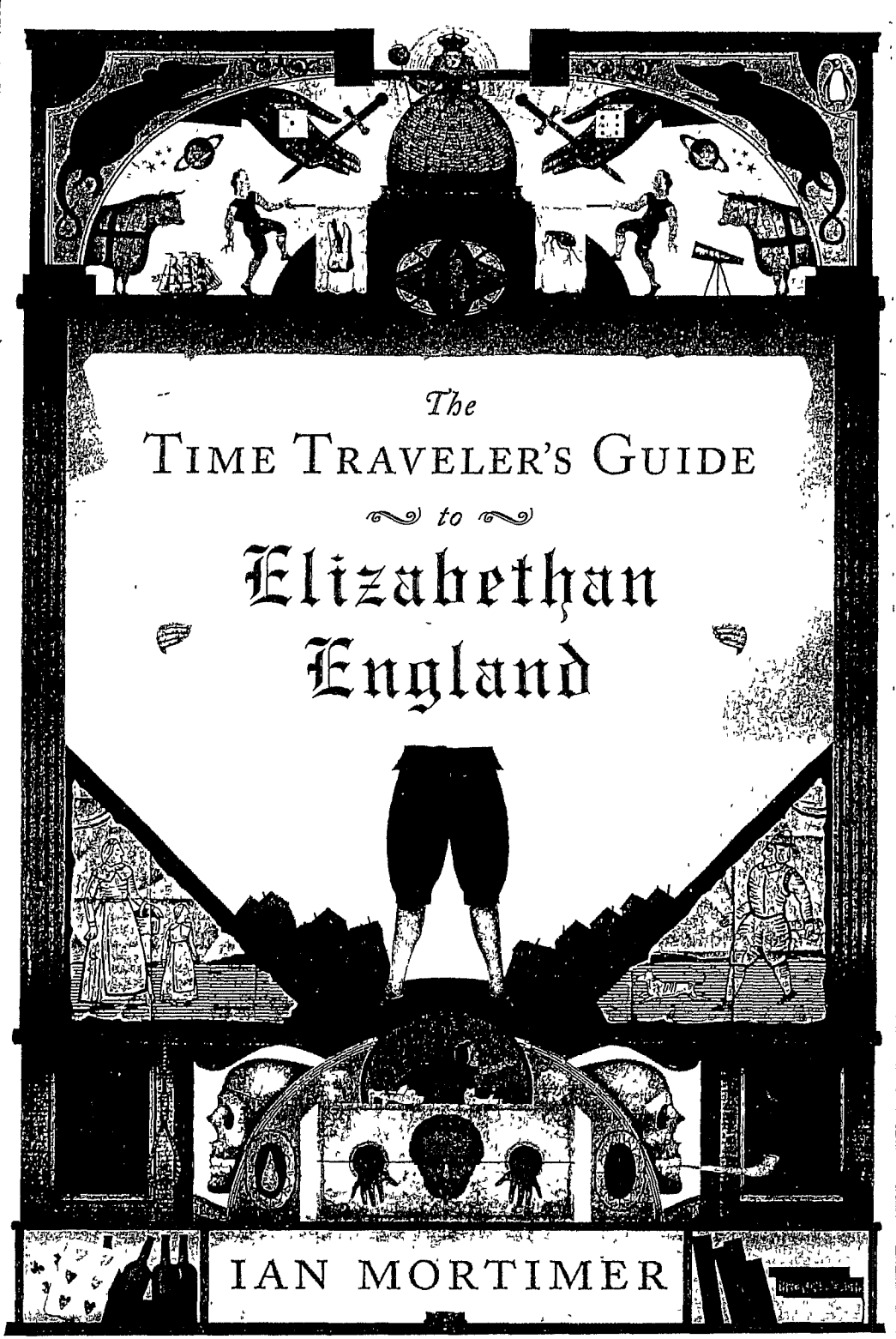
The
TIME TRAVELER'S GUIDE
to
Elizabethan
England
IAN MORTIMER

fantastical. Moors and blackamoors are common subjects for masques, as are the ancient Roman gods and medieval knights and queens with their maidens. Torches will illuminate the night, and people will process in their costumes, with their faces covered. Sometimes there is scenery and actors are hired to play specific parts: don't worry, you won't be called upon to speak impromptu. Masques are always ceremonial and symbolic: they do not have moments of high drama and no serious acting is ever included. After the spoken parts are complete, the court dances begin; and after the dancing comes the banquet. At the end guests remove their masks to reveal their identities to the people with whom they have been dancing, speaking, and eating. Few things in Elizabethan England are certain but you can be wholly confident that your partner at a masque will not turn out to be Philip Stubbes.

