Elizabethan Theatre

Elizabethan Theatre

- Also known as English Renaissance theatre

- Characterized by works of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson

- Theatres were built in circular or octagonal shape, with open-air or roofed design (e.g., The Globe)

- Stage had minimal scenery, relying on imagination and dialogue

- Male-only casts, with boys playing female roles

- Plays often blended genres: comedy, tragedy, history, and romance

Structure of the Stage

- Three-tiered platform: main stage, upper stage, and below-stage (cellarage)

- No proscenium arch or curtains

- Pillars supported the roof and divided the stage

- Trapdoors for entrances/exits and special effects

Audience and Patronage

- Audience

- Diverse social classes

- Seating arrangements were in the galleries; groundlings stood in the pit, and yard

- Audience interaction through direct address, heckling, and participation

- Patronage

- Royal patronage protected theatre companies

- Nobles sponsored companies for prestige

- Companies performed for Queen Elizabeth I

Theatres in London

- Red Lion

- The Theatre (1576)

- The Curtain

- The Swan Theatre

- The Rose Theatre

- The Globe (1599)

- The Blackfriars

- The Fortune Playhouse

Stage Conventions

- All-male casts

- Cross-dressing and multiple roles

- Minimal set, relying on imagination

- Music, dance, and acrobatics

- Stage combat and sword fights

Soliloquy and Aside

- Soliloquy

- A theatrical device where a character speaks their thoughts aloud, often while alone on stage

- This allows the audience to gain insight into the character's inner feelings, thoughts, and motivations.

- Aside

- A character speaks directly to the audience, sharing their thoughts or feelings, while other characters on stage are not aware of what is being said

- Asides are usually brief comments, providing insight into the character's true opinions or intentions, often revealing secrets or personal motives

- They help to engage the audience and provide a deeper understanding of the character's internal world.

Masques

- Masques were a form of festive court entertainment that flourished in 16th and early 17th century Europe, particularly in England

- They combined music, dance, acting, and elaborate costumes, often featuring allegorical and mythological themes.

- Masques were typically performed at royal courts or for the nobility by amateur court actors and were known for their elaborate staging and special effects.

- Renowned playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, and architects, like Inigo Jones, contributed to the development of the masque, making it a lavish spectacle that showcased artistic talent and opulence.

- These performances often involved audience participation, blending elements of theatrical performance with a festive, celebratory atmosphere.

Masques

- Shakespearean plays with masques:

- A Midsummer Night's Dream: Pyramus and Thisbe masque

- The Tempest: Masque of Iris, Ceres, and Juno

- Henry VIII: Henry meets Anne Boleyn in shepherd's disguise in a masque

- As You Like It: Masque of Hymen

- Romeo and Juliet has a masquerade ball

Shakespeare - I

Shakespeare's Life

- Born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England

- Third child of John and Mary Shakespeare

- Father was a glove maker and prominent figure in Stratford

- Received basic education at Stratford Grammar School

- Married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, at 18

- Had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet, and Judith

- Hamnet died at age 11

Shakespeare's Life

- Joined Lord Chamberlain's Men (later King's Men) theatre company

- Became an actor, playwright, and shareholder

- Wrote at least 37 plays and 154 sonnets

- Collaborated with fellow playwrights and actors

- Became wealthy and respected figure in London

- Purchased Stratford property, New Place

- Retired to Stratford around 1610

- Died on April 23, 1616, at 52

Major Comedies

- The comedies illustrate the themes of

- Love and relationships

- Identity and self-discovery

- Social class and hierarchy

- Deception and misunderstanding

- Transformation and resolution

The Two Gentlemen of Verona (perf. 1593)

- Considered by some as Shakespeare's first play

- Set in Verona, Milan, and the forest

- Two friends Valentine and Proteus fall in love with the same woman Sylvia, leading to complications and ultimately, reconciliation

- Proteus's girl friend Julia takes the disguise of a boy and wins back her lover Proteus

