

(MUSIC)

ANDREW SMITH: Welcome to The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast.

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HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Welcome to STC's Prosecast, for "Henry IV, Part 2." This is Episode Five of this season's Prosecasts, and we are happy to be back, continuing to talk about "Henry IV." I'm Hannah Hessel Ratner, Audience Enrichment Manager, and I'm joined by—

DREW LICHTENBERG: —I'm Drew Lichtenberg, the Literary Associate at the Shakespeare Theatre Company.

RATNER:—and so you've already heard us, hopefully, talk about "Henry IV, Part 1," and, if you haven't, get thee to iTunes and download the past episode. We get the chance to talk with, uh, Prince Hal, Matthew Amendt—

LICHTENBERG: It's a scorcher.

RATNER—I believe, is how you say his name.

LICHTENBERG: It's a really hot episode.

RATNER: It's so good.

LICHTENBERG: So hot.

RATNER: So hot. Also, we're recording in a very hot room, so that might have something to do with—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: In this episode, we're gonna talk about the two plays, and the continuing story of Henry IV and his son, Prince Hal, and, of course, Falstaff, and we're very lucky to be joined, later in this episode, by the actress playing Mistress Quickly, Kate Skinner, so she'll be with us soon. But, before we get to Kate, Drew, I've got a question for you: Do you think that Shakespeare wrote "Part 1" with the thought that he would create a "Part 2?"

LICHTENBERG: Well, that's a, that's a very interesting question actually, Hannah. Um, the short answer is that nobody really knows. Some people believe that he wrote "Part 1"—that there was an earlier version of "Part 1" that had parts of the end of "Part 2" in it, and that, at some point, that plan was scrapped, and the first play was such a commercial success, that he was like, "Oh, I can probably turn this into two plays."

RATNER: Right, and isn't one of the reasons why people assume that is, uh, that play's structure for "Part 1," as we talked about, it's very much a history play, that it goes, you know, quite in depth about the Civil Wars and the relationship between all these different factions and families, whereas "Part 2," the trajectory is very different. It's a much more personal play, and it goes, um—there's a lot more to do with the different communities versus the political wheelings and dealings.

LICHTENBERG: I guess so. I mean, I would say, like, what's striking about the two plays looking at them side by side, is that they actually have the most identical structures in the sense that you have three camps, the court of King Henry IV, the rebels in Wales and Scotland and Northumberland, and then you have Falstaff's kind of underworld, you know, in Gloucester, in Cheapside—

RATNER: So, correct me if I'm wrong, but, isn't it true that in "Part 2," the three camps also exist, but we see less of the battlefield, and we're spending more time in Eastcheap and in the court?

LICHTENBERG: Well, part of what you're saying is, is—I agree with and part of it I disagree with. There's no battle scene in "Part 2." In fact, the rebellion still exists and goes on until late into the play, into Act IV, and Prince John on Lancaster, who's Hal's younger brother, ruthlessly puts it down, executes all the nobles summarily, so, there's—instead of the rising action in "Part 1" with Hotspur, who's a very exciting character, we get the aftermath of the loss of the Battle of Shrewsbury at the end of "Part 1"—

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —and, you know, Northumberland, his father, grieving for his dead son, all the rebels saying, you know, "Come on, we can still do this." You know, Shakespeare probably—he doesn't devote—he doesn't—he—it's—he, he's showing a very difficult thing for a dramatist, a dramatist to show, which is failure, and, and these dreams of independence that the rebels had nurtured kind of falling apart, so the, the entire play—

RATNER: This aftermath of battle—

LICHTENBERG: Right. The entire play is like this long, choral, uh, almost speech of suffering and lamentation for the failure of the rebellion in "Part 1." But, you know, it is still, like, a very important ongoing theme, and it's not resolved until late in the action. So, like, there's still this kind of centrifugal or tertiary kind of—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: We kind of ping-pong from one place to the other in a manner that's very, very similar to "Part 1." Um, this is probably not making the play super accessible.

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: But, you know, what's interesting about "Part 2" is that it's—and I—and this is why I believe that Shakespeare wrote them both as separate plays. I don't know if he got that idea at the beginning or if he was, like, if he started writing, and then said, "Hey, I can, I can write a sequel that reworks 'Part 1' in, in a more minor key."—

RATNER: But, you think it—I mean, this is—who knows—but do you, you think that the decision was made not because of the popularity of "Part 1," but because Shakespeare felt like there was more to mind?