Literature

The explosion in the number of books published over the course of the reign means that you will find reading material on almost every conceivable subject. And people do love to read. In 1576 William Carnsew records reading a history of the Turks, an account of the Protestant martyrs Ridley and Latimer, assorted sermons, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Humphrey Gilbert's *A Discourse of a discoverie for a new passage to Cataia* (1576), an account of the acts of the Council of Basel, Calvin's letters, and *De Triplice Vita* by the Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino.[53] Well-educated people also love to read the ancient classics, such as Homer and Virgil, both in the original and in translation, and quite a few classic medieval works are now in print, such as Lord Berners's translation of *The Chronicles of Froissart* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. However, when it comes to contemporary creative writing, two forms dominate: poetry and writing for the stage.

Poetry

Almost every intelligent, well-educated person writes poetry—whether it be a short lyric on a special occasion or a pretty rhyme to amuse a potential lover. As a result, more than 440 volumes of verse are published during the reign (including reprints). But far more poetry is circulated in manuscript. Much of this is the work of gentlemen who do not wish to publish their private words. In some cases publication is quite out of the question—for

instance, in the case of Chidiock Tichborne's moving poem written "on the eve of his execution" in 1586. The last stanza reads:

> I sought my death and found it in my womb,
> I looked for life and saw it was a shade,
> I trod the earth and knew it was my tomb
> And now I die, and now I was but made:
> My glass is full, and now my glass is run,
> And now I live, and now my life is done.

The queen herself is not too high for occasional versification; she writes a hauntingly sad poem on the departure of the duke of Anjou, her last suitor and her final potential groom of suitable rank, wit, and disposition. Entitled "On Monsieur's departure," it reads:

> I grieve and dare not show my discontent;
> I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate;
> I do, yet dare not say I ever meant;
> I seem stark mute, but inwardly do prate.
> I am, and not; I freeze and yet am burned,
> Since from myself another self I turned.
>
> My care is like my shadow in the sun—
> Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,
> Stands, and lies by me, doth what I have done;
> His too familiar care doth make me rue it.
> No means I find to rid him from my breast,
> Till by the end of things it be suppressed.
>
> Some gentler passion slide into my mind,
> For I am soft, and made of melting snow;
> Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind.
> Let me or float or sink, be high or low;
> Or let me live with some more sweet content,
> Or die, and so forget what love e'er meant.

With so much poetry being published and far more being written, how do you pick the finest? Perhaps the best guide is John Taylor, a waterman and

poet in his own right, known to history as "the Water Poet." In his 1620 poem "The praise of hemp-seed," he lists those deceased English writers whose fame strikes him as well-deserved and secure:

> In paper, many a poet now survives
> Or else their lines had perish'd with their lives.
> Old Chaucer, Gower, and Sir Thomas More,
> Sir Philip Sidney, who the laurel wore,
> Spenser, and Shakespeare did in art excel,
> Sir Edward Dyer, Greene, Nashe, Daniel.
> Sylvester, Beaumont, Sir John Harington,
> Forgetfulness their works would over run
> But that in paper they immortally
> Do live in spite of death, and cannot die.

His reading list includes just three pre-Elizabethan writers: the two great medieval poets John Gower (d. 1408) and Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), whose works are still read in Elizabethan times, and Sir Thomas More (d. 1540), Henry VIII's chancellor, who wrote *Utopia* and published various religious and historical works but is not actually known for his poetry. Few would deny that the next three writers really do "excel": Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare. With the exception of the controversial poet and playwright Christopher Marlowe, no Elizabethan writer who dies in the century before 1620 comes anywhere near these three in terms of poetic skill, originality, and sustained achievement. Yet they all hail from different backgrounds and display varied ambitions.

