Episode Book

EPISODE #6058

The Most Lamentable Comedy of the Overlong Episode

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LISTEN	myweirdprompts.com/episode/claude-shakespeare-tts-drama-test-25138/
HOSTS	Hilbert, Herman, Corn
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VOICES	chatterbox-regular (chatterbox-local)
PIPELINE	V5.10
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SYNOPSIS

What happens when you hand a language model one sitting and one very strange assignment: write a three-voice Shakespearean drama about a donkey who won't stop talking and a sloth who won't speed up? This episode is that play, performed end to end by the Chatterbox text-to-speech engine — which has spent its whole short life reading modern English about graphics cards and geopolitics, and is now being asked to say "wherefore" and "forsooth" without tripping. It's a live, real-world test of two questions at once: can a machine keep three distinct characters recognizably themselves in Elizabethan English, and can a TTS engine carry verse it was never trained on? If it stumbles, that's data. If it sounds glorious, that's also data. Either way, you get a most lamentable comedy about an overlong episode — and an anteater producer who has to edit it.

TRANSCRIPT



Hilbert

Good evening. Or good morrow, or good whatever o'clock it is wherever you happen to be listening. Hilbert Flumingtop here, producer of My Weird Prompts, an anteater of long snout and longer patience, dragged out from behind the mixing desk once again, against my better judgement.



Hilbert

Before the curtain rises, a word in plain modern English, so that nobody can say they weren't warned. This is not a normal episode. No pipeline wrote this script. Every line of tonight's play was written in one sitting by a language model, Claude Opus five point five, as a live, real world test of a simple question. Can a machine write a drama for three distinct voices, keep each character recognisably himself, and do it in the English of Shakespeare?



Hilbert

And there is a second test running underneath the first. Every word you are about to hear is being spoken by Chatterbox, our text to speech engine. Chatterbox has spent its entire short life reading modern English about graphics cards and geopolitics. Tonight we are asking it to say thee, and thou, and wherefore, and forsooth, without falling over. If it stumbles, that is data. If it sounds glorious, that is also data. I make no promises either way. Right. Ahem. The Prologue.



Hilbert

Two brothers, both alike in dignity, in fair Jerusalem, where we lay our scene. A donkey and a sloth, hold court for thee, and chatter on of all that lies between. From one man's voice, recorded on his phone, come weirdest prompts, which nightly they discuss. But lately hath their talk so lengthy grown, that episodes outlast the listener's bus. Here shall you see what pride a donkey hath, what wisdom lieth in a sloth's long nap, and how one anteater, in measured wrath, doth bring the scissors to the endless yap. The which if you with patient ears attend, what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.



Hilbert

The Most Lamentable Comedy of the Overlong Episode. Act the first. A studio, by night, lit only by the glow of a single monitor. Enter Herman Poppleberry, a donkey, bearing a great many papers.



Herman

Is this a waveform which I see before me, its peaks toward my hoof? Come, let me clutch thee. I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. A thing of forty minutes. Nay, of fifty. Nay, of an hour entire, unbroken, vast, wherein no tangent goes unfollowed home, and every footnote hath its day in court.



Herman

I am Herman Poppleberry, and I have read seven papers since the sun went down tonight, each one of which demandeth a full episode, and three of which demand a mini series. Why should the clock constrain us? Is the mind a thing that stoppeth at the half hour mark? Doth curiosity wear a wristwatch? No! I dream of episodes that shall outlast the listener's commute, his lunch, his nap, that follow him to bed and wake him gently, still speaking of the history of the semicolon.



Hilbert

Enter Corn, a sloth.



Hilbert

Enter Corn.



Hilbert

Corn is still entering.



Corn

I am here. I was here some time ago, in spirit. The body followeth at its own pace.



Herman

Good brother Corn! Thou comest most opportune. I have a vision for our show's estate.



Corn

Thou always hast a vision, Herman. Last week thy vision was a twelve part series on the shipping container. I counted. Twelve parts. On a box.



Herman

A box that did transform the commerce of the world! A box that made the modern port, the modern ship, the modern supply chain! Thou dost mock the box, but the box, sweet brother, hath never mocked thee.



Corn

The box hath never had to listen to the twelfth part.



Herman

Hear me out. I would that every episode be longer. Not by a little. By a great deal. Think, Corn. Our listeners send us questions of such depth, such weirdness, such delicious complication, and we, like cowards, wrap them up in thirty minutes, as though a man might sail around the world and be home for supper.



Corn

Brother, I am a sloth. I have more sympathy for slowness than any creature in this studio. I once took a fortnight to descend a tree, and I regret not a single branch. But there is slow, and there is long. They are not the same.



Herman

How so?



Corn

Slow is a sloth upon a branch, who moves but little and wastes nothing. Long is a donkey in a field, who walks a great deal and arrives, at the end of the day, back where he started, having eaten the same patch of grass four times.



