

Who Was William Shakespeare

Shakespeare authorship question

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The Shakespeare authorship question is the argument that someone other than William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote the works attributed to him. Anti-Stratfordians—a collective term for adherents of the various alternative-authorship theories—believe that Shakespeare of Stratford was a front to shield the identity of the real author or authors, who for some reason—usually social rank, state security, or gender—did not want or could not accept public credit. Although the idea has attracted much public interest, all but a few Shakespeare scholars and literary historians consider it a fringe theory, and for the most part acknowledge it only to rebut or disparage the claims.

Shakespeare's authorship was first questioned in the middle of the 19th century, when adulation of Shakespeare as the greatest writer of all time had become widespread. Shakespeare's biography, particularly his humble origins and obscure life, seemed incompatible with his poetic eminence and his reputation for genius, arousing suspicion that Shakespeare might not have written the works attributed to him. The controversy has since spawned a vast body of literature, and more than 80 authorship candidates have been proposed, the most popular being Sir Francis Bacon; Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford; Christopher Marlowe; and William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby.

Supporters of alternative candidates argue that theirs is the more plausible author, and that William Shakespeare lacked the education, aristocratic sensibility, or familiarity with the royal court that they say is apparent in the works. Those Shakespeare scholars who have responded to such claims hold that biographical interpretations of literature are unreliable in attributing authorship, and that the convergence of documentary evidence used to support Shakespeare's authorship—title pages, testimony by other contemporary poets and historians, and official records—is the same used for all other authorial attributions of his era. No such direct evidence exists for any other candidate, and Shakespeare's authorship was not questioned during his lifetime or for centuries after his death.

Despite the scholarly consensus, a relatively small but highly visible and diverse assortment of supporters, including prominent public figures, have questioned the conventional attribution. They work for acknowledgement of the authorship question as a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry and for acceptance of one or another of the various authorship candidates.

William Shakespeare

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William Shakespeare (c. 23 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) 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. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon" or simply "the Bard". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays, 154 sonnets, three long narrative poems and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare remains arguably the most influential writer in the English language, and his works continue to be studied and reinterpreted.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592 he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner ("sharer") of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men after the ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne. At age 49 (around 1613) he appears to have retired to Stratford, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive; this has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, his sexuality, his religious beliefs and even certain fringe theories as to whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known works between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories and are regarded as some of the best works produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until 1608, among them Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth, all considered to be among the finest works in English. In the last phase of his life he wrote tragicomedies (also known as romances) such as The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Many of Shakespeare's plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. However, in 1623 John Heminges and Henry Condell, two fellow actors and friends of Shakespeare's, published a more definitive text known as the First Folio, a posthumous collected edition of Shakespeare's dramatic works that includes 36 of his plays. Its preface includes a prescient poem by Ben Jonson, a former rival of Shakespeare, who hailed Shakespeare with the now-famous epithet: "not of an age, but for all time".

Shakespeare's plays

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Shakespeare's plays are a canon of approximately 39 dramatic works written by the English playwright and poet William Shakespeare. The exact number of plays as well as their classifications as tragedy, history, comedy, or otherwise is a matter of scholarly debate. Shakespeare's plays are widely regarded as among the greatest in the English language and are continually performed around the world. The plays have been translated into every major living language.

Many of his plays appeared in print as a series of quartos, but approximately half of them remained unpublished until 1623, when the posthumous First Folio was published. The traditional division of his plays into tragedies, comedies, and histories follows the categories used in the First Folio. However, modern criticism has labelled some of these plays "problem plays" that elude easy categorisation, or perhaps purposely break generic conventions, and has introduced the term romances for what scholars believe to be his later comedies.

When Shakespeare first arrived in London in the late 1580s or early 1590s, dramatists writing for London's new commercial playhouses (such as The Curtain) were combining two strands of dramatic tradition into a new and distinctively Elizabethan synthesis. Previously, the most common forms of popular English theatre were the Tudor morality plays. These plays, generally celebrating piety, use personified moral attributes to urge or instruct the protagonist to choose the virtuous life over Evil. The characters and plot situations are largely symbolic rather than realistic. As a child, Shakespeare would likely have seen this type of play (along with, perhaps, mystery plays and miracle plays).

