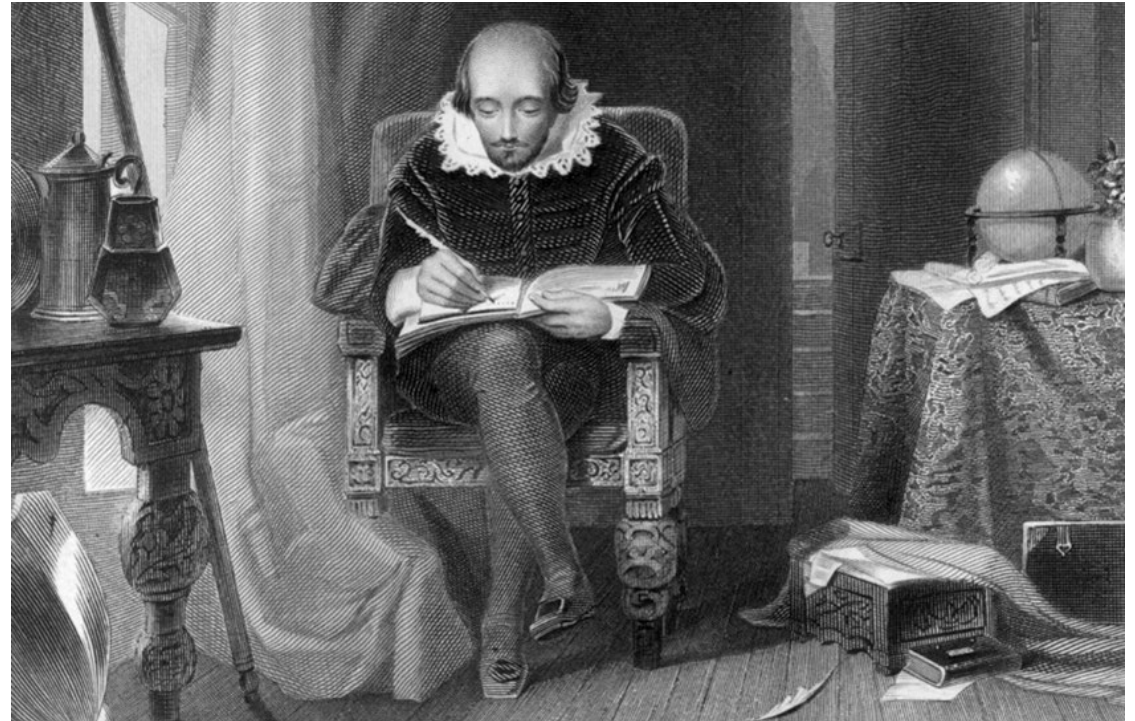




L'ESCHERE  
EDITORE

# William Shakespeare

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# Historical Background

## Theatre and Culture

- Shakespeare wrote during the reigns of two English monarchs, Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-1625).
- The **court was the centre of culture** and if a playwright wanted to be successful, he had to have patronage at the highest level of society.
- The **theatre was very popular with all classes** in Shakespeare's time. More people could read than at any time before and they were well informed about politics and religion.



# Shakespeare

## Early Life

- He was baptised on 26th April 1564 and may have been born on **23rd April** – the same day he died 52 years later.
- His father was a glove maker and successful businessman, who was also **mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon**.
- William was probably educated at the local grammar school, where he would have studied the **Classics** and learnt **Latin**.
- In 1582, when he was 18, he married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children.
- For the next seven years, Shakespeare's life is a mystery.



# Shakespeare

## The London Years

- By **1592** he was working as an **actor and playwright** in London.
- Shakespeare arrived in **London** at a time of great change. Plays were no longer presented on religious themes by groups of travelling players, but by established **theatrical companies** with influential patronage.
- The **Globe Theatre was built in 1598** and Shakespeare was a shareholder.
- He became a member of the most important acting company, the **Lord Chamberlain's Men**.
- Shakespeare understood the rules of censorship and the fact that his plays had to have **something for everybody**, for every social class.



