# THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
# TRANSCRIPTS

## EPISODE 171:
## SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLISH

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 171: Shakespeare's English. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention to the word-craft of William Shakespeare. Today, many people have mixed opinions about his plays and poems. They know that he is widely regarded as the greatest English writer of all time, but they struggle with his language. They read or listen to passages from the plays – and they have no idea what's going on. So why is that? Why is it so difficult for many modern English speakers to relate to the words of the man who is widely regarded as a master of the language. Well, there are many answers to that question. And in this episode, we're going to explore what makes Shakespeare's use of the English language so unique – and why it is so challenging for modern speakers.

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

Now this time, we're finally going to focus on the language of William Shakespeare. As we move forward with the story of English, we'll continue to explore historical developments, and we'll continue to see how those developments impacted English. But for next couple of decades of our story, Shakespeare will be a constant looming presence. His most well-known plays were composed during this upcoming period. But before we go any further in the story, I thought it would be a good idea to dedicate an episode to the way he used English. He was a language innovator and a creator of new words and phrases. And to understand how he used the English language, we need to consider the state of the language at the time. And we need to consider why his language was so different from the language we use today.

In this episode, I'm going to explain why the nature of Elizabethan English allowed writers like Shakespeare to play around with the language. I think we sometimes revere his language a bit too much. We see it as something that is so elevated that it's almost beyond reproach. But if we look at little closer at the state of English during the Elizabethan period, and if we look at the nature of the theater at that time, his use of language starts to make a little more sense. We have to think of Shakespeare not just as a playwright, but as a playful writer. He lived at a time when there were very few formal rules that regulated the use of the language, so he reveled in its looseness and flexibility. He wrote lines that bounced along in a lively manner where the rhythm and feel was just as important as the literal meaning of the words themselves.

In fact, he even gives us a glimpse behind the curtain in Hamlet. The drama features a play within a play, and Hamlet acts as the director informing his actors to: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines." In other words, pronounce the lines in a rapid, lively and bouncy way – trippingly on the tongue. Don't pronounce the lines in a formal, over-wrought way like many actors do. If you do that, he says the lines should just as well be pronounced by the town-crier.

That word ***trippingly*** is a good example of the way Shakespeare played around with words. It's a term that he almost certainly coined. It appears in a couple of his plays, but there is no evidence that anyone else used the word during that time, and very people use it today unless they are quoting his plays. But despite making up the word, it's easy to get a sense of what he meant. He took the existing words ***trip*** and ***tripping***, and converted them in an adverb by adding that '***-ly***' ending. Though the precise definition is a matter of some debate, the word ***trippingly*** conveys the idea of tripping, or staggering, or bouncing around. It can mean a lot of different things, but it certainly doesn't refer to a pronunciation that is overly formal, dull and stiff. In other words, the way Shakespeare's plays are often performed today.

That's why we need to consider the state of English at the time and the nature of the language as it was used on the stages of London. And to give us some insight into that, I've invited a guest to join me in the second half of this episode. I recently had a chance to speak with Ben Crystal. I've mentioned Ben before in the podcast because he is one of the leading proponents of what is known as Shakespeare's Original Pronunciation – or OP for short. Ben is an actor himself having performed in many of Shakespeare's plays. His father is the well-known linguist David Crystal, and David was instrumental in re-creating the Elizabethan accent for actors to use in a production of Romeo and Juliet back in 2004. He was able to phonetically transcribe the entire play for the actors so they could turn back the clock and re-create the original experience. The production was a smashing success, and since then, Ben has taken that concept around the world teaching theater troupes how to perform the plays using that original pronunciation. Over the years, Ben and David have written several books together about Shakespeare and his use of language. And in fact, they have a new book out called 'Everyday Shakespeare: Lines for Life.' In the second half of this episode, you'll hear part of my conversation with Ben where he discusses how Shakespeare's language was crafted for the stage and how the use of that older pronunciation changes the way audiences relate to the plays.

But in the first part of this episode, I want to explore how Shakespeare was a product of his time and how his use of language was aided by the flexibility of English in the late 1500s.

In fact, the Elizabethan period was a unique time in the overall history of English. The language was arguably at its most flexible during that period. Shakespeare wrote during a brief window when the language was bursting at the seams with new words, while at the same time, it had very few hard and fast rules to govern how those words could be used.

With respect to the vocabulary of English, it had been expanding for centuries – initially with Norse words, and then French words. But with the advent of the Renaissance, a new wave of words poured in from Latin and Greek. Those tended be longer multi-syllable words, and the influx of those words sparked the so-called 'Inkhorn Debate,' which I talked about in earlier episodes. Some people flaunted their education and learning by using a lot of those types of words called 'inkhorn' terms at the time. But many common people weren't familiar with those words, and they found it difficult to understand what was being said when they were used. For that reason, some scholars rejected those words, and they wanted speakers to use plain, ordinary speech. And the fact that there was such a debate at the time shows how much the lexicon had expanded.

At the same time, the pronunciation of those words was highly variable. As we've seen, accents varied by region and by social class. And of course, the Great Vowel Shift was still underway, so that also contributed to differing pronunciations.

Meanwhile, spellings also continued to be loose and flexible. There were some early attempts to encourage a more standard spelling system, but no one would have said that any particular spelling was wrong at the time.

