1 Medieval literature (1066-1515)

1.1 Beginnings of English drama (1350-1515)

Mimicry and make-believe (theatre) attained high distinction among the Greeks, but was less popular among the Romans, who preferred chariot races and gladiatorial combats in the circus and amphitheatre. Their best literary talents were not attracted by theatre. The Teutons (Germanic peoples) that caused the fall of the Roman Empire had never developed Drama. After the rise of Christianity the Church objected to theatre because of its associations with paganism, immorality, and because some lower forms ridiculed Christianity. With the fall of the Empire, Roman drama disappeared.

1.1.1 *Tropes*

The drama of the Middle Ages is not a continuation of Roman drama but a development from the services of the Church: the mass and the matins. In the text of the missal intrusions crept in, first as musical embellishments at the end of the gradual (a chant sung after the epistle of the day which closes with *alleluia*), to which words were in time added, and later through amplifications in other chants. These amplifications are called *tropes.*

A trope in the mass of Easter will have importance for the emergence of modern theatre. In its simplest form this is it:

> Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae?
> Jesus Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.
> Non est hic; surrexit sicut praedixerat;
> ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchro.
>
> (Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O Christians?
> Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, O angels.
> He is not here; he has arisen as he foretold;
> go, announce that he has arisen from the grave.)

This is a paraphrase of the dialogue between the angel and the Marys at the tomb of Christ as implied in the Gospel of St Matthew. It was sung antiphonally (alternately by the two halves of the choir), and so constituted a dialogued chant. This is the germ out of which modern drama grew.

This trope was equally appropriate for the matins earlier the same day. When it was transferred to the end of this office, the ***Quem quaeritis*** underwent a gradual change. Two members of the choir were robed in white to suggest angels; three others in black to represent the Marys. This simple but important change introduced the element of impersonation. Slowly other lines were added: *Who will roll away for us the stone?* the Marys ask; the angels invite them to *Come and see the place where the Lord was laid.* When all these amplifications are present we have a highly dramatic ceremony.

So successful an innovation was soon imitated, and a similar ceremony was introduced at Christmas. By a slight change the dialogue of the *Quem quaeritis* was adapted to that between the shepherds who came to adore the Christ-child and the *obstetrices* or midwives:

> Quem quaeritis in praesepe, o pastores, dicite.
> Salvatorem Christum Dominum, infantem pannis
> involutum, secundum sermonem angelicum.
> Adest hic parvulus cum Maria matre sua. [...]
> Et nunc euntes dicite quia natus est.
>
> (Whom seek ye in the manger, O shepherds, tell us.
> Christ our Lord the Saviour, an infant wrapped in
> swaddling clothes, as the angels say.
> Here is the little one with Mary, his mother. [...]
> And now go and say that he is born.)

Such a conversation, though plausible, lacks any biblical authority. It is simply an imitation of the Easter trope and its is known as the ***Officium Pastorum.***

1.1.2 *Liturgical drama*

Other ceremonies at Christmas have more theatrical interest. On Twelfth Day was celebrated the coming of the Magi to adore and to

bring rich gifts. As kings they were impressive in their costumes of Oriental splendour. They had to pass through the kingdom of Herod, who soon becomes the central figure of the action, as a symbol of the tyrant's power jealous of any threat to its supremacy. The star suspended from the roof of the church guiding the Magi gives this ceremony the name of ***Officium Stellae.***

Two other developments at the Christmas season. One is the ***Ordo Rachelis,*** a natural extension of the *Stella,* showing the slaughter of the innocents by Herod's soldiers. The children are slain and Rachel, representative of the mothers of Israel, sings her lament. The other was the ***Ordo Prophetarum,*** originated not in a chant of the choir but in a sermon frequently read in the Christmas matins. In one section of the sermon various Old Testament prophets are called upon the preacher to testify to the coming of Christ. When their words are not merely reported but delivered by separate personages appropriately costumed the sermon becomes elementary drama. In time episodes connected with some of the prophets were represented.

The amalgamation and elaboration of such dramatic ceremonies within the church in time put a strain upon the services. Additional episodes tended to develop. Such an extensive action took up much time and interfered with the service proper; it also taxed the resources of the clergy. In some places outsiders had to assist in the performance. The realistic elements verging on the humorous that crept in (for example, one of the prophets beat his ass and the beast brayed) were inappropriate to the solemn ritual of the church. Another difficulty was to provide adequate space for the crowds that wanted to witness the performances. So from choir to nave, and from nave to church-porch were natural steps on the way to public square. Once outside the church the performances gradually broke their liturgical bonds. Latin gave way to the vernacular, and musical rendering to the spoken word. The laity now participated increasingly and the clergy gradually withdrew until the plays ended up entirely in the hands of the people.

1.1.3 *Mystery cycles*

(On the Continent a careful discrimination was made between mystery drama, derived from the Bible, and miracle plays, based upon saints' lives. In England the term *mysteries* generally served for both. *Mystery* is an archaic term that means 'handicraft or trade').

At one stage we have drama passing out of the church and the control of the clergy. Next we see it in the hands of the craft guilds or mysteries and in the control of the civic authorities. The intermediate steps are missing. Probably the establishment in England of the festival of Corpus Christi was important. It included a procession with five (non dramatic) pageants (wagons) portraying the Fall of Man, the prophecies, the coming, and the death of Christ, and finally the triumph of Corpus Christi in the Judgement Day. With many additional details this constitutes the subject matter of the mystery cycles.

English religious cycles, which developed rapidly in the thirteenth century, had a civic character. The governing body of the city maintained and promoted them. In the beginning the various pageants must have been distributed to the guilds by mutual agreement or on the decision of the central authority.

Cycles of mystery plays seem to have been regular only in some of the larger cities. The important centres were in the north and the Midlands. The four extant cycles are those of York, Wakefield, Chester, and Coventry.

The most extensive cycle was that of York: its forty-eight plays cover the whole of biblical history, concluding with the Judgement Day. This was the typical scope of the English cycles. On the whole it is a dignified and impressive production. Only rarely it is highly realistic and vigorous: homely humour enlivens the play of Noah and the flood, in which Noah's wife demurs about entering the ark and prefers to go to town. She finally gives in but complains that Noah might have told her earlier of his plans.

The Wakefield cycle contains thirty-two pageants.

The extant English cycles seem to have been given in a manner peculiar to England. Each episode was performed on a separate stage set on wheels so that it could be drawn from point to point in the city. The stations were designated in advance. Where the entire cycle was given in one day it was necessary to begin early (six o'clock in the morning or earlier).

1.1.4 *Morality plays*

Basically, a morality play is an allegory in dramatic form. It differs from previous drama in dealing with personifications of abstract qualities such as Beauty, Strength, Gluttony, and Peace, or with generalized classes such as Everyman, King, and Bishop. In its true form the morality is distinguished by certain characteristic themes treated allegorically. These include such subjects as the summons of Death, the conflict of vices and virtues for supremacy in man's life (psychomachia, 'battle for the soul'), and the question of his ultimate fate as debated by the Four Daughters of God (Mercy and Peace pleading for man's salvation and Righteousness and Truth for his eternal punishment). They all seem to centre in the problem of man's salvation and the conduct of life as it affects salvation. The morality is also characterized by a definite purpose: the morality teaches a lesson about right living; it preaches a sermon in dramatic form.

The earliest play of this type that has come down to us, *The Pride of Life,* dates from about 1400. The longest (over 3600 lines) and most comprehensive of the English moralities of the fifteenth century is *The Castle of Perseverance.* By the end of the fifteenth century we get the classic of the English morality plays, ***Everyman.*** With a fine sense of unity the play avoids any direct representation of Everyman's heedless life and confines itself to the hour in which he receives the summons of Death. Told by the messenger that he must go on a long journey, he pleads in vain for a delay and has only the consolation of knowing that he can ask his more intimate friends to accompany him. But he finds that Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Worldly Goods cannot or will not go with him into the next world. Good Deeds, with whom he has had all too little to do in his lifetime, alone stands by him and descends with him finally into the grave. In its 900 lines *Everyman* conveys its lesson with a simple effectiveness that has been more than once demonstrated by revivals on the modern stage.

