

# HAMLET TO HAMILTON

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## Season One, Episode Four *Heresy!*

*(A crowd. Gavel pounding. Various angry murmurs. Extremely male and grumpy.)*

**JUDGE.** *(Played by COLIN. British.)* Order! ORDER!

*(Shouting, indistinguishable. But not orderly.)*

**JUDGE.** I call to *Order*—

*(Crowd dies down. A little.)*

**JUDGE.** The Most Venerable Brotherhood of Shakespearean Academians. Keepers of the Gnostic Flame, Knights of the Holy Pentameter, Crusaders of the One! True! Scansion!

*(Hearty cheers.)*

*(Then, very low and ominous:)*

**JUDGE.** Bring before me the HERETIC.

*(Cheers. Louder and more violent before. Enormous doors clang open, as the “Heretic”—played by EMILY—is dragged before the court.)*

**EMILY.** Get off me! Let me go! *(Etc.)*

**JUDGE.** *Ordeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeer.*

*(Considerably less order than before, more shouting, etc. Suddenly, close to the microphone.)*

**EMILY.** *(Deep sigh.)* Soooooo... *(Clucks tongue.)* Looks like I angered some Shakespeareans...

[music]

**HAMLET 1.** To be...

**HAMLET 2.** To be...

**HAMLET 1.** ... or not to be?

**HAMLET 3.** To be or not to be?

**HAMLET 1.** That is the question.

**HAMLET 3.** ... or not?

**EMILY.** This is: *Hamlet to Hamilton, Exploring Verse Drama*  
I'm your host, Emily C. A. Snyder  
You're listening to:  
Season One, Episode 4...

*(Music cuts out.)*

**JUDGE.** HERESYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!

*(Back to the courtroom. Gavel, etc.)*

**EMILY.** *(To microphone.)* Hi, friends. So, ever since the angry academians chased me at the top of our Deb Victoroff interview...things have been Not So Great.

**JUDGE.** Orrrrrrrder.

**EMILY.** To begin with, I maaaaaaaaaaaaay have done a Heresy—at least according to some Shakespeareans. Calling into question things about verse drama that academics *schwumpf* together, if you will. (Listen to Episode 3 to know what *schwumpf* means.) But—oh, sorry. It looks like I'm about to take the stand. Back with you in a minute.

**JUDGE.** *(Banging gavel.)* Order, order. Bring before us that heretic, Emily C. A. Snyder.

**EMILY.** Here, your honor.

**JUDGE.** Very well. Do you promise to speak in iambic, only iambic, and nothing but iambic, so help you Bill?

**EMILY.** *(Pause. Then:)* No.

**SOMEONE.** Burn 'er! She's a witch!

**JUDGE.** She's not a witch. She's a *heretic*. And very well. We hereby convene the hearing of Emily C. A. Snyder, on the following charges.

**BAILIFF.** (*High and very Spanish Inquisition-y.*) Read out the charGES!

**JUDGE.** Yes, yes. (*Hrumph.*) Yes. First charge is *very* grave indeed. I understand that you have been heard to say that...*Shakespeare. Doesn't. Matter.*

**EMILY.** Correct.

(*Uproar.*)

**EMILY.** But, if I may defend myself. I'd like to call to the stand, William Shakespeare—

**JUDGE.** "Call to the stand *William Shakespeare?*" "CALL to the stand WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE?!"

**EMILY.** Yes.

**JUDGE.** *No!* No you may *not* "call to the stand William Shakespeare."

**EMILY.** Exactly. Because he's dead.

(*Everyone gasps.*)

**EMILY.** This *can't* be controversial.

**JUDGE.** *We'll* decide what's controversial or not. And more to the point, we, the Noble Brethren of the Perpetual Footnote can speak for... *William Shakespeare.*

**EMILY.** But, no, that's exactly my *point*. You've done far too much of speaking for William Shakespeare and doing *this* about William Shakespeare and doing *that* about – Look. Give me a minute. And I promise I'll explain.

(*Unruly noises*)

**JUDGE.** Order! (*bangs gavel*)

**EMILY.** Right, so heresy one: Shakespeare's dead. Get over it. (laughs) Okay. So what do I mean by that? Well, the thing is that at least in the English-speaking world, we have a bad history of dealing with verse drama. What I mean is, in the rest of Europe, possibly in the rest of the world – and it's very exciting, we have an international listenership. So welcome everyone, at this point, from the US

and Australia and Ireland and the UK and Northern Ireland and France and Romania, Switzerland, Malaysia, Sweden, South Korea, Russia, India, Germany, and Norway. Yay! And please, drop us a line. Tell us what you do with verse drama in your country. But in the English language, we kind of stopped verse drama with Shakespeare, which is not true for the rest of the world. And we attempt, therefore... We've made an entire academic market off of selling Shakespeare merch, essentially. We have, and perhaps some of you are people who have made their entire living off of teaching Shakespeare, writing books about Shakespeare, going to conferences and doing your PhD on Shakespeare, writing Shakespeare fan fic, directing Shakespeare, acting in Shakespeare. Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Shakespeare.

This is not to take anything away from Shakespeare. I myself, in my career, began with Shakespeare at eight years old and have studied him and loved his work. He is renowned for a reason, and certainly he's paid my taxes 400 years after his death, which is not too shabby a legacy to leave behind. But he's only one person who wrote verse drama. It's the same thing as if we said everyone who composes music must sound like Mozart, and all of music concludes with Mozart. Well, if we did that, we would never get *Hamilton*. If we did that, we wouldn't even get *Les Mis*. Music is a form. Verse drama is a form. There is no one who owns, or even has mastered to the point of completion, any art form. You can try to look like Leonardo da Vinci, and it may be helpful to study how he used paint and varnish, but not everyone has to paint like Leonardo da Vinci. He is not the end-all and be-all of the art. In the same way, Shakespeare is not the end-all, be-all. And more specifically, I want to talk about how we have abused Shakespeare as the end-all, be-all, because this is the reason why he doesn't matter, in some ways. Or I should say he doesn't actually matter as much as you matter.

[music]

Let's take some examples, and once more, let's go to the overlap between verse drama and musical theatre with a pretty obvious one. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* has been told multiple times. Prior to Shakespeare, it was an Italian story, which then Shakespeare picked up, fan fictioned into his own work, and since then, of course, *Romeo and Juliet* has been performed countless times. I've seen multiple versions where various characters are gender flipped, so you have a male nurse. You have a female Tybalt, female Mercutio. Or it's been queered, so, for example, you'll make a little bit more canon, a little bit more textual through the way that you act, that Mercutio and Romeo are queer. Or, for example, I saw a queer version... I saw two queer versions where Romeo was a woman in a lesbian relationship with Juliet. This is fairly common.

There also was a version that was done several decades ago that used the text and translated, say, the Capulets as though they were from Palestine and the Montagues as though they were from Israel, and then the Prince or anyone who

was in between would speak in English. Actually, this apparently caused such a fervor that, because it was performed in Palestine, Israel, on the border, that several nights, bomb threats were called in and they had to close the show for safety's sake. But which is to say, the idea of forbidden loves, in whatever context that may mean, has been something put on top of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* text quite a lot. And you can do that through performance. You can do that through casting. You can do that, again, through translation of the language.

