

– a dialogue sample from –

SHAKESPEARE RESTORED

by

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CHARACTER LIST

The Editors:

THEOBALD -- Lewis Theobald, lawyer, writer, Shakespearean critic, male, 37 years old

POPE -- Alexander Pope, poet, translator, editor of Shakespeare, male, 37 years old

The Greeks:

ELECTRA -- from Sophocles' Electra, female, late 20s

CLYTEMNESTRA -- Electra's mother, female, 50s

CHRYSOTHMIS -- Electra's younger sister, female, 20s

CHORUS 1 -- female (can double with Chrysothmis)

CHORUS 2 -- female (can double with Clytemnestra)

The Shakespearean Characters:

RICHARD II -- from Richard II, King of England, male

GAUNT -- from Richard II, Richard's uncle, male

BOLINGBROKE -- from Richard II, Gaunt's son, male

YORK -- from Richard II, Richard's and Bolingbroke's uncle, male

MOWBRAY -- from Richard II, male

LORD MARSHALL -- from Richard II, male

NORTHUMBERLAND -- from Richard II, male

HOTSPUR -- from Richard II, supporter of Bolingbroke, Northumberland's son, male

SALISBURY -- from Richard II, male

HAL -- from 1 Henry IV, Bolingbroke's son, male

FALSTAFF -- from 1 Henry IV, male

BARDOLPH -- from 1 Henry IV, male

MISTRESS -- from 1 Henry IV, female

SETTING

A Shakespearean writer's garret, serves as Lewis Theobald's 1725 London study. The Electra scenes and the Shakespearean scenes play throughout the study.

COSTUMES

Theobald, Pope and Shakespearean characters are dressed Shakespearean. The Greeks can be Greek or Shakespearean.

TIME

Technically, it is autumn 1725; however, it should feel more akin to the late 16th Century.

ACT I

A Shakespearean writer's garret. A chair and small table serve as a desk. There is a bust of Athena. There may be a shelf or two for books. Other manuscripts, books and papers may be piled on the table, floor, benches or stools

Lewis THEOBALD at desk, with book

THEOBALD

(To Self)

Confounding, absolutely confounding! How is one to make any sense of this mess? Mr Stede, you are correct, Shakespeare Restored will need an appendix. Mr Pope you boggle the mind. You know not the least comings-and-goings of the backstage.

ENTER Alexander POPE. POPE carries a MANUSCRIPT. POPE is unseen

THEOBALD (cont'd)

Your knowledge of Shakespeare's time is nil! Indisputable!

(Reads)

"A table of Greenfield's. A table was directed to be brought in. Greenfield was the name of the property-man in that time who furnished implements for actors."

(To Self)

Mr Pope, your notes are creative, maybe even ingenious, but are they accurate? Mr Stede do you agree that prompters' notes, on occasion, found their way into Shakespeare's scripts corrupting the text through printers' errors? But have you ever in your entire career in the theatre seen one prompt book with one note scribbled in the margin that gave the actual name of a property man?

(Waits)

Well, Mr Stede?

(Looks up)

Oh, you're not here yet. He has me talking to myself.

(Takes breath)

What can you have been thinking Mr Pope? Editors dig into a corrupt text. They find, they discover. They seek the writer himself and what he wrote, whatever it may be, but you don't change it. **YOUR CONJECTURE IS WRONG MR POPE!**

POPE clears throat

THEOBALD (cont'd)

(Not seeing Pope, looks for BOOK)

Ah, Mr Stede, you're just in time. I'm looking for an old edition of Shakespeare. A large book. It may be over there. This is for your appendix, Mr Stede. I'm looking for Henry the Fifth. The scene, Mistress Quickly telling of the death of Falstaff.

(Finds BOOK, searches)

There was a note, a hand-written note in the margin of the book. To edit a corrupt text, Mr Stede, you must place yourself within the text. To be the writer. Urrr!

