

Shmanners 463: Hoop Skirts

Published July 9th, 2025

[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear!

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: I'm okay. I'm hanging in there. I think that... I think I like summer now.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: Yeah, I'm gonna say it.

Travis: Okay. I still don't.

Teresa: I don't like to go *outside*. But I think that I like summer.

Travis: Okay. But outside is where it's most summer.

Teresa: No. No. [chuckles]

Travis: You're saying you like the inside.

Teresa: Yes. [laughs]

Travis: Where it's environmentally controlled.

Teresa: [through laughter] Yes. But I like looking at summer.

Travis: Okay...

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: I could Google you pictures of summer. You're a regular Olaf.

Teresa: [giggles] Well, we had some really good rain, and we had some heat. And it's nice to look outside, and see the green grass, and hear the birds, and...

Travis: That's spring. What you're describing is spring!

Teresa: [laughs heartily] Maybe you're right.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I think that you have Stockholm Syndrome with summer. I think you just like whatever time it is.

Teresa: [laughter continues]

Travis: You're easygoing...

Teresa: There was a while there where it was *oppressively* hot. Maybe it's the contrast. It was oppressively hot here for, like, a week. And it felt like yogurt outside. [chuckles]

Travis: Yes, it did. Hot yogurt.

Teresa: [laughs] And now, it doesn't feel quite like that. So I'm like, "This is okay!"

Travis: I think that anything above when I can wear one of my cool jackets...

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: ... is too warm. There's, like, a month in spring and a month in summer.

Teresa: What's your perfect date?

Travis: January 18— No, um...

Teresa: [giggles] April 23rd, I think, is what she says.

Travis: Oh, what's that— Is it from— What movie is that?

Teresa: That's from *Parks and Rec*.

Travis: "Your perfect date."

Teresa: "Your perfect date. Describe your perfect date." And then she goes and talks about April 23rd, because it's not too hot, and you can wear a nice, light jacket.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It's when April joins the, um...

Travis: The beauty pageant.

Teresa: ... the beauty pageant.

Travis: Right. Right, right, right.

Teresa: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: Is any of this what we're talking about today?

Teresa: No, it's not. [laughs]

Travis: Is it even close?

Teresa: No, not really. [laughs heartily]

Travis: Ah! Ah, beans!

Teresa: Gotcha!

Travis: Okay. What *are* we talking about?

Teresa: We are talking about hoop skirts!

Travis: Hoop... skirts!

Teresa: The history of hoop skirts. 500 years of loving big butts.

Travis: But not... How come there were never square skirts?

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: Hi, I'm Travis McElroy, coming to you live from my podcast office.

Teresa: You know, there is an iteration...

Travis: Triangle skirts.

Teresa: No— Rectangle, really.

Travis: What?

Teresa: So it was where they were more wide, this way – I'm gesturing out to the side. Then, they were deep from the front to the back.

Travis: Oh, okay. Yeah, I'm picturing—

Teresa: You know what I mean? So it was a rectangle.

Travis: Yeah. Yes.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: But never, like—

Teresa: Think Marie Antoinette.

Travis: Yes, that's what I was picturing.

Teresa: Yes. Yes.

Travis: But they never went with, like, octagon. Or...

Teresa: No. 'Cause it's generally easier to make things in a circle.

Travis: Oh. [sarcastically] And easy is why the hoop skirt exists?

Teresa: [laughs heartily] I mean, kind of! Kind of.

Travis: Okay. Now, I need to hear about it.

Teresa: Okay. So there's a couple of levels, like Pokémon... what do you call 'em?

Travis: I'm not gonna help you with this.

Teresa: Evolutions.

Travis: There it is. Got it.

Teresa: There it is. Pokémon evolutions of what we think of as, like, a hoop skirt or a big skirt. So we've got bustle.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: We've got crinoline, and we've got hoop skirt, and bum roll.

Travis: That sounds like something from *Bluey*.

Teresa: It does, doesn't it?

Travis: Yeah. Now, I'm also, for some reason, picturing a poodle skirt. But that's poofed out from layers and layers, right?

Teresa: Yeah. That's a petticoat, yeah. You put a petticoat underneath that. Which, I mean, is often interchanged with a crinoline, but I believe that it is slightly different.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Especially when you're thinking about poodle skirts from, like, the '50s, they had different materials. Usually made from, like, tool netting.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So let's go way, way back.

Travis: How far? You said 500 years.

Teresa: Yeah. So we're gonna start in the 1500s, 1600s, in there.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So there wasn't really much padding to garments at the time. So you had more kind of soft, natural skirt shapes. Full-length skirts called curdles were common among women, all through social classes.

