

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 148: A MARITAL UNION**

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## EPISODE 148: A MARITAL UNION

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 148: A Marital Union. In this episode, we’re going to re-visit the theme of marriage. It’s a theme we’ve explored before, but this time, we’re going to focus on an interesting aspect of political marriages in the early 1500s. These types of marriages were nothing new, but in the early modern period, they were being used to unify previously independent realms under one monarch or one ruling family. That process had significant consequences for the history of Europe and for the history of England. But political marriages were not always happy marriages. And as we turn our attention to the early reign of Henry VIII, we’ll encounter a king who is famous for his many unhappy marriages. And in the same way that political marriages could bring people together, Henry’s reign showed that political divorces could tear people apart. So over the next couple of episodes, we’ll look at marital unions and messy divorces. And along the way, we’ll see how these events shaped the English language.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes and transcripts at [Patreon.com/historyofenglish](https://Patreon.com/historyofenglish).

Now, let’s turn to this episode, and let’s examine the intersection of marriage and politics in the early 1500s. Last time, we looked at the impact of the Renaissance and humanist movement on the development of English. We saw that Greek and Latin words were starting to pour into English in the early 1500s. Those new words often gave English three different ways of expressing an idea. We have basic Old English words, and we have slightly more elevated words from French that came in during the Middle English period, and we have technical or scholarly words that came in from Latin and Greek during the early Modern English period. We can see that development throughout English, and we can specifically see it in the way we refer to marital unions.

We might refer to a couple’s ‘wedding’ with the Old English word *wedding*. Or their ‘marriage’ with the French word *marriage* that was borrowed in the 1300s. Or we might refer to their ‘nuptials’ with the Latin and French loanword *nuptial* that was borrowed around the current point in our story in the late 1400s.

Whichever term we use, we’re ultimately referring to the union of two people. And it probably isn’t surprising that a word for the union of two people would be extended over time to refer to the union of other things. That’s what happened with the word *marry*. By the late 1400s, it was being used in the extended sense of combining or joining things together. For example, certain recipes might require you to ‘marry’ the ingredients by placing them in the same container for a while.

Well to express the idea of a union, we can also dip into our lexicon and find different ways of saying that. We can use the Old English word *bind*, or we can put together a couple of Old English words to create a phrase like ‘put together’ or ‘bring together.’ We can also use the Germanic word *blend*, which appears to be Old Norse, even though Old English had a related

version of the word. We can also jump forward to the Middle English period and use a couple of French loanwords like *join* or *assemble*. We can also use the word *combine* which appeared in late Middle English and was apparently borrowed from both French and directly from Latin. But if we go forward a little further into the early Modern English period, we have lots of Latin words to choose from. In fact, many of our common words to express the idea of a union came in during the late 1400s and 1500s from Latin. They include words like *aggregate*, *integrate*, *unite*, *unify*, *consolidate*, *coalesce*, and *connect*. And if we move forward a little further to the early 1600s, we find Latin words like *merge* and *amalgamate*. And I think that makes an important point. Latin loanwords from early Modern English are not always technical or scholarly terms. Sometimes they provided English with so many subtle shades of meaning that they came to be used alongside older English words. Today, we're just as likely to use a Latin word like *combine* or *connect* as we are to use the Old English *bind* or the French word *join*.

Now a marriage is a union between two people, but it not only unifies the people, it also unifies other aspects of the couple's lives. It brings together their respective families who now become in-laws or step-parents or step-children. It also brings together the property and possessions of the respective spouses. And if the couple has children together, those children may eventually inherit that combined estate. Through that process, any distinctions that once existed between the couple's separate property may be lost over time. The marital union produces a unity of property and estate.

Well, that idea takes us back to the story of Europe in the early 1500s because that's what was happening among several of the important royal families of Europe during this period. Now I've talked about political marriages in prior episodes. In fact, I've talked about them quite a bit. Throughout the Middle Ages, political marriages were often used as strategic tools by kings and queens and other rulers. They were used to form alliances with other leaders, and they were used to ease conflicts with rival rulers. Very often, those types of marriages produced an alliance or truce – but those developments were usually temporary. When one of the spouses died, the existing alliance often fell apart as friends and enemies scrambled to propose new marriage alliances to replace the old one. In this way, alliances came and went, and political marriages were just tools of the trade.

But in the late 1400s and early 1500s, political marriages began to re-shape the face of Europe in some new and important ways. During this period, we start to see several situations where a queen brought her own realm into the marriage, and we see situations where the king and queen produced a child who inherited the realms of both parents. Through this process, the two separate realms were brought together and unified under one ruler. And sometimes, a fractured kingdom was reunified in much the same way.

We saw this process at work in the rise of the Tudor Dynasty in England. The Tudors were a branch of the Lancastrian family descended from John of Gaunt. And they were able to re-unify England after the Wars of the Roses when the Tudor king, Henry VII, married the Yorkist heiress, Elizabeth of York. That meant that their children carried the blood of both families. Together, they had a son named Arthur three years later. Arthur was the heir to the throne – and

was set to be the first real life King Arthur in English history. And with a Lancastrian father and a Yorkist mother, his anticipated reign would further re-unify the divided the country.

Arthur was the first of eight legitimate Tudor children born to the marriage. Three years after Arthur was born, Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter named Margaret, and a couple of years after that, she gave birth to a son named Henry. Five other children followed. But Arthur was the eldest son and the heir to the throne.

As the heir, it meant that the identity of his future bride was the subject of much planning and debate among royal officials. And while Arthur was still a child, those officials identified the person who they thought would make an ideal wife and an ideal queen. That person was the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella was another example of one of these unifying marriages. Ferdinand was the King of Aragon and Isabella was the Queen of Castile, and through that marriage, their descendants ultimately inherited both regions, thereby unifying those regions and producing the modern nation-state of Spain.