The morality play does not concern Bible story but suggests the homily in dramatized form.

2 English Renaissance drama (1515-1542)

2.1 Early Elizabethan drama and the pre-Shakespearean dramatists (1515-1595)

The miracle plays and the morality plays continued to be acted throughout much of the sixteeth century. By the late fifteenth century these dramas were so popular that troupes of actors toured England in summer to present them. A favourite play site was the courtyard of the medieval inn. The mass of viewers (groundlings) stood upon the earth of the innyard; those who wanted seats sat in chairs upon the gallery. Actors acted under the patronage of influencial lords, to protect themselves from laws against vagabonds.

2.1.1 *Interlude*

Toward the end of the fifteenth century there was a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general problems, though with more pronounced realistic and comic elements. This kind of play is known as the *interlude,* though that name is also given to some much earlier secular moralities. These earlier 'interludes' are perhaps not to be regarded as morality plays at all, but as dramatized versions of *fabliaux*. But the later kind of interlude, the secular morality play, develops its comic and realistic side and by the sixteenth century comes to include scenes far removed from the theme and atmosphere of the medieval morality. It is perhaps simplest to use the term *interlude* to denote those plays which mark the transition from religious drama to Tudor secular drama. The shift of interest from salvation to education, marking the distinction between the medieval morality play and the Tudor interlude, was accompanied by a parallel shift from religion to politics.

After 1500 the term *interlude* was often used indiscriminately for any play, although it usually suggested the idea of essentially secular humour. Whatever its origin or exact meaning, the interlude is significant for developing the first wholly secular drama in English.

Cardinal Morton's circle. This group is concerned with private drama, performed indoors before Cardinal Morton's household on festivities, but these interludes can be adapted for the general public.

Henry Medwall, a chaplain and teacher in the household of Cardinal Morton, wrote *Nature,* a morality in the old allegorical tradition. *Fulgens and Lucres* is the first purely secular drama in English, and involves the earliest appearance in English of the love-triangle drama.

John Heywood, musician for Cardinal Morton, is the author of *The Playe Called the Foure PP.*

Secular moralities. In the early sixteenth century the morality play, performed in shools by students, was used for secular instead of religious indoctrination. *A New Interlude and a Mery of the Nature of the iiii Elements,* by John Rastel, is the earliest secular morality. *Wyt and Science,* by John Redford, is perhaps the best. It allegorizes the scholar's quests.

Native and new elements in the professional drama. Actors maintain the native tradition but, as the religious matter is delicate indeed in these controversial decades, they incorporate new and secular material. *A Newe Enterlude of Vice Conteyninge the Historye of Horestes,* by John Pickeryng, is the classic tale of Orestes with the Vice from the old moralities. *A Lamentable Tragedie, Mixed Full of Plesant Mirth, Containing the Life of Cambises, King of Percia,* by Thomas Preston, mixes comedy and tragedy, and includes melodramatic violence. *King Johan,* by John Bale, is the earliest employment of historical material in the drama. It is essentially a morality play with historical personages.

2.1.2 *Non-professional theatre*

2.1.2.1 ACADEMIC DRAMA

The classic Latin dramas by Plautus, Terence, and Seneca were performed in Tudor schools by student actors as an educational device to instruct in moral and literary style. Imitative drama in Latin was written by humanists. The next step was the imitation of the Latin drama in English.

Academic comedy. Plautus and Terence were the models. Nicholas Udall, headmaster of Eton and of Westminster School, wrote the first true English comedy, *Ralf Roister Doister,* in which the unities of time, place, and action are carefully observed. *Gammer Gurton's Needle,* by a 'Mr S', is more English, more original, and more humorous.

Academic tragedy. The model was Seneca, who chose the most violent themes of murder, incest, and adultery to display the conflict of human passions with external responsibilities. *Gorboduc,* by thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton (young lawyers), is a legendary tale of ancient Britain, in which incessant violence takes place offstage and the classic unities are treated with liberty. Here blank verse is used in drama for the first time. From this time on the Senecan tradition goes in opposite directions: to the closet drama written by cultured dilettantes, or to the public drama, mainly through Kyd and Marlowe.

2.1.2.2 DRAMA OF THE COURT

Dramas were performed in the court on festivities: the Queen's Accession Day, Christmas, New Year's, Twelfth Night, Candlemas, and Shrovetide. Their sources were moralities, Italian stories, biblical dramas, and mainly the classics (pastorals, comedies in the style of Plautus and Terence, and plays on mythology). A second source is the performances by the Inns of Court (law schools) and the London choirboys. Richard Edwards wrote for them some plays to be acted before the royal court. Lyly's six plays for the choirboys set the fashion for the court drama in the romanticized idyll of antiquity; the mixture of humorous, serius, and didactic elements; artificial speech and manner; opulent pageantry, and the medieval practice of simultaneous settings.

2.1.3 *Public theatre*

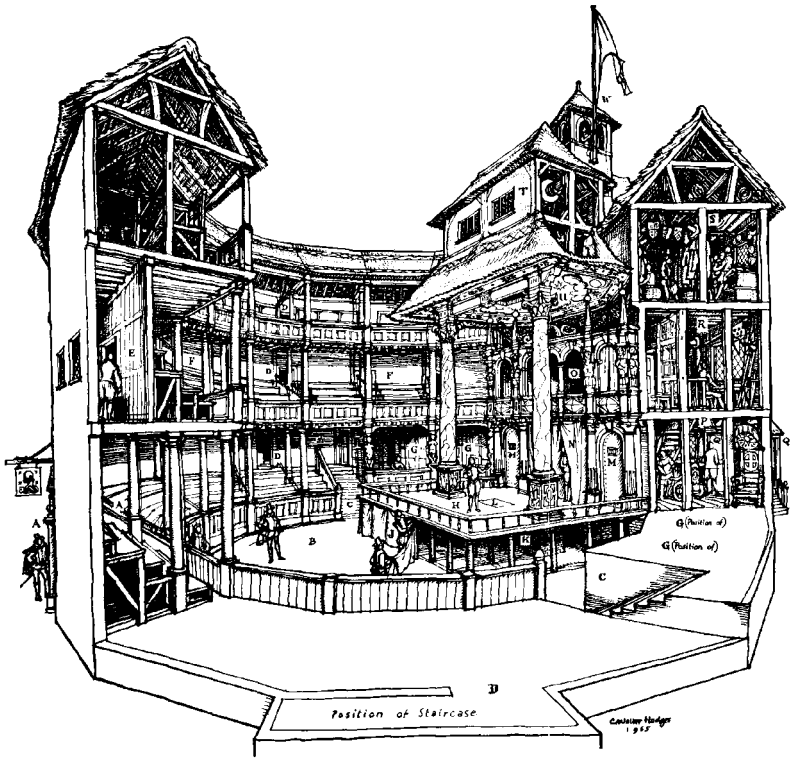
2.1.3.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The first permanent theatre for performance in England was erected in 1576. It was demolished in 1599 and reconstructed on the south bank of the Thames as The Globe. A decree of the London Common Council in 1574 forbade public theatres within the city limits.

The theatrical company. The acting troupes were theoretically servants of noble protectors in order to evade laws against vagabonds. They follow the model of the trade guild: sharers (masters), leading actors who share in all profits; hired men (journeymen), actors with minor roles, musicians, stage hands, prompters, etc., who earn a stipulated wage; and apprentices, boys learning the craft of acting, who play the roles of young women. The actors dominated the play (because the Elizabethan popular stage had no scenery), and tended to prolong their parts if the audience was with them.

