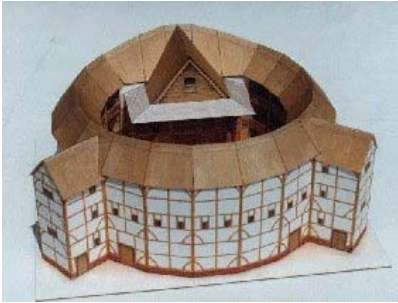


Shakespeare's Theatre

When Will Shakespeare arrived in London in 1587 he arrived at an exciting time. Most entertainments were cruel "sports" like bear-baiting and cock-fighting. Between the "sports" simple plays were performed -slapstick comedies with silly stories. But at that time serious plays were being written and performed and were becoming popular. Theatre companies usually had about eight men, and a few boys who were trained to play the women's parts. The theatre companies would buy plays from writers, buy costumes from tailors and put on the plays. They would share costs and share the money the public paid to see them. These men were called, not surprisingly, "sharers". The sharers hired extra actors when plays needed them, and these extras were called, not surprisingly, "hirelings". Shakespeare probably learned about the theatre by becoming a hireling, then trying his hand at writing for a company. Being quite a sharp businessman he soon became a sharer and helped to build for his company a new theatre, The Globe.



The Globe was an open-air theatre that seated up to 3,000 spectators. It had about twenty sides, which made it appear round. It was three stories high and had a diameter of about 100 feet.

The rectangular stage at the front of the theatre was about 43 feet wide and 28 feet deep, and it was raised a few feet off the ground so there was a crawl space underneath. There were trap doors in the floor of the stage and in the Heavens in the roof above the stage for entrances, exits, or special effects.

Around the yard and stage were three tiers of galleries. Wealthier patrons could sit in these seats, while the "groundlings" stood in the yard for a penny each. A special tiring room behind the stage provided a place for storage or costume changes. A balcony above the tiring room, behind the stage, provided an acting space, a place for the orchestra, or for more seating.

There were two doors on the left and right of the tiring area. In the middle was a large opening with a curtain, which could be drawn or opened as needed. There was no curtain hiding the entire stage. The plays were written so that the players could enter and exit the stage seen by the audience. There was no scenery and props were simple.

A flag at the top of the theatre announced plays every day since the Puritans would not allow publicity. A black flag meant a tragedy was being performed, white was a comedy, and red was history.

Patrons of the globe were transported by ferry from across the Thames. Shrewd ferryman ("Elizabethan taxi drivers") would withhold the price of transport until halfway across, so the passenger had to pay whatever the ferryman asked for. As theatre-goers entered the theatre, they dropped their admission into a box, (therefore we have box offices.)

The actors and the audience always interacted. This interactivity was unavoidable because of the audience's rowdy behaviour particularly in the groundling areas. For instance,



some people would join mock fights. The noise was tremendous. People could drink or eat without paying any attention to what happened on stage. Common refreshments were hazelnuts, beer, water, gingerbread, apples, and oranges, all of which were occasionally thrown at the actors onstage.

There are a few theories as to the creation of the Globe Theatre. In 1598, James Burbage's theatre, the Theatre, was in danger because the plot of land it was situated on was at the end of its lease. The landlord threatened to tear the theatre down. To avoid paying a high price to keep the theatre, he had his two sons, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage, dismantle the Theatre piece by piece and transport it across the Thames to a small lot on the south bank in Southwark. They renamed the "new" theatre the Globe.

There is another story that goes something like this. The Theatre was situated in the heart of London, where the theatre was subject to closures because of outbreaks of the plague and the Puritans disapproving of theatre in the city. These were detrimental to the livelihood of the theatre, so the Lord Chamberlain's Men disassembled the theatre in 1598 and moved it over to Bankside. However, the theatre did not belong to the company when they performed this feat. It had merely been leased to them. When the owner found out about this (for he was not in London at the time,) he filed a lawsuit. He lost.