# Shakespeare

## The Last Years

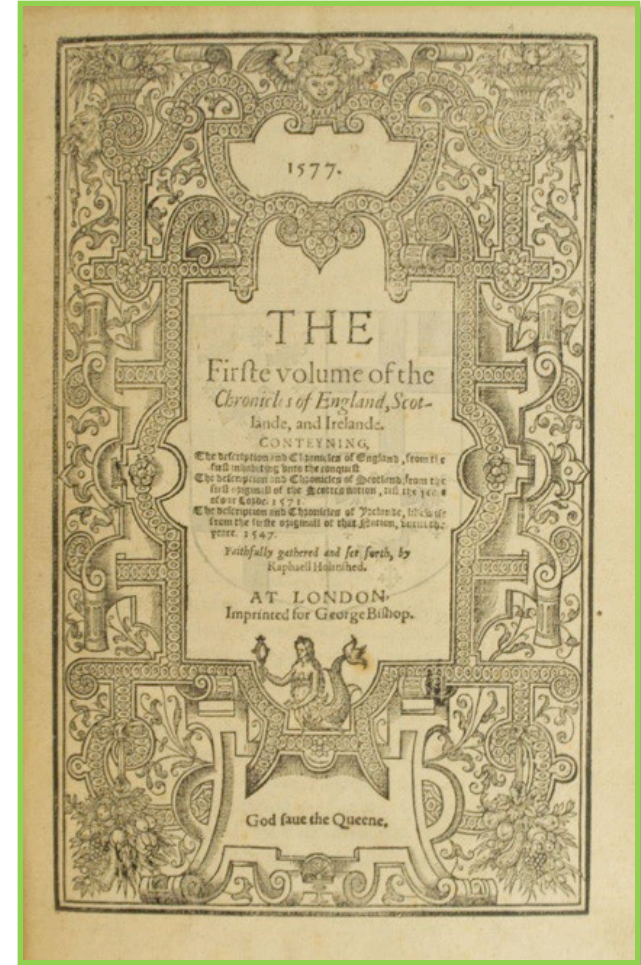
- In 1603, James I became king. He was an enthusiastic patron of the theatre and the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the **King's Men** and often performed at court.
- Shakespeare invested in another theatre, **the Blackfriars**.
- In 1612 he returned to **Stratford** as a rich man.
- He died in Stratford on **23rd April 1616** and is buried in Holy Trinity Church.
- On his tombstone is written:  
*“Good friend for Jesus sake forbear, to dig the dust enclosed here. Blessed be the man who spares these stones, and cursed be he who moves my bones.”*



# Sources

## Worldwide Knowledge

- Shakespeare drew on a large number of sources for his plays: **history books, other plays, novellas and poems.**
- As far as we know, he **never travelled** outside England, but nevertheless, his knowledge was vast.



# History Plays

## Historic Kings

- Shakespeare wrote **eight history plays**.
- Two kings cover five plays between them: **Henry IV** (two plays) and **Henry VI** (three plays).
- Shakespeare also wrote plays about **King John** (1199-1216), **Richard III** (1483-1485) and **Henry VIII** (1509-1547).



# Tragedies

## Tragic Masterpieces

- Shakespeare is perhaps best known for his tragedies, which include *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Several of the tragedies are historical tragedies, set in Classical times, like *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*.



# Comedies

## Romantic and Dark

- Shakespeare's comedies cover a **wide range of topics**: marriage, gender identity, disguises, misunderstandings.
- The romantic comedies include *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- Some comedies are called '**dark comedies**' because although they end happily for most characters and nobody dies, there are some very dark moments. *The Merchant of Venice* is in this category.



# Romances

## Last Plays

- Shakespeare's last plays are called '**romances**'.
- They are *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.
- Romances combine elements of tragedy, comedy and fantasy.



