

The
ELIZABETHAN
and
JACOBEAN
THEATRE

The Golden Years of English Drama



THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

Queen Elizabeth I was Queen from 1558 - 1603 These years are called the "Elizabethan Age".

The great literature of this time was Poetry and Theatre - some magnificent poetry, and the first great English playwright, Christopher Marlowe, and the even greater William Shakespeare.

THE JACOBEAN AGE

King James reigned from 1603 - 1625 These years are called the "Jacobean Age". ("Jacobus" is the Latin form of "James")

Because of the supreme greatness of Shakespeare and the other important playwrights and actors, this is known as the great age of English Drama.

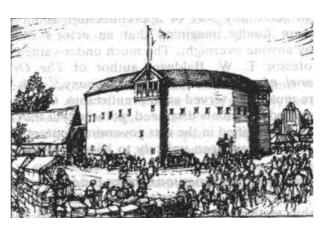
The Highlights of the Elizabethan & Jacobean Ages:

The First Elizabethan Playhouse 1567

The very first public theatre was built – just outside the walls of the City of London. (It was outside the walls because the city authorities did not want a theatre in their city). It was built in the yard of a public house called "**The Red Lion**". The owner was a businessman called **James Burbage**.

A new and bigger Theatre 1576

James Burbage's Red Lion was successful and made a lot of money. He decided to build a bigger one, called "The Theatre". It was north of the River Thames, again outside the city limits. He had a 21 year lease on the building. Performances took place in the afternoon, and had to end before nightfall — there was no electricity in those days! The ordinary people paid one penny and stood in the open space in front of the stage. If it rained, they got wet. The rich people paid two pennies and could sit on benches under a cover.

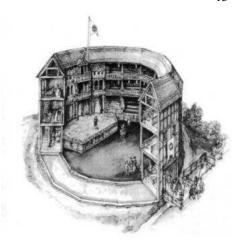


A rival theatre and Christopher Marlowe 1587

After eleven years of no competition, a man called **Philip Henslowe** opened a rival theatre, called **"The Rose".** This was south of the river. Philip Henslowe found a former University Student called **Christopher Marlowe**, and asked him to write some plays for the new Rose Theatre. Marlowe's first play was called **"Tamburlaine the Great"** – a play with a lot of fighting, exciting action and magnificent poetry. It was a huge hit.

Marlowe is a great success 1591

The enormous success of Marlowe's plays meant the business at Burbage's "Theatre" was not good. Philip Henslowe's "Rose" was selling more tickets. Everyone

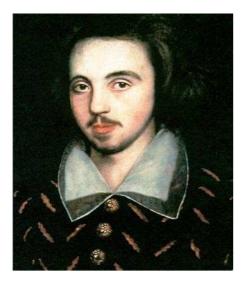


The Rose Playhouse

wanted to see the plays of Christopher Marlowe – his "Jew of Malta" and "Doctor Faustus" were attracting the crowds. Henslowe also had an extra attraction – a handsome, exciting leading actor, **Edward Alleyn**, who was a great favourite with the audiences.

1592

James Burbage needed to do something to save his business. One of his actors, a man from the countryside – a place called Stratford on Avon – was called **William Shakespeare**. Shakespeare and a few others got together and collectively wrote some history plays, starting with "Henry the Sixth". These plays began to attract the audiences away from the Rose and back to the Theatre. But for the moment, because these plays were written by three or four different writers, the name of Shakespeare did not appear on any publicity



Christopher Marlowe

Death of Marlowe. Is it murder?

Marlowe was killed on May 30th 1593. He was just 29 years old. He was stabbed in a fight in a public house. It was said the fight was an argument over who would pay the bill for the food and the drink. Marlowe was known as England's greatest and most successful playwright. He was also secretly employed by the Government as a spy, and had spent some time abroad on spying business. He was in trouble with the law, accused of blasphemy and of openly supporting homosexuality. He had said publicly " All they that love not tobacco and boys are fools" .His death was very suspicious. He was a kind of Elizabethan James Bond. There were rumours that his death was a political assassination - a successful attempt to silence a political asset. Whatever the real story, the world of theatre lost its first truly great His "Tamburlaine", "Doctor Faustus" and playwright. "Edward II" are likely to live on as long as theatre itself survives.