- Other Characters: Speed (Valentine's servant), Lance (Proteus's servant)

- Source: A long Spanish prose romance titled The Seven Books of the Diana by Jorge de Montemayor

The Comedy of Errors (perf. 1594)

- Set in Ephesus

- Antipholus of Syracuse is mistaken to be Antipholus of Ephesus, separated sons of merchant Egeon, and both served by Dromio twins

- Mistaken identities lead to slapstick humour and ultimately, resolution

- Source: Menaechmi by Plautus, with additional material from Plautus's Amphitryon and the story of Apollonius of Tyre

Love's Labour's Lost (perf. 1597)

- Considered Shakespeare's first play

- Set in Navarre

- Written to be performed before Queen Elizabeth I

- King of Navarre and his three companions Berowne, Dumaine and Longaville vow to abstain from women, but ultimately fall in love with the Princess of France and her ladies Rosaline, Maria and Katherine

- Includes a pageant of the Nine Worthies

- Other Characters: Don Adriano de Armado, a Spaniard, Holofernes, a pedantic schoolmaster, Costard, a rustic clown

- The play features the longest scene (5.2) in Shakespeare, and the longest single word 'honorificabilitudinitatibus'

- Source: No principal literary source

The Taming of the Shrew (perf. 1594)

- Set in Padua

- A strong-willed woman Katherine (Kate) is "tamed" by her suitor Petruchio, while her sister Bianca's love story unfolds

- The story is set within a frame narrative when Christopher Sly is tricked by his friends

- Source: No principal literary source but draws from folklore

A Midsummer Night's Dream (perf. 1605)

- Set in Athens and an enchanted forest

- Duke Theseus prepares for his wedding to Hippolyta.

- Meanwhile, four young Athenians - Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena - become entangled in a love quadrangle.

- In the enchanted forest, Oberon and Titania, the fairy king and queen, dispute over a young boy.

- Oberon's servant, Puck, uses magic to manipulate the lovers and a group of amateur actors, led by Bottom.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (perf. 1605)

- The amateur actors are six artisans or "rude mechanicals"—Quince, the carpenter; Snug, the joiner; Bottom, the weaver; Flute, the bellows-mender; Snout, the tinker; and Starveling the tailor.

- Puck's mischief causes chaos and Ttania falls in love with donkey-headed Bottom

- Puck ultimately resolves the love quadrangle and reunites the lovers.

- The play concludes with a joyful reconciliation and the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta.

- The tragedy Pyramus and Thisbe enacted by the artisans turns out to be hilarious

- Source: Ovid's Metamorphoses and folklore

Much Ado About Nothing (perf. 1598/99)

- Set in Messina

- Love story of Claudio and Hero complicated by deception and misunderstandings

- In the sub-plot, Benedick and Beatrice fall in love following a battle of wits

- Source: Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso and Matteo Bandello's collection of stories

Twelfth Night (perf. 1602)

- Set in Illyria

- Orsino, Duke of Illyria, loves Countess Olivia, who mourns her brother's death.

- Meanwhile, shipwreck-survivor Viola, disguised as Cesario, serves Orsino.

- Viola falls in love with Orsino, while Olivia falls for Cesario (Viola in disguise).

- Antonio helps Sebastian, Viola's twin brother.

- Confusion arises from mistaken identities and love triangles.

- Sebastian's arrival resolves misunderstandings, and weddings unite Orsino-Viola, and Olivia-Sebastian.

- There is the sub-plot of the Puritan Malvolio being cheated and treated like a lunatic

- Source: Plautus's Menaechmi and "Apolonius and Silla" in Barnabe Riche's His Farewell to the Military Profession

As You Like It (perf. c. 1600)

- Set in France, Forest of Arden

- Duke Frederick banishes his niece, Rosalind, from court. She disguises herself as Ganymede and flees to the Forest of Arden with cousin Celia.

