

# The Birth of Modern Theater

In Shakespeare's day, London was already a bustling city. Ships swept up and down the Thames River to dock in London and fuel the city with trade. Nearly 200,000 people crowded into London, making it the largest city in Europe. Reeking of garbage, ringing with street vendors' cries, Shakespeare's London was packed with danger and opportunity. In this stew of excitement, the first modern theaters were born.

**The Globe** Before the 1570s, Londoners had turned to traveling acting companies for entertainment. City officials, afraid of public unruliness, riots, and moral corruption, frequently cracked down on public performances. In 1576, an actor named James Burbage built the first public theater, north of the city. Other theaters followed. In 1599, Shakespeare's company built the Globe theater in Southwark, a neighborhood south of London.

Most of Shakespeare's plays were performed at the Globe, which was built around a roofless courtyard. The sun provided the only lighting; performances were given only during the day. Surrounding the courtyard were three levels of galleries with benches where wealthier playgoers sat. For only a penny, though, a person could stand in the courtyard, called the pit, and watch the performance.

**Popcorn and Pickpockets** Audiences were boisterous, cheering and booing loudly. Hazelnuts were Elizabethan "popcorn"; people munched on them all during a performance. Pickpockets were a constant danger, and fistfights occasionally broke out. Built to hold between 2,500 and 3,000 people, the theater drew the largest crowds on holidays.

**The Stage** The stage was a platform that extended into the pit. Actors entered and left the stage from doors located behind the platform. The galleries behind and above the stage were used primarily as dressing and storage rooms. The second-level gallery right above the stage, however, was used as an upper stage.

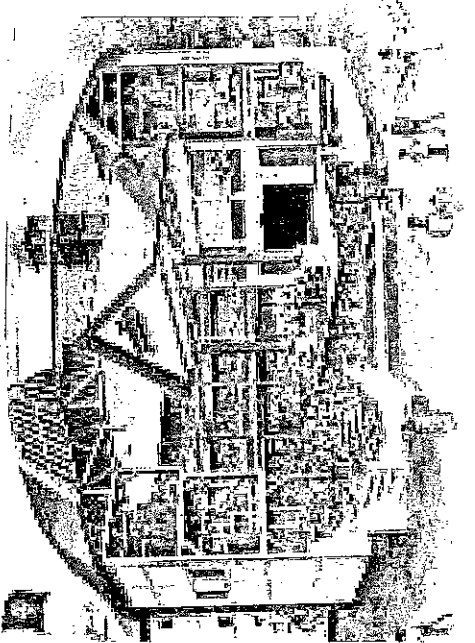
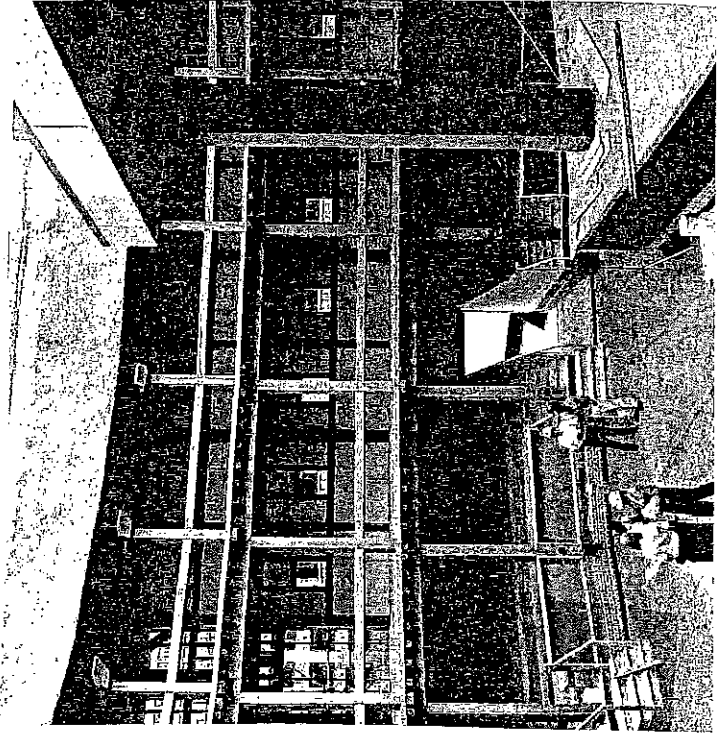
By modern standards, Elizabethan theater was hardly "realistic." No scenery was used: Settings were mentioned in the dialogue. The actors wore Elizabethan clothing, not costumes. Women were not allowed on stage: Young boys played the female roles. Shakespeare brought his world to life on stage at the Globe through imagination and words.

