

HAMLET TO HAMILTON

Season One, Episode Eight *First Folio and Emotive Formatting* *With Esther Williamson*

[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. Hello, friends. I am here with Esther Williamson, a name that you have all heard before in our credits, because Esther is part of the *Hamlet to Hamilton* team, and she is the one who has been doing the transcripts, but what you may not know is that she is primarily an actor of Shakespearean verse. Esther, can you tell us a little bit about how you got into Shakespeare and what you do in your real life?

ESTHER. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for having me here. It's lovely to be on this side of the Zoom microphone, whatever this is.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. I like Shakespeare. I've liked Shakespeare for a long time. I was raised by word nerds. My stepdad was a teacher of humanities, and Shakespeare was sort of held up as a thing that smart people did, and I wanted to be a smart people, so that was the first thing that got me into it. Then as I got into theatre in my later high school years, Shakespeare quickly became the path down which I knew I wanted to go. I have some ability with language, and I love taking apart complex language and heightened language, so that's where I am. I ended up going to grad school for it. I have a Masters of Fine Arts in Classical Acting specifically, from The Academy for Classical Acting at The George Washington University, which is The Shakespeare Theatre Company's program in Washington, DC.

EMILY. I didn't know that. Wow. Huh.

ESTHER. I'm fancy.

EMILY. Look at you, miss terminal degree.

ESTHER. That's me. I'm fancy and terminal. I'm terminally fancy.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. Or fancily terminal.

EMILY. And you've also done some really interesting work down in DC on Shakespeare.

ESTHER. I have been extremely fortunate to be a company member with [Taffety Punk Theatre](#) in DC, and they do... It's a bunch of classical actors. It was founded by a bunch of classical actors who also were members of the DC punk scene. I am definitely honorary punk, (laughs) but the people who founded this company were rubbing elbows with Fugazi, and [Marcus Kyd](#), who is still the artistic director, had his own punk band, The Most Secret Method. They toured Europe, they were all over DC, and he had several other bands as well. So it's this odd subset of people who love classical theatre but have a punk work ethic in that we all contribute. We sort of function like a band, and we do a bunch of Shakespeare and a bunch of new works as well. One of the offshoots of Taffety Punk is the Riot Grrrls, so I've done a bunch of Shakespeare with Taffety Punk, but I've also done a whole bunch of all-female Shakespeare with the Riot Grrrls.

EMILY. Wow.

ESTHER. Which is a good time.

EMILY. Yeah, I imagine. What are some of the roles that you've gotten to play?

ESTHER. With the Riot Grrrls, I've gotten to play Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet*. I played Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Antonio in *The Tempest*, Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. It was kind of weird being the girl in Riot Grrrls.

EMILY. Interesting. Did you both play as female presenting or did you...

ESTHER. The males we tend to play as male presenting, and the women we play as female presenting. Every now and then we'll swap a gender, but yeah, we dude it up.

EMILY. That's amazing.

ESTHER. We do the dudes as dudes. Then in non-Riot Grrrls, I've been Viola in *Twelfth Night*, and I got to be Horatio, Ofelia, and Voltemar in our bad quarto version of *Hamlet*, which was a blast.

EMILY. Oooh.

ESTHER. And then I've been Henry VI in all three plays.

EMILY. Did you get to run those in rep or...

ESTHER. We actually did all three of them as bootlegs, so every year our gift to the City of DC is a single-day Shakespeare performance. We'll all learn our parts for months before, and then we get together on the day of the show in the morning at The Folger, usually, and we start rehearsing at 10 a.m. We learn all the fights and dances. We *usually* get through the whole show by 5 o'clock or so, by the end of our rehearsal day. Every now and then we'll, like, skip stuff. (laughs)

EMILY. Right? (laughs)

ESTHER. Or just be like, "Here's a long speech. You'll stand there and give it later."

EMILY. Yes, yeah.

ESTHER. We have dinner. The audience comes. We do it with a prompter that night, and it's the most fun I have ever had in my life.

EMILY. Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

ESTHER. We have done, I think, 12 of those. It's an annual event.

EMILY. Wow. Wow.

ESTHER. It's a whole lot of Shakespeare and a whole lot of fun.

EMILY. Is it the same or similar people that come back every year, so you kind of know people's vibes?

ESTHER. Generally. I mean, we have a company. We have a company. There are probably about eight or ten actors in that company, and then a whole bunch of people that, yeah, come back year after year. Once you get a taste of it, you really want to come back every year. Even though it's terrifying and it sounds like a terrible idea, we always have the best time. It just renews our faith in theatre and what theatre can do and sort of gives us strength for the journey, for those days that are like, you got rejected for this dog food commercial, but you played

Richard II with a day of rehearsal and no one can ever take that away from you, and people were standing and screaming and never seen anything like it. It's the best.

EMILY. Oh my gosh. What's a role that's really resonated with you, that was really important to you?

ESTHER. Viola has come back a lot. *Twelfth Night*, as a show, is really important to me. I've gotten to do it five times.

EMILY. Wow.

ESTHER. I have been Viola thrice, and then I was Olivia when I was 22 and knew nothing, so I'm dying to play Olivia again. I got to play Sir Andrew Aguecheek Colonial Williamsburg.

EMILY. Oh, fun.

ESTHER. The Williamsburg people dressed us, so I had this amazing wig and no one had any zippers, and it was just great. But yeah, my most recent experience with Viola helped me... I think I'm done. I think I've aged out of Viola.

EMILY. Sure.

ESTHER. (laughs) My twin brother was, like, half my age.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. But she has such incredible hope and really never gives up, and has this faith, even though she must, in order to go on with her days, she has to believe that Sebastian is gone and she has to go on. But she also just has this little light burning in her that he's there somewhere.

EMILY. Yeah. Yeah.

ESTHER. And then he appears. And then they can't believe it for a minute and they have to circle each other for a while and look at each other from every angle, and then things fall into place. It's just, there's such hope and redemption there that... I love it.

EMILY. That's so beautiful. That's so beautiful.

ESTHER. That's Bill, man.

EMILY. That's Bill, man.

ESTHER. He's a good guy.

EMILY. No, it's true, and it's interesting because, both as a director and as an actor, I've seen that a lot of the roles that he writes have been transformative to myself and to, then, people that I've worked with. The way that I put it is there are characters that I can put on and off their coat, like Lady Bracknell. I've played her twice.

ESTHER. Sure. (laughs)

EMILY. I can put her on, take her off, no problem.

ESTHER. She may not change your life.

EMILY. She's not going to change my life. It's similar, you can throw me in a bootleg. What, is someone sick? Great, I'll go on as Lady Bracknell. Not a problem. (laughs) You know, throw it on, take it off.

ESTHER. Right.

EMILY. And then there are characters that wear you.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Yeah, and those are such gifts, especially if you can kind of, Narnia-esque, go back in. But I think you're right. Sometimes you know now you and the character are... You part friends.

ESTHER. Yeah, I think so. I mean, I could... I'd be happy to – if somebody casts me as Viola, I'll play Viola, but in my (laughs) in the back of my mind, I might be like, are you sure?

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. You don't have a 20-year-old who can play this role? I'm 44. You know.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. It's great. It's fine.

EMILY. Yeah, well, you know, it's all good. It's all good. It's all good. Actually, I can see the version, though, for, like, 70-year-olds.

ESTHER. Oh, totally.

EMILY. That'd be wicked fun.

ESTHER. We'll get there.

EMILY. You get sort of Alzheimer-y. You know, "What country, friend, is this?" (laughs) I mean, that could be really touching and beautiful, quite frankly.

ESTHER. It could be.

EMILY. Yeah, you know.

ESTHER. It could be this guide.

EMILY. And then you recognize your brother. Perhaps you have Sebastian there the whole time in the production.