And even the grammar of English was loose and flexible. Back in Episode 164, I discussed how older grammatical forms often existed alongside newer grammatical forms. In that earlier episode, I referred to Elizabethan grammar as a half-way house because those older and newer sentence patterns often existed side by side. In addition to that, word order or syntax was much looser than today. So a poet like Shakespeare could move words around in a sentence to make sure the line had the required rhythm.

But while English was a language with very few formal rules, that was starting to change. One of the themes that has emerged over the last few episodes is that some scholars were increasingly uncomfortable with the overall state of the language in the late 1500s, and they wanted to impose to some rules on it. For example, the so-called 'inkhorn debate' was really an effort by some scholars to encourage a more fixed and understandable vocabulary. We've seen that some early scholars like John Hart and Richard Mulcaster didn't like the state of English spellings, so they recommended a more fixed spelling system, though they disagreed about how to do that. Printers were also moving in the direction of standard spellings. William Bullokar wrote the first English grammar book during this period, though it was little more than an attempt to describe the grammar using Latin terms. It didn't really impose any rules on the language, but others would soon take up the cause, and those rules would be laid out for everyone to follow. And last time, we saw that George Puttenham recommended the use of educated London speech as the standard dialect for poetry, which was a way of saying that one particular dialect should be the model for English speech going forward.

But those were merely the early steps in the move toward standardization. It would take a few more decades for those efforts to take root, and more than a century for them to be completed – to the extent that such things are ever really completed. So Shakespeare lived at a time when those efforts to standardize the language were just beginning – when English was still a bit wild and unruly. He had the advantage of both an expansive vocabulary and the freedom to use it largely as he pleased.

This may seem like a strange analogy, but we can think of English during the Elizabethan period as a ball of Play-Doh fresh out of the container. At that early stage, it is loose and pliable. You can do almost anything with it. But if you leave it out for a while, it starts to harden and crumble. It becomes more difficult to work with, and a little less fun to play with. Well, that's what happened to English in the years after Shakespeare lived. The language started to harden a bit as it was standardized and as rules were adopted to define what was correct and incorrect. Along the way, it became stiffer and a little harder to work with – and maybe a little less fun to play with.

But Shakespeare's English was more like that brand-new ball of Play-Doh – soft and pliable – loose and flexible. There were so many different ways of saying the same thing. And he took full advantage of that flexibility.

One aspect of his language that reflects that looseness is his vocabulary. It's one of the things that frustrates some readers today because he sometimes used strange words, and he sometimes used common words in unusual ways. I should note that he accessed every register of English. He had no problem with those so-called 'inkhorn terms' – those fancy multi-syllable words from Latin and Greek. Some of those terms have become fully ingrained in the language over the centuries, so they might not seem all that fancy today, but words like ***demonstrate***, ***initiate*** and ***meditate*** were new and exotic at the time. Others still seem a bit exotic like ***multitudinous***. Some of them soon fell out of use and never really found a place in the language like ***vastidity*** and ***questrist***.

But Shakespeare wasn't just attracted to fancy loanwords. He also used local dialect terms. Those were words that were restricted to certain parts of the country – like ***bum-bailey*** meaning 'a bailiff or sheriff's officer,' ***gallow*** meaning 'to frighten,' ***pash*** meaning 'head or brain,' and ***geck*** meaning 'a fool.' [*SOURCE: The Evolution of the English Language, George H. McKnight, p. 187.*]

Those types of words pose a problem for many modern readers, but they're certainly not the only ones to do that. Shakespeare sometimes used words that were common at the time, but have largely disappeared since then. For example, he used the word ***haply*** to mean 'perhaps or by chance.' He used the word ***uneath*** to mean 'scarcely or with difficulty.' ***Whilom*** meant 'formerly.' ***Anon*** meant 'immediately.' ***Othergates*** meant 'otherwise,' and ***algates*** meant 'always.' Again, those types of words simply reflect an older form of English.

Another challenge faced by modern readers is that the meaning of some words has changed over the centuries. In the Elizabethan era, the word ***invest*** meant 'to clothe or cover.' ***Something*** sometimes meant 'somewhat.' ***Abroad*** could simply mean 'at large or outdoors' as in a line from Hamlet that reads "no Spirit can walk abroad." Of course, the word ***humor*** was still used in the medical sense as the fluids that had to be balanced in the body. ***Ecstacy*** meant 'fear or astonishment.' And of course, one of the classic examples is the word ***wherefore*** which originally meant 'why.' As we'll see in an upcoming episode, there's a very famous line from Romeo and Juliet that doesn't mean what most people think it means. It's Juliet's line, "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" Most people today think she is asking where Romeo is, but she is actually asking 'why' he is. Again, we'll take a closer look at that passage in the future, but it's a good example of how Shakespeare's language can be confusing and misleading – because words sometimes had different meanings than today.

Then, of course, there are all the words that Shakespeare coined. According to the experts, Shakespeare was one of the most prolific creators of new words in the English language. Now, while that is certainly true, it's a claim that is often exaggerated. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly how many words he coined, but some scholars have suggested numbers that are not realistic.

In the early 1900s, a researcher named Harold Bailey tried to calculate the number. He used the Oxford English Dictionary, which contains the earliest known citation for each word. And based in large part on those citations, he claimed that Shakespeare had coined about 10,000 words, which is an incredibly large number. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare's English, Keith Johnson, p. 30-1.*] That's roughly the total number of words borrowed from French during the entire Middle English period. That's also about how many words were borrowed from Latin and Greek in the 1400s and 1500s. It's unlikely that Shakespeare's innovations matched those entire languages.

