

A portrait of William Shakespeare, showing his face and shoulders. He has dark, wavy hair and a mustache. The background is a textured, blue-grey color. The text "Introduction to William Shakespeare" is overlaid in a bold, red, serif font, centered over the lower half of his face.

Introduction to William Shakespeare

Interesting Facts About William Shakespeare

- Probably the world's most famous poet playwright
- A writing genius
- Lived from 1564-1616 in the days of Queen Elizabeth I (the years of her rule are referred to as “The Elizabethan Age”)
- A Google search for “Shakespeare” returns over 51 million hits. In comparison, “Bieber” got the same, and “Twilight” got 71 million. “Del Monte” only got 21 million.
- There are only two authentic portraits of William today

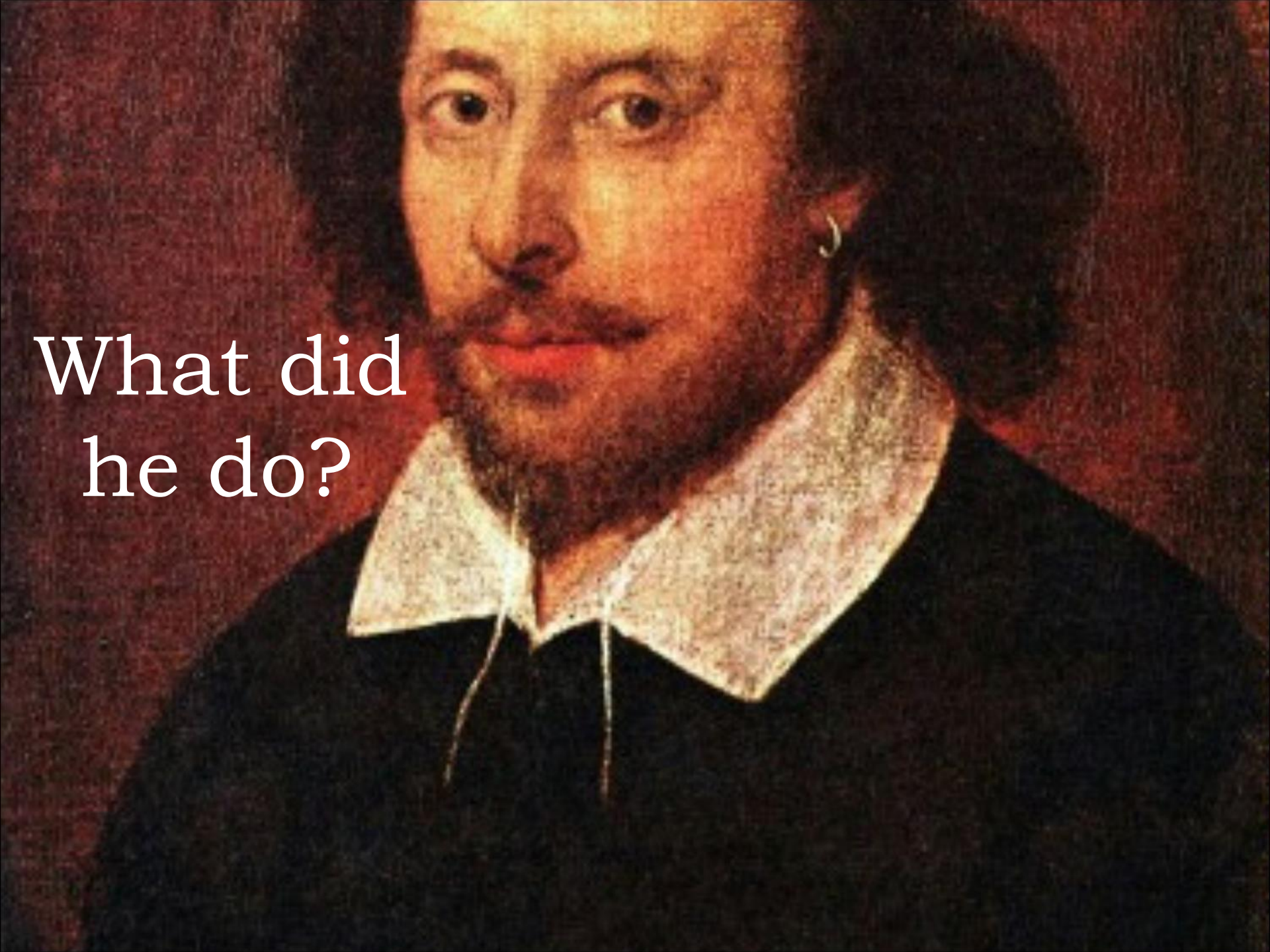


- Born April 23, 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon
- His family was “well-off” (father was a glovemaker and his mother inherited land)
- Probably attended free grammar school until he was 15, mainly studying Latin (read much mythology and ancient stories which he used as sources)
- Married Anne Hathaway in 1582 (she was 8 years older)
- Moved to London to be close to the theatres
- Had eight children, including daughter Susanna, twins Hamnet, Judith, and Edmund



