

ShakesDown-E1

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0:08 Hi, I'm Bryn Boice, and this is The ShakesDown, a podcast where I explore meaning and hidden clues within Shakespeare's text in a fun and accessible way. The ShakesDown is for Shakespeare lovers and haters, students, teachers, aficionados, or really anyone who likes a little language puzzle from time to time. Let's get started.

1s So today's podcast is our very first. And we have Hermione from *The Winter's Tale*, Act Three, Scene Two. I'm especially excited about this one because I am directing *The Winter's Tale* this summer for Shakespeare on the Common in Boston for Commonwealth Shakespeare Company. I'm going to read this piece, and then I'm just going to sort of start exploring the text, and then we'll do it again with all of the explorations, hopefully, sort of embedded into it. You'll be able to hear, more clearly, the piece. Okay, here we go. A little context also: Leontes, her husband has mistakenly accused Hermione of adultery with his best friend. Leontes is the king of Sicilia. His best friend is the king of Bohemia, Polixenes. And, this is the sort of 'final' monologue after she's been accused of this. She's been in prison. She has had a baby in prison. Her youngest son has been sort of ripped from her as well. And she's having a really, really hard time right now. So, uh, she's been brought before this sort of one-man court land to hear her punishment. And, uh, this is the sort of the last moment before she, uh, gives...what she's going to do. I'm not going to, I won't spoil it because it's in the monologue. So that's sort of where we are contextually here. Hermione says, "Sir, spare your threats. The bug which you would fright me with, I seek. To me can life be no commodity. The crown and comfort of my life, your favor, I do give lost, for I do feel it gone, but know not how it went. My second joy, and first fruits of my body, from his presence I am barred like one infectious. My third comfort, starved most unluckily, is from my breast, the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth, haled out to murder; myself on every post, proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred, the child bed privilege denied, which 'longs to women of all fashion. Lastly, hurried here to this place in the open air, before I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege, tell me what blessings I have here alive that I should fear to die. Therefore proceed. But yet hear this, mistake me not. No life, I prize it not a straw, but for mine honor which I would free, if I shall be condemned upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else but what your jealousies awake: I tell you 'tis rigor, and not law. Your honors all, I do refer me to the oracle. Apollo, be my judge."

Okay, that's a pretty sort of standard reading. Those are all the words! It is a beautiful, beautifully written, I think, very clear one of his monologues, but there are so many fun hidden treasures in here, um, that I, I'm just going to start diving in. Let's do a little paraphrase. So again, this is act three, scene two, toward the end. Sir, spare your threats. The bug which you would fright me with, I seek. I'm just going to paraphrase that, "hey, Guy, you can stop with the threats of dying or death, which you're trying to scare me with, is what I'm after. Now it's what I want now." 1s Uh, to me, life can be no commodity. So to me, life holds like. No, it holds no worth now. 2s Your love. So the crown and comfort of my life. Your favor, your love. Which is like the height and happiness. The light of my life. The crown. Right. It's sort of glowing, the crown and comfort of my life. Your favor. 1s She says, I do give lost, for I do feel it gone. I've given up on that because I feel it. I feel that it's gone. 2s Um, but know not how it went. Although I have no idea where or why it went. My second joy. My second blessing. And first fruits of my body. Meaning, Mamillius. That's the son, the first born son. Hers. So her second blessing, her first born son. I am barred from seeing him. 1s Like she's got some kind of contagious disease. See that? Um, I am barred like one infectious. My third joy—blessing—which is totally jinxed by being my kid. Our kid? Um, that's the, um, "starved most unluckily" born under

