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**COURSE WORK**

ON LITERATURE OF USA

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S CONTRIBUTION TO  
THE WORLD LITERATURE**

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# PLAN:

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

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# William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare

**William Shakespeare** was an English [poet](#), [playwright](#) and actor, 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". His extant works, including some [collaborations](#), consist of about [38 plays](#), [154 sonnets](#), two long [narrative poems](#), and a few other verses, the authorship of some of which is uncertain. His plays have been translated into every major [living language](#) and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and brought up in [Stratford-upon-Avon](#). At the age of 18, he married [Anne Hathaway](#), with whom he had three children: [Susanna](#), and twins [Hamnet](#) and [Judith](#). Between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a [playing company](#) called the [Lord Chamberlain's Men](#), later known as the [King's Men](#). 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, and there has been considerable speculation about such matters as [his physical appearance](#), [sexuality](#), [religious beliefs](#), and whether the works attributed to him were [written by others](#).

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly [comedies](#) and [histories](#), genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the 16th century. He then wrote mainly [tragedies](#) until about 1608, including [Hamlet](#), [King Lear](#), [Othello](#), and [Macbeth](#), considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote [tragicomedies](#), also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, [John Heminges](#) and [Henry Condell](#), two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published the [First Folio](#), a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by [Ben Jonson](#), in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time."

Shakespeare was a respected poet and playwright in his own day, but his reputation did not rise to its present heights until the 19th century. The [Romantics](#), in particular, acclaimed Shakespeare's genius, and the [Victorians](#) worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence that [George Bernard Shaw](#) called "[bardolatry](#)". In the 20th century, his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

## **Early life**

William Shakespeare was the son of [John Shakespeare](#), an [alderman](#) and a successful glover originally from [Snitterfield](#), and [Mary Arden](#), the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in [Stratford-upon-Avon](#) and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, [Saint George's Day](#). This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.

Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the [King's New School](#) in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile from his

home. [Grammar schools](#) varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar, the basic [Latin](#) text was standardised by royal decree, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin [classical](#) authors.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare married the 26-year-old [Anne Hathaway](#). The [consistory court](#) of the [Diocese of Worcester](#) issued a marriage licence on 27 November 1582. The next day, two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste, since the Worcester [chancellor](#) allowed the [marriage banns](#) to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, [Susanna](#), baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son [Hamnet](#) and daughter [Judith](#), followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the 'complaints bill' of a law case before the Queen's Bench court at Westminster dated Michaelmas Term 1588 and 9 October 1589. Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years". Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many [apocryphal](#) stories. [Nicholas Rowe](#), Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer [poaching](#) in the estate of local squire [Thomas Lucy](#). Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him. Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. [John Aubrey](#) reported that Shakespeare had been a

country schoolmaster. Some 20th-century scholars have suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of [Lancashire](#), a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshafte" in his will. Little evidence substantiates such stories other than [hearsay](#) collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area.

### London and theatrical career

"All the world's a stage,  
and all the men and women merely players:  
they have their exits and their entrances;  
and one man in his time plays many parts..."

—[As You Like It](#), Act II, Scene 7, 139–42

It is not known exactly when Shakespeare began writing, but contemporary allusions and records of performances show that several of his plays were on the London stage by 1592. By then, he was sufficiently well known in London to be attacked in print by the playwright [Robert Greene](#) in his [Groats-Worth of Wit](#):

...there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.

Scholars differ on the exact meaning of these words, but most agree that Greene is accusing Shakespeare of reaching above his rank in trying to match university-educated writers such as [Christopher Marlowe](#), [Thomas Nashe](#) and Greene himself (the ["university wits"](#)). The italicised phrase parodying the

line "Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" from Shakespeare's [Henry VI, Part 3](#), along with the pun "Shake-scene", identifies Shakespeare as Greene's target. Here [Johannes Factotum](#)—"Jack of all trades"—means a second-rate tinkerer with the work of others, rather than the more common "universal genius".

Greene's attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare's career in the theatre. Biographers suggest that his career may have begun any time from the mid-1580s to just before Greene's remarks. From 1594, Shakespeare's plays were performed by only the [Lord Chamberlain's Men](#), a company owned by a group of players, including Shakespeare, that soon became the leading [playing company](#) in London. After the death of [Queen Elizabeth](#) in 1603, the company was awarded a royal patent by the new king, [James I](#), and changed its name to the [King's Men](#).

