

Elizabethan Age/Shakespeare

Elizabethan Age, in British history, is the time period (1558–1603) during which Queen [Elizabeth I](#) ruled [England](#). Popularly referred to as a “golden age,” it was a span of time characterized by relative peace and prosperity and by a flowering of artistic, literary, and [intellectual culture](#) to such a degree that it (along with the succeeding reign of [James I](#)) is sometimes designated as the “English [Renaissance](#).”

The main reason that Elizabeth’s rule is sometimes called the English Renaissance was the innovative, creative, and enduring artistic achievements of the age. Elizabeth had a reputation as a lover of the arts, especially music and theatre, and patronage from her and members of her court was the foundation of many English writers’ careers. The most famous of these writers is, of course, playwright and poet [William Shakespeare](#). Other writers who rose to prominence under Elizabeth included [Sir Philip Sidney](#), [Christopher Marlowe](#), [Roger Ascham](#), [Richard Hooker](#), [John Lyly](#), and [Edmund Spenser](#).

[Elizabethan women](#) had little or no control at all over their destinies. Typically, it was a male who made decisions for the Elizabethan era women without as much as a consultation with or affirmation from the women involved. The women of the Elizabethan era were given education only if they were members of the [nobility](#). Otherwise, they had to stay home and learn to run the household. For Elizabethan-era women of noble birth, [education](#) included knowledge of several languages, including Latin, Greek, Italian, and French. However, even noblewomen were not allowed to go to university and were only taught by tutors who visited them in their homes. Gender roles during the Elizabethan era were clearly defined, with men reigning superior over women. Men really had such significant influence over women. While a man went out to work, a woman at that time was only expected to keep the hearth – to stay at home and manage the household duties in the [family](#).

Marriage in the Elizabethan Era

Speaking of [Elizabethan marriage](#), women were also expected to provide a dowry, which could be any amount of money, goods, or property that was to be their contribution to the marriage. While marriage was a highly coveted state, especially among women of lower classes, not all Elizabethan-era women married. For single women at the time, the nunnery was a place suggested. However, When monasteries were dissolved, the only place for single women during the Elizabethan era was domestic service. All throughout their life, the women of the Elizabethan times were made to become dependent on a male relative – father, brother, uncle, husband, or other. Even religion dictated the fate of women, as the obedience of a woman to a man was greatly emphasized.

. They were permitted to write literature as long as it was suitable for women to read and could work as maids or cooks outside the home. Married women spent a considerable amount of time

pregnant, but high infant and child mortality rates kept families small. Their success at home as a caretaker and mother brought honor and respect to their husbands.

The Role of Men in Elizabethan Society Men had greater freedom and power during the Elizabethan era. They held all the professional jobs in fields such as medicine, law and politics. Men also performed all the roles in plays. Not only were men able to inherit property from their fathers; they also often received property from their wives' fathers when they agreed to marry. Although only men had the right to vote during this time period, this right extended only to men with certain social ranks.

A man had absolute authority over his family, and his wives and daughters had no choice but to obey him. He typically worked outside the home and had a social obligation to improve the standing of his family within society. Marriage was just as important to men as it was to women, as it made him the head of a household. This made him eligible for civic positions and additional opportunities within the community which gave him and his family greater prominence.

England at this time was a patriarchal society. Elizabethan family life for men was one of power. The father was the head of the household and not only his wife, but his children were to obey him.

Only fathers held all legal rights over the guardianship of their children, the mother had none. He had complete control over his family; they were considered his property to do as he pleased. In this male-centered society, women were thought to be of lesser status. A daughter always had to answer to her father, even into adulthood, if she was still single. Rather than being educated in schools or in their father's trade or business, girls were taught skills to help them run their own households and please their husbands.

It was expected that fathers choose their daughter's husbands for them. This usually had nothing to do with love, the basis for marriage today. Even though women were thought to be lesser, they did have value in this transaction. It was hoped that by marrying their daughters off, the man and his family would acquire more land, titles, and an increase in social status. For their part in this contract, he would provide a dowry for his daughter. This could include anything from money to land. The larger the dowry, the more desirable the girl was to her future husband and his family. Girls had little to no say in the matter and most likely did not meet their husbands until the wedding day.

