emma combined

**Mark:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast

**Aven:** where the more we know

**Mark:** the more we want to find out.

**Aven:** Tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** and across disciplines.

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven

**Mark:** and I'm Mark.

**Aven:** And today we're talking about Greek drama. Before we get to that, very quickly, we want to say thank you to two new patrons. We want to thank Brian Koh and Octavio Trejo.

Woo.

Thank you so much. Anybody who would like to join them and support our work is welcome to go to Patreon.com and look for The Endless Knot.

Now, what we have today is an interview with Emma Pauly.

**Mark:** Emma is a classicist, translator and theater practitioner specializing in queer and non-human bodies in tragedy, myth, performance, and reception. They have worked with reading Greek tragedy online as a dramaturg and [00:01:00] are at present a member of the Queer and the Classical Collective.

**Aven:** Her translations have been used in storefront theater productions in Chicago, and their translation of Euripides' Bacchae has received several public readings, most recently with the Rhetoric and Poetics workshop at the university of Chicago. Currently, they are completing the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities at the University of Chicago, and we'll be starting a PhD in classics at UCLA in the fall.

**Mark:** We talked to them last summer about Greek drama, translation, and queer readings of classical texts. And we're excited for you to finally hear this really fun conversation.

**Aven:** So without further ado, let's talk to Emma. So, hi, Emma! Thank you so much for being here.

**Mark:** Welcome!

**Emma:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm delighted to be able to ramble at you in a constructive space.

**Aven:** That's exactly what we're looking for. Alright, let's start with our usual type of question, which is: [00:02:00] how did you become interested in what you're interested in-- specifically, I guess, classics and drama.

And how did that sort of-- or are there parts of your life and interests that connected in order to form the interests you have now?

**Emma:** Yeah, so that's a question that kind of operates on multiple valences for me, the first of which is I primarily work on tragedy and drama because I am an inveterate theater kid.

**Aven:** Hmm.

**Emma:** And have been for a very, very long time and came to Classics through the lens of theater and specifically tragedy. I was a theater kid all through high school. I was a theater major in college, I was a Classics minor. And then I trained as an actor. I have an MA in Classical Acting from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in the UK, and have been primarily working as a dramaturg specializing in Greek tragedy for the past couple of years.

And I'm now kind of pivoting more towards exclusively Classics and exclusively working in [00:03:00] Classics and specifically adaptation, restaging of tragedy. I also work at that through a queer lens because I also, in my personal and professional life, am queer. And so that lens kind of has a lot of say in the work that I do and the specific pieces of tragedy that I focus on.

So yeah, a lot of just-- like a very, very long theater background with a side order of queer.

**Aven:** A completely unexpected connection, no one would ever imagine that pair of identity markers.

**Emma:** I know, right? Who'd've thunk?

**Aven:** So you came to classics through tragedy, you're saying. What is it particularly about Greek drama and about Greek tragedy that you found interesting, that speaks to you? What kinds of those kinds of drama do you find interesting?

**Emma:** So I originally came at these texts as a performer and as an actor [00:04:00] and through college, I performed in some adaptations of the Oresteia, we did Medea, we did Bacchae, which, you know, planted a seed that I'm sure we will come back to in due course later. And the thing that always struck me about tragedy was the way that every character was operating at 150% of their emotional capacity at all times.

**Aven:** Yeah. There's no ordinary days on a tragic stage.

**Emma:** And that's something that's very attractive as a performer because I had also been trained mostly in Shakespeare and there is a level of that in Shakespeare, but there was this slightly kind of elemental, primordial feeling to the way that characters spoke in tragedy. And I had Greek from college, I had Latin from high school and I was fascinated by, you know, if I'm getting this out of a translation, if I'm getting this much out of a translation, what am I missing?

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** Because [00:05:00] I had done enough work with both languages to kind of know what I wasn't getting or to know what was hidden between the lines, or that there were choices that these translators were making in the works that I was doing. And so that kind of led to a process of reverse engineering, or going back and unpicking from a performance perspective. Like, 'okay, what is making this translation effective in performance? Why are, or aren't these words kind of sitting comfortably on my tongue? What could I --not improve, but like, what is making this be what it is and what is preventing it from being what it could be?'

**Aven:** What choices are being made and what choices could you make and how is that-- what is malleable and what isn't malleable in that text?

**Emma:** Yeah, no, I really like that particular point about like, what can be changed and what is fixed? Cause there are a fair few things that are very fixed. But I remember looking specifically at, I think it was something in the Cassandra scene in the Oresteia and-- [00:06:00] seeing the slaughterhouse metaphor in Cassandra's scene in Agamemnon, when she's at the gates of the palace and talks about the smell of the blood and the gore. And I remember the translation that I was looking at used the word 'abattoir'. And I had this moment of like,' what is that actually, what is the resonance there that I'm missing'? And going back and unweaving what that actually looked like. But yeah, it's always a really interesting process with theatrical translation because they go out of fashion so quickly? Or they kind of fade so quickly or something that is idiomatically comfortable for performers is such a brief window.

And like, translations from the 90s now don't really sit right with contemporary performers. They're not even-- maybe 'right' isn't the word, but translations from any prior decade and also translations by predominantly cis, straight, white men don't sit comfortably in every performer's mouth. And that's also something that I try to be [00:07:00] conscious of and try to kind of consciously unhook from in a lot of work that I do is-- particularly when working with actors, just to say like 'this text in itself is not the thing that is making this inaccessible or making this hard or making this feel like it's behind a gate and that it's not for you. The thing that is making this hard is the lens that you are being forced to view this through because the person that decided to transmit this to you, probably wasn't thinking about you performing this text'.

And the thing that I try to be conscious of, especially in work as a translator is to be aware of the lens that I am putting on the text. And as a dramaturg when working with actors to make everyone else very aware that this is very much a lens that you are viewing this through. And what my job is in the room is to give you a chance to kind of look beyond that lens and to find a more direct line to the text that is unmediated by a-- a [00:08:00] different old dead man than the playwright in question.

**Mark:** So do you continue to tweak your translation as you work with actors and when you kind of, hear what is landing and what isn't?

**Emma:** I do sometimes, yeah. My most recent experience with that, the full play translation that I've been working with most closely for the past couple of years is a full translation of Euripides' Bacchae, which most recently had a reading with the University of Chicago Rhetoric and Poetics Workshop in the fall of last year. And for that performance, I changed a few things and I've changed a few things in earlier readings and drafts.