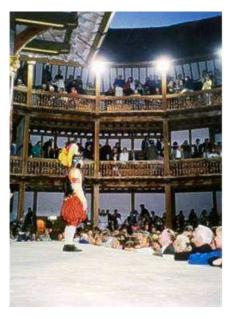
The name of Shakespeare starts to be known. Richard Burbage wins audiences. 1594

Now writing on his own, Shakespeare wrote three plays for the new season at the "Theatre". Business at the Theatre got better. Business at the Rose got worse. Without Marlowe, things were not so good. The "Rose" found a new playwright called **Ben Jonson**. The competition between the two theatres now involved the actors as well as the writers. At the Theatre **Richard Burbage** (James Burbage's son) became a "star" attraction. Audiences went to see Richard Burbage as well as the play.

At the Rose, the leading actor was Edward Alleyn (who had married the boss's daughter – he was now the son-in-law of Philip Henslowe) The audiences now could choose between the plays of Shakespeare or the plays of Jonson; and the acting of Richard Burbage or the acting of Edward Alleyn. Both theatres were very popular, selling thousands of tickets for each play.

1596-1599

Sometimes the theatres around London were closed because of plague. When they were open, Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" were the great hits. At the rival theatre Jonson had some comedy hits, but the audiences at the Rose still like seeing the old plays of Christopher Marlowe.



Shakespeare's Globe has been re-created on the same site and is a very popular tourist attraction in London.

The Theatre closes, and the Globe opens 1599

The Burbage family's 21 year lease on the Theatre had ended. The owner of the land would not renew the lease. He saw how much money could be made from plays, and he wanted to have the theatre for himself. There was a "loophole" (*) in the lease: this was a very important item written in the "small print". It said that at the end of the 21 years the Burbages could remove their property and belongings from the land before handing the land back to the owner. Legally, said the Burbages, this meant they could remove the building itself!

They moved in quickly and took the theatre apart, brick by brick, wooden beam by wooden beam. They carried all the pieces across the river to some new land they had bought, and they put all the pieces back together. When they finished, they called their "new" theatre, "The Globe".

(*) A "loophole" - When tying a knot in a rope, it is possible to create a loop in the knot which means the knot can be untied with one single pull. The "loophole" is therefore an instant way of untying a knot - used as a figure of speech, it is an instant way of getting out of trouble, an instant way of solving a problem,

1600-1602

The Globe was very successful. Shakespeare wrote several plays for each new season – and "Hamlet" became a great success – and certainly one of the greatest plays ever written..

The End of the Elizabethan Age 1603

Queen Elizabeth died. The Elizabethan Age ended – an age of great poetry and great theatre. All the theatres were closed by Government order. The new King would be King James 1st. As soon as the new King arrived in London, there was an outbreak of plague. The theatres were not allowed to open at all that year. Actors were out of work. Some of them left London to tour and perform in the countryside.

The Jacobean Age begins

The "Authorised" Version of the Bible

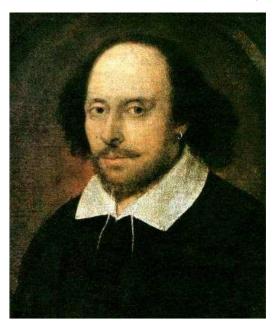
One of the first things King James did was to get leading scholars together to make an "official" English translation of the Bible. The churches used the Latin version. There were one or two English translations, but King James wanted an approved one. The "authorised" (i.e. the one with official permission) version is sometimes called the King James' Bible. It contains some beautiful language, superbly written, very poetic, and is a major influence of English literature ever since. "Jacobean English", as in this Bible, became a basic part of the language that is today's modern English.

Shakespeare becomes the greatest playwright of all time 1604 - 1612

The new King was very superstitious and interested in witches and black magic. Shakespeare wrote "Macbeth" – all about witches – and the King ordered the actors to come to the royal palace and perform the play for him. He loved it!

Because of the King's approval, the Globe became a "fashionable" theatre. By now there were seven other theatres around the London area, but the Globe was the most successful..

Shakespeare wrote very successful plays - "Othello", "Julius Caesar", "King Lear" - and Richard Burbage played all the leading roles. England's greatest playwright and England's greatest actor were easily beating the competition. Some of the rival theatres gave up, and put on bull- and bear-fights instead.

