**William Shakespeare** ([bapt.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptised" \o "Baptised) 26 April[[b]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-2) 1564 – 23 April 1616)[[c]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare" \l "cite_note-4) was an English playwright, poet and actor. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGreenblatt200511-5)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBevington20021%E2%80%933-6)[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWells1997399-7) He is often called England's [national poet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_poet) and the "[Bard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bard) of Avon" (or simply "the Bard").[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDobson1992185%E2%80%93186-8)[[d]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-10) His extant works, including [collaborations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare%27s_collaborations), consist of some [39 plays](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_plays),[[e]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-11) [154 sonnets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_sonnets), three long [narrative poems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_poem), and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship.

Shakespeare was born and raised in [Stratford-upon-Avon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratford-upon-Avon), Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married [Anne Hathaway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Hathaway_(wife_of_Shakespeare)), with whom he had three children: [Susanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susanna_Hall), and twins [Hamnet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamnet_Shakespeare" \o "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)). At age 49 (around 1613), he appears to have retired to Stratford, where he died three years later.

Shakespeare produced most of his known works between 1589 and 1613.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEChambers1930a270%E2%80%93271-16)[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTETaylor1987109%E2%80%93134-17)[[f]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-18) His early plays were primarily [comedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedy) and [histories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_history) and are regarded as some of the best works produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly [tragedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_tragedy) until 1608, among them [*Hamlet*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamlet), [*Romeo and Juliet*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_and_Juliet), [*Othello*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Othello), [*King Lear*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Lear), and [*Macbeth*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macbeth), all considered to be among the finest works in the English language.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGreenblatt200511-5)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBevington20021%E2%80%933-6)[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWells1997399-7)

Shakespeare was the son of [John Shakespeare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Shakespeare), an [alderman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alderman) and a successful glover (glove-maker) originally from [Snitterfield](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snitterfield" \o "Snitterfield) in [Warwickshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warwickshire), and [Mary Arden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shakespeare), the daughter of an [affluent landowning family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arden_family).[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTESchoenbaum198714%E2%80%9322-20) He was born in [Stratford-upon-Avon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratford-upon-Avon), where he was [baptised](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism) on 26 April 1564. His date of birth is unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, [Saint George's Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George%27s_Day).[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare#cite_note-FOOTNOTESchoenbaum198724%E2%80%9326-21)