The Elizabethan playhouse. The theatre derived ultimately from the medieval innyard. It had a round or polygonal form. The area beneath the stage flooring was termed 'cellarage' or the 'Hell'. The elevated stage proper contained most of the drama. The platform virtually created 'theatre in the round' with groundlings on three sides of the actors. Show-offish gallants, for a special fee, could even rent a chair upon the stage itself. Scenery was altogether absent from the stage proper, and the actors had to give descriptions of settings, time of day, and the weather. There were two doors at the rear of the stage, through which all entrances and exits took place. Without the breaks in modern stage performances, an actor would leave through one door, while a second actor would appear through the other door to swing into the next scene. Even the pillars upon the stage were employed dramatically. Between the rear doors was an inner stage with its curtain.

Immediately above the inner stage was a curtained alcove normally occupied by musicians. For acting purposes this alcove frequently served as a 'chamber'. The bay windows on either side of the alcove were utilized for the frequent window scenes. Above the



The Globe Playhouse,
1599–1613

A CONJECTURAL
RECONSTRUCTION

KEY

Aa Main entrance
B The Yard
Cc Entrances to lowest gallery
D Entrances to staircase and upper galleries
E Corridor serving the different sections of the middle gallery
F Middle gallery ('Twopenny Rooms')
G 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or 'Lords' Rooms'
H The stage
J The hanging being put up round the stage
K The 'Hell' under the stage
L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
MM Stage doors
N Curtained 'place behind the stage'
O Gallery above the stage, used as required sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spectators, and often as part of the play
P Back-stage area (the tiring-house)
Q Tiring-house door
R Dressing-rooms
S Wardrobe and storage
T The hut housing the machine for lowering enthroned gods, etc., to the stage
U The 'Heavens'
W Hoisting the playhouse flag

alcove in the third tier was a small balcony or *terras.* Frequently it represented the wall of a castle or a city. The highest part of the theatre was a small storeroom above the little balcony, constituing a fourth floor. Usually this room was the domain of the hired man who ran up the flag on the flagpole to let the world know a play was to be performed that day.

The audience. The groundlings were unruly, but could be impressed by drama that gave it a taste of the court and academic refinement. There were gentlemen more interested in being seen than in seeing who wanted seats upon the stage. There were also gentlemen from the gentry who demanded intellectual quality in the drama. Respectable women did not go to the public theatre.

The playwrights. The playwrights (both the 'University Wits' and the actor-turned-playwright) had to start doing whatever the company ordered. If the dramatist showed real achievement, he could look to 'original' dramas exclusively form his hand.

Conventions in the dramas. (a) Plotting. The use of soliloquies and asides derived from medieval practice. Disguises were accepted as impenetrable. Love at first sight, instantaneous conversions, the potency of aphrodisiacs and sleeping draughts, the appearance of ghosts, etc. were accepted. The viewers had to imagine what was depicted with words. (b) Play construction. The unities of time, place, and action were ignored. (c) Acting. Outdoor acoustics emphasized strong voices. Actions also were vigorous and clearly observable motions. Emotions were somewhat stylized.

2.1.3.2 MAIN KINDS OF DRAMA

Plays can be classified according to the following main categories:

(1) **Revenge tragedy.** It was modelled upon Senecan dramas. Plot: a treacherous slaying is avenged. It began with Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. With time it becomes a psychological and philosophical analysis of the human situation, as in *Hamlet.*
(2) **'Fall of princes' tragedy.** It followed the medieval concept of the Wheel of Fortune. Plot: the rise to an apogee through relentless ambition, followed by the fall to misery and destruction. It began with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine.* Later they depict the human dilemma of taking decisions not knowing their outcome, as in *King Lear.*
(3) **Chronicle play.** It is a free dramatizing of history to exalt the nation's past. It began with Marlowe's *Edward II.*

(4) **Romantic comedy.** Plot: a love affair, always ending happily. It began with Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* and Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.* Gradually it acquires some realism, as in *The Merchant of Venice.*
(5) **Domestic tragedy.** Middle-class business folk are the subject. It began with the anonymous *Arden of Feversham.*
(6) **Realistic comedy.** Plot: a happy marriage is based not upon poetry but upon adecuate material possessions. It began with William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money.*
(7) **Comedy of humours.** Sources: the classic comedies of Plautus and Terence (which used stock characters, like the clever slave, the braggart soldier, etc.); the *Characters* of Theophrastus; and the late medieval morality play. It began with George Chapman's *An Humorous Days Mirth,* but the most important author was Jonson. The name stems form the medieval theory of the humours.

2.1.4 *University Wits*

The 'University Wits' saw the drama as a way to obtain fame and fortune unattainable from other kinds of literary writing. These dramatists were fresh from the humanistic training in the universities and altered the medieval forms of the drama with their classic education. However, in order to gain subject matter for their plays, they used every source available to them.

The scripts were the exclusive property of the acting company, that published the plays when the acting days were over. Initial printings were usually in quartos, the cheapest form of contemporary book printing.

2.1.4.1 ELIZABETHAN COMEDY

John Lyly (1554-1606). The religious and political fluxes of Henry VIII's last years, and the reactionary reigns of Edward VI and Mary, carried the peers and the aristocrats of the nation into disgusted obscurity, if not to rebellion and sudden death. Elizabeth found herself a queen of the bourgeois and Philistines. It was the

business folk of London and the country squires who made her queen and kept her so, and it was they who made the literary as well as the historical drama of her reign, with few pretensions to breeding and none to hereditary elegance.

Lyly's cure for English rusticity of speech and manner was an affected style that proved very influencial among his contemporaries. He is also responsible for the introduction of etheralized fairies into English drama. Lyly's chief audience was the Queen, and his actors were 'her majesty's children', that is, the boys of the Chapel. His plays are all comedies and are all classically divided, but he is essentially romantic in his plots and violates the unities of time and place when he likes.

George Peele (1556-1596). He was a product of London streets and gutters. Peele's impudence is illustrated by the situation with which he concludes his first play, *The Arraignment of Paris,* presented before the Queen by the Children of the Chapel. His plot takes up the old myth of the quarrel of the three goddesses over the golden ball that is the perquisite of the fairest of all divinities. At the end he makes Diana step to the royal box and she 'delivereth the ball of gold to the queen's own hands'. Even Elizabeth, now fifty years old, seems to have realized that there was less of the sublime than of the ridiculous in such a dénouement, and Master Peale does not appear to have been allowed another opportunity to manifest his appeciation.

Peele had no reason, order or consistency. But he had the power of drawing an unearthy beauty out of words. His three great plays have an intensity of fancy that enables him to trascend the laws of logic, and they are filled with a kind of dramatic intuition that is the strangest thing about Peele. They are as different as possible in form and object. *The Arraignment of Paris* is a Greek pastoral, written mainly in varied lyrical measures, though the scant two hundred lines of blank verse it contains are much of the loveliest that any one wrote before Marlowe. *David and Bethsabe* is a tragedy from the Old Testament, nearly wholly in blank verse, and *The Old Wives' Tale* is an extravaganza of English folklore, mostly in prose.

Robert Greene (1558-1592). He introduced a nostalgic, day-dreaming element and he developed variety, subordinating form to atmosphere, and packing each play with such diverse materials that plot outlines become meaningless. His best plays, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *James IV,* would include a tangled love story

involving rural scenes, a little amount of fairy-lore or magical display, Plautine jokes, interlude devices (for example, the Vice riding to hell on the devil's back), classic reminiscence, and pseudo-history.

Green also handled his source freely in *Orlando Furioso,* which was played before the Queen and probably suggested by Harington's translation. Greene's blank verse in general sounds like a parody of Marlowe's style.