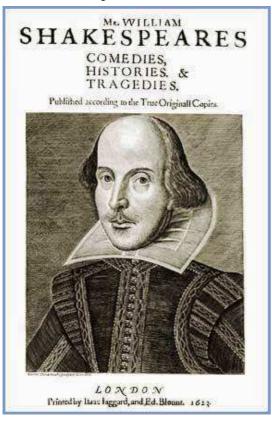


William Shakespeare 1564-1616

The Globe burns down. Shakespeare retires: 1613

The Globe was destroyed by fire! They were doing a performances of a play called "Henry the Eighth" and as part of the action they fired a cannon. Some of the burning stuff from the cannon landed on the straw roof of the theatre. The roof caught fire and the whole theatre burnt to the ground. Shakespeare decided to retire, and moved back to the countryside – to his home town of Stratford on Avon. He was now a very rich man, and bought a lot of property in Stratford.

The Globe re-opens: 1614



The title page of the First Edition of the plays of William Shakespeare, 1623

The Globe was rebuilt – this time with a tile roof (not a straw roof). There were a number of new writers, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, John Webster, George Chapman – all important and good – but none of them, of course, coming anywhere near the achievements of Shakespeare.

Death of Shakespeare, and other leading names 1616

Shakespeare died, aged 52. Philip Henslowe (the main rival theatre manager) also died. He was 66.

1618

Richard Burbage, the great actor who created most of Shakespeare's leading roles, died, aged 54.

Shakespeare's plays are published: 1623

The works of William Shakespeare were printed -36 plays printed in one volume. The rival playwright Ben Jonson wrote the introduction to the book, and said Shakespeare was

"not of an age, but for all time"

The collecting of all the plays into one volume meant the works would not be lost, and would be saved for the future.

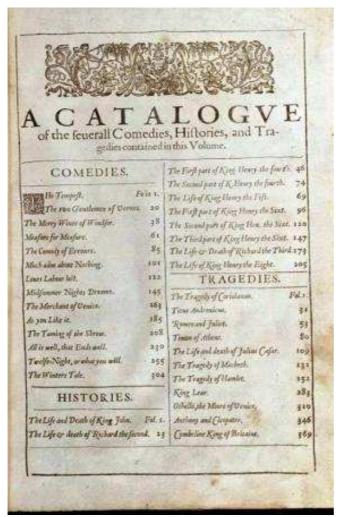
THE FIRST FOLIO

The works of Shakespeare were published in a "Folio", costing 20 shillings. This would have been a very large sum of money at that time. The volume contained 36 plays - half of them appearing in print for the first time ever. The edition was the work of two actors Henry Condell and John Heminge, both of whom had been employed at the Globe Theatre and were close friends of Shakespeare. The first few pages contained some tributes to the memory of Shakespeare, including a poem by Ben Jonson, claiming Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time".

The Introduction by Henry Condell and John Heminge claimed to correct the errors in the earlier printed versions of some of the plays - versions which were "stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious imposters". They said their versions were true to Shakespeare's plays "as he conceived them".

However, the publication has a lot of mistakes in it. Some plays, like "The Tempest", are printed with full stage directions, divided into acts and scenes and including descriptions of the stage spectacles. "Much Ado About Nothing" has one scene where the character's names are confused, and the names of the original actors are given instead. The proof reading has missed many obvious spelling errors, and the page numbers often go wrong: "Hamlet" jumps from pages 156 to 257 for no reason.

But in spite of all its faults, the Folio of the Collected Works of William Shakespeare is one of the most important books ever published. Along with the Authorised Version of the Bible, which appeared nine years earlier, it has become one of the greatest treasures of world literature. Thanks to the "care and pain" of two actors, John Heminge and Henry Condell, the world has become an infinitely richer place.



The End of the Jacobean Age

1625

King James died and the Jacobean age – a great period of English drama – ended. There were a series of political problems following the death of King James I. Over the next 17 years his successor, King Charles I became deeply unpopular, dividing the country into two groups, the Royalists (supporting the King) and the Parliamentarians (who wanted to reduce the powers of the King and create a powerful, democratic Parliament.)

In 1642 this division led to a Civil War. All theatres were closed, and eventually all theatre buildings were demolished.

All entertainment was banned. The Golden Age of English Drama had ended, and it would be nearly 20 years before any play was performed in England.