terrible stars, right? Is from my breast. So, she has been ripped from my breast, she's still nursing; the innocent milk still in her innocent mouth. I think that's pretty self-explanatory. Haled out to murder. Haled. Meaning hauled, pulled, dragged out of our home. Out of our, you know, the nursery. I, you know, I'm about to be murdered. I myself, she says, I myself have been publicly branded as a horror-floozy on every street corner, on every post, 1s and then was callously, viciously denied the normal medical care that all women receive who've just given birth. 1s And finally, that's lastly, and finally I was rushed to this place with the chill in the open air, um, before I've got strength of limit, meaning before I'd even gotten my strength back. 1s And so interesting here. Now, she says, now, my Liege. Um, I just want to sort of point out, my liege, to your husband is a really interesting word choice here. Um, 2s thinking about this as 'my lord protector'. Ruler man. Um, not pay my husband. She says, my liege, tell me what blessings and joys I have now to live for that would make me afraid to die. So she's she's like, hey, you know. Hey, mister. You know: Master. 2s Um. Why would I be afraid to die? Because I have no joy left to live for. So she says, so carry on, but hear this. And and do not misunderstand me. My life. I don't even value it anymore. But my reputation, my honor that I want to clear, that THAT I would like to clear up. Um, so that's what she's saying there on before my honor, which I would free, if I shall be condemned upon surmises, she says. 2s If I'm going to be condemned like this on your suspicions alone, with no proof except whatever your crazy, jealous mind has created. 1s I let you know that that is injustice, not law. Um, so that's what she means by tis rigor and not law. I tell you, it's injustice. It's not law. And then she opens the scene. She's been saying this all to Leontes, to her husband, Liege husband, ruler. Um, she opens it up to the room, and she says, your honors all, meaning everybody in the room, gentlemen. 1s And then she says, I'd like to defer to the Oracle for that, for the, for my reputation, my honor-clearing, that she just spoke of. And then she says, May God, may Apollo, be my judge. Not you guys. 1s So that's just sort of the paraphrase of what she's saying.

Now, I just want to go through, and this is my favorite, my favorite part of Shakespeare text work is going through and looking at the iambic pentameter; for those who, um, don't know what that means, I'm just going to give a little primer. Iambic pentameter is the rhythm and meter in which Shakespeare wrote most often. Um, and the rhythm and meter is really important because when he goes off of that rhythm and meter, you are supposed to take note. So I'm going to do a little exercise with this, where I'm going to kind of force it into iambic pentameter. So we can really hear when he, when he sort of does a little jolt. And we're going to take note of that in our notes on this and see what it does to the performance. 1s Okay, so we're starting here with a short line. And, um, this is not a short line that has extra spaces in it. It's actually a shared line with Leontes. Right before she speaks, he says something that ends in a short line, and she picks up on it. Um, he says, "Look for no less than death," "Sir spare your threats." So a shared line shows the actor or showed the actor when they were working in Shakespeare's time, "Yes. This is a cue I want to really pick up." 1s So it's a, this is a short line only because it's shared. We may get into more of that later. So we're looking for ten syllables in iambic pentameter. Penta- meaning there are five feet, um, or ten syllables. So here's a good example of that. The bug which you would fright me with I seek. That's ten syllables. You'll be able to count those out in iambic pentameter, and I am. It's sort of like the sound of a heartbeat. Bum BUM, bum BUM. Okay? So with five of those in the pentameter: Bum BUM bum BUM bum BUM bum BUM bum BUM. It's an unstressed and a stressed syllable. And then five of those makes up an iambic pentameter line. So what I will do is I will, like, take my little heartbeat. And hopefully you can hear this on the podcast with my headphones. Um, I'm going to sort of just beat out this, um, this rhythm, and just take note of places where it is a little. 1s OFF in a good way. Okay. So let's start with: the bug which you would frighten me with I seek. The bug which you would fright me with, I seek. That's a perfect line of iambic pentameter. 1s To me can life be no commodity, That is also a perfect line of