Greene's influence was great on Shakespeare's romantic comedies, which share the same materials: the nostalgic charm of the next county; the woodland setting and idyllic atmosphere, where evil, though present in its blackest form, is easily dispelled; the capable and high-spirited heroine, fond of disguising herself as a boy; Oberon and his fairies as factors in a human love story; and the melancholic, worldly humorist as a comentator on Utopia.

2.1.4.2 ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY

It was Kyd and Marlowe who succeded around 1585 in producing an English adaptation of Latin tragedy that not only gained the approval of the people as a whole, but aroused an excited enthusiasm such as no other productions of the English theatre have quite equaled.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594). Kyd is no poet, though he can write tolerable blank verse, but as a deviser of stage tricks and a master of the art of giving his audiences the sort of thrills that will most powerfully agitate their spines he has had very few superiors. In his most famous play, *The Spanish Tragedy,* he takes as a foundation three conventional devices which earlier writers had borrowed from Seneca. One was the ghost, another the theme of revenge for the murder of a relative (Kyd makes it the revenge of old Hieronimo for the murder of his son), and the third was a liberal use of stage declamation and soliloquy. But he adds his innovations:

(1) Instead of a unique story from classic mythology or legendary British history, the play is on modern love and war: the setting is Spain, and the plot is supposed to arise from the recent battle of Alcantara (1580).

(2) Complexity: Kyd evolves a perfect wilderness of subplots, plenty of hair-raising tricks and turns.
(3) Kyd gives his characters lurid psychological twists of mind. Hieronimo is obscurely mad, Lorenzo is an embodiment of Machiavellian cunning and ruthlessness, etc.
(4) Seneca had messengers who reported the interesting things that happened behind the scenes. *The Spanish Tragedy* offers eight murders and suicides on the stage, cleverly spaced and diversified, besides the spectacle of a public hanging, the running lunatic of an elderly gentlewoman, the biting out of a gentleman's tongue, and other devices to prevent tediousness.
(5) Kyd devised the arrangement of the play within the play, which Shakespeare found so useful; and in two separate scences of the *Spanish Tragedy* he gets a novel three-ring-circus efect by having certain characters discuss their intimate affairs while others look on from without, and Revenge and Andrea gaze down upon the whole.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593). 'Marlowe's mightly line', as Ben Jonson called it, is among his great dramatic achievements. He is not the first to use blank verse, but with him it becomes the most expressive and the grandest of English metres. Marlowe proclaimes from the stage the Renaissance lust for life. The time of homily and frivolity is past; the age of vision is at hand. With the exception of *Edward II,* his plays are all one-man dramas. The central character in each of his dramas is a towering figure, insatiably desiring to wrestle with every experience.

Marlowe has a native sense of dramatic values. He loves learning deeply and hates ignorance. Few English poets have so well vindicated the literary uses of academic knowledge. Marlowe is never more the poet than when he is most the scholar. His scholarship gives him a remarkable sense of form, and the scholar's passion for truth, for fair play in intellectual disputes.

In *Tamburline the Great* the hero-villain is carried from humble origins through incredible triumphs (Part I) to eventual fall (Part II). Thus it deals with the medieval Wheel of Fortune theme, and creates the 'Fall of Princes' tragedy. Marlowe creates the prototype of the Renaissance egoist, the audacious villain. Again in *The Tragicall History of Dr. Faustus* the central character has a great ambition, now

for intellectual power. The surviving text seems mutilated: the opening and conclusion are much better than the rest. *The Jew of Malta* was Marlowe's most popular play. The chronicle play reaches a maturity in *Edward II,* his best constructed drama.

2.2 Shakespeare as a dramatist

Born at Stratford-on-Avon (Warwickshire), in the rural centre of England. There is the possibility, but no definite proof, that he may have had a term or two at Oxford. However, he married at the age of eighteen to Anne Hathaway and had three children within the next three years, and that ended his regular schooling.

He went to London. By 1592 he had attained some prominence as an actor and playwright. Before 1594, by means unknown, he had established a friendship with the young Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his two long poems, and to whom he addressed, probably between 1593 and 1597, the bulk of his sonnets. He was one of the principal actors in the Lord Chamberlain's Company till 1603, though probably a dignified rather than highly gifted performer, and he was one of the seven partners in the building of the Globe Theatre in 1599. When James I took the Chamberlain's Men under his personal patronage in 1603, Shakespeare shared largely in the mounting prestige and prosperity of the company and had a modest place at court. He invested his wealth largely in Stratford property and in 1597 bought 'New Place', one of the great houses of the town, which about 1610 became his chief residence and the home of his family.

Many of the most significant writers of the last three hundred years have found channels for their own thought in criticizing Shakespeare (Pope, Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, Swinburne, Walt Whitman, and Shaw; Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Lessing, Schlegel, Goethe, Croce, etc.). In the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, there was a 'Shakespeare idolatry': Shakespeare was superhuman and could do nothing wrong.

2.2.1 *Elizabethan Shakespeare*

In this period his activities are efforts to acquire the various 'skills' of his profession. He follows what other men begin: he is going with the crowd, both in choice of materials and in workmanship. His poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* deal with the kind of classical story which had the greatest popular appeal at the time, and are written in the two stanza-forms most conventional in such work. His sonnets differ from those of Sidney and Spenser in being composed in the form that was the commonest and the easiest to write.

His imitations	
The Comedy of Errors	*Henry VI*
The Two Gentlemen of Verona	
Love's Labour's Lost	

He begun as a dramatist by imitating Plautus *(The Comedy of Errors),* Munday and Greene *(The Two Gentlemen of Verona),* Lyly *(Love's Labour's Lost);* Marlowe *(Henry VI).* He seems mainly concerned to turn out a workmanlike product along lines which the public taste had already approved. In his earliest plays he mixes different metres anarchically. His main ambition was to learn how to write, and he adapted himself to any models that were in vogue.

The history plays
Henry VI (1, 2, 3)
Richard III
King John
Richard II
Henry IV (1, 2)
Henry V
Henry VIII

His history plays are the most numerous group in his early period, because they were the most popular type of drama in the 1590s and intrinsically the least difficult to construct. In the three plays of *Henry VI* he is expanding earlier pieces, with great deference to his predecessors. His peculiarities were his sentimentality and the humorous understanding of simple stupid men.

In *King John* he is contracting the work of a predecessor, making two plays into one. This play shows that Shakespeare is at this point interested in style, not in structure or philosophy.

Richard III and *Richard II* are imitations of Marlowe. This plays were, with *Romeo and Juliet,* his first outstanding successes.

The *Henry IV* plays show a broader mastery, and more of that ability to make the characters speak like persons in real life which was one of Shakespeare's greatest accomplishments of style. *Henry V* may have been written for the occasion of the opening of the Globe Theatre (summer of 1599). Thereafter Shakespeare abandoned the history play, returning to it only in another show-piece at the very end of his life, *Henry VIII* (1613).

His development in comedy	
A Midsummer-Night's Dream	
The Merchant of Venice	
The Taming of the Shrew	The Farces
The Merry Wives of Windsor	
Much Ado about Nothing	The Essex Period
As You Like It	(middle of 1599 to 1601)
Twelfth Night	'Joyous' comedies

A Midsummer-Night's Dream and *The Merchant of Venice,* though not like each other, both resemble *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at various points. They do not seem to have been particularly popular in their own time; nor have they very much in common with his later comedies. *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* seems to have been written, or at least recast, for a state wedding, and it is the most lyrical of all the plays. It has little real resemblance to any of the rest, unless perhaps to the much later *Tempest,* which was likewise adapted to celebrate a royal wedding. *The Merchant of Venice* is one of the gravest of comedies, and capable of being misread as a tragedy.

