

# Aula 9

## THE ELIZABETHAN THEATER

### **META**

Apresentar ao estudante um panorama do desenvolvimento do teatro inglês da Idade Média até o período elisabetano.

Discutir o modo como o tema do racismo é tratado na peça **Othello**, de Shakespeare.

### **OBJETIVOS**

Ao final da aula o(a) aluno(a) deve ser capaz de:

Compreender o desenvolvimento do teatro inglês até o período elisabetano como um processo cultural e político.

Identificar as características principais da dramaturgia e do teatro elisabetano, relacionando os autores e obras citados com seus respectivos contextos de produção e recepção.

### **PRERREQUISITOS**

Contexto sócio-histórico do Renascimento inglês.

Contexto literário do período elisabetano.

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### INTRODUÇÃO

The period known as the English Renaissance (c. 1500-1660) saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and James I (1603–1625), in the late 16th and early 17th century, England in general, and London in particular, produced great poetry and drama. The English playwrights were attracted by the Italian model, something which was brought to England by a community of Italian actors who had settled in London. The linguist and lexicographer John Florio (1553–1625), whose father was Italian, was a royal language tutor at the Court of James I. He was the translator of Montaigne into English. The earliest Elizabethan plays includes **Gorboduc** (1561), by Sackville, and Norton and Thomas Kyd's **The Spanish Tragedy** (1592), which is said to have influenced Shakespeare's **Hamlet**. **Ralph Roister Doister** is a comic play by Nicholas Udall which is generally regarded as the first comedy to be written in the English language. The date of its composition is about 1552, when Udall was a schoolmaster in London, and some theorize the play was intended for public performance by his pupils - who were all male, as were all actors at that period. However, the work was not published until 1567, eleven years after its author's death. Another comedy is the anonymous *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c. 1566).



**John Florio** (1553–1625), known in Italian as Giovanni Florio [dʒo'vanni 'flɔːrjo], was a linguist and lexicographer, a royal language tutor at the Court of James I, and a possible friend and influence on William Shakespeare. He was also the first translator of Montaigne into English. He was born in London, and in 1580 he married Aline, the sister of poet Samuel Daniel. The couple had three children, Joane Florio, baptised in Oxford in 1585; Edward, in 1588 and Elizabeth, in 1589. He died in Fulham, London in 1625 in apparent poverty.

**William Shakespeare** is, as everybody knows, the most outstanding figure of the period. He had no education and was neither a “university wit” like many of his contemporary playwrights. He was himself an actor and deeply involved in the running of the theatre company that performed his plays. Most playwrights at this time tended to specialise in either histories, comedies or tragedies, but Shakespeare is remarkable because he produced all three types. His 38 plays include tragedies, like **Hamlet** (1599–1601) and **King Lear** (1605); comedies, such as **A Midsummer Night’s Dream** (1594–96) and **Twelfth Night** (1602); history plays, like **Henry IV** parts 1 and 2. He wrote also “problem plays”, or “bitter comedies”, that includes, among others, **Measure for Measure**, **Troilus and Cressida**, **A Winter’s Tale** and **All’s Well that Ends Well**. In his later years he wrote his greatest plays: **Hamlet**, **Othello**, **King Lear**, **Macbeth**, **Antony and Cleopatra** and the last play that he wrote (without a collaborator) **The Tempest** (c. 1611). (see **Aula 10**).



