

## **EGSM – Shakespeare**

### **Content Warnings**

- Discussions of: murder & suicide, ghosts & the afterlife
- Mentions of: human remains, war, depression, fire

### **MADDY**

I think it was also weirdly the inspiration for the Ents in Lord of the Rings, because Tolkien was so disappointed by the Woods of Dunsinane moving

**[Group Laughter]**

### **MADDY**

Because there was just people holding twigs! He was like... that's not a wood moving... I'll show you a wood moving!

**[Group Laughter]**

**[Show Theme - Intro]**

### **HELEN**

Rusty Quill presents Enthusigasm. Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusigasm. The Show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host, Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers and today we're talking about Shakespeare. And I am extremely glad to be joined by Grace, Imogen, Jonny, and Maddy. As always, we shall introduce ourselves,

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alphabetically, which means, Grace you are first up. Can you give us your pronouns and tell us what you do?

**GRACE**

Hello. My name is Grace. My pronouns are she/her and I am a script writer, for various different things, and currently for the very exciting Roman Cry Havoc dramedy.

**HELEN**

Excellent. So you're properly part of the Rusty Quill family...

**GRACE**

Hurray!

**HELEN**

Hurray! Next up, Imogen. What are your pronouns, and what do you do?

**IMOGEN**

Hi, I'm Imogen. My pronouns are she/her. I currently voice Imogen, the Evil Ship's computer on the Stella Spinoff Compulsory Film Appreciation and I am Mini on the Town Whispers.

**HELEN**

I feel like several fans will try and argue with you, about whether Imogen is evil or not.

**IMOGEN**

Oh no, she is. I know what goes on in her head!

**[Laughter]**

**IMOGEN**

I know what she really thinks!

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

But she helped our lovely clone David 7, and that's what really matters.

**IMOGEN**

Did she?!

**HELEN**

Yeah. I think so...

**IMOGEN**

Or did she help herself. I can't remember!

**HELEN**

The end result is that David is probably a bit happier, which is all we really wanted.

**IMOGEN**

The results justify the means, which is something Imogen says all the time.

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

Next up, Jonny. What are your pronouns and what do you do?

**JONNY**

Well, as The Bard once said, hi I'm Jonny Sims.

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

He/him pronouns. Writer and narrator of Magnus Archives and I'm just still kind of bumming around Rusty Towers.

**HELEN**

Maddy, what are your pronouns, and what do you do?

**MADDY**

I'm Maddy, my pronouns are she/her. I am the former lead editor on Stellar Firma, and the current director of the actual play Podcast, Chapter and Multiverse.

**HELEN**

Yes. It's going to be so much fun. We're going to do some of our first recordings soon...

**MADDY**

Yeah!

**HELEN**

Yee!!! I'm very excited. Also, it's very funny to me. I just saw my soundwaves... so when I did e... and it's just the smallest, tiniest little noise, but I am indeed very excited.

**MADDY**

Yeah...

**HELEN**

Alright then... The Bard - Old Shakes... Ol' Big Willy! Let's start off with the easiest possible question, which is... what's your favourite play - go?

**GRACE**

I don't think that's the easiest question!

**HELEN**

I know... I'm being cruel don't worry!

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

I know it's not easy!

**JONNY**

It's Macbeth. Just 'cuz... I know it's...

**HELEN**

It's obviously Macbeth.

**JONNY**

I mean I know it's a really basic answer, but it's Macbeth. It's just an absolute banger!

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

It's got everything. It's got witches, it's got murders, it's got blood - it's got some really cracking duals. It's got... whoever they've got, the star power, like leading actor, they get to make a severed of his head, to like hold up at the end, and that's always a treat. It's just the best one, in my humble opinion.

**IMOGEN**

Yep. Seconded. I would say Macbeth is a corker. It's full of guilt and murder and ambition and witches. So yeah - what else could you ask for?

**HELEN**

And Ghosts...

**IMOGEN**

Yes.

**MADDY**

I think it was also weirdly the inspiration for the Ents in Lord of the Rings. 'Cuz Tolkien was so disappointed by the Woods of Dunsinane moving...

**[Laughter]**

**MADDY**

Because there was just people holding twigs... he was like - that's not a wood moving! I'll show you a wood moving!

**[Group Laughter]**

**HELEN**

I love that idea!

**GRACE**

Macbeth definitely has the best - I reckon the best soliloquy in any Shakespeare, which is the tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow bit...

**EVERYONE**

Mmm...

**GRACE**

I've actually got a picture of that, on my computer wallpaper. It's just a picture of Patrick Stewart, looking at his own hand. And that - just that sort of 10-line soliloquy. And sometimes, when I think my writing's getting a bit rubbish, I just read that, to remind me - what really good looks like. Just to sort of re-set, it's sort of like reformatting your brain, on computer.