When I was at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, my cohort was nice enough to read it for me and let me hear how it sounded. And I changed a few things for them, but it's a very fluid process because I like to keep the text like, a little bit fluid, just to make sure that every actor can have their say in their own speech [00:09:00] patterns. It won't be major changes every time, but I will make minor tweaks for individual performers. With some characters, not all of them. For Bacchae, there's not a whole lot that I usually change for characters like Cadmus because the balance of archaism and contemporary language that I have with them kind of suits those characters and those characters are a little bit more set. But with Dionysus, Pentheus, Agave and the Chorus, I am a little bit more flexible just because they're the ones that are in the madness.

And with Dionysus in particular, the way that I tried to render their idiom is a very kind of fourth wall-- not so much breaking, but sort of gently elbow nudging the fourth wall at all times. I think-- a dear friend of mine once described the way that I have characterized Dionysus as a cross between the Genie from Aladdin, Dexter, and a pride parade.

And I took it as a compliment. [00:10:00] I hope it was. But there is this sort of fluidity with time and place, and that lends itself to also a fluidity in the performer. So if the performer puts a spin on a line or changes up the order of the wording and, or maybe makes-- there's a few pop culture references in the text and I've had one or two performers kind of change up those references.

And that is fine. And I really try to let the performers have a say. In the last reading, our performer was named Sarah or Sam Saltiel, who's also a tabletop RPG designer. They and I had a really long conversation about like costuming and choices and a lot of the emphasis that I put on for her was 'you play this in the way that makes you feel most like yourself. You wear what feels like good gender for you. You behave in a way that feels like good gender for you. I don't want to put the emphasis on you having to be seductive or coy or otherworldly or [00:11:00] powerful. Like, you don't need to worry about that. You just need to worry about being yourself and being the you-est you in this space and then watching other people deny that or reject that and let that anger, that completely natural anger be the thing that is going to push you through this play'.

**Aven:** And for people listening we'll put a link to the recording of the most recent reading, because I saw it in the fall and Mark, I think you've just watched it recently and it is really good and interesting and worth checking out. So, we'll make sure people can see that.

**Emma:** Yeah, no, totally. Thank you so much. That play holds a very special place in my heart, unsurprisingly--

**Aven:** --mostly because it's just amazing. Sorry, I can't speak for you, why it holds a place in your heart, but like how it could not hold a special place in anyone's heart is beyond me. Cause it's just an amazing play.

**Mark:** It's already like, great source material. And it is so ripe for kind of rethinking through a sort of modern [00:12:00] perspective.

**Emma:** Yeah, no, definitely. And that's-- I've been working on a paper about this too, and that's something that is so important and resonant for me right now. And it is kind of where a lot of my different streams cross where both like, as a theater maker, considering how productions have rendered this play and how that kind of creates this feedback loop with the scholarship and with public perception, is that there becomes this sort of like, vicious ouroboros of reception because these plays are getting staged in some very particular ways.

And I always talk about Bacchae as a play full of bear traps for a production, for a director, for an artistic team and the biggest bear trap is rendering this play as kind of-- the archetypal image of one shirtless cis, like, vaguely androgynous man with just long enough hair to be edgy in very tight pants and like, a little bit of [00:13:00] body glitter, surrounded by a pile of writhing scantily clad women.

**Aven:** Yes, it's the Mick Jagger approach.

**Emma:** It is the Mick Jagger and there is-- literally in a production about three, four years ago, the reviewers described Dionysus as Mick Jagger. That comparison gets made constantly. Yeah.

**Aven:** Yeah. I've seen definitely a number when I was looking for versions to show classes a couple of years ago. And so just looking for what's on YouTube and so they were often like local productions that have been filmed or-- not the big ones because those weren't free on YouTube, but looking for smaller ones and I'd say three quarters, at least, of them had essentially that approach to Dionysus.

**Emma:** And it makes sense given kind of the history of the production of the play because it wasn't something-- there was a production in 1908 at the Royal Court Theatre in London with Lillah McCarthy. There's a scholar from the UK named [00:14:00] David Bullen, who has some really amazing work on that production in particular. But that was with the Gilbert Murray translation and it only lasted like a performance and a half. It did not go well, it was not fantastically reviewed.

But it did have a female actor playing Dionysus, which is interesting because that standard kind of doesn't get picked up a whole lot. And then you get-- the play only kind of really kicks back up in popularity in the late sixties, early seventies, when you get Richard Schechner and The Performance Group,and Richard Schechner doing 'Dionysus in '69'.

Which is a notoriously intense and weird-- just a lot of genitalia, just a lot of genitalia everywhere, a lot of blood, a lot of audience participation. It's half ritual, half performance art, half Fellini movie. But there is this kind of inextricable connection in the production history of Bacchae between the character of Dionysus and this kind of threatening and [00:15:00] aggressive sexuality.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Emma:** And sexuality and attractiveness and alluring and his-- and I use the word 'his' and I have a little bit of an argument with using he/him/his uncritically for Dionysus,-- that sexuality, that seductiveness being a weapon. And being something that is meant to be either off putting or remote because again, the Mick Jagger thing, it's the allure of the rockstar.

And it's a way to emotionally distance a character, is to make them unapproachable and seductive and attractive because then you don't actually have to think about their emotional life. And that's something that's very, very consistently done across the board with Dionysus in many productions because the kind of emotional heart of the play or the locus of pity and fear, if we're going Aristotelian here, is meant to be Pentheus and somewhat Agave, but usually Pentheus--

**Aven:** --Agave only [00:16:00] because once Pentheus is gone, there has to be another locus, right?

**Emma:** Yeah. And I will not argue with her being the secondary locus of pity and fear because I'm not a monster.

**Aven:** Yeah. There is no way to render that final scene-- well, almost final scene as-- you can't discount it. It's over the top with its pathos. Yeah.

**Emma:** No, the Chorus in my head that does the Cell Block Tango from Chicago for most of that play with the, 'he had it coming'-- that stops when Agave gets on stage.

And that's also part of the complexity with tackling this particular play is I do come from an angle, and my translations and my readings come from an angle that is conscious of and making space for the emotional life and the emotional experience of Dionysus, but by no means do I ever want that to tip over into sainthood or lionizing.

And that's a conversation that's been happening on Classics Twitter today about [00:17:00] there's really no point in trying to, with most tragedies, trying to pick someone who is right, and someone who is wrong.

**Aven:** Yeah. So this is such an odd-- and I mean, I basically blame Aristotle because I blame Aristotle for everything--

**Emma:** Look, fair.

**Aven:** --That's such an odd approach to Greek tragedy that like, find your hero and say why they're right. And they make one error, but otherwise they're the right person. Like, I can't think of a Greek tragedy where that answer is being given. It's a question. It's a good question to ask. It's like, it's an okay question to say 'is Bacchus in the right? Is Medea in the right? Is Jason in the right?'