In 1599, a partnership of company members built their own theatre on the south bank of the [River Thames](#), which they called the [Globe](#). In 1608, the partnership also took over the [Blackfriars indoor theatre](#). Records of Shakespeare's property purchases and investments indicate that the company made him a wealthy man. In 1597, he bought the second-largest house in Stratford, [New Place](#), and in 1605, he invested in a share of the parish [tithes](#) in Stratford.

Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in [quarto](#) editions from 1594. By 1598, his name had become a selling point and began to appear on the [title pages](#). Shakespeare continued to act in his own and other plays after his success as a playwright. The 1616 edition of [Ben Jonson's Works](#) names him on the cast lists for [Every Man in His Humour](#) (1598) and [Sejanus His Fall](#) (1603). The absence of his name from the 1605 cast list for Jonson's [Volpone](#)

is taken by some scholars as a sign that his acting career was nearing its end. The [First Folio](#) of 1623, however, lists Shakespeare as one of "the Principal Actors in all these Plays", some of which were first staged after *Volpone*, although we cannot know for certain which roles he played. In 1610, [John Davies of Hereford](#) wrote that "good Will" played "kingly" roles.<sup>[44]</sup> In 1709, Rowe passed down a tradition that Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father. Later traditions maintain that he also played Adam in [As You Like It](#) and the Chorus in [Henry V](#), though scholars doubt the sources of the information.

Shakespeare divided his time between London and Stratford during his career. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, Shakespeare was living in the parish of St. Helen's, [Bishopsgate](#), north of the River Thames. He moved across the river to [Southwark](#) by 1599, the year his company constructed the Globe Theatre there. By 1604, he had moved north of the river again, to an area north of [St Paul's Cathedral](#) with many fine houses. There he rented rooms from a French [Huguenot](#) named Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear.

### **Later years and death**

[Rowe](#) was the first biographer to record the tradition, repeated by [Johnson](#), that Shakespeare retired to Stratford 'some years before his death'. He was still working as an actor in London in 1608; in an answer to the sharers' petition in 1635 [Cuthbert Burbage](#) stated that after purchasing the lease of the [Blackfriars Theatre](#) in 1608 from [Henry Evans](#), the King's Men 'placed men players' there, 'which were [Heminges](#), [Condell](#), Shakespeare, etc.'. In a document dated 7 June 1609 in a lawsuit he brought in Stratford against John Addenbrooke, Shakespeare is described as 'generosus nuper in curia domini

Jacobi' ('gentleman, recently at the Court of King James'). However it is perhaps relevant that the [bubonic plague](#) raged in London throughout 1609. The London public playhouses were repeatedly closed during extended outbreaks of the plague (a total of over 60 months closure between May 1603 and February 1610), which meant there was often no acting work. Retirement from all work was uncommon at that time. Shakespeare continued to visit London during the years 1611–1614. In 1612, he was called as a witness in [Bellott v. Mountjoy](#), a court case concerning the marriage settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613 he bought a [gatehouse](#) in the former [Blackfriars](#) priory; and from November 1614 he was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law, [John Hall](#).

After 1610, Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and none are attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with [John Fletcher](#), who succeeded him as the house playwright for the King's Men.

Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and was survived by his wife and two daughters. Susanna had married a physician, John Hall, in 1607, and Judith had married [Thomas Quiney](#), a [vintner](#), two months before Shakespeare's death. Shakespeare signed his last will and testament on 25 March 1616; the following day his new son-in-law, Thomas Quiney was found guilty of fathering an illegitimate son by Margaret Wheeler, who had died during childbirth. Thomas was ordered by the church court to do public penance which would have caused much shame and embarrassment for the Shakespeare family.

In his will, Shakespeare left the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna. The terms instructed that she pass it down intact to "the first son of her body".The Quineys had three children, all of whom died without

marrying. The Halls had one child, Elizabeth, who married twice but died without children in 1670, ending Shakespeare's direct line. Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife, Anne, who was probably entitled to one third of his estate automatically. He did make a point, however, of leaving her "my second best bed", a bequest that has led to much speculation. Some scholars see the bequest as an insult to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance.