LICHTENBERG: I think it's both. I think, I think "Part 1" is, unquestionably, the most popular of Shakespeare's plays in his lifetime and went through more editions, uh, publications than any other play while he was alive. Falstaff was the first character who any contemporaries of Shakespeare's will mention in connection with his name. So, you know, "Part 1" is the play that built the Shakespeare empire. There's no other Globe Theatre without "Part 1" and "Part 2" has never been as popular. It's, it's much more infrequently performed, and I think that's because it's, it's sort of a sequel that's not giving people what they want. It's, it's sort of like the second "Hunger Games" movie.

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: or "The Empire Strikes Back." It's like the dark, brooding, middle section of a trilogy. You know, "Henry V" is "The Return of the Jedi," uh, and "Part 2" is very much considered with death and failure and things ending. You know, Michael Kahn, when we were in rehearsal, said the action of "Part 2" is of, is of an old world dying and a new order rising and taking its place. Um, so it's very much like the "Luke, I am your father" of these plays—

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: You know, it has and, you know, these are plays that are very consumed with father figures—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —and we see both, kind of, Falstaff and Henry IV die symbolically or literally in this play.

RATNER: Right, I was, I was going to say, and, of course, we will be giving some things away about the plot—

LICHTENBERG: Oh, sorry.

RATNER: —in this podcast.

LICHTENBERG: Spoiler. Spoiler alert.

RATNER: Yeah, there are spoilers, so if you don't want to know what happens until after you've seen the play, stop listening.

LICHTENBERG: Right, Prince Hal does—

RATNER: Come back to us.

LICHTENBERG: —Prince Hal does become Henry, Henry V in this play.

RATNER: Oh no, spoiler.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: Um, but, I mean, one of the most moving scenes in the play is certainly the scene when Hal rejects Falstaff.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and that scene is foreshadowed in "Part 1," where we have the amazing inset theatrical scene, where Falstaff pretends to be the King and Hal pretends to be Falstaff, right—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and they reverse roles, and he says "I will banish you at some point in the future," and in "Part 2," we get to see that scene, and it's really a masterfully composed scene because there's this great buildup, Falstaff hears that King Henry IV has died and that Hal's gonna be the King, and runs off to London, presumably, to be a crony and to be set-up in some kind of Putin-esque office of petty bureaucracy, and Hal just turns to him and says, you know, "I know thee not, old man. I, I, I forswear you. I banish you. You shouldn't come near me because we used to be friends, but, now, we can no longer be friends," basically.

RATNER: Yeah, and when you look at these two plays as a whole, you're really looking at the trajectory of these relationships and the growth of the relationships as well as the separation and loss of the relationships.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and it's—in some ways, it's the story of Prince Hal coming of age. That's what these plays and "Henry V" show us, is that he is the main character. He is the one through line, running through all three of these plays. And Falstaff, you know, is such a, such a magnetic character, he's a such a fascinating character, that we kind of always end up getting seduced into wanting to spend more time with him, just like Prince Hal, and it comes as a shock to, I think, the audience as well as to the characters onstage, that Prince Hal is able to turn his back on Falstaff. It's what—it's the reason these plays keep getting performed, is because it's so—

it's such a human story of coming of age, turning your back on old friends, and people who—I lost the thread of what I was gonna say—(laughs)

RATNER: Oh no, it was so good!

LICHTENBERG: Um, but, it's just a very, very complex human story, right? We all have these surrogate father figures, and, and sometimes when we, when we grow up, we need to move past them, and be our own men—

RATNER: Well, and it's a lot about taking leadership and taking the responsibility. I mean, we're, we're talking about a man who's not just growing up, but who's growing up to become King and to rule England—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: —and become part of this, this dynasty, this line—

LICHTENBERG: Absolutely. It's a politically ruthless and very, very cunning and Machiavellian thing that Prince Hal does. In some ways, it's politically necessary. He can't be the King and still be best friends with Falstaff 'cause Falstaff has shown himself, over the course of these two plays, to be the most charming, critical, the most, the most, uh, brilliantly corrupt and conscienceless person, perhaps, in England.