**William Shakespeare** (/ˈʃeɪkspɪər/; 26 April 1564 (baptised) – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including some collaborations, consist of about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, of which the authorship of some is uncertain. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Other playwrights of this period include Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, and John Webster. Marlowe (1564–1593) was born only a few weeks before Shakespeare and must have known him. He was so fascinated by the new frontiers opened by modern German sources he introduced the story of Faust to England

in his play **Doctor Faustus** (c. 1592), about a scientist and magician who is obsessed by the thirst of knowledge and the desire to push man's technological power to its limits. Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) is best known for his satirical plays, particularly **Volpone**, **The Alchemist** and **Bartholomew Fair**. He was also engaged to write courtly "masques", ornate plays where the actors wore masks. **Volpone** (1605 or 1606) shows how a group of scammers are fooled by a top con-artist, vice being punished by vice. Others who followed Jonson's style include Beaumont and Fletcher, whose comedy, **The Knight of the Burning Pestle** (c. 1607-08), satirizes the rising middle class and the nouveaux riches who pretend to dictate literary taste without knowing much about literature. Another popular style of theatre during Jacobean times was the revenge play, popularized by John Webster (c. 1578 – c. 1632), though Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus* also belong to this genre. Webster's major plays, **The White Devil** (c. 1609 – 1612) and **The Duchess of Malfi** (c. 1612/13), are plays of this kind.

At the end of the class, as a way of introducing a practical activity related to the theme of the Elizabethan drama, we are going to read **Othello** – there are many versions and translations of the play, both in printed and online editions –, observing how the ethnic issues are dealt with by the characters – or by the author. Some passages in which the theme is emphasized were selected for you to analyze.

### MYSTERY (OR MIRACLE) AND MORALITY PLAYS

Mystery plays (or Miracle plays) are among the earliest plays in medieval Europe. They focused on the representation of Bible stories in churches with accompanying antiphonal song. They began to be performed in the 10th century, but reached popularity only in the 15th century. In the next century it was already considered obsolete because of the development of professional theatre. The word "Mystery" is used in its biblical sense, of a miracle. "Mystery" also derives from "misterium", meaning craft, once the plays were performed by the craft guilds.

There are four complete extant English biblical collections of mystery plays. The most complete one is the "York cycle", of forty-eight pageants. They were performed in the city of York, from the middle of the fourteenth century until 1569. There are also the Towneley plays of thirty-two pageants, once thought to have been a true "cycle" of plays performed around the Feast of **Corpus Christi** probably in Wakefield, England, until 1576; **The Ludus Coventriae** (also called **the N Town plays** or Hegge cycle), now generally agreed to be a compilation of at least three older unrelated plays and the Chester cycle of twenty-four pageants, now agreed to be an Elizabethan reconstruction of medieval traditions. There also two pageants from a New Testament cycle acted at Coventry. Additionally, a fifteenth-century play of the life of Mary Magdalene, **The Brome Abraham and**

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**Isaac** and a sixteenth-century play of the **Conversion of Saint Paul** exist. Besides the Middle English drama, there are three surviving plays in Cornish known as the Ordinalia.

Most of the plays contain biblical episodes such as the Fall of Lucifer, the Creation and Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac, the Nativity, the Raising of Lazarus, the Passion and the Resurrection. Other pageants included the story of Moses, the Procession of the Prophets, Christ's Baptism, the Temptation in the Wilderness and the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin. In some cases, the plays were sponsored by the emerging medieval **craft guilds**. The York mercers, for example, sponsored the Doomsday pageant. Other guilds presented scenes appropriate to their trade: the building of the Ark from the carpenters' guild; the five loaves and fishes miracle from the bakers etc. But the guild associations were not common in all towns. While the Chester pageants are associated with guilds, there is no indication that the N-Town plays are either associated with guilds or performed on pageant wagons. The most famous of the mystery plays are the Wakefield group. Nobody knows exactly how these plays were performed or even if they were ever performed.

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The **Morality play** was another typical genre of theatrical entertainment which was popular until the Tudors. They were known as "interludes", a broader term given to dramas with or without a moral theme. Moralities were a kind of allegory in which the characters are personifications of moral virtues and/or vices. Having grown out of the religiously based mystery plays of the Middle Ages, they represented a shift towards a more secular base for European theatre.