Travis: Yeah. So I think a lot of people have the wrong idea in their head when they think about costumes, because there's really heightened movies.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But I was thinking, what's the one, *The Cameraman* or something, that we were watching?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Where it's very, like... I wouldn't say shapeless. So, it's just a dress that heads straight down.

Teresa: Right. I mean—

Travis: There's no, uh— Not even really belted.

Teresa: The more fabric that you could afford, the more you would wear. Right? So let's think about Merida's dresses in *Brave*, okay?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Slightly flared, right? We've got Buttercup's day dresses in *The Princess Bride*.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That's also slightly flared, but not huge in any way. It touches the floor, for sure. And then Galadriel's gown in *Lord of the Rings*, right? Those are all curdles.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And you might wear a curdle underneath an overdress if you are really, really fancy, so layer it up. But that layering is pretty much it.

Travis: And then— So it went curdle, and then Durdle.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And then hurdle, and then fertile.

Teresa: No...

Travis: And *then* we got to girdle.

Teresa: No... It's a new word entirely.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And girdle doesn't—

Travis: I'm trying to have some fun here.

Teresa: Oh. Oh, okay, sorry.

Travis: Okay, thank you.

Teresa: Sorry, sorry. [chuckles] It's just a different garment. I mean, [with nerdy inflection] "Actually..."

Travis: I know it's a different garment!

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: I *know* it's a different garment, Teresa. But you see?

Teresa: You didn't see me put my glasses on.

Travis: Curdle and girdle and hurdle, these all rhyme. Turtle...

Teresa: They do. They *do*. They do. But we're talking about more of a flared skirt kind of shape, right? Kind of closer to A than to H, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But then in the 1520s, 1530s, we get a separate waist seam, okay? Instead of it being cut from all one cloth, the top and the bottom, we get a waist seam coming in. Which can give you a little more volume to the bottom, 'cause you don't have to balance it out in the fabric from the top. You can do more from the bottom.

Travis: But it also, from what I know of fashion and waists, must have been— I bet it's one of those things where it's like, minutes after the first person put a waist seam in, they were like, "[clicks tongue] I bet we could adjust that to be like... Maybe my waist is here. Maybe your waist is down there. Is this your waist? Who *knows*?"

Teresa: I mean, a little bit. There's something called a farthingale, which is a wooden structure that gave long skirts the voluminous shaping of a cone or a bell, right? It's small, by hoop skirts' standards, okay?

Travis: But we started to see the shaping of it.

Teresa: But we started to see the shaping. That started in Spain. And it's

made with cords of softer wood, like willow branches, right? Still really lightweight, and not—

Travis: But almost like a basket. Almost like you would look and say, like...

Teresa: Kind of, yeah! Like a basket under there.

Travis: "Oh, I kind of want a basket-shaped thing."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it's like, "Well, have I got an idea for you."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "We'll weave you a dress."

Teresa: That's right. And this came along partly because of that separate waist seam, but also because really big, poofy sleeves were in. And they were like, "Mm. This looks unbalanced. We've got big on the top; we need big on the bottom, too."

Travis: I love...

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: That logic is so great to me. Because it's like, "What are we gonna do? Stop having poofy sleeves? No, no, no, no, no."

Teresa: No, no, no, no, no. Of course not.

Travis: "The poofy sleeves are obviously staying. What we need is more poofy, to balance it out."

"So you're saying, like, we put big poofs around the ankles?"

"No. No, no, no, no, no."

Teresa: Mm-mm. Mm-mm.

So this became a real balancing act. The 1570s, 1580s – you know, the latter half of that century – we've got Elizabeth I, right? Who starts this whole... [chuckles] They call it, according to fashion historian Abby Cox, she says it looks like "swollen tick core." So it's like massive, puffy sleeves and puffed-up collars.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Small waist. Big, big skirt.

Travis: So this is what I'm saying, right? Because as soon as you introduce the waist, right, of a line, it's like, okay, great. We can change the proportions constantly of, like, "Oh, okay, well, then the waist is here. So the shoulders go out to here, and the hips go out to here."

"Oh, okay. No, what we want is the waist is up *higher*, and then the hips flare wider, and the shoulders get narrower."

"No, wait—"

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right, so it was like—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: They were constantly almost like they were trying to build something, engineer something, and the proportions had *never* worked.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because they're constantly trying to keep track of, like, "Well, now everyone has that, so I want something different, like this."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Instead of it being, "All the lines were like this." It's like, "No, no, no. Now, we can move *this* line up and down along the waist. And then we have to change everything else, as we go."

Teresa: And another way they changed it was the bum roll. And it's kind of like a U-shaped pillow that you tie around your waist.

Travis: Yeah. Almost like a neck pillow that you would have behind your waist.