SHAKESPEARE AND TRAGEDY

Among the greatest achievements of Shakespeare's writing career are a series of Tragedies, consisting of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear. The dramatic form of Tragedy had been around since the time of the Ancient Greeks, 2000 years earlier. The Greeks had created a series of rules and requirements for this dramatic form. The Romans then followed, and changed many of these rules. When English playwrights first appeared, some 30 years or so before Shakespeare started writing, they, too, made up some of their own rules. Shakespeare inherited a whole range of possible ways of writing tragedy, and went on to create his own, unique style, and make one of the most important contributions to the world of theatre.

In order to see what Shakespeare achieved, we need to look at what came before.

The Origins of Tragedy

THE EARLIEST BEGINNING IN ANCIENT GREECE:

Tragedy was originally a chorus of around 50 dancers, singing in honour of the Greek God Dionysus (also known as Bacchus) - the god of fertility and the god of wine. In the very early days the "tragedy" ended with a live goat being killed and sacrificed to Dionysus. The goat was killed because it was the animal that would spoil the vineyards by eating the plants.

The word "tragedy" meant "goat song". "Tragos" was the Greek word for "goat", and "ode" or "odi" was the Greek word for "song".

Many years later the live goat was replaced with actors wearing goat-masks. Other actors would mime the killing of the goats. The Greek word for this acting-mime was the "dithyramb".

The actors performed this dance and mime on the "orchestra" – the place in front of the audience.

Eventually some dialogue was introduced. There was a main speaker, and an answer from the chorus. The main speaker was called the "**protagonist**" and the answer from the chorus was called the "**hypocrita**"

Gradually there were more changes, and some comedy was mixed in . The Chorus was divided into two. Those who wore masks and the "buskin" would perform the tragedy, and those who wore the



The theatre of Dionysus

high platform shoes (the "socchus") would play the comedy.

AESCHYLUS (c 525-456 BC)

The first great name in Greek drama was a writer from Athens called Aeschylus. He made some changes. He introduced a second speaker in the "hypocrita". Now there was a true dialogue between two people, with the chorus commenting.

He also encouraged various writers to create tragedies which were not only in honour of the god, Dionysus, but were also a kind of competition between writers. These competitions were held on the Festival Days of Dionysus. Dionysus's Festivals took place in the winter months and lasted all day. Each writer would create three plays in honour of the gods – one performed in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The stories would show how powerful the gods were, and how death would come to any man who was foolish enough to challenge the gods.

Finally – after what must have been a very long and heavy day – there would be a fourth play performed. This would be a short comedy known as the "satyr" play.

Aeschylus is known for the "Oresteia" – the collective name given to his three plays about Orestes offending the gods. The three separate plays were called "Agamemnon", "Eumenides" and "Choephoroe".

SOPHOCLES (c 496 – 406 BC)

The next famous Greek writer of tragedies was Sophocles. He made more changes. He employed three actors instead of two. Later on, in his tragedy "**Oedipus**", he employed four actors.

EURIPIDES (c 480 – 406 BC)

The last of the three great Greek creators of tragedy was Euripides. He did not make many changes, but the chorus in his plays was reduced from the early fifty or so people down to just twelve. No women were allowed to appear in these Festivals, and when the story was about a woman challenging the gods, the leading actor would wear a mask to show he was supposed to be a woman. If the story was about a woman, then normally the twelve in the chorus would play the parts of women as well.

Euripides did alter this rule in one of his plays – "**Electra**" – where the chorus were men to emphasise the isolation of the leading woman. Gradually in the plays of Euripides the Chorus played a smaller and smaller part: they were getting in the way of telling the story.

The changes from centuries-old religious festivals to day-long public competitions happened in a very short time – just fifty years or so, when a whole new approach to tragedy was created.

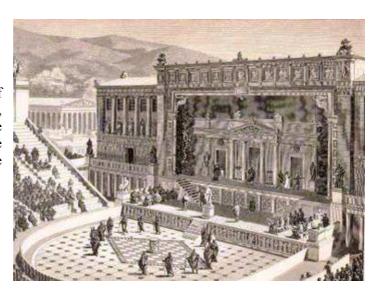
- Around 525 BC: In Aeschylus's works the Chorus is central to the action
- Around 495 BC: In Sophocles, the Chorus is less central but still involved
- Around 480 BC: In Euripides, the Chorus is gradually disappearing

The surviving Greek "comedies" which developed out of the "satyr" plays were written by Aristophanes (c 448-380 BC) and, much later, by Menander (c 160 - 120 BC).