But sometimes, in order to make more explicit, it's worth it to write your own version of the text. Again, Shakespeare was stealing from someone else's story. It's not like he has intellectual property rights over it. Much less, they've expired by now. But let's take a look at *West Side Story*. For all its flaws and the way that it doesn't necessarily represent Puerto Rican people in the best possible light, still, at least for its time, at the time of its writing in the 1960s, the intent was to take the form of *Romeo and Juliet*, this old, old, old, old tale which Shakespeare happened to be one person who did his version of that tale, and to make explicit the tensions between white people and those recently arrived from Puerto Rico, in this particular case, to, in fact, force, hopefully, producers and anyone who would put on the play to provide roles for people of Latinx descent. That's why, of course, there's difficulty when, for example, we attempt to have an entirely white cast for *West Side Story*, because *West Side Story* was written explicitly – and differentially, they didn't just use the text of Shakespeare. They had something more to say.

This goes back to content dictates form. They had things to say, not about Verona, Italy, but about America and the way that we treat immigrants and the way that those coming to our nation see both the flaws and the successes of this attempt at a melting pot. You need to make that explicit in the text. The problem with making Shakespeare matter for everything is, again, that the man is dead. If you want to talk about America or you want to talk about Brexit or you want to talk about COVID or you want to talk about anything that's happening now, well, you could take any play. Again, you could take a Shakespeare play, I suppose, and heaven knows in 2016, here in New York City, we saw not just The Public Theatre, but there were multiple independent theaters that took *Julius Caesar* and were like, "Well, we'll make Caesar Trump," which tells me, actually, they don't quite know what *Julius Caesar* is about and how it works, but anyway... But what they needed was new text. Shakespeare wasn't writing about our situation. We like to say that Shakespeare was universal, but while he writes to the universal human condition to the best of his abilities, he's still one dude. He's still one dude who wrote what he wrote, and that's all he wrote, and that's all he's ever going to write. And he could only write from his limited perspective, which, no matter how broad it is, there is no one in the world who can write to everyone's point of view. No matter how empathetic, no matter how woke, no matter how universal, no matter how progressive, no. There is no one who can speak to everyone or to every time.

I think we do Shakespeare a disservice when we have something else that we need to say and we try to take his plays and twist and turn them through costuming and through casting and through really overworking the text through the way that we deliver the lines to mean something else, when what we could do is write a new play. We could write a new play. We could, again, speak directly using this form and speak to the audience now rather than forcing one man to have spoken for everyone. That's just not fair.

It's a relief, I'd say, to say that Shakespeare, in some ways, doesn't matter. Or perhaps it's more fair to say Shakespeare doesn't always matter, just in the same way that... Let's say you just had a break-up. The music you may need may be something very angsty or something country music or something large and symphonic, and perhaps Mozart's harpsichord isn't going to do it for you. So what we need is you.

I want to take a moment and take a real quick look at an article that was just published a few days before the recording of this episode, and hopefully this will illustrate a little bit of what I mean by what it means to put too much on Shakespeare. This is in *American Theatre* magazine. For those of you who may not know it, it's a publication with Theater Communications Group, and it's a very well respected theatre magazine, certainly here in America, and I believe worldwide. Most recently, on October 29, 2020, they published an article titled "You Say You Want a Revolution: How to Rebuild the Theatre Post-COVID." "Invest in artists and let them do their best work in rep, and audiences will follow" is the tagline. It's by Jim Warren. Jim Warren is the former Artistic Director and Founder of The American Shakespeare Center here in Staunton, Virginia, in The United States of America.

Now, one of the things that Jim Warren says in this article – and as always, we will link to it for you to be able to read – but one of the things he says further on down is under the section, "Who Gets to Work." And I quote, at length:

Since I have spent the bulk of my career directing Shakespeare, I have been dancing with the issues of gender parity and diversity for a long time. Classical plays have more roles that were originally written for white, male-presenting actors. But in 2020, we should no longer be confined by the patriarchy or whiteness of the playwrights; we have the ability and talent available today to cast any role with actors of any gender and any race.

I'm going to stop there for a second. I happen to agree, but this is a fairly low bar. What a surprise. People should play roles. Okay. He goes on:

Shakespeare companies in particular have at their fingertips a cornucopia of classically trained women actors...

(heavy sigh) Okay.

... who can often out-fight, out-dance, and out-charisma a multitude of less talented men who get cast ahead of them simply because they are male.

That is true.

These women deserve their shot to play any and every role in Shakespeare without being forced to change pronouns, wear dresses, or re-gender the characters. Re-gendering is an option that has become more common today, but I posit that casting any woman in a character written as a man gives us more bang for the buck if we keep the pronouns as written. As powerful as it may be to see a great female actor play Queen Lear or Lady Hamlet, I think Shakespeare would have written different plays if he were writing these characters as females.

I'm going to say that again: if he were writing these characters as females.

And I find it even more of a triumph to watch a great female actor crawl inside the roles of King Henry V, King Richard III, Prospero, Hamlet, Iago, and all the many others—as written.

He then goes on to say:

And yes, actors who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) can play any character. I once heard a director say, "I want Macbeth to wear a kilt, so I can't cast a Black actor in that role." What?! Some directors also think that if they cast a character like Macduff with a BIPOC actor, then Lady Macduff and Young Macduff need to be actors of that same race. Poppycock. Homogeneity in family groups onstage is no more necessary than it is in real life.

We must start walking the walk with folks who are BIPOC. Either we believe in the ideas behind the platitudes or we don't.

And he goes on. I am not going to attempt to speak for anyone who is Black, Indigenous, or a person of color. I am white. I can, however, speak regarding "female actors." (laughs) By the way, if you're on Facebook, please follow Man Who Has It All, because it is delightful, and you will get all sorts of memes that will point out why I bristle so much at being called a "female actor." I'm an actor, dude. Like, calm down.

Anyway, I can speak directly to this, and I would love to hear from the listenership, especially any BIPOC actor who has really spent a lot of their life doing Shakespeare, or perhaps has not been able to spend their time doing Shakespeare. Whatever your experience is, I would like to know it. We are going to be bringing people onto this podcast who can speak to that experience, so I'm not going to speak for them. But perhaps some of the things that I say now will resonate for others. Similarly, although he doesn't address it, he doesn't address being LGBTQIA or at all within the queer community. I myself am cisgendered. I

am also straight, and so I can't speak as authentically to that experience. There are further diversities that were not mentioned, such as size, shape, age, neurodiversity, ability, and so forth, and the list just goes on and on. I would love, again, to know what is your specific experience, especially for anyone out there who is an actor. Whether you've been cast in verse drama or you've been barred from being cast in verse drama, I'd love to know what your experience is to see where we overlap and to see where we diverge. But I'm going to be speaking from my experience, and in this case pointing out why focus on Shakespeare is a bad start if you're trying to actually have any sort of diversity. There are loads of diversities that you represent that he can't. This is exciting. This is a feature. It's not a bug.

But to speak about what I can speak about, he mentions a few different points, and he says Shakespeare companies have a cornucopia of classically trained female actors, so let's talk about women in the arts. And by women, yes, I do mean everyone who identifies as a woman, so hello, my sisters. And just speaking quickly to anyone who, perhaps, is afraid or getting nervous that I'm recognizing trans women as women, I just invite you to actually go back to Episode 3. Listen to the schwumpf episode and, if nothing else, come from a place of charity. Trans women are women, and I would also say that trans women are going to have, possibly, a different experience in being cast than cis women will. Or we may discover, if we actually start speaking about our experiences, some surprising overlaps. But when I speak about women in this upcoming section, I am talking about everyone who is female presenting who identifies as a woman.