**The Somonyng of Everyman** (The Summoning of Everyman), usually referred to as **Everyman**, is the most famous morality produced in England. It dates from the 15th century and, like **John Bunyan's** 1678 Christian novel **Pilgrim's Progress**, **Everyman** examines Christian salvation by use of allegorical characters. The play is the allegorical accounting of the life of Everyman, who represents all mankind. Everyman tries to convince other characters to accompany him in the hope of improving his account. All the characters are allegorical, each personifying an abstract idea such as Fellowship and Knowledge.



**John Bunyan** (/ˈbʌnjən/; baptised 30 November 1628 – 31 August 1688) was an English writer and preacher best remembered as the author of the religious allegory **The Pilgrim's Progress**. In addition to **The Pilgrim's Progress**, Bunyan wrote nearly sixty titles, many of them expanded sermons. **The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream** was published in 1678. It is regarded as one of the most significant works of religious English literature and has been translated into more than 200 languages.

### THE ELIZABETHAN THEATER

The establishment of public theatres was essential for the development of the English drama. Their construction was prompted when the Mayor and Corporation of London first banned plays in 1572 as a measure against the plague, and then formally expelled all players from the city in 1575. This provoked the construction of playhouses outside London. The Theatre was constructed in Shoreditch in 1576 by James Burbage with his brother-in-law, John Brayne (the owner of the unsuccessful Red Lion playhouse of 1567) and the Newington Butts playhouse was set up, probably by Jerome Savage, some time between 1575 and 1577. The Theatre was rapidly followed by the Curtain Theatre (1577), the Rose (1587), the Swan (1595), the Globe (1599), the Fortune (1600) and the Red Bull (1604).

Archaeological excavations on the foundations of the Rose and the Globe in the 20th century showed that all the London theatres had a similar general plan. They were three stories high and built around an open space at the centre, the three levels of inward-facing galleries overlooked the open centre, into which was the stage—a platform surrounded on three sides by the audience, only the rear being restricted for the entrances and exits of the actors and seating for the musicians (and sometimes noble sponsors



of the theatrical companies). The upper level behind the stage was used as a balcony, as in **Romeo and Juliet**, or as a position from which an actor could speak to a crowd, as in **Julius Caesar**.



The Architecture of **Elizabethan Theatres** - think of a public outdoor structure like the Coliseum or a small football stadium with a capacity of between 1500 and 3000 people and this gives you a good idea about the architecture of an Elizabethan theatre. James Burbage built the very first theatre with his brother-in-law John Brayne, appropriately named 'The Theatre'. The architecture of 'The Theatre' was designed as a construction which was similar to a small Roman amphitheatre - the Elizabethan Amphitheatre.

Around 1580, when both the Theatre and the Curtain were full on summer days, the total theatre capacity of London was about 5000 spectators. With the building of new theatre facilities and the formation of new companies, the capital's total theatre capacity exceeded 10,000 after 1610. Ticket prices varied during this time period. The cost of admission was based on where in the theatre a person wished to be situated, or based on what a person could afford. If people wanted a better view of the stage or to be more separate from the crowd, they would pay more for their entrance.

The acting companies functioned on a repertory system. Unlike modern productions that can run for months or years on end, the troupes of this era rarely acted the same play two days in a row. One distinctive feature of the companies was that they included only males. Female parts were played by boys in women's costume. Performances also occurred in the afternoon, since there was no artificial lighting.

Costumes during this time period were often bright in color. Due to the nature of the plays, there was not enough time to create period specific costumes for the actors. As a result, the actors wore contemporary and not period specific clothing for the plays. It all depended on the text of

the play and the imagination of the audience. Costumes were also used to recognize characters. Colors symbolized class and costumes. For example, if a character was royalty, their costume included purple.

The growing population of London, the growing wealth of its people and their fondness for spectacle produced a dramatic literature of remarkable variety, quality, and extent. Although most of them have been lost, over 600 remain. The authors were primarily self-made men from modest backgrounds, but some of them were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge, the **university wits**.