You know, like it's an okay question to ask, 'is Clytemnestra in the right? Is Agamemnon in the right?', but if you think you have the answer, I don't think you read the play.

**Emma:** Yeah, that's something-- like, almost in that exact language is something that I talk about [00:18:00] with actors and production teams constantly when I'm working on tragedy is, if you go into this wanting an answer, you are going to give yourself and everyone else involved a headache.

Tragedy is never an answer. They are not plays where you are supposed to walk out and feel like you've figured something out. They are plays where you're supposed to walk out and have a lot more to think about. And I use the word 'supposed to' very loosely there because I'm not trying to put that purpose onto the text, but I think that is something, especially in contemporary performance, that can be very rich and useful, is treating these plays like a grounds for an argument or a forum in which points can be made rather than a means to an answer. I come from a Jewish background and I come from a tradition of questioning and argument and debate. And I think that that is the greatest way to express love and devotion for [00:19:00] a topic is to constantly question it. And if you really-- 'love' is a loose word-- but if you really care about a subject or if there is a lot of emotional, mental investment in a subject, the best thing you can do is just argue the living hell out of it.

And with tragedy, both on a macro scale of like, 'what is this supposed to be for right now? What are we supposed to do with these stories right now? How can these stories best be used to serve the community? Hmm, 'used' isn't the right word, because I do think that there is a tendency to kind of use the text as a bedrock, to just slap a message on top of that might not necessarily be honoring what's actually in the text.

**Aven:** Hm.

**Emma:** But what themes, what topics, what resonances are already there that can be brought out to best serve the community? Because I think there's a lot there and that's something that I talk about a lot-- again, to go back to Bacchae-- there's [00:20:00] a tradition-- or, not a tradition-- there's a trend recently of queering the classics, and this is good and valid and absolutely should happen.

And queer authors and queer performers should have platforms by which to take stories they might not necessarily think of as theirs and make them theirs. But on the other hand, how wonderful and beautiful to have to not enact queering on a text because the queer is there. The queer is just already there.

**Aven:** Yeah. Just take off the layers of straightening that have happened over the years.

**Emma:** So much, so many. The straightening, the cis-ening. And that operates across the board. Again, David Bullen, who's also the artistic director of By Jove Theatre is about to put up a like, digital installation work that is based purely on Orestes and Pylades and the dynamics there. The Oxford Greek Play recently was Euripides' Orestes and their take on the Orestes and Pylades relationship was also magnificent. And there's a lot, there's so much good queer [00:21:00] work to be done in tragedy that has a lot of good fertile soil to grow in. That queerness right now is something that I'm really focused on centering in Bacchae particularly because the way that the production history of that play has operated is that the queerness and the locus of sympathy is with Pentheus.

And there is so much focus on the psychology of Pentheus, the sexuality of Pentheus, Pentheus' gender, experience of gender. And that is again, good and valid and should be there, but they're ignoring the other queer body on the stage.

**Aven:** Right. Yeah.

**Emma:** And ignoring the other queer body on a stage that in a way that is very Othering and emotionally isolating, especially if you read the character of Dionysus, as I do, as gender nonconforming, nonbinary, genderqueer. And to put all of the emotional energy onto a character who is read as male and cis and [00:22:00] give all the focus to his trauma seems a little imbalanced to me.

**Mark:** One of the things that I noticed in your translation is that-- you know, English has developed this flexibility in terms of gender and sexuality that is maybe not so easy to express in Greek, for instance, at least directly. So, that must have given you a lot of opportunities to, to kind of utilize English's flexibility that has developed.

**Emma:** Yeah, no, definitely. And I try to be very conscious about pronoun choices and the ways in which characters refer to themselves. And it gets really interesting to kind of track how people refer to Dionysus throughout the play, and how Dionysus refers to themselves. With the way that the Greek operates, because the words that are used for Dionysus by themselves are relatively neutral. [00:23:00] They described, he describes himself as 'he' in the prologue, he describes what he's wearing. He describes that he is human or human-shaped for the purposes of the production. And the words that he uses to describe that are really, really fun. But there are very few aesthetic modifiers that he uses to describe his own appearance. Most of those come from Pentheus.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Emma:** Almost all of them come from Pentheus or the men in Pentheus' service, like the shepherd that brings Dionysus on bound and the messengers and even the Chorus when they talk about-- not necessarily the appearance of quote, 'The Stranger', because they don't know who that is, or they are explicitly saying that they don't know who that is, although it is a very fun choice to make in rehearsals of what do the Chorus know and I've seen some very fun and successful productions where they know exactly what's happening the whole time. Because then that makes their complicity at the end really interesting. And the way that the chorus goes quiet at the very, very end after this like, [00:24:00] one last violent explosion of ecstatic blood thirsty joy, and it makes it so much more impactful if they kind of knew the whole time what they were getting into.

But going back-- when the Chorus discusses the physical appearance of Dionysus, the things that they mention are long hair and flushed cheeks, and in very kind of neutral non-gendered language. Like, the language that they use to describe that hair is not the language of softness and luxury and demeaning, pejorative, effeminacy that Pentheus uses. And in translation, thinking about who is talking about who and in whose mouth are these words sitting is something that's always very important to me. Especially because a lot of the language that characters like Pentheus use against characters like Dionysus is a form of harm and a form of minor violence. And not that that completely justifies the not-minor [00:25:00] violence that will follow--

**Aven:** But it's real violence that needs to be expressed, I think.

**Emma:** Yeah. And there's a tendency when looking at this play to treat Dionysus' anger as disproportionate-- which it is, kind of. But it's not rootless.

**Aven:** I was going to say, an easy comparison that I don't see made very often is between him and Achilles in that Dionysus, like Achilles, is angry at being dishonored and everyone is mad at Achilles for taking his anger as far as he does, but nobody really-- unless I'm misremembering-- but I don't think in the Iliad and generally in the way people treat the Iliad-- the ancient world anyway, doesn't invalidate the anger in the first place. Everybody understands why Achilles is angry. Nobody disagrees with his right to be angry about it. He has [00:26:00] been disrespected in a way that everybody within the camp and within Greek literature, understand as like, 'yes, Agamemnon meant to disrespect him. He was disrespected and his kleos has been taken away and that's an important thing. And he should be angry about it.' Now, does he carry the anger too far? Do people die because of it? Yes. Dionysus is angry for reasons that I think to an ancient audience are totally explicable and completely reasonable.

**Emma:** Yeah.

**Aven:** The question is, how far do you take it and like Achilles, who is inhuman in his anger-- and that's the point that's made, of course, when he won't eat and all of that stuff--Dionysus is inhuman in his anger, but because Achilles is a human, he has to, in the end, give up his anger. Because Dionysus is not a human, he doesn't have to.