Part of the problem with Bailey's calculation is that he often confused 'first known use' with creation. Just because one of Shakespeare's plays contains the first known use of a word doesn't meant that he actually coined the word. It just means that there is no surviving evidence of the word prior to that point. The word could have been around for while – in fact it could have been quite common in language. It just might not have been written down before that, or it might have been written down in an earlier document that was subsequently lost or destroyed.

Also at the time of Bailey's research in the early 1900s, the OED was still in its earliest editions. Researchers had poured over Shakespeare's works because they were so popular, and the words in those plays and poems had been fully integrated into the dictionary, but other lesser known works had not been included yet, especially those from earlier periods of English. So that also tended to exaggerate the total number of words first documented by Shakespeare.

Over the centuries, those entries in the OED have been updated and revised as more and more documents have been examined and catalogued. And that has included a lot of documents from earlier periods of English. And as it turns out, a lot of the words initially attributed to Shakespeare have been found in those earlier documents. In fact, computers and digital technology have really aided that research in recent years. So today, the actual number of words first recorded by Shakespeare is much smaller than it was a century ago.

But having said all of that, I should point out that there are still a lot of words found for the first time in Shakespeare's works. And the revised numbers are still quite impressive. Modern scholars think he may have coined over a thousand new words during his lifetime. That's much less than the 10,000 suggested by Bailey, but it's still an incredibly large number. [*Shakespeare's English, Keith Johnson, p. 30-1.*]

I should note that most of the words attributed to Shakespeare weren't created from scratch. They were often variations of existing words. For example, he would occasionally add a prefix or suffix to an existing word. We saw an example of that earlier with the word ***trippingly*** where he added the '***-ly***' suffix to the word ***tripping***. He also took the word ***comfortable*** and added the negative prefix '***un-***' to the front of it, thereby producing the word ***uncomfortable***. That word is still used today, but others never really caught on. For example, he took the noun ***hair*** and added the same prefix '***un-***' to the front of it, thereby creating the verb 'to ***unhair***' meaning 'to shave one's head.' To describe a dead person being brought back to life, he converted the verb ***live*** into the new verb to ***re-live***.

Suffixes were also added. One who seems ('s-e-e-m-s') became a ***seemer***. To acquire the characteristics of royalty became to ***royalize*** and ***monarchize***. Blinding winds were described as ***viewless*** winds by adding the suffix ***-less*** to the word ***view***.

Sometimes, instead of adding a prefix or suffix, he would drop a prefix or suffix to create a new word. Linguists call this a back-formation. When English speakers borrowed words from Latin or French, they sometimes came in with prefixes and suffixes already attached. So for example, English had taken the word ***castigation*** from Latin. But Shakespeare is the first known writer to drop the suffix to create a new verb – 'to ***castigate***.'

That same type of process also produced the word ***grovel***, though the development of that word was more complicated. Prior to Shakespeare, English only had the word ***groveling*** meaning 'to face downward.' That word came from the Norse word ***groof*** which meant the same thing – 'to face downward.' Well, at some point, English speakers took that word ***groof***, and they added the Old English suffix ***-ling*** to it, thereby producing the word ***groof-ling***. And the pronunciation of ***groof-ling*** evolved into ***groveling*** in early Modern English. Well, Shakespeare apparently thought that ***groveling*** was a combination of ***grovel*** and ***-ing***, even though it was really a combination of ***groof*** and ***-ling***. And when he decided to drop the '***-ing***' part at the end, he gave us the new word ***grovel***, which didn't exist prior to that point. But that's just another quick example of how Shakespeare played around with prefixes and suffixes. Sometimes he even made little mistakes that produced new words.

Now I say that he played around with those prefixes and suffixes, but very often, he was actually doing something very intentional. He was trying to make the words fit the rhythm and meter of the line. Remember that the plays were written for performance. The lines were to be recited on the stage. And Shakespeare wanted them to bounce along with the appropriate rhythm – 'trippingly on the tongue' as he said. So if the line was in iambic pentameter, he wanted it to have that heartbeat rhythm – 'de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM.' Well, if a certain word sequence didn't have that rhythm, he might need to add a beat to a word or remove a beat. And he could do that by adding or removing a prefix or suffix. That would give the line the rhythm that he wanted. And it's a reminder that the rhythm of the line was sometimes the most important thing. It was OK to make up a new word or to create a new variation of an existing word to make that happen. And again, the language was flexible enough at the time to allow him to play around with words in that way.

Sometimes Shakespeare created new words by combining two or more existing words, thereby creating a new compound term. For example, he is the first known person to use the term ***watchdog***, and was one of the first to use the term ***cold-blooded***, though the term appeared in other documents around the same time. But many of his compounds were poetic and largely limited to his plays. He described a person acting in an unreasonable manner as ***brain-sickly***. He referred to sluggish profits as ***snail-slow*** profits. He gave us ***flower-soft*** hands, ***war-worn*** coats, ***tear-falling*** pity, and famously, ***star-crossed*** lovers.

Sometimes he changed the way a word was used. Verbs became nouns, nous became verbs, and both became adjectives and adverbs. For example, he used the word ***safe*** as a verb meaning 'to provide safety and protection.' He wrote, ''best you safed the bringer." ***Bringer*** meant messenger. Of course, the normal verb related to ***safe*** is ***save***, but ***save*** conveys a sense of rescuing someone from peril. 'To safe' someone conveyed a slightly different sense of keeping watch over someone and safe-guarding them.