I also want to acknowledge in this part, as I am going to be talking about gender, that no person is a monolith. If, I guess, this heresy boils down to anything, it's that Shakespeare's not a monolith of the entire human experience. My experience of being a woman is not a monolith of the entire experience of being a woman. A nonbinary but female presenting person's experience of gender, and therefore of being cast, and therefore of portraying roles, is going to be different from mine as well, even though we may have the same anatomy. If I were to call upon a far, perhaps, more eloquent man than I, I think that C. S. Lewis put it well, which is in *The Weight of Glory* he wrote:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

What he's getting at, what hopefully I'm getting at, is that I'm about to speak from my own experience, and I hope that you will speak from your own experience, and that perhaps one of the most charitable and loving things that we can do is to invite people to tell us their experience and to believe that experience and to cherish the fact that we were gifted with that knowledge, that we were honored and trusted to know what other people have gone through.

All right. That's a lot of talking. Let's get back to the article.

*(Banging gavel)*

**JUDGE.** Just a minute! Just a minute! Just a minute!

**EMILY.** Yes?

**JUDGE.** We brought you in here to speak about *Shakespearean* heresies. Not to talk about...gender.

**EMILY.** Yes, but Shakespeare was writing for all-male casts. And Shakespeare, like all verse drama, is performed by real people. And real people have to deal with gender. So do we.

**JUDGE.** FEMINIST! HERESY!

**EMILY.** (Oh boy, he's *really* not going to like this next part.) Your honor? May I suggest we take a brief recess? Y'know, maybe for an advertisement? (I'll be back with you in a moment, folks. Wish me luck!)

*(gavel bangs)*

[music]

Hello. This is Emily popping in here to take a minute to tell you about Turn to Flesh Productions. Turn to Flesh is a New York City theatre company that develops new plays in heightened text with vibrant roles for women and those underrepresented in classical art. So basically, we create new Shakespeare shows for everybody that Shakespeare didn't write for. Since our founding in 2013, we've given various levels of development space to over 50 plays through playwriting workshops, such as our monthly MUSE Program, or through our in-person classes, through the staged readings of full works, and even workshop productions and world premieres of entire shows.

We love to feature actors of all ages, abilities, shapes and sizes, ethnicities and orientations, usually swinging swords and falling in love and having epic battles, or just being terribly clever, frequently, although not always, speaking in blank verse.

Now, in 2020, Turn To Flesh is excited to be working internationally over audio programming and workshops and productions held via digital platforms like Zoom. And we'd like to hear from you. You can find us on all social medias @turntoflesh and to keep up with the latest events, such as our monthly MUSE Program, where playwrights bring in the first draft of their new scenes and actors embody and give feedback. Right now, The MUSE Program is also being held virtually over Zoom. I mean, you can, from your own living room on your laptop, watch a new Shakespeare play get written and workshopped right before your eyes. You might even have your own piece workshopped. You might be the new Burbage playing in the new Shakespeare's show. That's pretty cool.

So make sure to like us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @turntoflesh and join the Turn to Flesh community. If you want to do more, you can support us by visiting [turntoflesh.org](http://turntoflesh.org) and hitting that Donate button. Or if you want to book a one-on-one session with me, Emily C. A. Snyder, make sure to listen to the end of the podcast for more information.

Right, back to the show.

[music]

*(Commotion again. More banging gavel.)*

**JUDGE.** Order, order. Now, can we *please* continue without all this talk about *gender* and *sexuality*.

**EMILY.** I can't make any promises. But I *can* promise to talk about this article.

**JUDGE.** Very well. Proceed.

**EMILY.** Thank you.

So to return to the article, under the section "Who Gets to Work," Jim Warren says that "Shakespeare companies in particular have at their fingertips a cornucopia of classically trained women actors who can often out-fight, out-dance, and out-charisma a multitude of less talented men who get cast ahead of them simply because they are male." Anyone who's ever done educational theatre, independent theatre, musical theatre, anyone who's ever cast a show, there are a million women who are fully trained, fully capable, fully appropriate, and there simply aren't enough roles, which is another reason why we need more than Shakespeare, because he was writing for all-male casts, which is why he only has three female roles in any given play, and why half the time those female roles are just not as good as the male roles. Ophelia and Gertrude barely have

anything to say. So if you're in a play with Hamlet and you're Ophelia, okay, you might get top billing for whatever reason, but you've got almost nothing to do. You're not honing your craft.

So anyway, it is true that because we put such *emphasis* on *Shakespeare* that we are actually systematically keeping women who want to do verse drama out of doing verse drama because we are determined to do only Shakespeare, who just frickin' didn't write for women. So what we've been trying to do, rather than saying, "Oh, we need new plays," which will just open up the casting to begin with, what we frequently have done is, as I mentioned before, we will regender a role, has become a very common thing.

For example, when I played Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, it was a gender flipped production, so all the major roles were played by women and then the three female roles were played by men. It was extremely effective. It was very good. The interesting thing is, I can speak rather specifically to, as an actor, I have played Shakespeare's roles, some of his major roles, Prospero, Brutus, and played them sometimes as male, sometimes as sort of nebulous human being. But I get the closest to most out of it when I present the human that I'm portraying closer to my own alignments, portraying the human I'm portraying closer to my own, that I am a cisgendered, heterosexual woman. That's why the gender flip for Brutus worked for me. Whereas if they had wanted an all-female cast for *Julius Caesar*, I might not have been the best person to embody someone in a lesbian relationship because I'm not a lesbian and I couldn't speak as honestly to that experience. It should have gone to someone else.

But I can tell you definitively that since the first half of my acting career, I would get male Shakespeare roles and be asked to play them as male, and it screwed with my brain. It screwed me up, because the thing is, when you're an actor, you start believing about yourself the way that people cast you. If people keep casting you as the person to be mocked or they keep casting you as the fool or keep casting you as the villain or keep casting you as the other or keep casting you as magical fairy pixie person or keep casting you as a child or keep casting you as a cisgendered woman as a man, it's really kind of frickin', it messes with your brain. You start asking yourself, "Who am I? What are they seeing that I'm not? Am I really the fool? Am I really a villain? Am I really other? Am I really not the hero?" It's not healthy.

Whereas, at least if you're determined to only do Shakespeare and to only limit yourself to what one man wrote for the entirety of verse drama, I have found, both as an actor and as a director, that so long as you're not doing it as a gimmick, so long as you're not cross-gendering just to try it out or you play the role as presenting as your gender and your orientation, perhaps even, but then that has no commentary on the play, that's not helpful. But, for example, I directed *Lear* with a female Lear, and she played the role as female. That doesn't necessarily mean dresses. Hint: women can wear dresses or can wear pants.

Men can wear skirts or pants. I mean, have you been Billy Porter? He looks *fine* in a ball gown, let me tell you. (laughs)

But what I'm getting at is we had a "female actor" playing Lear and, I mean, first of all, she was one of those actors where as a director, I just more or less cast her and I got out of her way, because she had it good to go. It was more about just making sure the cast was all set to support her around her, because she was a powerhouse throughout. By casting her as the mother of these grown women, to have that moment of a mother cursing her own daughter with barrenness, that's powerful in a way that having a father curse his daughter with barrenness just has different resonances.

When I played Brutus, going back to that one, and again, I had a female Cassius, and it absolutely added a new and exciting and actually very settled flavor to the tent scene. Frequently I've seen versions where Brutus is a man, Cassius is a woman, and they're in this sexy love affair, and I find that interesting where you get to the tent scene, but it kind of adds too much to it. And then I've seen it, of course, a lot with two men playing the part, and sometimes the squabbling at each other in the beginning of the scene feels off somehow, because it's two men doing it. But it was myself and a friend who played the roles, and when we got to the tent scene, I don't know, there was something just, to be able to slip back into "I'm a bitchy high schooler, and I'm going to fling my shoes at you and just be, like, really ticked off at you." Then there was this lovely moment when the turn happens in the middle of the scene where we just kind of looked at each other and laughed and fell into each other's arms and then got down to the business of, "Oh, my husband's dead," and, "Oh, the world's falling apart." It felt kind of like female friendships that I've had, where sometimes you do just sort of snipe for a while, and then it's okay. There's something that I've experienced in that in my own gender. If I'd been trying to "play a man," that element of the scene would not have come to light.