Philip Sidney is an aristocrat, the grandson of the duke of Northumberland, educated at Oxford. A position at court is practically his birthright; traveling on the Continent—through Germany and Austria to Italy, Poland, and Hungary—is only to be expected of someone of his class. He is the epitome of the enlightened and educated courtier. But he is also proud and quick to defend himself. In August 1579, on the tennis court at Whitehall Palace, he challenges the earl of Oxford to a duel as they violently disagree about the merits of the queen's prospective marriage to the duke of Anjou. Elizabeth has to intervene to stop the bloodshed. Sidney then makes the mistake of presenting the queen with his argument against the marriage in written form; the queen is not amused and he hastily retreats from

court. His ignominy does not last long, however; he is soon restored to favor, being knighted in 1582. Four years later he dies in battle, at the Siege of Zutphen, after receiving a bullet in the thigh. He never sees his thirty-second birthday but in his short life he revolutionizes English literature, composing a long pastoral romance, *Arcadia* (1590), remodeling the Petrarchan sonnet in his sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), and robustly defending poetry against its critics in *The Defence of Poesy* (1595). To give you a taste of his poetic touch, the following is taken from *Arcadia:*

> My true-love hath my heart, and I have his,
> By just exchange one for the other given:
> I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss;
> There never was a bargain better driven.
> His heart in me keeps me and him in one,
> My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides;
> He loves my heart for once it was his own;
> I cherish his because in me it bides.
> His heart his wound received from my sight;
> My heart was wounded with his wounded heart;
> For as from me on him his hurt did light,
> So still methought in me his hurt did smart:
> Both equal hurt, in this change sought our bliss,
> My true love hath my heart and I have his.

Edmund Spenser is the son of a London merchant. Educated at Cambridge, where he too translates Petrarch's sonnets, he meets and befriends Sidney in the household of the earl of Leicester. A friendship develops and Spenser dedicates his first book, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), to Sidney. Shortly afterward he travels to Ireland, where he pens his great work, *The Faerie Queene*, a series of courtly tales composed in a deliberately archaic style, celebrating Elizabeth and the Tudor dynasty. The first three books of this poem (he plans to write twenty-four) are published in 1590 and championed by Sir Walter Raleigh. Spenser travels to London to present them to the queen, hoping for a position at court; unfortunately Elizabeth does not oblige him. Disappointed, he returns to Ireland where he writes the next three books of *The Faerie Queene* and composes a sonnet sequence for his much-loved new bride, *Amoretti* (1594), followed by a poem that celebrates

their marriage, *Epithalamion* (1595). Having attracted the hostility of the Irish, he is burned out of his home, Kilcolman Castle, by two thousand rebels in 1598 and forced to escape with his family by a secret underground passage. He returns to England and dies the following year at the age of forty-seven. This is Sonnet 75 from his *Amoretti:*

> One day I wrote her name upon the strand
> But came the waves and washed it away;
> Again I wrote it with a second hand
> But came the tide and made my pains his prey.
> Vain man, said she, that dost in vain assay
> A mortal thing so to immortalize,
> For I myself shall like to this decay
> And eke my name be wiped out likewise.
> Not so, quoth I, let baser things devise
> To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
> My verse your virtues rare shall eternize
> And in the heavens write your glorious name.
> Where when as death shall all the world subdue,
> Our love shall live, and later life renew.

By comparison with Sidney and Spenser, Shakespeare is of relatively humble background. Born in 1564, he does not attend a university but marries Anne Hathaway in 1582, when he is eighteen and she twenty-six. They have three children together before he is twenty-one, during which time he remains living at his father's house in Henley Street. But within six years he has moved to London, and begun writing and staging history plays. Despite early success as a playwright, his first published work is a poem, *Venus and Adonis,* which appears in 1593, when all the theaters are closed because of plague. You can pick up a copy from the stationers at St. Paul's for 1 shilling—as many people do, for it goes through reprint after reprint. The following year a second long poem, *The Rape of Lucrece,* is published. In 1595, when the theaters reopen, he appears on the payroll of the acting company known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and thereafter devotes himself entirely to the stage. But quietly he is writing brilliant sonnets, building up a body of 154 poems, which is finally published in 1609. You will undoubtedly be familiar with many of these, such as "Shall I compare thee to a summer's

day?" (Sonnet 18) and "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / admit impediment . . ." (Sonnet 116). But perhaps you are less familiar with Sonnet 78, one of the more obviously personal poems, in which he refers to his comparative lack of "learning" (i.e. his lack of a university education):

> So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse,
> And found such fair assistance in my verse
> As every alien pen hath got my use
> And under thee their poesy disperse.
> Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to sing
> And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
> Have added feathers to the learned's wing
> And given grace a double majesty.
> Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
> Whose influence is thine, and born of thee:
> In others' works thou dost but mend the style,
> And arts with thy sweet graces graced be;
> But thou art all my art, and dost advance
> As high as learning, my rude ignorance.

