

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 176:
ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE**

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EPISODE 176: ALL THE WORLD'S A PLAYHOUSE

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 176: All the World's a Playhouse. This time, we're going to look at how the theater shaped the English language. And when I say 'the theater,' I mean the actual playhouses used to present dramas. We're going to look beyond the plays themselves to the venues where they were performed. People flocked to those playhouses during the Elizabethan period, and they were an important part of cultural life at the time. Theaters were such an integral part of Elizabethan England that the venues themselves contributed words that survive to this day. And those words joined thousands of other words that were pouring into English from around the world. So this time, we'll also look at how distant cultures were contributing to the growth of English during this period.

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](https://www.patreon.com/historyofenglish).

Now this time, I want to continue our look at Elizabethan drama, but I want to expand the scope of that discussion to include the important role of the actual playhouses that were used at the time. When many of us think about this period of history, we can't help but think about William Shakespeare and the important role of the theater in the daily life of Londoners. It all began with the construction of the first permanent theater just north of the city limits in the 1570s. That first playhouse was simply called 'The Theatre.' And from there, English drama quickly emerged as a new art form. And some of the most important pieces of literature from the early modern period of English are those plays.

Over the next couple of decades, a few other theaters popped up around the city. A playhouse called the Curtain was built near the first theater in northern part of London. South of town, across the Thames in the region known as Southwark, Philip Henslowe had built the Rose theater. From the main part of the city of London, people had to take a boat or walk across the old London Bridge to get there. But the venue turned a profit anyway. The growth of those theaters reflected the fact that there was money to be made in the burgeoning theater industry.

In fact, by the 1590s, the most popular pastime in London was going out to watch a play. It has been estimated that well over half of the city's population went to the theater on a weekly basis. [*SOURCE: Globe: Life in Shakespeare's London, Catharine Arnold, p. 148.*]

Modern scholars have a sense of how successful those theaters were thanks to Philip Henslowe who built the Rose. As I noted in prior episodes, that theater is important to historians because Henslowe kept detailed records about the operation of the venue. Thanks to those records, we know which plays were performed there, when they were performed, and how much money they generated. We also know how much money he spent on other things like costumes and scenery.

About 35 years ago, in 1989, researchers began excavating the area where the Rose Theatre had once existed. While Henslowe's surviving records provided a lot of detailed information, scholars knew very little about the physical appearance and layout of the theater itself.

When the foundation of the old theater was excavated, the site actually revealed some surprises. An old drawing from the time the theater was in use suggested that it had six sides, but the excavation revealed that it actually had fourteen sides. A variety of artifacts were also unearthed – including a scabbard, a sword, some shoes, and even a human skull. The skull could have been a prop, but it was lodged in one of the walls in the stage area, so most scholars think it was placed there as part of a ritual or superstition when the playhouse was built. [SOURCE: *The Friendly Shakespeare*, Norrie Epstein, p. 52-3.]

Though there were some surprises, the excavation also confirmed what a lot of experts had suspected. The Rose was like most open-air playhouses of the Elizabethan period. A stage jutted out into an open yard where many audience members stood to watch the play. The yard itself was about fifty feet across, and the people who stood there to watch the play were called **groundlings**. They would have been mostly commoners and would have paid a penny to stand or sit in the open yard. They would have been about a third of the total audience. [SOURCE: *History of the Theatre*, Oscar G. Brockett, p. 168.]

That open area was sometimes called the **pit** because it was the lowest part of the theater – below the balconies and below the stage itself. It was a term borrowed from other arenas where cockfighting or bear-fighting were popular attractions at the time. That term **pit** still survives as the name for the area in front of the stage. The word can be found in the term **mosh pit** for the area in front of the stage where people crash into each during certain types of concerts.

In more upscale venues like a theater that same general area is sometimes called the **orchestra pit** today. And again, in that term, we see the continued use of that old word **pit**.

In fact, if we look a little closer at the origin of that term **orchestra pit**, we'll find that the term is somewhat redundant because the word **orchestra** once referred to the same general part of a theater or playhouse. You might think that it is called an **orchestra pit** because that is the place where the orchestra sits, but it's actually the other way around. The musicians are called an **orchestra** because they sit in the orchestra section of the venue.

The word **orchestra** is ultimately a Greek word, and it literally meant 'the place for dancing.' A couple of episodes back, I mentioned that ancient Greek theater featured groups of singers and dancers who performed between the scenes of plays. Through their songs and dances, they would comment on the events of the play. Well, it was common for them to perform on the ground in front of the stage. Since that is where they danced, that area was called the **orchestra**, which again meant 'dancing place' in Greek – and that 'dancing place' was typically located next to the stage.

Well, the word *orchestra* eventually made its way into English. In fact, it is found for the first time in an English document around the current point in our overall story of English in 1596. And in English it came to refer to the area immediately in front of the stage. In fact, the word is still used in that sense to refer to the seating area that is closest to the stage. So if you have seats in the orchestra section, it doesn't mean that you will be sitting in a musician's lap. It just means that you will be sitting close to the stage.

It was really in France that it became common to sit the musicians in the orchestra section immediately in front of the stage. [SOURCE: *Word Origins and Their Romantic Stories*, Wilfred Funk, p. 298.] And that's how that group of musicians came to be known as the *orchestra* – a meaning that first appeared in the early 1700s. And, again, we have both senses of the word *orchestra* today.

So inside of Elizabethan theaters, a spectator who paid a penny could stand near the stage in the yard – or pit – or orchestra. But for another penny, the spectator could stand in one of the elevated platforms that ran along the interior side of the theater. Those areas were further away from the stage, but they gave the spectator a higher, and perhaps better, overall view. Since this area cost more, wealthier patrons and those of the higher classes would tend to congregate there. That type of platform was sometimes called a *gallery*, using that Latin and French loanword.

Now over the following centuries, it became common to fill in the open area around the stage with seats. And when that happened, many people preferred to sit in those seats because they were closer to the stage. And the galleries, which were further from the stage, became the cheaper seats. And in later centuries, that change gave us the phrase 'playing to the gallery' meaning 'to play to the cheap seats in the back of the theater,' or more generally 'to appeal to the common people or to the masses.' In American theaters, it was common for people in those seats to eat peanuts during a performance. They would sometimes throw the hulls down onto the stage area – or the area around it. And that produced the term 'peanut gallery' with a similar meaning as 'the common people or people with common interests.'

Now in a modern theater, we might refer to some of those gallery seats as the *balcony*. It is very likely that people during the Elizabethan period also used that term, though according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word isn't found in an English document until 1618 – two years after Shakespeare's death. In fact, I mentioned this fact in the last episode about Romeo and Juliet. As I noted in that episode, there is a famous scene in the play that is sometimes referred to as the 'balcony scene' because Juliet is situated in a balcony. But Shakespeare's version of the play only notes that she is located at a window. He didn't use the word *balcony*, and again, the word isn't actually found in an English document until shortly after his death. *Balcony* is ultimately an Italian word from the word *balco* meaning a scaffold. That root word developed into the term *balcony*, which came to mean 'any part of a building that protrudes or projects outward from the main part of the structure.' And that term was then applied to these elevated galleries.