iambic pentameter. Look at this next one. The crown and comfort of my life, your favor. You hear that 11th syllable? That kind of -er at the end. There's an extra syllable, an 11th syllable. And because it is in an unstressed place, favor right? An unstressed place, we call that a feminine ending. And it's not feminine because it's weak. It's feminine because there's the ability to sort of spill over with emotion, allowing herself to spill over with emotion. She's taken an extra little half a foot, an 11th syllable. So I think of those as places where, um—and feminine endings don't just happen with female characters—they happen all over the canon. Think about, um, “To be or not to be. That is the question,” right? Hamlet. And To be or not to be has like seven SEVEN lines of feminine endings right in a row. He is distraught and he is allowing the emotion to overflow; it is maybe not allowing, maybe that's kind of a silly word to use, but the, uh, the overflow, it's like he cannot help it, here in this moment. Think about what she's saying. The crown and comfort of my life, your favor—the emotion. It's like, oh, my God, I can't stay within the rigid rules of ten here. I have to, um. I have to fill up your favor. 2s So that gives a clue to the actor back then, and now, um, that this is a moment where, where emotion is seeping in. Now I want you to look at the next line. I do give lost, for I do feel it gone. She gets back on track. Regular perfect line of iambic pentameter. Sort of the next line. But know not how it went. My second joy. Again, a nice perfect line. And first fruits of my body from his presence. Oh so. Oh my gosh. She's trying to keep it together. But she's talking about her son. Um, her, the first fruits of her body from his presence. Like, I can't even be near him. So we're overflowing again into a feminine ending on the 11th syllable. 2s I am barred like one infectious. My third comfort. Oh, okay. So we we need to look in this line that feels like it's really full and long. 1s I am barred like one infectious. Okay. So we play around with that. I'm barred like one infectious. My third comfort. So if we elide the word—“elide” means just to join together. We do this all the time in words like I'm: I am to I'm, but we also say things like Wednesday we don't say Wed-nes-day. Um, we usually say family. We don't say fam-i-ly. Right? So we elide all the time. And so you need to sort of look for that in Shakespeare lines just to see if there is a word that can be shrunken down into fewer syllables. So in-fec-tious. We don't have to say in-fect-i-ous. Right. So we know that that one is sort of, uh, elided already. That's how we say it anyway. Um, my third comfort. None of those words really can be shortened, but “I am” can kind of be smooshed together. And let's say that: “I'm barred like one infectious. My third comfort.” So it is a feminine ending. So you can make it 11 syllables; on the end of comfort it's unstressed. So we're going to elide “I am”. And we're going to just note that ,that is my third comfort. But it is an odd line. So what I think when I say that it's an ‘odd’ line, there is, I feel like there's like bubbling emotion. She's trying. She's really trying to keep it together. 2s Um, and it's a, it's it's a little odd in rhythm and it's odd that he wrote “I am”. He wrote the I am out. So just just something to take note of, that there's something emotionally going on with her in that line. The next line, ”starred most unluckily, is from my breast.” So in this line you'll see it's a regular line. Beautiful ten syllables, but starred feels like it is probably more stressed than maybe ‘most’ starred most unluckily is from my breast. Starred. 1s We call that a trochee. So the opposite of an Iamb, which is unstressed stressed. This is stressed unstressed. And we can make that choice. Here we could say STARRED most unluckily is from my breast. We could absolutely still hit MOST and make that a perfect iambic pentameter line. But we can, as an actor, choose starred as our trochee at the top there, and and hit that word a little bit. I love trochees. They kind of feel to me like a little stab. You'll hear me saying that from time to time. Trochees, especially at the top of a line. They're very, very common. And they feel just like a little, a little stab. So you'll hear me saying that from time to time, the little stab of the trochee. Starred most unluckily is from my breast. Trochee beginning, but a regular iambic pentameter, regular pentameter line. Now, this next one, uh, really innocent, really interesting. Because the word innocent. Um, the “innocents” need to be elided a little bit into two syllables to make this, make this sentence work. So I'm going to say the whole thing out, and then I'm going to say it with the elided “innocents”. 2s The inn-o-cent milk in its most inn-o-cent mouth. Right. You feel

