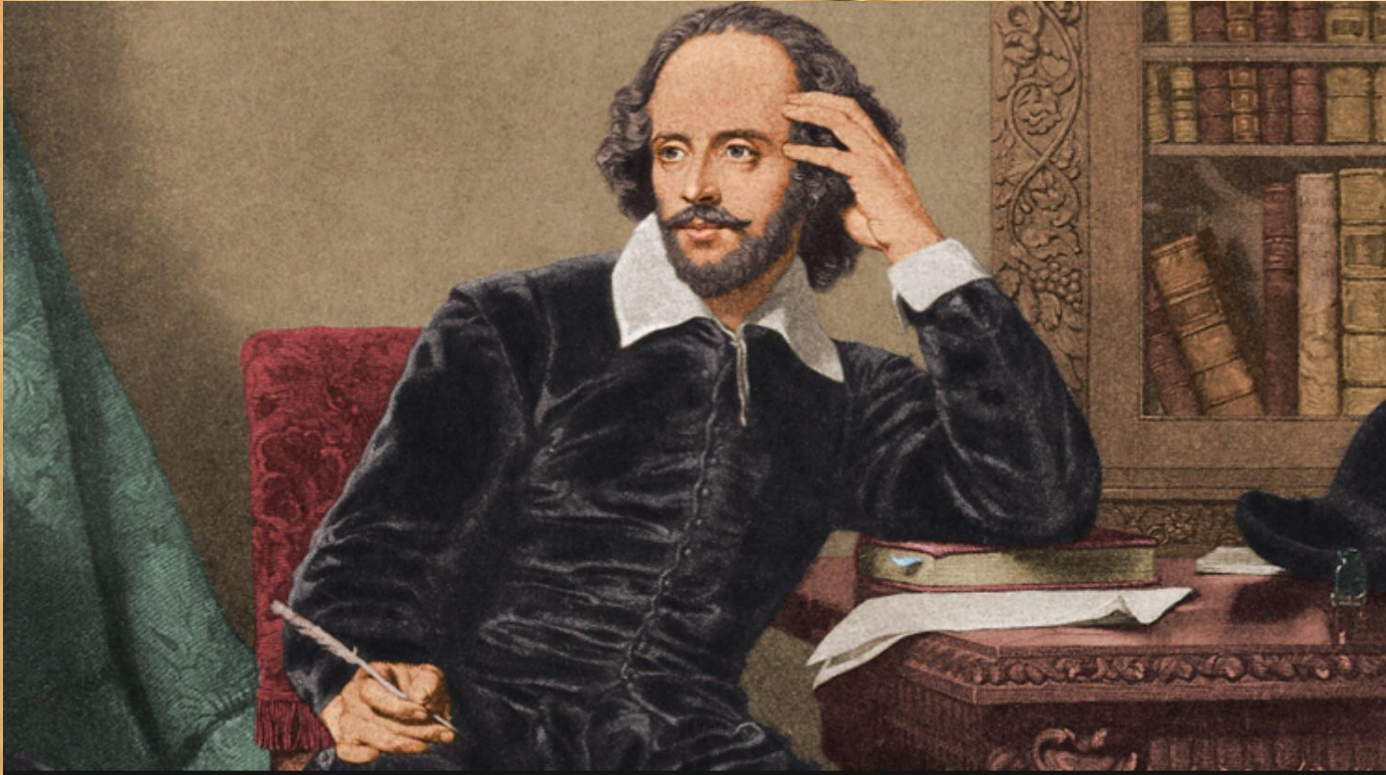
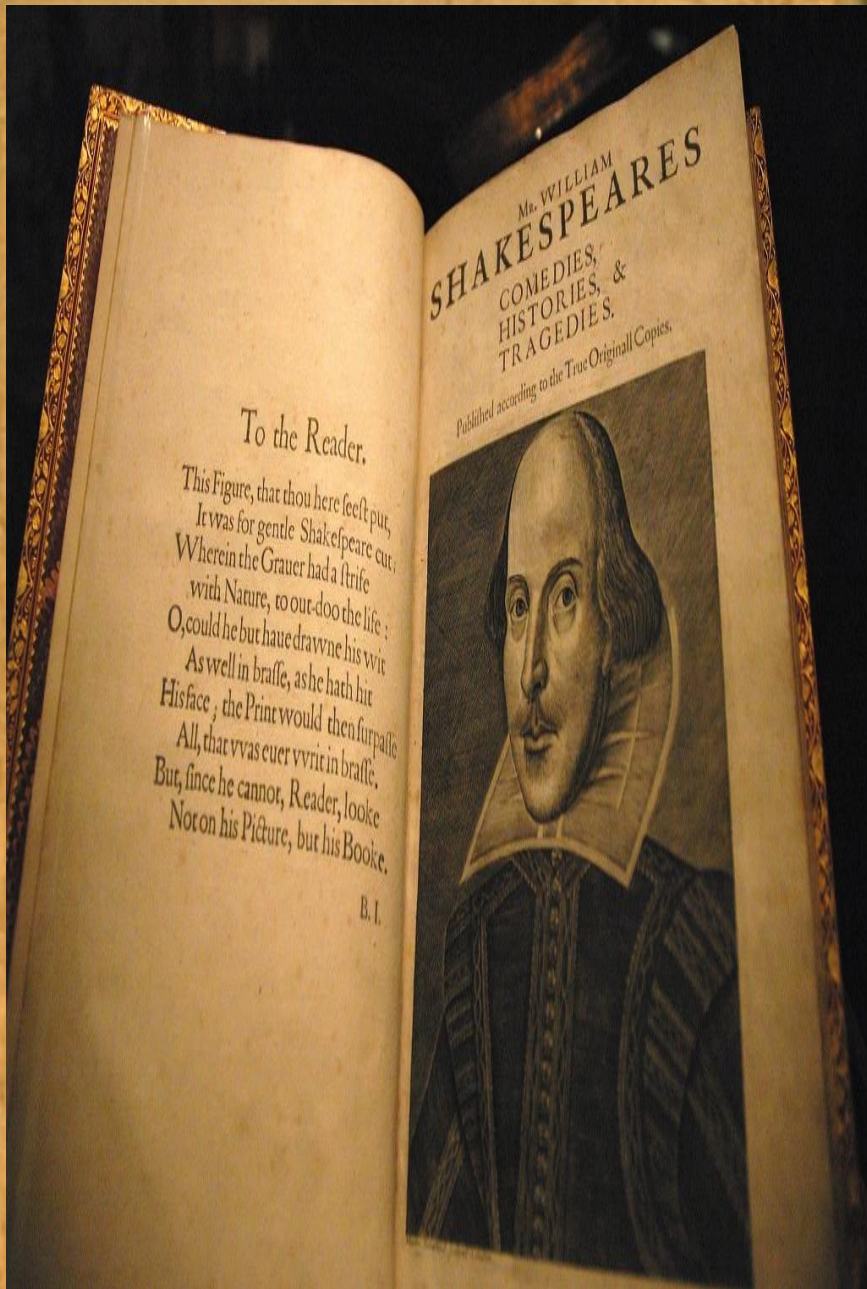


ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE, AND ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN
MERELY PLAYERS.