# Shakespeare's Theatre

## Past and Present Theatres

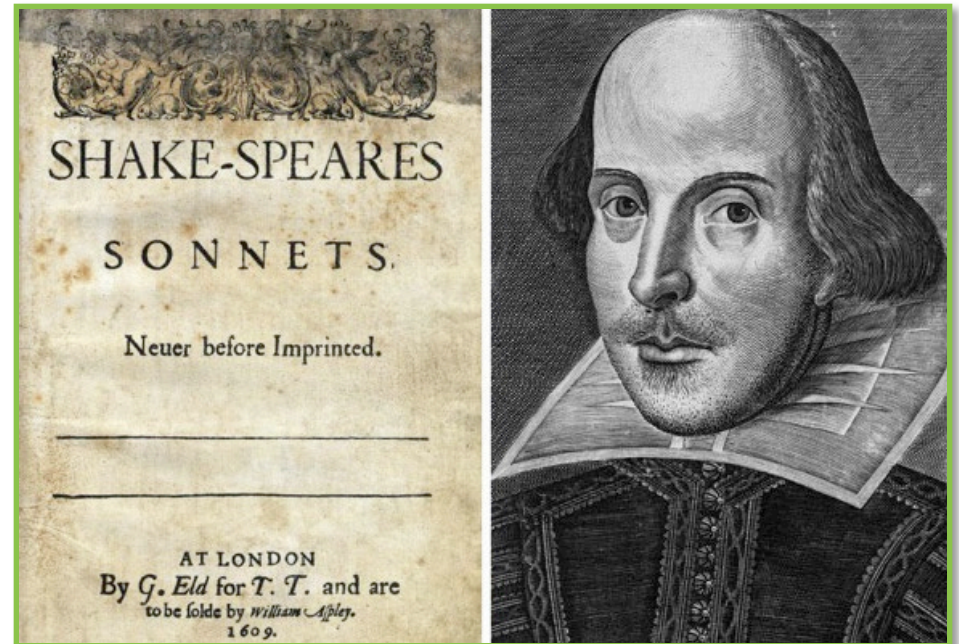
- Several theatres were built in London during Shakespeare's lifetime, including **The Globe**, **The Curtain** and **The Rose**.
- They were not roofed, and **performances took place only in daylight**.
- **It was forbidden for women to act**, so all the female parts were played by boys whose voices had not broken.
- The Globe was rebuilt in 1997 on the South Bank in London, thanks to the efforts of American actor **Sam Wanamaker**. In 2014 an indoor theatre next to it, modelled on The Blackfriars, was opened and named after Wanamaker.



# Shakespeare's Sonnets

## Poetic Texts

- Shakespeare wrote **154 sonnets**, covering the themes of love, beauty, the passing of time and mortality.
- Nearly all the sonnets are English in form: they are divided into **3 quatrains** and **a couplet**, and they are in **iambic pentameter**. The predominant rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*.
- 126 sonnets were dedicated to **a young man**, the remainder to **a woman**, but we do not know their identities.
- Shakespeare wrote other poems, the most important being ***The Rape of Lucrece*** (1594).



# Shakespeare's Style

## Innovative Writer

- His great strengths include:
  - unparalleled poetical / figurative / innovative use of **language**;
  - entertaining and compelling **action**;
  - **psychologically complex protagonists** whose struggles, both external and internal, are the focus of attention and give rise to...
  - ...**universal questions** regarding good and evil, morality and immorality, love and hate.



# Shakespeare's Legacy

## A Great Writer

- Shakespeare is acknowledged worldwide as **one of the greatest writers of all time**.
- He is estimated to have used more than 17,000 words in his works, four times the average of an educated person of those times. He **introduced more than 3,000 words and phrases into the English language**.
- His works are **still read and performed** and have been made into **numerous films**.
- The universality of his message means his works can still reach people of all ages, social backgrounds and cultures today.

“

*He was not of an age, but for all time*

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