The other thing that I take difficulty with is that he says here:

Re-gendering is an option that has become more common today, but I posit that casting any woman in a character written as a man gives us more bang for the buck if we keep the pronouns as written.

Bull. Shit. Bullshit. And for rebuttal, please allow me to introduce Ursula K. LeGuin. For those of you who may not know, Ursula K. LeGuin is a science fiction author, a novelist, whose work was mostly seen in the 1970s, 1980s. She wrote the Earthsea novels, which if you've seen the movie miniseries version, it's terrible and not at all representative of the books. She also wrote *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She's incredibly prolific. I love her collection of essays about writing science fiction. Highly recommend. We'll make sure to put a link in the show notes.

But she's got this really interesting article. I'm not entirely sure where it was first published. My pardons on that, but we will link to a photocopy of the article that is available. It's an essay that she wrote entitled "Introducing Myself." She begins this way, because... And again, keep in mind that what the former head of The American Shakespeare Center is saying is that I, cisgendered, heterosexual, white "female actor" Emily, might even be good enough to play a white cis-het man. Maybe one day I'll be good enough to play a man. Gosh, that'd be so nice.

This is how Ursula K. LeGuin begins "Introducing Myself." She writes:

I am a man. Now, you may think I've made some kind of silly mistake about gender, or maybe that I'm trying to fool you, because my first name ends in A, and I own three bras, and I've been pregnant five times, and other things like that that you might have noticed, little details. But details don't matter. If we have anything to learn from politicians it's that details don't matter. I am a man, and I want you to believe and accept that as a fact, just as I did for many years.

You see, when I was growing up at the time of the Wars of the Medes and Persians, and when I went out to college just after the Hundred Years War and when I was bringing up my children during the Korean, Cold, and Vietnam Wars, there were no women. Women are a very recent invention. I predate the invention of women by decades. Well, if you insist on pedantic accuracy, women have been invented several times in widely varying localities, but the inventors just didn't know how to sell the product. Their distribution techniques were rudimentary and their market research was nil, and so of course the concept just didn't get off the ground. Even with a genius behind it, an invention has to find its market, and it seemed like for a long time the idea of women just didn't make it to the bottom line...

So when I was born there were actually only men. People were men. They all had one pronoun, his pronoun; so that's who I am. I am him, as in "If anybody needs to throw up he will have to do it in his hat," or "A writer knows which side his bread is buttered on." That's me, the writer, him. I am a man.

Not maybe a first-rate man. I'm perfectly willing to admit that I may be in fact a kind of second-rate or imitation man, a Pretend-a-Him. As a him, I am to a genuine male him as a microwaved fishstick is to a whole grilled Chinook Salmon. I mean, after all, can I inseminate? Can I belong to the Bohemian Club? Can I run General Motors? Theoretically I can, but you know where theory gets us.

What she's getting at is that, again, in the English language – and for those of you who only speak English, I want you to wrap your mind around this, because this is not true in other languages or in other cultures or in other ways of thinking – but in English, just as long as we've had the history of Shakespeare being the only verse playwright, we've had this tendency, this cultural belief, that the default pronoun is him, in the same way that we've had the default be white, the default be straight, the default be cis. That just is part of stuff that we have to deal with. If you are a straight, white, cis, heterosexual, male man, hi. Thank you for listening this far. No, no one hates you. Unless you're a stupid poo-poo head. If

you're a stupid poo-poo head, then straighten yourself out. Then you can come back to class.

But the thing is, if the default has been you, then there are just a lot of stories that haven't been told. What I take exception to in this let's only use Shakespeare, in this

Re-gendering is an option that has become more common today, but I posit that casting any woman in a character written as a man gives us more bang for the buck if we keep the pronouns as written.

Do not tell me I am happier as an actor when I play a man. Do not tell me that is my experience. Do not tell me that one day I will be lucky enough to play a white man. No. Because the other thing about theatre is that the text that is written down is only one half of the text. The other half of the text is what we perform on top of it. If I perform Hamlet in my own body, in my own person, then Hamlet, at the time of my performance, is a white, fat, older, cis-het woman. That's who Hamlet is, and my pronoun is she, and that is what you will use, and that's fair game.

I fully expect, really, with my own plays, I want that to be the case. I want someone to take Cupid and to say, "I embody Cupid. These are my identifiers. This is what I'm playing," and that's okay. That's the game of theatre. We'll be getting to that later. That's a slightly later heresy. But what I'm getting at is that we need text that perhaps, rather than having to change someone else's words, begins with, "Hello. This is who I am." This is a role written for someone that Shakespeare didn't write for. Shakespeare doesn't have to be stretched. Shakespeare's not the end-all, be-all. There are other people who have things to say and things to write, and those things are beautiful and glorious and needed and should not be silenced. And if you are doing nothing but Shakespeare and trying to repurpose him seven ways to Sunday and silencing those beautiful writers, then you are doing evil. You are doing evil.

Now, what are some things that we can do? Well, part of it is let Shakespeare be just one in the canon, someone who does verse drama very well, and you do Shakespeare's plays when you want to do what the text actually inspires in you, rather than you sort of taking the text and pulling it away. Second, I was distressed to hear there was... We basically need to make him less prominent. We need, instead, if we're interested in verse drama, to make the tools of verse drama prominent. If we want to study it, we should study how it works, which is going to be our next episode, The Tool Boudoir. That is something that we can teach. English teachers, if you want to teach, teach the tools of writing verse in the same way that you teach sentence structure. And what you're going to be teaching is essentially schwumpf structure. If you don't know what schwumpf is, either look at our [glossary](#) on hamlettohamilton.com or listen to Episode 3.

But there's this story that I want to leave you with at the end of this particular section, the end of this little heresy, and then I promise I'll come back and we'll start in on the next heresy. Whoo, fun! But I was speaking with an educator who worked at one of the many Shakespeare companies in America, and we were swapping stories about different curriculums that we've used in terms of teaching verse drama. This person mentioned that one of the exercises that they do in order to increase diversity was, and I don't remember the exact specifics, but it was something like I think they went into a school that was for all women, and in this case for all Muslim girls, which is very cool. They were going to teach Shakespeare. Instead of teaching verse drama, they were going to teach Shakespeare.

We've begun already by saying this dead guy is the only person that matters. No matter how you cut it, that's a bad foundation to start with. It then was compounded in this way. What they did was they took one of his plays – doesn't matter which – and essentially had the students take all the words in a scene, or perhaps every word within the play was fair game, and you were supposed to do that poetry magnets where you've got different words and you can put them in whatever order you want. So they could take whole sentences. They could take soliloquies. They could take just words that he used and mix them up, and then put them together to make a new play. Doesn't that sound delightful? Except Shakespeare never used the word "hijab." There are so many words that Shakespeare never used that these Muslim girls are going to need, words that Shakespeare had no access to, that these young women did. And again, you're beginning by silencing and limiting and saying to these young, bright minds, "The very words you choose are of less importance than the words he chose." That's wrong. That's wrong. That is wrong. It is wrong. It is wrong. It is wrong. (sighs)

And the thing is, quite often, as a "female actor," for example, when I played Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, there are words that I'm meant to say that I wanted to go up to Bill 400 years in the past and be like, "These are not the words I need, dude. You have written woman wrong. (laughs) You've written woman wrong." For example, this. This is *Measure for Measure*, and, as always, we will make sure that we have the text for you. It's from act II, scene 4. This is the famous speech right after Angelo, who seems so holy, threatens Isabella with essentially that she needs to concede to her own rape. She was just in a terrible situation, and she's saying, "Look, I'll never sleep with you people. I'll tell everyone how terrible you are." And he's like, "Yeah, no one's going to believe you. I've got a great reputation." And then as he says, in fact:

As for you,  
Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true.