**Emma:** Well, I think that there's something-- I see those parallels and I hadn't thought about particularly the Achilles comparison before, and I really like that, but [00:27:00] I think, and this is my kind of bias showing through like, my personal read on this work. I think there is a difference between dishonor and loss of kleos and the loss of face and the level of kind of existential invalidation--

**Aven:** --right. Right, that Dionysus is being faced with.

**Emma:** Yeah. There's a very particular kind of erasure that can happen with non-binary or gender nonconforming people that isn't just, 'I don't agree with your lifestyle. I don't agree with what you're doing. I think what you're doing is wrong. I think who you are is incorrect' and it kind of broaches into this territory of 'you are not what you say you are. The version of you that you believe exists does not exist'.

**Aven:** Yeah. Not just that you aren't what you say you are, but you can't be because there is no such thing. Yeah, [00:28:00] yeah, no, that's totally fair.

I think you're right to point out that I'm making too broad a comparison there in the sense there are multiple things going-- you know, the standard story of Dionysus coming back and being disrespected is there in the Bacchae. Absolutely, like ' you aren't treating me like a God and I'm a God', but I think the play does more things with that and, and, and what you're bringing out is really important and true, which is-- of course it's true, but it's important to center that in a way that I kind of elided there, so the point of comparison really, is in both of them having valid reasons for anger.

And the question is simply about how far that anger goes, as opposed to, 'there's no reason for Dionysus to be angry'.

**Emma:** Absolutely. And that's really where that comparison holds fast. And I think-- and it's not necessarily perceived in the same way in the ancient world, but there is, I believe, when I work with performers and when I work [00:29:00] with directors, I see a lot of parallels between the kind of language that gets used around Dionysus' anger and Achilles' anger. And I see that discussion of anger applied to Clytemnestra.

**Aven:** Yes, absolutely. And Medea.

**Emma:** And Medea! I especially see it with the way that people talk about Clytemnestra killing Cassandra.

**Aven:** Right, right.

**Emma:** Because Medea is kind of--

**Aven:** --everyone understands why Medea has a point.

**Emma:** Everyone understands why Medea has a point. And that archetype, the image of what she does is so fixed in the culture, is so fixed in people's minds, that it is kind of-- not taken as a given, but it can be kind of swallowed and processed more easily by performers, but not everyone goes into the Oresteia knowing that Cassandra is also on the chopping block.

**Aven:** Right. And that it's Clytemenstra who's going to do it. Yeah.

**Emma:** Yeah. And it really [00:30:00] complicates this slightly 'rah-rah girlboss' energy that people try to apply to Clytemnestra as this kind of violent feminist paragon. And that gets really tough when she kills a woman who did nothing wrong.

**Aven:** Yeah. Who in fact is a victim of the same male entitlement that Clytemnestra is angry about.

**Emma:** Yeah. And again, you can't go into tragedy expecting anyone to be right about anything ever. Maybe Iphigenia if you really squint, but even Iphigenia--

**Aven:** Oh, yeah. A few of the victims kind of are right. But since they die, it's sort of like, 'but is the answer in the end that they were wrong because I mean, they lost'--

**Emma:** Polyxena! Polyxena did nothing wrong. We are allowed to uncritically look at Polyxena and that's it. In Bacchae--- it's just the cows, it's just the cows--

**Aven:** Poor calves ripped in half, what [00:31:00] did they ever do?

**Emma:** It's just the cattle, everyone else you have to be critical of, but those cows did nothing wrong.

**Aven:** One of the things about-- it's a small point, but one of the things about that portrayal of Dionysus that we're talking about, this Mick Jagger approach and of the Chorus, which is, you know, these go hand in hand, the Chorus is so often represented as wearing very little and just writhing around the stage and, you know, being all sexy. One of the things that has always driven me a little bit.-- Like made me a little annoyed about that is how very much it takes Pentheus' point of view.

**Emma:** Yes, yes. Yes.

**Aven:** Because-- and given yes, we can talk lots about the psychology of Pentheus and that also ends up making me a little grumpy, cause it gets all Freudian and weird and things.

But anyway, leaving that aside for a moment-- and then the questions of like, what age is Pentheus and all of those things-- but you know, Pentheus and the people in his employ, and in fact, most of the people that are employed do not, but Pentheus says that they're out there having sex and being sexy.

**Emma:** --and every [00:32:00] single time, someone in the play stands up-- someone in his service, it's Tiresias, it's Dionysus themself, stands up and goes 'Hmmm....no!'

**Aven:** Yeah. His messengers are like, "well, I didn't see any of that. I mean, I was looking for it, but I didn't see any."

**Emma:** "You said that they were all up there doing the nasty, but I didn't see that, sir!"

**Aven:** "And I was looking really hard--" but yeah. So you end up with these-- and you know, I've never seen this presented-- and it would be, I think on other ways, very ludicrous, but part of me kind of wants to see a Bacchae where Dionysus wears like, a three piece suit and is the straightest, most boring? I mean, you couldn't really, because that's not actually what the text says, but still-- where Pentheus is like, 'oh my God, they're having sex'. And all the women are like, veiled and chanting and holding hands and, and just, this is 'Pentheus, you are just--' I mean, it would be going too far because it turns him into this [00:33:00] pathological sex obsessed person. And that, I think, would do violence to Pentheus, but taking the other way and saying, 'Oh yeah, well-- Ooh, isn't it edgy to make them all sexy?' It's like, well, no. Now you're just buying into the idea that Pentheus is demonizing them and now it's true. And then it turns into Pentheus being justified in the things he's doing, because the people really are breaking all the social norms. So yeah.

**Emma:** Here's the thing is, I think you could. I think there is something in that staging that is not as ludicrous as you think it is. And a lot of it depends on the performers and on who we cast, because I think Dionysus in a three-piece suit looking very put together, if that is an actor who has a body that is going to be perceived as something other than cis and masculine--

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** --That becomes an act of transgression. That becomes an act of of binary-breaking, of gender [00:34:00] fuckery in itself. And I've seen and been in productions of Bacchae that play with that. I, in my experience as a performer, I played Dionysus. And did it in, you know, black slacks and a biker jacket.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** And did it with leaning sartorially very into the masculine elements. And I think there's absolutely a staging of this play that features a body that is not immediately perceived as masculine performing masculinity, much in the same way that the text kind of glosses a body that is predominantly perceived as masculine, performing femininity, right? In a way that something in Pentheus' brain that he doesn't like-- or that he does! And I do agree about like-- I don't want to do, as a performer and as a person who in invested in this text and as a scholar, I equally [00:35:00] don't want to do that violence to Pentheus by making him just this wildly irrational strawman.