The seven lesser poets on John Taylor's list have a collective wealth of ability, although not necessarily as much application as Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Sir Edward Dyer is a courtier who can turn an exquisite phrase and would be far more famous if only he put his pen to paper more often. He is well known as the author of the famous poem "My mind to me a kingdom is" and the even more touching "The lowest trees have tops." Robert Greene is a libertine, drunkard, and philanderer who writes extensively—poems and plays alike—but he is a jealous and conceited man who sees Shakespeare as a rival. Before things come to a head, Greene kills himself with red wine and pickled herring in 1592, at the age of thirty-four. Thomas Nashe, a clergyman's son from Suffolk, also manages to incur Greene's wrath but survives him to write a number of plays, satires, and poems as well as a notorious work of erotica, *The Choice of Valentines;* he too dies at the age of thirty-four. Samuel Daniel is of more sober stock: the son of a music master, he writes plays, masques, and poetry, including a series of sonnets to "Delia" (for which he is best known), the romance "The Complaint of Rosamond," and a history of medieval England in verse be-

fore he expires, aged fifty-six. Francis Beaumont is best known for collaborating on plays with John Fletcher but is also a friend of Ben Jonson and frequents the Mermaid Tavern in Cheapside. Sir John Harington has already been mentioned as a great wit, the inventor of the water closet and one of the queen's 102 godchildren. He is an epigrammatist of the first order but too risqué for his own good. Having incurred displeasure by translating some of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* in a very racy style, he is requested by his godmother to leave court and not return until he has translated the entire work in a more appropriate manner. This he does—to great acclaim. Apart from Shakespeare, Joshua Sylvester is the only sixteenth-century poet on Taylor's list who does not have a university education and the only one whose output is limited to translations (from the French), but he too is a highly accomplished wordsmith whose fame lasts for decades.

We should remember, however, that Taylor's poem only accounts for those poets who have died by 1620. In addition you have the poetry of Renaissance men like Thomas Campion, the physician and composer who dies in 1620, and Sir Walter Raleigh, the explorer, courtier, and historian who is executed in 1618. Then there are those poets who, like Shakespeare, also write plays, such as Ben Jonson and a young John Webster, but are only at the start of their careers; dedicated versifiers like the prodigious Michael Drayton, best known for *Poly-Olbion* and his historical poems "Agincourt" and *Mortimeriados;* and George Chapman, whose translations of Homer win the hearts of many readers. Although the young John Donne publishes nothing in Elizabeth's reign, his early amorous compositions date from this time. You also have the earliest female poets, including Emilia Lanier (whom we met in Chapter Two) and Sir Philip Sidney's remarkable sister, Mary, countess of Pembroke. Mary rewrites her brother's *Arcadia* for publication and presides over a worship of writers at Wilton House.

The Theater

In the modern world we have great admiration for Elizabethan theater. At the time, however, it is in the throes of a radical revolution. At the start of the reign the majority of productions are miracle plays—reconstructions of scenes from the Bible, performed as both civic and religious rituals. These go out of favor when the privy council decrees that they are too close to Catholicism and should stop. Those at York cease in 1569. In Chester the

citizens defy the privy council and continue performing their play about Noah's Flood well into the 1570s. The Coventry mystery plays are finally suppressed in 1579, so this is the town to visit if you want to catch one later in the reign. The Guary miracle play in Cornwall continues for some years but is so amateurish it can hardly be seen as a threat. During its performances, a prompter goes to each actor in turn and whispers his speech to him, line by line.[54]

