

Wild-living playwright, George Peele, dies

The present-day image of playwrights as a brawling, lecherous wild and undisciplined lot owes a great deal to George Peele, who has died at the age of 40. A graduate of Oxford University, and from a well-to-do family background, it is said that he turned to playwriting when he spent his wife's entire dowry and was consequently disinherited by his family.

He formed part of a group known as the "University Wits" amongst London's playwrights, and certainly was a match for all the excessive drinking and brawling associated with that group.

At the same time, he achieved much success in the theatre. His "Old Wives' Tale" was a great popular success, as was his bombastic "Battle of Alcazar" and his elegant and romantic "The Arraignment of Paris". He will probably be remembered as a gifted lyrical poet with a versatile but undisciplined style with plays. However, he is equally as likely to be remembered as a wild living, womanising lecher with a seemingly insatiable capacity for drinking.

"Dream" and "Merchant" are box office attractions

The two most successful plays of the current season are "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Merchant of Venice". Although no writer is credited, they are clearly the work of the young actor, William Shakespeare, who has come to prominence over the past two years. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" seems to have been written for private wedding celebrations, probably for Elizabeth Carey, the grand-daughter of the Lord Chamberlain, who is the patron of Shakespeare's company. After its private performance it has been given several public showings, and the fact that it has "been sundry times publickly acted" attests to its popularity with audiences.

"The Merchant of Venice" is an attempt to cash in on the great popularity of Christopher Marlowe's "The Jew of Malta", which has been frequently revived over the past four years. The Shakespeare version is a subtler, more complex and more human play altogether, and indicates the great advances made in play writing over recent years.

Writs Galore as Lord Mayor Tries to Close All Theatres

A flurry of writs and counter-writs has followed the Lord Mayor's desire to close all theatres - not just those within the City limits.

Under the Mayor's orders, Justice of the Peace, William Gardiner, issued a General Closure notice, which was served on the theatres by his stepson, William Wayte. The theatre people gave Wayte such a rough reception that he returned to his stepfather and obtained a writ against Francis Langley, William Shakespeare and others, claiming they had prevented him from carrying out his legal duties and had threatened him with violence and even with death.

Francis Langley immediately issued a counter-writ, craving sureties of the peace against both Justice of the Peace Gardiner and his stepson, Wayte. Langley claimed that both these men had threatened violence against the actors.

The next step in this saga was that the Lord Mayor and the actors sent separate petitions to the ultimate authority, Lord Burleigh - each party claiming that the other was in breach of the law.

The general opinion is that Lord Burleigh will decide to ignore the whole affair and will allow the theatres to continue in business, at least for the present time.

Total Ban on Plays in City of London

The authorities of the City of London have outlawed all play performances within the City limits - the area of its jurisdiction. The reasons put forward for the ban include incitement to rowdy behaviour, general licentiousness and immoral behaviour, plus the encouragement of workers to attend plays when they should otherwise be working.

The ruling does not affect the Theatre, the Rose or the Swan - which lie outside the City limits - but it does mean the end of performances at the Cross Keys Inn and other venues occasionally used for plays.

Lord Chamberlain's Men must take new name following death of their patron

The Lord Chamberlain, Henry Carey, has died, and his successor, Lord Cobham, has declined to continue patronage of the acting company known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Legally the actors cannot continue to perform without noble patronage, but their future has been assured thanks to Henry Carey's son, George, the second Lord Hunsdon. He has agreed to step into his father's role and take responsibility for the acting company. From now on the former Lord Chamberlain's Men will be known as Lord Hunsdon's Men.



Lord Hunsdon, the younger, patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.