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The Golden Ages of England

Context

Spain and England, both strong naval powers and vigorous traders at the Renaissance start, were early rivals. Spain, importing gold from its Central and South American colonies, pulled money to its profligate central government and clung to Roman Catholicism and absolute monarchy. England, on the other hand, developed a strong merchant class, broke with Rome, and moved toward constitutional monarchy. In both places, economic growth led to the growth of cities and the growth of theatre.

In England and Spain, a new, commercial theatre developed that exploited Medieval secular conventions in staging (i.e., emblem, environment, and simultaneity as discussed in Chapter 4). The stories told on their stages reflected

117



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characters and themes quite different than those of the Middle Ages. Theatres in both England and Spain, although influenced by Renaissance ideas, also built on conventions of the late Middle Ages.

Both England and Spain produced glorious dramas and robust public theatres soon after the end of medieval religious drama by about 1550. By 1600, with politically stable and economically sound circumstances, both countries were enjoying their **Golden Ages** of theatre and drama, with new freestanding theatres, professional players, paying audiences, and expansive plays of great complexity.

England and the Golden Age

The reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) brought greatness to England. With her ascent to the throne, the nation achieved the political and religious stability that permitted its arts and literature to thrive. When, in an attempt to mute religious controversies, the government outlawed religious drama, it opened the way for the rapid development of a secular tradition of plays and playgoing. When the queen finally agreed to the execution of Mary Stuart (1587), her chief rival for the throne and the central figure of Catholic assaults on the church and throne, Elizabeth's political situation was secured, and the domination of Anglican Protestants worshipping within the Church of England was affirmed. The English navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588 and established

England as ruler of the seas and leader among the trading nations. England, for the first time in generations, was at peace at home and abroad and was filled with a national confidence and a lust for life seldom paralleled in history.

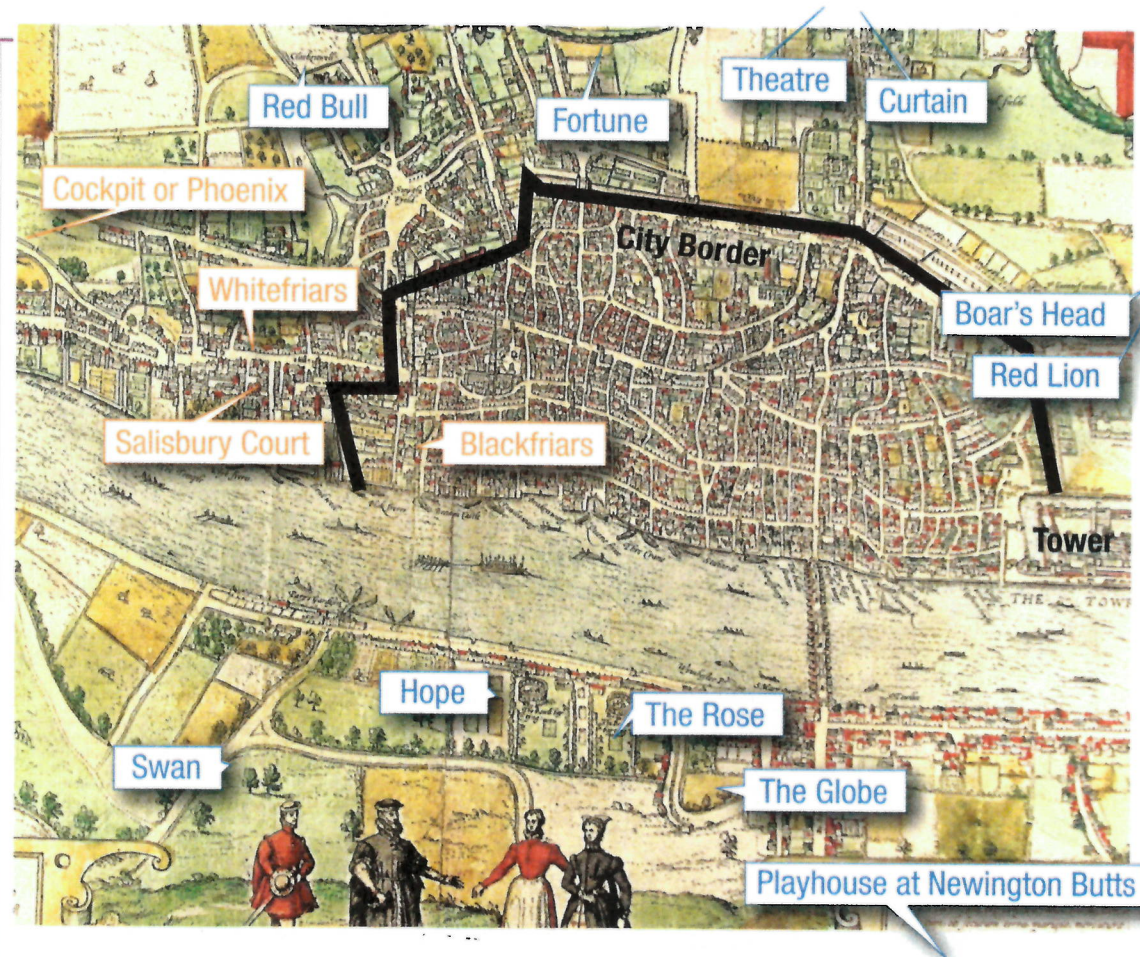
About twenty years after Elizabeth outlawed religious drama in 1558, commercial theatres began to open in London. They maintained some medieval conventions, but with one great difference: For the first time since Romans built theatres in England, the English were building special structures and setting them aside for use as theatres. In short, the age of staging in found environments was ending.