The Globe began its first season in 1599 with a production of *As You Like It*, and continued with works by Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and others. By the sharing system that theatrical companies commonly used during the 17th century, the Burbage family got half of the interest, and the other half was split between five actor-sharers: Shakespeare, Will Kempe, Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips, and John Hemmings. These men were players of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a popular group of the time whose home theatre was the Globe.

In 1613, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, a canon went off to mark the entrance of the king, and a stray spark set the thatch roof aflame. In one hour, the theatre was destroyed. Reconstruction of the Globe began quickly, and it was finished by June 1614. Performances continued until 1642, when the Puritans, who found theatre vulgar and intolerable, shut all theatres down in and around London. Two years later, the Globe was levelled to make way for tenement dwellings.

William Shakespeare lived in a time very different than ours. For instance, baths were *not* a thing that everyone indulged in; in fact, only royalty bathed on any kind of consistent basis...like, once a year or so. When at the theatre, for instance, men would bring an orange and a pocket knife as a matter of course. The idea was that, upon entering the crowded theatre, one would cut a half moon slice out of the orange, suck out the juices from what remained, and clamp it over his nose to camouflage the smell of those around him.

Women were not readily accepted into the theatre, and really, only destitute prostitutes would frequent the theatres, hoping to drum up some business. And, women not being accepted into the theatre was why female actors were not yet in vogue. In fact, all female parts would be played by young males, whose voices had not yet changed, and could pass for a female with some costuming and makeup. This is the most logical reason for *all* of William Shakespeare's comedies involving a female character dressing up as a male (which the actor really was), in order to go into the forest. Often, in the forest, the male actor, playing a female who is pretending to be a male, will then become a female, allegedly in disguise, in order to play a trick on some other male, who the *real* female character secretly loves, were it not for the fact that the female character is pretending to be a male, playing a girl.....sigh...it gets confusing.

THEATRE QUIZ

Since you are reading one of Shakespeare's plays, it helps to know a little about the theatre world in which they were performed. Try this **quick quiz** and discover some curious facts and learn how menacing Shakespeare's world of theatre could be.

1. Most of the audience stood on the ground around the stage to watch the play. These "groundlings" only paid a penny. Where were the best seats for important spectators?
 - a. in a small room (called a "box") with a window onto the stage.
 - b. in an armchair in front of the stage.
 - c. on the stage itself
2. Stage managers had the job of making sound effects for storms or battles. But when it came to making a sound effect of a cannon, they just fired a cannon - stuffed with paper - not a cannon-ball! When this happened in 1613 something went wrong. What was it?
 - a. the paper used to stuff the cannon was the script; it blew away and no one knew their lines.
 - b. the burning paper was blown onto the thatched roof of the theatre, where it started a fire that burned the theatre down
 - c. the noise shocked two old women in the audience so much that they both died of a heart attack
3. Cannon-balls weren't used in stage cannons, but pistols used real bullets at one time. In 1587, during a play by Christopher Marlow, one actor had to shoot another. He aimed to miss, of course. What went wrong?
 - a. he hit the other actor
 - b. he missed the actor but killed a woman in the audience
 - c. he missed the other actor but killed a bird which fell onto the stage and injured the actor with the pistol
4. The Church was against play performances in the city of London. They said that plays were sinful and kept people from going to church. What else were plays blamed for?
 - a. the plague
 - b. drunkenness
 - c. starving children.
5. When London theatres closed in 1592 and 1593 the actors went on tour around the country. This caused them special problems. What were they?
 - a. they couldn't find theatres to perform in.
 - b. they kept getting lost because there were no good maps.
 - c. they couldn't make enough money to eat
6. Rich people could "buy" a performance of a play. The company would come to their house (or palace or castle), set up in a hall and give a private performance for friends of the owner. A man called Gamaliel Ratsey paid a company to perform for him at his country house. What happened next?
 - a. the actors were robbed by a highwayman and lost their 40 shillings.
 - b. Gamaliel Ratsey refused to hand over the money and threw them out because their play was not good enough.
 - c. Gamaliel Ratsey enjoyed the play so much he built the company a theatre so they would always have a home.

