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## ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

*The focus of the article is on the theatre in Elizabethan Era which covers a period from 1558 to 1603 – well known for fruitful theatrical productions. The research traces the appearance and development of the first permanent professional theatres such as The Theatre, The Curtain, The Newington Butts, The Rose, The Swan, The Globe and The Fortune. The theatres were of two types – public and private with a few differences between them: size, comfort, price, location and audience. The actors were only males according to Elizabethan law which prohibited women to perform on the stage. The study is concentrated on the following constituents of the theatres: their repertoire, popular dramatic genres, theatre design, special effects, music, actors, their costumes as well as their representational skills. Also, the focus is on appearance of magical spirits and various fools who add mysticism to performances and make a satirical commentary on the life and events of the times. The article provides examples from the following widely known plays: “King Lear”, “The Taming of the Shrew”, “The Winter’s Tale”, “The Merry Wives of Windsor”, “King Henry IV” and “The Two Gentlemen of Verona” by W. Shakespeare; “The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus” and “The Jew of Malta” by C. Marlowe and also “The Blind Beggar of Bednall-Green” by J. Day.*

**Key words:** Elizabethan theatre, private theatre, public theatre, audience, actor, dramatic genre.

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## ЕЛИЗАВЕТІНСЬКИЙ ТЕАТР

*У статті розглянуто появу та розвиток Єлизаветинського театру, підйом якого припадає на роки правління Єлизавети I. У цей час виникли перші професійні театри. Увагу сконцентровано на особливостях таких складових тогочасного театру: дизайн та розташування театру, репертуар, сценарій, драматичні жанри, спеціальні ефекти, музика, актори, їхні костюми та навички репрезентації, а також на різниці між громадськими та приватними театрами. Окрім цього, виокремлено та проаналізовано існування типових для Єлизаветинської драми персонажів – дурня і магичних істот.*

**Ключові слова:** Єлизаветинський театр, приватний театр, громадський театр, публіка, актор, драматичний жанр.

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## ЕЛИЗАВЕТИНСКИЙ ТЕАТР

*В статье раскрыто возникновение и развитие Елизаветинского театра, расцвет которого относится к правлению Елизаветы I. В это время появились первые профессиональные театры. Внимание сконцентрировано на особенностях таких составляющих театра той эпохи: дизайн и расположение театра, репертуар, сценарий, драматические жанры, специальные эффекты, музыка, актеры, их костюмы и навыки репрезентации, а также на разнице между общественными и частными театрами. Кроме этого, выделено и проанализировано существование типовых для Елизаветинской драмы персонажей – иуда и магических существ.*

**Ключевые слова:** Елизаветинский театр, частный театр, общественный театр, зрители, актер, драматический жанр.

This article deals with Elizabethan Theatre – a term denoting the plays produced in England while Elizabeth I ruled the country. Owing to Elizabeth I this epoch is considered the peak of English Drama development. It was her who promoted the flourish of English theatre and encouraged building the first permanent theatres. The purpose of our investigation is to do a survey of Elizabethan Theatre concentrating on various theatres, their repertoire, special effects, music, actors, their costumes as well as their representational skills. Also, the article investigates the use of magical spirits and fools in Elizabethan Theatre plays. Their representation and functioning are of our interest. The object of the study is Elizabethan Theatre. The subject of the article is the development and constituents of the theatre. The novelty of the study lies in systematization of all the elements of Elizabethan Theatre and providing illustrative examples of theoretical issues.

Most playing companies in the sixteenth century travelled from town to town and used London as their base. The establishment of a theatre district in the London area, however, was a lengthy process fraught with disagreements, financial problems, and legal restraint. Nonetheless, the move towards permanence by a select number of innovators highlights the appeal and support for the performing arts and is an indicator of the increase in popularity of the theatre during the Elizabethan era [8, p.5].

In the early years of Elizabeth's reign groups of players performed where they could, occasionally indoors in halls to provide entertainment at court or in great houses, but more frequently in public in the square or rectangular yards of a number of inns in the city of London, the galleries round the yards being used by spectators. The companies were all licensed by the patronage of some

great lord to travel and perform; if they were unlicensed, they were considered “Rogues Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars” according to a statute of 1598. The civic authorities of London generally showed hostility to players, whom they saw as a nuisance, promoting crowds and disorder, and distracting people from their proper occupations, as well as from divine service on Sundays. Following a prohibition of 1559, the Common Council of London in December 1574 banned performances in taverns in the city unless innkeepers were licensed and the plays supervised and censored [2, p.2].