RATNER: Well, that's a great place to stop, and we'll be right back, joined by Kate Skinner.

(MUSIC)

RATNER: Well, here we are with the very talented Kate Skinner. Thank you so much, Kate, for joining us.

KATE SKINNER: Oh, thank you for having me.

RATNER: Yeah! So, you're returning to the stage at STC—

SKINNER: Yes.

RATNER: —after not being here in—for a number of years. I think “The Alchemist” was—

SKINNER: 2009.

RATNER: —the last. Yeah.

SKINNER: Yeah, so, the end of this year, it'll be four years, it's like three and a half—

RATNER: Yeah.

SKINNER: Yeah.

RATNER: But, then, before that you had done a, a number of plays with us in the '90s.

SKINNER: Mmm hmm.

RATNER: Do you wanna reflect a little on, on that time here at STC, and what it's like to be back?

SKINNER: Well, of course, it's always great to be here because this is one of my favorite places to work, and Michael's one of my favorite directors, so it's always a pleasure to come back here, and it's—the opportunities get less, partially, you know, due to the plays that they choose, but, also, as you become an older woman, in classical theatre, there's less and less roles. I mean, for example, in "Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2," there are 25 men, one boy, and five women, and only one woman my age.

RATNER: Yeah.

SKINNER: All the other women are quite a bit younger. So, it's, you know, when you only have one part to be giving out of a woman of a certain age, then, you have to spread it around, too, and, as brilliantly talented as I am, I'm not right for every part.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs) No! Um, well, that actually brings me, though, to one of the questions I was going to ask—

SKINNER: Mmm hmm.

RATNER: —which was: This is a very male-dominated world that we're in—

SKINNER: Yes.

RATNER: Um, and I'm just curious, I guess, for two perspectives: You as an actress in a very male-dominated rehearsal room, but also then as Mistress Quickly in this male-dominated world of the tavern—

SKINNER: Right.

RATNER: I mean, surrounded by soldiers and—

SKINNER: Yes.

RATNER: —of thieves.

SKINNER: Yes. Well, you know, in terms of with actors, you know, actors are artists, so it's not like being in the room with a bunch of football players. They're, they're, they—it's a pretty metro-sexual lot—

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs)

SKINNER: —you know what I mean? So, it's not so, "Oh my God, I'm scared," but, yeah, it's always interesting because it's—you have a lot of that energy, as opposed to the female energy. It's, it is a change, and, in terms of the play and the character, it's much different for me in the play because then it is much more ruff and tumble. The women have to be strong. They're, they're very—they have a lot of grit to them, and they're very practical and they're very down to Earth and they know how to deal with men in, in this world, you know. They've had a lot of practice (laughs) dealing with men who are out of control, but, you know, in terms of my relationship with Falstaff, I've known him, it says, almost 30 years, so, that's a long time to know someone, and they've been through a lot together. So, even though he often misuses her, in, in the sense of borrowing money from her and things like that, they have a very deep relationship, so, she does say, at the end of the play, an honest and truer-hearted man, and I think that that comes from many other dealings that you don't necessarily see in the play, you know. People can appear one way to the outside world, but, in a personal interaction basis, I think that he's probably come through for her in a number of instances, and—so, that builds a kind of builds a complicated relationship—

RATNER: You see someone more than how other people see them.

SKINNER: Yes. Yeah, and, you know, if someone's done numerous things that were helpful to you, then, you have a certain feeling about them, that even they're—you know, you accept them for—with their flaws, and that's one of the things about Falstaff because he is one of those—he's a very charming character, as is Stacy, you know, I mean, that's a great thing about having him do the play, is he has a great deal of charm and a sweetness of character that I think comes through, and Falstaff—and I don't mean to say that he's back-peddling any of his character flaws, but—he also brings to it those things that, that shine through when Falstaff is being less than noble (laughs)—

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

SKINNER: —shall we say.

LICHTENBERG: Kate, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about your character, Mistress Quickly.

SKINNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: Who is she? 'Cause I think people coming to the play don't know automatically who she is, and it's actually kind of hard to tell from just reading it who she is—

SKINNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: I think you have to do a lot of work in discovering that, right?