Teresa: Yeah, like a travel pillow that you can tie it around, and it accentuates the hips. And you can kind of drape the skirt out and down, right, from the bum roll.

Travis: Did it tie all the way around, or was it— I'm picturing it like a U, where it was wide on the hips and the butt. But the front, there wasn't padding.

Teresa: I mean, it tapered. It tapered, with strings and stuff.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So it wasn't a circle every time. But sometimes, it was a circle.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And so it was made out of a fine linen canvas, or a strong calico that would be pinned and sewed and stuffed with wool, or cotton fiber. And then you would fasten it around yourself, and then put your skirt on top of it.

Travis: Now, is it safe to assume all of this stuff smelled bad?

Teresa: I mean, probably.

Travis: Yeah. Okay. 'Cause it's not like you could take your bum roll to the dry cleaners.

Teresa: No, you definitely couldn't clean it. But, I mean, we think about smell differently now than they did. And you would change your undergarments every day, even if you didn't wash your outer clothes. So, like...

Travis: Musty and sweat, though, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, I mean, for a while, for—

Travis: 'Cause you're wearing all these layers. Talk about environmental control during the summer.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You're wearing all this, and it's not like you were hanging out in air conditioning.

Teresa: Yeah. So we talked about the Spanish farthingale. The French, not to be undone, also had their own little farthingale. And it was a structured underskirt that also had a bum roll incorporated. It didn't give you a little lift; it made your hips, like, gigantic. Right? So this is where we start to see that more rectangular shape. Like—

Travis: And weird-shaped doors.

Teresa: No, they didn't really change the doors. I mean—

Travis: Oh, they should've.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I wanted to see doors that were shaped like... person shoulder width down to the waist, and then doors that flared out like they were shaped like a paintbrush. But those didn't exist. But double doors, I bet, really came into fashion during this time.

Teresa: Right. I mean, if you could open both the doors, I think you should, to let the skirt through.

Travis: Well, you would have, you know, butlers and stuff to do that. With your French doors, to go with your French hips.

Teresa: Sure. Sure. The Spanish— Sorry, the French farthingale was a little bit shorter lived. We hadn't gotten, quite, to Marie Antoinette. We're still in the 1620s, right? So it wasn't super popular, especially because it was so extreme at the time. Like, people couldn't really afford it, right?

Travis: Wait. Are you telling me that there was a time in France where there was, like, a disparity in wealth?

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: Huh!

Teresa: Huh!

So we get some simpler shapes in the 1600s from the French and the English, like I said. But then Spain, Spain was really totally into the farthingales. They moved *further* out. They got flat-fronted, and huge hips, and like... This is when we start seeing miniature revolutions all over the place, and these things become synonymous with the nobility class.

Travis: Do you think that there was a, like— The peasants were like, "Alright. The hips have gotten too big. We need to do something."

"Yeah, we need to have a revolution. Their hips are r— They're knocking stuff over when they walk by us."

"Yeah! They knocked off all the fruit from my cart the other day."

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: "It's revolution time. We gotta stop these hips. Eventually, you won't be able to walk down the street without getting hit by a hip."

Teresa: That's true.

So we get this pendulum swing of everybody is like, "Oh, okay. So we need to calm this back down." We go back into kind of, like, malleable petticoats. So we're still big, right? But not so, so big. It's still voluminous.

Travis: And they weren't structured the same, right? When we're talking about the padded things – or in some cases, wooden things, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like, you could get wedged somewhere.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But *then*, this is when we get it. The 1740s, 1750s is when the noblewomen begun to wear that famous style. The Marie Antoinette style, right? If you look at the Sofia Coppola movie, the gowns that Kirsten Dunst wears for the coronation and the wedding day are prime examples of this. The huge, huge dress.

I mean, and really, if you see these paintings of people wearing these clothings, like, it doesn't— They look almost like they're wearing cardboard boxes. It's so interesting, because they are so spectacularly shaped. I

wouldn't even consider them a hoop dress, but it is definitely like a— It's gotta have some something under there.

Travis: It's so funny how— As you said, pendulum swings, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But during this time, it was, "How impractical can our fashion choices be?"

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? I think we've talked before about, like, wearing white clothes to be like, "Yeah. Not a spot on 'em," right? And the hair, and having your hair done up mostly in wigs. Of like, "Yeah, I can't turn my head too quick, or this all falls off," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And the idea of being, like, "Look how impractical this is. It's not like I would be expected to work in this."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: "I don't *have* to move quickly; I'm rich."

Teresa: Yes!

And so, there were actually several factions of fashion at the time. People who wanted to *look* like the rich people, right, and then people who didn't want to. Because the rich people were getting their heads cut off.

Travis: [sarcastically] Wait, *what*?

Teresa: Especially in France.

Travis: This is the first I'm hearing about this. What happened?