Shakespeare was one of the first writers to convert the noun ***rival*** into a verb – 'to rival' someone. Again, thanks to the popularity of the plays, some of that playful language survived into the modern era.

As I noted earlier, Shakespeare also played around with the grammar and syntax of the language. Again, those rules hadn't been formalized yet, so that allowed poets to arrange words in different ways, which was another way of making sure the words satisfied the rhythm of the line.

So, for example, if Shakespeare wanted to make a negative statement, he could do it in the traditional way by putting the word ***not*** after the verb, like 'fear not' or 'worry not about tomorrow.' Or he could choose a more modern approach and use a verb phrase beginning with ***do not***, like 'do not fear' or 'do not worry about tomorrow.'

Similarly, if he wanted to ask a question, he could do it in the traditional way by reversing the subject and the verb – from "You see" to "See you?" as in "What see you?" But again, he could also use a more modern approach with the word ***do*** as "What do you see?" Having said that, he preferred the older pattern – "What see you?"

He could also use what I have called the 'meaningless do' in prior episodes, where ***do*** didn't really serve any function at all. So for example, instead of writing "I saw you," he could write "I did see you."

In fact, verb phrases were still developing during the Elizabethan period. People increasingly added some form of the verb 'to be' or 'to have' to a sentence to express some slight variation in meaning. So they could add a form of 'to be' to create a progressive tense – from "I eat" to "I am eating." Or they could add a form of 'to have' to create what is called a 'perfect tense' – from "I eat" to "I have eaten." They could even put those two together to create what is called a 'perfect progressive' or 'perfect continuous' tense – so from "I eat" to "I have been eating." But those patterns were not as fully developed as today. For example, today, we can add even more of those variations together – like in the sentence "I had been being eaten." You couldn't really say that in the Elizabethan period, but the language was moving in that direction. And those new sentence patterns gave poets even more flexibility.

Again, there was no source book that laid out the rules for putting words together, so poets could play around with word order in a sentence. A poet could use double and triple negatives, and no one gave it a second thought. He or she could split infinitives and end sentences with a preposition. Again, that was no big deal. Shakespeare could say 'more better' and 'most quickest' without a grammarian criticizing him. In fact, one of his most famous lines from Julius

Caesar does just that. After Brutus stabs Caesar, Shakespeare describes it as "the most unkindest cut of all." 'Most unkindest.' Again, that was perfectly acceptable.

At the time, people tended to end an adverb with '***-ly***' like we do today as in ***quickly*** or ***sadly*** or ***trippingly***, but that wasn't a hard and fast rule. So that suffix was sometimes left out. And words or phrases used as adverbs – what are sometimes called adverbial modifiers – could be placed in positions that seem unusual today. Again, this is another source of confusion for modern readers. So for example, today we would say something like, "They have come together again," but Shakespeare could write "They have again come together." The word ***again*** seems out of place in that position today, but it didn't at the time. And today, we might say, "They granted permission to him," whereas Shakespeare might write, "They to him granted permission." The phrase 'to him' seems out of place in front of ***permission***, but again, you could say it that way in Early Modern English.

Another modern source of confusion is the way prepositions were used at the time. In Old English, most words had specific inflectional endings that conveyed grammatical information, including the relationship between one word and another. Well, as most of those endings disappeared, people had to find other ways of conveying that information, and one way to do that was with a preposition like ***over***, ***under***, ***to***, ***in***, ***around***, and so on. But many of those prepositions had much more flexible meanings, even as late as the Elizabethan period. And that can make Shakespeare's plays difficult to follow.

For example, the word ***upon*** sometimes meant 'over,' as when Shakespeare wrote "I have no power upon you." What he was really saying is "I have no power over you." And the word ***of*** could have a lot of different meanings, like 'from.' So when he wrote, "We were dead of sleep," what he was really saying is "We were dead from sleep." Again, these types of uses are common in Shakespeare's works, and they confuse many modern readers.

The old distinction between strong and weak verbs had also broken down a bit with verbs sometimes switching from one group to the other. So at the time, you would have heard people say ***catched*** and ***caught***, ***digged*** and ***dug***, ***meeted*** and ***met***, and so on.

When speaking to an individual, ***thee*** and ***thou*** existed alongside ***you***, though social context still encouraged the use of one or the other. Verbs could still end with the older '***-th***' ending like 'he runneth' and 'she walketh' or with the newer '***-s***' ending like 'he runs' and 'she walks.'

Those are just a few examples of how grammar and syntax were different from today. The rules were much less rigid and regulated, and again, poets took full advantage of that.

And then there is the issue of pronunciation. The way words were pronounced at the time would have also affected the way actors delivered their lines and the way audiences heard what was being said.

Of course, pronunciations would have varied in the Elizabethan era, just as they do today. They would have varied by region and class. But there were also a couple of other factors to consider. There had been a significant amount of migration into London from various part of the country. So within the capital city, you would have a variety of regional accents.

Another factor was the Great Vowel Shift, which was still underway. The pronunciation of long vowel sounds was still changing. Some of those distinct vowel sounds were merging together becoming identical or virtually identical. Meanwhile, other vowel sounds were drifting apart. It's possible that older, more conservative speakers would have used some of the older pronunciations while younger speakers would have used some of the newer pronunciations. Again, that would have created more variety – and would have given actors and playwrights even more flexibility in the way lines were crafted and presented.