7. Playwrights struggled to make a living. They were paid a few shillings for a play then didn't get another penny, even if the play was a great success and the theatre managers made a fortune. So playwrights took other jobs to make some money. Christopher Marlowe, who was writing when Shakespeare arrived in London had a curious job. What was it?
 - a. he caught rats for the rat-pit at the theatre where dogs fought. and killed them.
 - b. he made costumes for the actors in his play - and was famous for his glittering royal robes.
 - c. he was a spy working for Elizabeth I's government to seek out Catholic traitors.

8. Shakespeare shared his theatres with some cruel sports but occasionally made use of them to add interest to his plays. What did he add to his play *The Winter's Tale*?
 - a. a cock fight where two characters bet on the result.
 - b. a character chased off the stage by a bear.
 - c. a dancing monkey.

9. Writing plays could be a dangerous business. Ben Jonson spent time in jail for writing a play that insulted King James. Shakespeare wrote plays that supported the king or queen but even he ended up in very deep trouble. How?
 - a. he wrote a play that insulted Henry VIII and Henry was Elizabeth I's father. She was furious.
 - b. he wrote a play that praised Catholics at a time when James I had almost been blown up by a Catholic plot that involved Guy Fawkes.
 - c. he performed his play *Richard II* which showed a monarch being overthrown He performed it for a group who were plotting to overthrow Elizabeth at that time.

10. Theatre companies were always having trouble with theatre buildings. They were closed by the law or the owners wanted too much money for plays to be performed. Shakespeare and his friends came up with a daring plan when their "Theatre" building was closed down. What was it?
 - a. they knocked the building down and carried it to a new piece of land that they owned.
 - b. they showed plays anyway and refused to stop when the magistrates ordered them to.
 - c. they performed in front of Elizabeth I's palace as a protest and got the support of the queen to re-open the theatre.

Answers:

1. **C** Most important people sat on stools on the stage. The groundlings enjoyed watching the famous guests as much as they did the plays at times! There is a story about one of Shakespeare's greatest fans, Queen Elizabeth I. She not only sat on the stage but wandered across it and waved to the audience while the actors were trying to perform! One day Will Shakespeare himself was playing a part when the queen wandered across to say "Hello". He carried on acting and ignored her. So she dropped a glove. Shakespeare picked up the glove, added a couple of extra lines to explain the glove in the play, then left the stage. Elizabeth thought this was hilarious! It didn't always end so happily. At one performance a spectator argued with someone blocking his view by sitting on the stage - one drew his sword and killed the other.

2. **B** The thatch caught fire but without a great amount of smoke and flame. The audience thought someone would deal with it and carried on watching the play When they realized that the whole place was on fire they left in a hurry. No one was hurt except one man whose pants caught fire. A kind friend poured a bottle of beer over him to put out the flames. The theatre was totally rebuilt... with tiles on the roof!

3. B The accidental death of a member of an audience caused a great deal of trouble for theatres in 1587, the year that Shakespeare arrived in London to make his living: as a playwright. Some people were very eager to close down all theatres and such accidents gave them an excuse. Local councils objected to plays then in the same way some councils object to large rock concerts now. They said that the streets were blocked by crowds of spectators, there were lots of fights among the audiences and villains took advantage of the crowding to commit their crimes.

4. A Theatres were closed in 1592 because there was an outbreak of plague in London. People crowding together in a theatre could spread the plague so closing the theatres made sense. But some priests said theatres *caused* the plague. One argued, "Sin causes the plague and plays cause sin. So plays cause the plague."

5. C Theatre companies didn't need theatres to perform in. They could set up a platform in the yard of an inn and give their performance. But travelling around, feeding horses and staying at inns cost money, and the money came out of the actors' wages. They earned half what they would have been paid in London. Some companies became so desperate they sold their playscripts and their costumes so they'd have enough money for food.

6. A The actors headed home next day but were robbed by a highwayman who said, "I want the 40 shillings Gamaliel Ratsey paid you last night". How did the highwayman know about Gamaliel Ratsey's 40 shillings? Because under the mask it was Gamaliel Ratsey! The actors survived the frightening experience . . . but Gamaliel Ratsey didn't for very long. He was caught and hanged for his thieving ways.