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: Oh, my goodness. I'm gonna have to look into this.

Teresa: But that doesn't mean that skirts suddenly became sensible. Because they didn't. Because it's—

Travis: They would just wear 'em and in hiding, in private.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: They'd walk around in pants and they'd get home and be like, "Close the blinds."

Teresa: No. [crosstalk]

Travis: "I'm putting on the hoop!"

Teresa: No, no pants. But anyway, the 1780s brought the false rump, made out of cork.

Travis: Okay. That's a good place to take a break for a word from another Max Fun show. Then, we'll come back and talk about those corkbottom jeans.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Okay, so people were wearing cork butts.

Teresa: Yes. They're very similar to bum rolls, but slightly more pronounced. I mean, because they're—

Travis: And a flotation device, which must be nice. You know—

Teresa: [amused] You know, you are making a joke about that...

Travis: Get out of town!

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: What?

Teresa: It was a... a satire at the time that you could use your cork bum roll, the cork rump, [holding back laughter] as a life preserver.

Travis: I would've done *so well* as a satirical newspaper comic back then. Nailed it. Yes!

Teresa: *Allegedly*, the cork rump saved two ladies from drowning in the Vauxhall Gardens, by using their false rear ends as flotation devices.

Travis: There you go. What a good selling point. You're gonna see that at all of the cork rump expos, from now on.

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: Every cork rump vendor is gonna be the most safe.

Teresa: Let me tell you a little bit about the OG cork rump vendor.

Travis: Please.

Teresa: Because it's a very good story. Mr. Tape, in 1779...

Travis: Mr. Tape. And he was, like, tailor? Or like...

Teresa: I mean, he was an inventor.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He—

Travis: Mr. Tape is *such* a good inventor name.

Teresa: He had a surplus of cork. And he, apparently, was gazing at his wife's behind when he was struck with the idea. And [amused] was so excited that he smacked his wife's bottom. [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: I love that this exists! He apologized, telling her that his smack was a sign of their many fortunes to come. To which his wife replied, "You could've at least smacked me twice, and given us both a fortune." Get it? 'Cause one for each cheek.

Travis: Oh. Yeah! Bawdy!

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I like it.

Teresa: So he displayed this cork rump in his shop, and—

Travis: "Modeled after me wife!"

Teresa: A little bit, yeah! Got famous people to wear them on stage. And at one point, even the duchess of Devonshire was purchasing cork rumps to fill out her entire noble wardrobe.

Travis: Ooh, la, la!

Teresa: Yeah. It dominated fashion for the last two decades of the 18th century.

Travis: I can't get over how tickled I am...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: That this man, through whatever means, found himself with a preponderance of cork. I don't know how one finds himself in that position—

Teresa: I mean... Merchants gotta do what merchants gonna do.

Travis: But then he was like, "Whoops! Bought too much cork." And then he's just sitting, looking at the cork, looking at his wife's butt. Looking at the cork, looking at his wife's butt.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Looking at the *cork*, looking at his wife's butt. These two things [through laughter] are so similar! Smack!

Teresa: [holding back laughter] I knew you'd like this story.

Travis: It's great. It tickles me.

Teresa: Now, we get to Regency Era. By 1811, the Regency Era had completely taken hold. This is where the waistline moves up to under the bust.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: The empire waist, we sometimes refer it to. And then the silhouette turns more straight, to emulate the column.

Travis: Yeah. This is— When I picture that, I think about *Pride and Prejudice*.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: You have her, you know— It has a bit of a flare, a *little* bit, in that

it's not like a tube, right? But it's mostly the empire waist, as you said, and then *maybe* like a two-degree...

Teresa: Well, yeah, 'cause you gotta walk.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So if you're thinking about that movie – and when I think about *Pride and Prejudice*, I think about Keira Knightley version. Where her kind of day dresses, walking dresses, are flared, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because those were more utilitarian.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And she needed to be able to walk. And then the dresses that they wear to the balls are a lot more straight, and kind of that gauzey material. And very much not— And you think of Keira Knightley, and I do think of a column kind of thing, right?

Travis: How do they— 'Cause I know *Bridgerton* is a similar time period. A little bit later, Georgian.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: What's the style—

Teresa: A little bit *earlier*, because the Regency is when the Prince Regent takes over from George.

Travis: Right. So how was the style different, between those two? Does *Bridgerton* nail it? They don't.

Teresa: No.

Travis: 'Cause it's not, like, historically accurate.

Teresa: No, they don't. In a couple ways. So *Bridgerton*, I think the first season, when you see Daphne in her undergarments, she is wearing short stays, which is the most like a bra at the time. And that's what they normally would have worn.

