

ShakesDown-E2

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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. So let's get started!

This month's episode explores Helena's end of Act One, Scene One soliloquy, which you can find at line 226 through 251, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As I mentioned on the last episode, this podcast is most satisfying when you have the text in front of you, and it's even better if you have a pencil to mark that bit of text up. I should also mention that you'll probably hear me shuffling papers and grabbing books off of my bookshelf, just because I'm doing the work live as we record. So forgive the shuffles, I pray you.... so *Midsummer* is presumed to have been written around 1595, 1596, around the same time as *Romeo and Juliet*, and he's really coming into his own, coming into the height of his writing powers, but especially his comedy writing powers. I particularly love to teach this monologue as an introduction to iambic pentameter, because it's so steady and regular, and then it has a few really great character-helping or, I guess, actor-helping really!, surprises in it. It really shows you how verse can help *create* a character. So today we're going to work on this piece—Helena—and then talk about what it tells us about who Helena is. Okay. So let's give it a read:

2s

How happy some or other some can be. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she. But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so. He will not know what all but he do know. And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes, so I, admiring of his qualities. Things base and vile, holding no quantity, Love can transpose to form and dignity. Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind. Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste. Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste. And therefore is Love said to be a child, because in choice he is so oft beguiled. As waggish boys in game themselves forswear, so the boy Love is perjured everywhere. For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne, he hailed down oaths that he was only mine. And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt, so he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt. I will go tell him a fair Hermia's flight, then to the wood will he tomorrow night pursue her. And for this intelligence, if I have thanks, it is a dear expense: but herein mean I to enrich my pain, to have his sight thither and back again. 1s

Okay, so that's a fairly basic reading of that! And let's just paraphrase through, so that we know what we're talking about first, before we take a look at that meter. 1s So, "How happy some o'er other some can be." How happy some people are compared to others. Throughout Athens, where we live (that's the setting of the play) people think I'm as beautiful as Hermia. But what does that even matter? Demetrius doesn't think so—he does not agree. 1s Uh, that next line, I think, is very fun—"he will not know what all but he do know." First of all, just note the very staccato one-syllable nature of that particular line. But the meaning is—kind of confusing. "He will not know what all but he do know" he refuses to, he *won't* know what everyone (that's the *all*)—he won't know what everyone but he seems to know. It's as if the only opinion that he will listen to is his own stupid one! And as he mistakes—so if we look at the word "errs," as he errs, you'll notice that that's sort of, where *errors*

comes from, “errors” meaning to mistake. But it has a lot of other really fun, sort of sub-meanings. And so these sub-meanings, in Shakespeare, I love to look up—if you have a Shakespeare's *Lexicon*, the *Lexicon* is—I'm just going to pick up my book here, and read off the front, is by Alexander Schmidt, or he helped compile it, the “Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation dictionary; every word defined and located; more than 50,000 quotations identified.” And it's two volumes of books. It's really, it's...Shakespeare Nerds love this thing because Schmidt and his team have gone through every single word of Shakespeare and put it in this dictionary. And so if you're having a question about what “errs” means in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Act One, Scene One, line 230, or wherever it is, you can actually look up that instance of “errs” and find out which one, which definition he actually meant, or rather, this has got what scholars have deemed that means. So it's a fun, fun book for us Shakespeare Nerds! So “errs” in this case means not only mistakes like we think it means, and like to err is human, to forgive divine. It means to deviate from your course or wander or stray. So think about the choice of that word as, “as he strays.” 1s Doting on Hermia's eyes. So there. That implies a relationship. He used, you know, he used to like ME. But as he strays and now loves, he dotes on Hermia's eyes. And I want you to think about the word “doting.” Doting has sort of come to mean now, like, you know, really liking, just really liking someone. But it actually has kind of a fun negative connotation. It means “to be extremely and uncritically fond of.” So the use of that fun, fun word “doting” instead of liking or fawning, there is a little bit of a negative connotation in there that is funny. Just reminding everybody that this is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she's very sad. But! 1s It's a comedy! So. Some of these word choices can be very helpful in creating your character. Doting. So as he strays, extremely uncritically fond of Hermia's eyes, likewise I admire his...and then this funny word. Instead of saying I like his eyes, or I like his legs or his butt or his, you know, his mind, whatever! She uses the word “qualities.” And again, qualities. Here is his...it means, like, his virtues. So we can actually make a joke of that as well. She can't, she can't say all the things she likes about him. She likes so many things about him that she's just going to encompass this in this nice, virtuous word: “qualities.” But it gives the actor something to really play with because “qualities” like, “I like—I really like that guy's qualities!” is just kind of a funny thing to say. 1s