So again, if you were a spectator during this period, one penny would allow you to stand in the pit, and two pence would allow you to stand in the galleries, but for three pence, you could sit on a cushioned seat during the performance. Those seats were often located in an exclusive section of the gallery called a **box**. Of course, that term also exists today. A person who attends a modern theater or stadium might have a 'private box' or a 'luxury box' or a 'sky box.' Again, it's a term that goes back to Elizabethan theaters. [*SOURCE: History of the Theatre, Oscar G. Brockett, p. 178.*]

That sense of the word **box** may have also given us the term 'box office,' but there are actually two competing etymologies for that term. One commonly recited explanation is that patrons placed their pennies in a box when they entered the theater. And that produced the term 'box office' for the revenue generated for each performance. The main problem with that explanation is that the earliest recorded uses of the term are not really consistent with that view. The Oxford English Dictionary doesn't record the term **box office** until the mid-1700s, and it attributes the term to that other sense of the word **box** as a section of the gallery where patrons paid for a cushioned seat. Supposedly, in later centuries, theaters required printed tickets in order to be admitted into a box. The tickets for those boxes were sold at an office called the 'box office.' But over time, tickets came to be required for all of the seats in the theater, so the box office had to handle all of those sales. And from there, the meaning of the term **box office** was extended to the overall revenue generated by a play. So at least according to the OED, the term can ultimately be traced back to the box seats in those early theaters.

By the way, the idea that there was a box that people put their money in actually helps to explain the appearance of another brand-new word that is recorded in English for the first time around this point in the 1590s. And that is word **cash**. Believe it or not, **cash** comes from a word for a type of box. It's really just a variation of the word **case**. The word goes back to the Latin and Italian word **cassa** meaning a 'box.' The word passed into French, where it produced the word **case**. But in the mid-1590s, another version of the same word started to pop up in English as **cash**. It was used in the sense of a money box, but it was also sometimes used to refer to the actual money placed inside of the box.

Now I noted a couple of episodes back that actors in ancient Greece wore masks. And from time to time during a Greek play, the actors would need to change their mask as they changed character. So in order to do that outside of the view of the audience, they often used a tent or a small hut, which was placed behind the stage or performing area. In ancient Greek, that type of tent or hut was called a **skene**. Since the **skene** was located immediately behind the performing area, it provided the backdrop for the play that was being performed. Well over time, the word was extended to the entire area where the actors performed. So it included the entire stage area. And as the word passed through Latin and French into English, it lost the 'hard K' sound after the S. So the word evolved from **skene** to /se:n/, and then **scene** (s-c-e-n-e).

Much of the original sense of the word **scene** is preserved in the word **scenery** referring to the backdrop used in a play, as well as the other items used on the stage. We might say that those items help to 'set the scene.' The sense of the word **scene** as the place where certain action occurs is preserved in a phrase like 'the scene of the crime.' The word can also refer to the

action itself as when someone ‘makes a scene’ by being very disruptive. So the word has several related senses, all involving a specific setting and the action taking place within that setting. And that’s how the word *scene* came to apply to a specific part of a play. Traditionally, plays were divided into five acts, and each act was divided into a series of separate *scenes*. The word *scenario* is an Italian version of the same word that was borrowed into English in more recent centuries. Again, it originally referred to a summary or outline of a play or a scene within the play.

So as we can see, the various parts of a theater have contributed several common words and phrases to the language. And the excavation of the Rose theater provided some interesting new insights about the construction and layout of those venues in the late 1500s.

Well, speaking of the Rose, around the current point in our overall story of English in 1596, the Rose got a new competitor. A new theater was built just down the street in the same part of Southwark. And this new theater was called The Swan. It’s construction reflects the booming popularity of Elizabethan drama. And it also indicates that acting companies and theater owners were increasingly attracted to Southwark – across the river from the main part of London.

But while some new playhouses were being built, others were being threatened with closure. And that included the first permanent theater built just north of the city limits. That was the venue known simply as ‘The Theatre,’ and it also happened to be the main theater used by Shakespeare and his acting company known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.

The Lord Chamberlain’s Men included a prominent actor named Richard Burbage. Richard’s father James has built that original theater about twenty years earlier. But James Burbage didn’t own the land where the Theatre was built. He actually leased the land from a landlord named Giles Alleyn. Well, Alleyn was a Puritan, and he decided that he didn’t want the land to be used as the site of a theater anymore.

The original lease ran for twenty years, so it expired around the current point in our story in 1596. Of course, the actors didn’t want to leave their home venue, but the following year, the playhouse had to be closed due to the expiration of the lease.

Well, James Burbage had anticipated the problem, so he had acquired a small indoor theater located at the site of an old monastery called Blackfriars. The plan was to use the small Blackfriars theater until the lease issues could be resolved on the larger playhouse. But the Blackfriars back-up plan fell apart because the local residents didn’t want a theater in their backyard. More specifically, they didn’t want the crowd that tended to hang around the theaters. So they appealed to the Privy Council and were able to block Burbage from using Blackfriars as a theater. [SOURCE: *Shakespeare & Co., Stanley Wells, p. 16.*]

James Burbage was left heartbroken, and he died around this same time. Though the cause of his death is unknown, one has to suspect that the stress of the situation may have been a contributing factor. With Burbage’s death, his son Richard and another son named Cuthbert inherited his rights to the two venues. Richard was still an actor with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, but the

acting company now had nowhere to perform. A short time later, the parties worked out an agreement with the owners of the Curtain theater located nearby in the northern part of London. It became a temporary home for the acting troupe, but the matter of the lease on the old playhouse wasn't over yet. Over the next year or so, Richard Burbage pondered ways to preserve the old playhouse which was in danger of being ripped down by its Puritan landlord.

Of course, these types of venues were important if the acting troupe wanted to make money by performing before the general public. But not all performances were designed for the public. Occasionally, the actors gave private performances for the nobility and sometimes for the queen herself. And the surviving records confirm that the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed for the royal court during the Christmas season of 1596 and into the first few weeks of 1597.

Though the official record doesn't identify which plays were performed, most scholars agree that they likely included a new history play about Henry IV. And that's because the overall sequence of events during this time period would suggest that that's when the play was performed.