**IMOGEN**

I too have that on a poster...

**GRACE**

Oh!

**IMOGEN**

Weirdly, it's like a poster of the underground at Canary Wharf.

**[Laughter]**

**IMOGEN**

And it's like the escalators, as you go up, which when I was working at Canary Wharf, I used to go every day in this like mad commuter rush, and think of those words about you know, life creeping on this petty... I was very happy - I was very cheerful!

**[Group Laughter]**

**JONNY**

Although it's always... that soliloquy is always sort of weird to me, because they start it halfway through a sentence.

**HELEN**

I mean, Shakespeare does that a lot.

**JONNY**

Well yeah... no... because it's like - it's talking about Lady Macbeth having - you know yeeted herself. And it's like - oh, she should have died hereafter, there would have been time for... I forget...

**GRACE**

Such a word...

**JONNY**

...such a something tomorrow. And tomorrow. And like - so sort of - it flows into. But because it's... I mean it's like a lot of Shakespeare, soliloquys and lines, which - is fascinating - because they've achieved such - a standalone, cultural presence as these monologues... as these soliloquys of these famous lines. That - often when you actually go and see them in like a production, you won't actually necessarily notice when they turn up...

**EVERYONE**

Yeah...

**JONNY**

Because they'll be just flowing through.

**GRACE**

Right, like the bit of the end of "to be or not to be" where's its just ... "And soft you now, the fair Ophelia!" And it's like - oh yeah, hang on that's...

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

To be fair, it's not just Shakespeare. You get this with a lot of famous quotes from movies. They'll be a way that the culture remembers them as being delivered. And then sometimes you actually go back and watch a really old movie, and you're like "oh - that's not how they said it at all!"

**GRACE**

In the case of this particular one, I think it works amazingly, because it's like - he's sort of talking about - just like life - he's just talking about the thing that's happened and it's like - his entire brain has just been kind of sent into a cartwheel by this act. And so he kind of jumps from the prosaic to the profound without even bothering to put in a full-stop. You know, I think it's like - I totally take your point, that he does it all the time, and I think it's often hilarious, but in this particular case, I think it feels like it's saying something really important about loss.

**JONNY**

Yeah, to me that soliloquy always - I love a performance of it that's just completely hollow. That's just like absolutely burned out - like - well, I'm super guilt ridden, my wife's dead and there's a ghost - there's a bunch of ghosts - that's rubbish.

[Laughter]

**GRACE**

Yeah - it's just - it's all a bit much, isn't it, at that point. Poor chap.

[Laughter]

**HELEN**

"Macbeth - it's all a bit much!"

[Laughter]

**HELEN**

So Grace, is Macbeth one of your favourites then, or is - would you chose something else?

**GRACE**

Umm... it's not actually. I mean I do really like it, obviously you know - it's like one of the greatest plays by... you know... Shakespeare - but I think I probably - can I have one per category? Or do I just have to pick one?

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

We've got time - I'll give it to you.

**GRACE**

Alright - Much Ado About Nothing for the comedies...

**EVERYONE**

Yeah...

**GRACE**

I'm going to have Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>, which just to be clear - I massively disapprove of all of the politics, but oh... it's really good.

**EVERYONE**

Yeah, yeah, yeah...

**GRACE**

Brilliant speeches. If you either want to persuade yourself to - I don't know - invade France - that's probably the one to go for...

**HELEN**

This podcast does not endorse invading France...

**JONNY**

Standing on the Eurostar platform, muttering to yourself....

**[Laughter]**

**GRACE**

Yeah - but I reckon - and then for tragedies... then if I had to pick my all-out favourite, it's Hamlet. I know it's like - the like - the single on the album choice, but like it is - I think it's because every single time I see it, it's a completely different play. I think there's a kind of a - there's just - he's just this amazingly complex bloke. And the dialogue's always the same, but he's - he can be Ben Whishaw as a snotty teenager, who you just think "oh for God's sake, isn't anyone going to do any parenting" ... or he can be Kenneth Branagh, this great Statesman, or he can be - and in my opinion - correctly - this like unbelievably massively intellectually isolated David Tennant, playing this like deeply lonely man, who's just obviously massively clinically depressed and has just a zero-support network. I just think - I mean - ahh... it's amazing, and it has its flaws

obviously, because - but I don't think that means it's not perfect. So, for example, it has - like literally my favourite ever example of lazy exposition. There's a bit...

**HELEN**

Oh yes?

**GRACE**

There's a bit at the start, where one of the guards, in scene one, says to the other one - "well as you know, Fortinbras has just invaded Norway" and it's just!

**[Group Laughter]**

**GRACE**

It's like - "ah mate, nice one"!