In the early 1500s, Spain was emerging as one of the most powerful countries in Europe thanks in large part to the voyages of Christopher Columbus. Spain had claimed much of the New World that was slowly being revealed. And it claimed whatever riches those new lands offered. So for the English officials, a marriage alliance with Spain made a lot of sense. And it turned out that Ferdinand and Isabella had a daughter named Catherine – Catherine of Aragon.

Ferdinand and Isabella were also eager to form an alliance with England since both had a common enemy in France. So the marriage between Arthur and Catherine was agreed to, and the ceremony took place in the year 1501 at the very beginning of the sixteenth century.

I should also mention another interesting side note about this marriage because it may help to explain why Henry VII was so interested in bringing Catherine of Aragon to England as the future queen. It has to do with the somewhat shaky claim of the Tudors to the English throne. And once again, our story goes back to John of Gaunt in the 1300s. His legacy was always lingering in the background in the 1400s and 1500s. As we know from prior episodes, he was married three times, and had descendants from each marriage. The Tudors were descended from his third marriage to Katherine Swinford, and that was the basis of their claim to the throne. But you might also remember that Katherine was actually Gaunt's mistress at the time their children were born, so their children were illegitimate and they were legally barred from inheriting the throne. But after Gaunt's second wife died, he married Katherine in order to legitimize those children. But there were many who still questioned whether the Tudors were a legitimate line and whether they were entitled to claim the throne.

Now back when Gaunt was cheating with Katherine, he was still married to his second wife, Constance of Castile. And they also had children together. And those children went on to become the monarchs of Castile and Spain. And Catherine of Aragon was descended from that line through her mother Isabella. So in that regard, Catherine was not only Spanish, she was also a Lancastrian through a legitimate line of descent from John of Gaunt.

And here's another interesting fact. Catherine was also descended from John of Gaunt and his first wife Blanche through a completely separate line that produced Isabella's mother. So Catherine was actually a double descendant of Gaunt. That's how incestuous these royal lines could be.

So as we consider the shaky Tudor claim to the throne, we can see how Catherine of Aragon fits into the picture. She actually helped to re-unify so many of these competing lines of descent. She was a double descendant from each of Gaunt's first two marriages, and the Tudors were descendants from his third marriage. So a child born to that union would help to re-unify all of the Lancastrian lines. And remember that Henry Tudor – now Henry VII – had married the Yorkist heiress, Elizabeth of York. So the Yorkist line was also brought into the mix. That meant that any child born to Arthur and Catherine of Aragon would carry the blood of all of those competing lines. All of that helps to provide some additional context for the marriage of Arthur and Catherine, and it may help to explain why that marriage was so important in terms of royal lineage. It connected all of those competing lines.

So Catherine was important both in terms of her genealogy and the alliance she would provide with Spain. But Catherine's marriage to Arthur was short-lived. A few months after they were married, both Catherine and Arthur became very ill. It isn't clear what the illness was. Some historians suggest either consumption or a common illness at the time called the 'sweating sickness.' Whatever it was, Arthur soon died from it, and Catherine barely recovered. Arthur was only 15 years old at the time of his death, and Catherine was only a year older.

Even though she was now a teenage widow, she remained in England after Arthur's death because both the English and Spanish crowns wanted her to serve as the future queen of England. So it was soon decided that she would marry Arthur's younger brother Henry – the new heir to the English throne. Of course, young Prince Henry was the future Henry VIII, but he was only 10 years old when Arthur died. So the actual marriage was put on hold until Henry was a little older.

Meanwhile, Henry's father, Henry VII, was busy arranging another important political marriage. In the year after Arthur died, Henry married his daughter Margaret to the King of the Scots, James IV. This marriage was designed to improve relations between England and Scotland, and it worked for a while. This marriage is yet another example of a marital union that eventually produced a political union. This was the marriage that linked the English House of Tudor and the Scots House of Stuart. The descendants of this marriage include Mary Queen of Scots, and her son James who assumed the English throne in the early 1600s when the Tudor line came to an end.

As the king of both Scotland and England, James laid the foundation for the political union of Scotland and England, which still exists to this day – at least as of the date I'm recording this episode. Again, that modern union can be traced back to this political marriage between the English House of Tudor and the Scots House of Stuart in 1503.

So we've seen how these political marriages in the late 1400s and early 1500s unified the warring factions in England, and laid the foundations for a unified Spain and a unified Great Britain.

A similar process was also at work in central Europe. There, the Habsburg family of Austria was also using a series of marriages to consolidate several far-flung regions into one massive family empire. The Habsburgs were based in Austria, and the Habsburg ruler – Maximilian I – was also the Holy Roman Emperor. The Holy Roman Empire consisted of much of modern-day Germany and Austria, but at the time, it was really just a collection of largely independent regions whose princes elected an emperor. The emperor didn't directly rule those territories, but he was still a very powerful figure whose influence was felt throughout the region. As the ruler of Austria and the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian was the most powerful figure in central Europe at the time.

In the late 1400s, he had married the heiress of Burgundy and the Low Countries. That included much of modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands which had come under the control of Burgundy in the 1400s, and the heiress to that realm was Mary of Burgundy. So when she married Maximilian, that began this same type of process where those separate regions started to be united. When Mary died in the late 1400s, her realm in Burgundy and the Low Countries passed on to the son she had with Maximilian named Philip. So Philip inherited those regions in northern Europe from his mother, and he was in line to inherit the Habsburg lands in central Europe from his father Maximilian.

Then Philip married Catherine of Aragon's older sister Joanna. Joanna was the oldest living child of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, and she was in line to inherit Spain and all of its possessions from her parents. That included all of those newly discovered regions in the New World, as well as Naples and Sicily which were also part of Ferdinand's realm at the time.

So thanks to these marriages, the Habsburgs controlled much of central Europe, the Low Countries and part of Burgundy, and they were in line to add the massive Spanish realm to that empire as well. Through this process, the Habsburgs would soon come to dominate European politics.