SKINNER: Yes. Well, you know, you start—she runs a tavern, which, in, in this case, also has a little bit of the body house element involved in it, and a lot of—almost every single production I've seen of it—and, I mean most of them were on video or film—they—you know, Mistress Quickly, is—she always looks like a cross between a nun and a washer woman—

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

SKINNER: I mean, it's very odd, and I always think, "Who is that person? She doesn't seem to have a—," but, Michael had a, has a different idea, which I agree with. So, there's more, you know, she's more a woman of running a business, and has, still has, some sort of sexuality functioning, as opposed to everything being shut down, and we're not, we are not going to think of her in that way at all, so that's nice because it makes it more interesting for me, and he also really wanted to explore the idea of this really—exploring that part of their long relationship and what that meant, like that they're an old married couple—

RATNER: Mmm.

SKINNER: I mean, they're not married, but—

RATNER: They've been together that long.

SKINNER: Yeah, and they have that kind of relationship, and even though she—like, even though he seems to have something with Doll Tearsheet, he, he's doing—she knows, and it's—she's offering up that as something that she knows he likes, not as—well, I don't, you know—she doesn't feel—

RATNER: So, it's a very progressive relationship.

SKINNER: Yes, she doesn't feel threatened by that—

RATNER: Yeah.

SKINNER: It's not—a relationship is what it is, and, so, she values that for what it is. But, I think, yeah, you have to—it isn't readily apparent. I mean, the things that are apparent is she's constantly—she's a malaprop person, sort of. She's constantly either making up words or using the wrong words or meaning the wrong—and we're not so much highlighting that as a thing; it's just who she is, but she—what I like is that it's, it's done with a certain kind of ferocity, not like, “I don't know what I'm doing,” but more like, “I believe in this word” —

RATNER: Mmm.

SKINNER: —you know what I mean?

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

SKINNER: (laughs) Even if it's not a word.

RATNER: “I will make this world suit me!”

SKINNER: Yes, exactly. So, it's more in that direction, as opposed to dithery kind of—which is perfectly valued—you know, that's the great thing about these plays; there are many interpretations. There's as many—and I truly believe there are as many Hamlets are there are people to do them, so, I'm not—my own interpretation is not saying this is the one. It's just what the director and I and—collaboratively believe—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: You talked about how progressive their relationship is. There's also this very—in “Part 2,” since we're talking about “Part 2” today, there's this very unusual kind of ménage relationship with Doll Tearsheet. I wonder if, like, without giving too much away, you could just talk about what's going on and the dynamics.

SKINNER: Well, I think Doll is a sort of—she's like—I don't know, is she a protégé of mine? But, she's, you know, she's somebody that, obviously, I have a close relationship with more than—you don't see that with any other person, and she cares about her. You know, the first thing they—you see them together is she's helping her. You know, she's been, she feels sick and she's helping her, and saying, “You've drunk too much,” and trying to counsel her. So, it's sort of like an older person taking her under my wing—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

SKINNER: —and I think it's not really a ménage à trios 'cause we're not doing it all together—

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

SKINNER: —but it's—my job is to make him feel good, and, if having this little thing—'cause, I mean, even the Prince—I don't want to give away—but, even the Prince—and he, he's, he talks about it more than I think he's able to do anything—

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

SKINNER: —per se. Don't tell Stacy I said that (laughs).

RATNER: Our little secret.

SKINNER: Yes. But, you know, I don't—it's, as I said, I think their relationship, it is unconventional, I would say. They don't have—they're not married in this very specific thing, so, there's a lot more latitude. She doesn't—and she's a working woman, you know what I mean, she doesn't have time to just hang out with her, her favorite guy. She has a job to do, and she's busy, so—

RATNER: She has a business to run.

SKINNER: Exactly.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. Just—it just always amazes me Shakespeare writing something like this in 1596—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —you know, showing this kind of—

SKINNER: Yes.

LICHTENBERG: —society. You know, this is life—

SKINNER: Yeah.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —as people lived it, not by the book, or by, by the creed.

RATNER: Right. He's not just creating a fantasy of what life is, but he's actually showing all the levels.