In their stead, people increasingly choose to see secular plays on historical and moral themes. These are performed up and down the country by theater companies called after lords, for example "Lord Sussex's Men," "Lord Strange's Men," "the Lord Admiral's Men," and "Lord Leicester's Men." The reason for these names is that, while unattached actors are liable to be arrested for vagrancy, the Act of 1572 specifically excludes players properly authorized by lords from being considered vagabonds. Note that the actors are all men: women do not perform on the stage in Elizabeth's reign. If there are any female parts, these are played by boys dressed as women. In London, performances take place in the afternoons in the yards of galleried inns, such as the Boar's Head Inn in Whitechapel High Street, the Bell Inn and the Cross Keys Inn (both on Gracechurch Street), the Belle Savage Inn (Ludgate Hill), and the Bull Inn (Bishopsgate Street). When on tour the theater companies are quite small, sometimes comprising just six or seven actors, each taking on a number of roles. They perform for the fee-paying public in provincial inns or privately in the houses of gentlemen. However, as the new theater proves more and more popular, actors, writers, and audiences become increasingly centered on the London playhouses.

The Elizabethan theater as we know it develops slowly. In 1562 the play *Gorboduc,* the first English play to include blank verse, is performed in front of the queen at the Inner Temple in London. This is written by two gentlemen, Thomas Sackville (the future earl of Dorset) and Thomas Norton, and leaves a lasting impression. Its tale of a kingdom torn between two heirs has great significance for the audience of the day. Other plays follow, drawing on classical themes as well as on ancient British and medieval history, written by (among others) John Heywood, John Pickering, and Lewis Wager. A sign of their success is the construction in 1567 of the first purpose-built theater, the Red Lion, built by John Brayne in Whitechapel. Unfortunately this is located too far from the city and it does not attract large audiences. Performances in the city inns, however, are flourishing—much

to the annoyance of those who see them as uncouth and riotous establishments. In 1574 the city authorities are given powers to restrict playhouses, forcing the actors to find new premises in the suburbs. This becomes a golden opportunity for John Brayne and his brother-in-law, James Burbage, who in 1576 build a new theater, simply called The Theatre, at Shoreditch, just half a mile north of Bishopsgate. The following year a second theater, the Curtain, is built just two hundred yards away. Despite some heavy opposition from Puritan preachers and moralists, both theaters are successful.[55] New plays are written every year, courtesy of the new wave of playwrights: John Lyly, Thomas Preston, and Thomas Hughes. The queen continues to encourage dramatic art, personally attending performances at Gray's Inn, Greenwich Palace, and Whitehall Palace. In 1583 she establishes her own theater company, the Queen's Men, and leading actors flock to it. Puritans are enraged, and the following year the city authorities try to outlaw plays altogether, both within and outside the city walls. But now that drama has received royal approval, they don't stand a chance.[56]

In 1587 Thomas Kyd produces *The Spanish Tragedy,* and soon afterward Christopher Marlowe brings out the first part of *Tamburlaine the Great.* Kyd is the son of a London scrivener, born in 1558; Marlowe the son of a shoemaker from Canterbury, born in 1564 (the same year as Shakespeare), whose intellectual brilliance earns him a university education at Cambridge. They employ new verse forms, allowing different spoken rhythms, and compose bold speeches with greater resonance and meaning. The new conceptual framework of a revenge tragedy in particular allows them to portray powerful emotions voiced by strong characters. Suddenly it is possible to show so much more passion on the stage. The old narrative objectivity of the history play is replaced with a much more involved subjective experience, which excites and astounds audiences in equal measure. More theaters open their doors to the public. The Rose is built by Philip Henslowe at Southwark, not far from the bear-baiting and bull-baiting arenas, in 1587. Eight years later Francis Langley erects the Swan on a site nearby; and in 1596 Richard Burbage builds the Blackfriars Theatre, an indoor venue, although it does not open its doors until 1599. Most important of all, Shakespeare, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage, and their partners dismantle The Theatre and remove its beams to a new site at Southwark, where it is rebuilt in 1599 as the Globe. When Edward Alleyn builds the Fortune on the northern edge of the city in 1600, the array of Elizabethan theaters is complete.

Including the inn yards and the various other places where plays are still staged, London now has a dozen playhouses.