But there was one problem with the addition of those new regions to the Habsburg realm. With territories spread across Europe, the Habsburgs needed to find a way to communicate with those far-away regions. They needed to develop a way to send and receive news and information from one region to the next. Information was traditionally sent by courier, but an individual courier couldn't travel such long distances across Europe very efficiently. So Maximilian brought in a family from Italy who had been involved in a courier service there – and they developed a system whereby news and information could be sent from Austria where Maximilian lived to Brussels in northern Europe where his son Philip lived.

It involved the creation of a type of relay service with riders stationed at specific points along the route. A rider would travel from the first station to the next station, where he would hand off the documents to another rider who would cover the next leg of the journey, and then that rider would pass on the documents to the next rider, and so on. Using this method, documents could

be conveyed along this route between Austria and Brussels in just five days. [*SOURCE: News Networks in Early Modern Europe, Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham, p.20.*]

But the route was expensive to maintain, so in 1505, it was turned over to the Italian family who designed it, and it became a public service company meaning that it was operated as essentially a separate company. And to make it profitable, they opened it up to the general public meaning that anyone could use the service to send a letter or package to someone else along the route – if they paid a fee of course. Other private couriers then tapped into that main line – and within the first couple of decades of the 1500s, it was possible to send and receive letters and documents throughout the Holy Roman Empire with ease and efficiency. [*SOURCE: News Networks in Early Modern Europe, Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham, p.20.*]

This idea quickly spread to other regions as well. Since the idea was based on concepts originally used in Italy, the word for each station or transfer point along the way was ultimately borrowed from Italian. Each station was called a *posto* in Italian. Within Italian, the word meant ‘a fixed place or location.’ And it produced the word *post* in English. The original sense of the word as ‘fixed place’ survives in the military sense of the term, as when a soldier is stationed at a specific ‘post.’ Well, the sense of the word as a place where couriers were stationed to receive mail gave us the other sense of the word in terms like ‘post office’ and ‘postal service.’ And in fact, this sense of the word *post* as a place where mail is received appeared for the first time in an English document in the year 1506 – at the current point in our story.

Well, this early postal route running across central Europe was soon extended southward across the Alps into Italy, where it joined other courier routes there. That allowed letters and documents to be conveyed from southern Europe to northern Europe in a matter of days. It also meant that news about current events was conveyed along those same routes. At each station, riders would arrive with news they had picked up along the way, and then that news would be passed along to other riders who would carry the news with them.

The modern word *post* still conveys some of this same sense. If I promise ‘to keep you posted,’ I am promising to keep you informed about the latest news and developments concerning a particular matter. That’s an extended use of the word *post* that appeared in American English in the 1800s. But it conveys the idea that those who deliver the mail are also delivering news and information.

Well, as it turns out, there was something else in the Holy Roman Empire that allowed that news to spread even faster – the printing press. Remember that the Holy Roman Empire consisted of much of modern Germany. And it was the place where Gutenberg had invented the printing press about a half a century earlier. And by the early 1500s, there were presses everywhere. And those printers tapped into those mail routes where news and information were being passed along from station to station.

It became a common practice for printers to set up a press near those postal stations. They would gather the news and information that came in with the riders, and then they would print the news on single sheets of paper. Those news sheets were very popular, and they sold very quickly. It

also helped the printers to make some money while they working on larger projects that took several weeks to complete. Those early news sheets and pamphlets were the beginning of the newspaper industry, though proper newspapers wouldn't appear until the next century.

All of this meant that the early postal route established by the Habsburgs was the first real information superhighway. And it allowed news and information to spread very quickly throughout the entire region. That included news about wars, deaths, natural disasters, and in a few years, news about rebellious religious leaders who were starting to challenging the authority of the Pope down in Rome.

A major factor in the spread of those news pamphlets was the outbreak of war between the Habsburg realm and France. In the final few years of the 1400s, the French king had invaded the Italian peninsula tempted by the wealth of Renaissance Italy and the fractured state of the peninsula. In central Europe, Maximilian sought to counter the rising power of France. As we've seen, the Habsburg realm was quickly expanding through this series of marriages, and as it expanded, it surrounded France with Burgundy and the Holy Roman Empire in the east, the Low Countries in the north, and Spain and the Italian provinces in the south. This led to a period of extended conflict in the 1500s between the Habsburg emperors and the French kings with much of that early conflict taking place in a series of wars in Italy.

Each side used the new printing press to promote and defend its side of the conflict and to ensure their respective readers that victory would soon be achieved. The various battles, sieges, victories and defeats were chronicled in these early news sheets and pamphlets. We can imagine these early printers gathering news from riders bringing the mail – but also from merchants and other travelers who passed through town. We can even imagine those early reporters standing around and overhearing conversations and quickly running off to print what they heard. They might have even been standing under the eaves of a building to hear the idle gossip that was circulating. That was the place where water dripped from the eaves when it was raining. And around the turn of the century in early 1500s, we find the first use of the word *eavesdropper* in English. It was a person who stood under the eaves of a building to overhear the conversations of passers-by. On the continent, some of those eavesdroppers were probably these early printers looking for news to print. Those news sheets and pamphlets were really the precursor of the modern news media. And the various princes and kings quickly took notice of the power of the press. They came to realize how effectively it could spread news – and also how effectively it could spread propaganda. [SOURCE: *The Book in the Renaissance*, Andrew Pettegree, p. 136-8.]

As the Habsburg rulers and the French kings fought for control of the continent, England stood on the periphery, and during the reign of Henry VII, it largely avoided direct conflict in the region. Henry realized that wars on the continent were incredibly expensive, and they often achieved very little in the long run. So he maintained a foreign policy that emphasized trade and commerce over war and conflict. And it served England well. When Henry VII died in 1509, he left a full treasury to his son Henry, who now became Henry VIII.



At the time, the younger Henry was 17 years old and still unmarried. The marriage to his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon, had been intended for several years, but it had never been formalized. So a few weeks after his father's death, Henry married her in a hastily arranged ceremony so they that they could be crowned together as king and queen.