LICHTENBERG: You get the sense that these are real people who have lived real lives, which is such an amazing, it's an amazing thing—

SKINNER: Well, it's why, I mean, doing Shakespeare's a favorite pastime of mine (laughs), and working on it and reading the plays and seeing them—because, just because of that, because it tells you so much about the human heart and soul. He really—whoever he was who wrote those plays, he was a great, great person because he really had his finger on the pulse of many different kinds of people. But, you know, great writers are like that. Dickens—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

SKINNER: —and, in fact, that whole thing, I mean, I think, “Who is Shakespeare,” it—that thing is a class thing coming from England because they don't want to believe anyone from the lower class could possibly be a genius—

RATNER: (laughs)

SKINNER: —and it's so not true. If you look at any of the great writers, very few of them come from the upper or ruling classes. Very, very few.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. Many of them had fathers who lost everything actually.

SKINNER: Yes. Oh yeah.

RATNER: Mmm. Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Shakespeare's father, Ibsen's father, Dickens' father—

RATNER: They had to build up their own lives.

LICHTENBERG: —completely bankrupt.

RATNER: Changing the subject, slightly, when—before you go back to rehearsal, can you tell us what you're working on in the rehearsal room right now, what you worked on either today or are planning to do today or what you did yesterday?

SKINNER: Well, we're just in the process of finishing the staging for “Part 2,” um, so we're just—I still have, actually, my last scene, which is quite short, but we haven't staged that yet, so we're not doing that today, but we're going back to, uh, my first scene in the play because we just have been through it once, and, on Saturday, we did the fights—

RATNER: Mmm.

SKINNER: —for that scene, so, Michael hasn't seen that yet, so, he needs to see that so that he can weigh in on what he likes and what he wants changed in terms of the fights, so that's what we're working on right now.

RATNER: Right. So, since you worked with Michael years ago, and you're working with Michael again now, do you see his directing style having changed in this time, or have you changed or could it just be 15 years ago?

SKINNER: (laughs) Well, you know, actually, since—1989 is the first year I worked with him—

RATNER: Wow.

SKINNER: —and he's—you know, what's incredible about Michael is even all these years later, he's still so vibrant, so interested and present, and really attending to details, and he's really an incredible director to work with. He has a tremendous visual style, but he's very interested in the acting part of it. He really wants people to dig down those human motivations and the reasons people do things. That's really important to him, not just—and he's also how it sounds and what it looks like. I mean, he's very comprehensive. He has a great deal of knowledge and that's a real joy to be in the rehearsal room with because he really does know his stuff, and—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

SKINNER: —not naming any names, there are some directors who don't. (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs) Okay, that's great. Well, thank you so much, Kate, for joining us.

SKINNER: Absolutely, it was my pleasure.

RATNER: It was a lot of fun.

SKINNER: Yeah. It was great.

LICHTENBERG: Thank you.

(MUSIC)

RATNER: Okay.

LICHTENBERG: Well, as I was saying, you know, I really think Mistress Quickly is a role that, when you look at the play, it's easy not to be struck by it, but, with an actress like Kate Skinner—and, you know, one of the things about Michael is that he has these certain actors who he just has the upmost regard for, and he will do everything to guard their performances—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and make sure that they are special onstage, and her Mistress Quickly is going to be one of those performances where you say, “Huh. I never realized what an amazing, heartbreaking, complex human role that is.”

RATNER: And it really is so important, I think, when you have this play full of strong men, to have a strong woman, to have, you know—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: —I mean, certainly, there are other women in this play, in these plays, but they’re the wives and they’re secondary characters, and she really does stand on her own.

LICHTENBERG: Right, and we touched on it obliquely, but the kind of open relationship that they have—Falstaff keeps on promising to marry her, promising to make her a lady, right, as the wife of a Knight—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and she keeps on loaning him money, and he keeps on not repaying her. It’s just this very, very unusual arrangement that they have, which is not so—it feels very modern, you know. It’s not so different from a lot of arrangements you might see today, where you have a guy who’s a degenerate gambler and, you know, has this girlfriend who works at a bar somewhere—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —and sets him up with the hoochie coochie Doll Tearsheet, you know, to make him feel good.

RATNER: (laughs) Hoochie coochie.