Shakespeare was buried in the [chancel](#) of the [Holy Trinity Church](#) two days after his death. The epitaph carved into the stone slab covering his grave includes a curse against moving his bones, which was carefully avoided during restoration of the church in 2008:

In 1623, [John Heminges](#) and [Henry Condell](#), two of Shakespeare's friends from the King's Men, published the [First Folio](#), a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays. It contained 36 texts, including 18 printed for the first time. Many of the plays had already appeared in [quarto](#) versions—flimsy books made from sheets of paper folded twice to make four leaves. No evidence suggests that Shakespeare approved these editions, which the First Folio describes as "stol'n and surreptitious copies". [Alfred Pollard](#) termed some of them "[bad quartos](#)" because of their adapted, paraphrased or garbled texts, which may in places have been reconstructed from memory. Where several versions of a play survive, each [differs from the other](#). The differences may stem from copying or [printing](#) errors, from notes by actors or audience members, or from Shakespeare's own [papers](#). In some cases, for example *Hamlet*, [Troilus and Cressida](#) and *Othello*, Shakespeare could have revised the texts between the quarto and folio editions. In the case of [King Lear](#), however, while most modern additions do conflate them, the 1623 folio

version is so different from the 1608 quarto, that the *Oxford Shakespeare* prints them both, arguing that they cannot be conflated without confusion. Published in 1609, the *Sonnets* were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership. Even before the two unauthorised sonnets appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599, Francis Meres had referred in 1598 to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends". Few analysts believe that the published collection follows Shakespeare's intended sequence. He seems to have planned two contrasting series: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one about conflicted love for a fair young man (the "fair youth"). It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals, or if the authorial "I" who addresses them represents Shakespeare himself, though Wordsworth believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his heart".

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate..."

—Lines from Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18*.

The 1609 edition was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.", credited as "the only begetter" of the poems. It is not known whether this was written by Shakespeare himself or by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, whose initials appear at the foot of the dedication page; nor is it known who Mr. W.H. was, despite numerous theories, or whether Shakespeare even authorised the publication. Critics praise the *Sonnets* as a profound meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time.

## Style

Main article: [Shakespeare's style](#)

Shakespeare's first plays were written in the conventional style of the day. He wrote them in a stylised language that does not always spring naturally from the needs of the characters or the drama. The poetry depends on extended, sometimes elaborate metaphors and conceits, and the language is often rhetorical—written for actors to declaim rather than speak. The grand speeches in [Titus Andronicus](#), in the view of some critics, often hold up the action, for example; and the verse in [The Two Gentlemen of Verona](#) has been described as stilted.

Soon, however, Shakespeare began to adapt the traditional styles to his own purposes. The opening [soliloquy](#) of [Richard III](#) has its roots in the self-declaration of [Vice](#) in medieval drama. At the same time, Richard's vivid self-awareness looks forward to the soliloquies of Shakespeare's mature plays. No single play marks a change from the traditional to the freer style. Shakespeare combined the two throughout his career, with [Romeo and Juliet](#) perhaps the best example of the mixing of the styles. By the time of [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Richard II](#), and [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) in the mid-1590s, Shakespeare had begun to write a more natural poetry. He increasingly tuned his metaphors and images to the needs of the drama itself.

## Shakespeare's Contribution to World Literature

William Shakespeare created a new epoch in world literature. The ideas set forth by the Renaissance, the ideology of Humanism are expressed by him in the most realistic way. Shakespeare has faith in Man. He hates injustice. His plays have become popular throughout the world because of his realistic characters. The history of English drama is reflected in Shakespeare's works.

The development of his characters makes him different from his predecessors (Marlowe and others). Shakespeare's characters don't remain static, they change in the course of action. More than that, Shakespeare was the first dramatist to mix comedy and tragedy: "The Merchant of Venice" (1596-1597) is called a comedy, though Shylock is in fact badly treated. He has been called the first great tragic figure.

Shakespeare's language was understood even by the common people of those times. The soliloquies in his plays are not long; the dialogues are true to life. Many well-known English sayings come from his works.

He had a great influence on the English language and English literature. His work is known for its beautiful language, as well as for its understanding of the way people think and feel. Shakespeare is so great a writer that every generation discovers new ideas and social problems concerning the relations of man to man in human society in his plays. Shakespeare's plays do not grow old with time. His plays are regularly performed in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

The first memorial theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, was opened in 1879 in Stratford-upon-Avon. Many plays were staged there and many famous actors started their career in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Since then a season of Shakespearian drama can be seen each year in Stratford.

Research work and study of Shakespeare's literary heritage by scholars will never cease.

The name of Benjamin Jonson is worth mentioning in connection with Shakespeare's works. It was Ben Jonson, an actor of Shakespeare's Company and his close friend, who published Shakespeare's plays in 1623. Jonson was not only an actor, he was also a dramatist. He wrote more than twenty plays,

some of them were staged at "The Globe" by Shakespeare's Company. Jonson scorned many of the other dramatists of his time, but not Shakespeare. He was fond of him:

Soul of the Age!

The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage!

My Shakespeare, rise!

