

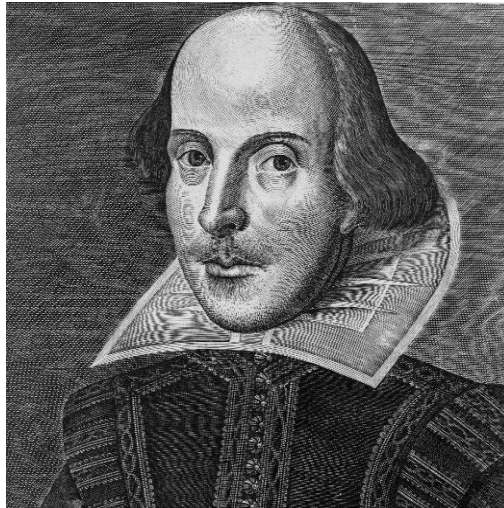
William Shakespeare & Elizabethan Theatre

The Life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was believed to be born on **April 23, 1564** in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Unlike today, no one kept birth records during that time, so scholars believe that April 23 is his birthdate, based on his baptism record. We know that Shakespeare was baptized on April 26, 1564. During the Elizabethan period, it was common for babies to be baptized by no later than the first Sunday after their birth.

Shakespeare was the oldest surviving child of John and Mary Shakespeare. He had 5 younger siblings. He attended school, beginning at age 7, where he was introduced to reading and writing, mostly in the classical language of Latin.

When he was 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 years old. They had 3 children: Susanna, the oldest child, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died at the age of 11, for reasons that are unclear. Based on several of his **sonnets**, we know that Hamnet's death was heartbreaking for Shakespeare.



After Hamnet and Judith was born, there is a 7 year period in Shakespeare's history where we have no records. It is unclear what happened and what he was doing at that time. What we do know is that by **1592**, he had made his way to London and was already becoming active in the Theatre scene. Anne stayed behind in Stratford-upon-Avon with the children during this time.

On **April 23, 1616**, Shakespeare died. The circumstances of his death are unclear. It is believed that he had been ill for a while, but some scholars believe it may have been the same infection that took his brother-in-law's life a week earlier.

Elizabethan Theatre

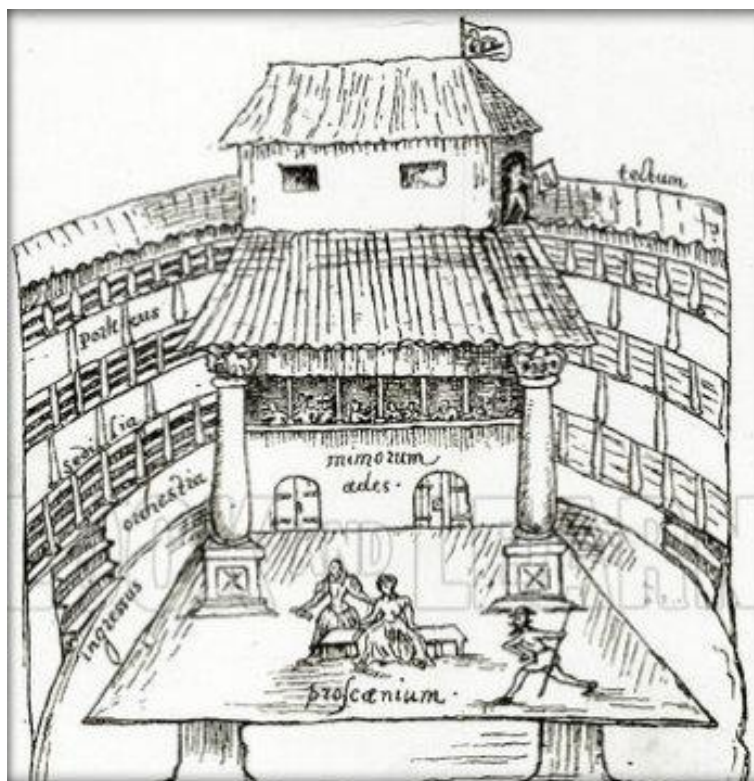
Plays were generally not exclusive to the theatre during the Elizabethan era. Plays could be performed in a number of different settings: indoors, outdoors, theatres, palaces, and even inn courtyards! Because of this, plays usually did not have much in the way of set pieces.