Theatre Architecture

In 1576, two commercial theatres opened in London, one outdoor—or “public”—called The Theatre and the other indoor—or “private”—known as the first Blackfriars Theatre. Therefore, when Shakespeare arrived in London about

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THEATRES IN LONDON

Superimposed on this map from about 1572 are the approximate locations of the theatres in Elizabethan London. Note that all but the Blackfriars theatre are outside the city borders. Public theatres are in blue; private theatres in orange.

fifteen years later, these two sorts of theatres were well established, and he wrote for and acted in both. Although their precise appearance cannot be known, their general features are known.

Public Theatres

Between 1576 and 1642, a number of outdoor **public theatres** were built. They consisted of a round or polygonal, partially roofed, multileveled auditorium that surrounded an open **yard**, into which jutted a platform raised to a height of four to six feet. The entire yard (or **pit**) and part of the stage platform were unroofed. Lighting was provided by the sun. The audience, probably numbering as many as

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120

HOW WE KNOW

The Swan Drawing

This drawing is the only visual contemporary evidence we have of the interior of an identifiable English public theatre. It was made in 1596 by



A rare piece of visual evidence for an Elizabethan public theatre.

Johnnes DeWitt, a Dutch visitor to London, and included in a letter to his friend Arend van Buchel. De Witt's original drawing does not exist. The Swan image that survives is a copy made by van Buchel discovered in a German library in the late 1890s. Clearly the perspective and scale are askew. Yet the drawing tells much about a theatre in Shakespeare's time.

The Swan sketch shows a round theatre, a raised stage with three people on stage, a musician in the central structure (seen in the upper right-hand area), and three galleries. The parts of the theatre were identified in Latin; this version of the drawing translates those labels for clarity. DeWitt noted in his letter, in Latin, that the Swan was the largest and most magnificent of London theatres; He estimated it could seat three thousand spectators. DeWitt described the two columns, made of wood, as so artistically painted that they looked like real marble.

Even if this copy is an accurate reproduction of the original, several questions remain unanswered: Is a performance or a rehearsal pictured here? Where is the discovery space, said to be an important part of English public theatre of this time? Who are the people watching from the area above the stage? Was the perspective and scale in the original drawing by DeWitt as inaccurate as it appears in the copy by van Buchel?

2,500, surrounded the playing area on three sides, some standing in the pit and others seated in the **galleries** or the still more exclusive **lords' rooms**.

The actors worked on a raised stage and apparently awaited cues and changed costumes in a **tiring house**, located at the rear of the platform. Covering part of the stage in many theatres was a roof (the **heavens**) supported by columns resting on the stage and perhaps decorated on its underside with pictures of stars, planets, and signs of the zodiac. Gods and properties flew in from the heavens.

The stage floor was pierced with **traps**, through which characters could appear and disappear. Connecting the tiring house with the stage were at least two doors, which often represented widely divergent locations (as, for example, when one led to the fields of France and the other to the shores of

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England). Atop the tiring house, a flag flew on days of performance, and at a level just below, in an area called the **hut**, were probably housed the various pieces of equipment and machinery needed for special effects. A **musicians' gallery**, visible in the Swan drawing (see page 120), was apparently located just below the hut, at the third level above the stage.