- **William Shakespeare (26 April 1564 (baptised) – 23 April 1616)^[nb 1] was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.^[2] He is often called England's national poet, and the "Bard of Avon".^{[3][3][nb 2]} His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays,^[nb 3] 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.^[4]**
- **Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, which has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, and religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others^[5]**

- **Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613.^{[6][6][nb 4]} His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, and these are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth, considered some of the finest works in the English language.^[2] In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.**
- **Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, however, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published a more definitive text known as the First Folio, a posthumous collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's.^[7] It was prefaced with a poem by Ben Jonson, in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time".^[7] In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular, and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.**
- **In 2016, the 400th anniversary of the playwright's death celebrations will commence**




Born	Baptised 26 April 1564 (birth date unknown) Stratford-upon-Avon Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, West Midlands Stratford-upon-Avon.
	Warwickshire, West Midlands, England
Died	23 April 1616 (aged 52) Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England
Occupation	Playwright, poet, actor
Period	English Renaissance English Renaissance, Elizabethan Era
Spouse	Anne Hathaway (m. 1582–1616)
Children	Susanna Hall Hamnet Shakespeare Judith Quiney
	<i>William Shakespeare</i>

Early life.



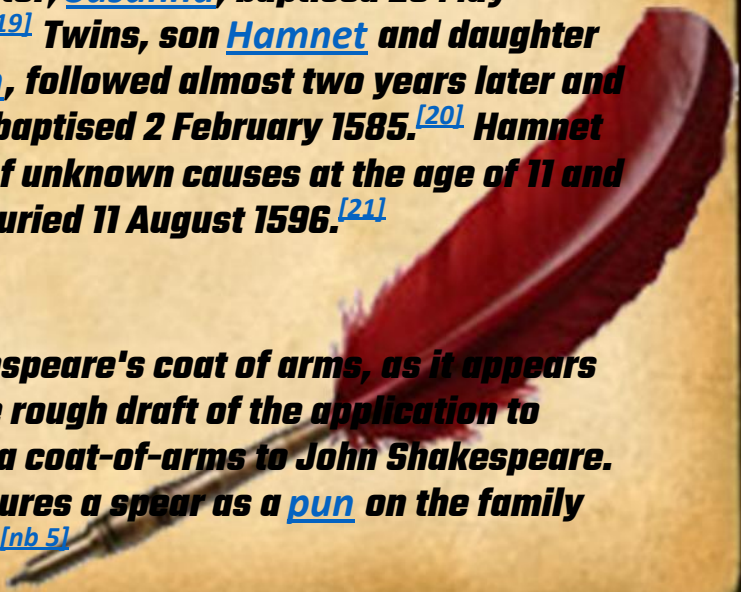
- **William Shakespeare was the son of [John Shakespeare](#), an [alderman](#) and a successful glover originally from [Snitterfield](#), and [Mary Arden](#), the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer.^[9] He was born in [Stratford-upon-Avon](#) and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, [Saint George's Day](#).^[10] This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died 23 April 1616.^[11] He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.^[12]**

- **Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the [King's New School](#) in Stratford,^[13] a free school chartered in 1553,^[14] about a quarter-mile (400 m) from his home. [Grammar schools](#) varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar: the basic [Latin](#) text was standardised by royal decree,^[15] and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin [classical](#) authors.^[16]**

- 
- **[John Shakespeare's house](#), believed to be [Shakespeare's birthplace](#), in [Stratford-upon-Avon](#).**

- **At the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old [Anne Hathaway](#). The [consistory court](#) of the [Diocese of Worcester](#) issued a marriage licence on 27 November 1582. The next day, two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage.^[17] The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste, since the Worcester [chancellor](#) allowed the [marriage banns](#) to be read once instead of the usual three times,^[18] and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, [Susanna](#), baptised 26 May 1583.^[19] Twins, son [Hamnet](#) and daughter [Judith](#), followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585.^[20] Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.^[21]**

- **Shakespeare's coat of arms, as it appears on the rough draft of the application to grant a coat-of-arms to John Shakespeare. It features a spear as a [pun](#) on the family name.^[nb 5]**



- **After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the 'complaints bill' of a law case before the Queen's Bench court at Westminster dated [Michaelmas Term 1588](#) and 9 October 1589.^[22] Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years".^[23] Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many [apocryphal](#) stories. [Nicholas Rowe](#), Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer [poaching](#) in the estate of local squire [Thomas Lucy](#). Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him.^[24] Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London.^[25] [John Aubrey](#) reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster.^[26] Some 20th-century scholars have suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of [Lancashire](#), a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshafte" in his will.^[27] Little evidence substantiates such stories other than [hearsay](#) collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area.^[28]**



The Armorial Bearings of
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
of Stratford-upon-Avon.

College of Arms,
London.

J. H. Hulton-Anderson
Chester Herald
and Registrar.

London and theatrical career.

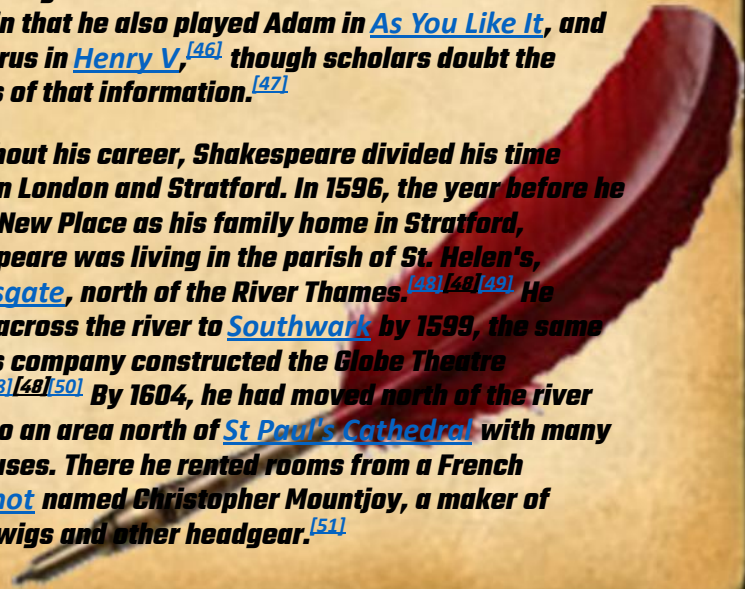


- *It is not known definitively when Shakespeare began writing, but contemporary allusions and records of performances show that several of his plays were on the London stage by 1592.^[30] By then, he was sufficiently known in London to be attacked in print by the playwright [Robert Greene](#) in his [Groats-Worth of Wit](#):*
- *... there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.^[31]*
- *Scholars differ on the exact meaning of Greene's words,^[32] but most agree that Greene is accusing Shakespeare of reaching above his rank in trying to match such university-educated writers as [Christopher Marlowe](#), [Thomas Nashe](#) and Greene himself (the so-called "[university wits](#)").^[33] The italicised phrase parodying the line "Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" from Shakespeare's [Henry VI, Part 3](#), along with the pun "Shake-scene", clearly identify Shakespeare as Greene's target. As used here, [Johannes Factotum](#) ("Jack of all trades") refers to a second-rate tinkerer with the work of others, rather than the*