Ben Jonson believed in the unity of action, time and place. He himself followed this rule, and was proud of his plays.

More than that, Ben Jonson was a talented producer of masques which were the real performances with different plots and characters, dancing and music.

**William Shakespeare's influence** extends from theatre and literature to present-day movies and the English language itself. Widely regarded as the greatest writer of the English language, and the world's pre-eminent dramatist, Shakespeare transformed European theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through characterization, plot, language and genre. Shakespeare's writings have also influenced a large number of notable novelists and poets over the years, including Herman Melville and Charles Dickens, and continue to influence new authors even today. Shakespeare is the most quoted writer in the history of the English-speaking world after the various writers of the Bible, and many of his quotations and neologisms have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages.

Shakespeare's work has made a lasting impression on later theatre and literature. In particular, he expanded the dramatic potential of

[characterisation](#), plot, [language](#), and [genre](#). Until *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, romance had not been viewed as a worthy topic for tragedy. [Soliloquies](#) had been used mainly to convey information about characters or events; but Shakespeare used them to explore characters' minds. His work heavily influenced later poetry. The [Romantic poets](#) attempted to revive Shakespearean verse drama, though with little success. Critic [George Steiner](#) described all English verse dramas from [Coleridge](#) to [Tennyson](#) as "feeble variations on Shakespearean themes."

Shakespeare influenced novelists such as [Thomas Hardy](#), [William Faulkner](#), and [Charles Dickens](#). The American novelist [Herman Melville](#)'s soliloquies owe much to Shakespeare; his Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick* is a classic [tragic hero](#), inspired by *King Lear*. Scholars have identified 20,000 pieces of music linked to Shakespeare's works. These include two operas by [Giuseppe Verdi](#), *Otello* and *Falstaff*, whose critical standing compares with that of the source plays.<sup>[162]</sup> Shakespeare has also inspired many painters, including the Romantics and the [Pre-Raphaelites](#). The Swiss Romantic artist [Henry Fuseli](#), a friend of [William Blake](#), even translated *Macbeth* into German. The [psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud](#) drew on Shakespearean psychology, in particular that of Hamlet, for his theories of human nature.

In Shakespeare's day, English grammar, spelling and pronunciation were less standardised than they are now, and his use of language helped shape modern English. [Samuel Johnson](#) quoted him more often than any other author in his *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the first serious work of its type. Expressions such as "with bated breath" (*Merchant of Venice*) and "a foregone conclusion" (*Othello*) have found their way into everyday English speech.

## **Changes in English at the time**

[Early Modern English](#) as a literary medium was unfixed in structure and vocabulary in comparison to Greek and Latin, and was in a constant state of flux. When [William Shakespeare](#) began writing his plays, the English language was rapidly absorbing words from other languages due to wars, exploration, diplomacy and colonization. By the age of Elizabeth, English had become widely used with the expansion of philosophy, theology and physical sciences, but many writers lacked the vocabulary to express such ideas. To accommodate, writers such as [Edmund Spenser](#), [Sir Philip Sidney](#), [Christopher Marlowe](#) and [William Shakespeare](#) expressed new ideas and distinctions by inventing, borrowing or adopting a word or a phrase from another language, known as [neologizing](#). Scholars estimate that, between the years 1500 and 1659, nouns, verbs and modifiers of Latin, Greek and modern Romance languages added 30,000 new words to the English language.

## **Influence on theatre**

Shakespeare's works have been a major influence on subsequent theatre. Not only did Shakespeare create some of the most admired plays in [Western literature](#)<sup>[12]</sup> (with [Macbeth](#), [Hamlet](#) and [King Lear](#) being ranked among the world's greatest plays),<sup>[13]</sup> he also transformed English theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through [characterization](#), plot, [language](#), and [genre](#).<sup>[5][14][15]</sup> Specifically, in plays like *Hamlet*, Shakespeare "integrated characterization with plot," such that if the main character was different in any way, the plot would be totally changed. In [Romeo and Juliet](#), Shakespeare mixed tragedy and comedy together to create a new romantic tragedy genre (previous to Shakespeare, romance had not been considered a worthy topic for tragedy). Through his [soliloquies](#),

Shakespeare showed how plays could explore a character's inner motivations and conflict (up until Shakespeare, soliloquies were often used by playwrights to "introduce (characters), convey information, provide an [exposition](#) or reveal plans").