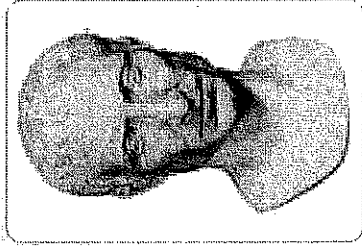
## Reconstructing the Globe

In 1987, years of fundraising and effort resulted in a remarkable birthday present for the playwright. Work began on a faithful reconstruction of the Globe.

The design of the reconstruction is based on archaeological evidence and a drawing by Wenceslaus Hollar, an artist of the time. A contract drawn up in 1600 for the Fortune playhouse, a theater built by the same carpenter who built the Globe, provides additional details. In 1989, the foundation of the original Globe was uncovered, providing even more information about the theater.

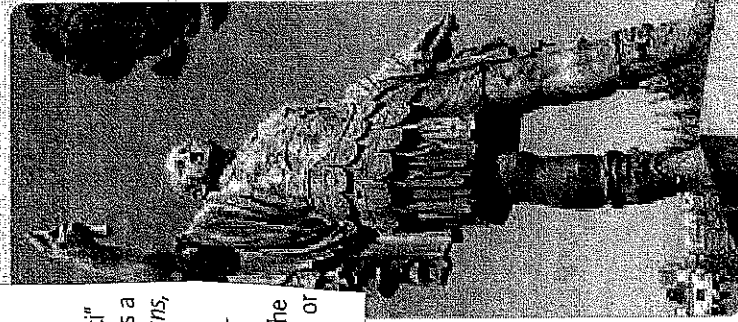
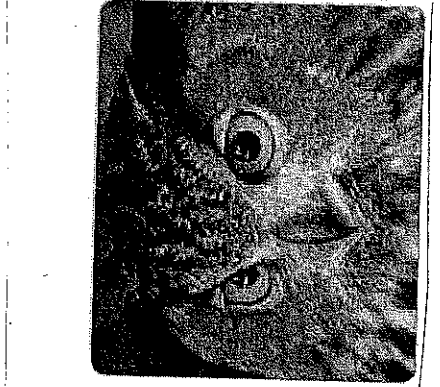
The new Globe, like the original, is made of wood. Traditional sixteenth-century carpentry techniques were used for much of the construction. A thatched roof protects the stage and galleries, and lime plaster covers the walls. After long years of fundraising and construction, the theater opened to its first full season on June 8, 1997, with a production of *Henry V*.





**The Rise and Fall of a Leader** Gaius Julius Caesar was a Roman general and politician who lived from about 100 BCE to 44 BCE. One of the ablest leaders the world has known, Caesar greatly expanded the Roman Republic. After defeating the king of Pontus, a territory in Asia Minor, he famously declared, "Veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered). Besides being a powerful military leader, Caesar was a good politician. His reforms improved the lives of the common people, or *plebeians*, who loved him for championing their causes. Some saw Caesar as an ambitious and shrewd self-promoter who hoped to end democracy and become a dictator, and some saw him as a hero, but either way, he was a legend. After his death in 44 BCE, Caesar's name became forever synonymous with power and leadership. The Russian word *czar*, the German *Kaiser*, and the Arabic *qaysar*, all meaning "king" or "ruler," are variations on his name.

**Elizabethan Superstition** The people who lived in Shakespeare's day are called Elizabethans, after their great monarch Queen Elizabeth I. The Elizabethans were extremely superstitious. They believed in astrology, magic, witchcraft, good and bad omens, ghosts, fortune-telling, and alchemy. Animals were often considered omens. For instance, owls and ravens were both associated with death. Belief in the supernatural was common, and Queen Elizabeth's successor, James I, wrote a popular work on witchcraft, the *Daemonologie*, in 1599. Do you share any of the beliefs of the Elizabethans? How did Shakespeare's descriptions of the abnormal events of the times affect you? How do you think these descriptions might have affected an Elizabethan audience?