- **Greene's attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare's work in the theatre. Biographers suggest that his career may have begun any time from the mid-1580s, to just before Greene's remarks.^[35] After 1594, Shakespeare's plays were performed only by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company owned by a group of players, including Shakespeare, that soon became the leading playing company in London.^[36] After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the company was awarded a royal patent by the new King James I, and changed its name to the King's Men.^[37]**
- **In 1599, a partnership of members of the company built their own theatre on the south bank of the River Thames, which they named the Globe. In 1608, the partnership also took over the Blackfriars indoor theatre. Extant records of Shakespeare's property purchases and investments indicate that his association with the company made him a wealthy man,^[38] and in 1597 he bought the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place, and in 1605, invested in a share of the parish tithes in Stratford.^[39]**



- **Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions beginning in 1594, and by 1598, his name had become a selling point and began to appear on the title pages.^[40] Shakespeare continued to act in his own and other plays after his success as a playwright. The 1616 edition of Ben Jonson's Works names him on the cast lists for Every Man in His Humour (1598) and Sejanus His Fall (1603).^[41] The absence of his name from the 1605 cast list for Jonson's Volpone is taken by some scholars as a sign that his acting career was nearing its end.^[42] The First Folio of 1623, however, lists Shakespeare as one of "the Principal Actors in all these Plays", some of which were first staged after Volpone, although we cannot know for certain which roles he played.^[43] In 1610, John Davies of Hereford wrote that "good Will" played "kingly" roles.^[44] In 1709, Rowe passed down a tradition that Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father.^[45] Later traditions maintain that he also played Adam in As You Like It, and the Chorus in Henry V,^[46] though scholars doubt the sources of that information.^[47]**
- **Throughout his career, Shakespeare divided his time between London and Stratford. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, Shakespeare was living in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, north of the River Thames.^{[48][49][50]} He moved across the river to Southwark by 1599, the same year his company constructed the Globe Theatre there.^{[48][49][50]} By 1604, he had moved north of the river again, to an area north of St Paul's Cathedral with many fine houses. There he rented rooms from a French Huquenot named Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear.^[51]**



Plays.



Most playwrights of the period typically collaborated with others at some point, and critics agree that Shakespeare did the same, mostly early and late in his career.^[84] Some attributions, such as [Titus Andronicus](#) and the early history plays, remain controversial, while [The Two Noble Kinsmen](#) and the lost [Cardenio](#) have well-attested contemporary documentation. Textual evidence also supports the view that several of the plays were revised by other writers after their original composition.

The first recorded works of Shakespeare are [Richard III](#) and the three parts of [Henry VI](#), written in the early 1590s during a vogue for historical drama. Shakespeare's plays are difficult to date, however,^[85] and studies of the texts suggest that [Titus Andronicus](#), [The Comedy of Errors](#), [The Taming of the Shrew](#) and [The Two Gentlemen of Verona](#) may also belong to Shakespeare's earliest period.^[86] His first [histories](#), which draw heavily on the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's [Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland](#),^[87] dramatise the destructive results of weak or corrupt rule and have been interpreted as a justification for the origins of the [Tudor dynasty](#).^[88] The early plays were influenced by the works of other Elizabethan dramatists, especially [Thomas Kyd](#) and [Christopher Marlowe](#), by the traditions of medieval drama, and by the plays of [Seneca](#).^[89] The [Comedy of Errors](#) was also based on classical models, but no source for [The Taming of the Shrew](#) has been found, though it is related to a separate play of the same name and may have derived from a folk story.^[90] Like [The Two Gentlemen of Verona](#), in which two friends appear to approve of rape,^[91] the [Shrew's](#) story of the taming of a woman's independent spirit by a man sometimes troubles modern critics and directors.^[92]

- **Shakespeare's early classical and Italianate comedies, containing tight double plots and precise comic sequences, give way in the mid-1590s to the romantic atmosphere of his most acclaimed comedies.**^[93] **A Midsummer Night's Dream is a witty mixture of romance, fairy magic, and comic lowlife scenes.**^[94] **Shakespeare's next comedy, the equally romantic Merchant of Venice, contains a portrayal of the vengeful Jewish moneylender Shylock, which reflects Elizabethan views but may appear derogatory to modern audiences.**^[95] **The wit and wordplay of Much Ado About Nothing,**^[96] **the charming rural setting of As You Like It, and the lively merrymaking of Twelfth Night complete Shakespeare's sequence of great comedies.**^[97] **After the lyrical Richard II, written almost entirely in verse, Shakespeare introduced prose comedy into the histories of the late 1590s, Henry IV, parts 1 and 2, and Henry V. His characters become more complex and tender as he switches deftly between comic and serious scenes, prose and poetry, and achieves the narrative variety of his mature work.**^[98] **This period begins and ends with two tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, the famous romantic tragedy of sexually charged adolescence, love, and death,**^[99] **and Julius Caesar—based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's Parallel Lives—which introduced a new kind of drama.**^[100] **According to Shakespearean scholar James Shapiro, in Julius Caesar "the various strands of politics, character, inwardness, contemporary events, even Shakespeare's own reflections on the act of writing, began to infuse each other"**^[101]

- **In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the so-called "problem plays" Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, and All's Well That Ends Well and a number of his best known tragedies.**^[102] **Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies represent the peak of his art. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, Hamlet, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy which begins "To be or not to be; that is the question".**^[103] **Unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is hesitation, the heroes of the tragedies that followed, Othello and King Lear, are undone by hasty errors of judgement.**^[104] **The plots of Shakespeare's tragedies often hinge on such fatal errors or flaws, which overturn order and destroy the hero and those he loves.**^[105] **In Othello, the villain Iago stokes Othello's sexual jealousy to the point where he murders the innocent wife who loves him.**^[106] **In King Lear, the old king commits the tragic error of giving up his powers, initiating the events which lead to the torture and blinding of the Earl of Gloucester and the murder of Lear's youngest daughter Cordelia. According to the critic Frank Kermode, "the play-offers neither its good characters nor its audience any relief from its cruelty"**^[107] **In Macbeth, the shortest and most compressed of Shakespeare's tragedies,**^[108] **uncontrollable ambition incites Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, to murder the rightful king and usurp the throne, until their own guilt destroys them in turn.**^[109] **In this play, Shakespeare adds a supernatural element to the tragic structure. His last major tragedies, Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus, contain some of Shakespeare's finest poetry and were considered his most successful tragedies by the poet and critic T. S. Eliot.**^[110]