This history play about Henry IV is notable because it introduced one of Shakespeare's most popular characters. That was the character of Falstaff – a vain and buffoonish knight who hangs around with the king's son Prince Henry, or Prince Hal as he is known in the play. According to tradition, Queen Elizabeth was so enamored with the character of Falstaff that she encouraged Shakespeare to write another play featuring him. And that play is called *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. As we'll see, most scholars think that play was first performed before Elizabeth's court a few months later. So based on that timing, it seems likely that Elizabeth would have first encountered Falstaff when *Henry IV* was performed at her court during the Christmas season of 1596. [SOURCE: *Shakespeare: The Evidence*, Ian Wilson, p. 223-5.]

Now I should note that *Henry IV* is actually divided into two parts, but I will sometimes refer to the two parts in the singular because they really tell one story and were probably completed and performed around the same time. The story of *Henry IV* is widely regarded as one of Shakespeare's best history plays, and it has certainly been one of the most popular history plays, again largely due to the comedic character of Falstaff.

As I noted a couple of episodes back, this play was part of a series of plays that told the story of the rise of the House of Lancaster leading up to the Wars of the Roses. Since Shakespeare had already told the story of the Wars of the Roses in his earlier history plays, this new sequence of plays was essentially a prequel to that earlier series. The first in this new series was *Richard II*, which I discussed a couple of episodes back. Richard was overthrown or deposed by his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, who then became King Henry IV. He was also the Duke of Lancaster, so this was really the beginning of the Lancastrian line of kings. And the two parts of *Henry IV* tell the story of his reign. Much of the story involves his effort to fend off claims by rival members of the extended royal family and to defeat them in battle when necessary.

But despite the title of the play, much of the story actually focuses on the king's son Henry, or Prince Hal. Hal eventually succeeded his father and became Henry V – one of England's great warrior kings. So everyone watching the play would have known his destiny, and Shakespeare

focuses much of his attention on Hal and his buddy Falstaff, even though the play is ostensibly about Hal's father.

Much of the political intrigue of the play involves Henry IV's attempt to stave off threats to his reign, specifically a rebellion in the north of England led by the Percy family. The leader of this rebellion is Henry Percy, more commonly known by his nickname 'Hotspur.' His father and uncle are prominent earls in the region, and in an early scene, they encourage Hotspur to take up arms against the king. When Hotspur shows his enthusiasm for the rebellion, his father encourages him to temper his emotions by saying, "Before the game is afoot, thou still let'st slip" – in other words, 'you've released the hunting dogs before the game or 'hunt' has even begun.' And that line is notable because it contains the first known use of the phrase 'the game is afoot.' It was later popularized in the Sherlock Holmes series, but it appears that Shakespeare coined the phrase here in the late 1500s.

We then have a scene where Falstaff and several other men rob a group of pilgrims. They had invited Prince Hal to join in, but Hal had chosen not to. Instead, he and a friend don disguises and rob Falstaff and the other thieves as soon as they have completed their robbery. Falstaff and the other thieves drop their loot and run away. Again, they don't know that Prince Hal is the culprit.

Later, back at the tavern, Falstaff recounts how he and the other thieves were set upon by a hundred men. He says that he fought off a dozen of them, and he was stabbed through his shirt several times. He says he got the better of two of them, but four jumped him. Hal starts making fun of Falstaff because the story and the number of men keeps changing. Of course, Hal knows that it is all a lie because he was the robber in disguise and no one put up a fight at all.

A few moments later, Prince Hal is informed by a messenger that a rebellion has begun. Hotspur and the Percys in the north have joined with the Welsh to depose the king. During the ensuing discussion, Falstaff notes that Hotspur's uncle, the earl of Worcester, has left London to join the rebellion. He says, "Worcester is stolen away tonight." Now I mention that line because it hits our ear a bit wrong today. Today, we would say "Worcester has stolen away tonight," not "Worcester is stolen away tonight." But this passage reflects an older grammatical form that was still common in the Elizabethan period.

When we use a form of the verb *to have* before another verb, that's called the perfect tense of the verb. We use it when we say things "He has stolen away," or "I have met you before," or "She had found her keys." Today, we always use *have* or *had* or *has* to form that tense. But in early Modern English, a form of the verb *to be* was sometimes used in that situation. Specifically, if the main verb involved some type of motion or movement or a change in state or condition, a form of *to be* was used like *am*, *is*, *are*, *was* or *were*. So people would say, "He is come" instead of "He has come." And they would say "She was arrived" instead of "She had arrived." And they would say, "I am become ill" instead of "I have become ill." And here, Falstaff says, "Worcester is stolen away" rather than "Worcester has stolen away."

This particular tense – the perfect tense – had emerged during the Middle English period, and it was still relatively new and unsettled in the 1500s. Though a form of *to be* was traditionally used with these types of motion verbs, that started to change during Shakespeare’s lifetime. The use of *to have* became more common with those verbs. And Shakespeare actually used both in his writings. He wasn’t entirely consistent. Over the following couple of centuries, the use of a form of *to be* largely disappeared when forming this tense. So today, it strikes us as a bit old-fashioned and awkward when we hear that type of phrasing, but it has survived in a few limited uses. For example, it is common to hear someone address an audience by saying “We are gathered here today,” instead of “we have gathered here today.” That’s the type of phrase that one would have heard in the 1500s, so it hasn’t completely disappeared. And again, we hear it when Falstaff says, “Worcester is stolen away.”

Now while Falstaff and Prince Hal are speaking, they are interrupted again – this time by the hostess of the tavern. The sheriff and his men have arrived and are looking for the thieves who stole from the pilgrims. The hostess says, “They are come to search the house.” Again, we hear that older perfect tense construction using a form of *to be*. “They are come” instead of “they have come.”

The sheriff is looking for an old, fat man who was involved in the robbery. That’s obviously Falstaff, and there is no doubt that Falstaff will be arrested if he is spotted by the sheriff, but Prince Hal is able to distract the sheriff and protect Falstaff in the process.

Much of the rest of this first part of Henry IV focuses on the king’s disappointment with his son’s carousing and partying and his lack of focus on being the future king. The play culminates with the Battle of Shrewsbury in which Hotspur and his allies attack the king’s forces in a famous battle from the early 1400s. Prince Hal finally proves himself and he fights alongside his father and defeats the rebel forces. He kills Hotspur in a scene that really serves as the climax of the play.

Falstaff fights in the battle as well, but at one point, he escapes and falls down and pretends to be dead. When it is discovered that he is faking his injuries, he says, “The better part of valor is discretion, in the which better part I have sav’d my life.” That line actually gave us the well-known proverb, “Discretion is the better part of valor.”

Henry’s victory at Shrewsbury effectively ends this first part of the Henry IV series. Henry utters the final words of the play by stating that the victory will help to deter further rebellions, but he still needs to be vigilant to wipe out any further rebels or challengers. He says:

Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway,
Meeting the check of such another day.
And since this business so fair is done,
Let us not leave till our own be won.

Now I mention that passage because in the first line, Henry says, “Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway.” Notice that he doesn’t say that rebellion shall lose “its” sway. He says that it shall “his” sway. So why would he refer to a rebellion with the pronoun *his* instead of *its*?

