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English 10B
Fall 2022

Shakespeare Biography from Shakespeare.org.uk

An Introduction

William Shakespeare was a renowned English poet, playwright, and actor born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. His birthday is most commonly celebrated on 23 April (see When was Shakespeare born), which is also believed to be the date he died in 1616.

Shakespeare was a prolific writer during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages of British theater (sometimes called the English Renaissance or the Early Modern Period). Shakespeare's plays are perhaps his most enduring legacy, but they are not all he wrote. Shakespeare's poems also remain popular to this day.

Shakespeare's Family Life

Records survive relating to William Shakespeare's family that offer an understanding of the context of Shakespeare's early life and the lives of his family members. John Shakespeare married Mary Arden, and together they had eight children. John and Mary lost two daughters as infants, so William became their eldest child. John Shakespeare worked as a glove-maker, but he also became an important figure in the town of Stratford by fulfilling civic positions. His elevated status meant that he was even more likely to have sent his children, including William, to the local grammar school.

William Shakespeare would have lived with his family in their house on Henley Street until he turned eighteen. When he was eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six. It was a rushed marriage because Anne was already pregnant at the time of the ceremony. Together they had three children. Their first daughter, Susanna, was born six months after the wedding and was later followed by twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died when he was just 11 years old.

Shakespeare in London

Shakespeare's career jump-started in London, but when did he go there? We know Shakespeare's twins were baptized in 1585, and that by 1592 his reputation was established in London, but the intervening years are considered a mystery. Scholars generally refer to these years as 'The Lost Years'.

During his time in London, Shakespeare's first printed works were published. They were two long poems, 'Venus and Adonis' (1593) and 'The Rape of Lucrece' (1594). He also became a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors. Shakespeare was the company's regular dramatist, producing on average two plays a year, for almost twenty years.

He remained with the company for the rest of his career, during which time it evolved into The King's Men under the patronage of King James I (from 1603). During his time in the

company Shakespeare wrote many of his most famous tragedies, such as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, as well as great romances, like *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare's Works

Altogether Shakespeare's works include 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and a variety of other poems. No original manuscripts of Shakespeare's plays are known to exist today. It is actually thanks to a group of actors from Shakespeare's company that we have about half of the plays at all. They collected them for publication after Shakespeare died, preserving the plays. These writings were brought together in what is known as the First Folio ('Folio' refers to the size of the paper used). It contained 36 of his plays, but none of his poetry.

Shakespeare's legacy is as rich and diverse as his work; his plays have spawned countless adaptations across multiple genres and cultures. His plays have had an enduring presence on stage and film. His writings have been compiled in various iterations of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, which include all of his plays, sonnets, and other poems. William Shakespeare continues to be one of the most important literary figures of the English language.

New Place; a home in Stratford-upon-Avon

Shakespeare's success in the London theaters made him considerably wealthy, and by 1597 he was able to purchase New Place, the largest house in the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon. Although his professional career was spent in London, he maintained close links with his native town.

Recent archaeological evidence discovered on the site of Shakespeare's New Place shows that Shakespeare was only ever an intermittent lodger in London. This suggests he divided his time between Stratford and London (a two or three-day commute). In his later years, he may have spent more time in Stratford-upon-Avon than scholars previously thought.

On his father's death in 1601, William Shakespeare inherited the old family home in Henley Street part of which was then leased to tenants. Further property investments in Stratford followed, including the purchase of 107 acres of land in 1602.

Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April 1616 at the age of 52. He is buried in the sanctuary of the parish church, Holy Trinity.