Herbs and Plants

In Elizabethan England, herbs and plants were used as highly regarded in everyday life. Although, in modern times, the notion of potions and poisons made from plants is fantastical, In Shakespeare's time, they were ever present and inspired many aspects within his works. Many historians believe that herbs and plants were used extensively in an average Elizabethan, such as food, [medicine](#), and many other common uses in addition to the outlandish. While the use of herbs and plants may seem audacious now, back then, it seemed at the center of life, giving many people a longer life. Elizabethan England was dependent on herbs and plants.

Additionally, plants were of great importance when it came to history, both medical and theatrical.

Fate

In the Elizabethan era people strongly believed in superstition, fate, destiny and the wheel of fortune. People believed they had no influence in their life as everything was already planned out.

It was believed that one's fate was determined by the stars and God had planned your destiny before hand. The word coincidence was not even used in this time. Everything was a plan and it was predetermined.

Most Elizabethans believed the stars and planets held some kind of power over the 'baser side' of man, and were to be used as tools of God, but they did not believe the stars held power over the supreme side of man--the immortal part. Thus, man had free will and could overcome his fate by choosing good; the stars couldn't force him to do anything.

Other people believed in fate but a "fate by free will." This was the belief that people made different decisions that could lead to their destiny. One well known person who agreed with this belief included William Shakespeare.

This concept of fate eliminated a person's ability to control his own destiny. Shakespearean tragedies such as "Macbeth" and "King Lear" make use of this concept of fate to dramatize the eventual fall of a character. In the play "Macbeth," the main character is a victim of the wheel of fate as he rises to a position of political power and then falls into ruin and eventually dies. In "King Lear," the Earl of Kent also holds a position of power but is eventually banished by the king. The Earl returns to Kent as a beggar, symbolizing his turn upon the wheel.

Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (baptized April 26, 1564, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, Eng.—died April 23, 1616, Stratford-upon-Avon), English poet and playwright, often considered the greatest writer in world literature.

Shakespeare spent his early life in Stratford-upon-Avon, receiving at most a grammar-school education, and at age 18, he married a local woman, Anne Hathaway. By 1594, he was apparently a rising playwright in London and an actor in a leading theatre company, the Lord [Chamberlain's Men](#) (later King's Men); the company performed at the [Globe Theatre](#) from 1599.

The order in which Shakespeare's plays were written and performed is highly uncertain. His earliest plays seem to date from the late 1580s to the mid-1590s and include the comedies *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, history plays based on the lives of the English kings,

including *Henry VI* (parts 1, 2, and 3), *Richard III*, and *Richard II*; and the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

The plays apparently written between 1596 and 1600 are mostly comedies, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *As You Like It*, and histories, including *Henry IV* (parts 1 and 2), *Henry V*, and *Julius Caesar*.

Approximately between 1600 and 1607 he wrote the comedies *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, as well as the great tragedies *Hamlet* (probably begun in 1599), *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, which mark the summit of his art.

Among his later works (about 1607 to 1614) are the tragedies *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*, as well as the fantastical romances *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

He probably also collaborated on the plays *Edward III* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In 2010 a case was made for Shakespeare as the coauthor (with John Fletcher) of *Double Falsehood*.

Shakespeare's plays, all of them written largely in iambic pentameter verse, are marked by extraordinary poetry, vivid, subtle, and complex characterizations, and a highly inventive use of English. His 154 sonnets, published in 1609 but apparently written mostly in the 1590s, often express strong feelings within an exquisitely controlled form.

Shakespeare retired to Stratford before 1610 and lived as a country gentleman until his death. The first collected edition of his plays, or First Folio, was published in 1623. As with most writers of the time, little is known about his life and work, and other writers, particularly the 17th Earl of Oxford, have frequently been proposed as the actual authors of his plays and poems.

Globe Theatre, London Theatre, in which the plays of [William Shakespeare](#) were performed after 1599. It was built by two brothers, Cuthbert and Richard Burbage; half the shares were kept by the Burbage, and the rest were assigned equally to Shakespeare and other members of the [Chamberlain's Men](#). The wooden theatre, built in the shape of an O with no roof over the central area, was destroyed by fire in 1613, rebuilt in 1614, and finally pulled down in 1644. Reconstructed (beginning in 1987) near the site of the original theatre, the new Globe Theatre inaugurated its first regular season in 1996.