ESTHER. We've got to do the dementia *Twelfth Night*. There it is.

EMILY. Okay, yeah, now in my brain, I kind of want to do the dementia *Twelfth Night*. I want to direct it. I don't want to be in it. (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) My favorite *Twelfth Night* was the one that Taffety Punk did. My dear friend Michelle Shupe directed, and the whole thing took place as a fever dream while Viola was drowning.

EMILY. I read a review of this one. Yes, go on.

ESTHER. Yeah, the whole play took place basically on the ocean floor. The yellow stockings were a scuba suit and fins, which were so great, because you cannot walk in a dignified way wearing scuba fins.

EMILY. You can't.

ESTHER. We had a remote control fish fly through a couple times.

EMILY. Wow.

ESTHER. And then at the very end, we circled back. Things get weirder and weirder as Viola loses oxygen, and the play gets weirder and weirder and darker and darker as you go.

EMILY. Yeah.

ESTHER. And then the very last thing that happens is I'm Viola, and Orsino pulls me out of the ocean, and I say to him, "What country, friend, is this?" and the lights go down.

EMILY. Oh, I have chills.

ESTHER. It was great. It was so good.

EMILY. That's... Oh.

ESTHER. Michelle Shupe, folks. She's an excellent director and everyone should hire her.

EMILY. Oh wow, oh that's so cool. Oh, that's so pretty.

ESTHER. She has good ideas.

EMILY. Let's get into – we're going to talk about emotive formatting, and you're going to talk about a little bit about First Folio.

ESTHER. Mm-hmm.

EMILY. Emotive formatting is the name that I have for, essentially what we do all the time, especially if you're writing a text or a Facebook post or a tweet or whatever it may be. We tend to manipulate spelling and typography and punctuation and where things are placed on the screen in a way to sort of tells you what the cadence is, cadence being the way that you would speak it, how you would deliver this, to indicate what the person should hear or what the person should express. We have emotive spelling, which is when you change the spelling purposely in order to get the sense of how someone should say it. For example, one of my favorite things to do is to write the word "complete" C-O-M-P-L-E-A-T so that you get the sense of "compleat," you know, The Compleat Work of Shakespeare.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Or if you add a lot of vowels, like to the word sooo, then it indicates how to speak it, what the cadence is. Similarly, using typography in different ways, using bold, underline, color – which most people don't do, but we could – using larger or smaller letters, using all caps. Lauren Gunderson actually puts in a note at the beginning of her plays saying, "This is what this typography means. If it's this size, it means be louder." She uses it for volume. You can use, then, emotive punctuation, which, again, we do all the time in terms of what does it mean to put something in parentheses? What does it mean to have ellipses at the end? What does it mean if you squish all the words together and have no spacing? Which we see in the beatnik poets, right?

ESTHER. Yep.

EMILY. Then lastly, emotive placement, which is silences, shared lines, where the text is on the page. That goes a lot into silences, and so we'll be doing that as a separate episode. But the thing is that there's something called First Folio technique, which posits this idea of emotive formatting, that the formatting is a clue to the actor. Now, the curious thing, of course, is that spelling and punctuation were not codified in the English language until, like, a hundred years after Shakespeare died.

ESTHER. Yep.

EMILY. (laughs) So the spelling and punctuation that we have in the First Folio, we don't know whether Shakespeare put it there. We don't know if Shakespeare cared. We don't know to what degree it was the editors that put it in there. We don't know to what degree the editors cared. But regardless, it still is accurate that nowadays, if you're writing, if you put a capital letter on it, you're doing so purposely.

ESTHER. Mm-hmm.

EMILY. The tricks and the tools and the techniques are still true. In fact, they're even more true because we have just more awareness of if we're changing something. Let's talk for a moment about First Folio technique, what it is, the very basics of it. Again, I did a questionnaire on Shakespeare Forum Facebook page to ask people where to look. Unfortunately, half the texts are ridiculously obscure and several hundred dollars.

ESTHER. (laughs) Nerds.

EMILY. Nerds. I know. I know. I might put a link up on the Facebook if anyone feels like pitching in in order to get this my way, and I will read it and we will talk about it on air. I will nerd out for you. (laughs)

ESTHER. You've got a market for obscure verse audio books, just so that people can have access to the texts again.

EMILY. Let me tell you, right? I mean, I went, and actually my allergies are acting up because I got this one obscure book, but the only way I could afford it was very second, third hand, and so it's a bit moldy. (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs)

EMILY. So I have to read it in very small chunks.

ESTHER. The sacrifices you make.

EMILY. Life is hard, man.

ESTHER. Life is hard.

EMILY. Life is hard. (laughs) Anyway, so First Folio technique. Tell me a little bit about what your experience is with it, and I'll chime in too. Again, we're going to touch this lightly, because those who have studied a bit more extensively have also said, as with any acting technique, use it if helpful, abandon it if not helpful, and certainly even with stuff that we're saying, there's nothing gospel about how to act.

ESTHER. Nope.

EMILY. It's just are you effective or not?

ESTHER. Yes.

EMILY. Does someone vibe with you or not? Here are some tricks that might help you vibe. If they don't help you vibe, meh, move on to another trick. (laughs)

ESTHER. Brilliant. Brilliant. Well, I will start in that spirit. I'll start with a disclaimer, in that there is a First Folio technique that I'm actually not party to, that I haven't been exposed to.

EMILY. Sure. I know that they teach it up at Shakes & Co., right?

ESTHER. They teach it at Shakes & Co., and there's a whole contingent of people in Chicago, also, that subscribe to a very specific thing that they call First Folio technique, that I simply know exists but do not have firsthand experience with. But I will tell you what I know of the Folio, and I will tell you that every time I play a Shakespeare role, I do refer to the Folio quite a bit, to the First Folio.

EMILY. Actually, I've got my full... Our dear mutual friend and my cousin and dear friend, Susannah Melone, for one of my early birthdays here in New York City, presented me with the complete First Folio text.

ESTHER. Oh my goodness.

EMILY. Which is really pretty sexy. (laughs)

ESTHER. That is an excellent gift. She knew you already.

EMILY. Mm-hmm, nailed it on the head.

ESTHER. I found a beautiful facsimile, the Norton facsimile that I've got on my shelf that I found in a used bookstore in Cumberland, Maryland, when I was there – I think when I was there doing one of my *Twelfth Nights*.

EMILY. Oh, nice.

ESTHER. You know, for far too little money, probably.

EMILY. Right.

ESTHER. So I've got that, but I also, every time I do a play – I'm showing you this on the Zoom, even though I know our listeners can't see this.

EMILY. I was just going to bring him up, yeah.

ESTHER. We've got these little tiny blue Folios that you, as soon as Drama Books opens again, hopefully they'll still carry them. But Paul Sugarman at Instant Shakespeare, they call it the Raw Shakespeare Pocket Edition. I get these tiny Folios every time I play a role in a play that I don't already own in tiny Folio. They're great because they are, as mentioned, tiny, and it's modern typeface edition...

EMILY. Which makes a huge difference.

ESTHER. ... of the First Folio, complete with punctuation, spelling, capitalization, lineation, all of it, and it's just a wonderful, wonderful little reference. I will tell you that one of the first things I do when I'm working on a role is I will take my little Folio, or my big Folio if I can't find a little one, and I will put, in red, the Folio punctuation into my script. I find that exploring the punctuation is really helpful, because modern editors... I usually have the Arden.

EMILY. The Arden is my go-to, yeah.

ESTHER. And often the Folger as well, because the Arden's a little more scholarly and a little lessactable, little less playable, and the Folger is a little more straightforward.

EMILY. Yeah.

ESTHER. And I find their notes... Usually their notes are all I need, and I don't need anyone to tell me that scholars have debated over this for years. (laughs) Later, that will be interesting to me, but when I'm trying to figure out my acting stuff, sometimes the Arden is too nerdy.