This exciting and rapidly expanding cultural melting pot—developing in parallel with the music and poetry of the 1590s—is the environment in which all the new plays are written. Over the last fifteen years of the reign, Shakespeare completes no fewer than twenty-five plays, including *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the great historical cycle of *Richard II, Henry IV* (Parts 1 and 2), and *Henry V, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It,* and *Hamlet.* Marlowe composes the second part of *Tamburlaine* and adds *The Jew of Malta, Doctor Faustus, Edward II,* and *The Massacre at Paris* to his oeuvre. George Peele writes all his plays (most notably *Edward I*), Robert Greene composes all his (including the comedy *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*), and John Marston completes his first five works. Thomas Nashe brings forth his masterpiece *Summers Last Will and Testament.* Thomas Dekker writes (or cowrites) his first twenty plays, some in conjunction with Michael Drayton, Henry Chettle, John Marston, and Robert Wilson. And Ben Jonson starts his headlong charge into English literature.

Alongside Marlowe and Shakespeare, Jonson is the third great dramatist of the age. Like Shakespeare, he does not go to university but, after schooling at Westminster, becomes a bricklayer and then a soldier. By the end of the reign he has married, had two children and lost one, tried to become an actor and failed, become a playwright, been arrested for a scurrilous play and released, killed another actor in a duel, been arrested again and put on trial for murder, and escaped hanging by pleading benefit of the clergy. The play for which he is arrested, *The Isle of Dogs,* coauthored with Thomas Nashe, is so slanderous and offensive that the privy council orders the closure not just of the play but of every theater in London. The following year, after most of the theaters open again, he has a blockbuster success with *Every Man in His Humour.* This he follows up with a sequel, *Every Man Out of His Humour,* and three more plays: *Cynthia's Revels, The Poetaster,* and *Sejanus: His Fall.* As with so many Elizabethan playwrights, he is prolific: by the age of twenty-nine, Jonson has completed at least six plays, comparable with Marlowe (at least six) and Shakespeare (at least seven).

With so many playwrights at work there are plenty of plays to choose from. Each theater shows twenty or thirty plays a year, changing the program every day. In 1594–95 the Lord Admiral's Men perform a total of

thirty-eight plays, twenty-one of which are newly written. One in three adult Londoners sees a play every month.[57] It all adds up to a maelstrom of creative energy, theatrical delivery, and personal rivalry. But if you travel around England you will notice how all this is increasingly centered on London. Whereas in the 1550s and 1560s several companies tour the country, by 1590 the principal actors stay in the city. The burgeoning population of London provides them with large audiences, especially when they become established at their respective theaters: the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose and the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe. Only when the theaters are closed by the authorities because of the plague—in 1581–82, 1592–93, and 1603–4—do the London companies start to tour again, from Bath to Nottingham. Ironically, one place they do not play is Stratford-upon-Avon. Although many players visit Stratford in Shakespeare's youth, the town's corporation prohibits traveling actors from performing there in 1602.[58]

How do you decide which theater to go to? As with a modern production, you will be attracted to watch the best and most celebrated performers. Many Londoners flock to see the clowns. Richard Tarlton, who plays with the Queen's Men at the Curtain, is a crowd-puller; he can reduce the audience to tears simply by putting his head out between the curtains and pulling faces. Will Kempe, who performs first with the Lord Leicester's Men, becomes the clown with the Lord Chamberlain's Men and takes on roles such as Dogberry and Falstaff in Shakespeare's plays. Some gentlemen and ladies who regard the theater as brutish—and it has to be emphasized that many do see playhouses as lawless places infested with rogues, thieves, and prostitutes—will only go to see performances by the companies of boys drawn from the choristers of Chapel Royal and St. Paul's Cathedral. These companies are socially more elevated and their venues roofed over (so there is no danger of the audience getting wet). Nor are their plays inferior: Ben Jonson writes for them regularly. However, it is to the actors of the two main companies that you will be drawn. The Lord Chamberlain's Men have Richard Burbage, who takes the lead in many of Shakespeare's plays. The Lord Admiral's Men have Edward Alleyn: a very tall and powerful man who roars his part as he crosses the stage. With such actors in place, a playwright can compose the part to suit the actor's strengths. If you really want to see an all-star cast, go to the Curtain in 1598 to see the production of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour.* William Shakespeare is playing Kno'well, supported by the other leading men of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, among them Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillips, John Heminges, Henry Condell, and Will Kempe.

