

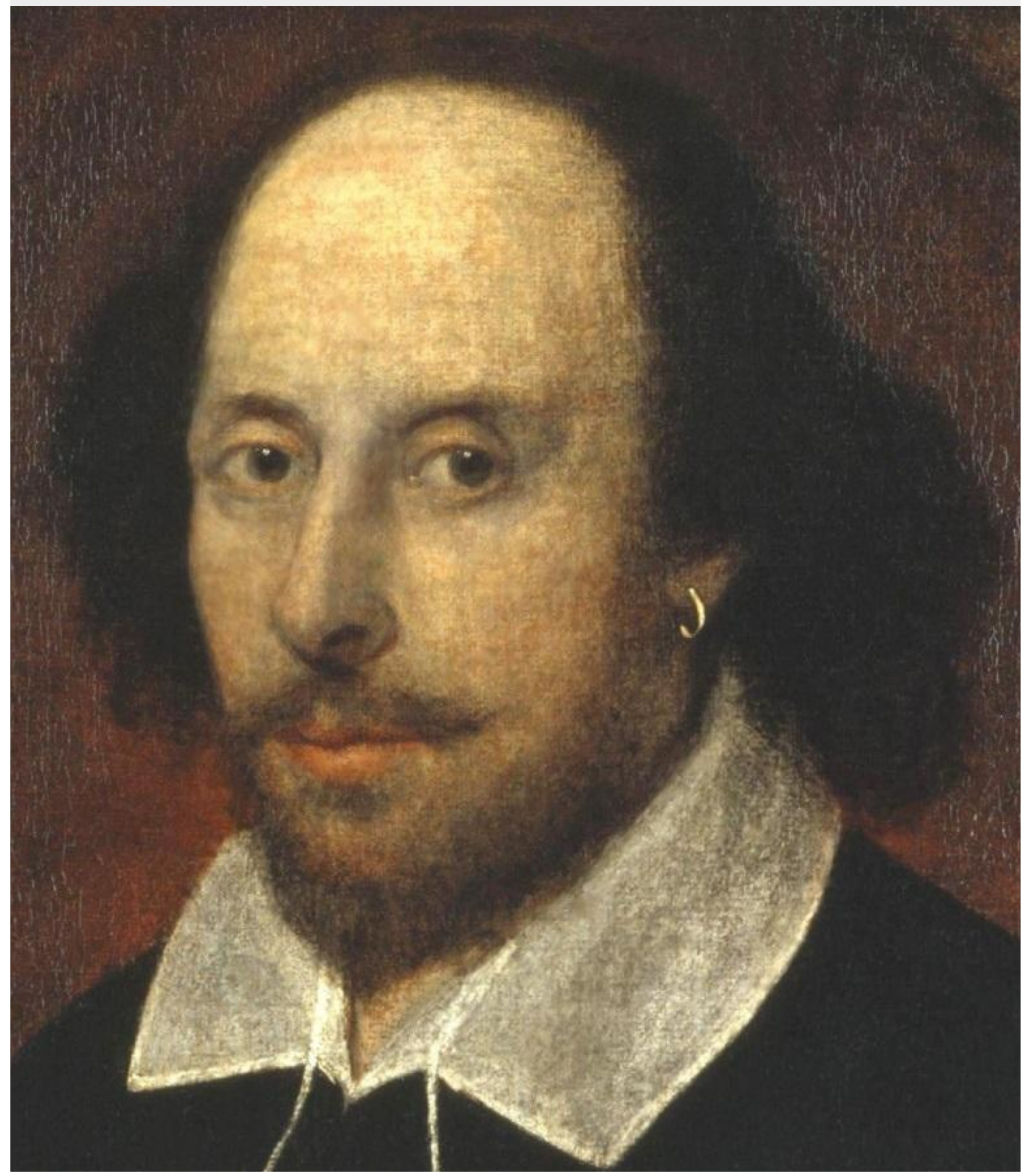
*William*

*Shakespeare*

*1564 - 1616*



**William Shakespeare** was an English poet, playwright and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 39 plays, 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.



William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover (glove-maker) originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. 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. He was the third of eight children, and the eldest surviving son.



Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, 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, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors. At the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

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. By then, he was sufficiently known in London to be attacked in print by the playwright Robert Greene.



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. 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. 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, 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.

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). 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.



Shakespeare continued to visit London during the years 1611–1614. In 1612, he was called as a witness in *Bellott v. Mountjoy*, a court case concerning the marriage settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613, he bought a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory; and from November 1614, he was in London for several weeks. After 1610, Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and none are attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the house playwright of the King's Men.

*But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief,  
That thro' her maid art far more fair than she.  
But soft! what maid so bright includes so bright a room?  
She doth touch her cheek for the Romeo's tomb.*

**Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616, at the age of 52. Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death. The epitaph (a tombstone) carved into the stone slab covering his grave includes a curse against moving his bones. Shakespeare has been commemorated in many statues and memorials around the world, including funeral monuments in Southwark Cathedral and Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.**