Other points are less certain. The plays clearly required two playing levels, an upper and a lower, and some sort of **discovery space**, a place where objects and characters could be hidden from view and revealed at the appropriate time. Most scholars agree that the discovery space was located between the two doors, but some conceive of it as being a permanent architectural part of the theatre, whereas others conceive of it as a portable unit to be added or deleted as required. Yet other scholars see it as a pavilion that jutted out into the stage. Obviously, any decision about the conformation of the space at stage level had implications for the upper acting level as well. Obviously, too, the degree of permanence of the discovery space would radically affect the general appearance of the theatre. The whole problem has been made thornier by the absence of such a space in the Swan drawing, the one extant sketch of a public theatre, and by the appalling problems with sight lines that any sort of discovery seemed likely to introduce. Because the available evidence will not permit the issues to be resolved, ideas about the appearance of Shakespeare's playhouse must remain tentative.

PUBLIC THEATRES

A view of the Globe Theatre from a contemporary map. Note the building shows three levels and is multisided with a structure over the stage area. The people in the foreground may suggest the scale.



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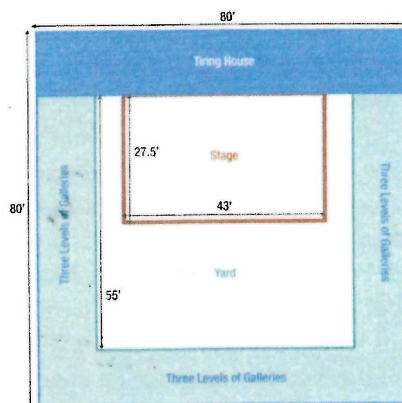
HOW WE KNOW

Four Public Theatres

Documents and archeological excavations shed light on the physical features of the Fortune, Globe, Rose, and Curtain—four important public theatres erected between 1576 and 1642.

Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn entered into a contract in 1599 with a carpenter-builder, Peter Street, to erect a new square-shaped theatre, the Fortune. Street had been the carpenter/builder of the Globe two years previously. The contract for the Fortune gives specific dimensions for the theatre, some of which are shown here. Yet in many instances the contract instructs Street to build the Fortune *in the manner of the Globe*. Thus, a close reading of the Fortune contract reveals some construction details of the Globe.

The contract adds evidence to the notion that the Globe was *not* square nor were the dimensions of the theatre, the yard, and the stage the same as the Fortune. Henslowe specified that the area below the stage should be “paled in” with strong boards or



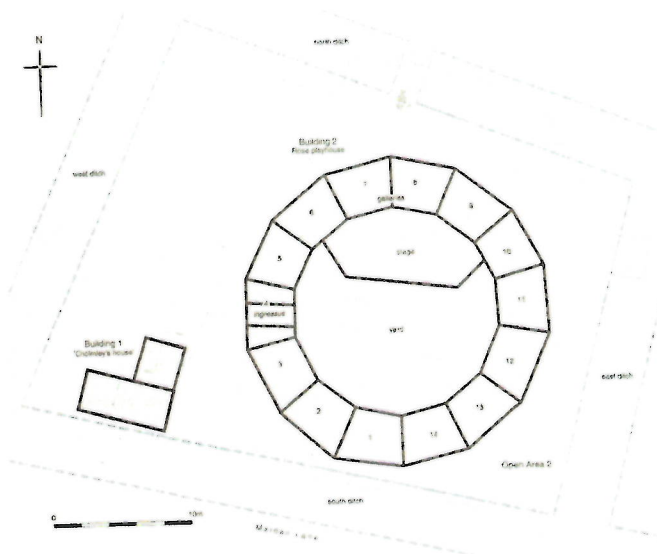
THE FORTUNE THEATRE

This modern plan is based on the dimensions found in the contract Philip Henslowe made with the carpenter-builder Peter Street.

permanently covered by wood. This specification suggests that the space below the Globe stage was not boarded over but was covered by a cloth during performances. These details are not profound, yet the information is helpful in understanding the Globe.

An archeological dig in the area of the Globe and Rose theatres in 1989 provides significant factual information about dimensions and configurations of these theatres. The remodeling of a century-old warehouse on the Southbank in London resulted in a series of trenches being dug in the basement, where the remains of the Rose were found. In each case, the remains are fragmentary with some of each site destroyed by later construction. Both the Globe and Rose were polygonal. Excavations revealed that the Rose had at least fourteen sides whereas the Globe may have had sixteen or eighteen sides. Thus, in long-view maps of the late 1500s and early 1600s, they appear

(continues)



THE ROSE THEATRE

Archeologists were able to determine the shape and size of the Rose Theatre based on careful excavation of the site.