ARISTOTLE and the "Poetics" - the "Rule Book" of Tragedy

About 75 years after the death of Euripides, the writer and philosopher, Aristotle, wrote a book called "The Poetics". In this book he listed the "rules" of tragedy, insisting on "Three Unities":

- The Unity of Time
- The Unity of Place
- The Unity of Action



The Unity of Time, said Aristotle, meant that the whole story should take place in "real" time – and should last no longer than the performance itself. Since the performance of these Festival tragedies would last the whole day, then the story of the play should begin and end within 24 hours.

The Unity of Place meant the whole story should take place in one place. (Very economical for scenery!) Anything that happened outside this place should be reported and not dramatised. Therefore, for example, these tragedies were full of messengers arriving to tell what happened at the battle. The scene would not change to show different parts of the country.

The Unity of Action, according to Aristotle, meant the play should tell the story of one man, and one deed, and be complete in itself. The "tragedy" should tell the story of one great and good man who through pride or envy of the gods, challenges the gods. This great and good man is brought down by his own "pride", by his own belief that he is as good as the gods, or that he can break the rules of the gods.

The Greek name for this kind of pride is "hubris". It is a tragedy that a man who is otherwise, brave, noble and good, should suffer from this fault or flaw in his character. The "tragic flaw" is his "hubris".

THE FALL OF GREECE AND THE RISE OF ROME

The all-conquering Romans were very different people. They were not really interested in day-long festivals of verse drama about the gods. They were more interested in chariot-racing and gladiator fights. The more educated Romans enjoyed the occasional Greek tragedy, but gradually these were replaced with comedies and mimes. Where tragedy was performed, it gradually changed to meet the popular enthusiasms. The action took place in front of the audience (not reported by a messenger), and the action was violent and bloody.

SENECA (c 4 BC - 65 AD)

The best known of the Roman tragedy writers was Seneca. He introduced lots of characters, changed the Three Unities rules, and inserted a lot of violence, blood and thunder into his plays.

Tragedy was not an especially popular form of theatre in Ancient Rome. So, enterprising writers like

TERENCE (c.190–159 BC) and **PLAUTUS** (c.254 –184 BC)

created a new form of entertainment . They wrote short comedies about servants cheating their



masters, old men chasing young girls, husbands being scolded by bossy wives, and so on - and these fast-moving, rude and funny plays were much more popular than the old Greek tragedies.

Historically, it can be said that the Greeks created Tragedy and the Romans created Comedy. However, Seneca's new-style "blood and thunder" violent tragedies were also very popular with Roman audiences, and would be very influential in future years)

A summary of the origins of tragedy:

- From earliest times the Greek Festival of the "Goat Song" (Tragedy) has one speaker and a chorus of 50
- After 525 BC The playwright Aeschylus introduces a two speakers with the chorus, and a three-play formula
- After 495 BC Sophocles introduces three actors instead of two. The Chorus is less central but still involved
- After 480 BC Euripides gradually loses the Chorus element.
- 330 BC Aristotle's "Poetics" creates a "rule-book" of the Three Unities
- In the 200 years BC the Roman writers Terence and Plautus create the "Roman comedies"
- Around 30AD Seneca creates a new kind of tragedy, full of action, blood and thunder.

The eventual fall of the Roman Empire meant the performances of both tragedies and comedies gradually disappeared for several hundred years. The missing years are called the "Dark Ages".

From the 16th Century onwards, it was the Renaissance all over Europe (and, of course, the introduction of the printing press) that led to the revival of drama and its new birth in Spain, and especially in England.

English Tragedy before Shakespeare

The first English theatre opened in 1567, when Shakespeare was three years old. It was built in the courtyard of an old inn called the Red Lion. This inn was just outside the walls of the old City of London. This and the other theatres which were built over the next few years were all built outside the City Walls – because the ruling authorities in London City refused to permit theatres inside the city walls.

However, there had been some performances of plays before this date. There had been public performances in the open air - performed on moveable wagons in town squares or innyards. There

had also been private performances given inside the palaces of the very wealthy.

