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# The Twits

David Wood and Roald Dahl

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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## THE TWITS

*The Twits* was commissioned by the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, and first performed there on 25th March, 1999, with the following cast:

<b>Mr Twit</b>	Andy Hockley
<b>Mrs Twit</b>	Isabel Ford
<b>Mr Muggle-Wump</b>	Anthony Ofoegbu
<b>Mrs Muggle-Wump</b>	Rachael Savage
<b>Roly-Poly Bird</b>	Jenny Sanderson
<b>Narrator</b>	David Baker
<b>Children</b>	Sophie Gabel, Lucy Haines, Jason Harvey, Gary Hornsby, Kelly Hynes, Lisa Kelly, Shazeer Mahmood, Sophie Majrowski, Sabrina Moustakim, Stephanie Nicely, Luka Owen and Alexander Smith

Producer **Jane Hytch**  
Director **Kathi Leahy**  
Assistant Director **Kay Fellows**  
Designer **Tom Conroy**  
Lighting Designer **Wesley Hiscock**  
Choreography by **Jill Freeman** and **Kathi Leahy**

## CHARACTERS

**Mr Twit**

**Mrs Twit**

The Muggle-Wump Family—monkeys:

**Muggle-Wump (Dad)**

**Mrs Muggle-Wump (Mum)**

**Little Muggle-Wump 1**

**Little Muggle-Wump 2**

**Little Muggle-Wump 3**

**The Roly-Poly Bird** (male or female)

**Birds** (it is suggested that these are puppets on rods, carried by children, who could also be dressed as birds)

**Monkeys** (optional—other monkeys living in the rain forest, perhaps played by children)

**Narrator/Musician** (individual productions may decide to have other musicians too, but the idea of the Narrator “accompanying” the action with percussion or other instruments works well)

## **Acknowledgements**

David Wood would like to thank Bob Eaton and Jane Hytch of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, for commissioning this play, and Kathi Leahy for directing such a splendid production.

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The cover illustration of *The Twits*, by Quentin Blake, is reproduced by permission of A.P. Watt Ltd, 20 John Street, London, WC1N 2DR, and the artist.

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Samuel French Ltd acknowledges the publication of the original book by the late Roald Dahl by Jonathan Cape Limited in hardback format and Puffin Books in paperback format.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Most of the cast need to be physical performers. The Muggle-Wump family should all be fairly acrobatic. It is possible that the Roly-Poly Bird should be able to fly on a trapeze. Mrs Twit will have to be flown on a rope. Mr Twit will need to be agile, particularly when he glues the branches of the tree.

The Narrator/Musician links the story. He could be a multi-instrumentalist, complete with mad percussion kit noises as well as keyboard, who can also project as an outgoing presenter.

There could be several Birds on each rod, so that four or five children can create quite a flock! They should be different colours and sizes, fantasy birds rather than realistic English garden birds, which might look rather drab. But they should not prove any competition for the Roly-Poly Bird, who should be flamboyant and brightly coloured. Two rods carry black birds (one on each rod) holding paintbrushes in their beaks.

### **Concept**

The challenge, as I see it, of adapting this book is that many of the episodes are so “gross” that to play them for real would probably not be as effective as playing them in a stylised up-front, presentational manner. The fact that the book tells us that Mr and Mrs Twit once trained monkeys in a circus suggested the idea of setting the whole play within a circus ring. This means that certain key episodes can be played almost as circus acts.

However, there is a danger in this. It would be wrong to make light of the unpleasantness and cruelty of the Twits, because we must get our children’s audience well and truly on the side of the animals. There will be many times when we want to play for a more convincing sense of danger than in, for instance, the often winking, conspiratorial (with the audience) comedy-style performance often given by villains in pantomime. We have to find the right balance.

The use of our Narrator as a linking device will hopefully have echoes of the role of a circus ringmaster, taking us from one act to the next; if necessary, setting the scene and filling in certain elements of the story which would otherwise be difficult to stage.

It is also worth mentioning that the circus style will be imposed upon a through story-line, which must be preserved; the play mustn't appear to be just a series of turns. But hopefully we can get the best of both worlds—the excitement of the circus, coupled with the dramatic momentum of a story enacted with a combination of “truth” and “big” acting.

The more physical skills that can be incorporated into the production the better.

### Set

A circus ring, with access from the sides and possibly the back. The Narrator/Musician must be on stage. He will need to be able to roam, but never be too far away from his instruments, which will often punctuate as well as follow his announcements and links. The original production gave him an enormous tricycle to ride round on.

There are three main large set pieces, which ideally will be on trucks. They should not be visible at the beginning of the play, but will be brought in at various points in Act I. (NB: the original production successfully kept the caravan and the tree on stage from the very beginning; only the cage “entered” during the action.)

The set pieces are:

*The Twits' caravan.* Ideally this will be able to revolve or open up at the front, revealing their living accommodation. In Act II, the whole of the interior needs to revolve (not necessarily in vision), so that we can see the room upside down. Hopefully the caravan will be large enough for the Twits to stand inside it. However, individual scenes at, for example, their dining table, can be played outside the caravan, further down in the circus ring acting area.