Then he leaves, and then these were the words I was supposed to say:

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,

Who would believe me?

That's good. That's good. I always wanted to say those words. You're shaky. You've just been assaulted. There is no Me Too for another couple hundred years.

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,  
Who would believe me?

And then it goes on this way. I'll give you a few lines. Let's go back.

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,  
Who would believe me? O perilous mouths,  
That bear in them one and the self-same tongue,  
Either of condemnation or approval;  
Bidding the law make court'sy to their will:  
Hooking both right and wrong to the appetite,  
To follow as it draws!

No. No. No, Bill. No. Nope, you're wrong. No. No, no. No. No. Perilous mouths? What the ever-loving, oh my stars, no. No. No one in the world has ever wanted to say, "O perilous mouths" immediately after being threatened with their own rape. Like, that is not what you say. No. And you don't necessarily go to an intellectual place, talking about, "Oh, yes, well, morality, yadda yadda yadda." He wasn't writing a woman. He was not writing to universal experience. He was not writing in a human way with that. I remember when I was working on that speech, what I wanted to start saying was, "Is his reputation of greater worth than mine?" And then follow down that question. Is his reputation of greater worth than mine? But I didn't have those words. If I wanted those words, the only way to get the words that I so desperately needed is if Shakespeare doesn't matter.

[music]

Psst. Psst. Did you know that *Hamlet to Hamilton* sometimes does super secret things? Well, we do. For example, every month we're going to have a bonus episode, and that might vary. It might be a conversation between Colin and myself. It might be a very special read-through of a super secret play. It might be an interview with a playwright or some bonus, behind the scenes features. But there's a new episode just for patrons. Now, sometimes we will release them to the public. They will always be released to patrons. If you want to be one of those people, you should head on over to [patreon.com/hamlettohamilton](https://patreon.com/hamlettohamilton). Everyone who signs up gets to be part of the super secret Facebook group so you can start sharing verse with each other or arguing over whether Schiller was an extroverted or introverted writer. Carl Jung already weighed in on that, so we can argue with Carl Jung, too. And support your favorite podcast about all things verse and all things very nerdy. We really appreciate the support. It means that

we can pay all the people behind the scenes, which, as you can imagine in a time of pandemic... Wow, the arts could use all the help we can get. So thanks for being an arts hero, and thanks for coming along and joining us at [patreon.com/hamlettohamilton](https://patreon.com/hamlettohamilton) at whatever level you can afford. And if you can't afford right now, as we completely understand – hello, all you fellow artists out there – you know that a like, a share, a subscribe, all of these go a really long way to helping us find those people who can be arts heroes on our behalf. Thank you so much. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for supporting us. Now, let's get back to that show.

*(Commotion again. More banging gavel.)*

**JUDGE.** All rise! We are back in session, and ready to pass judgment.

**EMILY.** But I'm not finished yet.

**JUDGE.** You certainly are. And in the case of Snyder vs. Shakespeare, we come down on the side that Shakespeare is *far superior to everyone in the world!*

**CROWD.** Hear! Hear!

**JUDGE.** But that you *might* have a point about letting in other playwrights.

**CROWD.** Fine. If we have to. (indistinct grumbling)

**EMILY.** Thank you.

**JUDGE.** Therefore our judgment is—!

**EMILY.** Just a minute, your honor.

**JUDGE.** Eh, what's that?

**EMILY.** Well, I haven't argued all my heresies.

**JUDGE.** You have more?

**EMILY.** Oh probably. Lots. But the thing is: I hold *you*, angry academians, in contempt of court.

*(Pearl clutching.)*

**JUDGE.** *Us?*

**EMILY.** Yes, *you*, Brethren of the Eternal Footnote, Soothsayers of the Bard—I condemn *you*. J'accuse!

*(More pearl clutching.)*

**JUDGE.** Look here, miss. We were ready to let you go and concede that we haven't been as great with diversity as we *could* be.

**EMILY.** Thank you.

**JUDGE.** So I *suggest* you take your minor victory and be on your grateful way.

**EMILY.** If I can call to the stand, William Shakespeare!

**JUDGE.** Oh, for Heaven's sake! We've already said he's *dead*. And if you *must* speak about him, *we* will speak *for* him.

**EMILY.** Ah-ha! J'accuse!

**JUDGE.** Pardon me?

**EMILY.** If you'll allow me? As you said: Shakespeare's dead. So he can't speak for himself. But you're determined to speak for him? Well, if you'll allow me, I'd like to start by speaking about... Galileo.

*(Grumbles. Gavel banging.)*

**EMILY.** Galileo was an Italian astronomer, physicist, engineer, a polymath – as it says on his Wikipedia page – who lived in the 1560s to the 1640s, actually exactly the same time, roundabout, as Shakespeare himself, which is kind of cool. He's rather famously known for helping to really popularize heliocentrism, which means the understanding that the Earth orbits around the sun, whereas previously it was generally widely believed that the sun orbited around the Earth, and that all the stars orbited around the Earth. Now, Galileo was not the first person to discover this, but he was one of the more vocal proponents, in fact, one of the more vocal heretics. The Catholic Church – since, again, he is Italian, so that was the primary religion in his area – The Catholic Church kept telling him, "Will you please be quiet about this?" Now, the curious thing is that The Catholic Church, as the authority, and frequently as the patron of the sciences as well as the arts, they already knew about heliocentrism. They already knew that the Earth actually orbited around the sun, rather than the other way around. But the thing is that various theologians in The Catholic Church prior to that point had gone and made a second theology, really kind of made a separate poetry all about, "Well, if the Earth is the center of the universe, that's why God came down." Again, this is The Catholic Church, Catholic theology. "That's why God came down as man, as Jesus, to us, and this shows that we are the center of his universe." And essentially, they built up all this mythology around a flawed

scientific theory that wasn't true, that wasn't fact. They built up all this poetry and called it theology, practically called it dogma, which is... Dogma is stuff that you have to believe, as opposed to doctrine, which is stuff you probably should believe, as opposed to popular stuff that people say that sounds about right, and so people believe.

People were treating this poetry, which wasn't doctrine, which wasn't dogma, but they were treating it as if it was dogma, as if it was as central to theology as the idea of God existing whatsoever. The Catholic Church was upset at Galileo, actually, because it ricocheted into their poetry. They wanted to be in charge of the narrative. I think perhaps part of their reasoning was, "If we just start talking about this, people have so bought into the poetry of this theology that some people might lose their faith." It was probably way more about control, because these things often are. But I think it's important for us to realize that the Shakespeare machine in the English-speaking world is behaving a lot like The Catholic Church did to Galileo.

Now, again, Galileo was apparently kind of a jerk of a man, so I'm not defending him as a human being. Sounds like he was a problematic person. But he also wasn't wrong. He wasn't wrong championing the science. The Catholic Church wasn't right in suppressing the science, because in point of fact, if your faith is based on something as shaky as where the Earth is in relation to the sun, and it isn't based, instead, on God, then what sort of faith do you have at all, really? The two things... I mean, to go back to schwumpf, they schwumped together the idea that the Earth must be in the center and something about human relationship to God, and those things are separate.