(SLAMS BOOK closed)

To be inside the head of William Shakespeare. Ah-ha,

(Finds BOOK, searches)

To be inside of Falstaff. He is old, dying. Mistress Quickly says, "his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a table of greenfields?" How baffling, "a table"! What can that mean? Urrrr!

(SLAMS BOOK closed)

The frustration of trying to decipher these poorly printed, corrupt passages. When you find it, it will be on the ... left-page, yes, left page --

(Finds BOOK, searches)

Henry, where are you Henry. I know you're in here somewhere. Where do you hide the note, where, where can you be, hand-written note, left-page where are you, left-page, left -- EUREKA! This is it Mr Stede, listen,

(Reads)

"For his nose was as sharp as a pen, and he talked,"

(Speaks)

ah, he "talked". A dying old man talks of sunshine on lush green fields. What could be more natural?

POPE

(Under his breath)

Oh my.

THEOBALD

Don't babble Mr Stede! That's it! I know it is! Talked, yes. Talked, not table. This makes the utmost sense. I'll have Mr Pope babbling to himself ...

(Discovering)

Babbling? Babbling? A babbling old man.

(Carefully)

Though corrupt in spelling, if you change the "t" to a "b", table becomes bable -- pronounce it, babble.

(Reads)

"For his nose was as sharp as a pen and he babbled of green fields."

(Speaks)

How simple. One letter changes everything.

POPE

Simple, I think not. Perhaps if one has that book, but otherwise I'm afraid --

THEOBALD

Why Mr Stede what's wrong with your -- you're not Mr Stede.

POPE

No, I'm not Mr Stede. My name is Alexander Pope.

THEOBALD

Why, why, I, why, I, why, I, I, I, I, I, I, I didn't see you come in, Mr Pope!

POPE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I was let in.

THEOBALD

Indeed.

POPE

I have something of yours.

(Shows MANUSCRIPT)

THEOBALD

Oh my.

POPE

I was asked me to drop this off, if you are the Mr Theobald, about whom I've been told.

THEOBALD

I'm Lewis Theobald, at your service.

POPE

Well, let us hope so. I've been wanting to meet you, to thank you for your kind words in your collection of poetry.

THEOBALD

The Grove. Yes, thank you for all four of your subscriptions. I trust you enjoyed them?

POPE

By all means. I was most impressed with your ... collecting abilities. And you write, too, and you translate, like me?

THEOBALD

Like you, Mr Pope. Well yes, I suppose, well I try, I, I, I'm not as, or even as, as you, but -- no, I mean you're a truly great poet. I am not, but, yes I, I do try.

POPE

You seem to know who I am?

THEOBALD

I was at Button's Coffee House when a friend saw you coming out of Will's Coffee House and pointed you out.

POPE

And you remembered me. I am honored.

THEOBALD

Yes, well, you have a memorable shape.

POPE

Like a question mark?

THEOBALD

Or Richard the Third.

POPE

Is that what your Buttonian friend said?!

THEOBALD

By no means. He said nothing unkind. Nothing but praise --

POPE

Balderdash! I know what those hack writers say about me!

THEOBALD

Not all of them.

POPE

(Over Theobald)

They poke and prod with their tirades.

THEOBALD

I'm terribly sorry. Some at Button's, not all, but some do not agree with those writers.

POPE

Well ... there's no harm done. I'm rather thick-skinned, were the truth to be known.

THEOBALD

But --

POPE

RUMORS AND GOSSIP, I ASSURE YOU!

THEOBALD

Once again, I'm terribly sorry.

POPE

And I'm sorry The Censor is no more.

THEOBALD

My periodical? I didn't know you knew of it.

POPE

It was a tri-weekly, as I recall.

THEOBALD

How good of you to mention it. And I must say I think your Iliad is, without doubt the most magnificent translation of Homer the English language has ever seen.