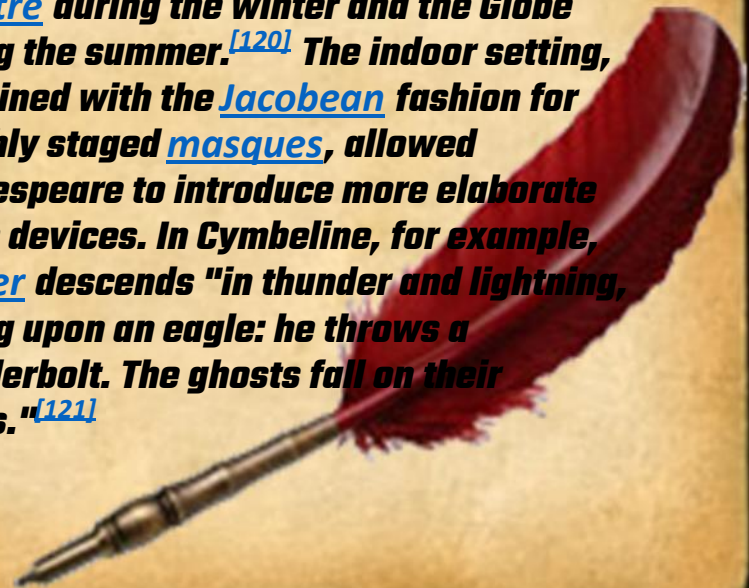
- **In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy and completed three more major plays: Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, as well as the collaboration, Pericles, Prince of Tyre. Less bleak than the tragedies, these four plays are graver in tone than the comedies of the 1590s, but they end with reconciliation and the forgiveness of potentially tragic errors.^[111] Some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day.^[112] Shakespeare collaborated on two further surviving plays, Henry VIII and The Two Noble Kinsmen, probably with John Fletcher.^[113]**



Performances.

- ***It is not clear for which companies Shakespeare wrote his early plays. The title page of the 1594 edition of Titus Andronicus reveals that the play had been acted by three different troupes.^[114] After the plagues of 1592–3, Shakespeare's plays were performed by his own company at The Theatre and the Curtain in Shoreditch, north of the Thames.^[115] Londoners flocked there to see the first part of Henry IV, Leonard Digges recording, "Let but Falstaff come, Hal, Poins, the rest ... and you scarce shall have a room".^[116] When the company found themselves in dispute with their landlord, they pulled The Theatre down and used the timbers to construct the Globe Theatre, the first playhouse built by actors for actors, on the south bank of the Thames at Southwark.^[117] The Globe opened in autumn 1599, with Julius Caesar one of the first plays staged. Most of Shakespeare's greatest post-1599 plays were written for the Globe, including Hamlet, Othello and King Lear.^[118]***

- ***After the Lord Chamberlain's Men were renamed the King's Men in 1603, they entered a special relationship with the new King James. Although the performance records are patchy, the King's Men performed seven of Shakespeare's plays at court between 1 November 1604 and 31 October 1605, including two performances of The Merchant of Venice.^[119] After 1608, they performed at the indoor Blackfriars Theatre during the winter and the Globe during the summer.^[120] The indoor setting, combined with the Jacobean fashion for lavishly staged masques, allowed Shakespeare to introduce more elaborate stage devices. In Cymbeline, for example, Jupiter descends "in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle: he throws a thunderbolt. The ghosts fall on their knees."^[121]***



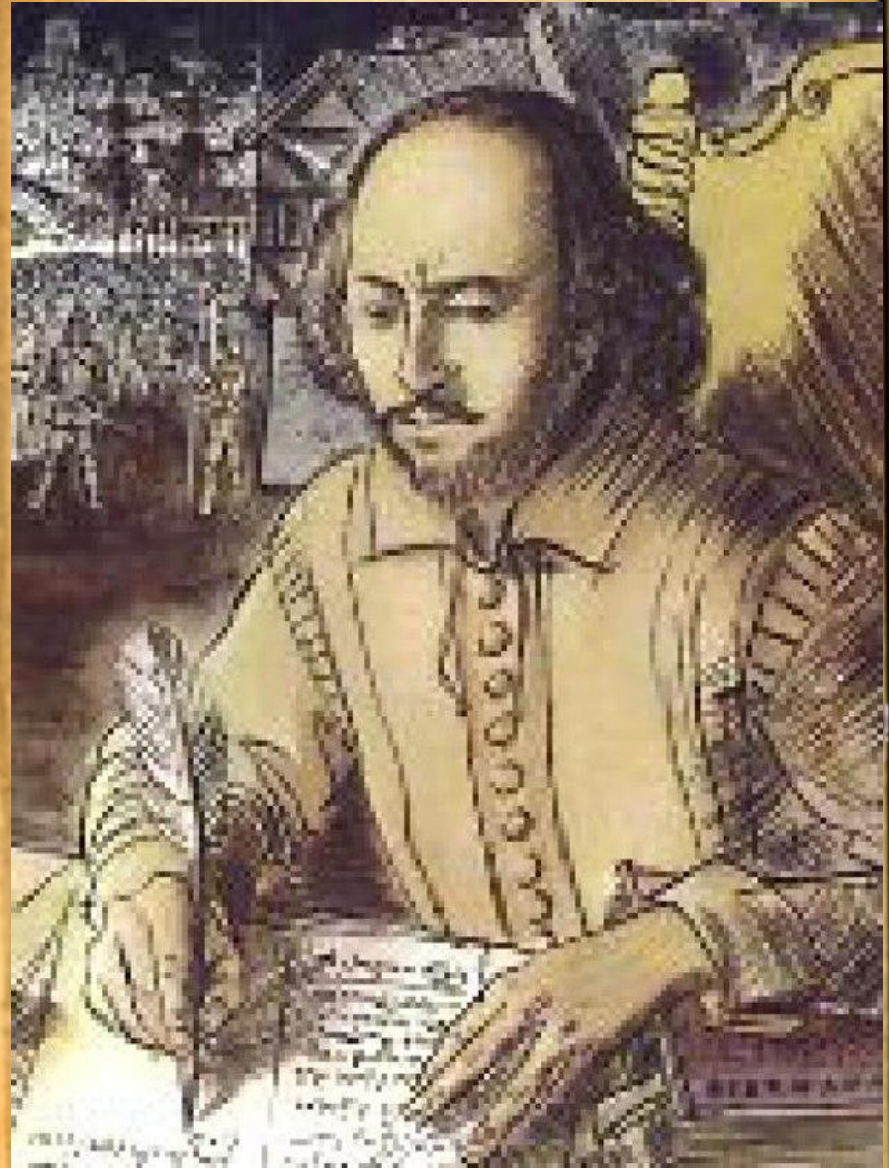
- **The actors in Shakespeare's company included the famous [Richard Burbage](#), [William Kempe](#), [Henry Condell](#) and [John Heminges](#). Burbage played the leading role in the first performances of many of Shakespeare's plays, including *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*.^[122] The popular comic actor Will Kempe played the servant Peter in *Romeo and Juliet* and [Dogberry](#) in *Much Ado About Nothing*, among other characters.^[123] He was replaced around 1600 by [Robert Armin](#), who played roles such as [Touchstone](#) in *As You Like It* and the fool in *King Lear*.^[124] In 1613, Sir [Henry Wotton](#) recorded that Henry VIII "was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and ceremony".^[125] On 29 June, however, a cannon set fire to the thatch of the Globe and burned the theatre to the ground, an event which pinpoints the date of a Shakespeare play with rare precision.^[125]**