By 1598 Shakespeare had attained name and fame. Two natural consequences of success—pressure towards over-production and a certain slackening of creative energy—may perhaps be observed in the other comedies of the decade. *The Taming of the Shrew* is an admirable farce, considerably superior to the *Comedy of Errors,* but not very suggestive of Shakespeare's unaided work. *The Merry Wives of Winsor* was written in great haste (according to tradition), and yet

this farce (the last Shakespeare would write) is one of the best in the world.

The period from Essex's departure to Ireland till his ill-omened insurrection (Essex period, mid 1599-1601) is, in Shakespeare's career, a period of suspended activity and indecision. The three great comedies of these years seem in their very titles to express a sort of carelessness: *Much Ado about Nothing, As You Like It,* and *What You Will (Twelfth Night).*

Thus, by the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, Shakespeare had brought his writing of English history plays to a close, having developed that type to the limit of its artistic possibilities; while in comedy he was floating in dead water, exploiting his elegant connoisseurship and for the moment content to take his profits as a public entertainer. As a nondramatic poet he had quite shot his bolt. *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* had no successors from his hand; and the great series of sonnets can scarcely be later than 1597. Only in tragedy is there any close link between Shakespeare in Elizabeth's reign and in King James's.

Tragedy
Titus Andronicus
Romeo and Juliet
Julius Caesar
Hamlet

Apart from the history plays, Shakespeare wrote four tragedies under Elizabeth, separated from each other by considerable intervals of time and very remarkable differences of manner. All four, however, belong to the revenge or vendetta type of play familiar in Seneca, and they all awe more to Kyd than to Marlowe.

Titus Andronicus is the only representative of the tragedy of blood, except *Richard III,* which can fairly challenge the supremacy of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy.* Like that play, and like *Hamlet,* it makes good use of quasi-insanity and the play-within-the-play.

Romeo and Juliet. One easily overlooks its Senecan affinities; it is a vendetta play. Shakespeare's interest in persons frequently drives his plays athwart their normal course. There occurred an unleashing of romantic sympathy for Romeo and Juliet which threatened at every moment to turn the drama into tragicomedy.

Julius Caesar was produced at the Globe in the autumn of 1599, immediately after *Henry V.* Mechanically, these two plays are much alike, and they exhibit the culmination of Shakespeare's middle style. *Julius Caesar* can still be called a Senecan tragedy, complete with ghost and revenge-motif; but it is given a bias-movement by the character of Brutus. For the average playgoer he allows Brutus to remain the idealistic hero that Plutarch called him; he had inward doubts. Brutus is a preliminary drawing for Hamlet.

Hamlet. Out of a tangle of Norse pagan myth Saxo Grammaticus produced his character of Amleth, the grim and purposeful avenger of his father's murder. This story, through the French version of Belleforest, had before 1589 been made into an English play by a bold and vigorous adapter, presumably Kyd, who evidently overlaid the realistic paganism of the North with supernatural paganism from Greece and Rome, introducing the ghost and other Senecan machinery and changing the crafty assumption of idiocy in Saxo's hero into neurotic brainsickness. When Shakespeare had revised this story, *Hamlet* was really no longer a play of revenge; it was a play of life and death and of man's ambiguous relation to them both. It was the passionate protest of a keen and honest thinker against the inescapable sophistications of thought, which make everything *seem* and yet can give no assurance that anything is absolutely true. *Hamlet* is a play of far greater philosophical density than anything that had preceded it.

2.2.2 *Jacobean Shakespeare*

The dark comedies
Troilus and Cressida
All's Well that Ends Well
Measure for Measure

Problem comedies

Shakespeare's Elizabethan period really ended with the sunny comedies, of which *Twelfth Night* is the last, and the questioning spirit which we may call Jacobean is strong in the play that most immediately followed *Hamlet,* that is, *Troilus and Cressida.* This is most naturally grouped with the 'problem comedies', *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well.*

Troilus and Cressida is a very long play, crammed with poetry and a social discontent. It contains the poet's grieved and angry analysis of the disintegration of a heroic age.

To about the same period and spirit may be assigned the revision of *All's Well that Ends Well* (the first version may have been the *Love's Labour's Won* mentioned by Meres in 1598). Helena, the chief character, is one of the exuberant Elizabethan heroines, but the unpleasant figures of Bertram and Parolles are developed in the later style of social irony and disgust.

Measure for Measure, written for King James, is one of Shakespeare's most sociological plays, along with *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens.* The problems it deals with are those of city government and of the police court, and its main lesson points to the need for sincerity and common sense in public affairs. It is less angry and more seemingly mature than the other dark comedies, offering a more constructive criticism of the new life.

The Great Tragic Triad

Tragedies
Othello
King Lear
Macbeth
Timon of Athens
Anthony and Cleopatra
Coriolanus

The satirical and contemptuous attitude was not normal with Shakespeare; and though in the dark comedies he went for a time with the crowd, as he had so often done, the great effect upon him of the Jacobean disillusionment was to induce reflections upon the nature of evil which crystalized into a nobler and deeper poetry than he had yet written. The Elizabethan Shakespeare had not seriously believed in villainy.

The three great tragedies of *Othello, Lear,* and *Macbeth* stand very close together, and apart from everything which preceded, in their assertion that the world is full of inscrutable and absorbingly interesting evil. They differ from the dark comedies in that there is nothing in them (unless here and there in *King Lear*) of the satirist, the man who hates the world he lives in and attacks the individuals he dislikes. And they are different from *Hamlet* in that the evil they deal with is wholly objective, not largely a matter of subjective

maladjustment to one's environment. There is no suspicion of pique in these plays. For Shakespeare and for his company the advent of King James was unmixed good fortune. He was never happier in a worldly way, few dramatists have ever been, than when, as the laureled favourite of the new court and idol of playgoers, he sat down to anatomize his characters and reduce them to their most primitive essentials.

Othello is, with the possible exception of *Romeo and Juliet,* the most drenched in poetry of all the plays. Othello and Desdemona, the most unsophisticated of Shakespeare's creatures, take precedence—not intellectually, but emotionally—over all the men and women in the plays. Iago, Shakespeare's greatest and most likeable villain, is a blindly wandering spirit whose evil is the perversion of potentialities for good, whose psychoses are those of a mischievous boy, forever subject to rush urges and unwitting of consequences.

Lear is a study of private selfishness; *Macbeth* of ambition, that is, public selfishness. In *Lear* the theme is bourgeois, in spite of the rank of the protagonists; the vices portrayed are mean and the virtues homely. The simplification is extreme; men and women have been stripped of the vestments of culture and even of their formal Christianity.

Almost equally primitive in its setting, *Macbeth* is a study of two characters, whose finest quality, their mutual love, becomes under evil ambition the means of their ruin. In both plays Shakespeare is studying minds cleaned, like laboratory specimens, of everything extrinsic.

Anthony and Cleopatra is the sequel to *Julius Caesar.* Historically, it is a much looser play than its predecessor, but psychologically it is far more intense. The influence of *Macbeth* is strong in *Anthony and Cleopatra:* the tragedy is two-fold, treating the fate of a devoted pair so opposite in mind and temperament that each brings out the best in the other only at the cost of ruin. To make this clear, Shakespeare has ventured his boldest experiment in structure, for he has written two conclusions into *Anthony and Cleopatra.* The fourth act is Anthony's catastrophe, the fifth act Cleopatra's.

Coriolanus, like *Anthony and Cleopatra,* is based on Plutarch. It deals with a large and simple hero conceived on the lines of Othello, Lear, and Macbeth. It is one of the most political of Shakespeare's

plays. Probably the poet wrote into it his nostalgia for the heroes of his youth; but his obvious purpose was to find an uncomplicated specimen for his psychological analysis.