7. C Marlowe was a spy. He was killed in a fight in an eating house in London. It was made to look like an accident, but most historians now believe he was murdered because of his spying activities. Another playwright of the time, Ben Jonson, was involved in the spying that led to Guy Fawkes being arrested. Shakespeare was more careful - he made extra money by becoming a theatre "sharer" but some modern writers believe that even he could have been caught up in the Elizabethan spy game.

8. B The bear was a tame one! But the character had to face a terrible danger in a strange land - Shakespeare decided there was nothing more dangerous than a bear, so he borrowed one for the performances. The audiences must have loved it! Modern stage managers have more trouble finding ways of having the character chased off the stage. An actor in a bear costume just doesn't look as good.

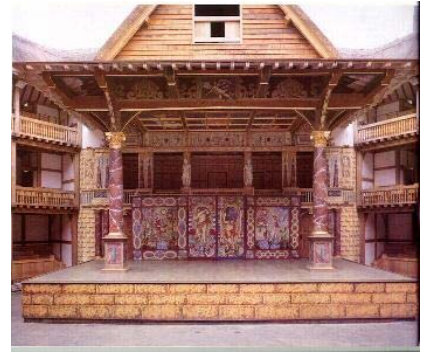
9. C The Earl of Essex gathered a group of rebels and plotted to replace Elizabeth on the throne of England. They hired Shakespeare to perform the play *Richard II* about a similar rebellion because it amused them. Shakespeare probably did not realize what was going on; still he was lucky not to be executed when the angry Elizabeth found out. Almost two hundred years after Shakespeare's death *King Lear* was banned because it showed a mad king - at a time when the British king George III was mad.

10. A Shakespeare hired carpenters and laborers to cut down the old theatre and carry it, plank by plank, across the river to a new site. There it was re-built and given a new name - *The Globe*. The site of *The Globe* was uncovered by archaeologists in the 1980s and rebuilt as a modern replica in the 1990s. The new *Globe* is a great achievement... but to move the original *Globe* across the River Thames was an amazing and daring idea. Perhaps only a man like Shakespeare could have planned that!

AUTHORSHIP OF THE PLAYS

Shakespeare wrote about great Roman characters like Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Coriolanus. He also wrote wonderful poetry. Over the years since Shakespeare's death, some academics and professors believed that a glover's son from Stratford could not have had the brains or the education to write these plays. Someone else wrote them, they claim, and then stuck the name of a simple actor on the play. The actor was William Shakespeare, but the real writer of the plays was someone else. Who?

A priest called the Reverend James Wilmot started the trouble about a hundred years after the death of Shakespeare. The reverend went to Stratford to investigate old records. He couldn't find any letters by Shakespeare, any books owned by him, or any mentions of "Shakespeare the play writer" by other Stratford people of the time. Wilmot also couldn't believe that a glover's son like Shakespeare could go on to become a favourite of a queen and a king. He started the suspicion that Shakespeare's plays weren't written by William Shakespeare.



American Delia Bacon was even more snobbish. She said Will was, "A stupid, ignorant third-rate play-actor from a dirty, doggish group of players."

Whodunit?

Here are the top ten possibles:

1. *Queen Elizabeth I*

Claim: The queen loved drama, but women and upper-class people could not be seen to write something as "common" as a stage play. She had to disguise her efforts by giving them to a young actor she liked, William Shakespeare. Elizabeth had the education necessary to write the plays and backed Shakespeare's theatre company for many years. Computer experts have matched Elizabeth's portrait with Shakespeare's and say they are the same person!

Against: She continued writing the plays for eight years after her death. A clever trick if you can manage it.

Score: 1/10

2. *King James I*

Claim: The king was fanatical about witchcraft and about his own right to the throne. The play *Macbeth* is about witchcraft and kingship. Who better to write the play than James the expert? He put a lot of his own money into Shakespeare's plays. So that Shakespeare would produce the plays written by the king?