Textual sources.

- In 1623, [John Heminges](#) and [Henry Condell](#), two of Shakespeare's friends from the King's Men, published the [First Folio](#), a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays. It contained 36 texts, including 18 printed for the first time.^[126] Many of the plays had already appeared in [quarto](#) versions—flimsy books made from sheets of paper folded twice to make four leaves.^[127] No evidence suggests that Shakespeare approved these editions, which the First Folio describes as "stol'n and surreptitious copies".^[128] [Alfred Pollard](#) termed some of them "[bad quartos](#)" because of their adapted, paraphrased or garbled texts, which may in places have been reconstructed from memory.^[129] Where several versions of a play survive, each [differs from the other](#). The differences may stem from copying or [printing](#) errors, from notes by actors or audience members, or from Shakespeare's own [papers](#).^[130] In some cases, for example *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Othello*, Shakespeare could have revised the texts between the quarto and folio editions. In the case of [King Lear](#), however, while most modern editions do conflate them, the 1623 folio version is so different from the 1608 quarto that the Oxford Shakespeare prints them both, arguing that they cannot be conflated without

^[131]



Poems.

- **In 1593 and 1594, when the theatres were closed because of plague, Shakespeare published two narrative poems on erotic themes, Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece. He dedicated them to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. In Venus and Adonis, an innocent Adonis rejects the sexual advances of Venus; while in The Rape of Lucrece, the virtuous wife Lucrece is raped by the lustful Tarquin.^[132] Influenced by Ovid's Metamorphoses,^[133] the poems show the guilt and moral confusion that result from uncontrolled lust.^[134] Both proved popular and were often reprinted during Shakespeare's lifetime. A third narrative poem, A Lover's Complaint, in which a young woman laments her seduction by a persuasive suitor, was printed in the first edition of the Sonnets in 1609. Most scholars now accept that Shakespeare wrote A Lover's Complaint. Critics consider that its fine qualities are marred by leaden effects.^[135] The Phoenix and the Turtle, printed in Robert Chesebrough's 1601 Love's Martyr, mourns the deaths of the legendary phoenix and his lover, the faithful turtle dove. In 1599, two early drafts of sonnets 138 and 144 appeared in The Passionate Pilgrim, published under Shakespeare's name but**

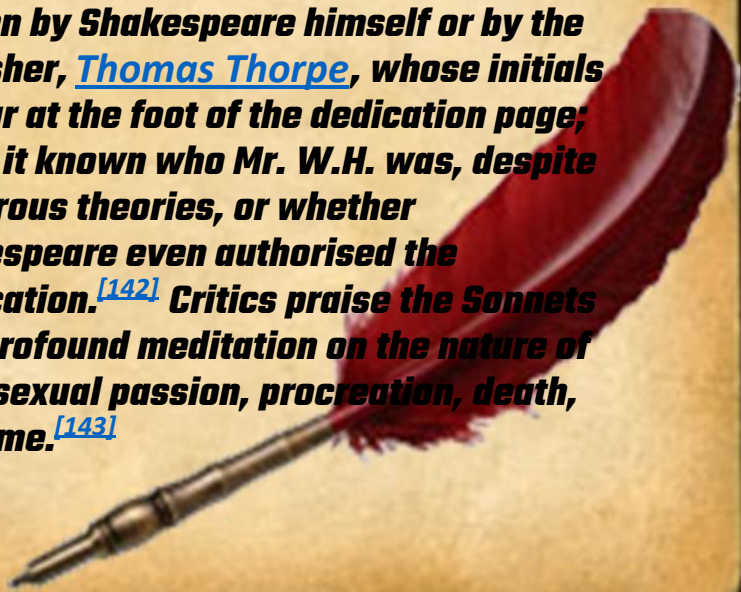
^[136]



Sonnets.

- **Published in 1609, the [Sonnets](#) were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership.^[137] Even before the two unauthorised sonnets appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599, [Francis Meres](#) had referred in 1598 to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends".^[138] Few analysts believe that the published collection follows Shakespeare's intended sequence.^[139] He seems to have planned two contrasting series: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one about conflicted love for a fair young man (the "fair youth"). It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals, or if the authorial "I" who addresses them represents Shakespeare himself, though [Wordsworth](#) believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his heart".^[140]**

- **"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate ..."**
- **—Lines from Shakespeare's [Sonnet 18](#).^[141]**
- **The 1609 edition was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.", credited as "the only begetter" of the poems. It is not known whether this was written by Shakespeare himself or by the publisher, [Thomas Thorpe](#), whose initials appear at the foot of the dedication page; nor is it known who Mr. W.H. was, despite numerous theories, or whether Shakespeare even authorised the publication.^[142] Critics praise the Sonnets as a profound meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time.^[143]**



Style.