The companies of actors were made up of males; all the female parts were performed by male actors [11].

The first man who built an outdoor theatre was James Burbage. He built the first permanent English public theatre in 1576 and called it *The Theatre*. Burbage’s theatre was so successful that it was quickly followed by others: *The Curtain*, *The Newington Butts*, *The Rose*, *The Swan*, *The Globe* and *The Fortune* [7, p. 205].

In Elizabethan Era there were two types of theatres – public (the Theatre, the Globe, the Curtain, the Swan) and private ones (Blackfriars). There were quite a few differences between them. First, the private theatres were indoor spaces and were much smaller in terms of audience space. They probably sat only about 500. As the private theatres were indoors, they had to be artificially lit, by candles. Another very important difference was the location of the private theatres. Unlike the public theatres, which had to be located outside the city’s boundaries, the private theatres were located in the city of London [4].

The private playhouses charged much higher prices than the public ones. Unlike the public theatres, all the audience was seated at the private houses. Moreover, greater comfort was offered in private theatres – cushions on the benches. Members of the audience could pay extra money for the privilege to have a stool and sit on the stage. Act divisions did not function as intervals at the public theatres, and music was not played between the acts. At Blackfriars music was played before the performance began, and sometimes there was dancing or singing too between the acts. Probably intervals were required because the candles needed to be trimmed [2, pp. 25-27].

All the public theatres, though varied in shape from round to square to octagonal, were designed according to similar principles. The basic plan – a yard with a stage jutting into the centre of it and three levels of galleries surrounding the yard – suggests that it may well have been modeled on inn-yard or courtyard performances of an earlier period. The stage itself consisted of two acting levels, and on each level there were several distinct acting areas [7, p. 205].

The size and design of the theatre also made possible a highly flexible drama. The main acting surface was generalized but it was not restricted to a limited number of locales established by set pieces. The stage could become any number of places simply by the departure of one set of characters and the appearance of another, implying in their dialogue a new location. The other acting areas made possible a wide variety of discovery scenes, bedroom scenes and balcony scenes, not to mention disappearance scenes through a trapdoor on the ground level stage. Only a few props were used to suggest the location of a scene: a bed, a throne, a tree, a rock [7, p. 207].

The first theatres were built of wood and thatch which made them easily catch fire but later tougher and more durable materials were used. After burning down the first wooden Globe and Fortune were rebuilt in brick and tile [11].

The grandest theatre of the Elizabethan era was The Globe. The Theatre was shut down in 1597. In late 1598, Richard Burbage (James Burbage’s son) took it to pieces and after six months he rebuilt it and renamed it the Globe [6, p. 290].

The Globe is considered to have been built round or octagonal. It is presumed that an important influence on the design of the theater was the bear-baiting and bull-baiting rings built in Southwark. These “sports” arenas were circular, open to the sky, and had galleries all around [6, p. 290].

The building was small enough to ensure that the actors would be heard, but we know that performances could draw about 3,000 spectators. These buildings were quite uncomfortable. Those who paid an admission price of a penny watched the performance standing. Some viewers even sat in a gallery behind the performers. Their seats were very expensive, they could not see or hear everything well but they were pleased to be seen by other members of the audience [6, pp. 290-291].

The conditions of an Elizabethan performance differed significantly from those of today. Of the three thousand spectator capacity, approximately a thousand of theatregoers were standing in the galleries. The performances had no intervals, and vendors circulated the audience with food and beverages. Performances would have started around 2 o’clock lasting about two hours. The day time was chosen in order to provide maximum sunlight and make the space well lit. If it was going to rain, a spectator had to pay an extra penny or two to sit under the roof. Wealthy viewers in the galleries demanded cushions to make their seats more comfortable [1, p. 65].

At first there was little music, but soon players of instruments were added to the company. The stage was covered with straw or rushes. There may have been a painted wall with trees and hedges, or a castle interior with practicable furniture. A placard announced the scene. Stage machinery seems never to have been out of use, though in the early Elizabethan days it was probably primitive. The audience was near and could view the stage from three sides. Whatever effects were gained were the result of the gorgeous and costly costumes of the actors, together with the art and skill with which they were able to invest their roles [10].