**JONNY**

I mean - there's a - sort of for me Hamlet - it's not my favourite to watch, but it is my favourite to analyse. Because it is fascinating... because the whole point of Hamlet, is like to my eyes - is that it's like a revenge tragedy protagonist, who categorically does not want to be in a revenge tragedy. And like knows he is in a revenge tragedy and like is aware that everything - like both textually and metatextuality is all pushing him towards this. And it's like - "I don't really want to do any of this". There's a whole - I forget - there's a - which scene, but there's one on the boat, which is often cut, but he's literally like - ah... the story wants me to go back and do a bunch of revenge, and I really would like to not

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do that. And then at the end it's just like "OK, well I guess I'll just go and do a bloody revenge then!"

**HELEN**

My hot take on Hamlet is that I don't like it at all. I was really fed up with Hamlet the entire time, and I was just like - "shut up". "Just kill them, or don't!"

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

I think this is kind of what I actually like about the lazy exposition and that sort of thing up top, is that it is - because it is written for an audience that absolutely knows how a bloody revenge tragedy is meant to go, who are like watching the Duchess of Malfi and being like - yes - yes!

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

The dance with the dead, murders... up top - it's just like - yeah so, this is a revenge tragedy, and they're like - oh yeah OK. And then Hamlet walks in and it's like -oh... do I have to do the killing... yeah...

**GRACE**

Hamlet walks in and is like "I don't wanna"

**IMOGEN**

I would agree with Jonny, I think that the... I think the least interesting thing to do with Shakespeare - and it's all really interesting, is watch it. I think the most interesting thing to be is be in it, then is to analyse it, and read it - and then is to just watch it. Although they're all great, I think that watching it is much less fun than the other two. Am I on my own with that opinion, obviously and that's fine?

**JONNY**

I think that - basically I've seen a lot of really mediocre Shakespeare's that – you know, full snooze fest... and I've seen a couple of really good Shakespeare's. There was a production years' back, at The Globe of the Comedy of Errors. Famously - not a good one.

**IMOGEN**

Famously hilarious - what are you talking about? The Comedy of Errors?!

**[Talking over each other]**

**JONNY**

I know!! Two sets of twins. Two sets of twins. Swappin'.

**IMOGEN**

The thing is you haven't understood it. The thing is he looks like his servant... they look like each other - OK.

[Laughter]

**JONNY**

The thing is, this was a brilliant production, because what they'd done is they had done it as literally Benny Hill style... sort of - so with chase sequences and swanny whistles, which was really, really funny and like - because it is that very specific sort of like - contrived farse... that framing meant that every one of the jokes massively landed.

**IMOGEN**

Yes, it's essentially who's on first. Just longer. It's the one joke...

**MADDY**

And with Shakespeare there's so many of the plots that he just completely nicked wholesale from other things.

[Laughter]

**MADDY**

And everyone was just like - "he was a genius" but the genius was choosing which things to steal. Like David Bowie.

**HELEN**

Originality is overrated.

**IMOGEN**

Because I studied Latin at school, because I was a nerd, and I was looking at Plautus and there is one about twins and all this kind of thing. And it was like - yep, yep - this is exactly the same and...

**JONNY**

But like, at the time, originality, in inverted commas, wasn't really thought about. It wasn't considered a virtue, in a piece. You look at a lot of - I want to say it's Chaucer - which is you know 100, 200 years before, but... Chaucer at one point makes up some stories in the Canterbury Tales, and he goes on long, long explanations of where he heard this story. And makes up an entire backstory for him knowing the story, to make sure people didn't think he was just making his own stuff up.

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

And so, a lot of that era - like reinterpretation and taking old stories and putting them out there, in new and interesting forms was what art and creativity was.

**MADDY**

And in some ways it still is, with the so many franchises that we have...

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

I mean, I personally I kind of agree. I think that originality is cool, but often the best stuff is taking and mixing and reinterpreting.

**MADDY**

Yeah, because you don't live in a vacuum and you are constantly surrounded by inspirations and to kind of try and pull everything out of your own head is impossible, because you are inevitably - no man is an island...

**HELEN**

Is that a quote?

**MADDY**

It is a quote, but I'm not sure from whom!

**GRACE**

It's John Donne...

**IMOGEN**

It's Donne isn't it?

**HELEN**

Oh...

**GRACE**

Ask not for whom the Bell tolls...

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

Maddy, which one's your favourite?

**MADDY**

I have to agree with Grace, and go with Hamlet as well...

**GRACE**

Yeah...

**MADDY**

... because I'm a massive goth baby, and I just love being miserable...

**[Laughter]**

**MADDY**

Yeah, I really relate to the kind of existential angst and I also love how funny Hamlet, the character is. And how he's just kind of doing intellectual rings around everyone, and because I was a massive fan of David Tennant's doctor, in Doctor Who growing up as well, I noticed a lot of parallels between the way he played the doctor, and the way he played Hamlet. And this is just complete nerdery but he - the sense of - I am so much cleverer than everyone else in this

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room, but I'm just going to let everyone believe that they're on my level, kind of thing. Which is very arrogant and not very attractive, but I find very interesting.