- In the forest, Rosalind (Ganymede) encounters Orlando, who loves her. Meanwhile, Silvius loves Phebe, who falls for Ganymede.

- Complications arise from mistaken identities and love triangles.

- Rosalind reveals her true identity, resolving misunderstandings. Four marriages: Orlando and Rosalind, Silvius and Phebe, Celia and Oliver and Touchstone and Audrey.

- Source: Thomas Lodge's Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie

Other Plays

- Dark Comedies

- All's Well That Ends Well

- Measure for Measure

- Troilus and Cressida

- Dramatic Romances (Tragicomedies)

- Cymbeline

- Pericles

- The Winter's Tale

- The Tempest

The Tempest (perf. 1611)

- Tragicomedy (Dramatic Romance) set on a remote island

- Prospero, exiled Duke of Milan, seeks revenge on enemies (because of them he had been living with his daughter Miranda on the island.) He uses magic and his servant Ariel to create tempest and bring his enemies on shore.

- His enemies are Alonso (the King of Naples), Sebastian (Alonso's brother), Antonio (Prospero's brother)

- Prospero's daughter Miranda falls in love with Ferdinand, son of King Alonso. Prospero tests Ferdinand's worthiness.

- Meanwhile, Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban (offspring of the witch Sycorax) conspire against Prospero.

- Prospero forgives his enemies, reconciling with Alonso and marrying Miranda to Ferdinand.

- Prospero gives up his magic and returns to Milan.

- Source: No principal literary source

Major Tragedies

- Romantic Tragedy which did not strictly follow classical rules.

- A noble, flawed protagonist who suffers a downfall.

- Internal and external conflicts drive the plot.

- Character is Destiny: Characters' choices lead to inevitable consequences.

- Use of Blank verse

Titus Andronicus (perf. 1594)

- Senecan Revenge Tragedy set in ancient Rome, but not a historical play

- Titus seeks revenge on Queen Tamora and her sons for the death his sons and the rape of his daughter, leading to cycle of violence

- Source: A mixture of medieval and classical myth and legend

Romeo and Juliet (perf. 1597)

- Set in Verona

- Feuding families, Montagues and Capulets, host a ball where Romeo (Montague) and Juliet (Capulet) fall in love.

- Romeo kills Juliet's cousin Tybalt, leading to banishment. Juliet fakes death to avoid another marriage, but Romeo believes she's really dead.

- Romeo poisons himself in Juliet's tomb. Juliet awakens, finds Romeo dead, and stabs herself to join him.

- Source: The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet, a long narrative poem written in 1562 by the English poet Arthur Brooke

Julius Caesar (perf. 1599)

- Set in Ancient Rome

- Julius Caesar's triumphal return sparks concern among senators, led by Brutus and Cassius, who fear his growing power.

- Caesar's assassination on Ides of March; Brutus and Cassius justify their actions.

- Mark Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus form alliance, avenging Caesar's death; Brutus and Cassius defeated at Philippi.

- Source: Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans

Hamlet (perf. 1601)

- Set in Denmark

- King Hamlet's ghost reveals murder by brother Claudius, who marries King Hamlet's widow, Queen Gertrude. Prince Hamlet vows revenge.

- Hamlet's madness (feigned or real?) sparks confusion; Ophelia's father Polonius advises Claudius; Hamlet kills Polonius.

- Laertes returns, seeks revenge for father's death; Hamlet and Laertes duel; Claudius conspires against Hamlet; ultimately, Hamlet kills Claudius, Laertes, and himself.

- Source: A Norse legend composed by Saxo Grammaticus, or History of the Danes in Latin around 1200 AD.

Othello (perf. 1604)

- Set in Venice and Cyprus

- Othello, Moorish general, secretly marries Desdemona; Iago, ensign, manipulates Othello, fuelling jealousy.

- Iago deceives Othello, making him believe Desdemona loves Cassio; Othello promotes Iago, demotes Cassio.