Against: Shakespeare's plays were being written in 1590 while James was still in Scotland. And James wasn't all that bright. Score: 2/10

3. *Anthony Bacon*

Claim: Brother of the famous Francis (see number 8). Anthony visited the French king's court in the early 1590s. When *Love's Labor's Lost* was performed in 1593 there were characters called Berowne, Dumain and Longaville, almost the same names as French lords that Anthony would be mixing with.

Against: He wasn't in England much when the plays were being performed.

Score: 3/10

4. *Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton*

Claim: He was a brilliant student who went to Cambridge University when he was just sixteen and a rich playboy who gave a lot of money to Will Shakespeare. Shakespeare is supposed to have written poems like *Venus and Adonis* for young Henry. But what if Henry wrote the plays and Shakespeare agreed to have his name put on them?

Against: Henry enjoyed good living too much. Would he have had the energy to write plays?

Score: 4/10

5. *The Earl of Rutland*

Claim: The Earl knew Shakespeare and there are records that he paid Shakespeare money. Money for Shakespeare's help in producing the Earl's plays? The Earl had been to several of the places where the plays are set - Venice, Verona, Padua - whereas William Shakespeare probably hadn't. The Earl even went to the Danish court just before *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* was written. He died in 1613 when the last Shakespearean play was written.

Against: There is no proof that the Earl of Rutland ever wrote a play.

Score: 5/10

6. *William Stanley, Earl of Derby*

Claim: A scholar dug up an old letter that said the Earl of Derby was "busy penning comedies for the common players". There is no record of a Stanley or Derby play ever being performed. So, if they weren't performed as Stanley plays, were they performed as Shakespeare plays? Derby had been to France as a young man and met some of the real people who later appeared in the Shakespeare plays.

Against: There may be no record of a Stanley play being performed because they never were performed. Lots of people write plays that don't get performed. They are just too awful!

Score: 6/10

7. *Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford*

Claim: There were letters that said he wrote plays but, like the Earl of Derby, no list of his plays survives. However, one of his descendants now travels around the world giving lectures on how Oxford came to write the plays. There are many supporters of the theory that Oxford wrote the plays.

Against: He died in 1604 and, like Elizabeth, must have written the greatest Shakespeare plays from the grave. Maybe he used a ghost writer!

Score: 7/10

8. *Sir Francis Bacon*

Claim: The writer of Shakespeare's plays knew a lot about law and a lot about the French king's court. Bacon's brother, Anthony, had been to the French court and written home to Francis. Bacon's father had been Elizabeth's Lord Keeper and his mother had been related to Elizabeth's chief minister. Bacon was a poet.

Against: Bacon had no experience in the theatre.

Score: 8/10

9. *Christopher Marlowe*

Claim: A brilliant young playwright and a huge success when William Shakespeare arrived in London. However, he was in trouble for his spying activities. He had to fake his own death to save his life. In order to keep writing plays he produced them under Shakespeare's name. Shakespeare was well paid

so he didn't mind taking the glory.

Against: There is too much evidence to show that Marlowe WAS murdered in 1592.

Score: 9/10



10. William Shakespeare

Claim: Everybody said he wrote the plays, including people like Ben Jonson and other playwrights that he was competing with.

Against: Not a lot.

Score: 10/10

The problem of "Who wrote Shakespeare?" was sensibly solved in the 1940s by a professor who paid a spiritualist to get in touch with the ghosts of Shakespeare, Oxford and Bacon!! The spirits told her that they *all* wrote the plays! Shakespeare did the plots, Oxford worked on the characters and Bacon polished the poetry.

Dead men tell no lies, but spiritualists sometimes do! Believe that if you want.