Scholars who have studied Elizabethan pronunciation believe that the language was pronounced a bit quicker than modern Shakespearean plays might suggest. Words were often clipped by dropping certain consonant sounds. Instead of saying ***and*** with a distinct 'd' sound at the end, it appears that people often did what we do today and just said 'n' like 'this 'n' that' and 'rock n' roll.' The word ***the*** often blended in with the word that followed it if that word began with a vowel. So instead of 'the entrance,' people would say 'th'entrance.' Instead of saying 'my lady' with a very distinct ***my***, it was usually pronounced as 'mi'lady.'

Initial H's were often dropped, so people said 'enry' instead of 'Henry,' and 'ouse' instead of 'house.' It was also common to drop final G's, so it was common for people to say ***singin'*** and ***dancin'*** rather than ***singing*** and ***dancing***. Of course, we still hear some of those pronunciations today in various accents and dialects, but those features were apparently much more widespread during the Elizabethan era. This is also confirmed by many of the spellings in Shakespeare's plays where initial H's and final G's are occasionally omitted. It also appears that the dialect was rhotic. So the 'r' sound was pronounced after vowels, though the nature of that 'r' sound probably varied. So people would have said ***carpenter*** with distinct 'r' sounds like American or Irish English rather that 'ca'pen'te' like modern Received Pronunciation.

Again, vowel sounds were also a bit different. Words like ***sea*** and ***say*** would have been pronounced the same way – both probably pronounced as /sɛ:/. Words like ***tie*** and ***toy*** would also sounded the same, probably pronounced as /tɔi/. Words like ***love*** and ***prove*** rhymed with each other, probably pronounced as /lʊv/ and /prʊv/. ***Wars*** rhymed with ***stars***, probably pronounced as /wahrs/ and /stars/. ***Rehearse*** would have been pronounced more like /re-HAIRse/ similar to Scottish English.

The 't' would have been pronounced in a word like ***nature***, probably pronounced more like 'nɛ-toor.' It would have also been pronounced in a word like ***nation***, probably pronounced more like 'nɛ-ti-on.'

Again, these are generalizations. Not everyone would have spoken the same way. And I've only pointed out a few selected examples of Elizabethan pronunciation. Obviously, we'll explore some of those features in more detail as we move forward with the podcast, but the net effect of

that older style is a pronunciation that zipped along a bit faster than the normal delivery used by modern actors. In general, when modern versions of the plays were performed in the Original Pronunciation, the running time was about ten minutes shorter on average.

So let me give you a quick example of that Original Pronunciation. This is a passage from Act V of Shakespeare's history play, Richard II. It is read by Ben Crystal, who I mentioned earlier in the episode. He provides a good example of the sound and rhythm used by the typical Elizabethan actor:

[CLIP]
I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world,
And for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.
My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father, and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humors like the people of this world,
For no thought is contented.

As I noted earlier in the episode, I recently had the opportunity to speak with Ben about the Elizabethan theater and the performance of plays using the Original Pronunciation. He has traveled around the world teaching actors and actresses how to perform the plays in that accent. And he has observed how that pronunciation has impacted performances, and the way audiences relate to the productions when they hear that older style of speech.

I began our discussion by asking him to describe the experience of going to an Elizabethan theater – and to explain how it was different from a modern theater.

BEN CRYSTAL: Sure. Well, if you went to see a play today, the chances are that you would walk into the auditorium and settle down in your chair, and when the show begins, the lights on the auditorium would go down, and you'd be sitting in the darkness, and the lights will go up on the stage. And you would watch a performance that had probably been prepared and planned over the previous - well, it really depends on the on the budget and the the level of experience and expertise - but anything from a few weeks to so quite possibly a couple of months, and indeed, for a big musical, even much longer. If you went into the Tardis or the Delorean, and traveled back to Shakespeare's time, then midday, you would cross the river somehow, either over the bridge or get a boat across the river Thames to Southwark, and walk along the straw-filled streets to that would be soaking up the mud if it had rained. You'd walk into a theater very much like the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe. That's on the south bank of the river Thames today. And that's a roundish building with no roof. They would perform their show at about 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the best light of the day, because, of course, they didn't have electricity. They did have some indoor theaters lit by candles, but for much of Shakespeare's London career, they were

performing in outdoor theaters. A lot of the audience would stand around the stage. There were some seated galleries as well, but this audience would watch a performance that had probably had as much as two or three days worth of preparation. Very, very little rehearsal time. And I suppose those are the biggest differences in experience. The nature of how you are as an audience member nowadays, sitting in the darkness, back then, standing in light - the same light as the actors. What we call shared-light environment, and rather than watching something that's very well rehearsed and polished, you would, instead be watching a group of craftsmen - because at the time women weren't legally allowed in England to act on the stage - a group of craftsmen that had spent all of their working life playing together, at least from from the age of 11, 12, or 13, when they would have apprenticed to an older actor. And they would improvise their play. They would learn their lines or prepare their parts, and they would prepare the dances and the fights, the complicated bits that you can't improvise, because then they're too pretty or too dangerous to improvise and all the movement. What each actor's going to do in each specific moment, that would all happen in the moment, unplanned but very prepared. So you're watching a very sort of alive and a performance piece is got very different dynamic both as an observer of it, and indeed, as a performer of it.