And I think that's something that also really gets wrapped up with that question of age that you brought up. In my reading of this play and the reading of this play that I've had since college is that it is two very young, very angry people with more power than they know what to do with, who are trying to figure out how to best be themselves and violently crashing into each other.

Bacchae is so often characterized as like, Pentheus is this tiny, helpless, little mortal who just gets swamped by this wave of divinity. And he couldn't possibly do anything to stand against it. Whereas the way-- and I think there's something compelling there, but I think what's more compelling is this kind of binary star system. That like, these two personalities, these two ideals, these two [00:36:00] ways of being are crashing into each other and consuming each other. And that everybody-- everybody loses, I think, in Bacchae. And I don't, I never take the end of that play as an uncritical victory of Dionysus. And I never take that as 'well, the cult is established now and... cool!'

Cause he did --Pentheus is dead. Cadmus is exiled and a snake. Agave is exiled. There are no-- Dionysus has destroyed their own family in the process of winning. And I think that's something also that gets overlooked a lot and can be very much suppressed in favor of rampant sexualization of these characters is that they're family.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** This is, you know, to be a little twee about it, it is kissin' cousins.

**Aven:** Well, and it's a family drama, right? Like, you can write it as a family drama. Yeah. I think there's-- one of the things that happens a lot. And I think this comes out [00:37:00] well-- you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it comes to a certain degree from the sixties and seventies and early sort of-- and some types of homophobia and things like that-- is a conflation of gender queerness with sexual deviance.

Right? So what you get is a presentation of, 'oh, well, if the play tells us that Dionysus presents gender ambiguous, then that must mean they're all up there having rampant weird sex, because those things go together'. And also that's how we present gender ambiguity or gender queerness, we present it by showing people having sex with people we didn't think they'd have sex with. And that's how we know that their gender isn't the same as we thought it was. And yes, Pentheus thinks that being sexual, but nobody else does. But the text as a whole is quite happy to say there's some gender ambiguity there. That's not just Pentheus. But like, conflating those two, and also with the women. You know, the women are not being-- they're gender deviant in that they're outside of the [00:38:00] house and doing all those things, but they're not being presented as, the Chorus isn't being presented as particularly ambiguous in their gender identity, I don't think.

**Emma:** No, I am very much in favor of-- and I think it gets very complicated in terms of trying to apply contemporary labels to ancient people--

**Aven:** and I have another whole set of questions about that. We'll get to it.

**Emma:** Oh, yeah. It's really hard. It's hard and weird. Something that I try to be very wary of doing uncritically. I think the Chorus are going against their own gender norms in that they are outside.

**Aven:** Yeah. Not just of the home, but of the city. Yeah. Yeah.

**Emma:** They are outside of the city. They are kind of following a figure-- and this is where I think also a queer reading of Dionysus has a lot of power, because it complicates some of the ways that this play can be read that the chorus, are just kind of [00:39:00] trading in one male authority figure for another.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** The male authority figure of their husband, their brother whoever's the head of the household, is kind of uncritically swapped in for Dionysus, who is read unambiguously as male. But if you don't read Dionysus as male, then the chorus' act of rebellion actually becomes a lot more real and becomes a lot more on their own terms. And particularly if you kind of take the Pentheus glasses off and say they are participating in sexuality on their own terms, which is to say, maybe they're not.

Maybe they're choosing to not be sexual for once.

And the fact that like, sexual freedom or uninhibited expression of sexuality is immediately kind of wrapped in with all of these other forms of uninhibited expression. And like-- actually like Jeremy, Jeremy Swist was talking about in his [00:40:00] episode, that the forms of expression that are present in a Dionysian context, movement, song, dance, music, occasionally substances but not always, doesn't necessarily have to be immediately conflated with sexuality. It can be. It doesn't have to be. No, but I can, the gender identity of the chorus is something that's really interesting. And I, as a performer, as a director-- I don't direct very often-- but as a person that is involved in casting and has a say in casting, I'm very much in favor of choruses that are not necessarily just women. The way I like my Choruses is just... not cis men.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** Just everybody else. And anybody who is having an experience of gender that is different from completely 100% masculine from day one.

**Aven:** So let me turn to that question I have about [00:41:00] modern terminology. Okay, we can all, I think, agree that uncritically using modern terminology for the ancient world is-- I'm not gonna say it's wrong because I think there are times when it's appropriate, but you have to think about it because they do not just-- we can't just take the terms that we have right now. And anyway right now, the terms we have change every year, essentially, at this point, much less decade. So we can't just swap them out for ancient terms. Fine. One of the questions I have when we talk about like queerness in the Bacchae or-- the Bacchae is a particular place, but in other tragedy too, or sort of Greek myth, that I always want to think about is how we--not we, how you and people who are thinking very deeply about these questions, think about what 'queer' means, that is not necessarily 'queer' as just being an umbrella term for lesbian, [00:42:00] gay, bi, ace, or whatever, but as 'queer' as a non-normative 'queer' as a-- I'm sure you have better and more theorized terminology for it.

And I'll ask you to do that in a moment, because one of the things that I've been thinking about for a very long time is that, you know, in the ancient world straight is queer, right? Like, exclusive heterosexuality by a man is unusual, is non-normative, right? So when we look at say, something like the Bacchae, and we look at, Dionysus being presented as not entirely masculine, the question that can be raised is, is he being not presented as masculine or is he not presented as grown male, which-- adult masculine.

And is that in fact actually 'queer' and I'm not-- this is not a question I'm asking to 'gotcha' about, like 'it's not really queer after all'. [00:43:00] And so the point of the question, but you know, is Dionysus being presented as, or is it possible to read Dionysus not as queer within his own society, but as simply non-adult because being a beautiful, sexually attractive to other men, as well as women, youth is a normative state for men in the Greek world.

**Emma:** No, it's a really difficult thing with those labels because there is-- particularly when talking with contemporary performers and contemporary production teams about what those norms are that are being violated, what those norms are that are being gone against --especially and it's never, I haven't personally worked on a production that deals with these particular characters, but just because they're so deeply, profoundly in the popular consciousness right now, Achilles and Patroclus.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** You know, the Madeline Miller of it all means that they're in the [00:44:00] popular consciousness a lot, and kind of talking about how we perceive those characters as going against the norm or that there is some level of Othering that happens with them, but that within their own setup, it's not, it's not normative-- and I never want to take away from any kind of representation or being seen that somebody might feel from looking at this. And I think that that's-- honestly, this is kind of where I fall down on something that maybe goes a little bit against the ancient world. I think that it is a higher priority, in this moment in time, for somebody to feel seen and represented and to be able to have their own experience of a character than it is to be the person kicking down the door going 'well, actually'.