## Literary Analysis: Shakespeare's Tragedies

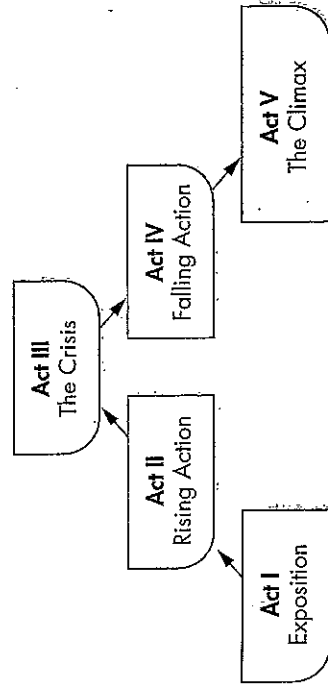
Like other tragedies, **Shakespeare's tragedies** show a reversal of fortune, from good to bad, experienced by a man or woman, usually of noble birth. Shakespeare's tragedies also have these distinctive features:

- The plays are sometimes based on **historical characters**.
- They include **archetypes** such as a **hero** who often displays a **tragic flaw**, a characteristic that brings about his downfall.
- Shakespeare emphasizes the hero's **internal conflict**.
- The plays include **motifs**, recurrent thematic elements such as images, objects, or actions that enhance the artistry.

Shakespeare's plays are structured in five acts. In his tragedies, the **crisis**—the turning point—occurs in Act III. The **climax**, or point of greatest intensity, often occurs in Act V, when disaster befalls the hero.

### Using the Strategy: Plot Diagram

**As You Read** Record the events of Act I in a diagram such as this one, and keep a list of the archetypes and motifs in the play. Then, analyze how the archetypes and motifs affect the plot of the play.



### Reading Skill: Use Text Aids

Because they were written centuries ago, Shakespeare's plays contain unfamiliar language and references. When reading Shakespearean drama, use **text aids**:

- Review the list of *dramatis personae* (the cast of characters) and the background information provided (p. 889).
- Consult the notes, called **glosses**, beside the text. These notes define words and explain references.

**As You Read** Use text aids to help you reflect on your understanding to monitor your comprehension of the play.

# The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Act I



## To what extent does experience determine what we perceive?

### Writing About the Big Question

In *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare reveals the dangers of misinterpreting people and their intentions. Use these sentence starters to develop your ideas about the Big Question.

A person might form an **impression** of someone based on \_\_\_\_\_  
Our own values and beliefs may also affect the way we see others because \_\_\_\_\_

#### As Your Read

Look for the opinions different characters have of Caesar, and look for signs that tell you why these characters' views of the leader differ.

### Vocabulary

Read each word and its definition. Decide whether you know the word well, know it a little bit, or do not know it at all. After you read, see how your knowledge of each word has increased.

- **replication** (rep' li kă' shən) *n.* duplicate; reproduction (p. 894) *His house is an exact replication of mine. replica n. replicate v.*
- **servile** (sər' vəl) *adj.* slavelike; humbly submissive to authority (p. 896) *The butler bowed in a servile manner. serve v. servility n. servitude n.*
- **spare** (sper) *adj.* lean; thin (p. 903) *She has a spare frame and is underweight.*
- **infirmity** (in fur' mē tē) *n.* weakness; physical defect (p. 905) *A doctor cured his infirmity. infirm adj. infirmity n. infirmness n.*
- **portentous** (pôr ten' tēs) *adj.* ominous; giving signs of evil to come (p. 908) *The portentous clouds promised snow. portent n. portentously adv.*
- **prodigious** (prō dij' əs) *adj.* of great size or power (p. 909) *The runner made a prodigious effort just before the finish line. prodiciously adv.*

## Background for the Play

**Ancient Rome** A republic since 509 B.C., Rome was ruled for decades by two public officials called *consuls* along with the senate, made up of high-born *patricians*, or aristocrats, and assemblies of *plebeians*, or lower-class citizens.

By the era of Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.), Rome ruled an empire won by military expansion. Powerful generals arose, and the balance of power grew unstable. Civil war was common. When a general named Pompey tried to make himself sole consul, another popular general, Julius Caesar, defeated him. As Shakespeare's play opens, all of Rome wonders whether Caesar will become emperor, ending the Republic.

## from SHAKESPEARE ALIVE!

Joseph Papp and Elizabeth Kirkland

Joseph Papp, the founder of the New York Shakespeare Festival, devoted his life to making Shakespeare accessible to all. In *Shakespeare Alive!* he re-creates England in Shakespeare's day. As he explains, Shakespeare and his audience viewed nature and society as a unified whole.