**JONNY**

Yeah, you know what I blame David Tennant for tricking a whole generation of nerds into thinking Hamlet's not just a big dweeb.

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

He's a whiner...

**MADDY**

I love a dweeb me...

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

Do you know what, I think that's a good point at which to take a break, and we will be back after this...

**[BREAK]**

**HELEN**

And welcome back. As usual with these recordings, we started talking about relevant things in the middle of the break. So, Jonny - you played Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, which is a play I did not know existed...

**JONNY**

Yeah, like I saying I haven't actually really - I don't think I've actually really read - because everyone was talking about Richard the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and I'm like - I've never actually read or seen that one. I don't know his histories very well, because the only one's I've encountered are ones that I actually was in. And one of them was I played Henry the 8<sup>th</sup> in Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. And I remember nothing. Nothing. Out my head. I remember the venue very well, because it was a really nice like chapel space and had really nice acoustics, when I said - whatever the hell I said in Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**IMOGEN**

Bring me another wife!

**JONNY**

Yeah, maybe...

**[Laughter]**

**GRACE**

I went to watch Henry 8<sup>th</sup> in Spanish once. I don't speak any Spanish... but the Globe...

**[Laughter]**

**IMOGEN**

Did you learn any, during the course of the play?

**GRACE**

No I didn't. I also didn't learn what happens in Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. The Globe did this really cool thing, it was for - I don't know - for some sort of centenary probably, where they did like 40 Shakespeare plays in 40 languages - something like that...

**HELEN**

Wow...

**GRACE**

Which was really cool, and for reasons that remain obscure to me, I decided that the one I would go and see was Henry the Eighth, a play I do not know at all, in Spanish - a language I do not speak. Yeah, so it got to about I don't know... halfway through act 1 - no I think I must have got to the end - to the interval, because I am definitely not the sort of person who has the confidence to walk out in the middle, and I think I was like - do you know what, I just... I feel like I should be getting something out of this cultural experience, but what I am getting out of it is that I don't speak Spanish!

**JONNY**

[Whispering] I don't know how much more you would gotten out of this if it was in English, to be honest!

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

Like, what I remember about Henry the Eighth, is being in it and being like - this doesn't mention any of the stuff I know about Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>...

**GRACE**

Really!?

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

Like... the six wives thing - don't think it really comes up...

**GRACE**

Because there's loads of really famous stuff about Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>...

**JONNY**

I think if memory serves, and it categorically does not... it's definitely more concerned with his relationships with other dudes and whether he's going to have them murdered or not. And like all of the Country politics that hasn't really lingered in the historical imaginings of Henry 8<sup>th</sup>, rather than like - the religious and wifely stuff that has...

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**HELEN**

That's interesting...

**JONNY**

I think - like I said...

**HELEN**

Maybe you're making it all up!

**JONNY**

I could be making it all up. This is what 12/13 years on. Yeah. It's all gone.

**GRACE**

I wonder if there was some sort of like contemporary political reason why he focused on all of that... so?

**IMOGEN**

Well presumably it was Elizabeth would have been the Queen at the time, so probably not lingering on the...

**GRACE**

Yeah, on all the massive...

**IMOGEN**

... all the wife murdering of her mum...

**GRACE**

The wife situation...

**JONNY**

Extra time, multi-wife yeah.

**GRACE**

Because when was it set? Was it set when her mum was his wife, or was it? I don't know why I'm asking you because you've told me twice now you don't...

**HELEN**

Write in on a postcard! Maddy, any facts about Henry 8<sup>th</sup>, the play that you've got stored away?

**MADDY**

I half remembered a fact, during the break, and then quickly did a stealth Google and found out I was right.

**GRACE**

Yeah!

**HELEN**

Oh, go on...

**MADDY**

So in June 1613, the Globe burned down during a performance of Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, because they were using some cannons as part of the play and like the sparks ignited on the thatched roof, and it burned down...

**HELEN**

Yeah, I was going to say, wasn't it made of wood - **[laughter]**?

**MADDY**

Yeah, so Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, both a bad play and bad luck for the theatre, I guess.

**IMOGEN**

So how come Macbeth is the one, that you're not supposed to... why isn't Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, the one you're not meant to mention backstage?

**JONNY**

Oh, because in Macbeth you don't want the theatre to burn down during it...

**[Laughter]**

**MADDY**

Yeah, that would ruin it - that's a very, very good point...

**GRACE**

The thing is, I reckon they were probably just like... look we've got this play, it's a dud - we all know it's a dud - how are we going to keep the audience until like 2 - I know - live cannons!

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

Or... a bear!