*The Muggle-Wump family's cage.* This need not be too big, as long as there is room for the monkeys to all stand and sit together, as well as stand on top of one another, so the height should accommodate this. A door, with a large key, gives access.

*The Tree.* In the book this is called the Big Dead Tree, and it certainly could be a skeletal structure with branches on which the puppet Birds will “sit”.

All three sets need to be on stage at the same time. I am imagining the caravan in the middle, with the cage to one side and the tree to the other side. Once all three are in position, it is quite likely they will stay there for most of the action of the play.

Bearing in mind that we will need the actors to climb on top of the cage and the tree (Mr Twit puts glue on them, and it may also be fun to have the monkeys climb on them), it is important that they can be made safe and strong enough to accommodate such activity.

I have also introduced two scenes set in the African rainforest. These will occur when the other three set pieces need not be on stage. The rainforest setting could be created very simply with ropes made to look like vines or whatever those things are that Tarzan swings on! Maybe some greenery flown in too? And, if the Roly-Poly Bird can work on a trapeze, it could be useful here. However, the rainforest scenes are not intended to be lengthy, and we must be able to move to and from them with the minimum of delay.

Towards the end of the play, Mrs Twit has to be lifted up in the air by masses of balloons. Obviously some sort of flying device will be necessary for this. It might be visually effective if our basic circus ring set incorporates several bunches of balloons filled with helium, at various points around the ring. These can then be used for the flying sequence.

### **Costume**

Presumably it is best to follow the guidelines given by Quentin Blake's illustrations in the book. However, it may be thought necessary to give the Twits something a bit more glittery, for their first appearance. Whether or not they should look like clowns, I'm not sure. That is what they are, in many ways, but they should be revolting, not glamorous!

The Muggle-Wumps need to be able to move well, so their costumes will probably be quite simple. However, they must be endearingly woolly—I don't think simple brown leotards will do! They should probably have a close-fitting helmet-style of head-dress, leaving their faces free to be made up. Obviously they must have full vision.

The children carrying the Birds could be dressed like birds themselves or wear a basic circus costume. But they shouldn't look too bright, as the focus must be on the puppet Birds.

The Roly-Poly Bird should be very exotic, but he/she will need as much freedom of movement as possible.

The Narrator shouldn't look like a conventional ringmaster. He could wear a colourful shirt and waistcoat, and a fun version of a top hat.



## ACT I

*Before the play begins, perhaps circus-style music plays, live or recorded, to set a jolly atmosphere*

*As the House Lights fade, an overture, quirky and fun, with lots of percussion, is played. Ideally the musician/s is/are on stage. Fanfare/drumroll*

*The Narrator, possibly a musician, steps forward*

**Narrator** Ladies and gentlemen, young ladies and gentlemen, the Belgrade (or local town) Super Circus is proud to present an exciting, extraordinary extravaganza entitle-i-titled... *The Twits*, featuring first the funny, fantastically fit, mirthful monarchs of monkeydom—please put your hands together for the Muggle-Wumps!

*Music as the Muggle-Wump Family enter and perform a short, impressive but not too impressive, acrobatic routine*

*Applause as the Muggle-Wumps exit, or stay on to see the other acts*

Now please welcome, in a fabulous formation of feathered flight, the Belgrade Super Circus' Fantasy of Birds!

*Music as the Birds enter and show off their skills. Perhaps the puppet birds are in colourful UV*

*Applause as the Birds exit, or stay on to see the other acts*

Next, my friends, prepare to meet our special guest star, straight from the magical, exotic, African rainforest, the clever, colourful, charismatic Roly-Poly Bird!

*The Roly-Poly Bird makes a spectacular entrance, possibly flying high to show off his rainbow-coloured plumage*

*Applause as the Roly-Poly Bird exits, or stays on to watch the final act*

It's time to meet and greet the stars of our show. Be prepared. They're

shocking, they're silly, they're stupid, they're stupidifyingly soppy, they're—get ready for—the one and only—thank goodness—the Twits!

*The Twits enter, wearing spangly cloaks. Mrs Twit carries a walking stick*

*Music as they perform a short comedy routine, silent not spoken. Perhaps Mr Twit presents, in an extravagant display of chivalry, a bouquet to Mrs Twit. She reacts delighted. She sniffs the flowers, which wilt or fall off. Mr Twit laughs. Mrs Twit hits him. Mr Twit reacts by falling. His false teeth come out and he holds them as they chatter. He politely offers a chair to Mrs Twit. As she sits, he puts the teeth under her. She reacts as though bitten and rubs her bottom. Mr Twit laughs and retrieves the teeth. He goes to sit, but Mrs Twit pulls the chair from under him. He crashes to the floor, reacts and rubs his bottom. Mrs Twit goes to sit and Mr Twit kicks the chair away. Mrs Twit crashes to the floor. This act can be worked on in rehearsal and changed or developed as required. But it should not be too “domestic” or feature food, because it should not pre-empt any of the “home-life” incidents that occur later*

*Applause as the Twits take their bow*

*Music as the scene changes. The other characters, if they have stayed on, now exit*

*The Twits, if necessary helped by stage management (as circus staff), bring on their caravan and park it UC of the ring*

*As they do so, the Narrator comes forward. He leads us into the story proper*

Ladies and gents, young ladies, young gents. Our story begins away from the glamour of the circus. Far, far away.