Henry had been well-educated as a child, and he was a true Renaissance king. He spoke several languages, including French, Spanish and Latin. [SOURCE: *The Tudor Monarchies: 1485-1603*, John McGurk, p. 33.] He loved hunting and athletic contests, and he was also an accomplished musician and composer. There's a legend that he composed the well-known song Greensleeves, but that's probably not true. The song was more likely composed a little later during the reign of his daughter Elizabeth.

[GREENSLEEVES]

Henry also embraced the New Learning associated with humanism and the Renaissance. In the last episode, I introduced you to John Skelton. He was England's poet laureate who described the English language as 'rude' and 'rusty.' Well, he had served as one of Henry's tutors when Henry was growing up. And he had ensured that Henry received a humanist education. [SOURCE: *A World Lit Only By Fire*, William Manchester, p. 108.]

As a student, Henry had met an important humanist scholar named Erasmus of Rotterdam, usually known simply as Erasmus. He was originally from the Netherlands, but he had traveled around Europe, and he had lived in England for a period when Henry was young. When Henry was crowned as the new king, Erasmus was in Italy, and Henry sent him a letter inviting him to return to England to teach and study. [SOURCE: *A World Lit Only By Fire*, William Manchester, p. 119.] Erasmus took Henry up on the offer.

Erasmus would prove to be a very popular, but controversial, figure. He was a deeply religious man, but he was an outspoken critic of what he considered to be the corruption of Church officials. During that first year back in England, he composed a work in Latin called 'Encomium moriae,' which translates as 'Praise of Folly.' In the book, Folly or foolishness is personified in the form of the female narrator. Folly explains how she is an essential part of human happiness and well-being. She presents many different aspects of life and how they are affected by folly. Appropriately enough, given the theme of this episode, she begins with marriage. She explains how marital stress is alleviated by folly. She notes how lawyers, doctors, merchants, poets and theologians all exhibit a great deal of folly. The book concludes with extended passages about the nature of Christianity. These passages emphasize morality and religious principals over specific rituals and superstitions.

This particular work – Praise of Folly – was translated and published in a dozen different languages, and it became a best-seller throughout Europe. It is considered to be one of the texts that foreshadowed the Protestant Reformation which began within the following decade. [SOURCE: *God's Bestseller*, Brian Moynahan, p. 20.] Over the next few years, other works by

Erasmus were regularly published, and they also proved to be some of the most popular books sold throughout England and rest of western Europe. [SOURCE: *A World Lit Only By Fire*, William Manchester, p. 127.]

One of Erasmus's closest friends during his time in England was Thomas More. More will become a very important figure in our story as we move forward. He was a political figure and a statesman, but he was also a religious scholar and a humanist. As I noted, he was close friends with Erasmus. In fact, Erasmus's work 'Praise of Folly' was written while he was living at Thomas More's residence in London. The original Latin title of the work, 'Encomium moriae,' can even be read as pun meaning 'In Praise of More.'

Well, Thomas More served as a member of parliament, and then became a close advisor to the new king, Henry VIII. Henry sent More to Flanders on a diplomatic mission, and while More was there, he began work on what would prove to be his most well-known book called 'Utopia.' [SOURCE: *God's Bestseller*, Brian Moynahan, p. 10.] It was written in Latin, but it was later translated into English in the mid-1500s after More had passed away.

In the book, More described an ideal society found on the fictional island of Utopia, supposedly discovered by explorers in the New World. He said that there was no private property on Utopia, so there was no need for people to lock their doors. There was no unemployment and no wars. The children played marbles with precious gems. It was a communal and agrarian society which allowed freedom for all religions – but not for atheists. With respect to marriage, he wrote that the Utopians placed a great deal of emphasis on choosing the right mate. Divorce was not permitted, except in the case of adultery or exceptional perverseness.

Now this is an interesting passage given our theme because More's Utopia allowed narrow exceptions for divorce. But in England, there were no exceptions. The Church didn't permit divorce. So More's Utopia was far more generous in that regard. And that's really the point here. In describing his fictional island of Utopia, More was really making a larger point about England itself. He used his Utopia to draw a contrast with so many aspects of English society that he felt needed to be addressed and reformed. Again, he was a humanist, so he thought humans could create a more ideal society here on earth through the application of reason and by providing practical solutions to problems. People didn't have to suffer through life while waiting for heaven. They could actually make their lives better in the here and now.

For our purposes, Utopia is notable because the word *Utopia* was actually coined by More himself. You might assume that More chose to call his fictional island *Utopia* because it was a 'utopian' society, but the word didn't exist before Thomas More. He just made it up. The reason why we use the word *utopia* today to mean an ideal society or a perfect situation is ultimately because of this particular book. The name of the island became synonymous with an ideal or perfect place, and the word *utopia* soon passed into general usage with that meaning. Though this particular book by More was composed in Latin, he did go on to write many other works in English. And he was another person who loved to borrow words from Latin and Greek to express his ideas. He is the first known English writer to use certain Latin terms like *exact*, *anticipate*, *exaggerate*, *obstruction*, *comprehensible*, *dissipate*, *exasperate*, and *insinuate*.

He is also the first known English writer to use certain words with Greek origins like *paradox*, *monopoly* and *monosyllable*.

And even though More coined the word, we can also categorize the word *utopia* as a Greek word. That's because he invented the term by putting together two separate Greek words. It actually appears to be a type of pun. The word *utopia* would have originally been pronounced more like /oo-topia/, and it combines the Greek root words *ou* (/oo/) meaning 'no' and *topia* meaning 'place.' We have that word *topia* in English words like *topography*, and also the word *dystopia* which literally means 'bad place.' Thomas More put those two elements together and gave us *Utopia* which literally meant 'no place.' That name can be interpreted as 'no place' in the sense of 'an ideal place that doesn't really exist,' and it can also be interpreted as 'no place' in the sense of an actual place that is unknown and unexplored, like much of the New World at the time.