And if somebody needs to-- or not even needs to, but like, gets any ounce [00:45:00] of fulfillment or joy out of looking at a character, seeing themselves in that mythological figure and applying their own experience of oppression or rejection or any experience that they've had trying to be the person that they are in contemporary society. If they need to put that on somebody for whom that-- especially somebody fictional and mythological--

**Aven:** Yeah. The fictionality of it means that it's a much more wide open field than if they're trying to discuss Alexander or something.

**Emma:** Yeah, no, and I will leave Alexander to Meg Finlayson, who is tremendously talented. And I stick to, and I harp on this for strictly the fictional dead people.

I really think that this is a place where the scholarship can take a back seat, the head can take a back seat to the heart. And especially with theater, because the thing about drama and the thing about theater production is that it is, by its Dionysian nature, so changeable. And having been on the [00:46:00] other side, the same play done by the same performers with the same production team wearing the same costumes will be a different play every time you do it, right?

The same text, the same everything. Theater is so desperately ephemeral that there is a lot of room in theater for multiple choices to be made for all sorts of decisions, for all sorts of flexibility. In a hypothetical full Broadway musical of The Song of Achilles that I sincerely hope will exist in the coming 20-25 years--

**Aven:** yeah.

**Emma:** How people choose to read Achilles and Patroclus can change on the night. It can change for the actor. It can change for the director. There is so much room. And especially with ancient properties, stuff that is fully in the public domain. The authors whoever they may be, whoever they may or may not be in the case [00:47:00] of Homer, they're are so profoundly out of the picture and context is important and knowing the cultural soup in which these people lived is important. But we're here now and we can make these decisions and one person making a decision that might not 100% align with every piece of historical accuracy will not lessen the work. And I'm very much on the side of these stories are not fragile. These stories do not need saving or protecting. They are beautiful and they are worthwhile and they are good, but that is something that needs to be tried and tested and used rather than something that needs to be coddled.

**Mark:** And it certainly does raise the possibility of embracing that flexibility and very intentionally performing it differently on consecutive nights-- [00:48:00]

**Aven:** Yeah, yeah. Right.

**Mark:** And you can use the same actors and the same text, but the actors can bring something different to the way that they realize that.

**Emma:** Yeah. And the changes can be slight and there's different types of performers, and some performers like to get kind of locked in and then they just do what they do.

And then there are other types of performers. And when I put my actor hat on I like to be somebody that can let things change and can let a character have an arc, not only over the course of an individual play, you know, the two hours, two and a half that you're on stage, but over the course of a production run. If you're running a show for a few months, the character is not going to be the same at the beginning as it is at the end.

And I always like to leave room for that. And it's something that-- theater scholarship and doing work about theatrical productions is so difficult because you are, if it's not a show that you saw, you're working [00:49:00] from reviews. You're working from photos. You're working from behind the scenes. You're working from anecdotal evidence. You're working from a script. And as every scholar that works on tragedy-- not every but many scholars that work on tragedy will, you know, rise from the grave to scream, the text is not remotely the whole story.

And there is so much that goes into production. Thinking about ancient staging, thinking about contemporary staging, what we have on paper is a drop in the bucket of the experience of being in a theater with one of these texts. And that it is-- with contemporary staging, it is never just the voice of the playwright or the translator. It is the voice of the director. It's the voice of the artistic team. It's the voice of your set designer, your lighting designer, your stage manager, your sound designer, every actor. And there is-- and sorry, this is diverting from the ancient world for a moment, but this is another particular soap box that I have.

I believe that the way that contemporary theater or particularly contemporary theater [00:50:00] working with classical text severely undersells and undervalues its actors and the intellectual merit that actors can bring to their work. Growing up as a performer, growing up in, working on Shakespeare, being mentored in Shakespeare, there was a thing of 'You're so smart, but...'. Actors having their own opinions about text and actors being able to intellectually engage with text is seen as either abberant or actively unhelpful.

And I think that in order to create-- turning back to specifically the ancient world-- create stagings of tragedy and versions of these stories that are resonant and powerful and do good for the community and do good for the people that they are involved with and ask the questions that are so powerfully there in the [00:51:00] text, we have to include everyone in that process and allow all stages of production to have a voice and allow all stages of production to have access to the same amount of information. And yes, not everyone is going to be coming into that room with a comprehensive knowledge of the ancient world, but they can be given access to that information and be able to pull, you know, not directly from the source, but be able to pull as much information as they can from as far back as we can give them in order to make their own well-informed decisions about production.

**Mark:** It's interesting, you know, the very fact that you're working in translation gives you a kind of freedom that you wouldn't have with Shakespeare. As you say, if you start messing with the text of Shakespeare, you're very gonna quickly get some pushback in a way that you wouldn't when translating from an ancient Greek author.

Have you thought about [00:52:00] doing something where it isn't a translation and yet still mediating the text in some way?

**Emma:** I have a project idea that has been just bubbling away in the back of my head for about three or four years now that is something very much in that vein that I would like to do. There's a lost Aeschylus play from which we have a very few fragments called Semele and/or The Water Bearers, Hydrophoroi that is about the death of Semele and the birth of Dionysus.

And there is so little left of that play, but it is so interesting. And my little theatrical translator brain, my little playwright brain has been kind of poking and digging away at that for ages, about taking the little fragments that we have and building that out and doing something that is half a reconstruction, half original work, something that can kind of live within the structures that tragedy establishes, live on that scaffolding and play by [00:53:00] those syntactical rules and play by those rules of reference.

But through a contemporary lens and this was something that really started kind of kicking off in my head during the confirmation hearings for Brett Kavanaugh. Well, and it's cause it's a woman not being believed and it's about the really insidious power that doubt can have.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** And that there's something really sick about--

**Aven:** It's literally destructive, yeah.

**Emma:** --about watching a woman have doubt eat her from the inside out to the point where it literally destroys her. I think Semele as a figure kind of gets the short end of the mythological stick a lot of the time.

And I think that she gets the kind of Disney mom treatment of getting to be tragically dead in the background. And then we don't have to look at her and talk about her ever. And she does get-- I mean, there's the expression of like-- does the expression of being like, fridged--

**Aven:** [00:54:00] Yeah.

**Emma:** She gets fridged.

And I think she's one of the women of myth or non-men of myth that I would be very interested in exploring. Particularly in the context of, as you said, Mark, a text that doesn't necessarily 100% try to cleave to something original but uses something original as a jumping off point.

**Aven:** Oh, that'd be fascinating. I'd love to-- yeah, no, you're right, Semele-- like, even her doubt and revelation is sort of usurped by the Psyche narrative, Psyche and Cupid, where you have that same mechanism. But that story is more sort of fully fleshed because we have a fictional representation of that idea.