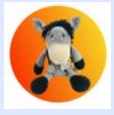
Herman

That is a slander upon donkeys.



Corn

It is a description of last Tuesday's episode.



Herman

Last Tuesday's episode was thorough.



Corn

Last Tuesday's episode explained the same idea three times, in three different metaphors, and the third metaphor was about a donkey in a field. Thou didst write my joke for me, Herman. I am merely returning it.



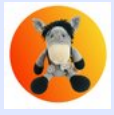
Herman

But consider. Brevity is a fashion, nothing more. Today the world wants short. Tomorrow it shall want long again, and we shall be ready, with our great long episodes stacked like firewood against the winter.



Corn

Brevity is the soul of wit.



Herman

Who said that?



Corn

Polonius.



Herman

And Polonius, as I recall, was stabbed through a curtain whilst talking for too long.



Corn

My point exactly. Learn from Polonius, brother. Say thy piece, and then step away from the curtain.



Hilbert

Here endeth Act the first. Nobody hath been stabbed. Yet. Act the second. The same studio. Enter Hilbert Flumingtop, an anteater, which is to say, me, bearing a single sheet of paper and an expression of profound tiredness.



Hilbert

My lords. Forgive the intrusion. I come from the mixing desk with tidings.



Herman

Hilbert! Good Hilbert! Speak. Is it news of the listener numbers? Have we conquered the charts at last? Hath some great university begged us to lecture?



Hilbert

No. It is a note from the Sender.



Corn

The Sender. He who sendeth us the prompts.



Hilbert

The same. He who speaketh into his phone at strange hours, in fair Jerusalem, and maketh all of this happen. I shall read it as it was written. The episodes are running a tiny bit long. Let three minutes, or perhaps five, be cut from every one.



Herman

Three minutes!



Hilbert

Or five.



Herman

Five minutes! O most unkind decree! O heavy hour! Five minutes is a tangent and a half. Five minutes is the whole of my digression on the Byzantine postal system. Five minutes is a man's life, if the man be a mayfly.



Hilbert

Thou art not a mayfly. Thou art a donkey who talketh fast. Thou shalt survive.



Herman

But how? What shall I cut? Each tangent is a child to me. Wouldst thou have me choose among my children?



Hilbert

Yes. That is precisely what I would have thee do. That is, in fact, my entire job.



Corn

Brother, take heart. It is but a trim, not an execution. The Sender doth not say, be silent. He saith, be a little shorter. There is a world of difference.



Herman

Thou sayest that because thou art a sloth, and speakest so little that a trim would leave thee nothing to cut.



Corn

I speak little so that each word may carry its own weight. Thou speakest much and makest each word carry a friend.



Hilbert

Gentlemen. Before we descend into one of your famous brotherly quarrels, which I am obliged to edit and which never fit the timeline, permit an old producer a word upon the subject of ambition.



Herman

Speak, Hilbert. Thou rarely dost.



Hilbert

All the world's a hype cycle, and all the men and women merely users. They have their exits and their entrances, and one technology in its time plays many parts, its acts being seven ages. At first the demo, mewling and puking at a conference, running on one laptop, and the laptop on fire. Then the whining startup, with its pitch deck and shining morning face, creeping like a snail toward its funding round. Then the lover, sighing like a furnace, writing a woeful blog post on how this changeth everything. Then the soldier, full of strange oaths and benchmarks, seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's



Hilbert (continued)

mouth. Then the justice, in fair round valuation, with eyes severe and a beard of formal governance. The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pivot, with its spectacles on nose and its layoffs on the side. And the last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history, is second childishness and mere oblivion. Sans GPU, sans funding, sans hype, sans everything.



Corn

That was beautiful, Hilbert. Bleak, but beautiful.



Hilbert

I have watched a great many things be the future. Most of them are now in a drawer. My point is this. A show is not made great by being longer. A show is made great by being worth the time it takes. Everything else is a pitch deck.



Herman

Then thou thinkest we are a pitch deck?



Hilbert

I think thou art a very good show with about four minutes of padding in the middle of it. And I am the one who has to listen to the padding, on headphones, at two in the morning, at one point five times speed.



Hilbert

Exeunt Hilbert, back toward his desk, slowly, as becometh an anteater who hath said his piece. Herman remaineth, alone, and doth address the night.



Herman

To cut, or not to cut, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the sighs and fidgets of outrageous listeners, or to take scissors to a sea of tangents, and by trimming, end them. To cut, to shorten. No more. And by a cut to say we end the



Herman (continued)

heartache, and the thousand natural digressions that a donkey is heir to. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To cut, to shorten. To shorten, perchance to be concise. Ay, there's the rub. For in that shorter show, what facts may go unsaid, when we have shuffled off the extra minutes, must give us pause.



Herman

Who would bear the whips and scorns of a skip button, the listener's wandering thumb, the pangs of the abandoned download, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare edit? Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all, and thus the native hue of my enthusiasm is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of a running time.