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

I mean it was like... to be fair - it was a lot of that. It was a lot of gimmicks and like... one of the things I really, really love about Shakespeare, is like - you know the political - obviously like political context for a lot of his plays is important but a lot of like - what about the reason this one was written. He must be getting paid - my favourite thing about Shakespeare, is how much of a sell-out he was and just like – absolute shill for like whatever. Because he was there to get paid. And I really respect that.

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

Like one of my favourite things is in Twelfth Night, at the Contra Antonio, keeps bringing up that the Inn they are staying in is called The Elephant. Like

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keeps mentioning it, out of the blue, for no reason and he goes on about how comfortable it is, and don't forget, we're staying at the sign of The Elephant. And you will never be able to convince me...

**GRACE**

... that it's not product placement!

**JONNY**

That there wasn't like a pub or an inn called The Elephant nearby, who slipped Shakespeare a few quid to drop it in the play. You'll never be able to convince me that did not happen.

**HELEN**

Amazing.

**GRACE**

Yeah, what a legend. I mean he was. He was politically super conservative. He wrote loads of his plays to please whoever the current monarch was. But my favourite kind of thing along those lines - I have no idea whether this is true. It might be massively apocryphal, is that Hamlet, obviously was famously a huge flop - because introspective whining wasn't a thing at the time. And then next play he wrote was called As You Like it...

**[Laughter]**

**GRACE**

And it's just this straight up - you know - ordinary like - here we go - it's a comedy - it's got a funny dog in it, I'll expect - that sort of thing - and it is just...

**JONNY**

You like laughing do you... you like fun marriages...

**[Laughter]**

**GRACE**

Fine, you don't want to watch three hours of someone introspecting and agonising... like well - you know - didn't like you either...

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

One thing I wanted to talk about is the fact that obviously we're still watching his plays today. There's been a million different adaptations of like almost all of them. And I'm wondering if anyone has a favourite adaptation that they've seen. Whether it's like one of the movie versions where it's only lightly based on it. Like Ten Things I Hate about You and stuff like that or... whether it's that Baz Luhrmann Romeo & Juliet one...

**JONNY**

Baz Luhrmann Romeo & Juliet is argh... I always forget his name, but the guy who plays Mercutio, is just wonderful.

**HELEN**

Umm... he took us all by storm. We watched that in school.

**IMOGEN**

I saw a really good production of Macbeth and Jonny you might have actually been there. It was in Edinburgh, in like 2012, and it was by a Polish group that did it, with motorcycles and fire and stilt walkers and...

**JONNY**

No I missed this... I missed this Macbeth.

**IMOGEN**

It was so good, it was - OK, apologies to people who speak Polish, it was Biuro Podrozy I think - a really famous production, and it was so cool. Outdoors, dark, flames - they burned down like the whole set at the end - it was amazing. And they lop off the final act, so there's no kind of slightly - oh no man can harm me, who is of woman born, which is a bit - isn't it?

**JONNY**

Oh no, but the moment where Macduff's like... caesarean mother f[bleep], and Macbeth's like... "oh s[bleep]...

**IMOGEN**

Yeah. They lop off all of that so it's just this pure psychological drama, because you don't have... you don't know if the witches' prediction would have come true. It could still just be chance. Like they could just be really, really good at guessing. But it doesn't have to be magical, Macbeth, I think - I think it's better if it isn't - but yeah, that was an amazing production.

**HELEN**

I've just found out who played Mercutio in the Baz Luhrmann Romeo & Juliet. His name is Harold Perrineau.

**JONNY**

Yes.

**HELEN**

He is also Link in the Matrix Reloaded and Revolutions, and he is also in Lost.

**MADDY**

Michael, yeah.

**HELEN**

As... Michael Dawson.

**MADDY**

I have a big soft spot for... even though there are some aspects of it, I'm so keen on, I have a big soft spot for the Kenneth Branagh, Much Ado About Nothing, because Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson, just give off such bisexual energy and that I love it. The bit I'm not so keen on is the Watchman. I don't think they're that funny. I think Michael Keaton was a weird choice. I had to look it up, because I was like... I know it was someone famous, who was the main Watchman, but I cannot remember, then I was like - oh yeah... Michael Keaton - huh - but also you get Keanu Reeves, as the villain in it...

**IMOGEN**

Oh my god!

**JONNY**

... Don John. Yeah...

**MADDY**

Yeah as Don John, and he's just so emo...

**IMOGEN**

[Impersonating Keanu Reeves] "I'm not a man of many words, and yet I thank you"

**MADDY**

[Impersonating Keanu Reeves] “I’d rather be a kanker in a hedge, than a rose in his grace...” It’s yeah, it’s such a weird mix of people. And it’s got Denzel Washington in it and it’s got the guy from Dead Poet’s Society in it. And they’re just having a lovely time in Italy.