Moving down into this section, “Love can transform.” So, love can transform crude, gross, horrible things that have no worth, into beautiful and dignified things. Think about that. That sentence. Love can make gross things awesome, right? I think that's so sweet. Love. It's because love doesn't look with the eyes, but with the mind. Like we are imagining, and it makes things even better than they are. I love that guy. And he. He loves Hermia because he's imagining she's perfect and something that she's not. 2s And then she has this realization: That's why they paint winged Cupid blind. So in most art from the era and before, if there is a relief sculpture or a painting of Cupid, he almost always has a blindfold over his eyes. That's why we say love is blind, because Cupid is always painted as this little baby with a blindfold on, with an arrow that he is shooting willy-nilly at people. And that's why so many odd people fall in love with each other and we say, well, how did that work out? Right? And so she has this discovery. That's why they paint winged Cupid—Winged Cupid is painted blind, right? And then she extends this and says, and Love, Love doesn't have good judgment. Doesn't have good taste. Imagine: wings and blindness must make for, you know, major mistakes like undue speed, one scholar says, “makes for undue speed in falling in love.” And then she further, Helena further moves through this metaphor, Thus love, oh yeah! Love is thought of as a childish baby, because he always makes the wrong choice. He's just like, blindly shooting his arrow. He makes the wrong choice with his arrow that he's no good at shooting, because he's blindfolded. Just like the mischievous boys who, who lie and go back on their word as they're playing, like, their little cops and robbers games, you know, they're out, and when they're playing, they lie and they go

back on their word. So too does the Boy Love. Does Cupid just lie himself? Silly little boy! Because—and she starts to relate this back to herself again—before Demetrius saw Hermia’s eyes, he swore that he belonged to me, that he was my boyfriend. 1s And then when he felt attracted to Hermia, he dissolved these—these love oaths—actually melted down like hail does in heat. 1s Okay. So we understand that that little metaphor, it's like, he melted. Like all the love that he had for me, melted when he saw her, when he felt a little heat from Hermia. 2s

And then we get an idea here. You know what? I will go and tell him that Hermia is running away, in the play. Just for, for context, in case you haven't read the play, right before this monologue, Hermia and Lysander have been told by Egeus, Hermia’s father, that, you know, over his dead body are you going to marry Lysander. You are going to marry Demetrius. And I am your dad, and I own you. And this is the way it's going to be. And so Lysander and Hermia vow to steal away together into the forest, and then go find Lysander’s dowager aunt and live with her in another land so that they can be together. 1s Um, so she says, you know what I— Helena—is like, oh my gosh, I'm going to tell him that Hermia is running away, and then he'll go to the forest tomorrow night to pursue her. And then he’s first going to thank me for this bit of info and all of my struggles will be worth it because, okay, yes, so she says this funny little line, “if I have thanks, it is a dear expense, but here in mean I to enrich my pain.” Think about that. So he's going to thank me for this information. The struggle will be okay because I plan to make my pain worse for NOW, but then he's eventually going to turn his sight back from her to me again, because of this plan that I have to go tell him. And then she's going to follow him in the woods. And then mayhem and hilarity ensue. That's what happens, for a little more context about what happens afterwards. So she is working this thing out.