Well, the answer is because the modern pronoun *its* wasn’t in common use yet. Traditionally, the pronoun *his* was used to refer to both males and to objects that didn’t have a gender. So people would have said, “The tree lost his leaves,” or “The cloud changed his shape,” or in this case, “The rebellion shall lose his sway.” Now the pronoun *it* was being used, and in fact, it had been used for centuries, but its possessive form was *his*. So why was that?

Well, if you recall the episodes I did about Old English, you might remember that almost all of the pronoun forms back then began with an ‘H’ sound. And those initial H’s are still prominent in our pronouns with words like *he*, *him*, *his*, *her* and *hers*. The plural forms also began with an ‘h’ sound, but they were later replaced with the Norse forms that begin with ‘TH’ – *this*, *that*, *these* and *those*. And those Norse forms may have been adopted specifically because they had a different sound at the beginning, which created more variety in the pronoun forms and reduced some of the confusion which inevitably occurred when all of the pronouns sounded similar to each other.

Well, the pronoun *it* also began with an ‘H’ sound in Old English. Back then, it was pronounced *hit*. And its possessive form was *his*. *Hit* and *his*. Well, *hit* lost its initial ‘H’ sound during the Middle English period, and that meant that *it* was used when referring to an object, but *his* was used when showing possession. So when referring to that tree that lost its leaves, you would have said that ‘Hit lost his leaves,’ but now, you would say ‘It lost his leaves.’ And that was the general state of those pronoun forms when Shakespeare was writing. You’ll also find that same usage in the King James Bible and other works composed well into the 1600s. But I mention all of that at this point in the podcast because the alternate form *its* began to emerge around this time. And in fact, we’ll encounter one of the first recorded uses of that new form a little later in the episode. So stay tuned for that.

Now, returning to the play, I noted that the victory at Shrewsbury concludes the first part of the Henry IV series. And this first part proved to be very popular with audiences. It covered most of the well-known events of Henry’s reign. Shakespeare could have stopped there and moved on to Prince Hal’s succession and reign as Henry V, but he chose to write a second part to the story. Though we don’t really know why, some Shakespeare scholars think it was because he knew he had a popular character in Falstaff, so he wanted to feature him in another play. Since Falstaff was much older than Prince Hal, he would have been too old to serve as a prominent character in a play that covered Hal’s later reign as king, so Shakespeare may have just decided to extend the Henry IV story so he could include some more scenes featuring Falstaff. [See *Azimov’s Guide to Shakespeare*, Isaac Azimov, p. 382.] Again, we don’t know that for certain, but Part Two is generally considered to be the weaker of the two parts.

Part Two focuses on the ongoing challenges to Henry’s reign, though none were as pressing as the earlier rebellion led by the noble Hotspur. This second part picks up where the first part left off with the victory at Shewesbury.

Hotspur was killed at Shrewsbury, so now, his father – the earl of Northumberland – vows revenge for his son’s death. He gathers a group of nobles opposed to Henry’s reign, and they plot another rebellion.

With a new rebellion brewing, the king’s forces assemble, and Falstaff is supposed to raise a troop of men as well, but he is spending his time at a tavern where he has run up a bill that he can’t pay. The hostess calls the authorities on Falstaff, and she tells them about his unpaid bill. She says, “He hath eaten me out of house and home, he hath put all my substance in that fat belly of his.” And I mention that passage because that line is still with us today. If you ever say that someone “has eaten you out of house and home,” it ultimately comes from the reference to Falstaff’s unpaid tab in this play.

By the way, *house* and *home* are both Old English words, and speakers have been pairing them together since the Old English period, presumably because of the alliteration afforded by the two words. I should also note during the Elizabethan period, the word *house* had a very broad sense. It could refer to a tavern, or a restaurant or other type of public establishment. It’s a usage that still survives in a term like *alehouse* and *steak house*. And in keeping with the overall theme of this episode, the word *house* could also refer to a theater. The theatrical usage survives in a term like *playhouse*. Also the lights of a theater are sometimes called the *house lights*, and if a play is sold out, we might say that it was performed before a *full house*.

Now returning to the second part of Henry IV, the rebellion fostered by Hotspur’s father grows. Meanwhile, King Henry laments the constant struggle against his adversaries. In a well-known passage, he says “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

Ultimately, the leaders of the rebellion are tricked and arrested for treason. The rebellion fizzles and comes to an end. Henry IV dies a short time later, and Prince Hal finally succeeds him, thereby becoming Henry V.

Now it isn’t entirely clear when this second part of Henry IV was composed. It might have been composed immediately after the first part, or it might have been composed a few months later. Scholars are not in agreement about the exact timing, but there is a widespread belief that a separate play called ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ was composed around this same time in the early part of 1597. So it was likely composed either shortly after the two parts of the Henry IV were completed, or perhaps it was composed in between those two parts. There is certainly a connection between these three plays because all three feature the character of Falstaff. Though the timing and sequence and relationship between plays is not known for certain, here is the conventional view of what happened.

As I noted earlier, many scholars think the first part of Henry IV, and perhaps even the second part, was performed before the royal court during the Christmas season of 1596. The surviving records confirm that Shakespeare’s acting company performed at court during that period. According to several later writers like John Dennis writing about a century later, Queen Elizabeth loved the character of Falstaff in Henry IV, and she asked Shakespeare to compose a separate play featuring Falstaff in love. According to this traditional view, Shakespeare then quickly

composed *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was performed at a royal function a few weeks later in April of 1597. That royal event was a ceremony to induct several prominent men into an honorary order of knighthood called the Order of the Garter. Supposedly, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was specifically composed for that event.

Now there is no way to confirm that that is what happened, but the circumstances do lend some credence to the story. In addition to the accounts of later writers who reported this story, Shakespearean scholars note *The Merry Wives of Windsor* shows signs of being hastily composed. First and foremost, it is written almost entirely in prose or regular speech. There is hardly any poetry in the play at all. And that was very unusual for Shakespeare. That suggests that he didn't have time to compose highly structured passages using iambic pentameter or some other meter – or passages using rhyming verse. He simply wrote out the dialogue without worrying about those elements. Some critics also think the play is not as well-structured as most of his other plays during this period. Also, the character of Falstaff isn't as developed here. He's a barrel of laughs in *Henry IV*, but here, he doesn't have the same kind of comic appeal, suggesting that the play was rushed a bit. [See *Azimov's Guide to Shakespeare*, Isaac Azimov, p. 421.] There are also several specific allusions in the play to the Order of the Garter, which is more evidence that the play was composed for a ceremony associated with that order, probably the one which occurred in April of 1597. In fact, one of the individuals honored at that particular event was the new Lord Chamberlain who had acquired that title after his father – the prior Lord Chamberlain – died the previous year. Of course, both were patrons of Shakespeare's acting company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men. So it would make sense that the company would have performed for the event that honored their patron. So if we put all of those pieces together, it suggests that the play was hastily composed in the early part of 1597. Again, that calls for a bit of speculation, but that time frame is consistent with the known evidence. [SOURCE: *Shakespeare: A Life*, Park Honan, p. 223.]