In the same way, the Shakespeare monolith has actually schwumped together different poetry on top of the various tools that can be used when writing verse drama. Let's go through a few of them. They're not going to be in any particular order, but probably a good one to start with is how academics, how Shakespeareans tended to approach iambic pentameter blank verse. Some of the myths, some of the poetry, some of the putting the Earth in the center of the universe that they have done is, for example, saying that the only way to write verse drama is if you write in iambic pentameter. Well, that's simply not true. To begin with, the Greeks wrote their verse in a variety of different rhythms and beats, which is where, in fact, we get the word "iamb" from. In all, an iamb is just unstressed-stressed. If we were able to look at French verse drama, you have what's known as an Alexandrine or a heroic, or we've got all these different names for it. But basically, it's just lines of hexameter – or rather, sorry, of hexameter. I like to call it hexameter because I find it to be passionate and sexy when you have six repeated strong beats. But essentially, they write it in six rather than writing it in five, which is pentameter. I'm sure that throughout the rest of the world, different rhythms are used.

But the academics come back and say, “iambic pentameter is the way that English speakers actually speak.” Okay, so let’s take a look at the English language, and let’s look at English language verse drama. Well, a few things. One, the earlier medieval drama that we have in English tends to be in tetrameter, which is four strong beats. You can see that even in Shakespeare’s own work. Whenever he tries to sound like the previous generation, he goes into tetrameter. We see that in *Macbeth* with Hecate. We see that a lot with the fairies in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He’s doing that to evoke the English tradition, which is tetrameter.

If you were to look at the Wakefield Master, who was an unknown, but very easy to spot the work that they did, because they wrote a couple of the medieval plays, they created their own rhythm pattern entirely, which is... I have to look at it again, but I think it’s four lines of rhymed pentameter and then a line of monometer and then two lines of rhymed, I think it’s tetrameter or trimeter, and then one line of dimeter/trimeter that rhymes with line fi- they did this whole system, right, and that’s in English and it uses a different rhythm and beat pattern in English. All right, that’s not iambic pentameter.

But in order to maintain their hold on the Shakespeare-centric universe, iambic pentameter-centric universe, what they do is they say, “Ah, but you understand all of those previous plays suck.” That’s quite a thing to say, but all right. They say, “In fact, it wasn’t until the invention of *iambic pentameter blank verse*,” (sings) “that the heavens opened up, and the true form of speaking in English was understood.” All right, so if that’s true, then one of the things that they claim is that the whole of English naturally falls into iambs.

Okay, what’s an iamb again? An iamb – and we’ll be talking way more about this next time with The Tool Boudoir – but an iamb is just a rhythm of an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable, so it’s ba-DUM. If you were to do pentameter – that’s five strong beats, pent, five – it would be ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, all right?

But sóft, what líght through yónder wíndow bréaks?

There you go. That’s iambic pentameter. So again, if this is how English is, then I should be able to open up any book I have here, and every single thing should at least be, if not in pentameter, should at least be iambs. And I actually have here beside me *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. So what the hey, I’ll open it up. Let’s see what it says, how it starts. Here is the first sentence:

The two men appeared out of nowhere.

Uh-oh, we’re in danger already.

The twó men appéared out of nówhere.

Ooh, the *two* men. That is three syllables, to begin with, on the first strong beat. That actually is an amphibrach. An amphibrach is the rhythm of unstressed-stressed-unstressed, *ba-DUM-bum*. You can hear it. The *two* men. And then it's appeared out – there's another amphibrach – of *nowhere*. Oh shoot. It's an amphibrachic trimeter.

A few yards apart...

Oh, there's an iamb. The word "apart" is an iamb.

... in the narrow...

Uh-oh. We've got a four-syllable beat on that one. I have to always look that one up. It's got a very funky name. And then "moonlit," that's a trochee. That's stressed-unstressed, "lane." Actually, "moonlit lane," that's three syllables. I have to go to my little cheat sheet because I can never remember three syllables. It's a dactyl. Strong, and then unstressed-unstressed. *BAH-buh-buh*. So we have had, thus far in this first sentence of English, one iamb in the whole thing. (laughs) Oh my stars.

Okay, okay. But we know that there are problems with J. K. Rowling, so let's look at the New York Times, and just because I've spoken a lot about some sensitive issues today, let's find an article headline that is not political, not religious, etc., etc. Let's see. This is October 5, 2020, and here's a headline that says:

Ancient Remains in Peru Reveal Young, Female Big Game Hunter

It begins with *ancient*, which is a trochee, stressed-unstressed, *BAH-da*. *Remains*, okay, that's an iamb. In *Peru*, in *ba-BAH*, that's a three. I have to look at my little cheat sheet, and I didn't write it down which one it is. (laughs) Oh, no, here it is. It's *bacchius*. It's unstressed-stressed-stressed. In *Peru*. Well, you could maybe make an argument that it's unstressed-unstressed-stressed. That would be an *anapest*, *da-da-DAH*, in *Peru*, *reveal*, ooh, an iamb again, *young*, *female*... Oh, that is possibly, let's see, that is an *antibacchius*. *DUM-DUM-dah*, *young female*, *big game*, another trochee, *hunter*, another trochee. (sighs) What do we have, one iamb in that?

All I'm getting at, friends, is, again, the Shakespearean academicians have said, (stuffy English accent) "Iambic pentameter, iamb, *ba-DUM*, is the entirety of English speech. I don't even know why we have dactyls and trochees and amphibrachs and any of these other dactyls and things." Matter of fact, in preparation for this, I was looking at my *Poet's Glossary*, this big old book that I have on the side here, and I was looking up what they said about other types of rhythms. They give it so little. They'd be like, "Oh, this is what it means, but you

never use it.” Which is (sighs) which is just dumb, and which is limiting. Which is limiting.

So mythology number one, that the whole of English revolves around the almighty iamb. Matter of fact, take the sentence I just said. Go ahead and see how many stresses it has, how you would scan it out. Again, if you don't know what these words mean, we'll be talking about it all next time. But it's clearly untrue. We do not normally speak in iambs. In fact, if we think, again, about music, people are going to be speaking in all sorts of different rhythms, just as people might be singing in all sorts of different keys, in all sorts of different time signatures. In fact – and I've seen a lot of people boast about this – but they'll say, “I have written in perfect iambic pentameter,” and when I read that, having read a lot of “perfect iambic pentameter,” which is sent to me, and we're going to be talking a lot about this friends, so strap in. Not this episode, but future episodes. But it's kind of like boasting that you have only ever written music in the key of C, using quarter notes, in 4/4 time, and in fact only using the notes in the key of C and not even using the other relative chords that would be within the family of the key of C, but only using C, E, and G. Which, for those of you who don't know music, I will now sing to you a song that is the equivalent of perfect iambic pentameter. It would go like this (sings a simple ascending arpeggio). If you wanted to get fancy, I supposed you could go: (sings a simple descending arpeggio). Sometimes you might go (breaks the arpeggio into multiple notes: C C C C, E E E E, G G G G, C C C C) And this for three hours. No variations. No variations.