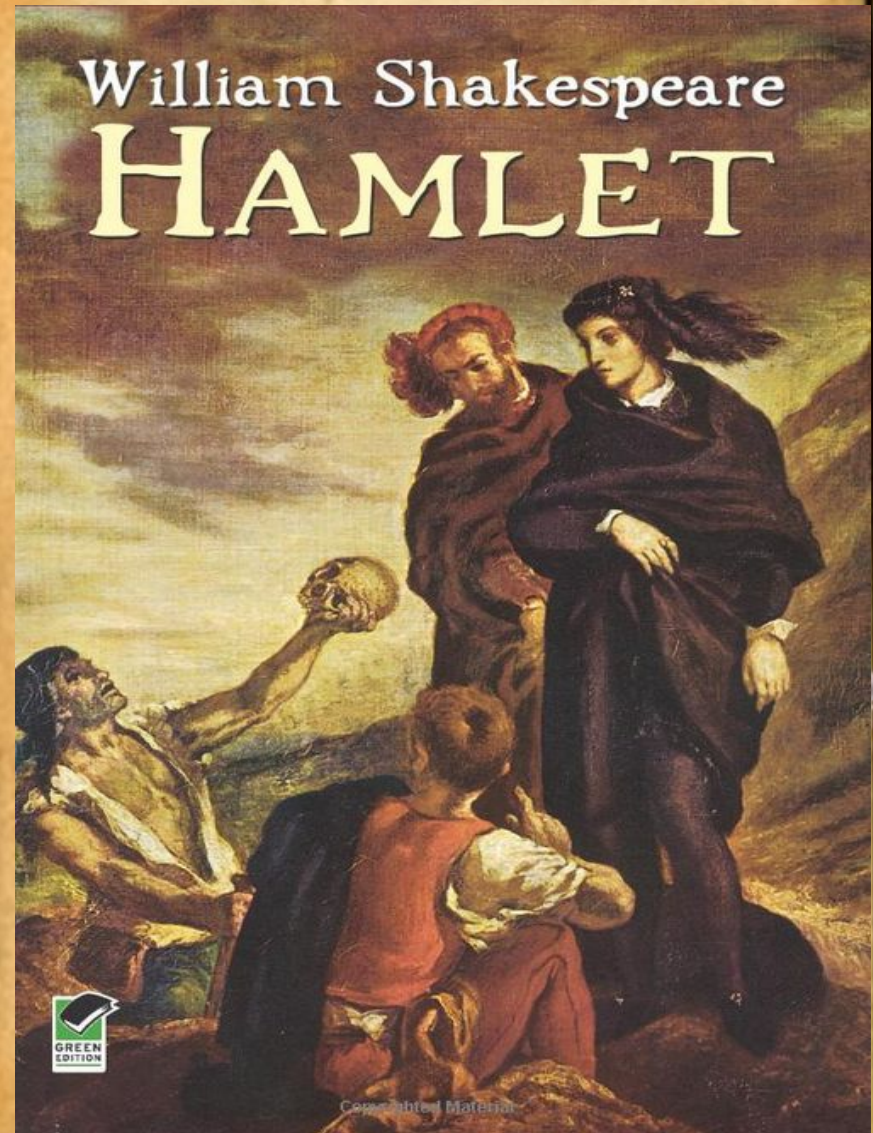
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- **Shakespeare's first plays were written in the conventional style of the day. He wrote them in a stylised language that does not always spring naturally from the needs of the characters or the drama.**^[144] **The poetry depends on extended, sometimes elaborate metaphors and conceits, and the language is often rhetorical—written for actors to declaim rather than speak. The grand speeches in [Titus Andronicus](#), in the view of some critics, often hold up the action, for example; and the verse in [The Two Gentlemen of Verona](#) has been described as stilted.**^[145]
- **Soon, however, Shakespeare began to adapt the traditional styles to his own purposes. The opening [soliloquy](#) of [Richard III](#) has its roots in the self-declaration of [Vice](#) in medieval drama. At the same time, Richard's vivid self-awareness looks forward to the soliloquies of Shakespeare's mature plays.**^[146] **No single play marks a change from the traditional to the freer style. Shakespeare combined the two throughout his career, with [Romeo and Juliet](#) perhaps the best example of the mixing of the styles.**^[147] **By the time of [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Richard II](#), and [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) in the mid-1590s, Shakespeare had begun to write a more natural poetry. He increasingly tuned his metaphors and images to the needs of the drama itself.**



-
- **"And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air."^[148]**
- **Shakespeare's standard poetic form was blank verse, composed in iambic pentameter. In practice, this meant that his verse was usually unrhymed and consisted of ten syllables to a line, spoken with a stress on every second syllable. The blank verse of his early plays is quite different from that of his later ones. It is often beautiful, but its sentences tend to start, pause, and finish at the end of lines, with the risk of monotony.^[149] Once Shakespeare mastered traditional blank verse, he began to interrupt and vary its flow. This technique releases the new power and flexibility of the poetry in plays such as Julius Caesar and Hamlet. Shakespeare uses it, for example, to convey the turmoil in Hamlet's mind:^[150]**
 - **Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—
And prais'd be rashness for it—let us know
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us
well ...**

-
- **After Hamlet, Shakespeare varied his poetic style further, particularly in the more emotional passages of the late tragedies. The literary critic A. C. Bradley described this style as "more concentrated, rapid, varied, and, in construction, less regular, not seldom twisted or elliptical".^[151] In the last phase of his career, Shakespeare adopted many techniques to achieve these effects. These included run-on lines, irregular pauses and stops, and extreme variations in sentence structure and length.^[152] In Macbeth, for example, the language darts from one unrelated metaphor or simile to another: "was the hope drunk/ Wherein you dressed yourself?" (1.7.35–38); "... pity, like a naked new-born babe/ Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, hors'd/ Upon the sightless couriers of the air ..." (1.7.21–25). The listener is challenged to complete the sense.^[152] The late romances, with their shifts in time and surprising turns of plot, inspired a last poetic style in which long and short sentences are set against one another, clauses are piled up, subject and object are reversed, and words are omitted, creating an effect of spontaneity.^[153]**

• **Shakespeare combined poetic genius with a practical sense of the theatre.** ^[154] Like all playwrights of the time, he dramatised stories from sources such as [Plutarch](#) and [Holinshed](#). ^[155] He reshaped each plot to create several centres of interest and to show as many sides of a narrative to the audience as possible. This strength of design ensures that a Shakespeare play can survive translation, cutting and wide interpretation without loss to its core drama. ^[156] As Shakespeare's mastery grew, he gave his characters clearer and more varied motivations and distinctive patterns of speech. He preserved aspects of his earlier style in the later plays, however. In [Shakespeare's late romances](#), he deliberately returned to a more artificial style, which emphasised the illusion of theatre. ^[157]



Influence.

- **Shakespeare's work has made a lasting impression on later theatre and literature. In particular, he expanded the dramatic potential of characterisation, plot, language, and genre.^[158] Until Romeo and Juliet, for example, romance had not been viewed as a worthy topic for tragedy.^[159] Soliloquies had been used mainly to convey information about characters or events; but Shakespeare used them to explore characters' minds.^[160] His work heavily influenced later poetry. The Romantic poets attempted to revive Shakespearean verse drama, though with little success. Critic George Steiner described all English verse dramas from Coleridge to Tennyson as "feeble variations on Shakespearean themes."^[161]**