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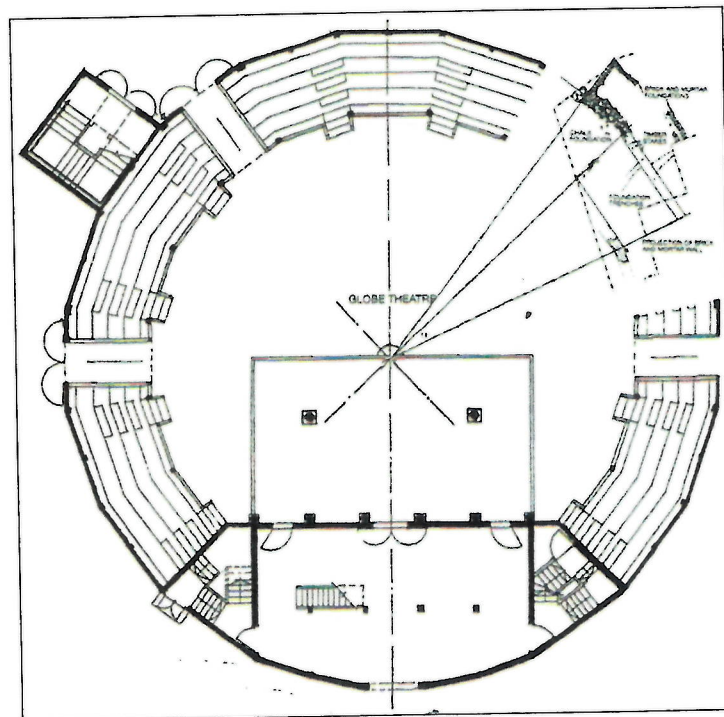
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HOW WE KNOW Four Public Theatres (continued)

circular. There is evidence that the Rose had a relatively small stage with no covering, or heavens, over it. Evidence from this dig suggests that the Globe did have a covering over the stage.

The same group of archeologists that excavated the Globe and Rose, the Museum of London

Archeology, discovered the foundations of the Curtain theatre in 2012. Scholars believe that two of Shakespeare's plays, *Henry V* and *Romeo and Juliet*, were first performed at the Curtain in about 1597. The Lord Chamberlain's Men left the Curtain for the newly built Globe Theatre in 1599.



THE GLOBE THEATRE

The layout of the Globe differs greatly from that of the Rose. Note the way in which the stage is placed. Clearly the Globe had better sightlines.

The Globe (1599), the Rose (1587) and the Fortune (1600) were important London public theatres because they were home to important actors, managers, and playwrights. The Globe housed Shakespeare's company, called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men. The Globe burned in 1613 but was immediately rebuilt. The Rose and later the Fortune housed the Lord Admiral's men led by the actor Edward Alleyn. The manager, Richard Henslowe, has earned a place in theatre history for the survival of his "Diaries," extensive and revealing business records from the Fortune.

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124



PRIVATE ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN THEATRE

Here, the Blackfriars Playhouse at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia. This modern, speculative reconstruction of the Second Blackfriars Theatre is based on documents from the period, none of them visual. Note the two audience galleries that go around three sides of the theatre; the original may have had three galleries. The audience here, as in the London Blackfriars, sits on benches in an auditorium that is not darkened. Like the original Blackfriars, some audience members are also seated on the stage.

Private Theatres

Even less is known about the indoor **private theatres**. They were roofed, smaller, and therefore more expensive to attend than the public playhouses. Despite their name, they were open to anyone caring to pay. Initially, the private theatres attracted the most fashionable audiences of London, who came to see erudite plays performed by troupes of boy actors. As the popularity of children's troupes waned, the adult troupes that performed in the public theatres in the summer took over the private houses for their winter performances. The fact is significant because it indicates that the arrangement of the stage spaces in the theatres was probably similar.

Audiences

Audiences for the public theatres were like medieval audiences but more urbanized and probably more sophisticated. They did not include the very poor or the very rich. (Sometimes the very rich would hire companies to play in their manor houses for invited audiences.) Audiences were sometimes rowdy, easily distracted, and they were probably heavily male. A good portion of the audience was educated enough to get jokes and learned allusions; most of them were fascinated by language, and so sat (or stood) rapt through long soliloquies and much lyric poetry.