### **Characters**[\[edit\]](#)

Shakespeare's plays portrayed a wide variety of emotions. His plays exhibited "spectacular violence, with loose and episodic plotting, and with mingling of comedy with tragedy". In [King Lear](#), Shakespeare had deliberately brought together two plots of different origins. His closeness to human nature made him greater than any of his contemporaries. Humanism and contact with popular thinking gave vitality to his language. Shakespeare's plays borrowed ideas from popular sources, [folk traditions](#), street pamphlets, and [sermons](#) etc. Shakespeare used [groundlings](#) widely in his plays. The use of groundlings "saved the drama from academic stiffness and preserved its essential bias towards entertainment in comedy ". [Hamlet](#) is an outstanding example of "groundlings" quickness and response. Use of groundlings' enhanced Shakespeare's work practically and artistically. He represented English people more concretely and not as puppets. His skills have found expression in chronicles, or history plays, and tragedies. Shakespeare's earliest years were dominated by history plays and a few comedies that formed a link to the later written [tragedies](#). Nine out of eighteen plays he produced in the first decade of his career were chronicles or histories. His histories were based on the prevailing Tudor political thought. They portrayed the follies and achievements of kings, their misgovernment, church and problems arising out of these. "In shaping, compressing, and altering chronicles, Shakespeare gained the art of dramatic design; and in the same way he developed his

remarkable insight into character, its continuity and its variation". His characters were very near to reality.

"Shakespeare's characters are more sharply individualized after *Love's Labour's Lost*". His [Richard II](#) and [Bolingbroke](#) are complex and solid figures whereas [Richard III](#) has more "humanity and comic gusto". The [Falstaff](#) trilogy is in this respect very important. Falstaff, although a minor character, has a powerful reality of its own. "Shakespeare uses him as a commentator who passes judgments on events represented in the play, in the light of his own super abundant comic vitality". Falstaff, although outside "the prevailing political spirit of the play", throws insight into the different situations arising in the play. This shows that Shakespeare had developed a capacity to see the plays as whole, something more than characters and expressions added together. In Falstaff trilogy, through the character of Falstaff, he wants to show that in society "where touchstone of conduct is success, and in which humanity has to accommodate itself to the claims of expediency, there is no place for Falstaff", a loyal human-being. This sentiment is so true even after centuries. Shakespeare united the three main streams of literature: [verse](#), poetry, and drama. To the versification of the Old English language, he imparted his eloquence and variety giving highest expressions with elasticity of language. The second, the sonnets and poetry, was bound in structure. He imparted economy and intensity to the language. In the third and the most important area, the drama, he saved the language from vagueness and vastness and infused actuality and vividness. Shakespeare's work in prose, poetry, and drama marked the beginning of modernization of English language by introduction of words and expressions, style and form to the language.

## **Influence on European and American literature**

Shakespeare is cited as an influence on a large number of writers in the following centuries, including major novelists such as [Herman Melville](#), [Charles Dickens](#), [Thomas Hardy](#) and [William Faulkner](#). Examples of this influence include the large number of Shakespearean quotations throughout Dickens' writings and the fact that at least 25 of Dickens' titles are drawn from Shakespeare, while Melville frequently used Shakespearean devices, including formal stage directions and extended [soliloquies](#), in *Moby-Dick*. In fact, Shakespeare so influenced Melville that the novel's main [antagonist](#), Captain Ahab, is a classic Shakespearean tragic figure, "a great man brought down by his faults." Shakespeare has also influenced a number of English poets, especially [Romantic poets](#) such as [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#) who were obsessed with [self-consciousness](#), a modern theme Shakespeare anticipated in plays such as *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's writings were so influential to English poetry of the 1800s that critic [George Steiner](#) has called all English poetic dramas from Coleridge to [Tennyson](#) "feeble variations on Shakespearean themes."

## **Influence on the English language**

Shakespeare's writings greatly influenced the entire English language. Prior to and during Shakespeare's time, the grammar and rules of English were not standardized. But once Shakespeare's plays became popular in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, they helped contribute to the standardization of the English language, with many Shakespearean words and phrases becoming embedded in the English language, particularly through projects such as [Samuel Johnson's](#) *A Dictionary of the English Language* which quoted Shakespeare more than any other writer. He expanded the

scope of English literature by introducing new words and phrases, experimenting with [blank verse](#), and also introducing new poetic and grammatical structures.

## Vocabulary

For a list of words relating to Shakespeare's vocabulary, see the [Words from Shakespeare category of words](#) in [Wiktionary](#), the free dictionary.