I want to talk briefly about the difference between a soliloquy and a monologue right now. So a soliloquy is when the character is on stage alone, talking to the audience. Now, this is a, I suppose, a preference, but I, I don't want to call it a rule—but to me it's a rule when I'm directing—that when a character is on stage, they're always talking to the audience. They're not talking to the inside of their own mind. They're not alone. They're using the audience as a, like a co-conspirator, a confidant. So as she's...she may be alone, but she is definitely talking to someone. And that someone is an audience who is supportive. Um, so a monologue, conversely, is when you're saying (and they can be lines that are this long) but you're saying it to someone who is on stage. So in this soliloquy, she's confiding in the audience that she's working out, confiding in them about this relationship problem, and how happy Hermia and Lysander are. And why can't I be happy like that? I used to feel like I was going to be happy like that, and I'm not now. So she's working that out, confiding in the audience. And then. As she works out the ‘why’ of this, the Cupid interfering, she gets the idea to go hatch this plan, to go out into the forest with Demetrius and see if she can get him back. So. The confidant. The Confidant Audience comes in at the end, so we have the confidant and the conspiracy/conspirator feeling; it's kind of fun.

Okay, so now I want to look at the iambic pentameter because this, like I said, this is a really great piece for beginners to work on because it's very *regular*. And every once in a while there'll be something fun that is a little odd and gives you an idea of the character and their frame of mind. Okay, 1s how happy some o'er other some can be. Okay, so that's how happy some o'er other some can be. We can tap that out again. I always like to tap the iambic pentameter on my heart, because it is like the heartbeat and it kind of lets me feel that. So hopefully you can hear that through my little earphones in my mic. How HAPpy SOME o'er OTHer SOME can BE. Nice. Perfect regular line. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she. Another perfect line. In this next line I want to just, um, put a little pin in the name Demetrius. Most, it's really kind of interesting, he, Shakespeare, elides

many names in these works. And so you'll see, "Demetrius" in this sentence is going to be elided. Elide, as you might remember from last episode, is to merge or join sounds. Demetrius gets sort of shoved down from four syllables to three, to fit into the sentence. And this happens all the time. Romeo is almost always pronounced Ro-myo, and it's almost always pronounced Jul-yet. Every once in a while, the person will say all three syllables and it becomes like this really... it is used beautifully, like Ro-myo, Ro-myo, wherefore art thou Ro-myo? But then later in the same monologue, Juliet will say Ro-me-o with all three syllables and that, the elongation of the name, becomes like, incredibly beautiful. So just take, just take note of that. We're going to shorten Demetrius. We're also going to shorten Herm-i-a into Herm-ya many times in this monologue. So I just want to say that a lot of names are elided. We do this! We do this now, like names like, um, Alicia, we don't always say Al-i-ci-a unless that's somebody's preference. We, I always say this. We don't always say fam-i-ly. We say fam-ly. It's eliding, it's something that we do all the time. So you'll see that in this monologue! So let's beat out this third line. But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so. Right. So we're just sort of shoving that, merging that together. He will not know what all but he do know. Another perfect line. And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes. Ooh, you hear that? Dot-ING. We don't say that. So we know right there. Because the word doting is not pronounced that way. We know that that is a trochee. And we remember from last episode a *trochee* is a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable, whereas an *iamb* is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes, gets right back on track. But that one word gets a little stab. And think about that. We just paraphrased this, and we learned that doting is very specifically chosen. Doting has a negative quality to it. It also, if you feel, like, the way that it feels in your mouth, "doting," it has its own little stab to it, right? So it's purposefully chosen there, and it gives you insight into what Helena is going through. She is feeling a little stabby, so she gets that little stabby word right in the middle of that sentence. Think about what she's saying, "and AS he ERRS, DOTing on HERmia's EYES. Right. Just a little. A little jab there. 1s "So I admiring of his qualities," back on track. Perfect line. "Things base and vile holding no quantity." Okay, so here's a place where you can make that choice. Things base and vile, right? We could make the beginning of that sentence a trochee. THINGS base and VILE. Or we can leave it regular iambic at the top there, "Things BASE and VILE." Right. We have a bit of a choice there. I think if I were doing this monologue, I would choose BASE, because base feels like it has a little more substance to it. It has more personality to it. So things base and vile. Oh, and then here is another trochee right in the middle of the line HOLDing because we don't say holdING, right? Things base and vile holdING no quantity. Again we hear that it's not right. HOLDing no quantity, okay. So we go back to that line. Things base and vile holding no quantity, right in the middle. That's like she's really feeling that again because it gives her a little stab right in the middle of that line. Next line: Love can transpose to form and dignity. Again, we have a choice there. The beginning of that line. Should we say love CAN transpose to form and dignity. I think if I were doing it, I would make that a trochee at the beginning of the sentence. LOVE can transpose to form and dignity. Love. We're about to go into like an eight-line segment of talking about Cupid and how dumb he is with his blindfold. Right? He's, he's bad at his job. So things base, things yucky and vile that have no, they have no worth anymore. Love, dumb Cupid, can transpose to form and dignity. So I think I would make a trochee of that one. But see, the next line begins with 'love' as well. So just to do it two different ways, I want to play with this for a second. Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind. That's a perfect line. And we're going to hit looks instead of love. Or let's try it. This one again. LOVE looks not with the eyes, but with the mind. We just did that in the sentence before. We just did that in the sentence before. 2s LOVE can transpose to form and dignity. LOVE looks not with the eyes, but with the mind. Because we already hit it in the prior sentence, I don't think I'm going to hit it so hard in this second sentence. LOVE can transpose to form and dignity. Love LOOKS not with the eyes,