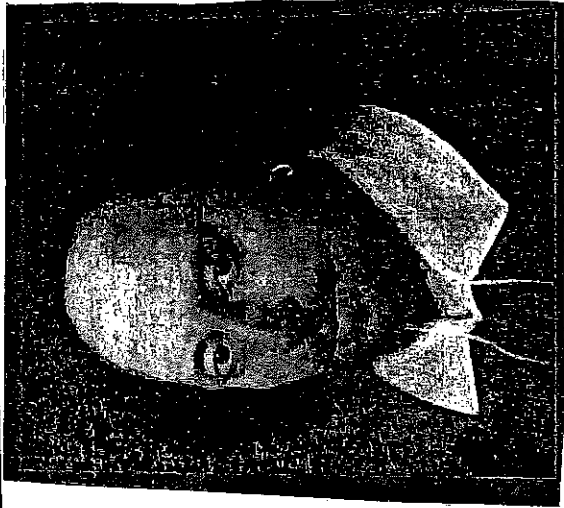
In the heavenly kingdom . . . several levels of archangels and angels spread downwards from God's throne, and each level knew its place. . . . The universe was a hierarchy too, and each planet and star was assigned to a specific position. . . . The animal world was another very stratified society in which each species had its king: the eagle was the king of birds; the whale the king of fish; and the lion, of course, king of beasts.

The Great Chain of Being, stretching from the lowliest creature in the natural world all the way up to God, connected these worlds to each other, and the hierarchy of one was mirrored in the others. . . .

Since all living things were linked by the Great Chain of Being, violations of order in society were thought to set off violent disturbances in the heavens or the world of nature. . . . In *Julius Caesar* [Act I, Scene iii], strange and terrible goings-on are reported in Rome as the conspirators hatch an assassination plot against the emperor. . . .

# Meet William Shakespeare

(1564–1616)



His characters are known by name around the world. The phrases he coined still slip into people's conversations. Filmmakers, painters, and composers reuse his plots. Writers continue to sift through his thirty-seven plays and his poems, borrowing titles, stories, and insights into the human soul. Nearly 400 years after his death, William Shakespeare's plays are still read and produced internationally. He is regarded as the greatest writer in the English language.

**What's Past Is Prologue** Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon, northwest of London. Based on a baptism record for April 26, 1564, scholars estimate that his birth date was April 23 of the same year. Shakespeare's father, John, a successful glove maker and businessman, was a respected leader in the community. His mother, born Mary Arden, was the daughter of John's landlord. No written evidence of Shakespeare's boyhood exists. Based on his father's status, though, scholars speculate that young Will attended the Stratford Grammar School. In addition to studying Latin grammar, Shakespeare and his classmates would have read the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence and the Roman poets Ovid, Horace, and Virgil. They would also have studied logic, history, natural history, and some Greek. When Shakespeare left school, he would have had a solid foundation in classical literature.

Scholars pick up the written trail of Shakespeare's life in 1582. Records show that he married Anne Hathaway in late November or early December of that year. Anne was twenty-six; William was eighteen. They had a daughter, Susanna, in 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, two years later.

**All the World's a Stage** For a brief time, Shakespeare may have worked as a country schoolmaster. In the 1580s, however, he found his true calling—the theater. Some speculate that traveling performers, stopping off in Stratford on their way to London, introduced him to the magic of the stage. At the age of eighteen or nineteen, Shakespeare was probably already acting in plays in London. Friends in the city helped him financially and professionally, and he advanced quickly.

By 1594, Shakespeare was part owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most successful theater companies in London. More importantly, in view of his contributions to English literature, he was the company's chief playwright. Many of Shakespeare's enduring plays first took form as scripts he wrote for performances by the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In 1599, the company built the Globe theater, and it was at the Globe that audiences first saw the plays of Shakespeare.

In 1603, following the death of Elizabeth I, James I became king and took control of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He renamed the company the King's Men. Shakespeare, a major stockholder in the company, continued to write for and act with the group.

**Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow** Around 1610, Shakespeare, now a prosperous middle-class man enriched by his theatrical career, retired to Stratford. He lived in the second-largest house in the town, invested in grain and farmland, and continued to write plays.

Shakespeare wrote his will on March 25, 1616. He left the bulk of his property to his oldest daughter, Susanna, and a smaller sum to his other daughter, Judith. (Hamnet had died in 1596.) By law, his widow automatically received a lifetime income from the estate. On April 23, 1616 (his birthday, if scholars are correct), Shakespeare died.

## FAMILIAR EXPRESSIONS TAKEN FROM SHAKESPEARE

You have probably quoted Shakespeare without even realizing it! Look for familiar expressions and phrases in the following list. You may be surprised at how many lines by Shakespeare you already know.

- "Eaten out of house and home," *Henry IV*, Part 2, Act II, Scene I
- "Cruel to be kind," *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene IV
- "Knock, knock! Who's there . . . ?" *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene III
- "Too much of a good thing," *As You Like It*, Act IV, Scene I
- "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III
- "Something wicked this way comes," *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene I
- "To thine own self be true," *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III
- "A tower of strength," *Richard III*, Act V, Scene III