Now there are a couple of storylines that run through *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but I'm going to focus on the main one involving Falstaff and the titular Merry Wives. Early in the play, we find Falstaff in a tavern in Windsor, which isn't really surprising given how much he likes to drink. And here, the tavern is called the 'Garter Inn.' In the *Henry IV* plays, the tavern was called the 'Boar's Head Inn,' so that's an interesting note right out of the gate. By calling the tavern the 'Garter Inn,' it is more evidence that the play was written for an audience at an Order of the Garter event.

At the tavern, Falstaff laments that he is broke and can't pay his bills, but he comes up with a plan. He decides to seduce the wives of two wealthy gentlemen in town. The two wives are Mistress Alice Ford and Mistress Margaret Page. Falstaff's plan is to make love to the two women and convince them to give him some of their husband's money. Falstaff reaches out to the wives by writing a letter to each of them. The two wives are friends, and they speak with each other and realize they have each received a letter from Falstaff – a man they barely even know. The letters are identical except for the names of the women they are addressed to. The two wives are surprised and offended at Falstaff's proposal, and they decide to play a joke on him in return. They intend to lead him on and then play on a trick on him.

The wives don't tell their husbands about the letters, but the husbands find out anyway when a couple of Falstaff's followers reveal his plans to them. Mister Page laughs it off knowing that his wife would not be tempted by the offer. But Mister Ford is jealous and intends to find out if Falstaff is really trying to seduce his wife. Page tells Ford that it is pointless to confront Falstaff over the matter because he is a liar and can't be trusted. Page says, "I will not believe such a Cataian." *Cataian* is Mister Page's word for a liar, but where did that word come from? Well, believe it or not, it came from China.

This word *Cataian* was also written and pronounced as Cathayan (/kuh-THAY-un/) with a 'TH' sound in the middle. The word literally meant 'Chinese' or 'a person from China,' and it was derived from the word *Cathay*, which was the old word for the region we know today as China. During this early period of exploration, the people of the British Isles only had a vague notion of what people were like in far away lands, and they often heard and assumed the worst. So in the late 1500s, the word *Cathayan* meaning 'a person from China' was often used in a derogatory way to refer to someone who was dishonest or untrustworthy. And that's the way the word is used here when Mr. Page refers to Falstaff as a *Cataian*.

The word *Cathay* for China had been around since the 1400s, and it came into the European languages via Persian. The Persians had encountered a nomadic people who inhabited parts of the Eurasian steppe region in the 11th and 12th centuries called the Khitan. The Khitan people had conquered much of China around that time, and the Persians referred to the region they ruled over as Khitai after their tribal name. That name for the region of modern China filtered westward through Persia and then into Europe, and in English it became *Cathay*. By the way, some eastern European languages still use that older term. For example, the Russian word for China is still *Kitay*.

The name *China* is derived from the name of the ancient Chin Dynasty, which was the first major dynasty to rule the region over 2000 years ago. That name found its way into English via a route that was similar to that of *Cathay*. It passed through Sanskrit and Persian before finally reaching western Europe and the British Isles. The newer name *China* was only starting to be used in English when Shakespeare was writing his plays. In fact, he uses the word *China* in a play composed a short time later called *Measure for Measure*. But it was a relatively new word in the language. *Cathay* was still the more common name.

The use of those words reflects the fact that Europeans had reached the far-flung corners of the world over the prior few decades, and they were starting to return home with things from those regions like herbs, spices, fabrics, trinkets – and words. As we'll see in a moment, the English language was acquiring words from all parts of the globe, and that included various words to refer to those regions and the people who lived in those regions, even if those words were sometimes used in a derogatory way as happened in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Now, returning to the play, the scene returns to Falstaff. He is waiting for a response from the wives when his companion Pistol asks to borrow some money from him. Falstaff refuses, and Pistol replies with one of the most well-known lines of the play. He says, "Why, then the world's mine oyster, Which I with sword will open." This passage is actually where we get the phrase

“The world is my oyster.” It may seem like an odd saying at first, but here we can find the original context of the phrase. Pistol is saying that if he can’t borrow some money from Falstaff, he will just take up his sword and make money with it, presumably as some type of mercenary. So he makes an analogy between a mercenary who uses a sword in exchange for payment and someone who uses a sword or knife to open an oyster to find a pearl. So if the world is your oyster, it contains treasures which can be obtained with a little effort and daring. And it’s a phrase that was apparently coined by Shakespeare here in this play.

Falstaff soon receives a response from Mistress Ford. She invites him to come over, but of course she and the other wife intend to trick him. After Falstaff arrives, the wives are going to pretend that Mistress Ford’s husband has suddenly arrived, and there are going to force Falstaff to hide in laundry basket full of dirty clothes. But as it turns out, her husband actually does arrive at that moment. Falstaff hides in the smelly basket, which is then taken outside and dumped in the river.

The wives then decide to trick Falstaff again, so Mistress Ford invites him over again. And once again, her husband arrives home unexpectedly. This time, Falstaff is forced to don a disguise and put on women’s clothes. He pretends to be one of the maid’s relatives, but Mr. Ford thinks the supposed relative is a witch, so he ends up beating the disguised Falstaff anyway.

The wives finally reveal the entire story to their husbands, and they all agree to play one final trick on Falstaff. They invite him to meet Mistress Ford in the forest under an oak tree. Falstaff is told to dress as a mythical stag spirit named Herne the Hunter. He goes to the forest at midnight dressed as the stag with antlers on his head, but he is afraid of fairies, and he holds the widespread belief that the forest is full of fairies. He proceeds cautiously through the forest and says, “The Windsor bell hath struck twelve; the minute draws on. Now, the hot-blooded gods assist me. Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa.” That’s a reference to Roman mythology where Jupiter turned himself into a bull in order to convince the princess named Europa to climb on his back so he could run off with her. So if Jupiter could turn himself into an animal to seduce a woman, Falstaff says he can as well. But the interesting thing about that passage is that he refers to the ‘hot-blooded gods.’ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, that is the first known use of the term *hot-blooded* in an English document, and it appears to be a term that Shakespeare coined in that passage.

Well, given that Falstaff is afraid of fairies, the wives have dressed several young children as fairies to scare him, and to pinch him while they sing a song. Falstaff freaks out before it is finally revealed that it is all a prank.