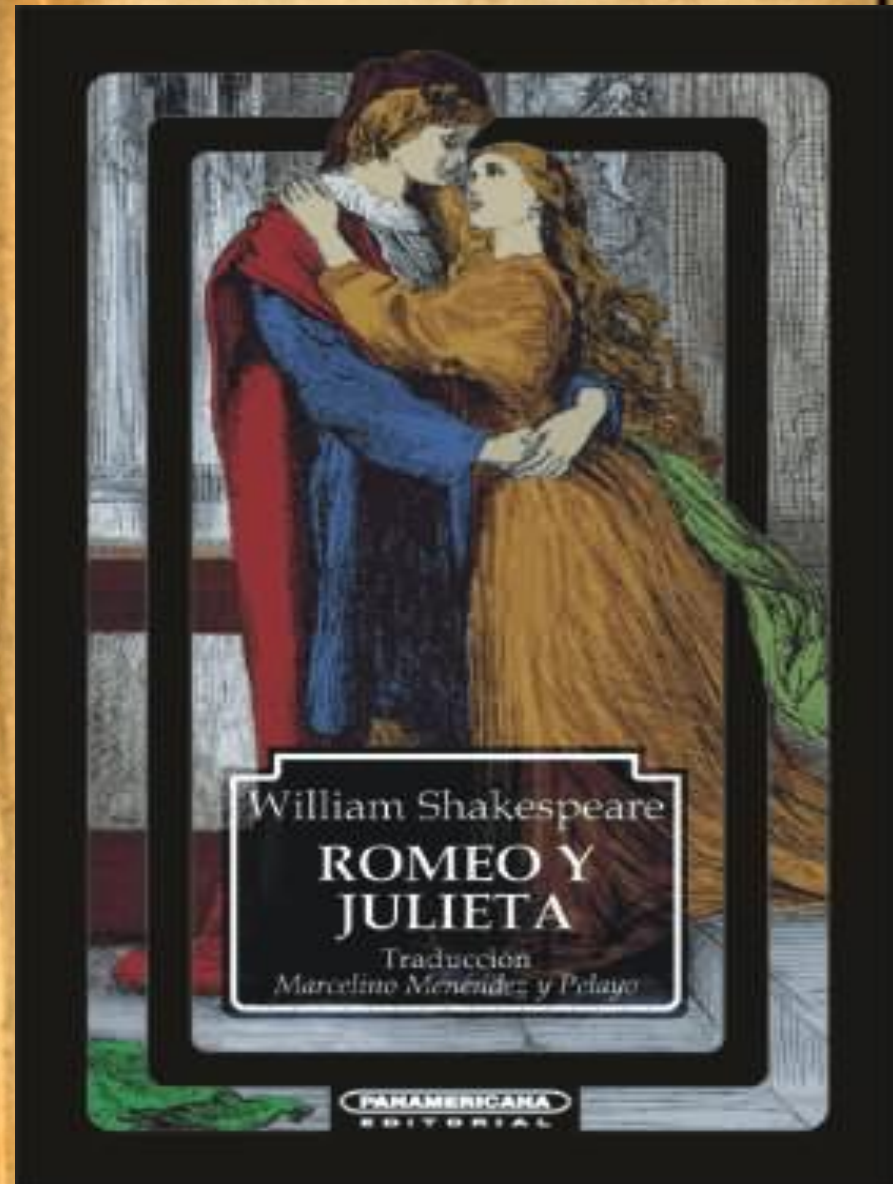
- **Shakespeare influenced novelists such as Thomas Hardy, William Faulkner, and Charles Dickens. The American novelist Herman Melville's soliloquies owe much to Shakespeare; his Captain Ahab in Moby-Dick is a classic tragic hero, inspired by King Lear.^[162] Scholars have identified 20,000 pieces of music linked to Shakespeare's works. These include two operas by Giuseppe Verdi, Otello and Falstaff, whose critical standing compares with that of the source plays.^[163] Shakespeare has also inspired many painters, including the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites. The Swiss Romantic artist Henry Fuseli, a friend of William Blake, even translated Macbeth into German.^[164] The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud drew on Shakespearean psychology, in particular that of Hamlet, for his theories of human nature.^[165]**
- **In Shakespeare's day, English grammar, spelling and pronunciation were less standardised than they are now,^[166] and his use of language helped shape modern English.^[167] Samuel Johnson quoted him more often than any other author in his A Dictionary of the English Language, the first serious work of its type.^[168] Expressions such as "with bated breath" (Merchant of Venice) and "a foregone conclusion" (Othello) have found their way into everyday English speech.^[169]**

Critical reputation.

- **Shakespeare was not revered in his lifetime, but he received a large amount of praise.**^[171] In 1598, the cleric and author [Francis Meres](#) singled him out from a group of English writers as "the most excellent" in both comedy and tragedy.^[172] The authors of the Parnassus plays at [St John's College, Cambridge](#) numbered him with [Chaucer](#), [Gower](#) and [Spenser](#).^[173] In the [First Folio](#), [Ben Jonson](#) called Shakespeare the "Soul of the age, the applause, delight, the wonder of our stage", though he had remarked elsewhere that "Shakespeare wanted art".
- **Between [the Restoration](#) of the monarchy in 1660 and the end of the 17th century, classical ideas were in vogue. As a result, critics of the time mostly rated Shakespeare below [John Fletcher](#) and Ben Jonson.**^[174] [Thomas Rymer](#), for example, condemned Shakespeare for mixing the comic with the tragic. Nevertheless, poet and critic [John Dryden](#) rated Shakespeare highly, saying of Jonson, "I admire him, but I love Shakespeare".^[175] For several decades, Rymer's view held sway; but during the 18th century, critics began to respond to Shakespeare on his own terms and acclaim what they termed his natural genius. A series of scholarly editions of his work, notably those of [Samuel Johnson](#) in 1765 and [Edmond Malone](#) in 1790, added to his growing reputation.^[176] By 1800, he was firmly enshrined as the national poet.^[177] In the 18th and 19th centuries, his reputation also spread abroad. Among those who championed him were the writers [Voltaire](#), [Goethe](#), [Stendhal](#) and [Victor Hugo](#).^[178]
- **During the [Romantic era](#), Shakespeare was praised by the poet and literary philosopher [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#); and the critic [August Wilhelm Schlegel](#) translated his plays in the spirit of [German Romanticism](#).**^[179] In the 19th century, critical admiration for Shakespeare's genius often bordered on adulation.^[180] "That King Shakespeare," the essayist [Thomas Carlyle](#) wrote in 1840, "does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying signs; indestructible".^[181] The [Victorians](#) produced his plays as lavish spectacles on a grand scale.^[182] The playwright and critic [George Bernard Shaw](#) mocked the cult of Shakespeare worship as "[bardolatry](#)", claiming that the new [naturalism](#) of [Ibsen's](#) plays had made Shakespeare obsolete.^[183]
- **The modernist revolution in the arts during the early 20th century, far from discarding Shakespeare, eagerly enlisted his work in the service of the [avant-garde](#). The [Expressionists in Germany](#) and the [Futurists](#) in Moscow mounted productions of his plays. Marxist playwright and director [Bertolt Brecht](#) devised an [epic theatre](#) under the influence of Shakespeare. The poet and critic [T.S. Eliot](#) argued against Shaw that Shakespeare's "primitiveness" in fact made him truly modern.**^[184] Eliot, along with [G. Wilson Knight](#) and the school of [New Criticism](#), led a movement towards a closer reading of Shakespeare's imagery. In the 1950s, a wave of new critical approaches replaced modernism and paved the way for "[post-modern](#)" studies of Shakespeare.^[185] By the 1980s, Shakespeare studies were open to movements such as [structuralism](#), [feminism](#), [New Historicism](#), [African-American studies](#), and [queer studies](#).^{[186][186][187]} In a comprehensive reading of Shakespeare's works and comparing Shakespeare literary accomplishments to accomplishments among leading figures in philosophy and theology as well, Harold Bloom has commented that, "Shakespeare was larger than Plato and than St. Augustine. He encloses us, because we see with his fundamental perceptions."^[188]