LICHTENBERG: —you know, it’s a—and, you know, Doll and the actress playing Doll—it’s very easy for that role to be like a kind of one-note, just like “Oh, I’m sexy and I’m, you know, a whore.” It’s not clear whether she’s prostitute or not, but she’s definitely like a lady of the night, so to speak, right. She’s familiar with sexual situations. But, the actress playing her is showing her to be this very intelligent person, born into a hard situation, making the best of—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —what they can—

RATNER: —and a lot of that’s in the language.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and it, it’s just such—these plays are just such an inexhaustible resource. You can, you can read them, you can see them millions of times, and you can always be discovering new things. I think part of it is because Shakespeare stopped—he wrote these after his Lyric period, in which 99 percent of his plays were verse, and the unusual thing about Falstaff is that he speaks entirely prose, and you get the sense that Shakespeare had been hanging out in taverns in Eastcheap, listening to way people actually talked in real life, and he was writing these kinds of realistic plays at a time in which the idea of realism, you know, would not be born for another 350 years or something, and yet, you look at these plays, and it’s there and it’s amazing. It’s an amazing thing to see.

RATNER: But, he’s also using it to tell a history of his country, which, I think is also really interesting to, to tell these stories that people probably have some outline of growing up that had been passed down, but to re-imagine them in the vernacular, almost.

LICHTENBERG: Right, um, Stephen Greenblatt wrote an essay for us for “Asides” and he talks about this, how—the amazing thing about these plays is that they display the wealth, the cultural vitality of the commonwealth of England in all of its variety and diversity, and, if you just had the battle scenes and the rebels and the court, you would lose a sense of the richness of the world, you know, and when Michael says that this is his favorite Shakespeare play, I think he means the, the sense in which it is life itself onstage. All of the diversity of life, encapsulated in three hours traffic onstage or six hours traffic, I guess, in this case—

RATNER: (laughs) —or if you include “Henry V” as well—

LICHTENBERG: —nine hours traffic, although “Henry V” is different ‘cause “Henry V” is a very military play, and it’s really—it’s about—it’s much more in verse and less in prose—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and it’s about the way English people think of themselves, right? It’s like a taxonomy of Welsh and English and Rustic dialects.

RATNER: Right, it’s interesting because even though we have Welsh characters in this—I mean, we have a character who does, in “Part 1,” only speaks in Welsh—

LICHTENBERG: Right, I had to find that Welsh song for “Part 1.” It was such a pain in the tuchus.

RATNER: (laughs) Um, but, but despite that, the characters who are Welsh don’t have those written-in dialects that Shakespeare uses in plays like, um, “Merry Wives of Windsor,” for example.

LICHTENBERG: That's true. There's no Doctor Caius in this plays, in this play, although people believe that there was an actor in Shakespeare's company who spoke Welsh during this period because there's so many roles for a comic Welshman, you know, Glendower—

RATNER: (laughs) Right. It was either that they all hated the Welsh, and, so, they always had to make fun of the Welsh, or they had someone who was Welsh.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, certainly, like, it's interesting to look at these plays through the veil of England, like, London as the center of England, and, then, the farther out you get from London, the more "in a different world" you are. Wales is a different world in Medieval England than London is. And these plays are really enacting the coming together of all those worlds. The, the disillusion of the rebellion in "Part 2," in part, is about creating a modern nation state, and you can draw a straight line from Elizabeth's England to ours, to the England that exists today. Um, so, I forget what point I was trying to make, but, yeah, I mean, in these plays, they just open themselves to political, historical, nationalistic, realistic readings. They are palimpsests—

RATNER: —while still being intimate and—

LICHTENBERG: —while still being these very human stories about families, you know, father and sons, nephews and uncles and surrogate father figures and best friends. They're, they, they put—they make this extremely complex story feel very easy to follow and very human and real, which is a, it's a virtuosic—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —and it's—you know, in my opinion, it's, it's certainly a great play, but, you know, Shakespeare hadn't even yet begun to do what he could do with, with form. He had not yet written "Hamlet." He had not written Julius, "Julius Caesar" or "King Lear" or the romances, you know. He's just finding how capacious his voice can be as a playwright.