how that doesn't, that you can't, "Iamb" that out? There's something that has to give to make it a perfect line. So the inn'cent milk in its most inn'cent mouth. Literally a tongue twister, of like, sort of shoving those words together. But the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth. It is a regular line, but the "innocent"s are not as long as we say today. And they are smooshed just a little bit with elision. So I want you to think about a woman who, well what is she, what's actually saying in this moment? The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth. The fact that it also needs to be sort of crammed together just a little bit? It really does tell you what her emotional state is, and like how those words are going to be very painful coming out of her mouth, and the fact that they HAVE to be shortened. It's almost like she's trying to gobble them back into her mouth because it's just too awful to even say. 2s Okay, let's keep going. Haled out to murder, myself on every post. What? Okay, Haled out to murder, colon, myself on every post. So I want you to take a look at this. This is another really interesting thing, and something you'll hear me say from time to time as well. Haled out to murder and we have too many syllables here. And post is obviously a stressed word. It was myself on every post. We're saying myself on every post that, um, let's count those syllables. So, um, haled out to murder myself on every post. Okay, it's 11. Um, even as we shorten every to two syllables, not ev-er-y, um, nothing else can be elided. So we know that it is an 11 syllable sentence, or 11 syllable line. But there's that fun colon right there, and a great phrase that I'm sure other people use, but I, I love this particular author, Giles Block. He wrote an amazing book. I'm just grabbing it off of my shelf, "Speaking the Speech: An Actor's Guide to Shakespeare" by Giles Block. It's amazing. He calls these, these moments: Epic Caesuras. You probably hear the word Caesar in there; we think about it as a little cut. And it's like little, little cuts, a little stab every once in a while in a line, there will be...a period midline, or a colon midline. And it seems to be separating, separating some thoughts. And that is where Shakespeare would place. 1s A pause, a move, some kind of stage direction sometimes happens in them. He calls it an epic caesura. So I always just mark it, mark it in the script, as a special moment where you get it! I literally think of the character getting to turn toward their, like, in this case, turn toward her accuser or turn somewhere, or take a step forward. Hey! Just enough time. To say, "write myself on every post." Um, she's, like, almost starting a new thought with that epic caesura. Just a tiny break. And you identify those by: the line is too long, and that last syllable is *stressed* versus unstressed. Like some of these others we've been seeing. Okay. So we'll hear more of those in our time to come. Just keep that phrase *epic caesura* in your mind. 2s "Proclaimed a strumpet with immodest hatred." There's a feminine, right. Feminine ending. 11 syllables. The child bed privilege denied, which longs. Okay. No, that doesn't work. That child bed priv-i-lege denied, which longs. The child bed. Privilege denied. Which longs. Right. So priv-i-lege. We want to stretch, right? We usually say priv-lege, but we want to stretch that. "The child bed priv-i-lege denied, which 'longs' and interestingly he takes off "be-longs" and gives that to privilege. Um, it's a regular line. She's trying to keep it together. But privilege gets full due. I think that's very interesting. "To women of all fashion. Lastly, hurried"... feminine. 1s "Here to this place i' th' open air before" you see that? I' th' open air. That is a Shakespeare clue. Hey, this needs to be elided because we want "before" to end our sentence. So it has to end our line. So it has that stressed syllable at the end. "I have got strength of limit". Now, my liege, WHOO, tell me what blessings I have here alive. That I should fear to die. Therefore proceed. We have a few lines in a row where she is like, keeping it on track. It is not going...I'm not going to allow the feminine ending to come out, right? And that's happened *since* that epic caesura, right? All of those lines end with a nice strong stress. 2s "But yet hear this mistake me not no life"... perfect. 1s I prize it not a straw, but for my honor. Oh. Feminine ending again. That. Oh, that word. Honor. Feminine. 11 syllables. Emotion creeping in. Which I would free if I shall be condemned. Perfect line. "Upon surmises all proofs sleeping else" ...perfect line. But what your jealousies awake, I tell you. Oh 11! Feminine ending. I was like she says the word jealousies, and it's like, "Hey, I, 2s I'm spilling over." I tell you, "tis rigor and not law. Your honor's all," back to perfect.