KEVIN STROUD: Those types of venues, like the Globe or the Swan, were open air. And they were relatively small by modern standards, so people crowded into them. And there were no modern audio systems or microphones. So what kind of affect did that have on the performers? Did it affect how they projected or addressed the audience – and how they delivered their lines?

BEN CRYSTAL: Well, you know, we just don't know the answer to that. There are very, very few records describing the sort of performance styles. You know, were the performances incredibly large and histrionic and exaggerated? Or were they very minimalist and realistic, you know, were the actors performing Shakespeare in the habit of more what we might call, you know, pantomime, pantomimic acting or more kitchen sink and realist. We've got someanecdotes in the plays. We've got the Mechanical's rehearsals in A Midsummer Night's Dream, which is evidently a pastiche of rehearsal – of amateurs rehearsing as well. But still there's probably some truth in some of the tools that they use. And we've got Hamlet's advice to the players where he talks about, you know, speaking this speech ‘trippingly on the tongue,’ which means quite, you know, fast. Do not mouth it, so don't take your time over it. Don't exaggerate it. And hold the mirror up to life. So from my explorations and gauging, I think what probably was experienced was what we might call – and there's two sort of more mainstream types of acting method. Right? There's the Stanislavsky method, where you know you live the part, and you believe the part, and you draw on your own life's experiences to make the part real. And then there's the Brechthian model where no one ever forgets that they're in the theatre, that this is a theatrical experience, and I think the Shakespearean equivalent was somewhere halfway between those two things where you've got actors performing to their best of their abilities to fully inhabit and portray the roles as realistically and humanistically as possible, although obviously, you know, they're in a heightened state and a heightened environment. But because of that shared light, because they're not acting into a black void of darkness, they can make eye contact with the audience. The audience can make eye contact with those actors. No one ever really forgets that they're in a theatre. I think that the experience was probably a wonderful balance, and indeed, friction of realism and immersion. And, of course, the Shakespeare's globe was built by his actors, and I

can't imagine but that they constructed an acoustically sound space. That it would have worked very, very well for the voice, and of course, had the added benefit of not having to deal with helicopters flying overhead like today's Globe does?

KEVIN STROUD: Well, you're right. There's so much we don't know about Elizabethan theatre, but I guess there is one thing we do know a little bit about and that is accent or the way people spoke at the time. So I'm curious if you could just tell me a little bit about original pronunciation, what it is, and how you've been able to determine what it sounded like.

BEN CRYSTAL: Oh, well, it's my was my father's work – David Crystal, the linguist, who was invited to the Shakespeare's globe in 2004 and 2005 to find out what this sound might have been. And reconstructing old accents is relatively straightforward fair for a linguist. There's some data that dad used is very much based around the first folio, some of which is the first printed collection of Shakespeare's works. That, in fact, is the 400th anniversary of that book in November 2023.

Using that book, he reconstructed an accent that's about 80% right, which isn't bad. But, of course, rather than it being an accent of Elizabethan London, or indeed Elizabethan England, I suppose this is a sound – not at least the sound that we've been exploring – is the sound of the theatre, so if you're using the folio as your main source, how do you find out what the sounds must have been like? Well, you start with the rhymes. Take Shakespeare's sonnets, which actually aren't printed in the folio, but take the quarto of Shakespeare's sonnets from 1609, two-thirds of the sonnets have rhymes that don't work in them. There's only two logical reasons for that. Either Shakespeare wasn't a very good poet, but we know that he was. And the other reason for rhymes not working is that the way that the words are pronounced has changed. So in the final sonnet, the final couplet of Sonnet 116, "If this be error and upon me prov'd, I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd," we know thereby that proved and loved had to have rhymed once. And so you go through all of the the works – because a lot of the plays just are written in rhyme as well, they'll have rhyming couplets in them – and there you get one chunk of data then. And this just, of course, isn't restricted to the first value or the quartos of the sonnets. But Elizabethan English was in a period where people would spell a lot more like they used to speak. So you can look at the spellings in the folio and see a word like Philome, and that is spelt PHILOME. And that might have turned to a word like film - FILM - nowadays, but, as I say, back then PHILOME is clearly a two-syllable, and possibly a three-syllable word. So the spellings are another chunk of data.

And then, beyond Shakespeare's works, there were people like Johnson, Ben Johnson, Shakespeare's colleague, who wrote dictionaries of how accents sounded. And Johnson wrote a dictionary of what the sounds of the language sounded like to him. And of course, you know he has his own filter and preferences and choices in making that, but still he goes through the letters of the alphabet in a dictionary that's now lost, and describes each sound. And when he gets to the letter R, he says, we pronounce this sound. We call it the doggy sound which implies a sort of 'urrrr.' Now, it's not clear whether it's a uvular /rrr/ or an alveolar trill – a /rrr/ – or just a stronger 'er' sound that's more familiar in North America today. But either way, that's another source of data. And so all of those sources combined took dad's work to that 80%.