Among Shakespeare's greatest contributions to the English language must be the introduction of new vocabulary and phrases which have enriched the language making it more colorful and expressive. Some estimates at the number of words coined by Shakespeare number in the several thousands. Warren King clarifies by saying that, "In all of his work – the plays, the sonnets and the narrative poems – Shakespeare uses 17,677 words: Of those, 1,700 were first used by Shakespeare." He is also very known for [borrowing](#) from the classical literature and foreign languages. He created these words by, "changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original." Many of Shakespeare's original phrases are still used in conversation and language today. These include, but are not limited to; "seen better days, strange bedfellows, a sorry sight," and "full circle". Shakespeare's effect on vocabulary is rather astounding when considering how much language has changed since his lifetime.

Shakespeare helped to further develop style and structure to an otherwise loose, spontaneous language. The [Elizabethan era](#) language was written the same way it was spoken. The naturalness gave force and freedom since there was no formalized prescriptive [grammar](#) binding the expression. While lack of prescribed grammatical rules introduced vagueness in literature, it also

expressed feelings with profound vividness and emotion which created, "freedom of expression" and "vividness of presentment". It was a language which expressed feelings explicitly. Shakespeare's gift involved using the exuberance of the language and [decasyllabic](#) structure in prose and poetry of his plays to reach the masses and the result was "a constant two way exchange between learned and the popular, together producing the unique combination of racy tang and the majestic stateliness that informs the language of Shakespeare".

While it is true that Shakespeare created many new words (the Oxford English Dictionary records over 2,000), an article in *National Geographic* points out the findings of historian Jonathan Hope who wrote in "Shakespeare's 'Native English'" that "the Victorian scholars who read texts for the first edition of the OED paid special attention to Shakespeare: his texts were read more thoroughly, and cited more often, so he is often credited with the first use of words, or senses of words, which can, in fact, be found in other writers." Shakespeare created many words that are commonly used in British lexicon today.

### **Blank verse**

Shakespeare's first plays were experimental as he was still learning from his own mistakes. It was a long journey from [Titus Andronicus](#) and [King Henry VI](#) to [The Tempest](#). Gradually his language followed the "natural process of artistic growth, to find its adequate projection in dramatic form". As he continued experimenting, his style of writing found many manifestations in plays. The dialogues in his plays were written in verse form and followed a decasyllabic rule. In *Titus Andronicus*, decasyllables have been used throughout. "There is considerable pause; and though the inflexibility of the

line sound is little affected by it, there is a certain running over of sense". His work is still experimental in *Titus Andronicus*. However, in [\*Love's Labour's Lost\*](#) and [\*The Comedy of Errors\*](#), there is "perfect metre-abundance of rime [rhyme], plenty of prose, arrangement in stanza". After these two comedies, he kept experimenting until he reached a maturity of style. "Shakespeare's experimental use of trend and style, as well as the achieved development of his blank verses, are all evidences of his creative invention and influences". Through experimentation of [\*tri-syllabic\*](#) substitution and decasyllabic rule he developed the blank verse to perfection and introduced a new style.

"Shakespeare's blank verse is one of the most important of all his influences on the way the English language was written". He used the blank verse throughout in his writing career experimenting and perfecting it. The free speech rhythm gave Shakespeare more freedom for experimentation. "Adaptation of free speech rhythm to the fixed blank-verse framework is an outstanding feature of Shakespeare's poetry". The striking choice of words in common place blank verse influenced "the run of the verse itself, expanding into images which eventually seem to bear significant repetition, and to form, with the presentation of character and action correspondingly developed, a more subtle and suggestive unity". Expressing emotions and situations in form of a verse gave a natural flow to language with an added sense of flexibility and spontaneity.

**Pre-Shakespearian English.** Shakespeare wrote under the influence of writers such as Chaucer, Spenser and Sidney. It is also important to note the setting of Shakespeare's language. In 449, the Germanic tribes – the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had moved to Britain to side with the Celts in order to help them defeat their northern neighbors. After their victory, however, the Germanic tribes gradually pushed the Celts into what became Wales and Cornwall. The tribes introduced Anglo-Saxon, more commonly known as Old English language (Mario Pei). Anglo-Saxon survived despite the Norman invasion of 1066, which introduced French to England and strengthened Latin's existing power. These events marked the beginning of the Middle English period. Around 1204, bilingualism developed amongst "Norman officials, supervisors, [and] bilingual children [resulting from] French and English marriages". English was, however, still not in common use, at least in matters of the state and clergy. King John's death indicated the end of Norman rule. The decision of the Norman proprietors and Edward I's (Henry III's son) conquest of Wales all contributed to increased usage of the English language. French/Norman cultural supremacy in England waned. The increase in the use of English resulted in the "smoothing out of dialectal differences [and] beginning of standard English based on London dialect". Nevertheless, French remained the official language until around the 14th century. It was not until 1509, however, that English was recognized as the official language of England. Until 1583, the rhetoric of the English language was deeply indebted to Chaucer. Otherwise, given the relative lack of written records, "the innovation of the language was uncertain". The late 15th and early 16th century marks the approximate shift from Middle English to Early Modern English, the language of the Renaissance. "Before the arrival of