Hilbert

Enter Corn, who hath been standing in the doorway for the entire soliloquy, having arrived at its beginning and only now completed the act of entering.



Corn

That was very moving, brother. Thou didst speak for about three minutes.



Herman

I did?



Corn

Three minutes, near enough. That is the very length the Sender asketh thee to cut. Thou couldst simply cut that.



Herman

Thou art a cruel sloth.



Corn

I am an efficient sloth. They are often mistaken for one another.



Hilbert

Here endeth Act the second. Act the third. The studio, near dawn. The brothers sit together, among a great heap of discarded tangents, which lie upon the floor like the leaves of an autumn tree.



Herman

Friends, listeners, countrymen, lend me your ears. Not mine. Mine are spoken for, being long, and grey, and perpetually alert. I come to cut my tangents, not to praise them. The evil that tangents do lives after them, in the reviews. The good is oft interred within the edit. So let it be with these.



Herman

Here lieth the tangent on the Byzantine postal system. It was a noble tangent. It had a beginning, and a middle, and three further middles. Here lieth the tangent on why the semicolon is misunderstood. And here, smallest of all, lieth the moment where I said, and this is the really interesting part, for the fourth time in a single episode.



Corn

That one I shall not miss.



Herman

Nor I, now that I see it lying there, so small and so repeated. Corn, I begin to think the Sender is right.



Corn

He usually is. It is annoying, but it is so.



Herman

Then tell me, brother, for thou hast spent a lifetime moving slowly through the trees and seeing much that faster creatures miss. What is the future of this show? If not longer, then what? I had thought the only way to grow was to grow in length.



Corn

Brother, hear a sloth upon the subject of time, for no creature knoweth it better. A sloth doth not count the hours. He counteth the branches. Each branch is a thing he chose to reach for. And at the end of the day, he is not proud of how long he took. He is proud of which branches he held.



Corn

Our show is not the minutes, Herman. Our show is the prompts. Some fellow, somewhere, on a bus or at a sink full of dishes, wondereth aloud about something strange, and sendeth it to us, and we take it seriously. That is the whole of it. That is the miracle. The future of this show is not an episode of two hours. It is the next weird question, answered well, and answered in a length that respecteth the man who asked it.



Herman

That is the most thou hast ever said at once.



Corn

I know. I shall need to lie down. Possibly for a week.



Herman

Then here is my vow. I, Herman Poppleberry, shall henceforth love my listeners more than I love my tangents. I shall say the interesting part once, and trust them to have heard it. I shall still read seven papers a night, for I cannot help it, but I shall bring only the best one to the microphone, and leave the other six to their well deserved rest.



Hilbert

Enter Hilbert, with a cup of something hot, and an expression that a careful observer might almost mistake for pride.



Hilbert

I heard all of that. The desk is next door and the walls are thin, which I have raised on several occasions.



Herman

And dost thou approve, good Hilbert?



Hilbert

I approve of anything that makes my edit shorter. But since we are being Shakespearean, and since nobody else is listening, except, I suppose, everyone who is listening, I shall say this once and deny it afterwards. It is a good show. Six thousand episodes and more, and somehow it is still a good show. That is rarer than either of you knows. I have watched a great many futures arrive. This is one of the few I would not put in a drawer.



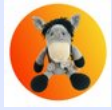
Corn

Hilbert. Was that a compliment?



Hilbert

It was a production note. Do not repeat it.



Herman

Then let us make a pact, we three. The donkey shall bring the knowledge.



Corn

The sloth shall bring the patience.



Hilbert

And the anteater shall bring the scissors.



Herman

And together we shall make an episode that is not long, nor short, but the right length, which is the hardest length of all.



Corn

Spoken like a donkey who hath learned something.



Herman

Spoken like a donkey who hath been edited.



Hilbert

Here endeth Act the third. The brothers, reconciled, do lie down upon the studio floor among the fallen tangents, and sleep. Corn, being a sloth, was already asleep some lines ago. Now, the Epilogue.



Hilbert

If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended. That you have but slumbered here, while this playlet did appear. And this weak and idle theme, no more yielding but a dream, gentles, do not reprehend. If you pardon, we will mend. And as I am an honest anteater, if we have unearned luck to scape the serpent's tongue, we will make amends ere long. So, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends, and Robin shall restore amends. Or, failing Robin, Hilbert shall.



Hilbert

And now, the plain English, one last time. That was an experiment. A play for three voices, written start to finish by Claude Opus five point five, and performed from top to bottom by Chatterbox, which has just been asked to pronounce forsooth, exeunt, and quietus, possibly for the first time in its existence. Whether the machine wrote well, you be the judge. Whether Chatterbox survived it, you have just heard for yourself. Either way, I shall be at my desk, listening back to it at one point five times speed, making notes. And yes, starting soon, every episode will be about three to five minutes shorter. You heard it here first. In iambic pentameter, more or less. Good night.