but with the mind. The thing that we want is to hear, the operative word in this one, is *looks*. Now okay? **1s** And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind. Yeah, that's another perfect line. You'll see in the middle of that one, “wing'd” has wing apostrophe D. When you see something like that in Shakespeare, that means he does not want you to give it two, doesn't want you to make it two syllables. He doesn't want you to say, and therefore is wing-ed Cupid painted blind. You'll hear that messes it up. He's giving you a clue. This one will not be elongated. We will not add a syllable here. It's not willy-nilly. It's a, it was a clue to his actor. Don't don't mess with this one! **1s** Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste. Perfect. Aligned; back on track. Wings and no eyes, figure unheedy haste. There's one where you can see the trochee at the top. WINGS and no EYES, FIGURE unheedy haste. Right. So if you think about how almost funny that is, wings and no eyes, he's literally placing the emphasis on the words that will get the joke to come out. It's very fun. **2s** And therefore is love said to be a child. That one is another perfect line of iambic; because in choice he is so oft beguiled. Yeah, perfect. As waggish boys in game themselves forswear. Perfect. So the boy love is perjured everywhere. So I probably would hit the SO instead of the THE at the beginning of that sentence. SO the boy love is perjured everywhere. So if we if we hit that SO, which also isn't a, like, a super important noun/verb/word, that we have to make a big choice on it. The word SO is sort of leading me. She's about to make a conclusion. So I think I would definitely hit the “so” harder than the “the.” But this is a really, also a really great example of a sentence that, when you're looking for operative words, and the words that are stressed the most, I wouldn't hit the SO harder than I would hit something like PERjured. Right? So, “so” in its foot (which is so and the) **1s** I would make that a trochee, but that doesn't mean I'm going to, as a performer, go do something like this. Let me give you an example, SO the boy love is perjured everywhere. It's going to be. I'm going to give it like a three on a scale of 1 to 10, whereas I would give perjured maybe an eight on a scale of 1 to 10. So the boy love is PERjured everywhere. So it is hit within its foot, as a more stressed word, but it is not the most stressed word in the sentence just because it's a trochee. Hope that makes sense. We'll get, we'll find more of those as we move through this podcast. For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne. See how we made both of those elided? Demetrius and Hermia. Let's look at that. If I didn't do that, “For ere Dem-e-tri-us looked on Herm-i-a's eyne: can you feel how that, that can't be? That like, ruins the rhythm. So we're going to squish them both: “For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne.” He hailed down oaths that he was only mine. Right. That's another perfect line. Perfect, perfect, perfect. And when this hail, some heat from Hermia felt, again perfect, as long as we elide Hermia. So he dissolved, and showers of oaths and melt. Oh, here's a word. Showers. So in the regular American dialect, we tend to really like elongate words like show-ers. Pow-ers flow-er. Hour. This is a word that, in Shakespeare's time generally is going to take one syllable, so we don't want to overdo it. Listen to how this sounds. So he dissolved and show-ers of oaths DID melt. So the only word we can truly elide in that— it's not even really eliding—because it's the way that it was said back then and the way it's said with an English accent. **1s** It's, it's just a shorter word. It doesn't, we don't do a triphthong. That's what that sound combination is called. So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt. We're just going to squish that and elide it. Especially for the American accent. We tend to make that word really long. I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight. Perfect line again. Then to the wood will he tomorrow night. Perfect. Pursue her, and for this intelligence. Perfect. But we're going to come back to that line in a second. If I have thanks, it is a dear expense. Perfect. But here in Mean-i to enrich my pain. Yeah. That's perfect to have his sight thiTHER and back again. Okay. ThiTHER, I would say, THITH-er, to have his sight thither and back again. So we have a trochee in the middle of that line, thither. “I'm going to have it go to her, and then boomerang back to me.” Right? Okay. So I want to go back to this line that I said, let's, you know, let's put a pin in this: “then to the wood will he tomorrow night/ pursue her” You'll notice, we talked last last episode in the Hermione monologue that she had all of these wrapping lines. We call that *enjambment*. When a line