EMILY. Right, whereas I'm going to say the Arden is great, though, if you're doing your director/dramaturg work.

ESTHER. Oh yeah, for sure.

EMILY. Because I could not have cut down the script of *King Lear* when I was directing it without that Arden that told me exactly...

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Because the quarto and the folio are so different from each other. It's worse than *Hamlet*.

ESTHER. *Lear* especially. *Lear* is like you have four complete plays to choose from.

EMILY. Yep.

ESTHER. And what do you do? Yeah.

EMILY. Yeah, exactly.

ESTHER. It's bonkers.

EMILY. But I agree, yeah. The Folger is very straightforward for just I need the text.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. The Arden is great if you need to do some dramaturgical work.

ESTHER. Yeah. But either way, the modern editions are punctuated for grammar. The editors are really going for grammar that you read on a page, to yourself, in your own brain.

EMILY. Yeah, much more literature, isn't it? Yeah.

ESTHER. It's much more literature, and they're looking at Shakespeare not necessarily as a tool that an actor uses, or not only as a tool that an actor and a director are going to use to put the play on, but also for something that someone's going to sit in an armchair and read.

EMILY. Right.

ESTHER. But punctuation in the time that the First Folio, in 1623, when the First Folio was put together, punctuation was a very different beast. It is there for rhetorical purposes, for the purpose of speaking it to someone else.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And so the First Folio does help me feel like I'm a little closer to authorial intent.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. Although what you said is absolutely true. I mean, the First Folio, it's important to note, was put together not by Shakespeare at all, but by Shakespeare's friends and companions and compatriots who, a few years after his death – he died in 1616, First Folio was published in 1623 – they realized that the work would die out, might die out, if it wasn't collected. Publishing plays was such a different beast then than it is now.

EMILY. Right.

ESTHER. And copyright was a different thing too, which is why plays weren't published-

EMILY. Well, what copyright?

ESTHER. Yeah, exactly, there wasn't any, and so if you were in possession of a full script, you probably were stealing, you know? (laughs)

EMILY. Right, because only the prompter would necessarily, the prompter and the author might be the only ones with a full script.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Since everything else was broken into the roles, literally.

ESTHER. Yeah. My understanding is that the full script belonged to the playhouse.

EMILY. That makes sense.

ESTHER. As a sort of business unit.

EMILY. Right. (laughs)

ESTHER. And so yeah, they would... Both to not get things stolen and to save on paper and things, you're right, they would write a cue script, and you would get, as an actor, your lines...

EMILY. Your part, literally.

ESTHER. ... and the line that came before on a little roll of paper, and that was your "roll."

EMILY. Yep.

ESTHER. Yeah, so that's...

EMILY. Although, you're quite right that it was put together, the editors were people that had worked with him in the industry. So the likelihood is that they're still thinking of punctuation, which, again, has not been codified in the English language. You can put a comma wherever you want and no one's coming around with a red pen to you, because it's still so young, which is a curious thing to think and wrap your mind around. So they've got, in their body, the performance history of how Burbage and Armin performed this stuff.

ESTHER. Mm-hmm.

EMILY. And I know for myself, with the plays that I've written, I certainly will go back and will change things in the script based on essentially trying to capture what someone perfected in performance, you know?

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. I did the first run-through, in sort of theory, as a playwright. Then there'll be certain lines, I'll put in words or change lineation or placement or whatever it may be, going, "Actually, they always performed it this way. I think my theory was off." You know. (laughs)

ESTHER. So what you have is a marriage of all sorts of things, from the First Folio capturing the performance all the way through that amazing Samuel French era where we have all of these scripts that have all of the stage manager's notes in parentheses, basically. (laughs)

EMILY. Oh, Lord, right. Yeah. Yeah.

ESTHER. A lot of my friends will cross out all of that immediately.

EMILY. Oh, yeah. (laughs)

ESTHER. But you have to find the way. I think another important thing to know about the First Folio is that there were sort of material concerns, and there were a lot of variants between the various compositors. You can sort of... Scholars can trace Compositor A and Compositor B, and they used punctuation a little differently. And sometimes if they got to the end of a page and they ran out of periods or they ran out of commas, they would put in a different piece of punctuation.

EMILY. Oh.

ESTHER. Sometimes they actually ran out of the physical pieces, so by the end of the page, some things would get funky sometimes.

EMILY. I hadn't even thought of that, of course.

ESTHER. Because it's a lot of words.

EMILY. Because they're putting in, literally... Yeah, too many words, Bill. Too many words.

ESTHER. Too many words.

EMILY. Yeah. Huh.

ESTHER. So that's just to say we have to take it all with a grain of salt.

EMILY. Mm-hmm.

ESTHER. I know that there are a lot of actors who make a lot about which words are capitalized and which are not, and capitalization in the Folio often will point to your operative words, but not always.

EMILY. Let's take a moment to talk about a few of the tenets that I've always heard as these are the most helpful bits of First Folio technique.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. The way it gets passed down from one person that took the intensive to another, is that there's sort of three things, is what I've heard about First Folio. If there's a capitalized letter at the beginning of the word, that's not the beginning, that wouldn't normally be capitalized as English.

ESTHER. Like, here's a Noun, yeah.

EMILY. Right, exactly, to make sure you definitely don't drop that word, that it gets a little bit of extra oomph or something, a little bit of extra attention. It's an important word now. If there's an extra e on it, you kind of have a choice as to whether or not they were just doing spelling that they chose that day or if it means perhaps extend the vowels in the earlier portion.

ESTHER. Hmm.

EMILY. So, for example, if you were to do... I'm trying to think of a word that doesn't have an e on the end.

ESTHER. Olde?

EMILY. Well, town, right?

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. T-O-W-N is the way we spell it, and if you put an e on the end, maybe extend the operative vowel, like tooowne as opposed to town.

ESTHER. Interesting.

EMILY. Yeah, and then last is, yeah, that the punctuation is going to tell you sort of ellipses to trail off, a hyphen to maybe dash forward or have a rest. Someone pointed out to me once – maybe it was even you – that there are very few exclamation marks in the Folio.

ESTHER. There are.

EMILY. So that those exclamation points become much more important to an actor if you actually get one, as opposed to just sort of throwing them everywhere. (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) It's true, and editors, one of my biggest beefs with modern editors is they like to throw in a lot more exclamation points, and I find exclamation points to be kind of bossy, so I don't...

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. I don't need them. I don't want them.

EMILY. I love...

ESTHER. I will decide how excited I am, thank you very much. (laughs) But that's just me.

EMILY. Yeah, I can see that, I can absolutely see that. It's like the terrible O'Neill type directions in italics right before every line telling you how to act the line.

ESTHER. Yeah. I think there's a fine line between...

EMILY. Just back off.

ESTHER. ... between clarity, making sure that your intention as an author is clear, and directing.

EMILY. Mm-hmm.

ESTHER. I am not a playwright, and thank God, because that's a really, that's a tricky line, I think, a tricky balance that you have to strike between making sure that what you intend comes through and just bossing everyone around, when this play's going to have a director. The director can boss you around. (laughs)

EMILY. Right? Yeah. (laughs) Well, that's where I think I would personally – this is just me, but I would personally love playwrights to essentially put in whatever they feel they need to put in, and then be cool, essentially, with people taking your script and being like, “And we are going to do this all dressed up as cupcakes.” You know? And just be like, okay. So that in the interpretive phase, I think you... This maybe comes from doing years of directing Shakespeare, where you can do whatever you want with him, but in the interpretive phase, then, you need to look at what was in the play and then decide what you're going to do with the play. And sometimes you'll have a spectacular failure.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. You will frequently have a spectacular failure.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. But I know, again, as a director, I'll then watch that, watch someone else do the cupcake version of *Macbeth*, let's say, and I'll go, “Well, now, that one moment, where actually Ross was a cupcake, there's something in that. There's a sort of cupcake-ness to Ross.” (laughs)

ESTHER. Yeah. Sure.