And then, in like the third season, you see Penelope in a full corset. That is not something that would happen until much later. And the corset, the full corset, went kind of in and out as well, as you needed to *support* multiple skirts.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: So the corset kind of left, and you could do short stays, because you didn't have to support all those petticoats, and crinolines, and hoop skirts, and contraptions underneath you.

But once that stuff comes back in with the end of the Regency and the Victorian Period, once all that comes back in, you need the corset again. Because you can't support all the weight of the garment without something around your waist, to protect it.

Travis: Well, I also imagine that the corset, when you have an entire waist...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... the corset is kind of unnecessary as a shaping garment.

Teresa: Sure, yeah.

Travis: Because, like, who's seeing your stomach at that point, when your waist is basically right below your bust?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? But then when you get back to a lower waist in the garment, now you need that more structured shape where, especially if you're really trying to emphasize more of an hourglass shape in the design, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And we start to see this move in the 1830s, when it gets back to those kind of cinched-waist, flared-skirt deal. And this is when we start to see references to bustles, specifically.

Bustles are artificial humps that were placed underneath the back of the gown to give you a more kind of pronounced bottom. Where it could be as simple as a tied sack around your hips, like the bum roll, right? *Or* an extended type of hoop skirt, with extra emphasis on the behind.

When I think about a bustle, and this is kind of the extreme of it, I think of it like a lobster tail on the back of the skirt.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's what I think of.

Travis: I think about Pecos Bill.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: Because in the cartoon that I remember watching as a kid, the woman who he was in love with, whose name is now escaping me, attempted to ride his horse. And his horse did not like her, so it tried to buck her off. And her bustle, combined with the horse bucking, bounced her into the stratosphere, if I remember correctly?

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: Yeah. 'Cause it was like spring metal, I think.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: And she bounced...

[ad break]

John: Do you want to travel this summer, but don't have the time?

Janet: Wanna learn all about state mottos and history without summer school?

John: Or maybe you just *love* urban legends and Latin?

Janet: Well, my friends, there's one podcast that ties it all together and celebrates the American states many call home: *E Pluribus Motto*.

John: Every episode, we showcase a different state, or commonwealth, or district, or territory, and celebrate its official motto and the absurdity of all its local life.

Janet: We'll go across the country with stops at Oregon, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and so many more! Join us, won't you, to take in the sights and sounds.

John: New episodes of *E Pluribus Motto* every other week on Maximum Fun.

[ad changes, action music plays in background]

Hal: What's more action-packed than prestige television?

[thud, audience cheers]

Danielle: With more continuity than comic books?

[punching sound, person groans]

Lindsey: And more reality than reality television?

Audience: One, two, three!

[bell rings, audience cheers]

Hal: It's [echoing] *professional wrestling*!

Audience: [chants indistinctly, clapping rhythmically]

Hal: And to better understand wrestling as the ultimate form of entertainment, you need the *Tights and Fights* podcast!

Danielle: *This* is the *perfect* wrestling show with a lot of love, a lack of toxic masculinity...

Lindsey: And just the right amount of butts, cats, and spandex.

[audience cheers]

Danielle: Listen to *Tights and Fights* every Saturday, on Maximum Fun.

[ad break ends]

Travis: Man, I hope I'm not the only person who remembers that. I hope I didn't dream it.

Teresa: Well, here's the thing! There's a little bit. There's a little grain of truth to that.

Travis: Oh, my gosh! What? I'm on fire.

Teresa: In the way of, if you were wearing, like around the 1850s, 1856 is when we see the big steel-wire cage crinoline, right? So if you did...

Travis: It would protect you from a fall?

Teresa: ... fall over, you might bounce!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: 'Cause of the springs, the steel!

Travis: Listen, is it possible the cork bum, the steel spring thing, that these are safety devices masquerading as fashion choices?

Teresa: No, I think it's more of a— [laughs]

Travis: Was there ever a fashion where people were in shark cage dresses?

Teresa: [through laughter] No! I think it's more that it's, uh, serendipitous.

Travis: "Yeah, it's my latest dress. It was designed by Samuel Kevlar!"

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: "Mm! Interesting."

Teresa: So it was as if we've returned back to the Spanish farthingales. But now, they're made out of metal, okay? So the basket idea, you can even wire your petticoat. You could put the wire through the skirt, or you could wear a separate cage underneath.

Travis: And if I'm picturing this correctly – I don't think I'm making this up – they were made in such a way of, like... What's the word I'm looking for? Of concentric circles.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: So they almost collapsed flat, when you weren't wearing them. And then it was raised up around you, when you stepped in.

Teresa: Yeah, you could totally do it like that.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. Um—

Travis: I bet it really built up your core strength, to move that around.

Teresa: I mean, the thing is, it was actually kind of lighter...