RATNER: Yeah. Well, that's a great place to end, but before we go, um, I know you and Andy had some thoughts about other media people should look into if they're interested in, in the "Henry IV" stories, so if either of you want to share now—

LICHTENBERG: Well, mine is—my—I guess my favorite adaptation of these, of these plays is Gus Van Sant's movie, "My Own Private Idaho," and you may say, "Who do gay hustlers in Portland, Oregon have to do with 'Henry IV,'" but, when he was—

RATNER: —but, what don't they have to do with them?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, right. One is: What don't they have to do with it," like, "What does Keanu Reeves in a leather vest have to do with "Henry IV?" We should cut all this. This is terrible. Explosive.

RATNER: It's beautiful. Go.

LICHTENBERG: Um, and, you know, the interesting thing is when Gus Van Sant was working on that, working on that movie, he became fascinated by this group of homeless bums in Portland, uh, and he thought, "This is the kind of underworld that I wanna represent in some way, and how, how can I do that? Well, I'm gonna look at Shakespeare's version of representing a mythic kind of underworld or a city—urban underworld," and he invents a Falstaff kind of character, who functions as a surrogate father figure to River Phoenix's Prince Hal in the movie, and it introduces this really interesting, rich layer to what would otherwise be, I guess, a more traditional realistic film about, you know, being—looking like River Phoenix and being in your 20s, and, you know, being depressed about stuff. You know, it makes it feel—it elevates the material and makes it feel very rich.

RATNER: And Andy?

SMITH: Yeah, well, um, we were talking earlier about this is actually the second time since my time here at the Shakespeare Theatre that we are doing "Henry IV, Part 1 and 2" in Rep, and the last time we did it, we had Keith Baxter playing Henry IV, which, at the point, was a real full circle for him because early in high school, he played Prince Hal in Orson Welles' "Chimes of Midnight," which is a 1966 movie. Most people consider in Orson Welles' last great film that he made. It went—what Welles did was—basically all of the stories, the Shakespeare plays Falstaff shows up in, and sort of merges them into this story, so, you see the story from Falstaff's perspective.

RATNER: You know, I've never seen it. I, I need to see it.

SMITH: You know, well, it's—

RATNER: I can't believe I've never seen it.

SMITH: I was gonna say, it's a little—it's not the easiest thing to find in America because of rights reasons. Um, you just can't pop onto Netflix and search for it. However, uh—and you can't buy a DVD of it on Amazon, but, last time I checked, there was an unedited copy on YouTube, so you can see the whole movie there.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I think I have an old VHS of it or something, but—

SMITH: Yeah, yeah, there was a VHS, I think from the 80's that came out—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: Well, speaking of adaptations of "Henry IV" that you can't see, there is a new adaptation that, I believe, is currently going through post-production, called, "H4," and it's an

all-black version of both plays together. Um, the screenplay was written actually by a professor who's at GW University, Ayanna Thompson, um, who I met with the other week, who writes a lot about race and Shakespeare, um, and I'm really excited for that to come out. It's gone, I think, to a couple of festivals already, but I know that they're doing some more editing and sound stuff on it, so I'm, I'm crossing my fingers that that'll get more, um—what's the word?

LICHTENBERG: It'll spread throughout? Proliferate the culture?

RATNER: (laughs) No, what's the word for a movie when it gets people—

LICHTENBERG: Publicity? Attention?

RATNER: —people to put it on their—

LICHTENBERG: Buzz?

RATNER: no, no, no, to put it on their—

LICHTENBERG: Cue?

RATNER: You know, 'cause, like, you go to festivals, you go to festivals—

LICHTENBERG: Distribution?

RATNER: Distribution! So, I'm hoping that it gets, uh, a wide distribution. Um, so, great! Thank you, guys, so much for joining us for these two fantastic podcasts. Again, if you haven't listened to Podcast One, you can go and download it either at the "Asides Online" website or through iTunes, and we hope to see you at the theatre.

(MUSIC)

SMITH: You've been listening to the Shakespeare Theater Company's Prosecast, Episode number 16, featuring Hannah Hessel Ratner, Drew Lichtenberg, Andy Smith, and, special guest, Kate Skinner. You can find additional episodes and subscribe to the podcast by searching iTunes for "Shakespeare Theater Company Asides" or visit the "Asides" webpage at shakespearetheatre.org. Tickets can be purchased by calling our Box Office at (202) 547-1122, or simply visit shakespearetheatre.org.