- Othello smothers and kills Desdemona; Emilia discovers truth, reveals Iago's deceit; Iago kills Emilia, is arrested; Othello, realizing mistake, stabs himself.

- Source: A short Italian novel, Hecatommithi, by Cinthio first published in 1565

King Lear (perf. 1606)

- Set in Ancient Britain

- King Lear wishes to divide kingdom among daughters Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, based on their love declarations. Cordelia's honesty leads to banishment.

- Goneril and Regan's treachery becomes apparent; Lear realizes his mistake. Meanwhile Gloucester's loyal son Edgar flees, disguised as Poor Tom.

- Lear's madness deepens; Gloucester's betrayal leads to his blindness; Edmund's schemes unfold; Cordelia returns with French forces.

- Lear reunites with Cordelia; Edmund orders Cordelia's death; Lear dies, heartbroken; Albany and Edgar restore order.

- Source: Chronicle history, Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae or The History of the Kings of Britain

Macbeth (perf. 1611)

- Set in Scotland

- Macbeth, Scottish nobleman, and Banquo encounter witches predicting Macbeth's kingship; King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor.

- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth murder Duncan; Macbeth becomes king, orders Banquo's death; Banquo's ghost haunts Macbeth.

- Macbeth's descent into tyranny; Macduff and Malcolm lead rebellion; Macbeth killed by Macduff; order restored.

- Source: Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland

Antony and Cleopatra (perf. 1607)

- Set in Egypt and Rome

- Love and politics entwine as Antony and Cleopatra face downfall and Octavius triumphs

- Themes: Love, power, loyalty, identity

- Source: Thomas North's Parallel Lives (1579)

Other Tragedies

- Coriolanus

- Timon of Athens

Histories

- Major Concerns:

- Power struggles and succession

- National identity and patriotism

- Morality and leadership

- Historical accuracy and artistic license

First or Minor Tetralogy

- Henry VI, Part 1

- Set during the Hundred Years' War, exploring the conflict between England and France.

- Henry VI, Part 2

- Examines the power struggle between the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions.

- Henry VI, Part 3

- Continues the story of the Wars of the Roses.

- Richard III

- Chronicles the rise and fall of the infamous Richard III.

Second or Major Tetralogy

- Richard II

- Explores the downfall of King Richard II.

- Henry IV, Part 1

- Introduces Prince Hal, who navigates rebellion and personal growth.

- Henry IV, Part 2

- Continues Prince Hal's journey as he becomes King Henry V.

- Henry V

- Depicts Henry V's conquests in France.

Second or Major Tetralogy

- Other History Plays

- King John

- Examines the life and struggles of King John.

- Henry VIII

- Chronicles the reign of Henry VIII.

Problem Plays

- The Dark Comedies were called Problem Plays by F.S. Boas in the book Shakespeare and His Predecessors

- Features of Problem Plays

- Complex, ambiguous themes

- Moral uncertainty

- Darker tone, often with tragic elements

- Unconventional endings

Problem Plays

- Measure for Measure (perf. 1604)

- Set in Vienna

- Duke Vincentio's deputy, Angelo, enforces strict morality laws, targeting Claudio and Juliet.

- Source: George Whetstone's two-part Promos and Cassandra, and Cinthio's Hecatommithi

- Troilus and Cressida (perf. 1602-03)

- Set in Troy

- Trojan prince Troilus and Greek princess Cressida's love affair amidst war.

- Source: Classical mythology and Homer's Iliad

- All's Well That Ends Well (?)

- Set in France and Italy

- Helena's unrequited love for Bertram drives her to extreme measures.

- Source: William Painter's Palace of Pleasure, an English translation of the story as told in Boccaccio's Decameron

Shakespeare - II

Shakespeare's Language

- Shakespeare contributed 1,700 words to the English language because he was the first author to write them down in the age when dictionaries were not yet made.