Timon of Athens, stylistically, most suggests *King Lear,* and it is animated by the same bitter wrath against ingratitude. It is possible that the incompleteness of the play might be due to a physical breakdown (not recorded), which could have cut short the poet's tragic period and put an end forevermore to these strenuous analyses of the human mind.

The last plays	
Pericles *Cymbeline* *The Winter's Tale* *The Tempest*	*Henry VIII*

Pericles is Shakespeare's only from the third act on. The story is from Gower's *Confessio Amantis.* Shakespeare's contribution was primarily the creation of a new type of heroine, gentler, less self-confident, and more childish-seeming than those in his earlier comedies. To the disgust of Ben Jonson, this ill-constructed play had an outstanding success, for the Jacobeans were well convinced that they were a coarse generation, and they found the same zest the dark ages did in virgin saints.

In *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest* there is a half-holiday atmosphere about the entire group, a valedictory note, as of a virtuoso displaying his skill for his own delight. They are all *tours de force,* special exercises in difficult technique. *Cymbeline* practises the utmost intricacy in tying and resolving a complex plot. *The Tempest* performs the gratuitous feat of limiting a highly unreal fable to the strictest unity of time, place, and action. *The Winter's Tale* takes two half-plays, one a realistic tragedy, the other an idyllic pastoral, and glues them together with a Chorus and a lapse of sixteen years. These plays are plays of light touch and easy mastery, but they should not be called plays of easy optimism. Shakespeare wrote nothing after the opening of the seventeenth century which ignores or palliates the evil in the world. He never wrote anything so dark or cynical as to hide his pious faith that the good elements in life are enduring and constructive, while the evil must by their own nature reform themselves or perish.

He died at fifty-two. The last plays show his mind returning, as his body returned, to the pastoral and richly storied country out of which it had come. He had four or five years of ease at Stratford, varied only by the minor help he gave his pupil Fletcher in some dramatic spectacles for the Globe: the *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII.*

2.3 Shakespeare's contemporaries and the post-Shakespearean dramatists (1595-1642)

2.3.1 *Non-professional theatre*

Academic drama. Most of the dramatists of the Elizabethan period continued to come from the universities. Throughout this perido the English schools and colleges continued to produce in their own halls drama in Latin and English.

Drama of the court. From the accession of James I in 1603 until the closing of the theatres in 1642 the royal court exercised a growing influence upon the drama. In part this influence arose from the more extensive patronage by James I. From 1594 to 1603 under Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's company, easily the most popular, performed 32 times before the court; from 1603 to 1616 the King's Men gave 177 performances before the court.

The courtiers became the chief patrons of the 'private theatre' because of their place of residence, their leisure, their taste, and their money. As Puritanism, with its fanatical distaste for the theatre, gained strength in the middle classes and among urbanites, the actors increasingly sought the patronage of the courtiers.

The most spectacular type of the court drama and the court's own unique contribution to the Renaissance theatre was the ***masque*** (a French term popularized by Lyly and Jonson over the earlier 'mask'). Mummery or disguising is extremely old, dating back to at least neolithic times, but more civilized eras maintained the practice as fun, unaware of its primitive origin in ritual. By the fourteenth century in England the masque was a well-defined entertainment in which disguised friends brought presents and music to a home, dancing before the hosts and then inviting everyone to join. During the fifteenth century the masque became a separate show which at no time included the undisguised hosts, who now became mere spectators. On Twelfth Night 1512, the youthful Henry VIII

reintroduced from Italy the practice of bringing the viewers back into the gaiety of dancing after the masque spectacle. Throughout subsequent Tudor times the masque proved an immensely popular diversion of the royal court, consisting generally of allegorical pageantry followed by the 'commoning,' or the participation in a dance, of masquers and spectators.

With the accession of James I the court masque expanded tremendously. Apparently Jonson was chiefly responsible for transforming the masque into a full-fledged dramatic performance. He and other poet-dramatists such as Beaumont and Chapman teamed up with the brilliant architect-designer Inigo Jones to produce glorious spectacles, enormously expensive and fabulously lavish. The masque was presented at night solely to the royal court, and therefore ladies of the court took female roles; all other Renaissance drama used males in female acting parts. The indoor, artificially fit settings were fantastically elaborate and showy. Costuming was gorgeously colourful and ornate beyond that of any other stage of the period. While music and spectacle were of greatest importance to many court viewers, a high literary quality was insured by excellent dramatists such as Jonson, who wrote at least thirty masques for court performance.

Private theatre. The roofed and enclosed theatres originally occupied by the choirboy actors were termed 'private' to distinguish them from the open-air public theatres of the adult companies. The Paul's Theatre was circular, but the others were rectangular, like the great hall of a Renaissance mansion. Blackfriars had at least one gallery. Seats were available throughout the private theatre and prices started at sixpence, in contrast to the penny admission of the public theatre. Plays were usually performed in the afternoon, but the artificial light of candles and torches supplemented the daylight. Scenery and backdrops were employed, though not upon the elaborate scale of the court drama. The audience consisted of the well-to-do, chiefly the royal court.

Because the private theatre originated in boy choirs, music was more important than in the public theatre. When Shakespeare's company took over the Blackfriars in 1608, it continued the tradition of extensive music between the acts. After Lyly's career the private theatre largely drew upon the fertile talents of the playwrights of the

popular theatre. Marston, Jonson, Beaumont, and other dramatists wrote for both the boys' and the adult companies.

2.3.2 *The mood of the Jacobean drama*

After the death of Elizabeth (1603) the Renaissance drama is divided into two categories named after the two monarchs who succeeded her: Jacobean, those plays written under James I (1603-25) and Caroline, those plays written under Charles I (1625-49).

The mood of the drama from the early Elizabethan to the late Jacobean period appears to pass through three phases: (a) from the beginning of the Elizabethan drama to about 1598, (b) from about 1598 to 1610 or 1611, and (c) from about 1610 or 1611 .

The Elizabethan age proper (until c. 1598) is characterized by its faith in vitality. But already within this age there is another movement: Marlowe announces the sense of defeat characteristic of the Jacobeans. He presents the contrast between the ideal (or spiritual) world and the real world, pragmatically seen by everyday observation. In this way, Marlowe culminates the process of secularization of drama begun with the separation of medieval drama from the church. Marlowe sees through the delusion of prosperity that intoxicates his contemporaries and anticipates that mood of spiritual despair.

And this position is reached by Marlowe through his exploration of the system of Machiavelli. Machiavelli bases his interpretation of civilization upon the assumption of weakness, ingratitude and ill-will as essential elements of human character and society, upon the acceptance of religion only as the means of making a people docile to their governors, upon the open admission of cruelty, parsimony and betrayal of faith as necessary instruments. In England he is understood as a grammar of a diabolic creed. The impact of this system comes obliquely to the Elizabethans, through the stage figure of the pseudo-Machiavellian villain. What is received by the Elizabethan drama is not only the matter-of-fact materialism proper to his method, but a more bitterly cynical individualism than he has ever implied.

This is reinforced after the turn of the century (c. 1598-1610) by the apprehensions and the disillusionment through political and social

life with the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, the influence of his court and the instability of the first years of his reign. This mood culminates about the year 1605 in a preoccupation with death where the Elizabethans have been in love with life. This period of despondency or anxiety appears to last from some four of five years before the death of Elizabeth to some five or six years after the accession of James. The sense of instability comes from the memory of the crises of the past three accessions and of the series of plots to assassinate the Queen. Besides, there is no obvious heir to the throne at her death, which implies the likelihood of civil war breaking at her death and of the intervention of foreign power. The rebellion of Essex takes place in 1601. James is recognized by 1602 as the probable heir. Then his personal unpopularity as a sovereign was combines with several plots to depose him.

