

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A MYSTERIOUS LIFE?

William Shakespeare is considered one of the world's finest playwrights of all time. Writing in England during the late 1500s during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, he established himself as a major poet, actor, and playwright. He mastered the comic and tragic dramatic forms and introduced over 2,000 new vocabulary words into the English language. Shakespeare is read by nearly every American student and is perhaps best known for *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

However, Shakespeare's life is a constant source of debate and question in the scholarly community. Many records of the time that might have tracked his life or given more clues to how, when, and why he wrote the plays that he did have been lost, if they even existed at all. Here are some of the more interesting things that we actually know about his life.

- Shakespeare was born under the old Julian calendar, not the current Gregorian calendar that was created in 1582 and adopted in England in 1751. What was April 23 during Shakespeare's life would be May 3 on today's calendar.
- Shakespeare is listed as an actor on documents from 1592, 1598, 1603, and 1608. It is supposed that he played mostly unassuming parts, such as the ghost in *Hamlet*, to allow him more time to write.
- On June 29, 1613, the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A theatrical cannon, set off during the performance, misfired, igniting the wooden beams and thatching. According to one of the few surviving documents of the event, no one was hurt except a man whose burning breeches were put out with a bottle of ale. It was rebuilt in the following year.
- Countless excellent phrases, now commonly used, occurred first in Shakespeare's writing, including *one fell swoop*, *vanish into thin air*, *play fast and loose*, *be in a pickle*, *foul play*, *tower of strength*, *flesh and blood*, *be cruel to be kind*, and *with bated breath*. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Shakespeare wrote about one-tenth of the most quotable quotations ever written or spoken in English.
- Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died in 1596. His daughter Susanna died in 1649. His younger daughter Judith had three children, but all died before their mother and without children. His granddaughter Elizabeth, daughter of Susanna, died childless in 1670, ending the William Shakespeare line.
- Shakespeare was buried in the Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon. He supposedly put a curse on anyone daring to move his body from that final resting place. Though it was customary to dig up the bones from previous graves to make room for others, Shakespeare's remains are still undisturbed.

Web Sources for these facts:

www.wikipedia.org

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facts.randomhistory.com/2009/01/11_shakespeare.html

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