In fact, it is no coincidence that More placed his fictional island in the New World. There was considerable interest at the time in what was being discovered across the Atlantic. And reports of newly found lands were pouring into Europe. At the time More began writing his *Utopia*, the Spanish had just discovered the southeastern coast of North America. In the year 1513, a Spanish explorer named Juan Ponce de Leon headed out from Puerto Rico and sailed westward through the Bahamas. He reached a new land mass a few days later. He wasn't sure if it was a large island or the mainland of a continent.

As he traveled southward along the coast of this land mass, he observed that it was covered with plants and trees. It also happened to be around the time of Easter, which the Spanish called Pascua Florida – literally 'Easter flowering' or 'flowering Easter.' Based on that Spanish term and all of the vegetation that was found in the region, this stretch of land was named *la Florida* – or *Florida* today. So the name of *Florida* actually means 'flowers' or 'flowering,' and in fact, the name is actually cognate with Latin-derived words like *flora*, *floral*, *florist*, *flower* and *foliage*.

In the same year that Ponce de Leon reached Florida, another Spanish explorer named Vasco Nunez de Balboa crossed the region of Panama in central America, and he became the first European to spot the Pacific Ocean from the New World. It confirmed what many people were already starting to realize. The region was a continent – or series of continents – that lay between Europe and Asia. There was an ocean on both sides of the New World. But again, the overall size and extent of that land mass was still unknown at the time.

Again, most of this region was being explored by Spanish explorers because it fell within the realm of Spain at the time. And that points us back to why the English were so interested in that marital and political link with Spain.

As we've seen, Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of the Spanish monarchs, but now she also the Queen of England. And one of her primary duties as queen was to provide England with a male heir. A couple of years earlier in 1511, she had done that. She had given birth to a baby boy, but the baby died a few weeks later. To date, she had been pregnant several times, but none

of her pregnancies had produced a surviving child. Catherine and Henry were still in their 20s, so no one was panicking yet. But as Catherine approached her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, concerns were starting to grow. Much of the prior century had been fought between warring factions of the royal family. As we've seen, Henry's heir could unify most of those competing lines. But if Henry failed to produce an heir, the Tudor line would quickly come to an end, and civil war would likely erupt again.

During this period, Henry remained close to Spain thanks in part to his marriage to Catherine, and also because England and Spain had a common enemy in France. England also maintained its traditional close links with Flanders and the Low Countries where the cloth industry was still very important to English wool producers. As I noted earlier, both of those regions were now linked to the Habsburg realm in central Europe. These various regions were destined to be inherited and consolidated by the grandson of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian. That grandson was named Charles, and by this point, his father Philip had died, and he had already inherited the Low Countries and part of Burgundy from him. He was also in line to inherit the Habsburg realm in central Europe from his paternal grandfather Maximilian, and he was in line to inherit the Spanish realm in southern Europe and the New World from his maternal grandparents Ferdinand and Isabella. In fact, Isabella had already died by this point.

During this period, England was aligned with the Habsburgs. They were all concerned about the power of France, and together, they surrounded France on most sides. As I noted earlier, France had invaded Italy in the late 1400s and early 1500s, thereby threatening the papal states. So the Pope was also allied with the Habsburgs and Spain and England. That alliance became known as the Holy League. During this period, the pope – Julius II – actually led troops into battle against France. And in the year 1513, Henry VIII of England decided to take advantage of the situation and launch his own invasion of northern France.

This was around the same time that Thomas More had started to compose *Utopia*, and Ponce de Leon had discovered Florida, and Balboa had spotted the Pacific Ocean from Panama.

Henry's expedition left England for France in the spring of 1513 with Henry himself following along a few weeks later. The English troops laid siege to a couple of French towns, and the French basically choose not to engage the English troops. It was enough for Henry to claim victory, even though the victory didn't amount to very much. There was no way such a small expedition could conquer France, and Henry didn't really have the money or manpower to do that anyway. But it did show the vulnerability of France when it was forced to deal with the Holy League as a broad alliance.

While Henry was in France on this expedition, the King of the Scots – James IV – tried to take advantage of Henry's absence. Remember from earlier in the episode that James was married to Henry's sister Margaret. Well, despite that marital connection, Scotland still had that old alliance with France, and any war with France always raised the prospect that Scotland would join in as France's ally. So James invaded the north of England while Henry was away in France. But the invasion quickly turned into a disaster for James and his forces. They were soundly defeated by the English at the Battle of Flodden, and to make matters worse, James himself was killed in the

battle. That meant that the Scottish throne passed to his son James V. But the younger James was still a baby. He was only seventeen months old at the time. So his mother effectively ruled on his behalf as his regent. She was authorized to do that as long as she remained a widow and didn't remarry. And that meant that Scotland was now effectively ruled by Henry VIII's sister, at least for a while. But about a year later, she married a Scots earl named Archibald Douglas, and that brought an end to her position as the young king's regent.

I mention that marriage because the new husband, Archibald Douglas, was actually the nephew of one of Scotland's greatest poets of this period – Gavin Douglas. You might recall from prior episodes that Old English had fractured around the time of the Norman Conquest with the form of English spoken in southern Scotland evolving in its own unique direction. That form of English became more and more distinct over time and is known as Scots today. While some people consider it to be a dialect of English, many others consider it to be a separate language, and that's a debate I'm not going to resolve here. But it's important to note that Scots experienced its own linguistic evolution over time. And the form of Scots spoken during the early 1500s is considered to be Middle Scots. And Gavin Douglas was one of its greatest poets.

In 1513 – the same year that James IV was killed at the Battle of Flodden – Douglas translated Virgil's classic poem *The Aeneid* into Scots. I mentioned this translation way back in Episode 77, which was the episode where I discussed the origin of Scots. It's considered to be one of the most important works of the Middle Scots period. So this is probably a good time to revisit that translation to get a sense of what the language sounded like at the time.