- Shakespeare lived through the Black Death, an epidemic of bubonic plague that killed over 33,000 people in London in 1603 and later returned in 1608. The plague was spread by fleas and rats.
- Shakespeare was said to have enjoyed playing the part of the ghost in *Hamlet*.
- Suicide occurs an unlucky thirteen times in Shakespeare's plays.
- No one knows how Shakespeare died. Among the possibilities are kidney disease, murder most foul, and too much to drink.





What did
he do?

A Master of Words...

- Shakespeare's plays have a vocabulary of some 17,000 words, four times what a well-educated English speaker would have.
- Shakespeare used 29,066 different words out of 884,647 words in all.
- He also **invented** many words you and I use today:
 - puking
 - Undress
 - Arouse
 - Assassination
 - Luggage
 - Crocodile
 - Obscene
 - Outbreak
 - Addiction
 - cold-blooded
 - torture



A Master of Plays/Poems

- Shakespeare wrote at least 36 plays and 154 sonnets
- All were written for his company—the King's Men—who paid him about \$40/play
- He got his ideas from other plays, rather than from personal or London material
- Other playwrights of the era (e.g. Marlowe, Jonson, Kyd) were too close to Shakespeare to see his greatness—many criticized him for being unorthodox
- He “could take any kind of dross and turn it into **gold**”