EMILY. I'll take that, and now I feel empowered to actually go do my, improve your version.

ESTHER. Yeah, but isn't it interesting how so many high concepts spring from one seed that works, and then they try and...

EMILY. Right, justify it.

ESTHER. I did a whole *Macbeth* that was really based on one cool costume change. (laughs)

EMILY. Oh no.

ESTHER. It really didn't support the whole show.

EMILY. Yeah, but so you were talking that you had some places of punctuation in the Folio that you found particularly actable. One of the things that I really want

to bridge in this podcast is, in fact, when you're writing verse drama, it's meant to be enacted, so you can't leave the actors and what they're receiving, like for example, someone listening to this now might go back and take out a lot of exclamation points.

ESTHER. And cupcakes.

EMILY. And cupcakes.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. So what are some things that you find with punctuation that are helpful and actable, or perhaps that are bossy?

ESTHER. (laughs) Well, I have a couple... I did bring a couple of examples.

EMILY. Great. Yay! Take it away.

ESTHER. I don't know how much time we have, but...

EMILY. Again, we might release this as a special bonus for December for our Patreons.

ESTHER. Great.

EMILY. And then we'll take the bits that non-Patreons get to hear (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) Fantastic. Well, I'll speak generally, and then I'll bring in an example.

EMILY. I love it.

ESTHER. To answer your question, yes, I do find exclamation points to be kind of bossy, especially in Shakespeare, because I know that those are later editorial emendations, usually from people who are not actors.

EMILY. Ah.

ESTHER. And a scholar of literature will approach Shakespeare from a different angle than an actor will and will have different needs and intentions and ends than an actor and a director will.

EMILY. Yes. Yes.

ESTHER. And so it's fine for the editors to follow their own needs and ends, but not always helpful to me as the actor. One of the things I love about the Folio is

there are a lot of random commas, but almost always, that comma will tell me there's a list. It might be a list of two, but I can see that there's a list.

EMILY. Ah.

ESTHER. And I adore the colons in the Folio, because it tells me that there has to be an energy in the way I deliver this, that something's going to happen. There's a setup, and then there's a payoff, and those things are on opposite sides of a colon.

EMILY. So a colon for you feels rather like a ramp up to a ta-da, and then the ta-da, essentially?

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Yeah. Yeah, I could see that.

ESTHER. The colon energy is like, here it is. Here it is: this, this, and this. Here it is (colon) this, this, and this.

EMILY. And that's where the commas come in with the list.

ESTHER. That's where the commas come in.

EMILY. Ah.

ESTHER. And then there's a period at the end, and if I want to be excited, I'll put my own exclamation point. (laughs)

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. I didn't realize I felt quite as strongly about that as I do.

EMILY. What I'm finding, actually, as I'm starting to talk to actors, is there's a terrible beggary in the way we train actors in terms of you must be quiet. Whatever work you do, kind of don't actually bring in your passion and opinions about it. Having you guys start to talk about it, I'm starting to hear, you're like, "Actually, I feel really strongly about this."

ESTHER. (laughs)

EMILY. And that's such valuable information, because, again, if I'm ineffectively communicating to you, why am I silencing you? You're the one doing the work?

ESTHER. Well, I think part of that really comes down to how we produce plays, at least here in the States. There's just never time. You know, one of the reasons

that I think a lot of actors just shut up and do their jobs is there just, there's a limited number of rehearsal hours.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And I know how I feel when (laughs) some actor sidetracks the whole operation going down a rabbit hole of their own devising that isn't actually going to help anyone else in the room.

EMILY. Oh, sure.

ESTHER. So, you know, there's a fine line.

EMILY. Very true. But I guess what I'm thinking is since with *Turn to Flesh*, this is, what, going on eight years...

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. We're past 50 new plays that we've worked on.

ESTHER. That's so exciting.

EMILY. Yeah, it's crazy. Like, what? Why? How? But one of the crucial things for developing not only new plays, but a new way of approaching creating theatre is not to shut up the actor voice.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. You know? To make the time, even if it's a longer development period.

ESTHER. Yeah, I hear you.

EMILY. Anyway, you were saying... Tell me all your feelings about punctuation. I want them all. Don't apologize.

ESTHER. (laughs)

EMILY. Feel your feelings.

ESTHER. So yeah, those are some of my big, general feelings. I do find colons, especially, to be gifts. I loved what Andy Barrett said in the last episode about the gifts that playwrights give us.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And one of the biggest gifts is when the playwright tells us with their form that Something, with a capital S, happens here. They're not telling us what happens here, but something does. I find... We're not talking about scansion today, but scansion in Shakespeare, especially-

EMILY. But this is all part of the tool boudoir.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Because if you have repeated meter, that is one of the gifts you're giving. Any of the forms of meter, once you recognize what the playwright is doing, that's a thing you can follow down.

ESTHER. Yeah, and if you have a strongly repeated meter, introducing irregularities and variations tells you something is happening with that person.

EMILY. Huge.

ESTHER. If you have a string of lines that are overfull, for example, the person probably is also overfull in some way.

EMILY. Mm-hmm.

ESTHER. Or if they're really sticking to the rhythm, that tells you something about the person, too.

EMILY. Or thinking of that *Richard II*, when it goes from extremely strict iambic pentameter, perfect lines of iambic pentameter, to all murdered with that spondee, that troche. And it hits you because it is that minor juxtaposition that you can't avoid.

ESTHER. Yeah, and if you do your analysis, you get to see where those gifts are. Those little, the fish are leaping out of the pool and you can...

EMILY. I love it.

ESTHER. I have an example for you.

EMILY. Great.

ESTHER. This is an example of how looking at the Folio just opens the door to more opportunities for you.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. As opposed to sticking just with the script that was handed to you, that was probably edited by a modern editor, depending on what company you're working for, who developed the script, and how much time they had. Sometimes you get the script that was printed off of MIT Shakespeare and it's riddled with inaccuracies.

EMILY. Sometimes?

ESTHER. And that's what they could do, and so you as an actor can then take that and see what the textual variants are and choose which ones you want. Decide with your director what's going to be most useful to you. I played Hotspur a couple of summers ago.

EMILY. Yeah, you did.

ESTHER. It was an utter delight. I played a lot of people. It was both parts of *Henry IV*. There were, I believe, six of us?

EMILY. Oh my gosh.

ESTHER. So we all played a whole lot of people, but Hotspur was one of the people that I played.

EMILY. Nice.

ESTHER. And there's a moment... It's Hotspur's last line. I'm dying.

EMILY. Can you give us act and scene?

ESTHER. This is *Henry IV part 1 Act V scene 4*, and I'm looking at around line 80, 75-80.

EMILY. And this is the First Folio you're looking at right now, correct?

ESTHER. I'm going to actually start with the Arden.

EMILY. I love it.

ESTHER. I'll try and read it in a way that people can hear, more or less, how the thoughts are put together on this particular page.

EMILY. Great, and as always, you can, in fact, take a look at the transcript, provided as well by Esther, who is recompensed. If you would like to help out and make sure that this continues, check our Patreon: patreon.com/hamlettohamilton. Help us out and make this successful for everyone. Go ahead. (laughs)

ESTHER. Yes, I'm already thinking about how exactly I'm going to format this in the transcript, and I actually might put the script that I was handed by the director in the transcript, because it has parentheses instead of commas in the bit that I'm talking about.

EMILY. Oh, that's fascinating. Yeah, please, walk us through all three, yeah.