**GRACE**

Yeah. They are having a really lovely time aren’t they. You can really tell as well - Like it’s just like - they’re obviously all really happy. They’re just like - we’re just going to make a really, really nice film. It’s not going to do anything like super - like interpretively interesting, but that’s actually fine, because this is an accessible lovely adaptation of an accessible lovely play.

**MADDY**

Yeah for sure.

**HELEN**

Love that for them.

**GRACE**

Yeah. [laughing]

**MADDY**

And we've obviously already mentioned the David Tenant Hamlet, which is...

**GRACE**

Oh, transformative.

**MADDY**

...one of my absolute favourites and I was also lucky enough to see the David Tenant/Catherine Tate Much A Do in the theatre... and that was on the same trip as I went to the Doctor Who experience as well, so... there's clearly a running theme for me of Shakespeare/David Tenant/Doctor Who linking... yeah, and just the 80s debauchery of it all was wonderful. And he was like wearing a kind of navel uniform at one point and there was a bit where they got covered in paint and yeah... it was just a great laugh. And there's a song in it - the hay no ne no song. It's like an 80s pop song. That was very fun.

**HELEN**

What do you reckon Imogen?

**IMOGEN**

As I say I really enjoyed the Polish motorcycle Macbeth. That was super cool. I very much enjoyed Emma Rice's production at The Globe of Twelfth Night. Which was so much fun. That's part of her Summer of Love, a couple of years

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ago. And that was just utterly joyous. Brightly coloured. Ridiculous. I cannot remember the name of the actor playing Malvolio, but she was amazing. So much energy, and so much heart, because actually Malvolio is this tragic figure. So when she's like - oh, she loves me - like so tragic and so like genuine in that love, and it makes you think like - actually love is the one thing none of us can resist. This is like a real low trick to play on someone. But yeah, it was so much fun.

**HELEN**

Ahh! One of my favourites was - I went to see a production of Midsummer Night's Dream. It was done via 6-foot-tall puppets. Like as soon as they enter the fairy realm the puppets appeared...

**IMOGEN**

Oh wow... so hang on were the puppets the humans, to make them feel small, or were the puppets the fairies.

**HELEN**

I think it was everyone. I think everyone was suddenly a puppet.

**IMOGEN**

Amazing.

**HELEN**

There was also a dance element to it, as well, and lots of music. It was a very bizarre experience, but I've never forgotten it, because they were massive, these things. They had such big heads...

**JONNY**

Well you would, wouldn't you?

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

But yeah, that's one of my favs.

**JONNY**

When I was 18, I managed to get on a trip from my mum's school that was going up to see the Macbeth starring Sean Bean. And that was - oh - he was very good at being Macbeth...

**HELEN**

I bet he was...

**IMOGEN**

And he dies at the end, which...

**[laughter]**

**JONNY**

Yeah he does!

**IMOGEN**

Sorry spoilers for Macbeth there...

**[Laughter]**

**HELEN**

I'm not going to put spoiler warnings for Shakespeare plays...

**MADDY**

You've had centuries to catch up guys...

**[Laughter]**

**GRACE**

I found it really, really difficult to pick favourite adaptations, because it's always just like one or two things about it that are perfect. Like I can't - I imagine the moment that we finish this conversation, I'll immediately think of an example, but generally I can't think of something that's - like absolutely about it is perfect. It's usually like - this particular performance or whatever. So - I really, really like it when somebody manages to do a performance of a Shakespeare tragedy, where they make the female lead have a personality. I went to see Lenny Henry play Othello - ah years ago... it must have been about a decade ago, I think...

**HELEN**

Yeah, it was a while back because I remember being excited...

**GRACE**

Yeah. It was absolutely... oh fantastic. The person who played Desdemona, whose name I don't know, like - just managed to turn this absolute drip of a character into someone charming and funny, and young. It was the first time I found a way into that character. The thing about Desdemona, is she gets a lot of dialogue, you know she's not like an Ophelia, who's like technically the most important woman in the play, but she's in a handful of scenes really.

Desdemona is in it a lot, but because her whole thing is like - I am perfect, she's like - super, super dull. But this... the way that they did the performance, they had her - they made her playful and like - I remember there is this moment where it's just after Iago started to get into Othello's head, and he's sort of standing in the front of the stage doing this really good kind of intense brooding, and Desdemona comes up to see him and her line is "How is't with you my Lord". And every time I've seen that performed, it's always been oh How is't with you my Lord, but the way that she did it, she kind of like stomps up to him, doing an impression of his like serious pose, and kind of goes... oh... How is't with you my Lord. And It's just... it's the only time I've believed in that relationship as something that exists, that could actually be a marriage, rather than just... you know... like these two people, obviously really fancy each other, and they got married very quickly and now it's all falling apart. Whereas in this performance, because she was so like real, and because she understood him, and because she had that sort of nuance, you're like - oh, you're a person. I

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can totally understand how you could be like one half of a marriage... yeah, I don't know. I found it very difficult to pick like a particular adaptation. Although 10 Things I Hate About You is cracking.