A play in Elizabethan age might be written, handed over to the manager of a company of actors which was produced with or without the author’s name. The author often forgot or ignored all subsequent affairs connected with it. If changes were required, perhaps it would be given to some well known playwright to be “doctored” before the next production [10].

Most dramatists of the time served an apprenticeship. They made their first drafts which would be finished by a more experienced playwright. They sometimes reconstructed a Spanish, French, or Italian piece in an attempt to make it more suitable for the London public. The written scripts and plays were the property, not of the author, but of the acting companies [10].

The manuscripts were locked up because, if the piece became popular, rival managers often stole it by sending to the performance a clerk who took down the lines in shorthand. Neither authors nor managers had any protection from pirate publishers, who frequently issued copies of successful plays without the consent of either [10].

Genres of the period included the history play, which depicted English or European history. Among history plays were *Richard III* and *Henry V* by Shakespeare; *Edward II* by Marlowe; *Famous Chronicle of King Edward I* by Peele. The history plays describing more recent events were represented by *A Larum for London* by an anonymous dramatist; *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* by Marlowe. The audiences particularly liked revenge dramas, such as Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*. Comedies were common,

too. A sub-genre developed in this period was the city comedy, which deals satirically with life in London after the fashion of Roman New Comedy. An example is Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* [11].

Costumes were important elements in theatrical languages. Henslowe's *Diary* reveals that costumes could be the most expensive parts of productions: "Henry the

*Fifth the velvet gown*", "Tamburlaine's coat with copper lace", "six green coats for Robin Hood", a "fool's coat, cap, and bauble [a stick surmounted with a head with the ears of an ass]", a "yellow leather doublet for a clown", "Eve's bodice", "a little doublet for [a] boy", "four torch-bearers' suits", and a "robe for to go invisible" are among those listed, along with devices such as "Cerberus' three heads", lions' and bears' skins, and that "dragon in Doctor Faustus". Thomas Platter, a Swiss traveller to London, narrates that it was a custom for the rich to pass on costumes to their servants who then would sell them to the players. This meant that a rich cloak which had served to fashion the image of an important courtier before the monarch one week could have appeared on stage the next [5, p. 142].

Some actors began their careers by becoming apprentices under the tutelage of the company. They might then progress to become the equivalent of "journeymen", qualified to work for a day's wages, but occupying a rank below that of "master", the equivalent of which was a "sharer". Famously, women's parts were taken by males, but it may be erroneous to imagine in all performances pre-pubertal youths with unbroken voices boying the greatness of the great female roles. A boy's apprenticeship might extend until he was about twenty, so that women's parts could be in effect taken by young men [5, p. 143].

In addition to their representational skills, exhibiting fictive others, players used the skills of presentation, exhibiting themselves. First, were their skills of speaking, that would have derived in part from their rhetorical study of classical texts and patterns of discourse. This was an aural culture, audiences would have been used to listening – and enjoyed listening to verbal art. Some playhouses had resident troupes of musicians or professional groups of wind instrumentalists ("waits") played at some performances. Surviving play texts often provide very little evidence of the amount of music that was required: significant affective moments may be signalled only by the direction 'song' with no words specified; "flourishes" and "sennets" were probably used more than is recorded to magnify entrances and exits [5, p. 143].

Presentational parts of the plays, songs, dances, fights, must have been fully rehearsed, probably under the tutelage of the an important member of the company – book-holder, or prompter. The "book" of the play was an important and precious document: like a modern stage manager's script it could be marked up to record the need for properties or to complete stage directions that were often missing from authorial manuscripts. A second document was the "plot", a paper, sometimes stiffened so it could be hung up, presumably in the tiring-house, which recorded the players required for each scene. Players were not given copies of the whole play but only their "parts", long strips of paper containing their own lines with necessary cues [5, p. 143-144].

New plays were added to the repertory on average every three weeks, and it took about the same time for the text to be prepared for performance. Companies were comparatively small: there seem to have been between six and eleven sharers in each, which means that, even with about four hired men, boy apprentices, and the possible use of stage-keepers for bit parts, doubling must have been extensive [5, p. 144].