ESTHER. Actually, let me – yeah. I'll grab that one. So I'm dying. Hotspur. I'm dying. I've had this huge battle with Prince Hal for the soul of England, more or less, and he finally gets me with his long pokey stick, and I say to him:

O Harry, thou hast robbed me of my youth.
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.
They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh.
But thoughts (the slaves of life) and life (time's fool)
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

That's what I was given.

EMILY. That's what you were given from your director or in the Arden?

ESTHER. That's what the director gave me.

EMILY. Okay.

ESTHER. I've put the Arden away, because I think it's cleaner to just look at what the director gave me and what the Folio says.

EMILY. Great, great.

ESTHER. In the version the director gave me, it says (dictating the punctuation):

But thoughts (the slaves of life) and life (time's fool)
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

EMILY. Yeah, no, actually, I heard those parentheses as I was listening to you that first time.

ESTHER. Yes. You do it with your voice.

EMILY. I'm not quite sure how, but I... Yeah, so keep going. Keep going.

ESTHER. There's a technique, and we can talk about that... later.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. So that's what I was given. Here's what the First Folio has:

Oh *Harry*, thou hast rob'd me of my youth:
I better brooke the losse of brittle life,
Then those proud Titles thou hast wonne of me,
They wound my thoughts worse, then the sword my flesh:
But thought's the slave of Life, and Life, Time's foole;
And Time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

EMILY. Hmm. It runs together so much more, yeah.

ESTHER. It does. In the Folio, you have (dictating punctuation):

But thought's the slave of Life

as in, thought is the slave of life.

EMILY. Right.

ESTHER. (continues dictating punctuation):

, and Life, Time's foole;
And Time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

Here's what I find to be the playable difference here. In the edition I was given by the director, it's highly structured.

EMILY. Yeah.

ESTHER. You have a list of three things, and each of those things has a sort of subclause, and the thought is that each of these three things must stop.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And then two lines later, I die.

EMILY. Right.

ESTHER. I'm so close to death that I can't even finish my sentence. I cannot get the last word of my life out because I'm done.

EMILY. Wow.

ESTHER. So the difference is that you've got that highly, highly structured, three, sort of six-part list two lines before you die.

EMILY. Yeah.

ESTHER. Or you've got the Folio, which really is more three parts than six parts, and it's really more of a stepping stone. You can have these thoughts as they occur. They can emerge, and to me that makes a lot more sense for somebody whose life is draining out of them.

EMILY. Well, that's exactly what I was feeling. The first time through, I'm like, okay, I can hear this, but... I was going to make fun of Shakespeare. I'm like, what have you written? Why is he suddenly doing philosophy while he's bleeding out? And the second time, because it was run through, because there wasn't the constant qualification of, "This is what I mean by this," as you're saying, yeah, I got the sense of this came from this. This comes, so that you get a gushing feel rather than a start and stop. Which I wouldn't mind if the circumstances were different.

ESTHER. Right. Right. Both of them can... You can use either of these and still die as Hotspur.

EMILY. Sure, if maybe you're gasping with the parentheses or something.

ESTHER. Yeah. I just think that it's much harder to do the parentheses one.

EMILY. Yeah, and die.

ESTHER. I think it's much easier to have... Yeah, it's just harder to get there (laughs) if your thoughts are so ordered two lines ahead.

EMILY. (laughs) Yes.

ESTHER. Oh, sorry, I'm wrong. Three lines.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. Anne Lamott has... I think it's Anne Lamott. She's got this great image for when you're sort of lost in life, and all you really need is the stepping stones. The light shines on your very next step and you step on it, and then the light shines on your next step and you step, and in that way, you get through the hard time that you're getting through, if you really can't see more than one step ahead. For me, the Folio version of this thought emerges and I step on that stone, and then the next stone emerges. You could say, "But thought's the slave of life."

End. "Life is time's fool." End. "Time, which can see everything, has to stop at some point."

EMILY. Yeah, it actually builds on each other rather than...

ESTHER. It's not a lecture.

EMILY. Well, it also, the previous one, you're right, absolutely sounds like a lecture, but it also... The three things don't feel as, those three different thoughts, the list doesn't feel like each one is schwumped into the next one.

ESTHER. Mm-hmm.

EMILY. You know? And in fact, even the noun is not schwumped into what its qualification is.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. It's too separated, as opposed to this is all one thing, and this is all one thing, and this is all one thing.

ESTHER. Yeah, it's more like waves crashing on the same shore and building on each other. Part of that, of course, is in the way that I read it, because I have an opinion about those parentheses.

EMILY. Sure.

ESTHER. And you could minimize that, and as you have said, do the playwright's work a little bit for them as the actor, and bend it to your will a little bit, which we always do anyway.

EMILY. You always do.

ESTHER. (laughs) For better or worse.

EMILY. Well, but that's the job of interpreting, right?

ESTHER. Yeah, well, it's true.

EMILY. Is that you bring yourself to it.

ESTHER. It's true. That's a nice justification. I'm interpreting.

EMILY. (laughs)

ESTHER. I'm not just doing whatever I want no matter what's on the page.

EMILY. That's how you get cupcakes. (laughs)

ESTHER. But that is just, that's one example of many that I could pull out of the gift that the Folio gives to you, which is really options.

EMILY. Yeah. Okay, so let's double down on that. Essentially, one of the gifts that any playwright can give to you is, essentially, the sense of options, the sense of being able to play with the text rather than against or under or... Do you know what I'm saying?

ESTHER. I do know what you're saying. I don't know if I know the answer to that, because...

EMILY. Great.

ESTHER. (laughs) Because I'm playing in the world of Shakespeare, who's had so many editors and has this First Folio thing, and we don't actually get to know the true authorial intent in a way that we do with modern playwrights like you.

EMILY. Much easier to do author is dead, yeah.

ESTHER. You get to tell me exactly what you want in a way that I can understand, because we understand the tools of grammar... Well, I was going to say we understand them in the same way, but actually that may not be true.

EMILY. Well, that's why I think actually people... There are, again, there are playwrights that I vibe with and playwrights that I don't vibe with.

ESTHER. Sure.

EMILY. I keep coming back to, actually, how people will love one comedian and hate another comedian. They're both comedians.

ESTHER. Right.

EMILY. But it really is about who you vibe with, so I do think that there is... When we were looking – I actually did have all three actors look at “Go, fool, gloat,” and Vanessa felt it was over-punctuated, which is absolutely fair. But then the people who have played Cupid, they vibe with it.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. You know?

ESTHER. There's a healthy dose of taste and preference involved in all of this, and what is useful for one actor will not be useful for another, and that is all a huge blend of temperament and training and experience and a million other informing factors.

EMILY. But regardless, as you were pointing out, I think... Part of the vibing is, let's say that Shakespeare had written it with parentheses. You would then play the role, and that would actually alter the degree to which you vibe with how he did his work.

ESTHER. It might. It might. If I were really on my game, at some point I probably would have gone, "What would happen if I took these parentheses out?"

EMILY. Right, sure.

ESTHER. But, I mean, the big clue to me that I don't know I would have arrived at was simply the apostrophe, thought's the slave of life, as in thought is the slave of life. Because that's...

EMILY. Ah, yes, yes.

ESTHER. Because the other version has thoughts, a plural noun, parentheses, the slaves of life.

EMILY. Can you read those two... Because that sort of thing, it sounds like... Okay, to those who are reading plays just as literature, they would go into a sort of academic, "Ah, well it means this. It means that." But in a practical way, one might expect that they sound the same to an audience. But I think we both agree, and we know that actually, because the actor can make you understand which version they mean, would you play both versions, thoughts where it's plural and thought's where it means "thought is?"

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. And just let us hear the difference of you fwahing the two different ways to us.