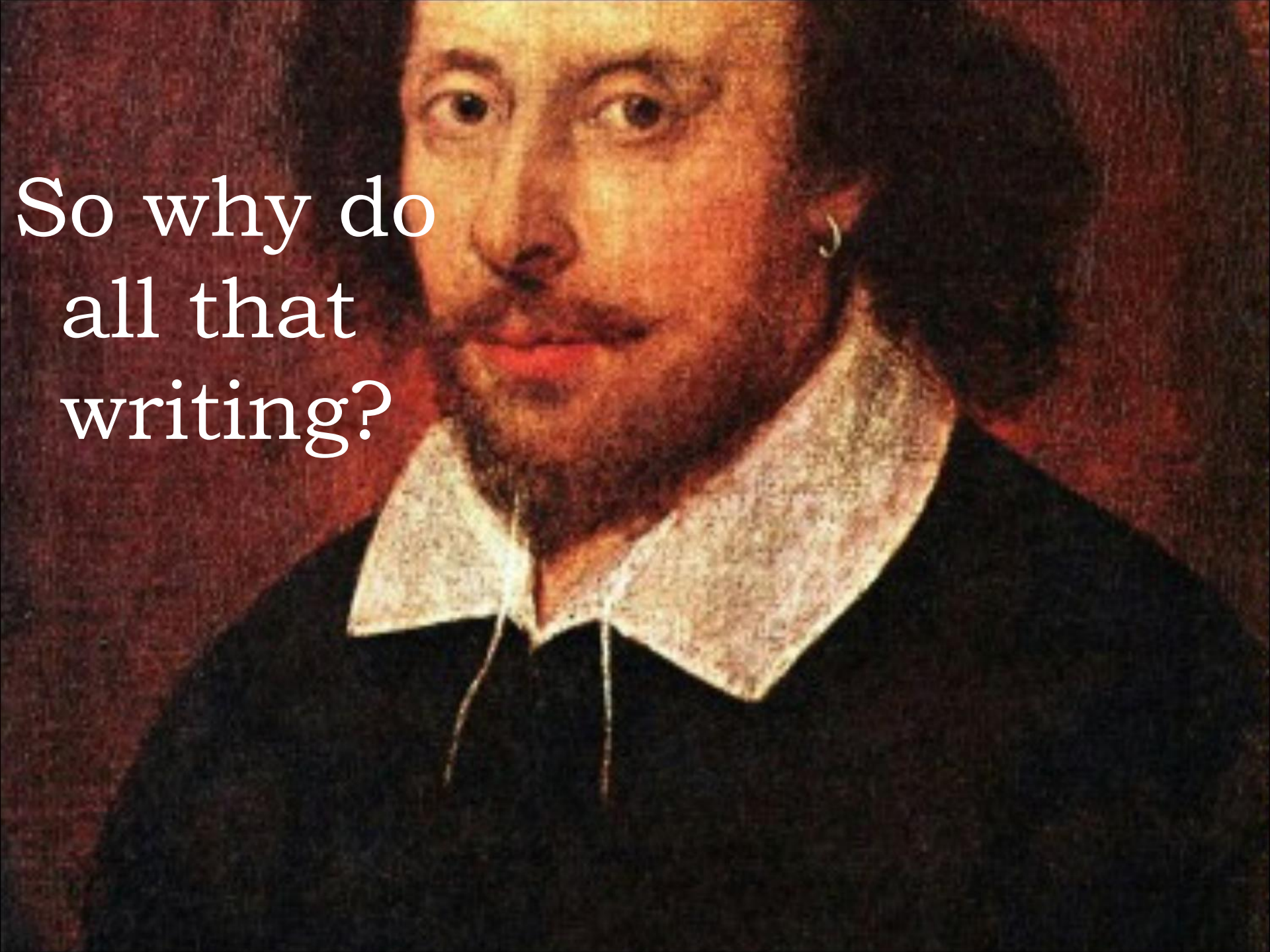
A Master of the Stage

An Elizabethan actor had to be skilled in:

- Fencing
- Tumbling
- Dancing
- Elocution
- Acting
- Music



So why do
all that
writing?



England at the Time

- In 1500, England had a relatively weak economy
- However, during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, England expanded in trade and economy
- Largely due to the implementation of mercantilism (sell at higher prices than you bought)
- By 1600, London was a busy, bustling walled city. It was having a Renaissance (re-birth) of arts and sciences under two monarchs who loved the theatre



Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603)

A liberal minded monarch who enjoyed the theatre and wrote plays for special performances.
Shakespeare gave 32 performances at her court during her reign



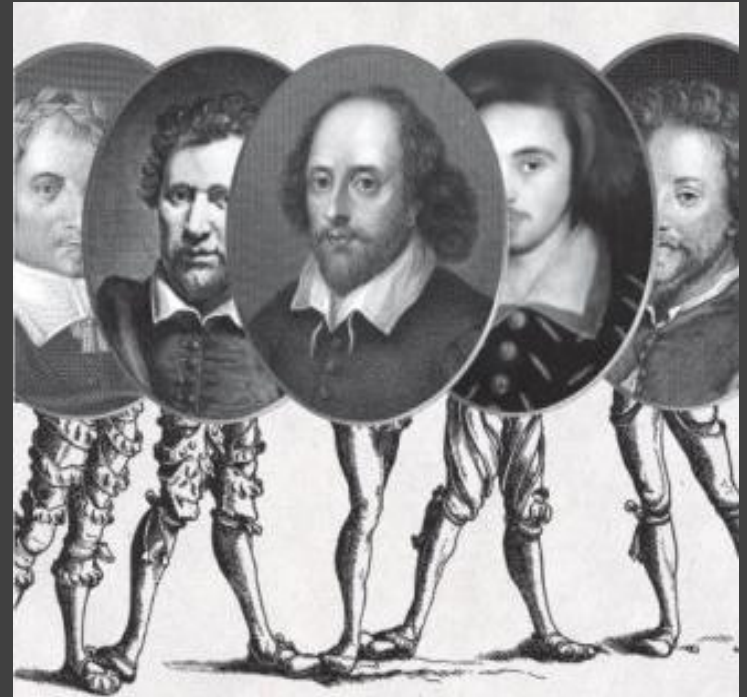
King James I (1603-1625)

Also wrote poems and plays. Saw many plays performed (at least half of them written by Shakespeare)



The Demand for Playwrights

- Extra wealth created a demand for entertainment
- Leads to fierce competition between rival playwrights and playhouse
- Shakespeare never published any of his plays (all published posthumously by fellow actors in 1623)
- William Shakespeare wrote to make a living