(Quiz and Top Ten List taken from Top Ten Shakespeare Stories, by Terry Deary)

POINTS TO NOTE ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S STYLE

rhymed verse: Rhyming couplets are usually found at the end of a speech or scene, and often indicate a change of scene.

prose: Prose is used in Shakespeare's plays in different situations, for different purposes:

comic scenes

common people

letters

intimate scenes - husband and wife, mother and son, etc.

mad people (not angry, but insane)

figurative language

Shakespeare is credited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language. His vocabulary, as culled from his works, numbers upward of 17,000 words (quadruple that of an average, well-educated conversationalist in the language). In the words of Louis Marder, "Shakespeare was so facile in employing words that he was able to use over 7,000 of them--more than occur in the whole *King James Version of the Bible*--only once and never again."

Shakespeare is also noted for the richness of allusions to things, places, current events (politics), mythology and history. His plays make amazing use of metaphors drawn from nature, soldiery, law, medicine, commerce, hunting, fencing, falconry etc.

THE NATURE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

Shakespearean tragedy generally follows Aristotle's view of tragedy:

1. A tragedy must not be the spectacle of a perfectly good man brought from prosperity to adversity for this merely shocks us.
2. A tragedy must not be a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity for this is not tragedy but a preservation of tragedy.
3. Tragedy should not exhibit the downfall of an utter villain since pity is aroused by undeserved misfortune and fear aroused by misfortune befalling a man like ourselves.
4. The only proper subject for tragedy then is the spectacle of a man, not absolutely good or wise, brought to disaster by some error or frailty in his nature.

Shakespeare did not follow this view implicitly. Shakespearean tragedy is based on the following premises:

Premise One: The protagonist (tragic hero) must have heroic proportions of high estate (he is a member of the nobility). He acts in accordance with his character traits. Actions bring him first to apparent success then to catastrophe.

Premise Two: The conflict in a tragedy must be a combination of problems external to the protagonist and conflict within the protagonist himself.

Premise Three: The tragic hero must possess so much greatness and nobility that in his error and fall we become vividly conscious of the fragility of human nature. We also become aware of the extremely wide range of actions of human nature.

Premise Four: The Tragic Fact - tragedy should instil in the audience the profound sense that the actions of man, no matter how noble or decisive, are not the ultimate power - man is not in complete control of his destiny. The catastrophe present in tragedy must illuminate the wastefulness of life - the good dies with the hero.

Premise Five: The catastrophic conclusion is the result of the actions of the tragic hero who ultimately causes his own destruction - a sense of inevitable doom always is present in Shakespearean tragedy.

Language

Languages do not just happen - they are the result of many hundreds and even thousands of years of development. The English language, as we know it, is relatively new and is in a constant state of change. Every day hundreds of new words enter the language and many are dropped. In addition the language is spoken in many dialects around the world. The English language contains about 300,000 words but your vocabulary is about 3000 and you get by on a daily basis with about 150. By contrast, William Shakespeare had a vocabulary of 15,000 words and invented many of the words and phrases that we still use today.

OLD ENGLISH -- The following common passage is from the time of King Alfred or about 800 A.D.

Faeder ure thu the eart on heofonum, si thin nama gehalgod.

Tobecume thin rice. Gewurthe thin willa on eorþan swa swa on heofonum.

MIDDLE ENGLISH -- The same phrase is written as it would have appeared at the time of Geoffrey Chaucer (1320-1384)

Oure fadir that art in heuene, halwid be thi name; thi kyngdom cumme to; be thi wille don as in heuen and in erthe; gif to us this day ouer breed oure substaunce; and forgeue uo us oure dettis as we forgeue to oure dettours.....

MODERN ENGLISH -- Here is the same passage as it appeared in 1611 or about the time of Shakespeare. Modern English begins to appear at about this time.

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation....

Our present language is roughly Half Germanic and half Romance (Latin and French)
What do the following words mean? This should give you an understanding of how our language continues to evolve with new words entering and other words leaving. If you were to go back or forward in time, could you speak to anyone?

sound off	sad sack	biofeedback	pass the buck	to root for
on the make	grodey	unisex	gag me with a spoon	chill
stool pigeon	on the loose	white dwarf	cool	groovy
tizzy	mooch	saddle shoes	smooch	whodunit
Ipod nano	CDrom	gigabyte	Internet	hard drive