Travis: Really?

Teresa: ... than wearing multiple petticoats. Because if you think of the materials at the time, you could wear three, four, five petticoats to achieve the same look as a single steel hoop skirt.

Travis: Oh! I bet— Definitely better air flow.

Teresa: Oh, yeah. Totally. That's one of the things that women have been quoted on saying, that it's actually, for especially women in the American South where it's very humid obviously, it was better to have the steel hoop skirt. Because you could get the air around your legs.

Travis: Easier to get dressed. Easier to go to the restroom, I imagine.

Teresa: Probably! Probably.

Here's a really great quote from a book on American women, especially women in Cincinnati. It is—

Travis: Wait, that's where we live!

Teresa: I know! It is written there that, quote, "Crinoline is worn at all times, though difficult to manage on the heavy grades of the sidewalk." I mean, because there's a lot of uphill in Cincinnati. "Like mules, the women are sure footed, and through the doughy mud of the streets, with an agility both surprising and amusing."

Travis: I would say that, in my head— We were talking about this the other day. There's this concept in abstract theater called Gestus.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: G-E-S-T-U-S, if I remember correctly from my History of Theater class. And it's the idea of, like, "This is a move that conveys all of this emotion, or whatever." And I think of rolling up your sleeves, right, to be like, "I'm about to get to work."

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: But there's also one I picture, where you see it in movies of the time, where a woman has just gotten really serious about something, or is about to go confront somebody or whatever. And kind of lifts the front of her skirt a little bit...

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: And you see her, like, "Oh! Oh, somebody's in trouble now!" Right?

Teresa: She picks up her skirt, she's serious.

Travis: Right? And those two ideas are kind of the same, to me, of like,

"Oh, no. She's grabbing the front of her skirt to walk really quickly at that guy. He is in trouble!"

Teresa: So here is the thing about these hoop skirts, okay? They were very fashionable, and everyone was wearing them. And you could get other kind of petticoat crinolines made out of extremely flammable materials.

Travis: Oh, no!

Teresa: Like bobbinet, and muslin, and gauze, and [tartan?]. And with your structured metal cage keeping everything up, if a single spark caught on your underskirts, you were probably burning right along with it.

Travis: Oh, *no*! It wasn't something— "Stop, drop, and roll" wouldn't really work, would it?

Teresa: No.

Travis: No.

Teresa: And you couldn't really escape it, 'cause it was strapped to you.

Travis: Oh, *no*!

Teresa: Experts estimate that up to 3,000 women died in crinoline fires during the Victorian Era. In 1858—

Travis: There were only like 8,000 people on Earth at that point.

Teresa: [laughs] No, that's not true.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: In 1858, it was covered by the newspaper in Boston that a woman died after her skirts caught fire and then, extension, her home also burned.

The Continental Theater in Philadelphia, nine ballerinas had their skirts catch on fire as well.

The newfound flammability of clothing was such a problem that ladies magazines started to encourage women to install fire blankets in their parlors.

Travis: Oh, my!

Teresa: Right?

Travis: I mean... Good advice. A shame that you needed it.

Teresa: Yeah. And this was because, like I said, at this point everyone was wearing them. Because fabric was readily available, and because of the sewing machine that was invented in 1851, the convenience of clothing production just exploded. Right?

So garments that were available to only really the nobles and the aristocrats started to be available to regular people. We've got the Industrial Revolution. We've got people working in factories more than ever before. New goods available. We've got the sewing machine, all this kind of stuff.

Travis: But not a lot of regulations. There wasn't, like...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: ... testing fabrics to make sure they were safe for people to wear. And you think about all sort of during the time of the Industrial Revolution and all that, a lot of burning things as the main way you heated your house, lit your lamps, powered machines, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So fire was *everywhere*!

Teresa: And of course, there was a certain subset of women that spoke out against these sort of fashions, right? They were bulky and uncomfortable, and they were, if you'll excuse the pun, the *butt* of the joke for satirists.

Travis: Ah. And you know what? I'm just gonna go ahead and guess: no pockets.

Teresa: Probably— I mean, we've talked a little bit about pockets. It is possible that a lot of them had pockets, but not the kind of pockets we talked about.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: The kind of pockets—

Travis: Deep JNCO jeans pockets?

Teresa: [laughs] The kind of pockets that you wear in between your skirt layers, under your skirts, where you have like a slit— We've talked about this.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: It's not the pocket *in* the garment. It's the pocket that you wear, that you can access *through* the garment.

Anyway. It was difficult for women to pass through small aisles, or through doorways or whatever. And like—

Travis: Get in and out of carriages?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Sometimes they got caught in machinery when women were working in factories.

Travis: Mm-hmm. That's ridiculous, by the way.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like, I don't mean the idea of women working in factories. I need to stress that so hard.