Acting companies produced very dramatic special effects. Thunder and lightning filled the theatre for storms [9] – for example, in "*The Tempest*" by Shakespeare a reader notices an author's remark about the weather: "*Thunder and lightning. Enter Ariel, like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table; and with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes*" or "*He vanishes in thunder...*" [15, p. 1263] or in "*King Lear*" the playwright draws a reader's attention to the oncoming storm: "*Storm heard at a distance*" // "*A storm with thunder and lightning...*" [15, pp. 991-992]. There was a variety of effects to suggest magic was at work. Many special effects needed special ingredients. As they were not cheap, they could not be used all the time. The easiest way to make the noise of thunder was to beat drums offstage or roll a cannonball across the floor of the Heavens over the stage. Some companies used a thunder machine – a wooden box balanced like a see-saw. A cannon ball could be rolled from one end to the other to make a thundering noise. Storms needed lightning, too. Lightning flashes were made by throwing a powder made from resin into a candle flame. It lit with a flash. The companies could make lightning bolts, too. The machinery for this was called a swevel. They fixed a wire from the roof to the floor of the stage. They fixed a firecracker to the wire and lit it when they wanted the effect. The firecracker shot from the top of the wire to the bottom, making sparks all the way [9].

Magical spirits, devils and gods and goddesses often appeared in plays from Shakespeare's time. Good spirits and gods and goddesses usually entered through a trapdoor in the Heavens. The actors were lowered on a rope or a wire. This was called "flying in". Evil spirits and devils came up from Hell, under the stage, through a trapdoor in the stage. Companies often set off firecrackers when devils appeared or magic was used. In one production of *Dr Faustus* the actors playing devils even put firecrackers in their mouths to suggest they were breathing fire [9].

In tragedy "*Doctor Faustus*", C. Marlowe makes a remark about the appearance of a devil mentioning fireworks: "*Re-enter MEPHISTOPHILIS with a DEVIL drest like a WOMAN, with fire-works*"; or "MEPHISTOPHILIS and FAUSTUS beat the FRIARS, and fling fire-works among them; and so exeunt" [14]. In general, magical spirits, supernatural creatures and witches were frequent characters of Elizabethan drama: Oberon, Titania, Puck, Peasblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed ("A Midsummer Night's Dream"); Ghost of Hamlet's father ("Hamlet"); three Witches, the Ghost of Banquo ("Macbeth"); Ariel, Iris, Ceres, Juno, Nymphs, Reapers ("The Tempest"); Spirits ("King Henry VIII"); Margery Jourdain, a Spirit ("King Henry VI"); Queen Mab ("Romeo and Juliet"); Lucifer, Belzebub, Mephistophilis, Good Angel, Evil Angel, the Seven Deadly Sins, Devils, Spirits in the shapes of Alexander the Great, of his Paramour and of Helen ("Doctor Faustus"); Ghost of Andrea ("The Spanish Tragedy"); Juno, Iris, Venus, Morpheus ("The Maid's Metamorphosis"); Enchanter ("The Wisdom of Doctor Dadypoll"); Fairies, Oberon ("The Scottish History of James IV").

Theatre companies used smoke mostly as a magic effect, although it was sometimes used to suggest a fire. They could make black, white, yellow and red smoke – depending on the chemicals they mixed together. They used real fire as little as possible, it was very dangerous in a wood and thatch building. If they needed flames they burned strong alcohol mixed with a variety of salts, depending on the colour they wanted the flames to be [9].

A typical feature of Elizabethan theatre was presence of a fool. The stage fool satisfied the principal want – the desire of the public for a satirical commentary on the life and events of the times [3, p. 6]. Shakespearian fool is always shrewd and wise. For example, in the tragedy *“King Lear”* the fool is funny and entertaining, his function is to uplift Lear’s mood. However, he utters very clever and serious things. He is not afraid to criticize anyone, even the king, calling him a fool. Moreover, his statements are usually crude and sarcastic. At the beginning of the play the fool comments the fact that King Lear has divided his kingdom between his eldest and middle daughters while he himself is left with nothing:

*Fool: That lord that counsell’d thee  
To give away thy land,  
Come place him here by me, –  
Do thou for him stand:  
The sweet and bitter fool  
Will presently appear;  
The one in motley here,  
The other found out there.*

*King Lear: Dost thou call me fool, boy?*

*Fool: All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with [15, p. 980].*

The situation is analogous to Shakespeare’s comedy *“The Taming of the Shrew”*. Grumio, Petruchio’s servant, is a fool whose purpose is to serve and entertain his master Petruchio. He can afford to play jokes on Petruchio pretending to misunderstand him:

*Petruchio: ...I trow this is his house. Here, sirrah Grumio, knock, I say.*

*Grumio: Knock, sir! Whom should I knock? Is there any man has rebused your worship?*

*Petruchio: Villain, I say, knock me here soundly.*

*Grumio: Knock you here, sir! Why, sir, what am I, sir, that I should knock you here, sir? [15, p. 367]*

When Hortensio, having his own interest, offers Petruchio to marry wealthy Katherina, Grumio immediately makes a comment and characterizes his master:

*Grumio: Nay, look you, sir, he tell you flatly what his mind is: why, give him gold enough and marry him to a puppet or an aglet-baby; or an old trot with ne’er a tooth in her head, though she has as many diseases as two-and-fifty horses: why, nothing comes amiss, so money comes withal [15, p. 368].*

One understands that the fool gives a truthful characteristics of Petruchio. What is more, Petruchio allows him to speak like that and does not react to his words.

The English fool was a lover of comfort and tasty food, hating work or physical discomfort, hunger, thirst and bad weather conditions. Fine clothes and money also had considerable attraction for the clown [3, pp. 63-64]. Such characteristics of the fool can be found in *“The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus”* where the clown is ready to serve Wagner for a shoulder of mutton – *Clown: How! my soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though ‘twere blood-raw! not so, good friend: by’r lady, I had need have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear [14];* in *“The Jew of Malta”* where Barabas boasts of numerous treasures – *Barabas has heaps of gold before him: Well fare the Arabians, who so richly pay the things they traffic for with wedge of gold, whereof a man may easily in a day tell that which may maintain him all his life... Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts, jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds, beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds, and seld-seen costly stones of so great price, as one of them, indifferently rated, and of a carat of this quantity, may serve, in peril of calamity, to ransom great kings from captivity. This is the ware wherein consists my wealth [13];* in *“The Winter’s Tale”* where Autolycus speaks about money and clothes – *Autolycus: I have sev’d Prince Florizel, and in my time wore three-pile...I am robb’d, sir, and beaten; my money and apparel ta’en from me, and these detestable things put upon me.” [15, p. 1226];* in *“King Lear”* where the Fool is frightened by the storm – *Fool: O nuncle, court holy water in a dry house is better than this rain water out o’ door. Good nuncle, in; and ask thy daughters blessing: here’s a night pities nether wise men nor fools.” [15, p. 992];* in *“The Merry Wives of Windsor”* where Slender is interested in his legacy – *Slender: I may quarter, coz? [15, p. 603];* in *“King Henry IV”* where petty Shallow talks about compensation for the lost sack – *Shallow: A’ shall answer it. [15, p. 525]* and Silence cannot hide his happiness about feasting – *Silence: Ah, sirrah! Quoth-a, – we shall do nothing but eat, and make good cheer, and praise God for the merry year... [15, p. 527];* in *“The Two Gentlemen of Verona”* where Speed complains about being left with no reward for his service and demands his money – *Speed: ...and she gave me nothing for my labour... Nay, sir, less than a pound shall serve me for carrying your letter.” [15, p. 205]*

The fool was often a coward. He was ready enough to brag and threaten but he usually made a poor show if anyone confronted him, even if it be only a woman [3, p. 65]. The most illustrative example is Swash in John Day’s play *“The Blind Beggar of Bednall-Green”*. Swash, having his master’s money, boasts of being courageous and fearless of any thief but when he meets the one on his way, he utters obediently: *“I pray you, do bind me hard, do, good Mr. Theef, harder yet, Sir” [12, p. 33].*

Of the clown’s dancing but few traces remain in the plays, but contemporary references show that dances accompanied by the pipe and tabor were sometimes given between the acts, and also formed an important part of the concluding jig. Clowns sang whole songs or frequently broke into fragments of ballads, suggested by some remark or passing event. Their songs formed a part of the inter-scenary and concluding entertainments and were frequently interspersed in the plays themselves. Songs and dances were rather in the nature of interludes than integral parts of the play. The fool had his audience continually in view. Other actors might forget the spectators in their roles, but the role of the clown was to remember them and keep them entertained [3, pp. 66-68].

Thus, we have described the development of Elizabethan Theatre. The article represents an exhaustive survey of peculiarities of the theatre and can be used for further linguo-stylistic analysis of plays by Elizabethan playwrights.

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