Let's say you want to go to one of the theaters for an afternoon performance. If you are heading to the Swan, the Rose, or the Globe you will cross London Bridge or take a wherry across the river and then walk through Paris Garden. All sorts of people will be heading in the same direction: working men in groups, shop owners, gentlemen, householders' wives accompanied by their servants or husbands, foreign tourists, boys and girls. As you approach the theaters you will notice that they all seem to be round; in fact, they are polygonal—the Globe is twenty-sided, the Rose fourteen-sided. Whichever one you choose, you can expect to queue with two thousand other people to get in. You will see people standing in hats with pipes in hand, and women in their headdresses, all chatting, with an eye open for people they know. Entrance costs a penny: this allows you to stand in the yard in front of the stage, an uncovered area (hence the need for a hat). Around the yard are three galleries where you can stand or sit under cover. It costs an extra penny to stand here and another penny again for a place upstairs. If you are feeling very flash, you might hire a box for 6 pence. This gives you the best chance of seeing the stage and being seen by the crowd.

When the trumpets sound, most people quieten down, waiting for the play to begin. If you are sitting in the gallery you will have a clear view of the stage as it projects out from the far side of the round enclosure. Leading actors will come right out along this platform and deliver their soliloquies directly to the crowd. So too will a clown like Will Kempe, when he wishes to extemporize and make "a scurvy face." There are two large columns, both elaborately painted, which support the roof that covers the back of the stage. Behind them is the "tiring house," where the actors robe (or "attire") themselves. Above the tiring house is a gallery—useful for scenes such as the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* but sometimes let out for those spectators who want to be seen. Note how few props are used: although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* cannot be performed without an ass's head, and *Titus Andronicus* requires a large pie, most of Shakespeare's plays are performed without props. The costumes, however, are splendid; many lords and merchants leave their best gowns to their servants who, being prohibited from wearing them by the sumptuary laws, sell them to the theatrical companies. As a result, the players are normally better dressed than the audience. There is a low murmur of voices throughout the play as women

shoulder their way through the crowd, selling apples, nuts, and bottles of beer. People are constantly on the watch for cutpurses and pickpockets, and the chance encounter that might lead to an illicit liaison. Unlike your modern theater experience, you will find many people chatting away during the performance. Some speeches, however, do command universal attention and silence. At other points the report of a cannon or the sound of rolling thunder from above will make you jump. The latter effect is made by rolling cannonballs around the gallery roof.

As you sit there watching a performance of a Shakespeare, Jonson, or Marlowe play, the crowd will fade into the background. Instead you will be struck by the diction. There are words and phrases that you will not find funny but which will make the crowd roar with laughter. Your familiarity with the meanings of Shakespeare's words will rise and fall as you see and hear the actors' deliveries and notice the audience's reaction. That is the strange music of being so familiar with something that is not of your own time. What you are listening to in that auditorium is the genuine voice, something of which you have heard only distant echoes. Not every actor is perfect in his delivery—Shakespeare himself makes that quite clear in his *Hamlet*—but what you are hearing is the voice of the men for whom Shakespeare wrote his greatest speeches. Modern thespians will follow the rhythms or the meanings of these words but even the most brilliant will not always be able to follow both rhythm and meaning at once. If they follow the pattern of the verse they risk confusing the audience, who are less familiar with the sense of the words; if they pause to emphasize meanings, they lose the rhythm of the verse. Here, on the Elizabethan stage, you have a harmony of performance and understanding that will never quite be matched again in respect of any of these great writers.

It has been a long time in development but Elizabeth's reign sees the advent of a dramatic culture which has meaning for us in the modern world. Unlike their predecessors, the late Elizabethan playwrights are keen to explore the human condition. At the same time they have an awareness of the changing world that sets them wholly apart from the Middle Ages. Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson know full well how novel their art is. Not for them the timeworn traditions of miracle plays, or the humility of writing only to please the wealthy. A great cultural wave is breaking here, on the Bankside shore of a Brave New World, sending up the spume of Marlowe's vitriolic atheism and Shakespeare's poetic and philosophical

meditations amid the spray of madrigals and airs, scientific and geographic discoveries, a sense of history and Renaissance ideas. At a time of great discoveries, these wordsmiths are the spokesmen for the mass of newly educated townsmen who have never really known before what it is to have a voice. And Shakespeare above all others meets the challenge of the age by holding up a mirror to Mankind and showing people what they really are—and not what they think they are in the eyes of God. This is something truly original, and one of the reasons the rabble in the theater yard does fall quiet, and strains to hear the words of the great soliloquies and speeches; and, in so doing, becomes a little more like us.