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: I jumped in there so quickly. But like, that when you went to work at a factory, there wasn't an, "And of course, you will wear pants here. This is allowed *here*."

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Right? The idea of they'd be like, "No, you'll still wear big, awkward skirts."

Teresa: Of course!

Travis: "What are you trying to do, be weird?"

Teresa: And in a time where it was considered very taboo to expose your legs, your ankles at all. I mean, if you do one wrong move going through the doorway, or you tip over a little bit, bend over in the wrong way, of course people are gonna see when your hoop moves, right? And you might show someone your ankle.

Travis: Well, I also would have to imagine if one of the big selling points of this is you have to wear less under it, and you—

Teresa: Well, you're allowed to wear less under it.

Travis: You're allowed to wear less under it, right? And I'm trying to think of a tactful way to say this, but undergarments were different than we think of them now. To make it easy, especially if you're wearing one of the big hoop skirts, *to go to the restroom*.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And it was just done under the skirt.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I could see a scenario in which you tip and trip over something coming out of the carriage. And when you flip upside-down, maybe your ankle isn't the only thing you're showing everybody.

Teresa: Okay. Yes, I can see that as well.

So we've got two sides of this coin here. On one side, we have the group of people saying, "Wearing this enormous bird cage around your body makes you susceptible to fainting, and headaches, and problems, and all this kind of stuff," right?

And *then*, we have the other group of the people who *love* wearing the crinolines, and it is a very surprising argument.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Women wearing these large hoop skirts were able to actually have more physical space in public.

Travis: I could see that!

Teresa: Right? Because if—

Travis: A shark cage.

Teresa: A shark cage! Exactly! If you have this three-foot berth all the way around you, where people—

Travis: That people would literally bounce off of.

Teresa: That people could not enter.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It gives you *so much more* personal power, right? It increases your personal space, you're not gonna get jostled as much. People can't physically get close to you when you're wearing these great, big skirts.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so I can see on both sides, how there would be people being like, "Ugh, this is so terrible! I can't get through the door. But also, I like that this guy can't stand next to me on the trolley."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: "Like, he physically can't fit."

Travis: What would be great is if you could control it.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: Is if there was a button that made the hoop go, "Bwowop!" and expand out, right? And then it's like, "Oh, I gotta go through this doorway. Bwowowop," and it went small again. And you were Inspector Hoop Skirt. [to the Inspector Gadget theme] "Na, na, na, na, Inspector Hoop Skirt!"

And you could change the size of your hoop skirt, and maybe use them like a spring to bounce around town. And different attachments would come out of it. And it could spin you like a top. I gotta go write this...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: ... children's story. Excuse me, I have to go. TM, TM, TM.

Teresa: There's always a pendulum swing in fashion, as in almost everything in human history. And so this kind of seed of women's agency *could* be, according to some experts, the reason why people started to swing fashion the other way.

And so we've got people now moving to a more hourglass shape. The skirts, especially in the front, are kind of draped across to emphasize the hip.

Travis: And what time period are we looking at?

Teresa: The mid-1880s.

Travis: Okay. So we're not too far away from the flapper, like, swing...

Teresa: Oh, that's definitely gonna come.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But that's an even *further* pendulum swing.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: This is to that lobster tail bustle that I'm talking about.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So we get the flat front, but we still love the booty. So we're gonna move all the volume...

Travis: I picture this in *Deadwood*, right?

Teresa: Oh, sure!

Travis: There's a couple, like, very high-class women who have this kind of thing. And it's almost like a snail, right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Where you look at them head-on, and you're like, "Okay. Like..." And then you turn, and you're like, "Whoa!"

Teresa: You turn and, "Whoa!"

And so you can not only add— You can add a little bit to the sides, to make the hip-to-waist ratio larger, right? So you make the hips look bigger, so the waist looks smaller. Right?

Travis: You know what it reminds me of?

Teresa: What?

Travis: Parade floats.

Teresa: [gasps] Yeah!

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: I could totally see that.

Travis: Especially with all the ruffles and everything. Where it's like, "They gotta be as narrow as the street. But as long as you want them." [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

So then we get, like I said, this kind of draping to the front. And then you get it kind of big in the back. And—

Travis: It's one of the things I always liked about that draping. It reminds me of proscenium curtains.

Teresa: Oh, sure!

Travis: Where you look at a lot of the layers of— It's like, pulled up. And you get the drape, drape, drape. And sometimes, a different color. But this is what I picture a lot of Victorian— I mean, not quite. This is... past Victorian? Pre-Victorian? Anyways—

Teresa: Around the turn of the century.