ESTHER. Yeah. I'll give you the whole list.

EMILY. I was going to say, yeah, if you want to back up, yeah.

ESTHER.

But thoughts (the slaves of life) and life (time's fool)
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

Option A.

But thought's the slave of Life, and Life, Time's foole;
And Time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

EMILY. It's amazing. It's subtle. It's really subtle, and I think sometimes... I think as a theatre practitioner, we live in the subtleties, right?

ESTHER. I would hope so.

EMILY. I would hope so, right. But sometimes I feel that people who look at plays as just literature, they do work on subtleties, but the subtleties they'll focus in on are not the ones that we're ever playing, you know? Again it comes, at least to me, it comes back to it's lovely that you're focused on that, but when we're telling this whole story, these are the things that we need to be concerned with. Yet at the same time, when I think about people going, "Well, why would you study this? What does it matter?" It's like, no, these little differences vastly change whether you're laughing at Hotspur's death or whether you feel Hotspur's death.

ESTHER. Yeah. Yeah, and again, the director will decide who's doing what at Hotspur's death, with input from the actors, I would hope. But yeah, I think the more the playwright can think about and understand what an actable choice is, a playable choice, rather than a literarily sound choice.

EMILY. Well, this is the thing I keep com- have you done *Troilus and Cressida* yet?

ESTHER. I was in a reading of it once, but I haven't spent a ton of time on it.

EMILY. Okay.

ESTHER. Oh yeah, we did bootleg it. I was Andromache. I don't remember it very well. (laughs)

EMILY. It's not a big role, and so you may not have been onstage a lot. I was in *Anything Goes* my sophomore year of high school, and then I finally saw *Anything Goes*, and I was like, oh, is that the plot? (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) Yeah. In that particular bootleg, I had to teach all day, so I wasn't at the rehearsal until 5:00, which is good because Andromache doesn't come on until Act IV, so I pretty much, I got there at 4:00 or 5:00. I walked in just about the time that we rehearsed my scene. I did my scene. I didn't meet the person playing my father until I met him onstage in the performance. (laughs)

EMILY. That's kind of so thrilling, though, to be honest.

ESTHER. It is fantastic.

EMILY. It's actually, coming back to Paul Sugarman, who runs the Instant Shakespeare Company and puts out the First Folio blue pocket editions...

ESTHER. Adore them.

EMILY. ... I've done a ton of Instant Shakespeare with that company, and there is such a delight to just walk in and go, "Well, we're doing it."

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. And that is completely unrehearsed, so...

ESTHER. Yes. I've done a couple of them, and it's great. You just, again, you prepare as much as you can on your own and you shed whatever expectations you have, and then you do it.

EMILY. And then you do it, and you vibe off the people and what they're bringing right then to try to make something cohesive in the moment, and it's kind of thrilling. But *Troilus and Cressida* is such a weird play for whatever reason. Actually, with Instant Shakes, I played... I was brought on to play Pandarus, for which I was prepared. And then the person who was playing Ajax didn't show, so all of a sudden I was playing Ajax as well.

ESTHER. (laughs) There's a combination.

EMILY. It was quite a combination. Then in a different, private read for Hamlet Isn't Dead, I read Diomedes and two other small characters, and actually fell in love with Diomedes, found some really interesting stuff. But every time I come back to this play, I'm like, what are you? Why? It's just so obvious to me that he was kind of up his own ass in terms of he's being kind of literary, but so much of it is just so unactable.

ESTHER. Hmm, yeah.

EMILY. So much of it is so... And it's Shakespeare. It doesn't feel like Fletcher.

ESTHER. Right.

EMILY. It's still, you can understand what he's saying, but he's being so "literary" about it, as opposed to playable about it.

ESTHER. I've taken a book off my shelf to see where in the timeline *Troilus and Cressida* falls.

EMILY. Well, it falls right around *Hamlet*. I believe that's actually what he was referring to when he was doing...

ESTHER. Oh yeah, it's pretty late.

EMILY. ... yeah, when he has them do the play within the play. I guess that those two speeches are essentially his outline draft for what would have been part two of *Troilus and Cressida*.

ESTHER. That's so interesting.

EMILY. The part two theory comes from Abby Wilde, who believes that *Troilus and Cressida* was supposed to be a Trojan duology or trilogy or something, and I think she's right.

ESTHER. I buy that. It's certainly a little bit like, well, that happened.

EMILY. Yeah, now it's done.

ESTHER. You know? (laughs)

EMILY. It's weird. Yeah. But yeah, no, it's notactable, but it is literary.

ESTHER. That's so interesting, because it falls in... I don't know quite why I have this on my shelf, but in Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, he places it in his timeline right around *Twelfth Night* and *All's Well*.

EMILY. Well, *All's Well* is not great either, but at least...

ESTHER. I love *All's Well*. But I agree that it's not great. (laughs)

EMILY. Well, okay, I love *As You Like It*, but also, I grant you, structural mess.

ESTHER. Sure. I think I just love *All's Well* because I really want a crack at Helena. I think I'd be a good Helena, you know.

EMILY. I think you'd be a great Helena. I played First Gentleman or First Nobleman in it, which sounds like a throwaway part, but actually is in, like, every third scene.

ESTHER. (laughs)

EMILY. He just never bothered to name him. He should be George Nobleman or something.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. He does a lot. It's really weird, but-

ESTHER. I hope your First Gentleman was called George Nobleman.

EMILY. I should have. It was an Instant Shakes, and so I didn't... I actually, it was one of my very first Instant Shakes, and so I came in kind of unprepared, because I'm like, "Oh, it's First Nobleman. It'll be three lines. I'm new to the company." And then found out, like, "AH!"

ESTHER. (laughs) Classic rookie mistake.

EMILY. Classic rookie mistake. But Laura Iris Hill was playing Helena and did a beautiful job. But even so, as I was doing the show, I'm like, "I hate this play. I viscerally loathe this play." (laughs)

ESTHER. It's awful. It's awful. People behave so terribly in it and it's deeply unsatisfying. I still want a crack at it.

EMILY. You know what, though? There are those nuts that you're just like, "I know this is flawed. That's why I love it, because I think I could do it. I think I could do it."

ESTHER. I just want to try, see what I can do, you know.

EMILY. Yeah, it's like *Timon of Athens* is one of the few plays of his that I have yet to do anything for. I'm positive it's terrible, but for some reason, it's desperately on my bucket list, just because I haven't done it.

ESTHER. Sometimes we just like to collect the thing that's rare.

EMILY. It really is. It's the Pokemon of Shakespeare. (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) And also, I'll tell you, recently a friend of mine was understudying *Timon* for the Theatre for a New Audience production, for Simon Godwin's production that they did.

EMILY. I heard about that.

ESTHER. I helped her work on her text, and there's actually some really excellent text in *Timon of Athens*.

EMILY. Oh really?

ESTHER. In terms of the story, it's kind of a downer, but some of those speeches are actually fantastic.

EMILY. That's amazing.

ESTHER. I utterly support your bucket list.

EMILY. Let me ask you, is there anything else that you wanted to take a look at, First Folio and whatnot? There may not be. That is an incredible example, and so helpful.

ESTHER. I mean, I have another one from *The Tempest*, but it's kind of the same thing of the editor got in the way and it's much easier to play when you just look at the Folio.

EMILY. Yeah, actually, give me half a second. I had two things of this of tea.

ESTHER. I saw you on Facebook go, "I'm drinking pints of tea." I was like, "We're going to take a break." (laughs)

EMILY. Right. So let's, can I take a little break? Just keep the audio going.

ESTHER. Yep.

[music]

Let me take a look at that example really fast and see if it's worth... I think it might just be editor shaming, in which case it's not that useful.

EMILY. You know what, though? I don't know. Well, you heard "Heresies."

