Renaissance Theatre

1450-1649
Renaissance means rebirth of classical knowledge.
Italy:

- Known more for stage equipment and scenery than great plays.
  - Ideas from Greek and Roman period blended to develop perspective paintings and colored lights.
Continued...

- **Street comedy started**
  - (Commedia Dell’Arte: improvised comedy: no script.)
  - **Troupes:**
    - Acting companies traveled from town to town presenting these comedies.
  - **Had fixed or stock characters:**
    - Identified by costumes and masks (doctor, maid, clown, male servants).
      - **Harlequin**: diamond-patterned costume.
      - **Pantalone**: old man: wears black coat with long sleeves and red vest.

- **15th and 16th Centuries developed interludes: one act farces.**
France (late 1600s):

- Returned to ideas of Aristotle:
  - Greek philosopher (*considered first literacy critic*).
    - Three unities:
      - One action
      - One day
      - One place

- Plays portraying heroes were popular.

- After French Revolution, Commedia Francaise established (comedies and farces).
  - Led to the development of French professional theatre.
  - Theatre further developed by the government under direction of Louis XIV (great supporter of the arts).

- Famous playwrights:
  - Moliere and Racine
Moliere

Racine
English Monarchy: The Tudors (1485-1603)

Henry VII (1485-1509)

Henry VIII (1509-1547)

Mary I (1553-1558)

Elizabeth I (1558-1603)

Edward VI (1547-1553)

Lady Jane Grey (1553)
England: Elizabethan Age (1550-1650 CE):

One of the most important periods. Height of change in drama; it becomes very expressive and a force in the lives of people.

- Morality play continued as farces.
- Plays done in taverns:
  - People throw food at actors.
- NO real scenery yet
- All men...men even played women!
- 1st English public playhouse:
  - 1576- built by James Burbage.
London Bridge in the Renaissance
Continued...

- **Famous playwrights**
  - **Christopher Marlowe:**
    - Known for use of language and exciting plots.
    - *Doctor Faustus.*
  - **Ben Jonson:**
    - First master of English comedy.
    - Made personality traits and weaknesses a cause for laughter.
    - *Volpone*
Part of the “university wits” who set a standard for dramatic structure

Dramatic poetry
- “The Mighty Line”
  • Iambic pentameter

*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1588)
- A good angel and a bad angel attempt to influence Faustus to sell his soul to the devil

Produced plays in The Rose

Stabbed in a brawl in 1589
Christopher Marlowe

Inquisition into the death of Christopher Marlowe
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

- Born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564
- Chose not to follow Italian neoclassic rules
  - Episodic structure, subplots, comic scenes to emphasize serious
- Wrote *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and many others
- Produced plays in The Globe Theater
- Retired in 1613 to Stratford and died in 1616
Continued...

- **William Shakespeare:**
  - Greatest dramatists of all time.
  - Successful because his plays appealed to everyone.
  - Considered a master of characterization:
    - Characters are well defined and the center of interest.
    - Characters are moved by emotions: love, jealousy, and grief.
  - No Woman: female roles played by boys.
  - Globe theatre: Burbage managed later.
The Globe of 1599
Cross Section View of The Globe
Plays were written to be seen, not read, by loud audiences. Used to be shouting approval and displeasure so plays had to be exciting, humorous, and moving to maintain interest.

Typical Shakespearean devices:

- **Couplet:**
  - Two rhyming lines that signal the end of a scene.

- **Soliloquy:**
  - Character speaks directly to the audience; explained action or described characters (no programs).
Continued…

- Famous Shakespeare plays (Shakespeare is credited with writing 37 plays, as well as poems and sonnets):
  - Romeo and Juliet
  - Julius Caesar
  - Hamlet
  - Macbeth
  - King Lear
  - A Midsummer Night’s Dream
  - Much Ado About Nothing
Julius Caesar
William Shakespeare

Macbeth
King Lear
Playhouses

- Multi-sided open-air theaters built outside city limits of London
  - City forbade theater on moral grounds
  - However, Queen Elizabeth and other nobles supported theatre financially, so it flourished
Audience Seating

- Seating had three tiers
  - Part of one tier was divided into boxes called lords’ rooms which were rented by wealthy
- Ground floor was called the *yard*
  - Lower-class spectators stood here and were called *groundlings*
Stage and Tiring House