So that becomes a folk, a fairytale narrative and we get it elsewhere. So even that part of the story, which is the real heart of the emotional part of the story, we don't have. Maybe if Aeschylus' play had survived, we'd have a much bigger role for her in our pantheon of mythology, but you're right. [00:55:00] She doesn't get much time.

Well, and there's something interesting about the way she gets treated in the mythological record is that she goes from the fridge to the kind of damsel in distress because Dionysus goes down to the underworld to get her.

Yeah. Some of the stories, yeah. Yeah.

**Emma:** In some versions. That's --assume anything I say ever about any mythological record has that asterisk next to it.

**Aven:** The multiplicity of the stories about her are part of what makes it harder to see the emotional story behind it, because there's so many different parts of her story that are really part of somebody else's story.

**Emma:** Yeah. And she gets kind of weirdly wrapped up with Ariadne and this kind of underworld rescue narrative of a femme person in Dionysus' life gets kind of shared between the two of them. And then it leads to this apotheosis. I would be very interested to explore Semele on her own terms and on her own grounds because-- every woman in that [00:56:00] family!

Like, I would kill for like a-- and this is going to be one of those situations where in 10 years I lose it and I'm like, 'okay, fine. I'll do it myself.'-- I would kill for a series of one-acts that is just every daughter of Cadmus, in order of their tragedies. So like you've got Autonoe first, losing Actaeon, and then you've got-- and it's weird because like, in order for Agave's tragedy to happen in the way that it does, Ino's can't because the reason that Ino is punished and Athamas and Ino are both kind of driven mad, comma into the sea, comma into becoming a goddess, is because she was raising baby Dionysus and that can't be canon in order for Agave's stuff to go down.

**Aven:** Yeah, you can't put all of the parts of the story together. They simply don't work, but that's--

**Emma:** --or you can, and then you kind of textually look directly into the camera and go, 'I know this doesn't make any sense, roll with me'. But yeah, you [00:57:00] go from Autonoe to Semele to Ino and Agave. Like, you just do every woman of that family. And the ways in which they--

**Aven:** I mean, not to mention Europa, not to mention even Harmonia, who just marries in--

**Emma:** --Who then also gets snake'd!

**Aven:** --And then leaves her necklace so that the next generation of Thebans can use it too. And then you get the next generation of Thebans and their disaster.

**Emma:** Yeah. And then we go to intermission and then we come back and we do Jocasta. And Jocasta gets her whole own thing. And then we go to intermission again.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Emma:** Yeah.

**Aven:** Just-- nobody ever tells the Ismene story. I want to know what happens to Ismene after Antigone is dead and everybody else is dead. And then Ismene is just left there having done the right thing and having suffered, maybe not the same, but everything has gone disastrously for her anyway. And she doesn't even [00:58:00] have the self-righteousness that Antigone got to--

**Emma:** No, I need the like, 'Ismene Survivor's Guilt: The Musical'. There's something always just so fascinating to me specifically about the House of Cadmus.

Because there is-- the House of Atreus and the House of Atreus' violence feels very pointed and directional. It feels like dominoes. It feels like violence begets violence, begets violence, begets violence, and then we stop.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** We have, you know, cannibalism and murder, cannibalism and murder, and which-- I don't mean to dismiss the gravity of cannibalism.

**Aven:** No, I know what you mean. Like it's, you know, what is the point of the story? The point of the story is that when you do these things, they keep resonating until everybody's dead or until somebody stops it. You can't-- the cycle does continue.

**Emma:** Yeah, but the thing about the House of Cadmus is that, like, not every change or major event that is wrought in that family is [00:59:00] necessarily violent or bad, it's just change.

The metaphor that I like to view it through is-- there's a movie that came out a few years ago that was based off of a very good book series, Annihilation, which is a very trippy scifi movie about a group of specifically female scientists that go into this kind of, force field, bubble, portion of land that has been taken over by this alien ...consciousness... thing called The Shimmer.

And that within that lens, things are changing and mutating and evolving really, really fast and in really, really weird ways.

Right.

And that leads to these kinds of abominations, like a zombie bear that can mimic the voices of people it's killed. But also these really beautiful like, plant formations and there's these amazing deer and there's all these really kind of hauntingly beautiful ways that things change. [01:00:00] And that's something always makes me think of the way that the House of Cadmus operates, is that it is suffused with so much change and this kind of mutative energy that isn't always violent and destructive, but can be beautiful and terrible in the same breath.

And this kind of gets wrapped into-- I think it's Froma Zeitlin that talks about Thebes as the anti Athens.

**Aven:** Yeah.

**Emma:** That like, Thebes is a place where the issues that there is Athenian anxiety about can be unresolved--

**Aven:** Explored at least, yeah.

**Emma:** And it's particularly interesting because like, we get this kind of typified in Oedipus and Jocasta, in that this is an act that is not violent. This is an aberration, a change, a mutation or change that is not blood and destruction, but that has equal [01:01:00] ramifications to a murder.

And it also comes with a murder because it comes with a patricide.

**Aven:** And that's true because the relationship of Oedipus and Jocasta, even in Sophocles and elsewhere where it's treated as, you know, the abomination that incest is, is never, or at least very rarely, portrayed as hateful or violent, like even after the revelation. You think about Statius--

**Emma:** --yeah! They're functional as a couple.

**Aven:** Well and they cared about one another. Like, Jocasta is horrified in Oedipus and kills herself, but not because she now hates Oedipus or not because Oedipus raped her in the beginning or anything like that. It's all-- if you get all structuralist about it, it's affection taken too far rather than hatred. So all of those things-- they're problems but they're not figured as the same kind of violence. That's a really interesting point.

**Emma:** And to bring us full circle back to Bacchae, this is something that I always see very strongly in the way that Pentheus dies. And [01:02:00] particularly a scene about which I have many feelings, which is Pentheus' costume change, Pentheus' dressing up as a woman-- which if I ever see another production that plays it for comedy, I'll scream.

**Aven:** Yeah, for sure.

**Emma:** But there is this combination of beauty and terror and this combination of something very, very good with something very, very bad. And I think that that method of death and that experience that Pentheus is having in that moment is this archetypal expression of the way that the House of Cadmus deals with itself, which is, you know, softness and sharpness in the same breath.

Because I think that the experience that Pentheus has of a gender that isn't the one that he's used to is something that could be so beautiful and healing and could be just a joyous celebration. In any other play, in any other moment, maybe, you [01:03:00] know, in a different life, in an alternate reality, Dionysus giving Pentheus this experience could be something really beautiful.

And it is, for a moment. I mean, Pentheus has a moment of feeling good and liking how he looks and enjoying being able to have this experience. And there is something holy about that. And especially because he's also having-- you know, he's seeing double, he's seeing the bull horns, he's having this moment of spiritual closeness.