The *Aeneid* is divided into several different parts called 'books.' And Douglas composed a prologue for each book. The first lines of Douglas's version of the poem are part of the Prologue to the first book. These lines begin with a praise of Virgil. I'm going to give you these lines first in Modern English, and then I'm going to give you a version in the original Scots. So here are the opening lines Gavin Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* in contemporary Modern English:

Laudatory praise, honor, and infinite thanks,  
to you, and your pleasant ornate fresh composition,  
most revered Virgil, prince of Latin poets,  
gem of intellect and fluid of eloquence,  
you peerless pearl, patron of poetry,  
rose, register, palm, laurel, and glory,  
chosen, precious stone, chief flower and cedar tree,  
lantern, lodestar, mirror, and a per se,  
master of masters, sweet source and springing well,  
wide where our awe rings your heavenly bell –  
I mean your crafty curious works,  
so quick, lusty, and most skillful with sentences,  
pleasing, perfect, and smooth in all degrees,  
as any material held before our eyes;  
in every volume which you wish to write,  
far surmounting all other manner of composition,

like the rose in June with her sweet smell  
the marigold or daisy does excel.

Now here's the same passage in the original Middle Scots as composed by Gavin Douglas in 1513. For this passage, I'm going to use a reading by Rab Wilson, which can be found at YouTube under the title "Scots language Eneados part 1." So here is Rab reading the same passage in Douglas's original Middle Scots:

Laud, honour, praisings, thankis infinite  
tae thee, and thy douce ornate fresh indyte,  
maist reverend Virgil, o Latin poets prince,  
gem o ingyne and fluid o eloquence,  
thou peerless pearl, patron o poetry,  
rose, register, palm, laurer and glory,  
chosen cherbukle, chief flouer and cedar tree,  
lantern, leidstarn, mirror, and a per se,  
maister o maisters, sweet source and springin well,  
widewhaur owre aa reignis thy heivenly bell –  
I mean thy crafty warkis curious,  
sae quick, lusty, and maist sententious,  
pleasable, perfit, and feelable in aa degree,  
as wha the maiter held tofore thair ee;  
in every volume whilk thee list dae write,  
surmountin faur aa ither mainer indyte,  
like as the rose in June wi her sweet smell  
the marigold or daisy doth excel.

Now as I noted, the Aeneid is divided into multiple parts or 'books.' In Book 6 of the poem, the main character Aeneas travels to the underworld, and Douglas's prologue to that book contains the following passage:

"Aa is but ghaists and eldritch fantasies;  
o brounies and o bogles fu this buik.  
Out on thir wanderin speerits, wow!" thou cries.

'It is but ghosts and frightful fantasies;  
benevolent goblins and scary phantoms fill this book.  
Out on these wandering spirits, wow!' you cry.

I mention this passage because, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, this is the first recorded use of the word 'wow.' So this interjection 'wow' is ultimately a Scots word – or at least a word first found in Scotland. It can be found in standard English documents after that, but it didn't really become common in standard English until the 1900s, when it exploded in popularity.

By this point, Gaelic – the native Celtic language of Scotland – was still dominant in the highlands. But most of the lowlands spoke Scots. And as I noted, Scots had diverged quite a bit from the English spoken in England, especially in southern England. Scots had been less affected by the Norman French influence in much of England. And it was also less affected by the Great Vowel Shift. Had it maintained that trajectory, Modern Scots would probably be even more distinct from Modern standard English than it is today. But when James of Scotland became King James of I of England, and when the two nations were unified as Great Britain, the English influence of the south crept back in to Scotland and reduced some of the stronger distinctions that had existed in this period in the 1500s and 1600s.

Gavin Douglas's Scots translation of the Aeneid gives us some idea of what Scots was like during this period, but he was not the only notable Scots poet of this period. Another important poet who wrote in that dialect or language was William Dunbar. And Dunbar's writings also introduced some common terms to the broader English-speaking world. In the same time that Douglas translated the Aeneid, Dunbar composed a poem that contains the first known use of the Scots word *billy* in writing. It meant 'a male friend or companion or fellow.' It was apparently derived from the nickname *Bill* or *Billy* for *William*. In Scotland, it became a somewhat generic term for a man, especially for a male friend or mate. This Scots use of *billy* for a man eventually found its way into the term *hillbilly*. *Hillbilly* was coined in American English, and it referred to people who lived in rural areas like the Appalachian mountain region. Many of those people were considered to be simple and unsophisticated people who lived off the land. And they came to be called *hillbillies*. As you may know, the Appalachian region was heavily settled by the Scots-Irish – many of whom came from Ireland, but had deeper historical and linguistic connections to Scotland. So the word *billy* – first recorded by William Dunbar in 1513 – made its way across the Atlantic and eventually became part of a very common word today. We also find that somewhat generic sense of the name *Billy* in the term 'billy-goat,' meaning a 'male goat.'

By the way, this evolution of the name *Billy* from a nickname to a term for a common man can also be found in the evolution of the name *Jack*. I noted this in an earlier episode, but *Jack* also became a somewhat generic term for a man, especially a rustic or simple man. It gave us a term like a 'jack of all trades.' Well you might remember that this same development also occurred in Scotland, but there, the name was often rendered as *Jock*. It ultimately gave us the word *jockey* – for the person who rides a horse, and even gave us the term *disk jockey* or 'DJ' in the twentieth century. Well, William Dunbar was not only the first Scots writer to use the word *billy* as a term for a male companion, he was also the first Scots writer to use the word *Jock* for a common man.

It appears in several of his poems, and he used it in one particular poem that he wrote in 1513 – the same year that used the word *billy* for the first time. It appeared in a poem where he expressed resentment about rustic or common men who had usurped their expected station in life and had acquired property and benefits that traditionally belonged to the nobility and upper classes. This reflects the changing nature of society over the prior century as the feudal system had broken down and some of the peasant class had acquired property of their own.