- Raised platform surrounded on three sides by audience
- Trapdoors led to below the stage
- *Tiring House* similar to Greek skene
  - At least two doorways; possibly a center door for a reveal space
  - Second story for an “inner above” playing area
  - Third story for musicians’ gallery
  - Roof covered stage; called *the heavens*
Private Theaters

- Private meant they were indoors, not that they excluded people
  - Admission was more expensive, so poorer class would be excluded only because they couldn’t afford it
- Staged productions in winter months or nighttime
- Smaller than public theaters
- Stage probably extended to side walls
- Pit seating faced one direction; galleries and boxes faced three sides
Scenery and Costumes

- Neutral stage that did not represent a specific location
  - “Spoken décor” or characters’ lines were used to establish location
  - Minimal props to also suggest location
- Costumes were not historically accurate to time of play
  - Wore contemporary fashion
  - Traditional costumes to indicate antiquity, supernatural characters or racial groups were worn over Elizabethan clothing
Acting Companies

- All plays had to be licensed by master of revels
- All troupes had to be sponsored by a patron, a nobleman above rank of Baron
  - The Lord Chamberlain’s Men – performed at Globe and performed Shakespeare
  - The Lord Admiral’s Men – performed at the Rose and performed Marlowe
Companies

Each company had about 25 members organized on a sharing plan

– Shareholders: elite members who bought a percentage of the company and received profits as payment; played major roles
– Hirelings: actors contracted for specific period of time and specific salary; usually minor roles
– Apprentices: assigned to shareholders; received training, room and board in hopes they would become shareholders
– Householders: star members who part owned the theater building as incentive to stay with company

Playwrights hired under contract

– Plays performed once a week for a few weeks and several times later in the season if it was popular
How to act in Elizabethan England...

- Against realism
  - Female roles played by boys
  - Doubling or tripling of roles
  - Lines learned roughly or poorly
    - Given *sides*, or only their lines and cues and not the full script
  - Rehearsal time was minimal
    - Stylized movements and gestures
    - Improvisation must have been used frequently
Jacobean and Caroline Drama

- New rulers in England: The Stuarts
  - James I (Jacobean) and later his son Charles I (Caroline)

- Bad relations with Parliament
  - Civil war in 1642 when Puritans took control of Parliament and beheaded Charles I in 1649
    - Commonwealth created by Oliver Cromwell
Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

- Followed neoclassic principles
- Developed “Comedy of Humours” where each principal character had excess of one trait, or humour
- Wrote *Volpone* about a man who dupes old men out of their riches by pretending he is about to die
Beaumont and Fletcher

- Mixed serious and comic elements
  - Serious themes with a happy ending
  - Wrote in an artificial, superficial style
- Wrote plays
  - *Philaster* (1610)
  - *A King and No King* (1611)
- Partnership broke up when Beaumont married in 1613
  - Fletcher collaborated with Shakespeare on *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613) and *Henry VIII* (1613)
Court Masques

- Elaborate entertainment presented at court
  - Created to honor the King or member of the royal family
- Flourished under reigns of James I and Charles I
- Emphasis on music and dance with elaborate backdrops and moving equipment
- Performers were amateur members of the court
  - Incorporated mythological and allegorical figures to tell a story where the monarch proved to be the hero in the end
- Introduced Italian scenic practices in England
End of an Era

- From 1649-1660, England was controlled by Puritans
- Puritans were violently opposed to theatre
  - Believed that theatre was a den of iniquity and taught immorality
  - Outlawed all theatrical activities
The Reformation 1642-1660

- Puritans, under direction of Oliver Cromwell, come into existence.
- Puritan - wanted to “purify” the Catholic Church. (Aka. Pilgrims...you know... the Mayflower, Thanksgiving, Squanto?)
- Wanted Church of England to be stricter about morals.
- Killed theatre for 18 years.
- Puritan Rebellion 1642-1660.
Restoration England: During reign of Charles II (1660-1737)

- Theatre monopoly granted to one group to serve all of London.
  - Most plays performed in only:
    - Drury Lane Theatre
    - Convent Garden Theatre
  - Lead to “legitimate theatre”: refers to professional stage plays.

- Actors wore dress of the day:
  - No historical costuming.

- Acting monopolies connected to rich landowners and did shows and performances for them only.
- Women were allowed to play female roles.
- Elaborate scenery more widely used.