

William Shakespeare - An Analysis

(English Literature for BS English, M.A English, and competitive exams)

For College & University Students

Why was William Shakespeare regarded as the best English playwright?

In his book *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt describes Shakespeare as “the greatest playwright not of his age alone but of all time”. This echoes the fact that ‘the Bard’ is often considered to be one of England’s greatest authors. Even today his work is read by thousands of schoolchildren, his plays are performed in many theatres (including the replica Globe in London which is named after him), his plays have been repeatedly filmed and turned into parts of popular culture, and his language is often quoted in various forms. In addition, his hometown of Stratford has become one of England’s premier tourist attractions.

Considering Shakespeare is such a famous figure, it is remarkable how little we actually know about his life. In fact, some critics have suggested that this is one reason for his continuing success or for the ‘cult’ of ‘The Bard’: if the man himself is a myth then he can be permanently recreated for many generations. However, there are some details that we can identify with relative confidence. Shakespeare was born in 1564, probably on April 23rd as he was baptized on the 26th. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in the county of Warwickshire where his father was a glover and alderman. He received a good education at the local grammar school, the Kings New School, where boys were taught Latin grammar and classical texts (he later used Latin sources for the plots of some of his plays, for example, *Titus Andronicus* refers to Ovid’s tales *Metamorphoses*).

By the time Shakespeare was 18 he was married to a relative and a local woman named Anne Hathaway, with whom he eventually had three children, called Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. Between 1585 and 1592 there are few records to indicate where Shakespeare was living and under what occupation, though a number of different stories suggest he was already in London, or had fled accused of poaching, or was, in fact, himself a teacher: “He had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country” wrote John Aubrey. But by 1592 records suggest that he was established in London as