It's not as impressive as you think to say you have written in strict iambic pentameter, and in future episodes, we will look at pieces of text that were written in *perfect* iambic pentameter and are absolutely unplayable as drama. So no. No, in point of fact, iambic pentameter is just one tool that you can use well or use poorly, and doing it with no variation whatsoever only tells me that you probably don't know the difference between one character and another. Unless you're doing a world that is a monolith, what are you doing if you're writing in “perfect iambic pentameter?” More to the point, you are conflating several things when we're talking about iambic pentameter. You have this mythology that Shakespeareans say, “Ah, yes, well, the iamb, the iamb is like a heartbeat, (lofty) ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM.” But when I hear an iamb, I don't feel that way at all. I feel oppressed, frankly. I hear (ominous) ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM. Someone else might hear skipping, (bouncy) ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM. Someone else might hear anxiety, (insistent) ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM. We have, again, schwumped this poetry, this mythology, this theology onto what an iamb is, and that's stupid. Y'all are stupid. That's just dumb. (laughs)

All you can say about an iamb is that it is the rhythm of unstressed-stressed. And then what's far more interesting, just like everything I hope you're getting from this episode, what's far more interesting is what the person who is writing in this

rhythm – if they decide to write in rhythm – they might decide to write in a variety of rhythms, but let's say they're using one rhythm in repetition. What does the playwright feel about that? What are they trying to convey? Then, what does the person who's interpreting that work feel like? What are they going to convey further? What are they going to fwah out? That's where the magic happens.

We're going to be doing all sorts of exercises next time to help you figure out how you feel about various rhythmic patterns, how you feel about various beats, how you feel about repetition or non-repetition, how you feel about rhyme or non-rhyme. Four separate things that we schwumpf together as iambic pentameter blank verse, as well as schwumpfing onto it that English is in all iambs, which we've just disproved, or that speaking in perfect iambic pentameter means that you'll feel a heartbeat. You might not. Or that speaking in perfect iambic pentameter somehow will magically make your verse good. I promise, in future episodes, I will completely address that, but in the meantime, I can tell you it doesn't.

Lastly, we have this thought, again, that iambic pentameter, we sometimes teach – and I'm looking at you, English teachers who I hope know better – is we tell people that iambic pentameter or that blank verse or that the proper way to write verse drama is to count to ten. Now, the thing is, if you have decided that iambic pentameter is the rhythm and the beat, combined, that your character speaks in, then yes, the math will lead to ten syllables. But again, not everyone is going to speak in pentameter and not everyone's going to speak in repetition. Not everyone's going to speak in iambs. If you speak in amphibrachs, it'll be fifteen syllables long. There's a great danger, and I've seen two varieties of text cross my desk most frequently. One is that it is perfect iambic pentameter, and usually that means that all the lines are end-stopped, meaning that the thought ends at the end of the line. But then the other half are trying to be perfect pentameter, but really what they've just done is they've put a line break when there's ten syllables, and it's a mess. It's a mess. It's a mess. It's a mess. And again, it's not playable.

There's an interesting piece that I want to take a moment to look at some new verse text and show how this playwright had a really good, solid verse, but then they were told to put a line break whenever it was ten syllables, and that kind of messed up their verse. Let's take a quick look at the case of *The Mother of God Visits Hell* by Daniel Guyton. This piece has been around for a little bit over a decade now, or at least has been in publication. It's had a few performances, and one thing that's important to note is that apparently it was written in rhyming couplets. Now, generally speaking, you put the line break on the rhyme for the rhyming couplets. Can there be variations? The answer is there can always be variations, right? I mean, if this podcast is about anything, if this episode is about anything, it's that variation and diversity are generally going to be way more interesting than monoliths.

In this case, he did it in rhyming couplets, but instead of doing the line break on the rhyme, he put the line break at every ten syllables. We're going to be taking a look at Act I, scene 2, and I'm going to read it twice. The first time, I'm going to read it probably the way that he heard it and probably the way that his actors played it, because frequently what happens is when the playwright has been guided poorly about how to write verse drama – and by guided poorly, generally what I mean is that they have written very playable stuff, very good characterization, very good plot, it's good drama, but the verse, generally speaking, they believe, they've been taught that they have to put the line break at ten. Usually what happens is that the actor just kind of ignores the verse and fixes their verse for them on the fly and gets their music properly, even though the playwright essentially didn't write out the music of their line properly.

Again, I attribute this not so much to a failing of the playwright, but to a failing of how we have taught verse playwrights. Again, I'm looking at you, academicians. You have not actually examined the *Tool Boudoir*. You have not actually examined verse drama. You have said, "This is what Shakespeare does. This is how Shakespeare uses the tools. Therefore, all this mythology and the world revolves around Shakespeare and there is no sun," or whatever it may be. You've come up with some bad theology that has led playwrights astray. And, man, then you wonder why there are no good verse playwrights or whatever, and it's like, well, you taught them wrong to begin with. So let's set the record straight.

Anyway, I'm going to read it the first time the way he probably heard it, and then I'm going to read it the way he wrote it. Here we go. *Mother of God Visits Hell*, Daniel Guyton, Act I, scene 2, The Underworld. And this is about St. Michael the Archangel and the Virgin Mary and Satan. It was inspired by a Dostoyevsky short story, and so content dictates form. This should absolutely be in verse. That makes sense. We've passed the first test. Again, I'm going to read it now with his music on his rhyming couplets.

*(The following is reformatted from the original to cut on the rhyme.)*

**MARY.** Hello? Is anybody **here**?

**MICHAEL.** Nay, step behind me quickly, Lady, for I smell Beezlebub is **near**.

**SATAN.** *(Entering)* **Well!** Speak the devil's name, they say, and soon he shall **appear**. *(Bowing)*  
M'lady.

**MICHAEL.** *(Aiming his sword)* Stay! Vouchsafe to keep thy distance.

**SATAN.** What? And harm the Holy Virgin? Why, I'd sooner sell my soul.

**MARY.** To **whom**?



**SATAN.** Myself,  
Of course. Hmm hmm! (*He laughs*)

**MARY.** Why then, I pray thee gets  
A bargain. For a soul as venerable  
As thine, 'twould be a shame to cheat thyself.  
Don't go below a dime.

**SATAN.** (*Honored*) Dost find me so  
Expensive? I concur. (*Aside*) In troth, I would  
Have bartered for some frankincense and myrrh. (*Aloud*)  
But hold thy sword! I do abate. (*Aside*) Methinks  
He overcompensates. (*Aloud*) Nay, please re-sheathe,  
I mean no harm. 'Tis just a spot of jest.  
Why comest thou so duly armèd, unto  
My address?

Okay. You can immediately hear how the way that he chopped it at ten actually broke up the music and the melody of his rhyming couplets, and therefore how, if we teach that, we are doing a disservice to people who are writing some interesting text.

If you take a look at Satan's speech here, you have

Dost find me so Expensive? I concur.

Is the music that he hears. He wrote it

Dost find me so\*  
Expensive? I concur. In troth, I would...

I'm not going to worry too much about whether it's in iambs. I scanned this before. He does tend to force the iambs. If I were to actually speak with him as a playwright, I would suggest to him don't worry so much about forcing an iamb. Let your characters be in whatever jazz rhythms they're in. But what I would point out to him is that he's actually writing in sort of unrepeated beat rhyming couplets.

What do I mean by that? Let's take a look. Let's examine how many beats are on each rhyming line, not looking at where he counted to ten and put a line break, but looking at where the line break actually ought to be, on the rhyme.

Dost find me so Expensive? I concur.

would actually be a perfect line of perfect iambic pentameter if he had not put a line break after the word "so." And then

In troth, I would Have bartered for some frankincense and myrrh.

is actually seven strong beats, so it's in septameter for that line. And that's fine. Again, we have this slavish sense that if it's not in pentameter, that we're doing it wrong. But as you heard when I read it in the pentameter that he's forced it into, it didn't help anything. It's fine that the next line is seven feet, seven strong beats long. Then the next line would be

But hold thy sword! I do abate.