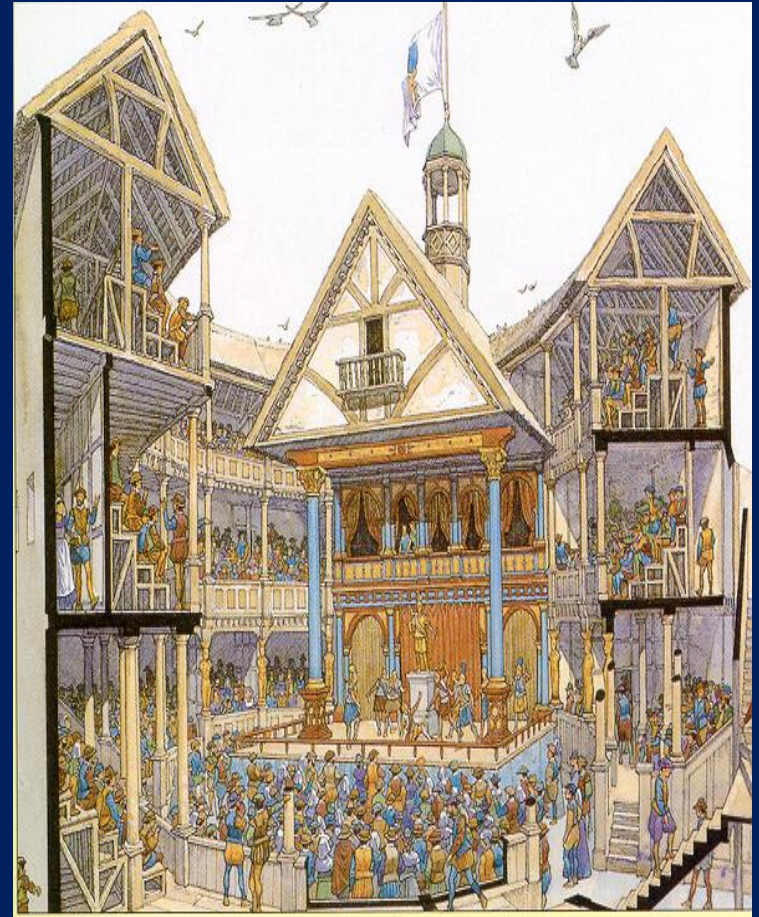
An Important Tangent

- **Bear baiting** was a popular form of entertainment in Shakespeare's time. A bloody sport, bear-baiting involved tying a bear to a post and letting dogs attack it.
- Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed bear-baiting and when Parliament tried to ban the practice, she over-ruled it.
- These festivals were held in oval shaped arenas...



The Globe Theatre

- Could hold up to 3000 people at a time
- The pit cost one penny where poor people (“the groundlings”) would stand, uncovered, in case of rain
- In the summer, groundlings were also called “stinkards” because of their smell (no toilets or heat)
- The “box seats” were covered sections where wealthy people would pay much more money to watch the performances
- The Elizabethan stage gave the playwright great freedom to create action, mood, locality or characterization