The other strand of dramatic tradition was classical aesthetic theory. This theory was derived ultimately from Aristotle; in Renaissance England, however, the theory was better known through its Roman interpreters and practitioners. At the universities, plays were staged in a more academic form as Roman closet dramas. These plays, usually performed in Latin, adhered to classical ideas of unity and decorum, but they were also more static, valuing lengthy speeches over physical action. Shakespeare would have learned this theory at grammar school, where Plautus and especially Terence were key parts of the curriculum and were taught in editions

with lengthy theoretical introductions.

Hamnet Shakespeare

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Hamnet Shakespeare (baptised 2 February 1585 – buried 11 August 1596) was the only son of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, and the fraternal twin of Judith Shakespeare. He died at the age of 11. Some Shakespearean scholars speculate on the relationship between Hamnet and his father's later play Hamlet, as well as on possible connections between Hamnet's death and the writing of King John, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, and Twelfth Night.

Life of William Shakespeare

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William Shakespeare was an actor, playwright, poet, and theatre entrepreneur in London during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. He was baptised on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England, in the Holy Trinity Church. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children. He died in his home town of Stratford on 23 April 1616, aged 52.

Though more is known about Shakespeare's life than those of most other Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, few personal biographical facts survive, which is unsurprising in the light of his social status as a commoner, the low esteem in which his profession was held, and the general lack of interest of the time in the personal lives of writers. Information about his life derives from public rather than private documents: vital records, real estate and tax records, lawsuits, records of payments, and references to Shakespeare and his works in printed and hand-written texts. Nevertheless, hundreds of biographies have been written and more continue to be, most of which rely on inferences and the historical context of the 70 or so hard facts recorded about Shakespeare the man, a technique that sometimes leads to embellishment or unwarranted interpretation of the documented record.

Sexuality of William Shakespeare

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The sexuality of William Shakespeare has been the subject of debate. It is known from public records that he married Anne Hathaway and had three children with her; scholars have examined their relationship through documents, and particularly through the bequests to her in his will. Some historians have speculated Shakespeare had affairs with other women, based on contemporaries' written anecdotes of such affairs and sometimes on the "Dark Lady" figure in his sonnets. Some scholars have argued he was bisexual, based on analysis of the sonnets; many, including Sonnet 18, are love poems addressed to a man (the "Fair Youth"), and contain puns relating to homosexuality. Whereas, other scholars criticized this view stating that these passages are referring to intense platonic friendship, rather than sexual love. Another explanation is that the poems are not autobiographical but fiction, another of Shakespeare's "dramatic characterization[s]", so that the narrator of the sonnets should not be presumed to be Shakespeare himself.

List of works by William Shakespeare

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John Shakespeare

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John Shakespeare (c. 1531 – 7 September 1601) was an English businessman and politician who was the father of William Shakespeare. Active in Stratford-upon-Avon, he was a glover and whittawer (leather worker) by trade. Shakespeare was elected to several municipal offices, serving as an alderman and culminating in a term as bailiff, the chief magistrate of the town council, and mayor of Stratford in 1568, before he fell on hard times for reasons unknown. His fortunes later revived and he was granted a coat of arms five years before his death, probably at the instigation and expense of his son, the actor and playwright.

He married Mary Arden, with whom he had eight children, five of whom survived into adulthood.

List of William Shakespeare screen adaptations

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As of November 2023, the Internet Movie Database lists Shakespeare as having writing credit on 1,800 films, including those under production but not yet released. The earliest known production is King John from 1899.

Anne Hathaway (wife of Shakespeare)

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Anne Hathaway (1556 – 6 August 1623) was the wife of William Shakespeare, an English poet, playwright and actor. They were married in 1582, when Hathaway was pregnant at 26 years old and Shakespeare was 18. Some writers, such as Schoenbaum, have assumed that she was rather old for an Elizabethan bride, but in fact it was normal for her contemporaries to marry in their 20s, although legally they could marry earlier. Shakespeare, on the other hand, was young for an Elizabethan bridegroom.

She outlived her husband by seven years. Very little is known about her life beyond a few references in documents. Her personality and relationship to Shakespeare have been the subject of much speculation by many historians and writers.

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