That's tetrameter, four.

Methinks He overcompensates.

That's another four. Why not? Why not? Why shouldn't it be five, seven, four, four? Why should Satan, the character, follow the rules? Are you kidding me? Of course he should be mucking about with, "I'm just going to keep varying my beat. You can't catch me. What are you talking about?" That's appropriate to his character.

And the weird thing is, that's what the playwright did, but then he went and he cut it every ten syllables because that's what he was told to do, because that's the theology he was told, is that pentameter is this magic, secret sigil that's going to secretly make things better. My guess is, actually, if he were to revise his play again, which he may want to, he may not want to. I have no idea where he's at in the writing versus sort of abandoning process. As Picasso said, no art is finished, it's just abandoned. But what I would encourage him to do is instead, to cut all his lines on the rhyme of the rhyming couplet, because that's going to help the actors know what the actual rhyming couplets are, because that is appropriate to the way that he's writing his piece, and then not to worry about whether it's in iambs, not to worry about whether it's metered. If he wants to, then go back and say, is Jesus in a strict meter, perhaps? Is he in a strict repeated rhythm? Is he in a strict repeated verse? Same thing for Mary. Same thing for St. Michael the Archangel. Is Satan? What am I saying about these characters? What am I saying about this world?

I bet you he would find, if he just went back and put the line breaks on every rhyme rather than on the tenth syllable with this false theology he's been given... I find it really amusing, of course, that we're looking at a text that looks into a Christian myth as we're talking, in this episode, about heresies. It tickles me pink. Anyway, I bet you he would find some really interesting things that he already did as a playwright, that he already did without knowing it, and then he kind of went,

and it looks like he tried to clean it up to make it look (sighs) what you damn academicians have said is acceptable and is perfect.

Which brings me to one of my last pieces, is you know what, academics? You need to get on the stage and start acting some of this stuff, because some of your theories don't hold water in regards to performance. I could talk about a lot of different things, to talk about some of them very briefly in the time that we have left. So, for example, academics go really hard on the idea of a feminine line ending, and all a feminine line ending is, is that the last syllable isn't stressed. They say, therefore, they call it feminine because they feel that it is a weak line ending. And just like saying that an iamb always feels like a heartbeat, that's not true. So let's say it's an unstressed ending. Well, it might be because it's a trochee, meaning it's stressed-unstressed, and so you're just writing a different rhythm. So of course every last syllable's going to be unstressed. It might be, though, that you're aiming not so much for a sense of weakness but perhaps you feel that to end on an unstressed syllable is like a conspiracy, or maybe you find it really sexy. Or maybe you find it really confused? Or maybe you find it's very angry and I'm just not going to... It has nothing to do with gender.

This is the weird thing. You academics have put gender on the wrong stuff. You've put it... You're conflating femininity with weakness, to begin with. I'm sorry, but who's pushing babies out of their bottom? Anyway, sure. Sure, yeah. But you're also presuming that unstressed means weak, which, frankly, is a little capitalist. I mean, like, hey, mon, I'm unstressed. I'm on an island. I am having a daiquiri. That sounds great. Are you kidding me? Maybe to end on an unstressed syllable is to end on happiness and relief. But again, we say that if there's a feminine ending, which I would suggest there is no such thing as a feminine or even a weak line ending. It's just some lines end on stressed syllables, some lines end on unstressed syllables. You, the writer, will have different opinions about what you feel about that. You, the writer, might have no opinion. It might just be how the grammar worked.

For example, in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, you have trochaic tetrameter with "If we sháadows háve offéended." Stressed-unstressed, stressed-unstressed, stressed-unstressed, stressed-unstressed. And if you were determined to end it strong because you're determined that Puck must be played as a male, and male equals strength or something, then you'd say, "If we shadows have offend, think but this and all is mend." And now you're just doing Borat. (laughs) It's a choice. It's a choice, I guess. Which is to say sometimes, like "To bé or nóto bé, that ís the quéstion." What do you want me to do? "To be or not to be, that is the quest?" "Question," in English, just ends on an unstressed syllable. Maybe it doesn't mean anything other than that's English. And again, as we go back to it, not all English is in iambs.

We have something called an epic caesura, which I hate that as well, and I argue there's no such thing as an epic caesura. I would suggest sometimes a line, if

you're using repeated beats and repeated rhythms, that sometimes the first half of the line might be in iambs, and the second half of the line might be in trochees. They tend to call that an epic caesura. A caesura is a little break in the middle of the line. Well, it might not be epic. It could be the oppressive caesura. It could be the desperate caesura because you're going from ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM and feeling very calmly to be like, BA-dum, BA-dum, which is the trochees, right? It could be the passionate caesura, (blasé) ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM. I'm bored with iambs, to (steamy) BA-dum, BA-dum. Do you see what I'm getting at? There's no reason to call it epic caesura. What we could call it, perhaps, is sometimes use a caesura for a reversal of your rhythm, That would be true. So we could call it a reversal caesura. We could say it's a trochaic caesura. It's an iambic caesura. It's an amphibrachic caesura. Yeah, I mean, we have schwumped together, again, all this poetry on something that is value neutral, and we've schwumped it all because they call it an epic caesura because, again, they feel that it's masculine. They're putting gender where gender does not belong, and again, they're saying if you're lucky, you can be a guy and you can be epic and strong. (sighs) And I'm the one who's speaking heresies? Come on, dude.

But the thing is, I sometimes have to wonder if people who study Shakespeare in a purely academic sense, if they've ever played Shakespeare, if they've ever played, not just with Shakespeare, played with verse drama. They'll say things like a line of six strong beats, an Alexandrine or a heroic line, is boring and dull, as if that were gospel when, again, I find... I call it sextameter because I find it long and sexy and passionate, and future historians, yeah, I find that, without meaning to, I'll slip into sextameter whenever I'm overflowing with emotion. I don't get bored. And yet, academics will say, "An Alexandrine, hexameter, is dull. It's too much." Well, that's not how I experience it. I'm sorry that's how you experience it, but that's not what I experience. Again, all we can say definitively is it's six strong beats. It's neither good nor bad, but your thinking has made it so. And if we're going to go on, there is way more between heaven and earth than is dreamt of in Shakespeare's philosophy.

But the thing is, I wonder if the people who teach Shakespeare as a monolith, all the angry academicians, all the people that have made a living off of writing books about Shakespeare and teaching programs about Shakespeare and doing papers on Shakespeare and doing PhDs on Shakespeare, of all the people at RADA and all the people at LAMDA and all the people at the RSC and all the people at the ASC and at Oregon Shakespeare Festival and all over, those of you who treat Shakespeare as words on a page and come up with all these theories, do you even know how to read verse drama? Do you even know what good, playable, exciting, passionate, wonderful verse drama looks like? Have you inhabited any verse drama that isn't Shakespeare? Have you sat in the silences that are written by modern verse playwrights? Have you had to deal with people who count to ten and what that actually does to you as an actor? Have you dealt with verse that is "perfect iambic pentameter" and just, again, that

oppresses you as an actor? Have you dealt with stuff that looks irregular, and then when you perform it, is so full of life? Do you even know what good verse drama is? Or have you gotten yourself so Shakespeare-centric that just like the people that believed that the Earth was the center of the universe, you've missed the entire world?

[music]

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Thank you for joining us, dear friends, for all things true, good, beautiful, and frequently in verse.