And since he first established that work in the the mid-noughties, I've been exploring it, both at Shakespeare's Globe and around the world, with lots of different cultures and peoples and accents, from New Zealand to India, to America, to Canada, and all around. And the beautiful thing is that everybody that comes to Original Pronunciation fills in that last 20% with their own accent. So if you and I were to both learn original pronunciation, we would sound 80% the same, and the last 20% of me would be filled in with my natural speaking accent, which is modified, Received Pronunciation with bits of Irish and Welsh and Lancastrian and Cockney and Transatlantic cause of my life experiences, and your original pronunciation would be 80% the same as me but 20% you, and so on and so forth. And that's had a really interesting effect on people and audiences in Shakespeare, because a lot of people, I think, have grown up with the idea that there should be a particular sound for Shakespeare, and that sound should be Received Pronunciation. You know the posh English accent. And, of course, that accent is really quite far away from the accent that Shakespeare and his actors spoke in, and it's interesting to have worked with companies and to see that rather than performing Shakespeare where everyone learns the same accent and their natural or regional accents are flattened out or removed entirely, the explorations in Original Pronunciation have allowed for people to retain their accent - to allow their own accent and sound to blend in with original pronunciation. And of course, after all, accent is identity. So they're allowing more of themselves into the parts. And it's been a really interesting exploration, mainly, I think, because it's paved the way back towards a place where there is no longer one right "sound" for Shakespeare. The the right sound for Shakespeare is your sound because you want to speak it. So I think dad's work has really given a lot of agency and permission for ownership over Shakespeare all the way around the world, and to stop people feeling like they can't do it right because they don't have that posh English sound.

KEVIN STROUD: I love the idea that the Original Pronunciation makes the plays more relatable to modern audiences – and makes them feel more real in a lot of ways. I think most English speakers can hear some part of their own accent in it – because it represents a type of speech that existed shortly before English spread around the world. So it has features that have survived in many different regional dialects today. But what happens when we combine that accent with the specific meter and the rhythm that Shakespeare used? How does that impact the modern performance of a Shakespearean play when it is performed in Original Pronunciation – for example, the speed, the rhythm, and timing of the plays?

BEN CRYSTAL: Well, if you build in the approach that my theatre company uses, which is to rehearse in the same time frame as Shakespeare, so we usually make our professional productions of Shakespeare in two or three days. And indeed perform in an original practice-esque space. Now, that doesn't have to be a theatre like the Globe. But, you know, recreating that shared-light environment. All of those elements combined, and including Original Pronunciation, the effect seems to be one – well, first of all, the experience happens in under two hours. Second of all, the characters, the actors seem more grounded and emotionally engaged, and that's partly to do with the ripple effect of the placing of the the vowels in the mouth and the way that the center, the physical centre of gravity shifts from somewhere in your chest or your throat down to your gut. That has a knock-on effect in all genders of a lowering of the pitch of the voice, which is going back to what you're asking earlier about the acoustics. A lower pitched voice is much, is very, very useful in an outdoor space. Audiences say that their

experience is much more visceral. I think, much more emotionally engaged. And I think that's because of the nature of watching and improvised and playful dynamic rather than a carefully rehearsed one feels much more unique. But also the number of consonants that have changed since Shakespeare's time in spoken English are not that many, but the number of vowel sounds have changed quite a bit, and a director once said to me, "You know the meaning of a word is carried by its consonant." So if I were to say, "I love you," I can sharpen the meaning or the effect of you know the meaningfulness, I suppose, in the listener's ear, by sharpening the consonant sound. So "I love you" versus "I love you." The meaningfulness is much more sharper there. If I want to sharpen the emotional quality of it. Then I need to play with the vowel sound. So consider, "I love you" against "I looove you." So the emotional sounds have changed an awful lot since Shakespeare's time, and the meaning sounds have changed a lot less, and I think that's certainly events in the performances of Shakespeare and Original Pronunciation that I've seen, as I say, with performers from all around the world, coming with all their own different cultures and sounds and accents. The feedback generally is one of connecting and engaging with the audience in a more sort of grounded and visceral emotional level than than people generally tend to experience in modern accents.

And then, on the other side of things, there are some practical changes. When Richard, in Richard III says that he's been "cheated of feature by dissembling nature" in his opening speech that becomes "cheated of feature by dissembling nature" [*OP*]. And you can hear that the rhythm in modern verses original prronunciation, it changes quite a bit, though so “cheated of feature by dissembling nature” becomes “cheated a feature by dissembling nature,” [*OP*] you can hear that Shakespeare is also playing with the rhythm through this sound as well, so and and we're really only I think about a third of Shakespeare's plays have been explored so far in Original Pronunciation. Maybe we're teetering towards a half now, but there's still an awful lot more to be found out. More of these things that Shakespeare wrote and wove into the sounds and the words that that haven't been revealed yet.

KEVIN STROUD: You've done so much work with Original Pronunciation. I'm curious if you ever find that it affects your own personal accent when you're speaking in normal speech? Do you catch yourself you're pronouncing vowels like they were pronounced four centuries ago?

BEN CRYSTAL: Certainly, I struggle not to say “in sooth” rather than “in truth” these days, and that's 20 odd years of working with Shakespeare in lots of lots of different ways. Someone just said to me yesterday, you know the day before, where's your accent from? And I think that, you know, each and all of our life experiences affect our our accents, and my Transatlantic Irish twang has certainly been magnified because of those sounds that are evident in Original Pronunciation and spending so much time working on OP. It wasn't until because, of course, I went to drama school in England, and so I was told that my regional Welsh accent wasn't appropriate for Shakespeare, and that I would have to speak Received Pronunciation. So first of all, I started doing Shakespeare in RP. Then I started exploring it in OP. And it wasn't until 2017 that I was invited to play Leonte's in New Hampshire, and speak Shakespeare in my natural speaking voice, and that really dumbfounded me. It took me a moment to work out what that might sound like without slipping into “Shakespeare voice,” but having done so, it's incredibly liberating.