Now in the midst of this final scene in the forest, a character named Mistress Quickly has an interesting speech. She is present in the forest and is part of the prank. She tells the children dressed as fairies to “Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out.” Windsor Castle is where the Order of the Garter ceremony would have been held if this play was in fact originally performed on such an occasion. Mistress Quickly then says, “And nightly, meadow fairies, look you sing, Like to the Garter’s compass, in a ring.” Again, the passage has another reference to garters. And then the passage concludes with a Latin phrase. She says, “And ‘honi soit qui mal y pense’ write In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue and white.” That Latin phrase was actually the motto of the

Order of the Garter. So this passage provides the strongest evidence that the play was composed specifically for the Order of the Garter ceremony, again presumably in April of 1597.

That brings us to the end of the Merry Wives of Windsor – the third and final play featuring Shakespeare’s comic character Falstaff.

As we’ve seen, the evidence suggests that the Merry Wives of Windsor was first performed in the spring of 1597. Now around that same time, an interesting book appeared, and it further reflects that growing contact with the far reaches of the globe that I mentioned earlier. The book was an English translation of an Italian work about the Congo and the surrounding regions of central Africa. The translation was prepared by a writer named Abraham Hartwell, and it was one of the first books printed in English that described Africa south of the Sahara in detail. Like many books of this period, it has a very long title, but it is generally known by the opening line, “A Report of the Kindome of Congo.”

Now I mention this particular book because it illustrates the expanding knowledge of the world during this period, and also because it introduced several new words to the English language. Of course, those words reflect things found in Africa that were largely unknown in England at the time.

Not only does the book contain the first known use of the name *Congo* in an English document, it also contains the first English use of the word *zebra* – or /zeb-ra/ if you prefer. It was one of many animals that Europeans encountered for the first time in Africa. The book also contains the first recorded use of the word *banana*. Of course, we think of a *banana* as a fruit, but the word has had a very active life within English. If you feel like you’re going crazy, you may feel like you’re ‘going bananas.’ If you’re the person in charge, you might be described as the ‘top banana.’ And certain countries with authoritarian governments are referred to as ‘banana republics.’

The book also contains one of the earliest recorded uses of the word *coco* for the fruit of certain types of palm trees. The fruit resembled large nuts, and the outside was so hard that you had to break it open to get to the good stuff inside. So over time, the word *coco* became *coconut* in English, but initially, it was simply called a *coco*. In fact, this text uses both terms, but *coconut* is rendered as two distinct words.

Now even though a coconut is not really a nut, this particular book about the Congo does contain references to African nuts. In fact, it contains the first English reference to a specific type of nut found on trees in the tropical rainforests of Africa, and that was the *kola* nut. And that may seem like an obscure word, but it’s really not. Kola nuts contain caffeine, and many Africans chewed them as a stimulant. Well, in the late 1800s, an American pharmacist named John Pemberton began extracting caffeine from kola nuts to use in his new carbonated beverage. The drink also used coca leaves from the same plant that produces cocaine. And of course, when those two words were put together, it gave us the name of a drink you’ve probably heard of – Coca-cola. Of course, the word *cola* was then added to other similar types of drinks like Pepsi-Cola, RC Cola, and many others around the world. It even became a somewhat generic term for those types of

beverages. But that common word *cola* can be traced back to this book about the Congo published in England in 1597.

As I noted, the publication of this book illustrates the expanding scope of words that were coming into English during the Elizabethan period. We can now start to see words coming in from the languages of sub-Saharan Africa, and presumably those words were coming in alongside some of those African items that traders were bringing to England.

In London, ships routinely arrived with items from other parts of the world, and those ships docked along the Thames. As we've seen, that important waterway separated the main part of the city from the region of Southwark to the south. People routinely crossed over the old London bridge to get to Southwark where they could watch a play at the Rose theater or the brand-new Swan theater, which I mentioned earlier in the episode. And it appears that William Shakespeare moved to the area around this same time.

In 1597, Shakespeare failed to pay the taxes on his property in the northern part of London. But it doesn't appear that he was broke. In fact, in May of this same year – around the time that *Merry Wives of Windsor* was probably performed before the royal court – Shakespeare purchased the second largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon. So he was apparently doing quite well financially. But property taxes were often left unpaid when someone moved away, even to a different part of town. And an entry in the tax records related to Shakespeare's London property indicates that the matter was referred to the Bishop of Winchester. The bishop had authority over tax matters in area of Southwark, and if we put those two pieces of evidence together, we can conclude that Shakespeare probably moved from the northern part of London to the burgeoning theater district in Southwark at some point in 1597. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 222*]

Despite the growing theater scene across the river in Southwark, a major controversy in July almost brought it all to an end. In fact, it did bring it to an end temporarily. The controversy involved a young playwright who had recently appeared on the scene and who composed a play that offended the authorities. That young playwright was named Ben Jonson, and he would soon emerge as one of the most popular playwrights in England. His popularity would eventually rival that of Shakespeare.

But in the summer of 1597, Jonson was a young actor and playwright. He had recently composed a play called the *Isle of Dogs* with another writer named Thomas Nashe, who I've mentioned in prior episodes. The play was performed for the first time in July at the new Swan theater in Southwark. But virtually nothing is known about the content of the play today because the royal authorities raided the theater about half way through the performance. The play apparently took aim at certain government officials or other prominent persons. According to an official account, it contained 'seditious and slanderous' material. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare & Co., Stanley Wells, p. 133-4*] All we know is that the performance was shut down, Ben Jonson and several other actors were arrested, and all copies of the play were apparently destroyed. And that wasn't all. A royal decree shut down all of the theaters in London for about three months. [*SOURCE: Globe: Life in Shakespeare's London, Catharine Arnold, p. 163-5.*] Some in the government wanted the

theaters to be closed permanently, but the queen was too much of a fan. A few months later, in October, Jonson was released from prison and the theaters were allowed to open again.

By the way, censorship was nothing new in England or anywhere else in western Europe for that matter, but the word *ensor* in its modern sense was brand-new in the 1590s. The word *ensor* comes from the Latin word *censeo*, which referred to census-takers in ancient Rome. But their authority was much broader than that. They also took note of public offenses and violations of public morality. So the words *ensor* and *census* are actually cognate.

By the early part of 1598, the controversy over Ben Jonson's play had subsided, and patrons were once again crossing the Thames and pouring into the theaters in Southwark. Meanwhile, that same river was delivering ships loaded with new products and new words from around the world.

In that same year, we find the first recorded use of the word *curry* for a type of Indian dish cooked with spices. It derives from the native languages of southern India. The word appeared in an English translation of a Dutch work called 'Discours of voyages into ye Easte & West Indies.' The book also contained the first recorded use of the word *coffee* in an English document. It's ultimately an Arabic word. I mentioned the word *coffee* in an earlier episode in the general context of European exploration, but this is the first time the word is actually found in an English document. Of course, that same root word also gave us word *café* via Italian and French.