These things then are the heritage of the Jacobean drama: spiritual uncertainty springing in part from Machiavellian materialism emphasised by Marlowe's tragic thought, and in still greater degree from fear of the destruction of a great civilization. Through all these runs, besides the sense of spiritual emptiness or fear, there is a tendency to hold more closely to the evidence of the senses and of practical experience, to limit knowledge to a non-spiritual world of man and his relations with man. In this sense, Jacobean drama reaches a secularization that will later extend to poetry, philosophy, and science. Comedy becomes increasingly immediate and concentrated upon the manners, habits and morals of man. Tragicomedy escapes into romance. Tragedy becomes satanic, revealing a world-order or evil power. There is a revived Senecanism. Jacobeans remember Seneca as the moralist; his disillusionment is the greater; he shares their vision of a decaying civilization. They are interested in Seneca's acceptance of the bitter fate, in his stoic acceptance of death.

After the middle years of the period (from c. 1610) a slow return to equilibrium sets in. Satanism and a revived Senecanism gradually give place to a mood that is sometimes serenity, sometimes indifference.

2.3.3 *From Jonson to the closing of the theatres*

Ben Jonson (1573-1637). Unlike Shakespeare, who worked with the popular dramatic tradition of his time and produced an English poetic drama which owed nothing to any external doctrine of correctness, Jonson, more learned and deeply concerned with classical precedent, is the great example in English of the Renaissance humanist (in the narrowest sense of that term) turned dramatist and poet. With him the formula came first, and the classical model was the source of the formula. He knew the rules of dramatic structure and he understood what propriety was.

He was also a rugged Englishman with a sardonic relish for the varied and colourful London life of his day; he had a boisterous and even a cruel sense of humour; he showed vigour and originality even when most closely following classical; and he had in a delicate artfulness in the handling of word and image in lyrical verse.

In the latter part of his career he was the leader of an important literary group and indeed something of a literary dictator. Jonson rivalled with Shakespeare in popularity among his contemporaries.

Every Man in his Humour (1598) is a comedy of intrigue owing much to Roman comedy. He wanted to present a satire picture of his own age, to write with cool irony of contemporary human foibles, as he considered Plautus and Terence had done. He considered himself a realist. The function of comedy was the reproving of human foibles by holding them up to ridicule, and he adapted the old explanation of human character by the four humours to develop a 'comedy of humours,' a comedy, that is, in which each character is seen to be dominated, and even obsessed, by one particular quirk. Jonson's insistence on the humours was at cross purposes with his realistic intention, though he never seems to have realized this. A 'humorous' character is bound to be a caricature.

Every Man Out of His Humour (1599) concentrates with greater single-mindedness on the illustration of ridiculous 'humours.' *Cynthia's Revels* first acted in 1600 was a satire on contemporary gallantry using mythological characters. *The Poetaster* (1601) was a vindication of his position against his enemies. There is much learned reference to Latin literature. *Volpone, or the Fox* (1605) is the first and the greatest of a series of comedies which show Jonson's characteristic mixture of savagery and humour, of moral feeling and

grim relish of the monstrous absurdities of which human nature is capable. Volpone was followed by *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman* in 1609, *The Alchemist* in 1610 and *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614.

Jonson also produced two tragedies on Roman themes, *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1611), moved probably by Shakespeare's success with *Julius Caesar.* But he drew on the original Latin sources (Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, Seneca, and Dion Cassius).

Of Jonson's later comedies—The *Devil is an Ass (1616), The Staple of News (1625), The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and A *Tale of a Tub* (1633)—all that need be said is that they show him playing variations, with differing degrees of success, on his favourite satiric-comic themes.

Jonson possessed wrote a large number of masques. As we have already seen, the purpose of the masque was entertainment at Court or at a great house. Spectacle and movement were an important part of it, and the arts of the stage designer and the composer were often as important in its production as that of the poet. The masque became a regular part of festivities accompanying coronations, state visits of foreign princes, and royal or noble marriages. These masques drew on classical mythology for their characters and themes. Jonson was a principal purveyor of masques to James I and his queen. His saturnine wit and misanthropic irony disappeared when he turned to the production of these courtly entertainments, in which he showed a very different side of his genius—a delicate fancy, a lyrical grace, and a lively sportiveness. Jonson's long career of collaboration with the architect and designer Inigo Jones (which ended with their quarrel in 1630) meant that his masques were produced with particular visual effectiveness.

Jonson also wrote *Eastward Hoe* (1605), a bourgeois morality, in collaboration with Marston and Chapman.

George Chapman (c. 1559-1634). He has been generally known as a translator of Homer; but he produced five tragedies which show the Elizabethan interest in Stoic philosophy. Chapman's great men try to achieve a Stoic calm; sometimes, like the protagonist of *Bussy d'Ambois* (1604), they are surprised and betrayed by passion; sometimes, like Clermont d'Ambois in *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (c. 1610), he does achieve a Senecan detachment. In *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608) Chapman

also derived his plot from recent French history. *Chabot, Admiral of France* (c. 1613) and *Caesar and Pompey* (printed 1631) explore different aspects of stoical virtue. Chapman's attempt to produce a philosophical drama within the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre, while not wholly successful in dramatic terms, produced some of the most interesting and individual plays of the period. His comedies, on the other hand, are less individual.

John Marston (c. 1575-1634). Having begun as a writer of coarse and violent verse, Marston turned to drama, where he shows the same extravagant language in melodramatic tragedies of love and revenge and cynical comedies which combine bitter exposure of human folly and ambition with wild farce. *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) and *Antonio's Revenge* (c. 1602) are, like so many Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, set in Italy, which was now seen as a land of political violence and psychological extravagance. Ben Jonson criticized them. Marston is the Crispinus of his *Poetaster,* and Jonson's picture of him vomiting up his strange, invented words has its justification. The animosity between Marston and Jonson is part of the War of the Theatres. Dekker was also involved in this quarrel and also both attacked and was attacked by Jonson But Marston became reconciled to Jonson later, at least temporarily; he collaborated with him, as well as with Chapman, in *Eastward Hoe,* and dedicated to him *The Malcontent* (1604), his best play.

Thomas Heywood (c. 1570-1641). He was a professional man of the theatre and miscellaneous writer who produced many more plays than the twenty-three or so that survive as his and had a hand in very many others. The theatre of his day demanded constant new material, and Heywood was professionally equipped to provide it. He wrote on historical and patriotic themes; he glorified the London citizenry and prentices in plays which showed him appealing to urban middle-class feeling; he had a vein of somewhat ribald comedy which he worked into his most serious plays with little or no sense of construction or appropriateness; and, in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) and *The English Traveller* (c. 1627), produced two impressive examples of the domestic tragedy, plays that deal with the tragic results of passion or lust in ordinary family situations, in an atmosphere of sentimental morality.

Thomas Dekker (c. 1570-1641). He was another versatile professional who showed a remarkable knowledge of London low life. Apparently of humble origin and self-educated, he gives in all his work the impression of an untrained talent making the most of itself with whatever material comes to hand. He collaborated with others whenever he got the opportunity. Of the comedies written by Dekker alone, *Old Fortunatus* (1599) and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) show his characteristic combination of a romantic imagination with an eye for realistic detail. *Old Fortunatus* (1600), is a morality play, based on German legend. Perhaps Dekker's greatest achievement is *The Honest Whore,* a play in two parts in the first of which (1604) Middleton is thought to have had a hand. But the second part (1605), which is the more interesting and original, is all Dekker's own. Dekker resembles Heywood in his fluency and his feeling for middle-class urban life; but he has both a vein of poetry and a sense of character that Heywood lacks. The 'citizen comedy' produced by these and other dramatists of the period is a reminder that, although Puritan opposition to the stage was centred in London, the London citizenry, as a whole, were eager theatregoers.