**JONNY**

Great film.

**MADDY**

Yeah.

**HELEN**

We are starting to come towards the end of the episode, and we're going to end on another very simple question. And that question is - why do you think we're still talking about Shakespeare today? Like we've still got so many opinions, after like 400 years - is it just because he wrote so much, and so the odds are high, that we will have experienced it, or is it that he is just that good? Because I don't think he's like extraordinarily good. There are other playwrights that I would say are just as good. I don't know. What do you think, what do you all think?

**GRACE**

Well, I think there are three reasons...

**HELEN**

Oh...

**GRACE**

Firstly - I think it's because we've still got him, so he is massively important to us, culturally, in a way that means that like so much of what else we've done, in terms of our artistic output, is sort of a footnote to Shakespeare, that means for that reason he remains important because we're still sort of - like in his wake. Secondly, I think he is absolutely amazing. And thirdly I think it's enough of a blueprint, that we can make his plays be whatever we need them to be.

**HELEN**

Ah...

**GRACE**

Like, I think there's a reason that we don't remember Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. And it's probably because it doesn't do this job. He wrote 37 or 27 plays, like loads anyway...

**JONNY**

37 I think.

**GRACE**

37, right. of which we remember what 15, really? Like how many can you name without consulting Wikipedia. You know...

**JONNY**

I mean, we can probably name about basically all of them but...

**GRACE**

Right... OK, but culturally speaking, there's like 10 that's important, right? And that will be because - I reckon... yeah, it's a massive sweeping statement - I'm going to stand by it. It will be because those are the ones which are broad enough that they can be whatever we need them to be. So our Shakespeare is not the Shakespeare that Gladstone understood. And he's not the Shakespeare that Peeps understood. He is the one that we need now. And if he stops being versatile enough for us, we'll just ditch him.

**MADDY**

That makes a lot of sense. Because there's so many different iterations of the character of Robin Hood throughout the ages, depending on the cultural need at the time. So yeah. That makes absolute sense. And I think another thing I like about Shakespeare - that kind of makes him continue to be relevant, is - in his best works, even if it's a tragedy, there's some comedy in it. And even if it's a comedy, there's some tragedy in it. And that's something that I take very much to heart in all the kind of storytelling I do. It's not going to be as

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impactful - unless you have something to contrast the other side off of. So, like in Macbeth, there's like - there's a funny doorman...

**[Group Laughter]**

**MADDY**

And in Much Ado About Nothing they fake a woman's death...

**[Group Laughter]**

**JONNY**

The thing about that though was like they had to, because they had a clown... because it was all written for like the same gang...

**[Laughter]**

**MADDY**

Yeah, that is true...

**JONNY**

And they had a couple of clowns... and like it's a horrible tragedy but then... I forget his name, but the famous clown who was like Shakespeare's...

**GRACE**

It's the Falstaff bloke isn't it? Yeah.

**JONNY**

Who's like - so err... I'm making any jokes about bums?

**[Group Laughter]**

**GRACE**

Do you know what, I reckon that's another reason why he's still so popular actually, is because he was writing for the crowd. You know, like if people were bored, they'd leave, so obviously... so you're absolutely right... you know it's got to be funny, and it's got to be serious. But also, I thought that was a really interesting point that you've made about Robin Hood, Maddy, it sort of links to something that... I think also you said this right at the start about how Shakespeare basically nicked all of his stories from... you know... ancient, oral tradition stories. That's the thing, isn't it? That's sort of what we're doing now. We're just taking very old oral tradition stories. It's just that, we happen to be keeping most of the words the same, and we're doing it with interpretation and sort of nuance and cinematography, rather than by actually just changing the words. But really what we're doing is the same thing, which is we're turning the same stories that humans have been telling each other forever, into the stories we need them to be now.

**IMOGEN**

I think there's also like a shared cultural... like everyone has to study Shakespeare at school. Like we all have to. And I think that's really good, because it says... you know, Shakespeare is not this elitist thing. It's not something that... you know, only people who are very interested in obscure

Jacobean plays might be interested in or love blank verse, it like - no this is for everybody. No, this is for everybody. Everybody is capable of understanding this, if it's like you know made interesting to them, they'll be interested by it. And I guess. I really like that about it. Because when some people say "oh you know, why don't we study other Jacobean playwrights, or what about Ben Jonson, he was just as good, or Kit Marlowe or something. It's like... well yeah, but there's something really powerful about everybody having the opportunity to study this, and it not being out of reach for anybody. It's not for any one particular group of people.