The same book also refers to a drink "made with the powder of a certaine hearbe called Chaa." That appears to be the first reference we have to *chai* or *tea* in an English document. Now again, I mentioned those words in an earlier episode because the first reference we have to Europeans discovering tea was in the 1560s, about thirty years earlier. And I noted that it was Dutch ships that brought tea back to western Europe from China. Well, here in this English translation of a Dutch text, we find the first actual use of the word in English. As I noted in that earlier episode, the word *chaa* – or *chai* as we know it today – is derived from the Mandarin form of the word spoken in northern parts of China. The word *tea* is derived from the Chinese dialects spoken along the southern coast of China. That was the form of the word that became more familiar to Europeans as their ships traded with the people along that coastal region. But *chai* and *tea* are just regional variations of the same root word.

This same book also contains the first English reference to *bamboo* – a word likely derived from the Malay language spoken in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia. The word *hashish* for cannabis appears for the first time in the text. It's an Arabic word. If you're into cooking and the culinary arts, I should note that the word *quinoa* also appears for the first time in English in the same text. It refers to a plant found in South America and is derived from the ancient Incan language. Beyond foods, the word *maracas* for the musical instrument is also recorded for the first time in English in the book. It's a word that derives from an indigenous language spoken in Brazil.

The text also contains the first use of a lot of other words that are still obscure or have largely disappeared from the language over time like the word *jaggery* for a type of brown sugar made from the sap of palm trees in India.

As I noted, the text illustrates how words from the far corners of the world were reaching the British Isles in the final few years of the 1500s. And given that development, perhaps it isn't surprising that in this same year – 1598 – another important text was published that related to the global influence on English. It was called, appropriately enough, *A Worlde of Wordes*. The text was composed by an Englishman of Italian ancestry named John Florio. And Florio is a fascinating character because he was really the man who taught many English-speakers how to speak Italian.

As I noted in prior episodes, the Elizabethans were fascinated with Italian culture, and many English scholars were interested in Italian poetry and drama. But relatively few of those works had been translated into English in the late 1500s. As a result, many people in England wanted to learn how to speak Italian, which would give them greater access to Italian culture and other aspects of the Italian Renaissance. And one of the leading Italian teachers in England was John Florio.

Florio was born in England to Italian parents, but his parents returned to the continent when he was an infant. So he spent most of his early life in continental Europe before returning to England when he was around 20 years old. As a result, he was fluent in both Italian and English, and after returning to England, he set about teaching Italian to English speakers. And he composed several books which served as instruction manuals. He was an avid promoter of Italian culture and was a bit of missionary in that regard. And he was also a bit of a wordsmith.

Florio also had a possible connection to Shakespeare. I've noted in prior episodes that Shakespeare's earliest published poems were dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton. And many Shakespeare scholars think that Wriothesley was the young man referenced in many of Shakespeare's early sonnets. Well, John Florio was Wriothesley's personal tutor. And it's possible that Shakespeare and Florio came to know each other through that connection.

In fact, it is very possible that Florio's writings had an influence on Shakespeare's works. A few episodes back, we look at one of Shakespeare's plays called 'Love's Labour's Lost.' That play has a somewhat unusual title, and some scholars think it came from Florio. Florio's first book was a series of dialogues composed in English and Italian. In that book called 'First Fruits,' Florio wrote, "We need not speak so much of love, all books are full of love, with so many authors, that it were labour lost to speak of love." [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 162*]." There is also more evidence that Shakespeare may have been reading Florio while composing *Love's Labour's Lost*. The play includes an Italian proverb which is identical to an Italian proverb used that by Florio in that same book of dialogues. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 163*] And if we consider that the play was composed around the same time as Shakespeare's sonnets, the Florio-Wriothesley connection is very intriguing.

Now, as an aside, we've encountered many examples words and phrases that Shakespeare introduced in his various plays and poems. And I have noted that he is considered to be one of the most prolific creators of new words in the history of English. In reality, many of the words attributed to him were probably already in use, but he recorded lots of them for the first time.

Well, a Stanford professor named John Willinsky looked at resources like the Oxford English Dictionary to determine how many English words were found for the first time in Shakespeare's works, and he put the number at just under two thousand. That actually put him second on the list of people who introduced the most words to the language. Geoffrey Chaucer had slightly more at just over two thousand. Of course, it isn't really surprising that Chaucer and Shakespeare hold the top two slots on that list. But the person who came in third probably is a surprise. It was John Florio.

Florio's contribution of words came from his books that were designed to teach Italian to English speakers. As I noted, his earliest books contained dialogues in English and Italian, but he eventually decided that his students would benefit from an actual dictionary that could be used to translate Italian words into English, and vice versa. And the result was the book I mentioned earlier called *A Worlde of Wordes*, which appeared at the current point in our overall story in 1598.

Florio's dictionary contained about 44,000 words. And it proved to be a very popular resource for writers and scholars who wanted to read Italian publications that had not yet been translated into English.

In the book, each Italian word was defined in English – usually by including one or more English synonyms for the Italian word. That meant that Florio needed to access every nook and cranny of the English language to come up with the words he needed to define over 40,000 Italian terms. And in doing so, he recorded a lot of English words for the first time. It is this dictionary that caused Florio to take a place right behind Chaucer and Shakespeare on that list of writers who introduced the most words to the English language. Of course, most of those words already existed, but we don't find them in print until this text.

Just to give you some examples of the words recorded for the first time in Florio's dictionary, we have words like *destination*, *negotiate*, *compromise*, *transcription*, *disabled*, *foliage*, *disgust*, *turbulence*, *improbable*, *radiate*, *outnumber*, *conditioner*, *underground*, *moneylender* and *unbecoming*. We also find the first use of some very common, everyday terms like *main street*, *watermelon*, *goldfish*, *firefly*, *flowerpot*, *dining hall* and *knitting needle*.

He also gave us the first recorded use of the word *balloon* in the sense of a ball filled with air. The word had been recorded a few years earlier in the sense of a game played with that type of ball, but Florio used the word to refer to the ball itself. The modern sense of the word as a thin material filled with air and designed to float emerged in the 1700s.

Florio also gave us the first recorded use of the term *sidewalk*, which is a term that is more associated with American English today. The thing that Americans call a *sidewalk* is more commonly known as a *pavement* or *footpath* in other parts of the English-speaking world. But that's not the way Florio used the word. He used the word *sidewalk* in its original sense as a short walk – like a walk around a park or a neighborhood.

Florio also gave us one of the first recorded use of the word *cash*, which I mentioned earlier in the episode. You might remember that it was originally an Italian word for a box. The word was *cassa* in Italian. And that's the way Florio used the word, but as I noted earlier, the term had also acquired the sense of 'a box where you keep your money.' And during the following century, the meaning of the word shifted from the box itself to the money inside the box.

Another one of the Italian words that Florio included in his dictionary was the word *gazetta*, which would soon become the word *gazette* in English. Florio's Italian version of the word predated any known English use of the word.

