

The Renaissance

Historical Background

The Tudors

- War of the Roses 1455-1485 (between the York and Lancaster families)
- Henry Tudor defeated the last Yorkist, Richard III, and became King in 1485 as Henry VII (he was the heir of the Lancaster, son of a Lancaster woman who had married a Tudor).
- First Tudor = Henry VII 1485-1509

The Tudors

- Henry VIII (1509-47), a Renaissance scholar, six wives, breach with Rome, “political” reformation, supremacy of the State over the Church, suppression of monasteries, confiscation of the Church’s riches but also destruction of many art treasures.
Establishment of the Anglican Church.
- The King is the Head of the Anglican Church

The Tudors

After Henry VIII, his successors (and children):

- **Edward VI (1547-1553)** - son of Jane Seymour - Protestant reformation, The *English Book of Prayer* replaced the Latin missal. The form of worship and furnishing of the church became much simpler.
- **Mary Tudor (1553-1558)** - daughter of Catherine of Aragon – “Bloody Mary”, persecuted Protestants. Married to Philip II of Spain. War against France, loss of Calais (England’s last toehold on the Continent).
- **Elizabeth I (1558-1603)** - daughter of Ann Boleyn

Humanism

- **Fall of Constantinople** to the Turks in **1453** (Ottoman Empire), fall of the Byzantine /bɪ'zæntaɪn/ empire (Eastern Roman Empire) → emigration of Greek speaking Christians from the Eastern Empire to Italy. Scholars brought classical texts with them.
- England was influenced by the 'New Learning'. Rediscovery of the classics.
- *Utopia* by Thomas More. The ideal state for the humanist.
- *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam

Humanism

- Generally, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. It views humans as solely responsible for the promotion and development of individuals and emphasizes a concern for man in relation to the world.
- Humanist thought triumphed over medieval scholasticism (truths taken from authority).
- Ipse dixit

The English Renaissance

- The physical extent of the known world was expanded by voyages of discovery.
- The breaking down of the Christian Church into Protestant and Catholic radically changed personal and public life.
- Printers and booksellers became more numerous. **William Caxton** = first printer. First book published in England: *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers* (**1477**)

A few dates

- 1492 (on 12th October) **Columbus** lands on an island in the Bahamas (Central America)
- 1517 **Martin Luther's** articles begin the Reformation
- 1534 **Act of Supremacy**: Henry VIII divorces Catherine of Aragon. Breach with Rome. King = Head of the Church
- 1536 **Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*** becomes known. Heliocentric model of solar system (Ptolemy and Aristotle had believed in a geocentric view).
- 1549 Edward VI's **Act of Uniformity**, enforces the use of the *English Book of Prayer*. Protestantism appealed to Middle Classes.
- 1559 Elizabeth's **Act of Supremacy and Uniformity**, avoided the extremes of Catholic and Protestant. *The Book of Common Prayer* (both moderate Catholics and Protestants could use it). Extreme protestants, called **Puritans** were not happy with this compromise. Queen= Governor not Head of the Church

Elizabethan Age

- A nation finally united under her Crown and independent of Catholic countries.
- **Equilibrium** in religion and foreign politics.
- She consolidated the Anglican Church.
- 1584 Queen Elizabeth gives Sir Walter Raleigh permission to set up the American colony of **Virginia**: beginning of the Empire and economic expansion.
- 1588 Victory over the Spanish Armada. **Explorations** and **overseas trade** expanded, making England a seafaring power. English sea-captains like Drake, Raleigh and Hawkins engaged in **piracy** were secretly encouraged by the Queen, who took share of their profits. Britain = main power in **the Old and New World**.
- Elizabeth: learned woman, patron of the arts and the theatre.

Drama in the Elizabethan Age

- The **Queen** loved the theatre and supported it
- **Puritans** = extreme Protestants (Calvinists) (widespread among the middle classes, the City of London,) were against the theatre: attributed directly to Satan, distraction from work, caused disorders, helped spread diseases and infections. Even religious drama debased the word of God.
→ all theatres were built outside the jurisdiction of London, at Shoreditch (east of London) and Bankside (on the south bank of the Thames)

From itinerant companies to «servants»

- 1572 **Vagrant Act** solved the problem of the number of masterless and unemployed people leaving their districts in search of employment(vagrants). Penalties for those who had no land, no master, and no legitimate trade or source of income.
- Actors, too, were affected by this law. No more free to wander around the country as before (itinerant companies) → had to acquire a new status as household servants under a personage of high degree patron/master/aristocrat → Earl of Leicester's Men (1572), Lord Admiral's Men (1576), Queen's Men (1583), Lord Chamberlain's Men (1594, Shakespeare's company, called "King's Men" under James I).
- Pronunciation : Leicester / 'lɛstə/ and admiral /'adm(ə)r(ə)l/

Playhouses

- Stable base in a playhouse → Leicester's Men at the 'Theatre' built at Shoreditch by John Burbage in 1576
- Public theatres. Different prices for different tickets. The public came from all social classes.
- Shape like the buildings for animal baiting, open to the skies.
- Small companies staging plays with many characters - → **doubling** (assigning several roles to the same actor)
- **Women could not act**
- **Cross-dressing**
- **Play within the play**