Cyril Tourneur (c. 1575-1626). Tourneur, in *The Atheist's Tragedy* (c. 1608) and *The Revenger's Tragedy,* especially in the latter (if this play, published anonymously in 1607, really is by Tourneur), explored the corrupting power of revenge, constructing a kind of tragedy whose chief interest lies in the spectacle of injured innocence turning monstrous in the endeavour to avenge its wrongs.

The Revenger's Tragedy has echoes from Hamlet, as in the opening scene, with Vendice standing aside to meditate bitterly on a skull, but the tone is quite un-Shakespearean. The plots, the disguises, the moments of calculated frightfulness, the melodramatic ingenuity of the Duke's murder, illustrate the avenger's mounting hysteria, his insane self-confidence, his utterly obsessive concern with his revenge and with that only, his savouring of the actual moment of revenge by revealing himself and his motives to the dying victim—all this produces an atmosphere of contrived horror which, while splendid in its way, is too deliberately artful to enable the reader or spectator to lose himself in the dramatic situation. At the end of the play, Vendice and his brother Hippolito, who started off as injured innocents, have

become monstrous connoisseurs of cruelty who have ceased to have any contact with the ordinary world.

John Webster (c. 1580-1625). He is a greater poet than Tourneur but he has less control over dramatic structure. Ambition, covetousness, and lust are the motivating factors in the cunningly cruel behaviour of his villains, and sometimes we have the impression that motive is really unimportant and the interest of the plays lies in the virtuosity with which cruelty is manifested or the nobility with which even a vicious character confronts his doom when there is no alternative. *The White Devil* (c. 1610) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1614) are his best plays. The ambitions and lusts which drive the characters in Webster's plays are beyond ordinary human compass; there is something Faustian about them—they are after they know not what. They kill and betray and contrive for reasons which are deliberately left vague.

Webster's art, like Tourneur's, is decadent, if by decadence we mean the desperate search for effect indulged in by those who work in a literary tradition after it has been fully exploited by a consummate genius. Perhaps after Shakespeare only this kind of brilliant sensationalism was left.

Thomas Middleton (c. 1570-1627). He dealt in his comedies with London life, though he neither glorified nor romanticized it; instead, he drew on it for characters, sometimes almost Jonsonian in their humours, whose follies and trickeries are presented with high-spirited enjoyment. Middleton collaborated with other playwrights, his most successful collaborations being with William Rowley. The one tragedy that he wrote by himself, *Women Beware Women* (probably 1612), is a powerful and sombre work. Middleton's other great tragedy he wrote in collaboration with Rowley. This is *The Changeling* (1632), also an ironic story of degradation. In Middleton's plays, both comedies and tragedies, there is no moral disorder: he never exploits moral corruption for purely sensational purposes, or suggests (as Ford seems to do) that passion is its own justification. There is a firm moral order underlying his plays.

Francis Beaumont (c. 1584-1616) and **John Fletcher** (1579-1625). In the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher (1579-1625) the Jacobean

drama gives up any serious attempt to grapple with moral problems to indulge in the skilful professional exploitation of titillating, pathetic, or emotionally extravagant situations. This popular couple collaborated on over fifty plays in the second decade of the seventeenth century. In these plays they introduced a new kind of tragicomedy, where passion and honour whirl the action into every kind of confusion, before the casting off of a disguise or the revelation of some concealed relationship or some such device brings about the resolution. The tragic element looks forward to the heroic play of the Restoration, just as the preference of social poise to moral adjustment in so many of their comedies looks forward to Restoration comedy. Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies are similar in tone to their tragicomedies, distinguished only by a different manipulation of the conclusion.

Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1608) is a brilliant satirical comedy, mocking the popularity of Spanish romances and similar chivalric works among London prentices and their masters as well as burlesquing such urban heroics as are found in Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London*. The aristocratic Beaumont is of course quite unsympathetic to the claims of the citizens.

Philip Massinger (1583-1640). Fletcher collaborated with other playwrights besides Beaumont, notably with Massinger, whose early years as a dramatist were spent as Fletcher's assistant. Massinger also collaborated with other playwrights. In his comedies the characters are in the tradition of the Jonsonian comedy of humors, with hints from Fletcher. Massinger's social attitude reflects that of the audiences of the private theaters, a crude hostility to bourgeois pretension on the part of the nobility, but it still has some trace of the Elizabethan conception of hierarchy and order, however vulgarized, which is not to be found in Restoration comedy, where aristocracy is a matter of sophistication of speech and manners only. Massinger's tragedies are less credible and coherent than his comedies.

John Ford (1586-c. 1639). He developed an interest in the psychology of frustrated and of illicit love, which produced plays like *The Broken Heart* (c. 1629) and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c. 1624). His almost clinical curiosity about the aberrations of the love passion is combined with that taste for the melodramatic incident and the

extravagantly contrived tableau which is characteristic of so much Jacobean drama.

The chief concern of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is with the incestuous love of a brother and sister. The physical passion of Giovanni for his sister Annabella is presented with an almost gloating precision. The play opens abruptly with Giovanni's unavailing attempt to persuade a friar of the lawfulness of such love, and moves on to a remarkable scene in which, after some preliminary fencing, brother and sister declare their mutual passion and surrender to it with triumphant abandon. Annabella's subsequent pregnancy makes it necessary for her to marry one of her many suitors, a nobleman called Soranzo, whose servant Vasques, acting with an inadequately motivated zeal, ferrets out the truth about the incest and plans on his master's behalf an appropriate revenge on both brother and sister. The revenge, as so often in this kind of drama, takes place at a party. Annabella, repentant, receives her brother in her room before the festivities begin and puts aside his renewed declarations of physical passion with talk of repentance and grace. He stabs her, to prevent her further defilement by her husband and in the end is killed himself by Vasques' hired assassins. The atmosphere of Italian violence in which the play moves is only loosely related to the main action in which the fact of incest is presented with that curious mixture of romantic fatalism and clinical exploration which is characteristic of Ford. The moral pattern of the play is obscure. Annabella dies repentant, but from the beginning she has been the weaker character; Giovanni dies exulting in his passion, proud of having put his sister out of Soranzo's reach, and confident of seeing her again in another world. Critics have debated whether Ford is a deliberate immoralist or merely the disinterested psychological inquirer. Perhaps the simplest explanation of the theme and atmosphere of the play is that, at this late stage in the movement of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the theme of normal love between the sexes had been so thoroughly explored that the only way to contrive a tragedy with a new interest was to concentrate on incest. Drama becomes decadent when it is content to exploit the moment without any probing of cause or consequence, or when it seeks eccentric causes for common emotions, or when it uses human emotion for the simple purpose of making our flesh creep. These three categories are all found in Jacobean drama; Ford's best plays seem to come in some degree into the second.

James Shirley (1596-1666). He was in full career as a dramatist when the closing of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642 put an end for the time being to the publicly acted drama in England. He was a competent professional, and wrote tragedies of Italianate intrigue and villainy or of dark passion, tragicomedies in the Fletcher tradition, and comedies of manners which in some degree point forward to the comedy of the Restoration.

Writing for the theatre was the obvious way for a literary man to secure public acclaim and economic satisfaction. Though plays were printed, generally in cheap quarto editions, it was as acted plays that they made their impact and achieved popularity. The audience was not large enough to make long runs possible, so that there was a continuous demand for new plays. Many plays of the period have not survived. Printed copies of plays were regarded as ephemeral light literature. One must remember, too, that in spite of the enormous popularity of the drama during this period, Puritan hostility toward the playhouse increased rather than diminished, and when the Puritans finally gained control of the government they closed the theatres. The closing of the theatres in 1642 brought this greatest of all periods in the history of English drama to an end; the next phase of English drama, which appeared after the Restoration, produced a very different kind of dramatic literature. The themes and attitudes that were to emerge in the Restoration theatre were being prepared behind the scenes under the Commonwealth.