Sometimes Florio used funny terms to define his words like *higgledy-piggledy* meaning 'confusion or disorder.' He also gave us the first recorded use of the word *chuckle*.

The book is interesting not just for the words that it contained, but also for certain grammatical changes that it documented. Earlier in the episode, I mentioned that the possessive form of the pronoun *it* was actually *his* in Early Modern English. The word *its* (i-t-s) didn't really exist yet. But in Florio's dictionary, we find one of the first recorded uses of that new pronoun form. Florio included the Italian word *Spontaneamente*, which was basically the Italian form of the word *spontaneous*, but *spontaneous* hadn't yet appeared in English. It isn't recorded until the following century. So Florio had to define it with existing English words. So he defined it with the following passage, "willingly, naturally, without compulsion, of himselfe, of his free will, for its owne sake." Now notice those final words, ". . . for its owne sake." There we see the use of *its* for the possessive form of *it*. Again, this wasn't the very first use of that form. There are a couple of other documents that use it around the same time over the prior decade or so. But it was clearly a new pronoun form at the time, and Florio was one of the first to use it in writing.

Presumably, the word *its* was formed though analogy and imitation. When we look at possessive pronoun forms, *he* becomes *his*, *her* becomes *hers*, *our* becomes *ours*, *your* becomes *yours*, and so on. That is similar to the way we add an 's' to a noun to show possession like when *dog* becomes *dog's* as in the 'dog's collar.' So by analogy, speakers converted *it* into *its* when showing possession. Again, it was apparently a new development in the late 1500s.

Now around the same time that Florio's dictionary was published in 1598, another notable book appeared. And it's a book I've reference several times in earlier episodes. The book was called 'Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury.' And it was written by a scholar name Francis Meres, who apparently knew many of the literary figures in London at the time. And in one part of the book, he compared the writers of his day to those of the classical era. He specifically mentioned William Shakespeare, who he praised as one of several writers who had enriched the English language. He then wrote, "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love's Labour's Lost, his Loves Labour's Won, his Midsummer Night's Dream, and his Merchant of Venice – for tragedy his Richard II, Richard III, Henry IV, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet." [SOURCE: *Shakespeare: The Evidence*, Ian Wilson, p. 242]

I've made reference to that passage in earlier episodes because it appears to provide a list of Shakespeare's plays up to this point in 1598, so it's very important to scholars in their efforts to date the various plays. You will notice that I've discussed all of those plays so far because Meres tells us that they had been completed by this point. Of course, there is an exception, and that's the play he called 'Love Labour's Won.' No play by that name has ever been found, so it isn't clear if that is a lost play or an alternate name for one of Shakespeare's other plays.

Now speaking of Shakespeare, I noted earlier in the episode that his acting company – the Lord Chamberlain's Men – were dealing with lease issues associated with the playhouse called the Theatre in northern part of London. The lease had recently expired on the venue. They had tried to move to a small indoor theater called Blackfriars, but local residents had prevented them using that building. So they had to temporarily move to a nearby theater called the Curtain. And you might recall that the Burbage brothers had inherited the lease to the older playhouse called the Theatre when their father died. They apparently hoped that something could be worked out with the landlord named Giles Alleyn. But late in 1598, they apparently received word that Alleyn intended to tear down the structure. Realizing that they were on the verge of losing their beloved playhouse, they made a drastic decision.

The Burbages looked across the Thames to the region of Southwark where the Rose and the Swan theaters had been built. It was also apparently the area where Shakespeare himself was now residing. They decided that the center of English drama was increasingly focused in that region across the river from the main part of the city. They looked around and were able to secure a lease for a plot of land in the area from a man named Nicholas Brend. [*SOURCE: Globe: Life in Shakespeare's London, Catharine Arnold, p. 172.*]

Now that was all fine and well, but it was just a piece of land. There was no playhouse on it. But the Burbages' father had built that original playhouse in the northern part of town. That was the oldest surviving playhouse in London. The one called the Theatre. And even though the landlord wouldn't let them use the land anymore, the Burbage brothers decided that it would be fair to take down the old playhouse themselves, and move it across town to Southwark where it could be re-built on the new piece of land that they had leased there. Of course, they didn't inform the landlord of their plans.

Shortly after Christmastime of 1598, the Burbages gathered with other members of the acting company and a group of workers, and they quickly dismantled the theater that they had used for many years. Somehow, they were able to transport it piece by piece across town and across the Thames on barges. They then reassembled the pieces on their new plot of land in Southwark.

The new structure was completed by spring. It likely resembled the old structure, but since very little is known about the layout of the old venue, it isn't clear how much the new playhouse resembled the old one. But we do know that it had a circular shape. And was 100 feet in diameter and was the largest theater in the city. It could hold as many as 3,000 patrons and was intended to be the centerpiece of English drama. [*SOURCE: Globe: Life in Shakespeare's London, Catharine Arnold, p. 175.*]

In building the new theater, the Burbage brothers had carried out one of the greatest heists of the Elizabethan period. They had moved an entire outdoor theater from one part of London to another. All without the permission or approval of the original landlord. But then they had to decide what to name their new venue. They decided to give the playhouse a new name. The old name was simply The Theatre. That name was somewhat unique when it was built twenty years earlier because there were no other theaters in London at that time. But now, with several theaters dotting the landscape around the city, the name seemed somewhat generic and bland.

The name of the new playhouse needed to be ambitious. It needed to evoke the sense of something grand and imposing – something remarkable on a global scale. So it was decided that the name of this new venue would be the Globe. In an era when Englishmen and other Europeans were traveling to the four corners of the world and returning with objects and words derived from far-away cultures, it probably seemed appropriate to call this new venue the Globe. In prior generations, people didn't really give much thought to the world outside of their hometown – or their own country. Maybe during times of war with France or Spain, they would think about what was happening on the European continent. But now, people were starting to think about the entire world. It was reflected in the goods that were being brought up the Thames, it was reflected in the new words that were coming into English from the remote corners of the world. And it was reflected in the name of this new theater.

When the playhouse opened, a flag was placed out front. The flag depicted Hercules carrying a globe on his back. It also contained a motto written in Latin – “totus mundus agit histrionem.” Translated into English, the motto read, “All the world's a playhouse.” [*SOURCE: Globe: Life in Shakespeare's London, Catharine Arnold, p. 177-8.*]

It was a line that Shakespeare would soon adapt into one of his plays called ‘As You Like It.’ The play contains the more well-known version of the phrase – “All the world's a stage.”

That play was written shortly after the Globe opened to the public, along with the final part of the history sequence that Shakespeare had been working on. Prince Hal finally got his due in Shakespeare's Henry V – a play that opens with a specific reference to the newly-built Globe theater. Those plays were followed by Julius Caesar and Hamlet. So we're entering into the period of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Next time, we'll explore those developments and others, and we'll also continue to trace the evolution of English into the 1600s.

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