ESTHER. Mm-hmm.

EMILY. I'm so kind of... I'm about to teach a class, hopefully, if we can figure it out, that I've taught for years down at... We'll do it virtually, but for eighth graders, for a friend of mine. She's got two other teachers that also take this course, and what we're trying to do is basically just stave off kids going into ninth grade and hating Shakespeare because they're subjected to the, you know.

ESTHER. Yep.

EMILY. So really, we just kind of give them acting or theatre 101 class, with Shakespeare text.

ESTHER. Right, yeah.

EMILY. As I'm working on this, the more and more I'm thinking it is so deathly to treat teaching plays as literature.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. It just is. You don't get... I mean, it's as if you were forced to only ever read sheet music and you could never, ever, ever hear a symphony.

ESTHER. That's so sad.

EMILY. Why would you do that, ever?

ESTHER. Then you're just, you're trapped by your own ability and your own singleness and all of it, yeah.

EMILY. Yeah, and then you think this is what all of music is like, and it's like, no. Or even more, if you were forced to only ever listen to Brahms and you had no idea that, I don't know, Busta Rhymes existed and you prefer one over the other, but you're like...

ESTHER. That's a broad range.

EMILY. Well, but they use the same tools.

ESTHER. Yeah, it's true. It's true.

EMILY. Mm-hmm. Anyway, yes, go for it.

ESTHER. Well, my issue with this is just that I don't know how succinct I can be about it.

EMILY. Again, we can always snip. Why don't you give it to us?

ESTHER. All right.

EMILY. I'd rather have more information than less.

ESTHER. All right. Okay, so here's another example of a big difference, and this is actually an even bigger difference between the Arden and the Folio. This is from *The Tempest*. I've had a couple experiences with *The Tempest*. I played Ceres in college. It was my first role. I was a freshman.

EMILY. Aw.

ESTHER. And I played Ceres and a nymph, and notable mostly for my costume, because our designer made these amazing headdresses for all of the goddesses, and mine, because I was Ceres, the goddess of the harvest, was wheat. It was just this Vegas style, longer than my arms, taller than the doorway rainbow of wheat. My compatriots laughed at me very hard, but it actually took a lot of balance to wear it properly and come out and do my thing.

EMILY. I mean, you were a Follies girl, yeah.

ESTHER. I was a Follies girl. They called me the Oroweat woman, but yeah, that was my first experience of *The Tempest*. Then more recently, with the Riot Grrrls, I got to play Antonio.

EMILY. Nice.

ESTHER. Which is an excellent role.

EMILY. It is. It really is.

ESTHER. It's a real winner.

EMILY. Yeah. I played Prospero by mistake once. (laughs)

ESTHER. Whoops. (laughs)

EMILY. In my own version, because... Which was not the plan, but then Prospero couldn't do opening night.

ESTHER. Oh no. That's not good.

EMILY. That was a really interesting experience, and I learned a lot. (laughs)

ESTHER. Man, if you take Prospero out, the play gets a lot shorter.

EMILY. So short. (laughs) Anyway, so tell me what we have here. First one's Arden.

ESTHER. All right, so we're in Act II scene 1, right around line 280 or so, and this is the scene in which Antonio is convincing Sebastian to do a murder. We've found ourselves marooned on this island, and if I can kill my brother, the king, and you can kill Gonzalo, the king's advisor, we will be in charge of Milan, if we can ever get back there. After this shipwreck.

EMILY. Right, right.

ESTHER. Or I guess at the very least, we can be in charge of this island.

EMILY. Well, at the very least, they won't be in charge.

ESTHER. At the very least, we will have done away with them.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. Let me take a look and see exactly where I want to start. Yeah, I'll just start at the problem bit.

EMILY. Great.

ESTHER. In the Arden, Antonio says:

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon.
If he were that which now he's like (that's dead)
Whom I with this obedient steel – three inches of it –
Can lay to bed forever (whiles you, doing thus,
To the perpetual wink for aye might put
This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who
Should not upbraid our course) – for all the rest
They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;

All right, so there's some instructions in there, but the bit that is difficult is at the very beginning. (reads dictating punctuation)

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon.
If he were that which now he's like (that's dead)
Whom I with this obedient steel – three inches of it –
Can lay to bed forever

and we go on from there. But that "if" never gets a "then."

EMILY. Oh. Huh.

ESTHER. It's hard to follow. It's a long sentence. There's a whole lot of parenthetical stuff in there.

EMILY. And they're actually put in parentheses? No.

ESTHER. The editor has put them in parentheses. The editor has put "that's dead" in parentheses, and then the editor has put everything about Gonzalo

(whiles you, doing thus,

To the perpetual wink for aye might put
This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who
Should not upbraid our course)

is all in parentheses.

EMILY. Holy crap.

ESTHER. My friends, when you see – I'll put this in the transcript so that you can see it, because it's hard to hear it.

EMILY. Thank you so much. You're going to have to provide some of the texts.

ESTHER. I will provide the texts, because they're right in front of me. I have the bookmarks all ready.

EMILY. I love it.

ESTHER. That's the Arden. The Arden does that.

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon.

Full stop. Seems useful to just lay it out like that, but then we have a problem when we go on and the rest of the sentence is fragmentary.

EMILY. Yeah. Yeah.

ESTHER. The Folio has:

Heere lies your Brother,
No better then the earth he lies upon,
If he were that which now hee's like (that's dead)
Whom I with this obedient steel (three inches of it)
Can lay to bed for ever:

And then it goes on from there.

EMILY. I heard the difference. All of a sudden it was clearer.

ESTHER. You just take the full stop out, and then you have a complete thought.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And I never, with that period in there, I never would have gotten there.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. And (laughs) you know, it's a little thing. It seems like such a tiny thing, this one period, but it changes the thought entirely from a thought that's hard to think and hard to say to a thought that might be long and complicated, but makes sense.

EMILY. Can you read them back to back again, with the period and then without the period? No commentary in between. Let's just hear the difference.

ESTHER.

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon.
If he were that which now he's like (that's dead)
Whom I with this obedient steel – three inches of it –
Can lay to bed forever

Or:

Heere lies your Brother,
No better then the earth he lies upon,
If he were that which now hee's like (that's dead)
Whom I with this obedient steel (three inches of it)
Can lay to bed for ever:

EMILY. It's two separate thoughts that suddenly make sense.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Here's the person. This is what we're seeing. This is what we could do to the person.

ESTHER. Yeah. Isn't that...

EMILY. It's amazing. It's amazing. One of the things, though, that I'm noticing or that I'm thinking of is what the editors are doing. You don't have to editor shame. I will editor shame.

ESTHER. Okay. (laughs)

EMILY. (laughs) And all the editors can be angry at me like they are already and they can put me on trial again.

ESTHER. I have great respect for editors, but sometimes they make choices that are not actable, not playable, and also, this particular one, I don't think that full stop belongs there no matter what.

EMILY. Grammatically, yeah. But there's actually, I do think, a danger of putting in... Essentially, again, of writing out the piece according to grammar, which feels like clarity but is not actually acting clarity, and therefore is not actually audience clarity.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Versus – and this is why I call it emotive punctuation – because what is it that having the punctuation or not having the punctuation there, you know, emotive formatting, what is the formatting that's going to actually clarify the thought and the emotion and the action? Putting in parentheses, for example, all over the place, might clarify subclauses when you're just looking at it, if you're not doing anything else but keeping it caught on the page, but it actually trips you up when you try to act it. I would suggest, then, for playwrights now, I know when I put stuff in parentheses or whatever, what I'm attempting to do is – or if I don't put anything in – is to give you, yes, indicate, essentially, the music of it. And the music with that one period is vastly different.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. Vastly, vastly different.