Private theatres supposedly attracted a more discerning and probably a more affluent audience. They sat indoors, were warmer in winter, and less bothered by rain and slush. Probably mostly male, they were self-aware of themselves as embodiments of the "new" in Elizabethan culture.

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Production Practices

Both the physical arrangement of Elizabethan theatres and the medieval features of the plays—particularly the numerous short scenes and settings—argue against the use of elaborate scenery. In the theatre, there were few places to store scenery and no way of moving it on and off stage quickly; the action moved from place to place rapidly, with little or no break in the flow from scene to scene. Small properties were therefore important, and we find stage directions for the use of ladders, chairs and tables, tapestries, a freestanding arbor, and other small items. The underlying staging conventions were clearly medieval, with a chair emblematic of a throne room, for example, and an arbor for a garden. The onstage columns and the two doors also sometimes represented specific locations, thus resembling medieval mansions. On the other hand, such things as “a view of Rome” appeared on lists of properties, and so perhaps some locations were illustrated in paintings. Most of the stage platform worked like a medieval platea, serving alternately as a bedroom, a throne room, and a rampart in quick succession.

Costuming was probably more important to spectacle than scenery. Contemporary accounts mention rich fabrics in many colors. Again, the basic convention was medieval, undoubtedly emblematic, with real Elizabethan dress the basic look. Nonetheless, other periods, countries, and races were signified by emblematic costume pieces—a turban, a Roman breastplate—but historical accuracy was unknown.

Most actors wore contemporary dress, some of it the castoffs of patrons or wealthy friends. Actors mostly supplied their own costumes, and building up a stock would have been important to an actor; however, unusual characters—devils, angels, allegorical figures, Turks, savages—would have called for costumes from the theatre company. Masks were used rarely, and then only for specific reasons; they were no longer a major convention of theatre.

Actors and Acting

A royal official, the Master of the Revels, licensed acting companies. The license protected actors from harsh medieval laws against players, often called “rogues and vagabonds.” Actors in the London troupes were further protected by nominal servant status in noble households: Servants “belonged” to a household and found a medieval—feudal—shelter there. Despite this status, a few actors became wealthy. Shakespeare was able to retire as a gentleman, that is, a wealthy man of property.

The troupes themselves were organized as self-governing units—**sharing companies**—whose members shared expenses, profits, and responsibilities for production. A very few members owned a part of the theatre building itself; these were called **householders**. The most valuable members of the company held a whole share in the costumes, properties, and other company possessions; lesser

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HOW WE KNOW

Philip Henslowe's Inventory

Philip Henslowe, the principal business manager of the Lord Admiral's Men, inventoried the properties, set pieces, and costumes of this company in 1598. He recorded the totals paid for admissions to the theatre and noted payments to twenty-seven Elizabethan playwrights. He variously commissioned, bought, and produced plays by, or made loans to, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, and others.

His record also tells much about the theatrical conventions of the English Golden Age. The inventory notes one rock, one tomb, one hell mouth, one tomb

of Guido, one tomb of Dido, one bedstead, one pair of stairs, eight lances, one golden fleece, two rack-ets, a bay tree, a tree of golden apples, a small altar, two moss banks, and a "chain of dragons" among other items.

Henslowe's inventory also lists specialty costumes: a Neptune costume, Tamberlaine's breeches in crimson velvet, a Phaeton costume, gowns for Dido and Juno, and "a robe for to go invisible"—a ghost costume. This inventory of set pieces and costumes lets us know that some three-dimensional properties were employed in the production of plays in Shakespeare's era.

members owned only half or quarter shares, with their influence and income reduced accordingly. In addition, each company hired some actors and stagehands (**hirelings**), who worked for a salary rather than for a share of the profits.

The precise style of acting is unclear, but vocal power and flexibility were prized. Plays of the period offered ample opportunity to display breath control and verbal dexterity in the monologues, soliloquies, complicated figures of speech, and symmetrical and extended phrases. On the other hand, oratorical and rhetorical techniques did not seem to overpower the actors' search for naturalness. Contemporary accounts, including lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, speak of an acting style capable of moving actors and audiences alike. The goal was apparently a convincing representation of a character in action performed by an actor with a well-tuned vocal instrument.

Because all actors (and playwrights as well) were male, the roles of women were taken by men or young boys, many of whom were apprenticed to leading actors in the troupe. Boys then created the roles of Juliet, Cleopatra, and Lady Macbeth. Among the adult actors, most specialized in certain kinds of roles (e.g., clowns, comic older women, or heroes), and many were widely admired in Shakespeare's day: Richard Tarleton and Will Kempe as clowns, and Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn as tragedians.