Dunbar was particularly concerned about peasants – or Jocks – who had acquired benefices. Those were specific Church offices or grants of Church property. Those types of offices or properties produced a nice income, and they were highly coveted because they ensured that the recipient could live a life of relative ease and comfort. Traditionally, they were handed out to families who were privileged or wealthy, but now, common people were starting to acquire them as well. And that upset Dunbar, who was jealous that he had never received one. In a poem from this period, he wrote the following passage – first translated into Modern English:

A jock that was wont to keeping young bulls  
Can now draw himself a handful of churches  
With a false card into his sleeve  
Worth all my writings under the birches  
Excess of thought does me mischief.

Now here's the same passage in Dunbar's original Scots:

Jok that wes wont to keip the stirkis  
Can now draw him ane cleik of kirkis  
With ane fals cairt into his sleif  
Worthe all my ballattis under the byrkis.  
Exces of thocht dois me mischeif  
(II. 66-70)

Now I wanted to read that passage to you, not only because it contains one of the first uses of the word *Jock* for a common man, but also because it contains the first recorded version of a very common idiom – ‘to have something up your sleeve.’ Here Dunbar says that the jock – or common man – collects ecclesiastical offices “[w]ith ane fals cairt into his sleif” – ‘with a false card into his sleeve or up his sleeve.’ That implies that it was something being done in an underhanded or improper way.

It's actually a reference to the common fashions of the day which often featured shirts with long puffy sleeves. They were so loose-fitting that they were a great place to hide something like a playing card in a game of cards. And that's how Dunbar uses the phrase here, and it shows how the phrase became associated with something done in a hidden or secretive manner.

Now speaking of ‘having something up your sleeve,’ we sometimes refer to a person who schemes to acquire power as *Machiavellian*. It usually refers to a politician who uses political expediency and cunning to acquire power without regard to morality or other similar considerations. It's derived from the name of the Italian writer Niccolo Machiavelli who wrote a guidebook for aspiring princes and politicians called ‘The Prince.’ And it was also composed in this same year – 1513. So this was a very active period for literature, from the writings of Erasmus and Thomas More in England, to the poetry of Gavin Douglas and William Dunbar in Scotland, to this important guidebook by Machiavelli in Italy.

[MUSIC BREAK]



Early in the year 1516, the English royal court was abuzz with the news that Queen Catherine was pregnant and about to give birth. After several miscarriages, Catherine finally gave birth to a healthy baby in February. But it wasn't a baby boy. It was a girl. The girl was named Mary. She would eventually go on to become the first female monarch in English history – not counting the disputed reign of Matilda way back in the 1100s. Matilda was never crowned as queen, but Mary would be. However, in 1516, the notion that England would be ruled by a queen was too novel and untested. English tradition required a male heir to inherit the throne, and Henry still didn't have one of those. By now, Catherine was in her early 30s. The birth of Mary proved that she was still able to provide Henry with children, but time was starting to run out, especially given the high mortality rates associated with childbirth and the short life expectancies of the 1500s. An average person of that period only lived into his or her 40s, so it seemed apparent that Catherine's child-bearing years were coming to an end.

By this point, Henry was already having open affairs with other women. In fact, a couple of years before, one of his mistresses named Elizabeth or 'Bessie' Blount had given birth to a son conceived with Henry. The son was named Henry FitzRoy, literally 'Henry Son of the King.' But the boy was illegitimate, so there was no chance of making him the heir to the throne. [SOURCE: *Tudors*, Peter Ackroyd, p. 34.]

Henry's only chance of producing a legitimate heir would have to come with Catherine because the Church didn't permit divorce. They were married until 'death they did part.' Outside of death or a special exception made by the Pope, Henry had to submit to the rules of marriage dictated by the Church.

However, Church doctrines were sometimes challenged. Around the same time that Catherine gave birth to Mary, a German theologian named Johann Eck was conducting public debates in Germany on the subject of usury or the charging of interest on loans. It was a practice prohibited by the Church, though many lenders had found creative ways to get around the limitation for centuries. Eck argued that the charging of interest was morally acceptable.

He presented a creative way of structuring a business arrangement so that lenders could receive a return on their money without running afoul of the Church's restrictions. The argument was championed by the growing merchant and business class throughout Europe, and Eck was widely seen as the winner of those debates. He was even invited to northern Italy and Austria to promote his views there. Eck's views may have found sympathy with the Church because he also defended the Church's practice of selling indulgences for a healthy profit. [SOURCE: *Worldly Goods, A New History of the Renaissance*, Lisa Jardine, p. 328-9.]

As Johann Eck was traveling around central Europe in the year 1516 to promote his pro-business views, the business-world of central Europe got a surprise boost with the discovery of a massive silver deposit in Bohemia – in what is today the Czech Republic. The silver was discovered in the mines of western Bohemia near the border with modern-day Germany. The deposit was located near the modern town of Jáchymov, but what was then called Joachimsthal.

Now this was an important development because the supply of silver had started to dry up in much in Europe in the late Middle Ages. As a result, many European countries had started to increase the production of gold coins to make up the difference, but gold was also scarce. [SOURCE: *The Old World and the New: 1492-1650*, J.H. Elliott, p. 60.] In fact, in the early 1400s, there was such a shortage of silver and gold that France and Flanders stopping minting money for a while. And it virtually stopped in England as well. [SOURCE: *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History*, David Hackett Fischer, p. 48.] Supplies improved a bit over the course of the 1400s, but gold and silver were still in high demand. That's why Christopher Columbus was desperately looking for gold and silver when he arrived in the Caribbean in 1492.

So when this new supply of silver was discovered in western Bohemia in 1516, it was a big deal. The silver was soon turned into coins. And since the silver came from the region around Joachimsthal, these coins were called *Joachimsthalers* – or just *talers* for short.