Travis: Yeah. A lot of dark colors, right? You weren't seeing, like, the Regency pastels and whites and stuff. This is a lot more black, and dark reds, and—

Teresa: Well, I mean, you did get— What you get is *saturated* colors.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: From the Victorian Era. Because a lot of these dyes were more freely available, and people wanted to look nice under the gas light. Right? You could see the colors a lot better than you could in candlelight. So you get a lot more saturated colors.

Travis: I bet it showed soot and ash and stuff less, too.

Teresa: Yeah. That's true.

So when we get to the 1910s, this is when the straight silhouette comes right back in. This is what you're talking about. We've got *no* padding underneath shift dresses. And we haven't got bias cut just yet, but—

Travis: But this is like the flapper, right? Where it is like a tube.

Teresa: Right. In the '20s, we've got the waistline drops. We're not seeing the waist at all. We've got it almost slung lower than the hips, right? Where the skirt and the top of the dress are delineated.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It goes all the way down. And not really until the '50s, when we get Dior's new look. When we get the petticoats again, and the cinched waist. And then it goes right back out again, with the Mod '60s.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? 'Cause then we get the straight dress again. Even if it's a miniskirt.

Travis: The '50s is such a weird standout fashion time. It must've been that post-World-War-II GI kind of idea. Because it feels so disconnected. Like, I'm picturing in of like, "Oh, no, no. Here, you have the '40s." And I can picture that very clearly.

Teresa: Wartime rationing.

Travis: And I can picture the '60s onward, and how I say, like, "Oh, that became this, became this, became this." And then you just have the '50s.

Teresa: '50s, yeah. The Dior new look was really, really out of its time period, really. Because we had just come out of the war, we had no more rationing, and you could use as much as you wanted. And the idea of, like, pulling women back from the workforce.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Maybe inhibiting them, a little bit, by all their skirts again. Who knows?

Travis: But also, men becoming bad boys in fashion. You know?

Teresa: Oh, sure.

Travis: Of it going like, "Oh, you have your young businessmen. Oh, he's gonna be a stable father." To that, "Oh, he's back from the war."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "I bet— Oh, mm, who knows about this guy!"

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: Right? And it's like, you suddenly get your greasers and stuff. Where it's like, "I'm a bad boy."

Teresa: [chuckles] So in the 20th and the 21st Century, we've got more, really, fashion breadth than ever before. Especially here in the West. And you hardly ever see hoop skirts, except in costume dress, like ballgowns or I would even say wedding gowns are often like a costume, almost.

Travis: Or something like the Met Gala.

Teresa: Right, yeah.

Travis: Where it's like, "Look how extreme this is."

Teresa: Extreme costume dress. Where we don't really get that kind of silhouette anymore. And the fabrics are different, right? We've got knitted fabrics. We've got plastic fabrics, like rayon and polyester and stuff. And so it's just not— The way that our garments are shaped is more body-shaped, unless we are wearing a costume for something.

Travis: Mm. I bet you could easily do a collapsible hoop skirt now, using like Venetian blind design kind of thing.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: Where it pulls again, so you have— It pulls— Okay. I'll work on it later on.

Teresa: Okay. You'll work on it.

Travis: Along with my Inspector Hoop Skirt, the—

Teresa: You'll 3D print it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Okay, everybody. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not have done this episode. She was excited to do this one; she had a lot of fun with this one. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not do the show.

And thank you to you for listening; we appreciate you! You— Listen, if you need some protection, hide under our hoop skirt. We'll walk through the crowd, bump everybody away to get you through. You're safe here. [chuckles] This is a safe hoop skirt.

Teresa: There's some new merch.

Travis: Yeah, we do!

Teresa: New month, new merch.

Travis: Over at McElroyMerch.com. One of them, I can't say the first word, but it's like, "Go off, king." But instead of "Go," it's the F-word.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: "F off, king!" as a negative form of "Go off, king."

Teresa: I see.

Travis: "Why not a wizard?" is there. Go check that out. And 10% of all merch proceeds this month will be donated to the Immigrant Defenders Law

Center, so go check that out and all the other amazing stuff there at McElroyMerch.com.

Also, we have some live shows coming up. We're going to be doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* and *Adventure Zone* in Anaheim on the 11th.

Teresa: Ooh, Dadlands!

Travis: Dadlands with Brennan Lee Mulligan on the 11th and 12th. And we're also gonna be in Sacramento doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* as well as a bunch of other places coming up. You can go to bit.ly/mcelroytours for all that information, and tickets, and everything like that.

What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found.

Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

Also, we are always taking your topic suggestions, your submissions, your questions, your idioms. Keep sending those in, shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: That's gonna do it for us! Join us again next time.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*! Get it?

[theme song plays]

Maximum Fun.
A worker-owned network...
Of artists-owned shows...
Supported directly by you.