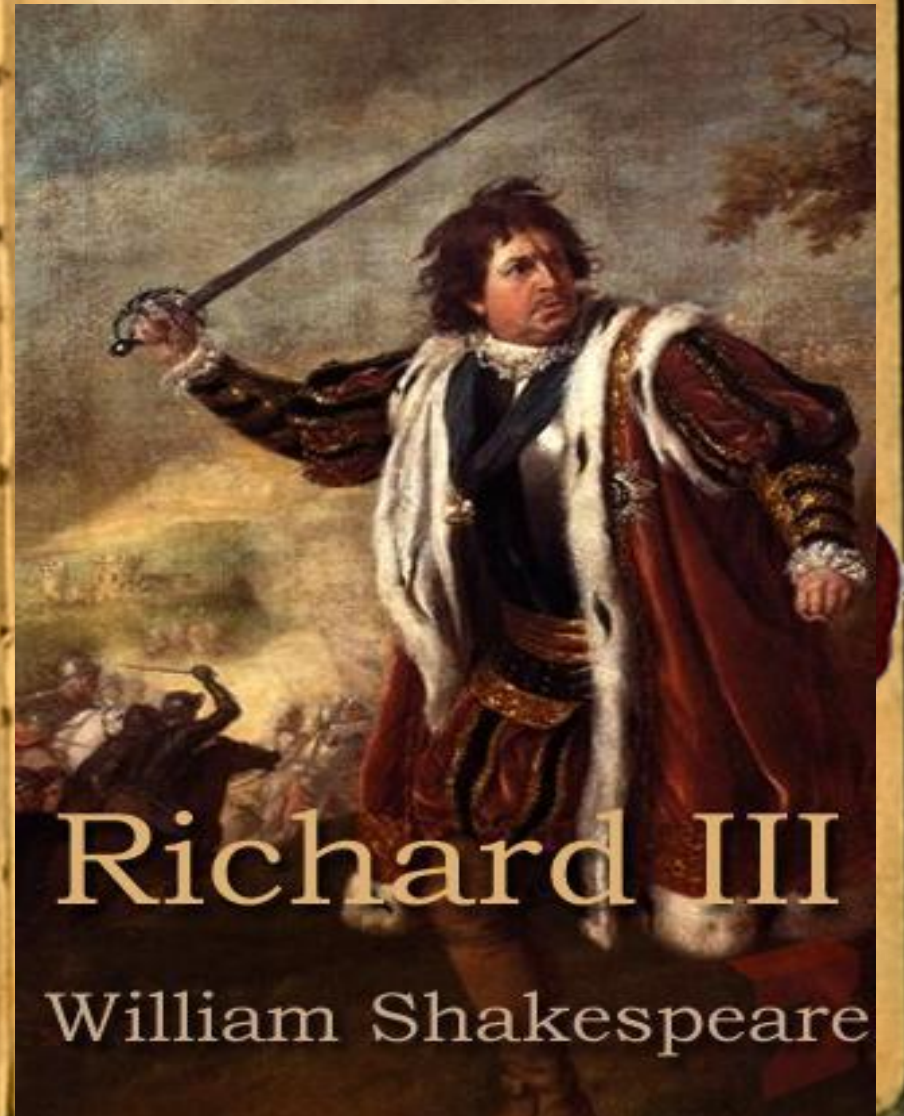
Classification of the plays.

- **Shakespeare's works include the 36 plays printed in the First Folio of 1623, listed according to their folio classification as comedies, histories and tragedies.^[189] Two plays not included in the First Folio, The Two Noble Kinsmen and Pericles, Prince of Tyre, are now accepted as part of the canon, with today's scholars agreeing that Shakespeare made major contributions to the writing of both.^[190] No Shakespearean poems were included in the First Folio.**
- **In the late 19th century, Edward Dowden classified four of the late comedies as romances, and though many scholars prefer to call them tragicomedies, Dowden's term is often used.^[191] These plays and the associated Two Noble Kinsmen are marked with an asterisk (*) below. In 1896, Frederick S. Boas coined the term "problem plays" to describe four plays: All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida and Hamlet.^[192] "Dramas as singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies", he wrote. "We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays."^[193] The term, much debated and sometimes applied to other plays, remains in use, though Hamlet is^[194]**



Speculation about Shakespeare.

- **Some scholars claim that members of Shakespeare's family were Catholics, at a time when practicing Catholicism in England was against the law.^[200] Shakespeare's mother, [Mary Arden](#), certainly came from a pious Catholic family. The strongest evidence might be a Catholic statement of faith signed by his father, [John Shakespeare](#), found in 1757 in the rafters of his former house in Henley Street. The document is now lost, however, and scholars differ as to its authenticity.^[201] In 1591 the authorities reported that John Shakespeare had missed church "for fear of process for debt", a common Catholic excuse.^[202] In 1606, the name of William's daughter Susanna appears on a list of those who failed to attend Easter [communion](#) in Stratford.^[202] As several scholars have noted, whatever his private views, Shakespeare "conformed to the official state religion", as [Park Honan](#) put it.^{[203][203][204]} Also, [Shakespeare's will](#) uses a Protestant formula, and he was a confirmed member of the [Church of England](#), where he was married, his children were baptized, and where he is buried. Other authors argue that there is a lack of evidence about Shakespeare's religious beliefs. Scholars find evidence both for and against Shakespeare's Catholicism, Protestantism, or lack of belief in his plays, but the truth may be impossible to prove.^[205]**



Portraiture.

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- ***No written contemporary description of Shakespeare's physical appearance survives, and no evidence suggests that he ever commissioned a portrait, so the [Droeshout engraving](#), which [Ben Jonson](#) approved of as a good likeness,^[209] and his [Stratford monument](#) provide perhaps the best evidence of his appearance. From the 18th century, the desire for authentic Shakespeare portraits fuelled claims that various surviving pictures depicted Shakespeare. That demand also led to the production of several fake portraits, as well as mis-attributions, repaintings and relabelling of portraits of other people.^[210]***



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