POPE

Why, thank you. That is most kind and coming from a man of your esteemed literary reputation --

THEOBALD

Me? Esteemed? I do not have a literary reputation.

POPE

Would you like one?

THEOBALD

I beg your pardon.

POPE

Would you like to have a literary reputation?

THEOBALD

What do I need to --

POPE

(Throws down MANUSCRIPT)

Don't write this book!

ENTER ELECTRA, dressed as a servant.

ELECTRA

It is a night of bad omens. Horror strikes at my heart. Blood is everywhere. The two of them howled, howled with laughter. Treachery and deceit now rule this kingdom. Unimaginable horror! My unhappy father, Agamemnon, is dead. Killed by his wife, my mother, Clytemnestra, and her secret paramour, Aegisthus. My mother, my mother, lured him inside and covered him in a luxurious cloak proclaiming his victory over Troy, but it was her victory cloak. The cloak weighed him down so he couldn't defend himself. Then he came in, Aegisthus, and took an axe and split -- no, no it doesn't matter. It won't change what happened. The gods must be angry. My mother and her paramour are drunk with their blood-soaked success. They are proud, boasting throughout the palace. The gods will not stand for this, I am sure of it.

(KNEELS before bust of Athena)

By all that is holy, great Athena, daughter of Zeus, hear my words and protect my young brother, Orestes, on his way to King Strophius. Watch over and protect him. Prevent the murderers from finding him. Help him grow to manhood. Help him grow strong, strong enough to return to Mycenae to purge this land of the murderers who now rule.

ENTER CHORUS 1, dressed royally

ELECTRA (cont'd)

(Stands)

Do you know where they are?

CHORUS 1

I only saw one of them.

ELECTRA

Do you know where he is?

CHORUS 1

No, we led him to the northern gate. He was there, I could see him lurking about in a shadow. After a while he saw we weren't moving anymore, so he came closer. I then uncovered the young girl's head. When he realized his mistake, he gave up.

ELECTRA

Are you sure he left?

CHORUS 1

We waited and waited, but he didn't return, so I took the child home and came here.

ELECTRA

Did he recognize you?

CHORUS 1

I don't think he was sure. He was more concerned with the child than me. He tried to get close as he was following us, but we kept moving, though not rushing, as you said. The girl was quiet and sensed the danger, but, bless her she didn't make a sound.

ELECTRA

Did he return to the palace?

CHORUS 1

It was the direction he went.

ENTER CHORUS 2, dressed royally

ELECTRA

Uh -- oh it's you. Were you followed?

CHORUS 2

Yes, there were two watching us that I saw.

ELECTRA

Did you make it to the east-southern gate?

CHORUS 2

Nearly. One gave up before the gate.

ELECTRA

And the other?

CHORUS 2

He followed close by, all the way to the gate.

CHORUS 1

Do you think they got away?

ELECTRA

Of that I'm not sure. Perimedes is loyal to my father. He will do what he can.

CHORUS 2

Were there only three of them then?

ELECTRA

Three men against one boy. How can the gods stand for this?

CHORUS 1

They got away then, if there weren't any more. I'm sure of it.

ELECTRA

We must return to the palace. We must not stir suspicion on a night such as this.

EXIT ELECTRA, CHORUS 1 and CHORUS 2

THEOBALD

Don't write my book? You can't mean that?

POPE

What if I do?

THEOBALD

But that's not possible.

POPE

It is, indeed, possible.

THEOBALD

Are ... are you that powerful?

POPE

Take a good look at me, Mr Theobald. What do you see?

THEOBALD

I see ... what I see.

POPE

Do you not see this twisted and bent body of mine?

THEOBALD

I, I wouldn't say it is --

POPE

Can this tiny frame you see before you, be deemed powerful?

THEOBALD

There are different ways of --

POPE

My body, Mr Theobald, does not offer physical strength.

THEOBALD

My intention was not to impune your --

POPE

My power does not come from my body, but from my pen.