Acting Companies

Two London-based adult theatre companies tower in prestige and achievement, the Lord Admiral's Men and Lord Chamberlain's Men, each headed by widely admired actors.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men This acting troupe, founded in 1594, became, in 1603, the King's Men under the patronage of King James I. This

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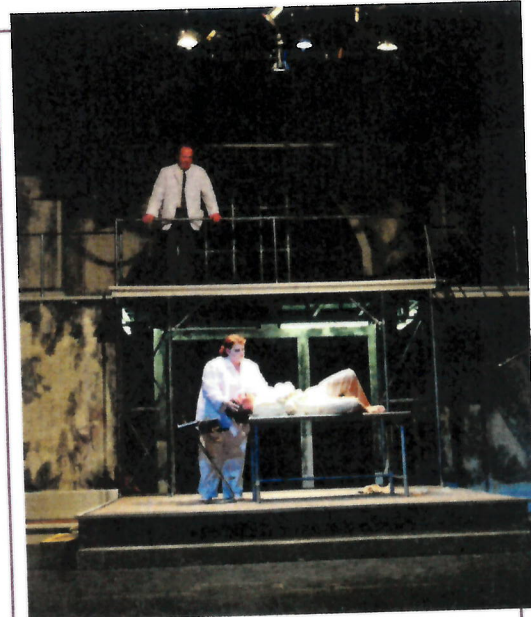
is the company that Shakespeare joined as actor and playwright when he came to London in about 1590. The troupe played first at the Rose, then at the Theatre, and at both Globe theatres. In the winter months it often performed at Blackfriars, at court, and on the road, traveling England and playing in the courtyards of inns or at grand houses of the titled. In addition to the plays of Shakespeare, the company performed plays by Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Francis Beaumont, and John Fletcher. The Lord Chamberlain's Men's greatest actor was Richard Burbage (c. 1567–1619) who originated the leading roles in Shakespeare's plays: *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. An important actor of clown roles was also with this company, Will Kempe the original Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*. He left the company in 1599 to seek work in Europe.

The Lord Admiral's Men Under the leadership of Philip Henslowe, the manager, and Edward Alleyn, the company's leading actor, the Lord Admiral's Men was the only important rival to the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Kings Men). Alleyn, considered an important rival to Burbage, originated important roles in plays by Christopher Marlowe. He played the original Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, the title role in *The Jew of Malta*, and, probably, *Edward II*. Alleyn, married to Henslowe's stepdaughter, preserved many of Henslowe's business records thus providing a wealth of information about London theatre and its practices.

Tudor Plays and Playwrights

Adding to the general well-being of the nation was the vigor of the court, the schools, and the universities, where scholars were remaking Italian **humanism** and classical documents with an eye to English needs and preferences. In particular, some university students, called the University Wits, were applying classical scholarship to the English public stage and laying the foundations for the vigorous theatre to come. These University Wits, including Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, brought the erudition of humanistic scholarship to the English stage.

Shakespeare Shakespeare was not a University Wit. Born in 1564 in provincial Stratford-upon-Avon, a day's journey from London, Shakespeare was a middle-class boy who grew up as the nation moved from a medieval to a Renaissance culture. Not university educated, Shakespeare nonetheless received the solid basics of village schools: Latin, the classics, and the foundation of writing style.



EDWARD II'S DEATH SCENE

In this modern-dress production, Edward II is confined to a mental institution. Here, he is about to be assassinated by the insertion of a red-hot poker in his rectum. Death by red-hot poker is a well-known myth of Edward II's death, which is not found in contemporary accounts.

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His early life appears to have included acquaintance with powerful local families; his father, although a tradesman (a glover), was a man of position in the town.

Shakespeare (1564–1616) married a local woman but did not stay long in his hometown. By his mid-twenties, he had gone alone to London to take up the perilous profession of acting, putting his father's trade behind him. He took with him, however, the rural England and the English characters of his youth, which would inform his plays and poetry for his entire life.

Rich and famous, he retired from the stage in about 1612. He returned to Stratford, there to purchase a handsome house and display the gentleman's coat-of-arms his financial success justified.