**Aven:** An ecstatic experience.

**Emma:** Yeah, a really ecstatic religious experience. And if we stopped there, this would be incredible. And this would be something that maybe he could-- in a different life, in a different world-- integrate into his own life and process and become a different person and become maybe a person who doesn't have as much anger and who can live a life where he's more himself. Obviously, in a different society than the one that he lives in, [01:04:00] because that wouldn't work.

But this is still the House of Cadmus.

**Aven:** Yeah. It's in the service--

**Emma:** --of something so, so terrible. The way that I talk about that moment with actors when I've done readings like this, I kind of take the actors who play Dionysus and Pentheus aside.

And I talk about-- the way that I always visualize that, is that-- a very kind of visceral, physical metaphor is Dionysus like, taking out a silk scarf that Pentheus has like, jammed down in his pocket for years and years and years, and just kept at the bottom there.

And they take it out and they hold it up to the light and they say, 'this is so beautiful. Why did you keep this locked away? This would look so pretty on you.' And then strangling him with it.

There's a lot of heartbreak in that play, but that's one of the biggest heartbreaks of that play for me, is the fact that something that could be so good for both parties is used in anger.[01:05:00]

And particularly that an experience of queerness is used in anger and an experience of gender is used for violence, which is very depressing. But really wonderfully resonant because it also, it means that we can't make any of the queer characters in this play, and I include all of them, nobody gets to be just the tragic martyr role model.

**Aven:** Right.

**Emma:** And that's also tremendously liberating for queer performers who so often-- if there are queer characters in a text, their job is to either be Othered to the point of not being able to identify with them emotionally or that they are just supposed to suffer prettily and nobly, and to take their suffering and to do nothing with it.

And to have a play like this, where a queer character can suffer and feel rejected and alone and angered and dishonored and isolated and not take that well [01:06:00] is actually tremendously like, fun and cool and liberating to not have to be a saint.

**Aven:** Well, and that's the important distinction between using fiction as a way to think and feel and understand these roles, between that and saying that fiction is giving you role models. Right? To say that, it's not to say this is teaching someone how to take their anger and turn it into violence and that that is the right thing to do. It is to say that being able to see that there are other ways that this works in different contexts. It doesn't mean that that's what you've decided you're going to do, but it doesn't mean that you get to explore the full range of what that emotional state might be in a way that other people have been able to do in fiction forever. And not everyone has had the chance to do that.

**Emma:** Cue me, shaking my fist at Plato.

**Aven:** Always, I'm always there to shake my fist at Plato.

**Emma:** One fist is shaking at [01:07:00] Aristotle, one fist is shaking at Plato because I don't think either of them are right. And one of the reasons why I love these stories so much as a performer, as a translator, as a scholar, as somebody who wants to enlist other performers, is that I believe with a translation that acknowledges the humanity in both the performer and the text itself and the wide applicability of that humanity, that kind of being a body and a voice and a soul that can walk through these stories rather than just being on the outside of them can be such a tremendously, not always-- not joyous, I mean, it's not meant to just be a positive experience. And this is kind of why I disagree with the theory of catharsis, is because I don't think that people necessarily walk out of these stories feeling wholly purged. But I think it's a really good way to trouble the waters just enough and to allow for processing on this [01:08:00] truly grand massive scale.

Like I said at the very beginning, everyone in these stories is operating at 150% of their emotional capacity, every moment that they are on. Right. And that for performers and audience, that can be so good to see our little stories and to see lives that we perceive as insignificant in the grand scheme of things blown up and writ large. And the experience that I have had with this play is something that's been really good and useful for me as a person. And I think that that's something that can apply across the board-- except for Rhesus. I don't think anybody's getting anything out of Rhesus.

**Aven:** It's tragedy. Yeah, no, that's fair. Look, not every single thing that survives from antiquity is a gem. Most of them are, but not everything is--

**Emma:** But that's also kind of the joy of it, is that some of it is weird and stupid! And I think there's also room [01:09:00] for things to be weird and stupid and that they are valuable because they are weird and stupid. That is one of the reasons that I love Iphigenia Among the Taurians so much. It is a bonkers play. But like genuinely, I think that that can be really useful in accessibility and kind of opening these texts up, is if we stop thinking of them as sacred and untouchable.

**Aven:** Yeah. And sometimes they don't have to be deep, sometimes they're just really silly.

**Emma:** Yeah. In the case of Iphigenia, sometimes it's a heist. Sometimes it's a heist where one of the main plot points is that Iphigenia goes to the king and says, 'okay, everybody has to turn around and close their eyes and I'm going to walk away'. And she does. And it works.

**Aven:** Well, I think that is a great place to leave it for now. So your translation of the Bacchae exists online and I will leave a link, you're heading off [01:10:00] to grad school now--to more grad school--

**Emma:** --never ending loop of grad school. Yes, I will be starting in the fall with the University of Chicago's MAPH program. So I'll be getting a one-year Masters in the humanities focusing in Classics. Obviously, it would be a shame if I was suddenly pivoting. And yeah, and my translation of the seventh Homeric Hymn to Dionysus just dropped last Friday and I can provide a link to that as well.

It's with Ancient Exchanges, which is a journal out of the University of Iowa and they've been super lovely. And yeah, I'm slowly working on a translation of Prometheus Bound because I have a lot of feelings about that play too.

**Aven:** There's a lot of things to have feelings about in that play.

**Emma:** There is a lot of feelings to have about that play, particularly Io. And I have a lot of feelings about Io and embodiment, but that is another podcast--

**Aven:** --we'll come back when you can, when you put that out into the world.

Well, I mean, that's more than enough on [01:11:00] your plate given what you're heading into, I think. Would you like to tell people where they can find you if they want to continue this conversation?

**Emma:** Yes. So you can find me on Twitter @EmmaPauly8, 'E-M-M-A-P-A-U-L-Y, the number eight, because apparently somebody else already had my name on Twitter.

And you can actually, and this is also a method that I use to communicate fairly frequently, you can find me on Instagram @academicmaenad -- Thank you. Yes. I'm particularly proud of that one. But yeah, those are the two best places to find me. I am very responsive and always happy to chat theater, queer, queer-theater, theater-theater, queer-queer, and anything in between.

And I also talk about Dungeons and Dragons more than is probably helpful.

**Mark:** I don't know. I think that's always pretty helpful.

**Aven:** I'm sure that's a selling point for at least some members of our audience.

**Emma:** Oh, I'm sure. But yeah, no, thank you guys so much for having me on.

**Aven:** Oh, thank you. This has been really fascinating and I wish you all the luck in the next stage of your program.[01:12:00]

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**Mark:** Bye