THEOBALD

Your ... pen?

POPE

Yes, my pen. My strength, my power comes from my words.

THEOBALD

Your words?

POPE

Yes, from my words, therein lies my power.

THEOBALD

What are you saying, Mr Pope?

POPE

My words are strong and can be powerful. My words, Mr Theobald, can put you and keep you in the most selective group of writers, poets and playwrights alive.

THEOBALD

Are you saying you would --

POPE

Write and praise your words.

THEOBALD

But --

POPE

And no one would know.

THEOBALD

No one?

POPE

No one.

THEOBALD

There are those who suspect you of --

POPE

I said, no one would know!

THEOBALD

What about my book? What about Shakespeare and his plays?

POPE

What about them? The public will still read them, still see them, still enjoy them.

THEOBALD

I don't know. I don't think so. No, no I can't.

POPE

It will be the most heroic thing you ever do.

THEOBALD

I'm terribly sorry, but Shakespeare's scripts are --

POPE

ALL I DID ... all I did was make Shakespeare more accessible.

THEOBALD

You made Shakespeare more confusing, Mr Pope.

POPE

I made him accessible for today's more sophisticated audiences.

THEOBALD

I agree, the English language has changed.

POPE

Changed! His phrasing, his grammar, his spelling!

THEOBALD

Yes, it can be difficult and awkward.

POPE

Incomprehensible is more like it.

THEOBALD

Not to William Shakespeare.

POPE

But he's not with us, so he can't tell us what he wrote.

THEOBALD

What if I can?

POPE

What if you can -- what?

THEOBALD

I am a lawyer, Mr Pope. I deal with older Elizabethan documents, such as wills and deeds.

POPE

No doubt you would.

THEOBALD

We are taught Elizabethan Secretary Script to allow us to read older documents.

POPE

We are talking about William Shakespeare.

THEOBALD

So am I. His plays were written in the older orthographic form. My experience with Elizabethan Secretary Script will allow me to decipher these older, corrupt play texts.

POPE

It is a task no one shall accomplish.

THEOBALD

I can not agree with you, much can yet be discovered.

POPE

Shakespeare is dead. All anyone can do is dress him up.

THEOBALD

He is not a character in a play.

(Beat)

I have a friend who is prompter at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

POPE

The gentleman for whom you mistook me?

THEOBALD

Yes, Mr Stede.

POPE

What has he to do with this?

THEOBALD

He has shared his firsthand knowledge of theatre with me.

POPE

The theatre has changed since Shakespeare's time.

THEOBALD

All the same, it is theatre, so certain things will happen.

POPE

The spellings are too corrupt, his grammar, his --

THEOBALD

Without doubt corrupt and difficult to penetrate.

POPE

Mind-boggling, unfathomable, confounding is more like it!

ENTER ELECTRA, dressed royally, and CHORUS
1, as a servant. Both sew

CHORUS 1

Is there no word yet?

ELECTRA

It is a long journey. The best we can hope for is no word of their capture.

CHORUS 1

I think, I hope --

ELECTRA

So do I. This will take much time and it will be difficult, more difficult if we are --

ENTER CLYTEMNESTRA

CLYTEMNESTRA

Leave us!

CHORUS 1 gathers sewing

CLYTEMNESTRA (cont'd)

NOW!

EXIT CHORUS 1

CLYTEMNESTRA (cont'd)

Where is your brother?!

ELECTRA

I ... I've not seen him yet today.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He's not in the palace.

ELECTRA

Are you sure? You know he likes to hide.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He is gone!

ELECTRA

He is probably scared. He will return, I'm sure of it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your king is displeased!

ELECTRA

My king is dead. You killed him last night. Don't you remember?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your king is upset!

ELECTRA

My father is dead. You killed him. The emotional state of your paramour interests not me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Don't fight me on this! Where is your brother?!