I do refer me to the oracle. 2s Apollo, be my judge. Bum bum bum bum. Okay, so here's an example of a shared line. Apollo, be my judge. It's a short line. And right after this, um, if you have a full script out, great! If you have just the monologue out, you might not know this. This is, that's not a short line. Again, it's a *shared* line. And this interesting character, the First Lord, who doesn't have a name but is sort of always around in this play. He he picks up on that. "This your request." So..."Apollo, be my judge. This your request." So the first Lord fills the rest of that line. He comes in fast so that Leontes can't! It's a really interesting moment. It's like, hey, this request and the end of his sentence is this. Your request is altogether just! Therefore, bring forth. And in Apollo's name, his oracle is the first Lord's line. So literally this, this Lord, who is feeling that Leontes is really wrong about this, because Hermione is, could not be, more honorable, that he's like, I'm just gonna come right in here, finish that beautiful ten syllables for you and say, you know, this is a great idea that you have! Let's let's talk to Apollo, the Oracle! He will tell us the truth! So it's just a really interesting interruption. Leontes does not get a chance to finish that sentence—or decide it won't be shared. Right? Um, so just something to keep in mind with those short lines, thinking about the WHY Shakespeare did that. It's really—it tells you a lot about the First Lord. 2s Okay. So that, going through and just seeing where those feminine ending spillovers of emotion happen, it is something that I always love to do with my actors. Just find those moments because they really do inform the actor emotionally. To hang on to those like, "this is really important!" This is really important. Not that everything isn't important, but, it really points you, to those lines, those moments where she's having the hardest time staying together. Something else I want to point out is that there is a 'medial' thing that's happening. So medial meaning "in the middle" of lines—you're going to see a lot of end stops. End stops or commas. End stops meaning periods, or colons, but you're also seeing some commas. And they happen in the middle of the line, which means that it's, it's almost like a little more... jagged sounding. And, and of course, it would be! Hermione has literally, she's probably in like a, like her dressing gown. With like, no, you know, no corsets. No, no. 1s Underwear. Like she literally just gave birth! She's probably still bleeding from giving birth. It is that soon after the birth of her little baby girl. 1s And so her trying to keep it together, and even getting it together on some lines is actually really impressive! And it really sort of shows you what a strong woman she is. But these medial stops, I'm just going to read them through. And um, just as your as you're looking at the script, I want you to take a look; we're going to start on the line, "I do give lost" which is the fifth line down. I do give lost semicolon for I do feel it gone. But know not how it went. Period. My second joy and first fruits of my body. Comma. From his presence I am barred like one infectious period. So you'll see in the middle, if you literally just look down the monologue, you'll see, oh my gosh, there's a period! There's a comma in the middle, there's a period, there's a comma in the middle. But then she gets, she'll have a long strung out one," the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth." Right? That one, that one, she's able to get out without being jagged. All good if this doesn't make sense to you, this medial stop thing, the jaggedness of this. Just take a look at something like, um, Helena in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Helena works to the end. Stop. Works to the end. Stop. "How happy some or other some can be." Period. The periods always happen at the end of the line, and it feels very sort of, natural and musical. This (The Winter's Tale) is written much further along in Shakespeare's career, where he started to understand true rhythm of speaking, and he tried to use this incredible... the incredible structure of iambic pentameter, but use it to his advantage to mirror the sound of true human speech, and especially in Winter's Tale. You're really seeing him at the height, height of his craft. And so looking at these mid stops and thinking about how that affects a person's breath in the middle of performance of this! So I want to, I'm going to just sort of demonstrate what that breath sounds like. Um, so that you can feel how, feel the jaggedness of this. 1s Just going to do some breathwork. 1s Sir. Spare your threats. The bug which you would fright me with. I seek. To me. Can life be no commodity. The crown and comfort of my life. Your favour. I do give lost. For I do feel it gone. But know not how it went. My second joy. And first fruits of my body.