Shakespeare is the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world and one of the greatest dramatists of Western civilization. Between 1590 and 1613, Shakespeare wrote thirty-eight plays, which for convenience are customarily divided into three types:

- History plays (those treating English history): *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (Parts 1 and 2), *Henry V*, *Henry VI* (Parts 1, 2, and 3), *Richard III*, and *Henry VIII*.
- Tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.
- Comedies: Ranging from popular romantic works, like *Love's Labor's Lost*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to the darker tragicomedies, such as *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespeare's plays, and those of his contemporaries in England and Spain, shared more ideas and techniques of playwriting with the Middle Ages



TWELFTH NIGHT IN MODERN PRODUCTION

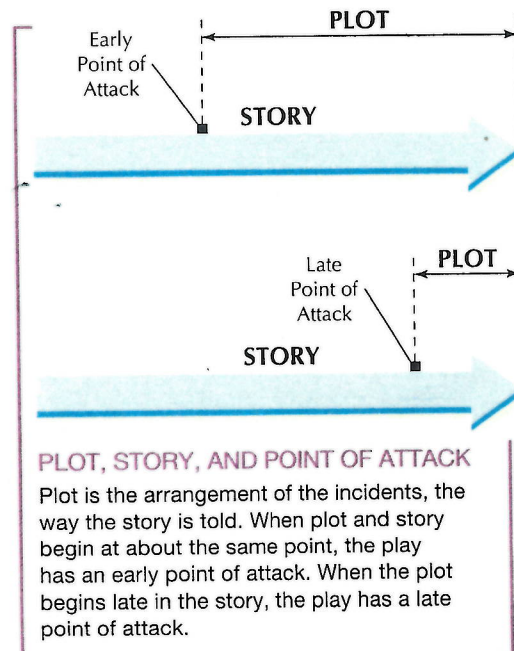
This unusual production scheme at Kutztown University uses a series of mirrors to underscore the cross-dressing comic episodes in this popular Shakespeare comedy. It seems to ask the question, "Is what we see what we get?" Note the two vertical columns that might reflect the columns in the original production on the Elizabethan stage.

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than with Greece and Rome. Six important traits of the golden age of English plays (including those of Shakespeare) are:

- An Early Point of Attack: Plays begin near the beginning of the story, with the result that the audience sees the story develop onstage rather than learning about it secondhand through messengers or reporters.
- Several Lines of Action ("Subplots"): Early in the plays, the various lines appear to be separate and independent, but as the play moves toward its resolution, the several lines gradually merge so that, by the play's end, the unity of the various lines is evident.
- A Large Number and Variety of Incidents: The mixing of tears and laughter is not uncommon, nor is the close juxtaposition of tender scenes of love with brawling scenes of confrontation.
- Free Use of Time and Place: Action unfolds across several months or years and in several locales.
- A Large Number and Variety of Characters: Casts of thirty characters are common, and among the characters can be found kings and grave-diggers, pedants and clowns, old people and youths, city dwellers and rustics, rich people and poor.
- A Varied Language: Within the same play are found lyric passages, elegant figures of speech, ribald slang, witty aphorisms, and pedestrian prose, all carefully chosen to enhance the play's dramatic action.

The art of Shakespeare and his contemporaries was an expansive one that filled a large dramatic canvas with portraits of a wide cross section of humanity engaged in acts ranging from the heroic to the mundane. In this aspect, Elizabethan plays contrasted greatly with the medieval. The texture of Elizabethan plays is rich, detailed, linear, and allusive, whereas medieval plays were often simplistic. Classical plays such as *Oedipus Rex* had late points of attack, unity of action, and relatively few characters, locations, and incidents. Shakespeare and his contemporaries told their stories from the beginning and included many details in several developing lines of action, each with its own characters. Whereas classical plays adopted rather restricted patterns of time, place, and dramatic action, Elizabethan plays ranged freely. Whereas the power of classical tragedy rested on intensity achieved through concentration and sparseness, in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, power emerged



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through the wealth of detail, the range and contrast of emotion, and the sweep of the playwrights' vision.

Two other playwrights of Shakespeare's era, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, were greatly admired in their time.

Christopher Marlowe Marlowe is ranked among the most talented of English playwrights even though his output was limited by an early death from a stabbing in a tavern brawl. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe (1564–1593) had a university education. He is noted by critics for his vigorous command of blank verse and the brilliance of his language. When he died in 1593, he had written about as many plays as Shakespeare. They include *Tamburlaine*, Parts 1 and 2, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*. Although *Dr. Faustus* was influential, *Edward II* is his most often revived play in the modern era.