ELECTRA

No doubt someplace safer than this palace.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I know it was you. You were followed last night.

ELECTRA

I never left the palace last night, except to pay tribute to Athena.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You and your gods! Aegisthus will not take this lightly.

ELECTRA

He will not take what lightly?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your sneaking your brother out of the palace last night.

ELECTRA

So he couldn't kill him too?

CLYTEMNESTRA

He is your king! You will not speak of him like that!

ELECTRA

He killed my father. I will speak of him in any way I wish.

CLYTEMNESTRA

It is of no concern. Your brother is just a boy.

ELECTRA

Aegisthus was "just a boy" once, but he grew to manhood and look at his treachery now.

CLYTEMNESTRA

If you think this is a game?

ELECTRA

My father took you at your word, I will not make the same mistake.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where is your brother?

ELECTRA

I told you I've not seen him this day.

CLYTEMNESTRA

So, they were right, he escaped last night.

ELECTRA

Who was right?

CLYTEMNESTRA does not respond

ELECTRA (cont'd)

So you would kill your own son.

CLYTEMNESTRA does not respond

ELECTRA (cont'd)

Wherever my brother is, he is in a safer place than in his mother's arms.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your king will come to see you. You will not like it.

(Goes to leave)

ELECTRA

He needn't bother.

CLYTEMNESTRA

(Stops)

Where is your brother?

ELECTRA

Somewhere safer than Mycenae.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I want to know.

ELECTRA

If I were you, I too would be concerned.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You are spiteful!

ELECTRA

You are wicked.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You are impudent!

ELECTRA

I take after my mother.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You ungrateful wretch.

(Goes to leave)

ELECTRA

I have sent Orestes away!

CLYTEMNESTRA

(Stops)

I know that. Where?

ELECTRA

Some place safe, where he can grow to manhood.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He'll not grow to manhood.

ELECTRA

Once he's grown he'll return to avenge his father's death and reclaim his throne.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where is he?

ELECTRA

The gods know where he is.

CLYTEMNESTRA

The gods don't care.

ELECTRA

The gods will see he grows to manhood. They will see he returns to Mycenae.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He would not kill his own mother.

ELECTRA

The gods will see to it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

The gods are feeble.

ELECTRA

Then I'll see to it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You can not see to it. What will you do?

ELECTRA

I will ... why of course I will mourn.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You'll mourn?

ELECTRA

Yes, I will mourn.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Mourning is good. You'll need to do that.

ELECTRA

I will mourn my father's death, yes. I'll cry lamentations until my brother returns. I'll mourn for all of Mycenae. I will sing dirges so the gods won't forget this injustice!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I will destroy you, if you do this.

ELECTRA

You will only destroy yourself.

CLYTEMNESTRA

It will be a woeful destiny. Your clamorous tongue will be scorned. Your suffering and anguish will be laughed at.

ELECTRA

Maybe so, maybe not.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your father was a woeful dunce of a man!

ELECTRA

I will not fail my father.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Time will adjust your lamentations.

ELECTRA

To your oppression? I think not. Time will be kindly to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

This will not be so!

ELECTRA

(KNEELS before Athena)

Oh, holy goddess Athena, hear me. This palace is betrayed. Prevent my mother from murdering her son. Watch over Orestes. Help him grow to manhood. Help him grow strong, sturdy and wise. Steel his nerves. With all your power Athena, help Orestes reclaim our father's kingdom from the usurping murderers who sit upon his throne.

EXIT CLYTEMNESTRA. ENTER CHORUS 1,
puts a wrap on Electra. THEY EXIT

THEOBALD

Mind-boggling the spellings may be, and the grammar confounding, Mr Pope.

POPE

It is not possible! I have been through each and every play.

THEOBALD

It is possible. There's not one person in all of London who can do this better than can I.

POPE

For all their beauty, no one will penetrate their meaning.

THEOBALD

I will! I will tell you and everyone else what he wrote.