

1590-1591

"Old Wives' Tale" is Unexpected Hit

Some first performances known to have been given prior to 1590

1585c

Arden of Faversham
The Spanish Tragedy

1587c

Tamburlaine the Great

1588c

Tamburlaine, Part 2
Titus Andronicus
Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay

1590c

King John
Henry VI, Part One
King John
Love's Metamorphosis
The Massacre at Paris
The Old Wives' Tale
The Pindar of Wakefield

1590: George Peele has had an unexpected hit with his latest play "Old Wives' Tale". The 32 year old playwright has been better known in recent years for his dissolute behaviour and disreputable companions like Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe. In spite of coming from a good family background, he has gained a reputation as a shiftless, impoverished jobbing writer, earning small sums for miscellaneous verse and the occasional pageant. Some years ago his "Arraignment of Paris" was presented at Court, but more recently he has been better known in the taverns than the theatre.

However, "The Old Wives' Tale" is clearly the work of a writer with a fine command of language. It is a work of high romance and folk-tale, and has certainly introduced a more subtle strain of humour into English drama. His "pleasant conceited comedie" has proved to be very popular with audiences.

Henry the Sixth starts vogue for History Plays

1591: A new play, with no authors credited for its writing, has proved to be a great crowd-puller, and has been repeated several times in its opening season. It deals with the first part of the reign of the English King and tells of the French rebellion led by the Dauphin and by Joan of Arc. The political intrigue in the English Court and the dynastic ambitions of rivals to the throne of the weak, young Henry are fascinating the audiences and have already led to a vogue for plays about English history. The quality of the writing is very uneven, and suggests that several hands have been involved, with Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe being the most frequently mentioned as possible authors. There are claims that a new actor/playwright from Stratford on Avon - William Shakespeare - has made a large contribution to the authorship.

Six Command Performances

1591: Lord Strange's Men were commanded to perform six productions for the Christmas Festivities at Queen Elizabeth's Court in Whitehall between 27 December and 8 February.

Robert Greene cheats Managers by selling Play twice

1591: Robert Greene, the dissolute author of the highly successful "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay" has been accused of selling his new play "Orlando Furioso" to both the Queen's Players and the Lord Admiral's Men for concurrent productions.

According to fellow writer, Thomas Nash, Greene sold the work to the Queen's Players for 20 nobles for presentation in London, and, at the same time, he sold it to the Admiral's Men who were carrying out a countryside tour. Greene hoped that neither company would realise they were performing the same play.

Robert Greene, who is about thirty years old, is part of the group of young writers called the "University Wits". These include Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and George Peele. At times they seem to work as a collective group altering and improving various plays for London's companies.

An additional factor they have in common is that they are known for their heavy drinking and riotous living.



A woodcut of playwright Robert Greene