**William Shakespeare** (1564 - 1616) was an English [poet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet), [playwright](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playwright), and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the [English language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's [national poet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_poets). His extant works, including [collaborations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_collaborations), consist of approximately [38 plays](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_plays), [154 sonnets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_sonnets), two long [narrative poems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_poem), and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major [living language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_language) and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and brought up in [Stratford-upon-Avon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratford-upon-Avon), [Warwickshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warwickshire). At the age of 18, he married [Anne Hathaway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Hathaway_(Shakespeare%27s_wife)), with whom he had three children: [Susanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susanna_Hall), and twins [Hamnet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamnet_Shakespeare) and [Judith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Quiney). Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a [playing company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_company) called the [Lord Chamberlain's Men](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Chamberlain%27s_Men), later known as the [King's Men](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King%27s_Men_(playing_company)). 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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portraits_of_Shakespeare), [sexuality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexuality_of_William_Shakespeare), [and religious beliefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_of_William_Shakespeare), and whether the works attributed to him were [written by others](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare_authorship_question).

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily [comedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy) and [histories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_history), and these are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly [tragedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_tragedy) until about 1608, including [*Hamlet*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamlet), [*Othello*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Othello), [*King Lear*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Lear), and [*Macbeth*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macbeth), considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote [tragicomedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragicomedy), also known as [romances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_late_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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Heminges) and [Henry Condell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Condell), two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published a more definitive text known as the [First Folio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Folio), a posthumous collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognized as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by [Ben Jonson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Jonson), in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time". 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.