Actors were all men. Women were not allowed to perform onstage during this time period. Men played all types of characters, including women. Actors were responsible not just for acting, but also any onstage combat, singing, playing musical instruments, and dancing.

Costumes were very expensive, so many were hand-me-downs from nobility. The actors didn't usually pay much attention to costumes being historically accurate – they simply wore what they thought best suited the characters.

Theatre spaces during Elizabethan England typically included a trapdoor for actors to make entrances from the floor. Actors could also be flown in, or they would sometimes appear in galleries above the stage to portray a “voice from above”.

Theatre companies usually needed sponsorship from nobility to be successful.



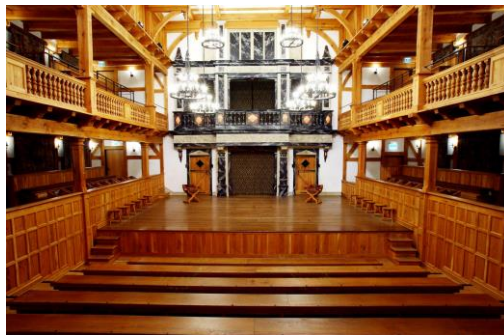
The Lord Chamberlain's Men



Sometime after he moved to London, Shakespeare became a member of a theatre troupe named **Lord Chamberlain's Men**. This troupe also included the actor, **James Burbage**. James Burbage was responsible for building the first theatre in London since Roman times, which was simply known as the **Theatre**. The Theatre was built in 1576, and it was the home the Lord Chamberlain's Men until the late 1590s, when the Burbages lost their lease. Several of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (including Shakespeare) financed the construction of a new playhouse, which became the **Globe Theatre**.

The Globe opened in 1599. Many of Shakespeare's works were performed at the theatre until it burned down in 1613. It was re-built and re-opened in 1614 and was heavily used until all the theatres were shut down in 1642 by the Puritans. In 1644, it was demolished due to disuse. A third version of the Globe was built in 1996 and is in full working order to this day.

Both the Theatre and the Globe were outdoor theatres. Lord Chamberlain's Men wanted an indoor space where the seasons wouldn't hold up their performances. In **1609**, the Burbages acquired the first indoor theatre, **Blackfriars**.



The Lord Chamberlain's men were more than just their theatres – they were an extremely popular and successful theatre troupe. They were so popular, in fact, that King James I later became a patron of the company. This prompted the troupe to change their name to the King's Men.

Shakespeare's Works

Most scholars agree that Shakespeare wrote a grand total of 38 plays. This does not include the possibility that Shakespeare may have contributed to other works as well, including *King Edward III* and *Sir Thomas More*. It is well-known that Shakespeare wrote a play entitled *Cardenio*, but unfortunately, not much is left of that particular play.

Generally, Shakespeare's plays are divided up into 3 major categories: **Tragedy**, **Comedy**, and **History**. Some scholars include a fourth category: **Romance**.

Shakespeare's plays were published in 1623 in what is called the First **Folio**.

Shakespeare was also a poet. He wrote a poem entitled *Venus and Adonis*, which was published in 1593. He also wrote **sonnets**. Sonnets are a form of a poem. Shakespeare's sonnets followed an ABAB rhyme scheme, and were divided up into 3 **quatrains** and 1 **couplet**. In total, he wrote 154 sonnets.

Because he wrote the sonnets at different points in his life, they are divided into 3 separate periods. Sonnets 1-126 are considered the **Fair Youth** sonnets, because they were written to a young man, most likely his deceased son. Sonnets 127-152 are considered the **Dark Lady** sonnets, because they were written about a mysterious woman. Finally, the third period is called **The Rival Poet** period. Sonnets 78-86 demonstrate Shakespeare's frustration with one of his contemporaries. It is thought that he was writing about the playwright and poet, Christopher Marlowe.