Thomas Kyd Like Marlowe, Kyd (1558–1594) was university educated. He wrote the most popular play of the Elizabethan era, *The Spanish Tragedy*. This play of murder and revenge used a model established by Seneca that included a chorus of one, ghosts, soliloquies, and an episodic structure that straddles many locales. Revenge tragedy is a genre that includes a murder, a visit by the victim's ghost to his avenger who is usually his son, a phase of intrigue by the murderer and the avenger, real or faked madness by the avenger, a climax of great violence that leaves the murderer, the avenger, and many bystanders dead. For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* follows the conventions of a revenge tragedy.

Stuart Plays and Playwrights

When Elizabeth I, a Tudor, died in 1603 without children, James I, a Stuart, ascended the throne to guide England's fortunes. His son, Charles I, came to the throne on the death of James I in 1625. In this Stuart period, England enjoyed the works of several important playwrights. Yet drama had changed. Shakespeare's heroic themes had given way to ones of depravity and pessimism. Melodrama replaced tragedy.

Ben Jonson After Shakespeare, Jonson (1572–1637) is considered the finest Elizabethan playwright. He wrote nearly twenty plays, almost forty court masques, and eleven other books. His career spanned the reign of Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I, but his most productive period was during the Jacobean era, the era that saw the productions of *Volpone*, or *The Fox* (1605) and *The Alchemist* (1610), immediately successful in first performances. ("Jacobean" refers to the reign of James I as King of England.) These plays are only sometimes revived today.

John Webster Although he was a prolific writer for the stage, collaborating with other playwrights, John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1634) is best known for two plays that reflect the dark, violent, horror-filled turn of drama after Queen

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Elizabeth's death. *The Duchess of Malfi*, first produced by the King's Men in 1614, became a quick success. Although the play begins as a love story, it ends as a violent tragedy.

The Duchess has two brothers, a cardinal and a duke, who forbid her to remarry after her husband dies so that they might usurp her lands. She secretly marries her steward. As a result the Duchess, her children, and her second husband are murdered. The wicked brothers die as well. Another of Webster's plays, *The White Devil*, is remembered today. A revenge tragedy, *The White Devil* failed in its initial presentation but later achieved success.

Beaumont and Fletcher Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher coauthored plays for almost a decade during the reign of James I, usually tragicomedies (serious events followed by a happy ending) and comedies of manners, none particularly memorable today. Their collaboration was so admired that a folio of more than fifty "Beaumont and Fletcher" plays was published in 1679, including ones Fletcher wrote himself and others on which he collaborated. Recent scholarship suggests Beaumont and Fletcher, however, wrote no more than fifteen plays together. Beaumont retired from the theatre in 1613. Fletcher then wrote plays independently and with as many as eleven additional collaborators, including Shakespeare, usually for the King's Men. He is suspected of teaming with Shakespeare on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Shakespeare's Legacy

Once printed and distributed, Shakespeare's language, along with that of the King James Bible of about the same time, did much to establish modern



TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

This play is generally accepted as a collaboration between Shakespeare and John Fletcher in 1613. It was first presented at the private (indoor) Blackfriars theatre. These images from Butler University Theatre show the two dominant moods of the play.

Patterson, Jim and Tim Donahue. *A Concise History of Theatre*. Boston: Pearson, 2014. Print.

The following except is for use in preparing for quizzes, discussion board posts, and response papers for this semester only.

English. Successive generations only rarely revived plays by other Elizabethan playwrights, but Shakespeare took hold. Productions of Shakespeare are notable throughout the history of Western theatre. That said, for many years there was little reverence for Shakespeare's writing as each generation rewrote Shakespeare freely to fit its notion of what theatre should be. In the mid-nineteenth century (1800s), the British actor William Charles Macready began once again to perform the plays as written.

In frontier America in the nineteenth century, literate households, if they owned any books, had a Bible and a collected Shakespeare. Itinerant troupes played Shakespeare on barges along the Mississippi and in gold rush towns in California territory. Many of the catchphrases of Shakespeare—*Neither a borrower nor a lender be*—entered common usage, even among English-speaking people who had never seen a Shakespeare play. German translations of Shakespeare in the 1700s fit with the country's romantic style and made Shakespeare, in English and translation, among Germany's three most popular playwrights.

In the twentieth century, troupes in totalitarian countries sometimes staged Shakespeare as a way to criticize their own society but safely, behind the undeniable value of the classic author. In the twenty-first century, productions of Shakespeare, some with film actors in leading roles, have been commercial successes. With Shakespeare, the past is very much in the present.