, I would love to read more Caryl Churchill, and I would love to hear theories in what the heck was going on. To the reviews I go!