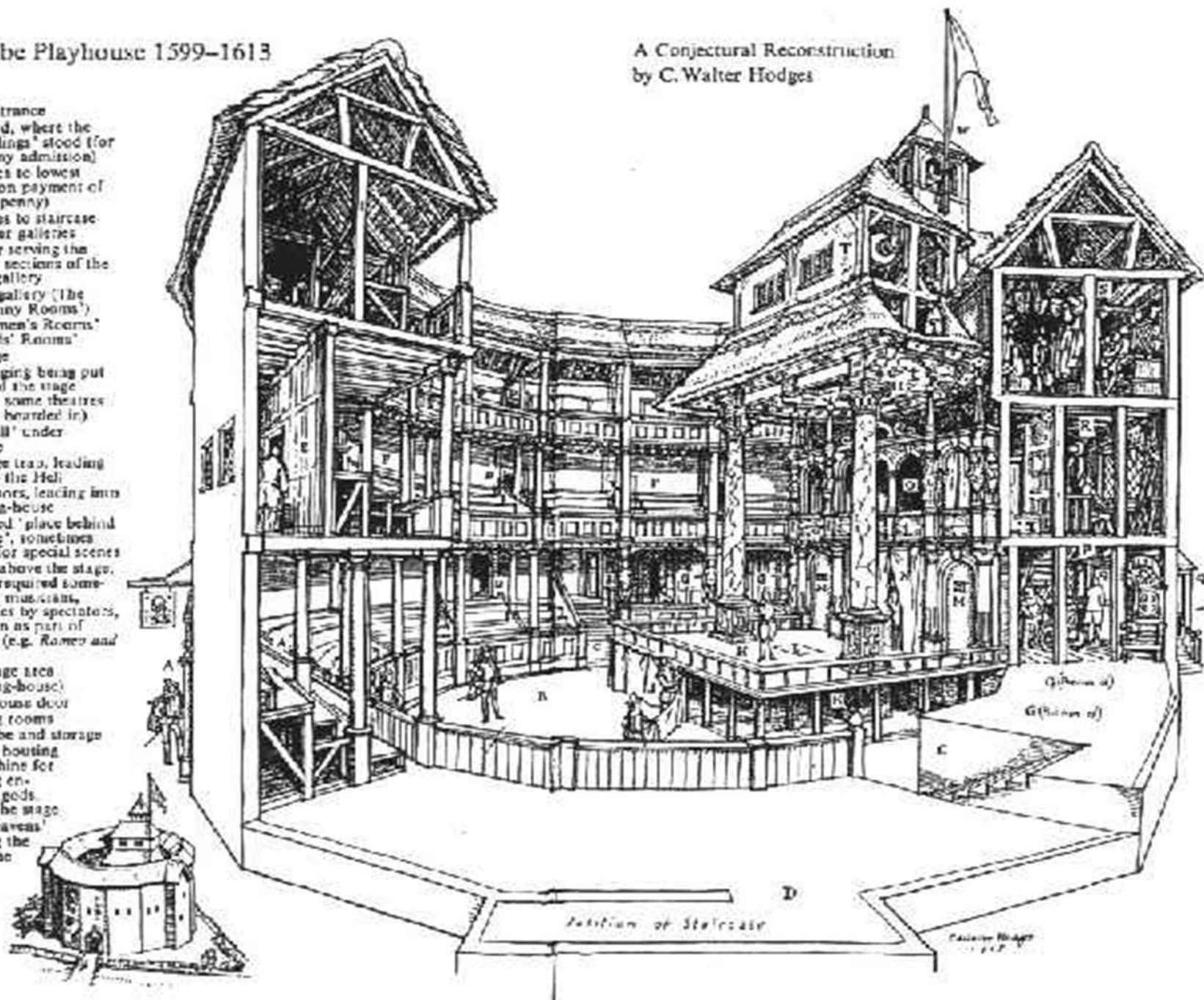


The Globe Playhouse 1599-1613

A Conjectural Reconstruction
by C. Walter Hodges

KEY

- AA Main entrance
- B The Yard, where the 'groundlings' stood (for one penny admission)
- CC Entrances to lowest gallery (on payment of another penny)
- D Entrances to staircase and upper galleries
- E Corridor serving the different sections of the middle gallery
- F Middle gallery (The 'Twopenny Rooms')
- G 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or 'Lords' Rooms'
- H The stage
- I The hanging being put up round the stage (N.B. In some theatres this was boarded in)
- K The 'Hell' under the stage
- L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
- MM Stage doors, leading into the tiring-house
- N Curtained 'place behind the stage', sometimes opened for special scenes
- O Gallery above the stage, used as required sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spectators, and often as part of the play (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*)
- P Back-stage area (the tiring-house)
- Q Tiring-house door
- R Dressing rooms
- S Wardrobe and storage
- T The hut housing the machine for lowering enthroned gods etc. to the stage
- U The 'Heavens'
- W Hoisting the playhouse flag







Features of the Globe

- A show lasted about 2.5 hours (usually in the afternoon to use natural lighting)
- No **ACTS** but frequent intermissions
- No **SCENERY**, but elaborate props and costumes gave reality
- No **ACTRESS**,—men or boys took parts of women, clowns, ghosts, witches
- No **PROGRAMS**
- Closeness of stage to audience led to use of “asides” and “soliloquies”
- Many **DEVICES** such as trap doors, scaffolds to produce or make disappear, tress, gods, etc

And lots for the audience

- Lots of **ACTION**—duels, murders, headless horsemen, drinking soldiers, clowns, ghosts, witches, and gods
- **PUNS, WIT, ASIDES, CONCEITS**
- **EVIL OVERCOME**, patriotism, earthly humour
- **NOISE**—music, shouting, sound effects







Andy Butterfield and Julia Motyka

Why so famous?

- His understanding of people
- His skill with words
- His sense of drama and what would please an audience
- The English language and the English theatre have never been the same since
- Everyone should know something about William Shakespeare