sort of wraps around from one line to another one and it needs to still make sense. And it doesn't make sense unless you keep moving and wrapping around. And she had all those medial stops, um, the periods, colons, uh, question marks in the middle of her line. Now, I want you to take a look at THIS in comparison to that Hermione monologue, "Sir, spare your threats," if you did not listen to last time--totally fine. You'll notice that there are very, very, very few midline stops. Maybe a couple of commas, but there is an end-stop feeling to each one of these lines. How happy some or other some can be?--end-stop. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she"--end-stop. But what of that? Here's one. Demetrius thinks not so--end-stop. He will not know what all but he do know--end-stop. And as he errs, doting on Hermione's eyes. Right. Okay, so we have a little comma there. Totally fine. But we're not stopping. So I admiring of his qualities. Oh my gosh. Right. Things based and vile, holding no quantity. Love can transpose to form and dignity. I just want you to look down. Like. Look at the monologue and look down at the end of each line. We have be, she, so, no, eyes, qualities, quantity, dignity, mind, blind. Every single one. Like keep going down; blind, taste, haste. Child beguiled. Forswear, where, mine, felt, melt. Flight, night. Oh! 1s Night does not have an end-stop! 1s It has a wraparound line. It's called *enjambment*: "jamb" from the French, meaning leg. It's like the leg is leaping over to the next line: then to the wood will he tomorrow night/pursue her. It's as if her mind is running over with this amazing idea, and he's used the punctuation at the end of this line, or the lack thereof, to give us the feeling of running over, the running over the end of the pentameter, the meter, with this amazing idea that's like falling out of her brain. 2s So think about that. Then to the wood will he tomorrow night pursue her! 1s And then the breath. There at that lovely medial stop. And for this intelligence, if I have thanks, there's another one! And for this intelligence, if I have thanks, it is a dear expense. Okay. So I know if I give him this information, it will be very painful. But he's going to, he's going to thank me. 2s