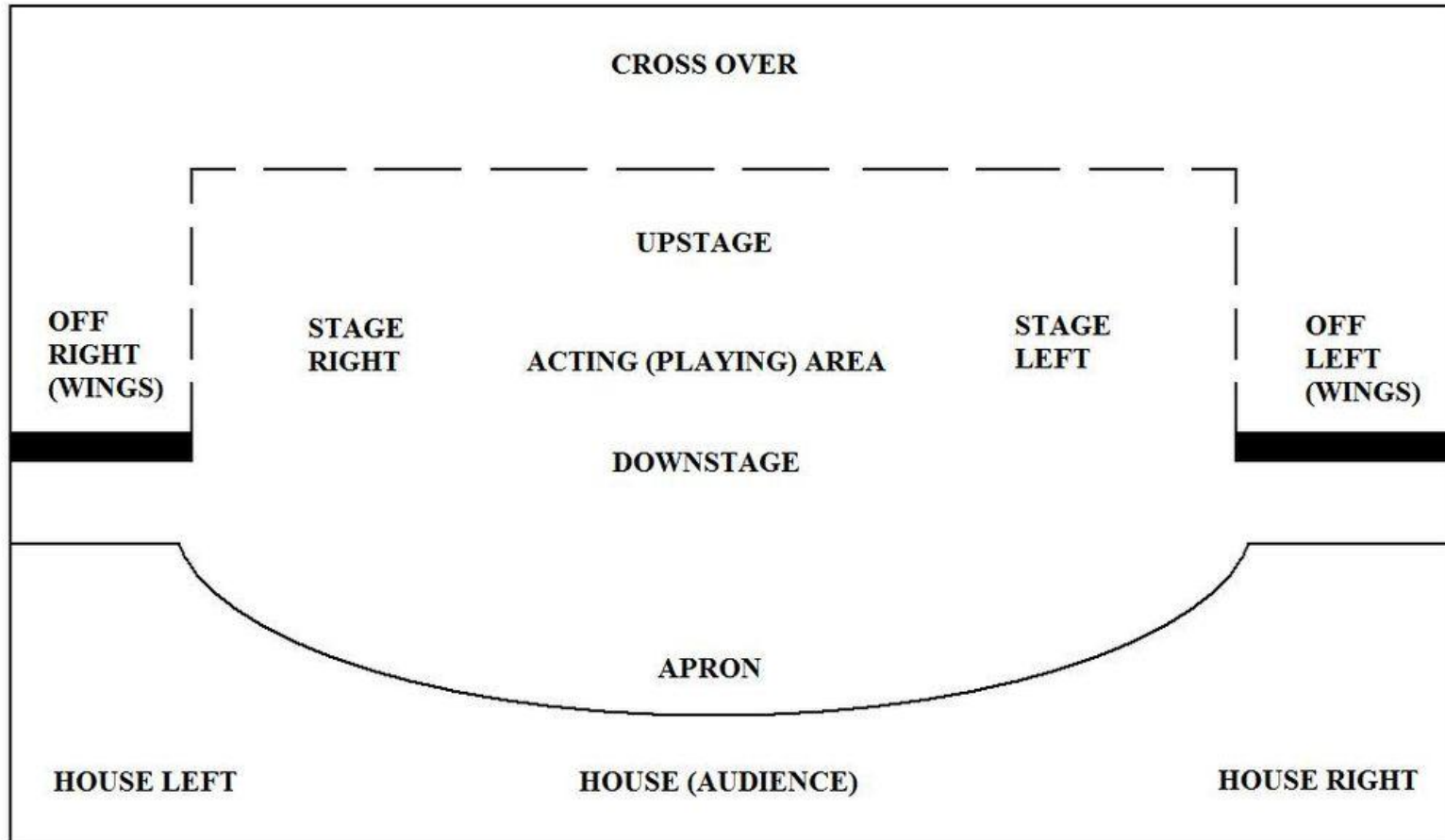
Playhouses

- Shape = Polygon (with 8 or more sides)
- It could contain 2,000 (or The Swan 3,000) spectators
- The **pit** (an arena where the public stood)
- Three levels of **galleries** (where the public sat)
- The stage was a platform jutting into the arena, surrounded by people on three sides and covered by a canopy.
- It encouraged a **direct relationship** between actors and public.
- Plays were performed in the **daylight**.
- No scene changes, props were minimal. Space and time of the action was recreated by the actors' words → the text is most important.

Private vs public theatres

- At the end of 16th century private theatres emerge, designed as the great halls in noblemen's mansions. **Rectangle**
- Platform on the short side, with two or three doors at the back and a balcony.
- **Artificial lights, indoors.**
- Public from a more **restricted social class.**
- More cultivated type of performance.
- Higher price of admission.

Modern Theatre.



The Fourth Wall

- The **established convention** of the Fourth Wall is not present in classical theatre from Greece up to the Renaissance (or in the Elizabethan theatre).
- Many asides and soliloquies are addressed to the audience
- Fourth Wall = the rise of **illusionism** in the mid-17th century. It leads to the **realism** and **naturalism** of 19th-century theatre.
- Today the temporary suspension of the convention draws attention to its use in the rest of the performance. This act is **metatheatrical**.
- Breaking the fourth wall

Elizabethan Age

- **Poets**

- **Sir Philip Sidney** (1554-86)
- *Arcadia*
- *Astrophil and Stella* (sonnets)
- **Edmund Spenser** (1552-99)
- *Amoretti* (sonnets)
- *The Faerie Queene*

- **Playwrights**

- **Christopher Marlowe** (1564-1593)
- **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616)
- **Ben Jonson** (1572-1637)
- (generally included in Jacobean and Caroline Drama)