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The life of the playwrights seems to have been adventurous and dangerous. Christopher Marlowe was killed in an apparent brawl. Ben Jonson killed an actor in a duel. They were normally paid in increments during the writing process, and if their play was accepted, they would also receive the proceeds from one day's performance. However, they had no ownership of the plays they wrote. Once a play was sold to a company, the company owned it, and the playwright had no control over casting, performance, revision or publication. This problem of authorship is explored in 1998 movie **Shakespeare in Love**.

They generally combined into teams of two, three, four, and even five to generate play texts, once the majority of plays were written in collaborations. Solo artists like Jonson and Shakespeare were the exceptions to the rule. Most playwrights, like Shakespeare for example, wrote in verse.

### GENRES

The genres of the period included history plays, which depicted English or European history – Shakespeare's plays **Richard III** and **Henry V** belong to this category, just as Christopher Marlowe's **Edward II** and George Peele's **Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First**. Tragedy was a very popular genre. Marlowe's tragedies were exceptionally popular, such as **Dr. Faustus** and **The Jew of Malta**. The audiences particularly liked revenge dramas, such as Thomas Kyd's **The Spanish Tragedy**. The four tragedies considered to be Shakespeare's greatest (**Hamlet**, **Othello**, **King Lear**, and **Macbeth**) are from this period, as well as many. Comedies were very common, too. A subgenre developed in this period was the city comedy, which dealt satirically with life in London after the fashion of Roman New Comedy. Examples are Thomas Dekker's **The Shoemaker's Holiday** and Thomas Middleton's **A Chaste Maid in Cheapside**. After 1610, the new hybrid subgenre of the tragicomedy emerged.

### PRINTED PLAYS

Only a minority of the plays of the Elizabethan period were printed. Of **John Heywood's** 220 plays noted above, only about 20 were published in book form. A little over 600 plays were published in the period as a



whole in individual quarto editions. Larger collected editions, like those of Shakespeare's, Ben Jonson's, and Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, were a late development. It was thought that play texts were popular items which provided healthy profits but they were not considered art the way we understand it, that is, in a Romantic way. Some of the most successful publishers of the English Renaissance, like William Ponsonby or Edward Blount, rarely published plays. A small number of plays from the era survived not in printed texts but in manuscript form.



**John Heywood** (c. 1497 – c. 1580) was an English writer known for his plays, poems, and collection of proverbs. Although he is best known as a playwright, he was also active as a musician and composer, though no works survive.



**Shakespeare in Love** is a 1998 British-American romantic comedy-drama film directed by John Madden, written by Marc Norman and playwright Tom Stoppard. The film depicts an imaginary love affair involving Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow) and playwright William Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) while he was writing *Romeo and Juliet*. Several characters are based on historical people, and many of the characters, lines, and plot devices to Shakespeare's plays. *Shakespeare in Love* won seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actress (Gwyneth Paltrow), and Best Supporting Actress (Judi Dench).

### CONCLUSÃO

The English Renaissance theatrical movement begins, according to the historians, around 1561, when there was a performance of **Gorboduc**, the first English play using blank verse, until 1642, when a ban on theatrical plays was enacted by the English Parliament, as soon. Before the sixteenth century, the Miracle (or Mystery) and Morality plays were among the earliest plays in medieval Europe. The label Elizabethan theatre is given by the literary historians to mean English Renaissance theatre. Thus, the literary period itself doesn't finish in 1603, with the death of the sovereign, but applies also to the theater produced during the Jacobean and Caroline periods. Under Elizabeth, however, the drama was a unified medium as a social cultural practice. The Court watched the same plays the commoners saw in the public playhouses. With the development of the private theatres, drama became more oriented towards the tastes and values of an upper-class audience. Shakespeare is undoubtedly the most important dramatist of the period. In one of his greatest tragedies, **Othello**, we are going to see how the issue of racism is dealt with.