### **GRACE**

Exactly and that's really culturally powerful as well, that we've got these kinds of touchstones. Even if it was like hammered into your brain when you were 14, and absolutely furious about it. It does mean that we've got this kind of thing that we do share. Although I would say that one of the biggest barriers that I used to find when I was teaching... I used to teach the GCSE resit class Romeo & Juliet, and the biggest barrier I found, which was like the difference between this is going to work, and this isn't - was ownership. Like, because everyone who had got a D the previous year, was just like, this is nothing to do with me. These lessons are nothing to do with me. And so, I used to do... I basically didn't go anywhere near the text for the first three lessons, usually, because I was just like, I have to persuade you that this is yours, because if it's yours you won't mind that the language is a little bit difficult to access. But if it isn't you're not going to go anywhere near it. And if you can just get people to understand that... well that you're right Imogen, that it's ours, it's everyone's, it's not for any particular group. It's supposed to be for all of us, then it

becomes that, basically. You know, if you know it's for you, you can understand it.

**JONNY**

I have a few ideas, and like one particularly... one hot take... I very much agree that a lot of it comes down to how mutable all these plays are. The only ones that take place in London, are his histories. All the others are set in like... it says it's Florence, or it's Verona or it's ancient Rome. But it's not, it's just the stage. So - I think there is this... I think Shakespeare's plays do lend themselves to keeping going and not being quite as thoroughly tied to the place and context of their original performance as something like - people like Marlowe or Webster or Jonson which, in my experience do tend to be a bit more tied to the where and the when.

**IMOGEN**

I mean most of Venice - no canals.

**[laughter]**

It's like I've never been to Venice... never been to Italy. It's just like... it's a place. It's another place.

**JONNY**

I also have a... reckon that it is - I think there is a lot of it that is actually to do with quantity. Just that Shakespeare is - he is a very, very popular playwright

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of the time, that we have loads of. Like, most of his contemporaries we have like a half dozen plays, of which there's one good one.

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

And... whereas Shakespeare we've got loads and a bunch of them are crackers.

**HELEN**

We are now well over time, but my fancy has been taken by something that you said earlier, which is... I want us, as a final, final thing before we say goodbye, to try and name as many Shakespeare plays as we can... right?

**[Laughter]**

**JONNY**

Oh alright...

**HELEN**

Midsummer Night's Dream.

**MADDY**

Love Labour's Lost

**JONNY**

Coriolanus

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**IMOGEN**

Two Gentlemen of Verona

**GRACE**

Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello

**JONNY**

Merry Wives of Windsor

**MADDY**

The Merchant of Venice

**IMOGEN**

All's well that end's well.

**GRACE**

Much a Do about Nothing

**JONNY**

Measure for Measure

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**MADDY**

As you Like It, Twelfth Night

**JONNY**

Romeo & Juliet

**IMOGEN**

Timon of Athens

**JONNY**

A Winter's Tale

**GRACE**

The Tempest

**HELEN**

Titus Andronicus

**IMOGEN**

King Lear

**MADDY**

Have we said Comedy of Errors

**GRACE**

Ah, we need to be more systematic about this. Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> Part 1, Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> Part 2.

**JONNY**

Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>... Was there a Henry the 6<sup>th</sup>? There was probably a Henry the 6<sup>th</sup>?

**GRACE**

Oh, there must have been. He wouldn't have missed one out, would he?

**JONNY**

Did we say Richard the 3<sup>rd</sup>?

**GRACE**

Pericles.

**IMOGEN**

Cymbeline. King John!

**HELEN**

Alright, alright. That's... Lowri is making frantic wrap it up motions, so we shall do that. Listener, thank you for...

**JONNY**

If Lowri wants us to wrap it up, Lowri should have been writing them down!

**[Laughter]**

**IMOGEN**

We'll stay here all night, until Lowri writes them down!

**JONNY**

Did anyone say the Taming of the Shrew?

**EVERYONE**

No!

**GRACE**

Oh, Merchant of Venice on that subject...

**HELEN**

But we've got to stop... WE HAVE TO STOP...

**[Laughter]**

STOP I AM PUTTING MY FOOT DOWN!

**[All ignoring HELEN]**

**IMOGEN**

Did anyone actually say Romeo & Juliet?

**GRACE**

Oh, must've...

**JONNY**

I said... I said Romeo & Juliet.

**[laughter]**

**HELEN**

We are ending this. I regret... I regret starting this little game! Listener, you can play this game at home, but...

**JONNY**

Don't though!

**HELEN**

I hope that you have enjoyed listening to us waffle on about Shakespeare. I shall see you in the next episode, but for now, it's goodbye from me.

Goodbye. And it's goodbye from all my lovely, lovely guests, thank you for coming on. Would you all like to say goodbye?

**EVERYONE**

Goodbye...

**[HELEN giggles]**

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

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**[Show Theme – Outro Ends]**

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