ESTHER. It's just a real... It's something to trip on, honestly. And it's entirely possible that I am not seeing something that the editor is seeing or intending, and that I'm just missing the boat.

EMILY. No, but I want to put this out there, because, again, having worked now on new text for loads of years, as well as then having worked through Shakespeare for decades prior and continuing through, I'm finding consistently that if you are whatever, dramaturg, director, playwright, producer, whatever it is, editor AND actor, but you have to have the AND actor part of it in order to do this work.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. And to do it clearly. I mean, even if that's not your primary hat, you need to have that skill, that knowledge.

ESTHER. The more that you can understand what actors do, the better off everyone will be.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. I mean, I find that in the a little bit of film work that I've done, there's an even greater divide between directors and actors, and especially if I'm

working with directing students, they really don't understand what actors are doing or what they need, and that can really hobble a whole production. It just makes everything a lot harder for everyone, and you're not going to get where you're trying to go.

EMILY. Yes, yeah.

ESTHER. So I fully support everyone involved in theatre understanding what everyone else does.

EMILY. Yeah, even just have some passing knowledge.

ESTHER. Yeah.

EMILY. It doesn't have to become your primary part of study, but this work supports multi-hyphenates. It can be much more democratic, much more communal. It doesn't need to be as separatist, I guess.

ESTHER. Yeah, yes, and certainly not as hierarchical as it has been in some places.

EMILY. Yeah. Do you have another one there? Otherwise, I understand that you actually-

ESTHER. No, I'm-

EMILY. Go ahead, yes. What do you want to say?

ESTHER. I'm good.

EMILY. Are you sure? Okay?

ESTHER. Those are my two big ones.

EMILY. I love it.

ESTHER. I mean, if I went through it with a fine-toothed comb, there are so many tiny little places where... I find that there are fewer full stops in the First Folio than there are in modern editions, and sometimes that's helpful, and sometimes it's like, I really need to put... That compositor ran out of periods at the end of the page. I'm definitely putting a full stop there.

EMILY. (laughs) I need to breathe, if nothing else.

ESTHER. I've got to breathe at some point, and these thoughts need to be separate.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. But I will just say no matter what we're doing, in verse drama, clarity has to be key. Clarity of thought, clarity of acting, just what is this person doing? And I think it's important to keep an extra sensitivity to the audience with verse drama, Shakespeare especially, because there's always going to be someone out there sitting there that's fearful they're not going to get it.

EMILY. Yes, yeah.

ESTHER. One of my goals as a performer is to walk out and have that person feel like they are in good hands from the very moment that they understand the words coming out of my mouth, that we are all speaking English, and this story is for them.

EMILY. Yes.

ESTHER. So anything, modern playwrights, that you can do that helps us stand in clarity, I salute you and thank you for all of that.

EMILY. Yeah, absolutely. And speaking of clarity and teaching, you are... Can you tell us a little bit about your upcoming class that you are providing, that you're teaching?

ESTHER. I can. I can tell you about that. I'm teaching a class beginning on January 4. This is a Zoom-based class that's going to go for seven weeks.

EMILY. January 4, 2021.

ESTHER. January 4, 2021.

EMILY. For those of you listening in 2022, you can contact Esther and ask her to revive the class for you.

ESTHER. Yes, or maybe by then we'll be teaching something else. But the class is called [Exploring Shakespeare: Macbeth](#), and it's a class that explores the mechanics of Shakespeare's verse and how we can get the most out of it as actors and as readers. It's really designed for whoever loves Shakespeare. We'll be looking at it from an actor's perspective because that is my perspective and I'm teaching the class, but Exploring Shakespeare: Macbeth. If you want to know more about it, there's a link on my personal website. If you go to estherwilliamson.com, right on the homepage there will be a link to sign up for the class if you're interested or want to find out more about it. We'll put a link in the transcript.

EMILY. Yeah, we will, and on hamlettohamilton.com, absolutely.

ESTHER. Excellent. And yeah, registrations are coming in, and there's a really fantastic group of people – actors mostly, and just wonderful people – forming.

EMILY. And you're doing this through Teachable, is that right?

ESTHER. I'm doing this through the Teachable platform, yeah.

EMILY. Great, and what are some of the things that people are going to get out of this script, out of this work?

ESTHER. We will take a look at *Macbeth* with a fine-toothed comb. We're going to read the whole play aloud over the course of seven weeks, and actors will gain more tools for clarity, just like we've been discussing today. I think anybody who does any sort of public speaking will be able to apply the tools that we discover, things like using your operative words, making sure that lists stand out in a particular way, using antithesis, using opposites and figures of balance. All the stuff that captures an audience's ear, that can be applied to any kind of public speaking that you do. And if you're an educator, hopefully you'll walk away with a few more tools and a new perspective on Shakespeare that might be useful to your students, that is not from a literary perspective, but from an actable, playable perspective.

EMILY. What I would suggest as well for anyone that maybe is primarily a director or a stage manager, dramaturg, producer, that wants to start getting these skills and boning up on their acting in a gentle and both scholarly and actable way, Esther is a fantastic person and a fantastic teacher, a fantastic Shakespearean, as you've just heard, and a gentle, kind soul, so you will not be lost. You, too, will gain clarity. (laughs)

ESTHER. Aw, shucks, thanks, Emily.

EMILY. It's true, it's true.

ESTHER. Yeah, I'm all about... I'm hoping that this is the beginning of a larger venture for actors and for people who are interested in Shakespeare, and breaking down barriers is really important to me, which means making sure that everything's affordable, which means that no one feels dumb, that we can come with a spirit of curiosity and fun and joy and not poverty, and not needing to impress anybody.

EMILY. Yes. Yeah. I love that, and I fully stand behind it. Absolutely. (laughs)

ESTHER. (laughs) Thank you. Excellent.

EMILY. Great. Thank you, Esther, for joining.

ESTHER. Well, thank you for having me.

EMILY. It's so nice to have you on this side of the mic? On this side of the headphones, maybe? (laughs)

ESTHER. It's a delight. I don't know what this is anymore. We all live in the ether now.

EMILY. We do.

ESTHER. But it's nice to be on your side of the ether for a second.

EMILY. It really is. Nice to be actually seeing your face and not just emailing each other (laughs)

ESTHER. And I get to ask you about things that aren't spelling.

EMILY. I know, I know. God bless you for... "What are the names of these people?"

ESTHER. (laughs)

EMILY. I'm sorry! I was supposed to send that to you. I thought I got back to you. I did not. (laughs)

ESTHER. I got it. It all comes right in the end.

EMILY. It's all good. It's all good. All right, friends, check out estherwilliamson.com if you want to take the class. If you want to help support, patreon.com/hamlettohamilton, and we thank you for your support. All right? All right. Well done us, we did it! We did the thing!

EW: (laughs) Yay! Whoo.

E: Thanks so much

[music]

EMILY. *Hamlet to Hamilton* is a special project of [Turn to Flesh Productions](http://TurntoFleshProductions.com) audio division. Turn to Flesh is a theatre company in New York City that develops new plays in heightened text with vibrant roles for women and those underrepresented in classical art. In other words, we create new Shakespeare plays for everybody Shakespeare didn't write for. *Hamlet to Hamilton* is hosted by [Emily C. A. Snyder](http://EmilyC.A.Snyder.com) with audio engineering and sound design by [Colin Kovarik](http://ColinKovarik.com)

and original music by Taylor Benson. Special thanks to our patron Madeleine Farley for helping to produce this episode. Special thanks to [Esther Williamson](#) for transcripts.

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Are you a verse playwright, an educator, an actor, an interdimensional space traveler with a love of blank verse? Well, we want to hear from you. You can join the Turn to Flesh community and the community of *Hamlet to Hamilton* by finding us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram @hamlettohamilton or @turntofresh.

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

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