From his presence I am barred like one infectious. My third comfort starred most unluckily, is from my breast. The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth. Haled out to murder, myself on every post, proclaimed a strumpet with immodest hatred, the childbed privilege denied, which 'longs to women of all fashion. Lastly hurried here to this place in the open air, before I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege, tell me what blessings I have here alive. Just notice that. Tell me what blessings I have here alive. 2s My meaning: that is the line that smooths out. Finally, there are there literally, except for the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth. To hear every one of those lines has multiple, multiple stops. Midline. It's like she is. She's literally gathering thoughts, gathering breath, unwell. But the smoothness of this line, "tell me what blessings I have here alive"-- There's a defiance to that. I'm going to, I'm going to work through this, so YOU can tell ME. Notice it also starts with a trochee. "Tell me what blessings I have here alive that I should fear to die." And she makes it just to the middle of that line before she has to breathe and say, 1s "Therefore proceed." But yet hear this, right, we have that comma or that colon right there. But yet hear this, mistake me not. No life, okay? It keeps going. I prize it not a straw, comma, but for my honor, which I would free comma. If I shall be condemned upon surmises. Comma. All proof sleeping else. But what your jealousies awake. Comma, I tell you, 'tis rigor and not law. Period. So just taking note of how this is not smooth, but she is doing her very best to be smooth in this language. And she's, she's being as strong as she possibly can. And you can SEE it in the way that these end stops in the middle of the line are happening. Really great clue to an actress. Okay. So 1s what, we've just taken this apart. We've paraphrased it, we've uh, we've done the iambic pentameter. And then we also just took note of these really interesting medial moments. So I'm going to read it again, knowing what I know about the feminine endings, and knowing what I know about these, these medial stops and, and knowing what the thing means! Okay. Um. 1s Sir. Spare your threats. The bug which you would fright me with, I seek. 1s To me, can life be no commodity. The crown and comfort of my life, your favor, I do give lost. For I do feel it gone. But know not how it went. My second joy, (I want to point out one moment notice she's doing a list that builds. This is also something really important in all Shakespeare monologues and soliloquies. They all build to the final thoughts. But this one is beautiful because it actually sort of lists them out.) So...the crown and comfort, the number one thing in my life, your favor. God right? Your favor, I do give lost for I do feel it gone. But know not how it went. My second joy, and first fruits of my body, from his presence I am barred like one infectious. My third comfort, starred most unluckily, is from my breast, the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth, haled out to murder. Myself. (She takes a maybe a step forward on that colon) Myself on every post proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred, the childbed privilege denied, which 'longs to women of all fashion. Lastly, hurried here to this place in the open air, before I've got strength of limit. 1s Oh, that period feels so, um, 1s that we've had colon, colon, comma, comma, comma for so long. I like, I should not be outside here. Right. 1s She's got a moment right in the middle of the line to take her little breath if she's got to. Right. Lastly, hurried here to this place in the open air before I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege, tell me what blessings I have here alive that I should fear to die. 1s Therefore proceed. But yet hear this: breath...breathe here. That 1s "Mistake me not," No life, I prize it not a straw, but for mine honor, which I would free. If I shall be condemned upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else, but what your jealousies awake, I tell you, 'tis rigor and not law. (And notice how that too is, there are no periods in that, right?) Therefore proceed. Period. And then from, "But yet hear this" to "tis rigor and not law" is all one, is all one sentence. Let's hear that one more time. "But yet hear this" right. We've got that colon there. "Mistake me not; no life, I prize it not a straw, but for mine honor which I would free, if I shall be condemned upon surmises, all proof sleeping else but what your jealousies awake, I tell you, tis rigor and not law." Step back. "Your honors all, I do refer me to the Oracle. Apollo, be my judge". 2s Okay! So just in terms of like, working those out, working those moments out, it's really, really exciting to just be like, okay, this is where she's gotten! This is where she's getting emotional.

Oh my gosh. We have a list! This is what she's saying, breaking the piece apart like that is so fun! And you can do it with every single piece of Shakespeare. It's very exciting. Thank you so much for for joining me on this journey today. That's it for this episode of The ShakesDown. Hope you learned a little bit about Hermione and The Winter's Tale. I hope you read the whole play. It's gorgeous! That's it for this episode of The ShakesDown. As you can see, there is so much to shake down in even one small passage in a Shakespeare play. This is Bryn Boice. Thanks for joining me, and stay tuned for our next episode, where I will be breaking down a bit of...A Midsummer Night's Dream. Thank you.