Okay. So when we look, it's a great example of like, end-stop end-stop end-stop. She's thinking very, very clearly in a very measured way. And then, oh my God, I get this idea and my cup runneth over. So it's really fun. So you notice just in looking at the iambic pentameter and paraphrasing and finding some of those enjambments you... what do we learn about Helena? We learn that she really does try to stay on meter. She tries to keep it together. She's also, I don't know if you noticed, but she's rhyming! She rhymes every single couplet very strictly and perfectly. Now, rhyme in Shakespeare's, sort of, his methodology, is magic and unrequited love and feeling. So if you ever hear things rhyming when they didn't necessarily rhyme before, there's magic, there's love, there are spells being cast and oh my gosh, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If you know this play, it's like spells! Like once they get to the forest. Oh my gosh, different rhyme schemes are happening all the time. And. 1s You really feel that unrequited love feeling when a rhyme comes about. Another thing that rhyme could do--and you may notice this in in 1s pieces to come in this podcast--sometimes there will just be a rhyming couplet at the end of a scene, and that signaled to the audience, signaled to probably also the backstage actors that are waiting to come on!-- it's a bit of magic, like a scene wipe. It reminds me of the *Law & Order* "Dun dun!" Like we're going to switch scenes! That is also magic, if you think about it. We are going to move from one place to another to talk to different characters! Magic. Right? So her whole monologue is, is rhymed and magic, because this unrequited-- the spell that she is under--that is magic. The spell that she is under is literally compelling her to rhyme. And you'll see this, 1s many times throughout Shakespeare. There's some really great examples in *12th Night* where people are speaking with absolutely no rhyme, and totally in prose, and then suddenly the love walks out the door, and they're suddenly speaking, compelled to speak, in rhyme. So it's just something to take note of. And, uh, there is meaning to it. Whereas blank verse instead of rhyme, blank verse is the sound of logic and reality. Truth, reason. Rhyme is like, all that goes out the window. All of that goes out the window. Something... something's in the

air. Something's in the air. Magic, magic, magic. So it's quite fun. So I think that a lot of this, all this verse work, actually tells you who Helena is. She chooses words like *doting*. She's, she's mad. She's mad. But it's kind of funny. Um, she's a young girl. She's hatching this really ill-advised plan to trick the guy that she likes into hopefully liking her back. Because of the magic in the air and the unrequited feelings that she has for him.

Okay, so now I'm going to do the whole monologue with all of those treasures unpacked so you can hear how they help to create Helena's character. Doing a little example for you. And there's no perfect way to do these things—especially like, I'm just reaching out here to actors—this is not like the WAY to do this. This is my excavation with my creative filter, the filter that is me. That's why a million people can play Helena. A lot of different kinds of people can play Helena, but these are the treasures that I unlocked that are going to help me perform Helena.

How happy some or other some can be. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she. But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so. He will not know what all but he do know. And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes, so I, admiring of his qualities. Things base and vile, holding no quantity, Love can transpose to form and dignity. Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind. And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind. Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste. Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste. And therefore is love said to be a child, because in choice he is so oft beguiled. As waggish boys in game themselves forswear, so the boy love is perjured everywhere. For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne, He hailed down oaths that he was only mine. And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt, so he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt. *1s* I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight, then to the wood will he tomorrow night pursue her. And for this intelligence, if I have thanks, it is a dear expense. But herein mean I to enrich my pain, to have his sight thither and back again. *2s*

Okay. So we feel how just the unpacking of those treasures, that we sort of excavated from the text, starts to make you understand her. So that's what actors try to do when they work on a text, is unpack and figure out how...how these things actually can help them to create a performance, create their character. *1s*

I hope that you have enjoyed this edition, and that you're learning more about meter and rhythm and all of the fun treasures that are in Shakespeare's plays. I love doing this! Thank you so much for listening. That is it for this episode of The ShakesDown. As you can see, there is so much to shake down in every one small, tiny passage in a Shakespeare play. This is Bryn Boice, thanks for joining us, and stay tuned for our next episode where I'll be breaking down a bit of... *1s Julius Caesar*.