
Theatre In The Era Of Elizabethan England

Elizabeth the 1st (1533–1603) was born of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. A woman with fiery red hair and pale skin who was just as charming if not more than her father before her. She is most recognized for her victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. In fact, our beloved Elizabeth was 3rd in line to the throne behind her younger brother Edward and older sister Mary. However, both siblings met an early death which led her to take rule. In an attempt to prove her worthiness of the crown she often was very reserved on the topic of her mother who was known as the “Great Whore”.

As a young monarch, she was the most sought-after woman in her time, and she used her femininity to her advantage. As she grew older in age she took extra precautions to remain the focal point of her pursuers. She came into power with a positive outlook on the arts which provided a flourishing environment for the humanities. England's economic advantage during her rule provided the optimal capability for an expansive development of visual, decorative, and performing arts. England was a filthy location with raw sewage staining the city streets and a stench which permeated the air. The average lifespan of a citizen, if they survived past 12, was usually just over 60.

Elizabethan England is known as one of the most violent time periods that also brought to life one of the most infamous eras of Theatre. The face of this theatre era were men like Sir Philip Sydney who contributed through his poetry, William Shakespeare the infamous playwright, as well as Christopher Marlow who has been speculated to have been the true author of the playwrights attributed to Shakespeare who remains shrouded by mystery. This was the age where new ideas and ways of thoughts were highlighted and became the focal points of theatre. Printing presses became one of the most influential inventions of the time period due to its ability to "mass produce" different manuscripts and playwrights.

People were enraptured with the theatre and it's no surprise since some of the most popular Elizabethan Classics such as the 'The Jew of Malta', 'The Malcontent', 'The White Devil', and more household names such as 'Romeo and Juliet', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'Hamlet', and 'Macbeth' are still performed to this day. The companies worked in a hierarchical manner. Actors who had a foot in were known as 'sharers' and they would collectively divide the profit amongst themselves. 'Hirelings' received weekly wages, and the boys actively playing the role of females were known in name as 'apprentices' and paid a minuscule amount when compared to there fellow actors. Actors would choose to become specialized in set specific roles which became a well-known part of their personal repertoire.

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Two of the most well-known theatre companies were the Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Companies were known to present approximately 30 and 40 new performances annually. Due to this demand, playwrights were expected to increase the number of new plays written every year. The majority of these works were never published. Plays upon completion would become the property of the coordinating company and wouldn't be published under the playwright.

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