*Mr and Mrs Twit remove their spangly costumes, revealing their drab, dirty, everyday clothes*

*They leave their circus costumes with the caravan and come forward into the ring, acting out the Narrator's words*

The Twits lived in a caravan. The best word to describe them was ... disgusting. Mr Twit...

*Mr Twit steps forward*

...was a very hairy-faced man. His thick, spiky hair stuck out straight like

the bristles of a nailbrush. The stuff even sprouted in revolting tufts out of his nostrils and ear-holes.

**Mr Twit** My hairiness...

**Narrator** ...thought Mr Twit...

**Mr Twit** ...makes me look terrifically wise and grand!

**Narrator** But in truth he was neither of these things. Mr Twit was a twit. He was born a twit.

**Mrs Twit** (*coming forward*) And now, at the age of sixty, he's a bigger twit than ever!

*Mr Twit looks daggers at Mrs Twit*

**Narrator** How often, you may ask, did Mr Twit wash this bristly, nailbrushy face of his? The answer is *never*.

**Mr Twit** (*proudly*) Not even on Sundays!

**Narrator** As a result, there were always hundreds of bits of old breakfasts and lunches and suppers sticking to the hairs.

*Mr Twit licks eagerly round his face*

Specks of gravy, dried-up scrambled egg, spinach, tomato ketchup, fish fingers...

**Mr Twit** (*with relish*) ...minced chicken livers!

**Narrator** If you delved deeper still—hold your noses, ladies and gentlemen—you'd discover things that had been there for months and months.

*Mr Twit delves and finds...*

**Mr Twit** A piece of maggotty green cheese! (*He eats it noisily*)

**Narrator** A mouldy old cornflake!

*Mr Twit finds it and eats it*

Or even...

**Mr Twit** (*digging it out*) ...the slimy tail of a tinned sardine. (*He holds it aloft*)

*Mrs Twit grabs it and eats it with relish*

**Mrs Twit** Mmmm. Tasty.

*Mr Twit looks daggers at her*

**Narrator** Mrs Twit was no better than her husband.

**Mr Twit** You ... you ugly old hag!

*Mrs Twit reacts*

**Narrator** Ugly, yes. But not born ugly. When she was young she had quite a pretty face.

*Mrs Twit smiles "prettily"*

But she had ugly thoughts every day of every week of every year, and so her face got uglier...

**Mr Twit** ...and uglier...

**Narrator** ...and uglier...

*Mrs Twit demonstrates*

**Mr Twit** ...so ugly I can hardly bear to look at it!

*Mrs Twit looks daggers at Mr Twit. Then she hits him with her walking stick*

Ow! (*He holds his arm up threateningly*)

*Both freeze*

**Narrator** Mr and Mrs Twit were a very happy couple. But seldom happy at the same time. For what really made them happy was playing nasty tricks on one another...

*Music as, unseen by Mrs Twit, Mr Twit snaps off the lower half of her walking stick. Then he goes to the caravan and sits at the table, pouring out two glasses of beer*

**Mr Twit** (*warmly*) A glass of beer, my dear?

*Mrs Twit unfreezes*

**Mrs Twit** Mmmm. Lovely. (*She goes to walk, using her stick, but it is so short she crashes to the floor*)

*Mr Twit laughs*

Aaaah! (*She struggles up, forced to stoop because of the short walking stick*) What's happened?

*Mr Twit quickly removes his shoes, kneels down into them and shuffles towards her*

**Mr Twit** You seem to be growing, my sweet.

**Mrs Twit** Growing?

**Mr Twit** (*arriving, and looking shorter than her*) Growing. Take a look at your stick, you old goat, and see how much you've grown in comparison.

**Mrs Twit** (*looking at her stick, in amazement*) Never!

**Mr Twit** You always said you wanted me to look up to you! Your wish has been granted.

**Mrs Twit** I don't want to grow!

**Mr Twit** No?

**Mrs Twit** No! Do something!

**Mr Twit** Do something? Anything?

**Mrs Twit** Anything! Stop me growing!

**Mr Twit** Of course, my pet.

*Mr Twit stands up, unseen by Mrs Twit, and fetches an enormous joke mallet, which he brings crashing down on her head*

**Mrs Twit** Aaah!

*Mr Twit laughs and, seen by Mrs Twit, replaces the bottom half of her walking stick*

**Mr Twit** Just a little joke, my honey-bunny!

*Mrs Twit growls in fury. Both go to sit at the table and drink their beer. Mr Twit belches*

**Narrator** Mrs Twit was determined to pay back Mr Twit.

*Musical sting. Mrs Twit smiles*

Suddenly she had an idea.

*Mrs Twit checks Mr Twit is not looking*

Into her beer she dropped...

*Mrs Twit follows the narration*

...her glass eye...

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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