KEVIN STROUD: So you and your dad have written a lot of books about Shakespeare and Original Pronunciation. And the two of you have put together a new book, and coincidentally, it has to do with Shakespeare. It's a collection of Shakespeare's quotes, but it's also more than that. It an analysis of each quote and an application of the quote to modern life. So can you tell me a little bit about the book because I think it's a very interesting concept. It's called 'Everyday Shakespeare: Lines for Life.'

BEN CRYSTAL: That's it. It's our fifth put together. It is indeed called 'Everyday Shakespeare: Lines for Life.' There's a different page for every day of the year and a different quote for every page, but rather than the quotes the people might expect, you know, "To be or not to be," "A horse or horse, my kingdom for a horse," "Is this a dagger I see before me?," we have picked lines that you might not even have noticed, and from the corners of the canon, from plays that you may not have or poems you may not have engaged with before that hopefully offer both the thought that this could have been written yesterday and the thought that it would be relatively easy to drop it into everyday conversation. So we have lines like "Better three hours too soon than a minute too late," and "Make not your thoughts your prisons." "Grief makes one hour ten." And "I have heard it said, unbidden guests are often welcomest when they are gone," and that sort of thing, you know. Lines to hopefully invite a moment of reflection – potentially a moment of resonance, and that are short enough and bite-size enough and accessible enough to both make it clear that Shakespeare doesn't need that much work to gain access to the things that he wrote. Also that there isn't a hurdle is not achievable to dare to say it out loud yourself, and maybe even memorize it, and maybe even drop it into your everyday conversation. I think that's a testament both to the work that dad and I do, and to the work that I am increasingly interested in – especially after the last few years. You know the oracy in eloquence aren't things that are by and large taught in mainstream education. The places that we can go to hear great speakers that speak in such a way that make our hearts thrill are rare and few and far between. There's something of a mental health crisis ongoing since the pandemic and certainly I witness this in schools you know the amount of pastoral care that teachers are being asked to do as we help our younger generations, and indeed the older generations help each other recover from all that grief and isolation. And yet we haven't really provided an environment in our lives to work out, to give each other space and a safe space to practice saying how we feel and say to children, "Tell me how you feel," but we don't teach them how to do that. And I think that seeing as Shakespeare was so wonderful at wrapping feeling into word and creating these very human characters, and making those characters say and explore so such a vast panoply of of humanity, all the good and the bad, no matter where we might hail from, that these works can be a really wonderful safe sandbox to try out saying things that hopefully we never have to say, but thereby getting used to the idea of of trying to cram our emotional language, which is, of course, the language of the body, into our our word verbal cerebral language.

And then, yeah, the other half of of the work with dad and did the work that I carried on aside from dad has been about building bridges. I hated Shakespeare when I was in school, because it was taught to me on the page, and it and it took acting it on the stage for me to learn to understand just what riches there are there. So our first book was a dictionary, and we learnt from making that dictionary that, of the one million or so words that Shakespeare uses, only 5% actually might cause someone difficulty to understand them. Then we wrote a book of trivia – all

the fun and fascinating facts about Shakespeare. Then we did an illustrated dictionary of Shakespeare together. Then we did a book about accents, 'You Say Potato' And now this "Everyday Shakespeare," and you can find out more about it at everyday-shakespeare.com. It is a real celebration, I hope, of all the work we've done together, but most of all of Shakespeare, and actually, not of the man at all, but of the really quite wonderful and profound humanistic, pragmatic 'capital S' Stoic things that he had to say and offer us to not just celebrate the loves that we feel as a species and the wonders that we can achieve, but also to recognize that the griefs that we experience, the difficult points, and the hates, and the jealousies and the parts of ourselves as a species that were less happy to look at. And of course, some of his characters say very hateful things, and there has been a some movement in the last few years to suggest that those things are Shakespeare's opinions. But if there's something that dad and I learnt from – and of course we are two white men from the UK, so it is filtered to our experience – but we found very little evidence of that human Shakespeare and his own personal thoughts and beliefs beyond, as I say, the pragmatic and the stoic and the humanistic of love, and be kind, and life is brief, take it whilst you've got it, not taking advantage of it whilst you've got it, but be compassionate, and be aware that it's natural to feel all sorts of hateful things, and that we can do better as a species. So to inhale the cannon again for the essentially the fifth time with dad, but with this filter of trying to mine for well, yeah, for lines for life, has been an incredibly nourishing and rewarding venture.

KEVIN STROUD: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this. I really do appreciate it. And I know that the podcast listeners are going to be fascinated with what you have to say.

BEN CRYSTAL: It's a great pleasure. Thanks for having me Kevin. All the best.

A quick thanks again to Ben Crystal for joining me. I should note that we also talked specifically about the some of the passages in Romeo and Juliet. We looked at what those passages tell us about the way words were pronounced at the time and the way Shakespeare's pronunciation reveals some otherwise hidden puns. So I'll include that part of the discussion in an upcoming episode where we'll look at that play in a little more detail.

Next time, we're going to pick up our overall narrative in the mid-1590s, and we'll look at some notable developments that took place in England and France. As we move the story forward, we'll continue to explore the works of Shakespeare, as well as other writers of the period. And we'll focus on what those works have to tell us about the nature of English during those last few years of the Elizabethan period.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.