### RESUMO

In this class, I hope we have learned something about the development of the English drama, since its first appearance during the Middle Ages until the Elizabethan Period. To begin with, we defined the Mystery (or Miracle) and Morality plays, which are among the earliest plays in medieval Europe. Then we summarized the main characteristics of the Elizabethan drama, as well as of the Elizabethan theater, in order to understand better the conditions of production and reception of the Elizabethan plays during that period. In doing so, we mentioned the main authors and works of the period, relating them to their respective contexts. We also classified, described and defined the main theatrical genres of the period, as well as printed production of those plays.

At the end of the class, as a way of introducing a practical activity related to the theme of the Elizabethan drama, we are going to read Othello – there are many versions and translations of the play, both in printed and online editions –, observing how the ethnic issues are dealt with by the characters – or by the author. Some passages in which the theme is emphasized were selected for you to analyze.



**Othello** is one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. It is believed to have been written in the year approximately 1603, and based on the short story *Un Capitano Moro* ("A Moorish Captain") by Cinthio, a disciple of Boccaccio, first published in 1565. The plot revolves around four central characters: Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army; his beloved wife, Desdemona; his loyal lieutenant, Cassio; and his trusted but unfaithful ensign, Iago. Because of its varied and current themes of love, jealousy, betrayal, revenge and repentance, Othello is still often performed in professional and community theatre alike and has been the basis for numerous operatic, film, and literary adaptations. Read the play (there are many printed and online editions of Othello, in English or in Portuguese) and then analyze these fragments below, trying to explain the issue of racism in the context of the play.

IAGO

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is tugging your hake ewe. Arise, arise;  
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,  
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.  
Arise I say! (1.1.9)

BRABANTIO

this is Venice;  
My house is not a grange.  
[...]

IAGO

Because we come to  
do you hakespe and you think we are ruffians, you'll  
have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;  
you'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have  
coursers for cousins and gennets for germans.  
[...]

I hakes, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter  
and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.  
you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;  
you'll have your nephews neigh to you. (1.1.7)

BRABANTIO

She, in spite of nature,  
Of years, of country, credit, every thing,  
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!  
It is a judgment maim'd and most imperfect  
That will confess perfection so could err  
Against all rules of nature, (1.3.6)

### COMENTÁRIO SOBRE AS ATIVIDADES

A intenção desta atividade é familiarizar o estudante com o texto shakespeariano e, ao mesmo tempo, inseri-lo no debate sobre racismo que a peça propõe. Há muitas versões da peça em português e em inglês. É importante lê-la na íntegra antes de responder a estas questões. As respostas poderão ser dadas em português.



### PRÓXIMA AULA

William Shakespeare visto pelos brasileiros

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**GLOSSÁRIO**

The Feast of **Corpus Christi** (Latin for Body of Christ), also known as Corpus Domini, is a Latin Rite liturgical solemnity celebrating the tradition and belief in the body and blood of Jesus Christ and his Real Presence in the Eucharist. It emphasizes the joy of the institution of the Eucharist, which was observed on Holy Thursday in the somber atmosphere of the nearness of Good Friday.

In contrast to the land-bound serfs, townspeople of the Middle Ages were free. Some engaged in commerce and formed groups known as merchant guilds. The majority, however, were small merchant-craftsmen, organized in **craft guilds** as masters (of highest accomplishment and status), journeymen (at a middle level), and apprentices (beginners). The medieval master was typically many things at once: a skilled workman himself; a foreman, supervising journeymen and apprentices; an employer; a buyer of raw or semifinished materials; and a seller of finished products. Because medieval craftsmen employed simple hand tools, a workman's own skill determined the quantity and quality of his output. Apprentices and journeymen underwent long periods of learning under the guidance of a more experienced workman. When he could produce a "masterpiece" that met the approval of the guild masters, the craftsman would gain full admission into the guild.

**The University Wits** is a phrase used to name a group of late 16th century English playwrights and pamphleteers who were educated at the universities (Oxford or Cambridge) and who became popular secular writers. Prominent members of this group were Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, and Thomas Nashe from Cambridge, and John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, George Peele from Oxford. Thomas Kyd is also sometimes included in the group, though he is not believed to have studied at university.