**Shakespeare to London, there was little hope for the future of English but by 1613, when Shakespeare's last work was written, the literature of modern English was already rich in varied achievements, self confident and mature".**

## **Poetry**

He introduced in poetry two main factors – "verbal immediacy and the moulding of stress to the movement of living emotion". Shakespeare's words reflected passage of time with "fresh, concrete vividness" giving the reader an idea of the time frame. His remarkable capacity to analyze and express emotions in simple words was noteworthy:

"When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her, though I know she lies-"

In the sonnet above, he has expressed in very simple words "complex and even contradictory attitudes to a single emotion".

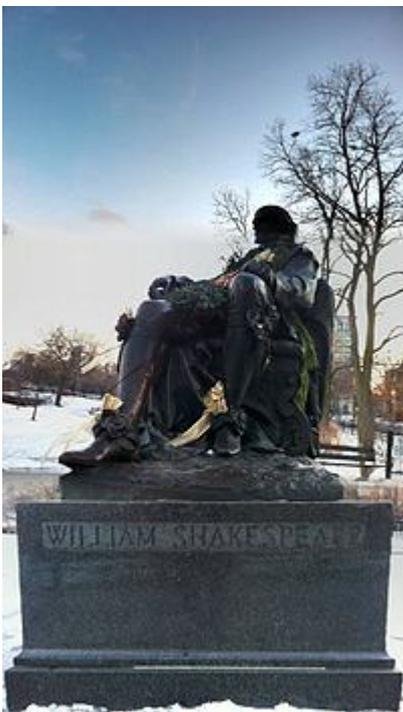
The [sonnet](#) form was limited structurally, in theme and in expressions. Liveliness of Shakespeare's language and strict discipline of the sonnets imparted economy and intensity to his writing style. "It encouraged the association of compression with depth of content and variety of emotional response to a degree unparalleled in English". Complex human emotions found simple expressions in Shakespeare's language

## **Critical reputation**

"He was not of an age, but for all time."

—[Ben Jonson](#)

Shakespeare was not revered in his lifetime, but he received a large amount of praise. In 1598, the cleric and author [Francis Meres](#) singled him out from a group of English writers as "the most excellent" in both comedy and tragedy. And the authors of the *Parnassus* plays at [St John's College, Cambridge](#), numbered him with [Chaucer](#), [Gower](#) and [Spenser](#). In the [First Folio](#), [Ben Jonson](#) called Shakespeare the "Soul of the age, the applause, delight, the wonder of our stage", though he had remarked elsewhere that "Shakespeare wanted art".



A recently garlanded statue of William Shakespeare in [Lincoln Park, Chicago](#), typical of many created in the 19th and early 20th century. A recently garlanded statue of William Shakespeare in [Lincoln Park, Chicago](#), typical of many created in the 19th and early 20th century.

Between [the Restoration](#) of the monarchy in 1660 and the end of the 17th century, classical ideas were in vogue. As a result, critics of the time mostly rated Shakespeare below [John Fletcher](#) and Ben Jonson. [Thomas Rymer](#), for example, condemned Shakespeare for mixing the comic with the tragic.

Nevertheless, poet and critic [John Dryden](#) rated Shakespeare highly, saying of Jonson, "I admire him, but I love Shakespeare". For several decades, Rymer's view held sway; but during the 18th century, critics began to respond to Shakespeare on his own terms and acclaim what they termed his natural genius. A series of scholarly editions of his work, notably those of [Samuel Johnson](#) in 1765 and [Edmond Malone](#) in 1790, added to his growing reputation. By 1800, he was firmly enshrined as the national poet. In the 18th and 19th centuries, his reputation also spread abroad. Among those who championed him were the writers [Voltaire](#), [Goethe](#), [Stendhal](#) and [Victor Hugo](#).

During the [Romantic era](#), Shakespeare was praised by the poet and literary philosopher [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#); and the critic [August Wilhelm Schlegel](#) translated his plays in the spirit of [German Romanticism](#). In the 19th century, critical admiration for Shakespeare's genius often bordered on adulation.<sup>[179]</sup> "That King Shakespeare," the essayist [Thomas Carlyle](#) wrote in 1840, "does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying signs; indestructible". The [Victorians](#) produced his plays as lavish spectacles on a grand scale. The playwright and critic [George Bernard Shaw](#) mocked the cult of Shakespeare worship as "[bardolatry](#)". He claimed that the new [naturalism](#) of [Ibsen's](#) plays had made Shakespeare obsolete.