- He anglicized foreign words, such as creating "bandit" from the Italian "banditto"; fused prefixes and suffixes onto preexisting words to craft new words.

- Shakespeare made extensive use of blank verse in his plays. Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter. This allowed him to have characters speak in a way that felt poetic, but also natural and unforced.

- He used a vivid language rich with imagery, puns and word play, which added a tone of irony and humour.

Words that Shakespeare coined

- Alligator (Romeo and Juliet)

- Bedroom (A Midsummer Night's Dream)

- Critic (Love's Labour's Lost)

- Downstairs (Henry IV Part 1)

- Eyeball (Henry VI Part 1)

- Fashionable (Troilus and Cressida)

- Gossip (The Comedy of Errors)

- Hurry (The Comedy of Errors)

- Inaudible (All's Well That Ends Well)

- Jaded (Henry VI Part 2)

- Kissing (Love's Labour's Lost)

- Lonely (Coriolanus)

- Manager (Love's Labour's Lost)

- Nervy (Coriolanus)

- Obscene (Love's Labour's Lost)

- Puppy dog (King John)

- Questioning (As You Like It)

- Rant (Hamlet)

- Skim milk (Henry IV Part 1)

- Traditional (Richard III)

- Undress (The Taming of the Shrew)

- Varied (Titus Andronicus)

- Worthless (The Two Gentlemen of Verona)

- Xantippe (The Taming of the Shrew)

- Yelping (Henry VI Part 1)

- Zany (Love's Labour's Lost)

Folio and Quarto

- Folio: A sheet of paper folded once to form two leaves (four pages) of a book.

- Quarto: Half the size of Folio.

- Folio also refers to the large-format book made from Folio paper (about 15 inches tall)

- Major writers had their Complete Works published in Folio format.

- Shakespeare's First Folio

- Contains 36 plays, including 18 not previously published

- Published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death

- Considered the most authoritative text for Shakespeare's works

- Quarto also refers to the small-format book made from Quarto paper (about 7 inches tall)

- Individual plays published separately during Shakespeare's lifetime were in Quarto format

- Often based on early drafts or performance texts, sometimes with errors or variations

- Shakespeare's sonnets were first published in Quarto format.

Shakespearean Sonnets

- Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets that explore love, beauty, mortality, and the passage of time.

- Dedicated to W.H.

- William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, or

- Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton

- Shakespearean or English sonnet structure: 14 lines, iambic pentameter, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme.

- Innovative language, metaphor, and imagery.

- Exploration of complex emotions and themes.

- 1-126 — Fair youth

- 127-152 — Dark lady

- 155-156 — Cupid

Major Themes

- Love and beauty

- Aging, time and mortality

- Passion

- Infidelity and betrayal

Shakespeare's Sonnets: Categories

- Shakespeare's sonnets are divided into three categories:

- The Fair Youth Sonnets (1-126)

- Addressed to a young man, exploring themes of love, beauty, and aging.

- Sonnets 18 ("Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?") and 130 ("My Mistress' Eyes") are famous

- The Dark Lady Sonnets (127-152)

- Focus on a mysterious, darker-haired woman, exploring themes of passion, infidelity, and mortality.

- Sonnet 130 ("My Mistress's Eye are Nothing Like the Sun") is famous.

- The Cupid Sonnets (153-154)

- Shorter, more experimental poems, exploring Cupid's power.

Major Sonnets of Shakespeare

- Sonnet 1: "From Fairest Creatures We Desire Increase" - Urges youth to reproduce.

- Sonnet 18: "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" - Compares beloved to summer, conclusion that beauty transcends seasons.

- Sonnet 30: "When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought" - Reflects on past love.

- Sonnet 116: "Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds" - Defines true love, resistant to time and change.

- Sonnet 127: "In the Old Age Black Was Not Counted Fair" - Introduces Dark Lady, challenging beauty standards.

- Sonnet 130: "My Mistress' Eyes" - Satirically describes Dark Lady's appearance.