In addition, there had been performances given in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and at Eton College – and it was these performances in the houses of education that specially looked to the old Greek and Roman plays for their inspiration.

THE FIRST ENGLISH DRAMATISTS

A schoolteacher at Eton College, Nicholas Udall, wrote the first known English comedy. It was called "Ralph Roister Doister" (1550). It was very much like an English version of a Roman verse comedy by Terence or Plautus.

Ten years later another schoolteacher (name unknown), this time at Cambridge University, wrote a comedy called "Gammer Gurton's Needle". This was written in rhyme and told of the gossip and upheaval in a village over the loss of Gammer Gurton's ("Grandma Gurton's") needle.

The first English tragedy was written by two lawyers, Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. It was specially written to be performed in front of Queen Elizabeth I in one of her palaces. The play was called "Gorbuduc" (1565).



Title page of "Gammer Gurton's Needle"



"GORBUDUC" - THE FIRST ENGLISH TRAGEDY

"Gorbuduc" was an odd mixture of the old Greek and Roman tragedies, with some new "English" features added. It was a story of blood, murders, killing, greed and violence (very much in the manner of the Roman tragedies of Seneca). It was written in blank verse and in five "acts".

The younger son of a king kills his brother so that he can be next in line to the throne. But the Queen, his mother, kills him. Some rebellious citizens revolt and kill both the king and the queen. Some of the noblemen kill the rebels and then kill each other in a dispute over who will be the next king.

However, just like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and the Greek tragedies – all the action happens offstage. The story is told by messengers coming on and making long speeches describing what had happened – speeches that go on for ever! (No surprise that "Gorbuduc" was written by two lawyers!)

THE GROWTH OF THEATRE AS A BUSINESS

By 1587, twenty years after the first theatre had opened, London had four theatres, and theatre had become big business. These theatres were controlled by two different families, although, legally, the theatre companies were under the management of appointed noblemen. Because theatre-going had become enormously popular, attracting several thousand people each time a play was performed, the Government was worried that playwrights could attack the Queen or the Government's policies and could cause riots. Therefore a strict censorship was imposed – and no company of actors could work without the control of one of the Queen's noblemen.

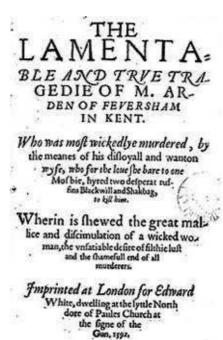
The two families were rivals. One was headed by James Burbage, whose son, Richard Burbage, was a very popular "star" attraction. The other family was headed by Philip Henslowe, whose son-in-law, Edward Alleyn, was the "star" performer.

Each of these family businesses needed to find a supply of new plays - comedies, tragedies and histories. Even the most successful play could only last for a few performances because the population of London was not very large. The Burbage family was lucky with a writer called Thomas Kyd, and the Henslowe family was even luckier with a writer called Christopher Marlowe.

The Tragedies of Thomas Kyd

Thomas Kyd was around 25 years old when he wrote his first plays. He specialised in tragedies. Although there is no real evidence, it is generally thought he was the author of an early version of "Hamlet" and a play called "Arden of Faversham".

"Arden of Faversham" was a topical tragedy – about a real-life murder that had taken place in Faversham, Kent around 40 years earlier. It was the story of a woman who hired two men to murder her husband, but by mistake they murdered the Mayor of the Town. This was the first "domestic" tragedy to appear on the English stage, and was very popular.



Kyd's greatest success was a blank-verse play called "The Spanish Tragedy". The story took place in Spain, and was about a father called Hieronimo. His son, Horatio, has been murdered for political reasons. Hieronimo fails to get legal justice, so he carries out his own personal revenge. He stages a play, employing his son's murderers as actors. In the performance of this "play within a play" he gets his revenge as the two murderers are themselves killed. Hieronimo then bites off his own tongue so that he cannot confess to the crime, and then runs off to commit suicide.

This play was an enormous success. It was a bit short on poetry but very generous with blood. The audiences loved it. It led to a whole series of imitations, and created a special kind of English "Revenge" tragedy based on the old Seneca model.

Thomas Kyd got into serious trouble with the authorities just ten years later. He was a close friend of Christopher Marlowe – possibly his lover. When Marlowe was arrested

The Spanish Tragedie:
OR,
Hieronimo is mad againe.