Now this region had recently become part of the Holy Roman Empire, so it was part of the greater Habsburg realm that I described earlier in the episode. And within a very short time, those new silver talers were being used as currency throughout the vast Habsburg realm.

In this very same year, King Ferdinand of Spain finally died. At that point, Spain and all of its possessions effectively passed to his grandson Charles. As I noted earlier, Charles was the beneficiary of all of those Habsburg marriage alliances. He had already inherited the Low Countries and parts of Burgundy when his father had passed away. Now he inherited Spain and its territories. Remember that his paternal grandfather was the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian. And he died three years later, so at that point, Charles inherited all of Maximilian's territories in central Europe as well. That series of marriages by the Habsburg family finally resulted in the unification of all those various regions under the leadership of one person – Charles – known to history as Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire.

His massive Habsburg realm stretched from central Europe to the Netherlands and Belgium in northern Europe, to Spain and parts of Italy in the south, and even to the Spanish New World across the ocean. And with this sudden formal expansion of the Habsburg realm, those new silver talers went with it. [SOURCE: *The History of Money*, Jack Weatherford, p. 113-4.]

The taler became so common in Europe that the word *taler* became a common term for any large silver coin. In Dutch, those silver coins were called a *daalders*, and in English, those talers became *dollars*. When the term first entered English in the mid-1500s, it was mainly used in reference to the currency produced in central Europe. But then the Scots started to produce a silver coin that resembled the taler, and they called their version a *dollar*. It was seen as the Scottish alternative to the English currency.

Meanwhile, thanks to the vast reach of the Habsburg realm, those central European talers also made their way to the Spanish New World. And that helps to explain why the United States adopted that word *dollar* for the name of its official currency in the late 1700s. At the time, some of that Spanish currency was in common circulation in North America where some of those coins

were still referred to *talers* or *dollars*. And many of the founders of the United States had connections to Scotland where the Scottish dollar was well-known and where it had a bit of an anti-English sentiment behind it. So that word *dollar* was adopted as the official name of the US currency in 1785. [*SOURCE: The History of Money, Jack Weatherford, p. 116.*] But it all goes back to these two important events in the year 1516 – the discovery of silver in Joachimsthal combined with the death of Ferdinand of Spain which led to the addition of Spain to the Habsburg empire.

Back in England, Henry VIII was keeping a close eye on these developments. And he renewed his traditional alliance with the Habsburgs. His wife, Catherine of Aragon, was the aunt of the young Habsburg ruler Charles V. Charles's mother and Catherine were sisters. So Henry had a close family tie to the Habsburg ruler. The Habsburg realm also included the Low Countries which were still vital to England's wool industry. And Henry and the Habsburgs shared a common enemy in France. The previous year, France had once again invaded northern Italy.

So England once again found itself allied with the Habsburgs and with the Pope in opposing French rule in Italy. But this grand alliance was only temporary. Back in England, Henry VIII was about to blow the whole thing to pieces. And it all started, appropriately enough, with the son of a miner who lived in central Europe, but this miner lived in modern Germany, not Joachimsthal. The miner's son was a priest who lived in the city of Wittenberg, Germany within the vast realm of the Habsburgs. His name was Martin Luther. He was a devoutly religious man who struggled with what he perceived as the hypocrisy and corruption of certain church practices, especially the sale of indulgences which had frustrated so many theologians for years. But unlike his fellow German theologian Johann Eck, who defended the sale of indulgences, Luther had different opinions.

The Pope had recently authorized the sale of a new round of indulgences to raise the money to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. One of the Pope's best fund raisers was a German friar named Johann Tetzel. His sales pitches were presented as part of an elaborate show. People flocked to hear him speak, and they happily gave him money for the pieces of paper that proved that their sins were pardoned. Tetzel raised lots of money for the Church, but his fund raisers infuriated Luther. [*SOURCE: A History of Civilization, Prehistory to 1715, Crane Brinton et al., p. 318.*] In that year – 1517 – Luther composed a series of 95 theses or arguments against these and other Church practices that he objected to. According to the traditional version of the story, he nailed the arguments of the door of the Church in Wittenberg.

The arguments were written in Latin, and they were intended to initiate a theological debate among church scholars. And at first, no one took much notice of Luther or his complaints. But earlier in the episode, I talked about the expanding Habsburg realm in central Europe, and how the emperor Maximilian created the first modern-style postal system to communicate with the far-flung regions of his realm. And I noted that printers soon set up presses near those postal stations to print the news that was passing through. That created the first information superhighway. Well, all of that suddenly became very important at this point in the story.

Luther's fellow scholars may not have been all that interested in his complaints, but Luther's friends and supporters were. And some of them quickly translated his arguments from Latin into German. And thanks to the printing press and the ability to spread those publications very quickly, Luther's theses were available in several German towns within a matter of days. [SOURCE: *The Written World*, Martin Puchner, p. 163-4.] From there, they were translated into other European languages, and they were soon followed by a series of other writings from Luther that proceeded to set the Christian world on fire. The Church had underestimated the popularity of Luther's message, and the power of the printing press. Those presses transformed what would have been an academic debate among religious scholars into a popular movement. The Protestant Reformation was now underway.

Back in England, Henry VIII initially objected to Luther and his writings. He was a devout Catholic and a loyal ally of the Pope in that alliance against France known as the Holy League. But Henry desperately wanted a son to inherit his kingdom, and he increasingly realized that Catherine wasn't going to be able provide him with one. And the Church wouldn't allow him to divorce her. He was stuck. But as the Protestant movement grew, Henry slowly came to realize that Luther was actually providing him with a solution to his marital problems. A messy divorce was just around the corner.

Next time, we'll look at that divorce. Not just the divorce of Henry from Catherine, but also the divorce of the English Church from the Catholic Church. We'll also look at the English Bible produced by William Tyndale during the early years of the Protestant Reformation. That Bible proved to be one of the most important and influential documents ever produced in the English language, and it had a surprising impact on the English language we speak today.

So next time, we'll look at those developments. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.