The modernist revolution in the arts during the early 20th century, far from discarding Shakespeare, eagerly enlisted his work in the service of the [avant-garde](#). The [Expressionists in Germany](#) and the [Futurists](#) in Moscow mounted productions of his plays. Marxist playwright and director [Bertolt Brecht](#) devised an [epic theatre](#) under the influence of Shakespeare. The poet and critic [T. S. Eliot](#) argued against Shaw that Shakespeare's "primitiveness" in

fact made him truly modern. Eliot, along with [G. Wilson Knight](#) and the school of [New Criticism](#), led a movement towards a closer reading of Shakespeare's imagery. In the 1950s, a wave of new critical approaches replaced modernism and paved the way for "[post-modern](#)" studies of Shakespeare. By the 1980s, Shakespeare studies were open to movements such as [structuralism](#), feminism, [New Historicism](#), [African-American studies](#), and [queer studies](#).

## **Speculation about Shakespeare**

### **Authorship**

Around 230 years after Shakespeare's death, doubts began to be expressed about the authorship of the works attributed to him. Proposed alternative candidates include [Francis Bacon](#), [Christopher Marlowe](#), and [Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford](#). Several "group theories" have also been proposed. Only a small minority of academics believe there is reason to question the traditional attribution, but interest in the subject, particularly the [Oxfordian theory of Shakespeare authorship](#), continues into the 21st century.

### **Religion**

Some scholars claim that members of Shakespeare's family were Catholics, at a time when Catholic practice was against the law. Shakespeare's mother, [Mary Arden](#), certainly came from a pious Catholic family. The strongest evidence might be a Catholic statement of faith signed by [John Shakespeare](#), found in 1757 in the rafters of his former house in Henley Street. The document is now lost, however, and scholars differ as to its authenticity. In 1591 the authorities reported that John Shakespeare had missed church "for fear of process for debt", a common Catholic excuse. In 1606 the name of

William's daughter Susanna appears on a list of those who failed to attend Easter [communion](#) in Stratford. Scholars find evidence both for and against Shakespeare's Catholicism in his plays, but the truth may be impossible to prove either way.



*The Plays of William Shakespeare.* By [Sir John Gilbert](#), 1849.

Shakespeare's works include the 36 plays printed in the [First Folio](#) of 1623, listed below according to their folio classification as [comedies](#), [histories](#) and [tragedies](#). Two plays not included in the First Folio, [The Two Noble Kinsmen](#) and [Pericles, Prince of Tyre](#), are now accepted as part of the canon, with scholars agreed that Shakespeare made a major contribution to their composition. No Shakespearean poems were included in the First Folio. In the late 19th century, [Edward Dowden](#) classified four of the late comedies as [romances](#), and though many scholars prefer to call them [tragicomedies](#), his term is often used. These plays and the associated *Two Noble Kinsmen* are marked with an asterisk (\*) below. In 1896, [Frederick S. Boas](#) coined the term "[problem plays](#)" to describe four plays: [All's Well That Ends Well](#), [Measure for Measure](#), [Troilus and Cressida](#) and [Hamlet](#). "Dramas as singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies", he wrote. "We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays."

## Consolidation

*Shakespeare's earliest years were dominated by history plays and a few comedies that formed a link to the later written [tragedies](#). Nine out of eighteen plays he produced in the first decade of his career were chronicles or histories. His histories were based on the prevailing Tudor political thought. They portrayed the follies and achievements of kings, their misgovernment, church and problems arising out of these. "In shaping, compressing, and altering chronicles, Shakespeare gained the art of dramatic design; and in the same way he developed his remarkable insight into character, its continuity and its variation". His characters were very near to reality.*

### External links

- Internet Shakespeare Editions
- Folger Digital Texts
- Open Source Shakespeare complete works, with search engine and concordance
- First Four Folios at Miami University Library, digital collection
- The Shakespeare Quartos Archive
- Shakespeare's Words the online version of the best-selling glossary and language companion
- Shakespeare's Will from The National Archives
- Free scores by William Shakespeare in the Choral Public Domain Library (ChoralWiki)
- Works by or about William Shakespeare in libraries (WorldCat catalog)

## Used Sytes

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

[www.englishliterature.com](http://www.englishliterature.com)