Containing the lamentable end of Don Horatio, and
Selimperias with the pittifull death of Hieronimo.

Newly corrected, amended, and enlarged with new
Additions of the Painters part, and others, as
it hath of late been divers times acted.

LONDON,
Printed by W. White, for I. White and T. Langley,

for atheism, blasphemy and accused of homosexuality, Kyd was also arrested and tortured. When Thomas Kyd was finally released from prison he had suffered crippling physical and mental injuries under torture. No one would employ him, and he died in disgrace, age 36.

Christopher Marlowe and the "Mighty Line"

Christopher Marlowe was a Cambridge University graduate, born the same year as Shakespeare. By the time he was 23 Marlowe had written one truly great tragedy. It was called "Tamburlaine" and it was the most accomplished play yet written in the English language.

What was special about "Tamburlaine" was its epic scale, its dramatic sweep and its superb theatrical language. It was written in blank verse, but in verse which was far better than anything written so

The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus.

With new Additions.

Written by Ch. Mar.

Printed for this Printed, and sectors fold at his stop without Newgore, at the signs of she Bible. 1650.

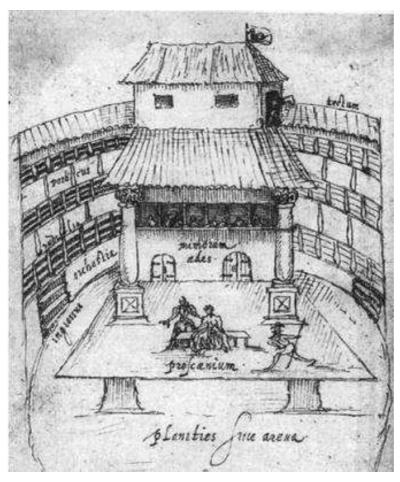
far. Everyone praised "Marlowe's mighty line" – but his play didn't just contain single lines of great poetry – it contained line after line of the most exciting verse. Audiences were thrilled.

A year later Marlowe wrote "The Jew of Malta" – a revenge play, but with a well developed central character. He then wrote a history play, "Edward II" about a king whose love for another man caused him to lose his throne. The love poetry between two men was astonishing and shocking.

Marlowe followed this with "Doctor Faustus" – a magnificent verse play where the hero sells his soul to the Devil in return for 24 years of absolute power. The character of Dr Faustus was deeply analysed. The last scene, which shows Faustus's last hour on earth as he waits for the devil to come and claim his soul, is most dramatic and harrowing.

If there had been no Shakespeare, then Christopher Marlowe would be remembered as the greatest of the Elizabethan playwrights.

Marlowe's personal life was a mystery. He fought duels, had love affairs with men, attacked the church, and worked as a spy for the Government. He was under arrest for blasphemy and homosexuality and due to appear before the judges, when he was suddenly killed in a fight in an inn.



The body was hastily taken away and the whole affair hushed up. Ever since then there has been a mystery. Was it an accidental death? Was it murder? Did he know too many secrets?

Whatever the answers, for the development of English tragedy Christopher Marlowe had

- created magnificent verse,
- created real depth of characterisation,
- turned the revenge play into an art form,
- adapted Seneca's Roman tragedies into a new kind of English tragedy,
- Taken Aristotle's rules of tragedy - a great man brought down by a tragic flaw in his character but turned it into something different: an English form of tragedy.

A sketch of the interior of the Swan Playhouse drawn in 1596 by John de Witt. He was a student from Utrecht in Holland and was on a visit to London.

A summary of English tragedy before Shakespeare:

- "Gorbuduc", the first English tragedy is performed.
- The Red Lion, England's first public theatre opens
- Thomas Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy" is the first "Revenge Tragedy" success
- London has four theatres run by two families. The Henslowes and the Burbages.
- Christopher Marlowe writes "Tamburlaine" a great verse tragedy
- Marlowe's "Jew of Malta" is a revenge tragedy but with deeper characters
- Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus" uses some elements of Aristotle's "rules" to create the character of a great man brought down by a tragic flaw
- Marlowe, age 29, is killed in a fight in an inn. Thomas Kyd, age 36, dies after a prison sentence and torture.

The scene was now set for the arrival of Shakespeare and a major development in English tragedy. The theatres were there. The audience was there. The groundwork in creating a new style of theatre writing, both in comedy and tragedy, was in place.