William Shakespeare

Widely regarded as the greatest writer in English Literature
Shakespeare

- **Lived:** 1564-1616
- **Born April 23, 1564**
- **Stratford-Upon-Avon, England**
  - drama was a significant part of Stratford's social life
- **Christened April 26, 1564**
- **Parents:** Mary Arden and John
Shakespeare

- Married Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582
- Shakespeare at the age of 18
- Anne at the age of 26
- Susanna born May 26, 1583
- Twins Hamnet and Judith born in 1585
Shakespeare

- The Lost Years
- 1586-1592
- Living in London?
- School Master?
- Writing sonnets?
- No one really knows...
The Curtain Falls

- Died April 23, 1616
- Age: 52
- Left most of estate to Susanna
- Left Anne Hathaway “2nd best bed”
- First Folio published in 1623
Shakespeare

- Shakespeare's Career/Reputation was established in London by 1592
- Started out as an actor
- Wrote 37 plays
- 154 sonnets
  - Long Poems and other poems including songs
Shakespeare

- “This Upstart Crow”
- Mentioned by Robert Greene
- First comment about Shakespeare as playwright
Stage Celebrity

- **Actor for Lord Chamberlain’s Men (London theater co.)**
- Also, principal playwright for them
- **1599, Lord Ch. Co. built Globe Theater where most of Shakespeare’s Play’s were performed**
Shakespeare wrote:

- Comedies
- Histories
- Tragedies
The Theater

- Plays produced for the general public
- Roofless - open air
- No artificial lighting
- Courtyard surrounded by 3 levels of galleries
Spectators

- Wealthy got benches
- “Groundlings” - poorer people stood and watched from the courtyard (“pit”)
- All but wealthy were uneducated or illiterate
- Much more interaction than today
Staging Areas
Staging Areas

- **Stage** - platform that extended into the pit
- **Dressing & storage rooms in galleries behind & above stage**
- **second-level gallery - upper stage** - famous balcony scene in *R & J*
Differences

- No scenery
- Settings - references in dialogue
- Elaborate costumes
- Plenty of props
- Fast-paced, colorful - 2 hours!
Actors

- Only men and boys
- Young boys whose voices had not changed play women’s roles
- Would have been considered indecent for a woman to appear on stage
Elizabethan (QE1) Words

- An, and: *If*
- Anon: *Soon*
- Aye: *Yes*
- But: *Except for*
- E’en: *Even*
- E’er: *Ever*
QE1 Words (contin.)

- **Haply**: Perhaps
- **Happy**: Fortunate
- **Hence**: Away, from her
- **Hie**: Hurry
- **Marry**: Indeed
QE1 Words (contin.)

- **Whence:** Where
- **Wilt:** Will, will you
- **Withal:** In addition to
- **Would:** Wish
Blank Verse

- Unrhymed verse
- Iambic (unstressed, stressed)
- Pentameter (5 “feet” to a line)
  - ends up to be 10 syllable lines
Prose

- Ordinary writing that is not poetry, drama, or song
Shakespeare wrote his own epitaph because during his time, when the graveyard was full, people would dig up someone's corpse and burn it so that another could be buried in that person's place. This disgusted Shakespeare, and he didn't want this type of disrespect after his death. His epitaph reads as follows:

"Good Friends, for Jesus' sake forbear,
To dig the bones enclosed here!
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones."
Qualities of Shakespeare’s Verse

- **Density** and richness

- **Characters** express thoughts through abundant, powerful **images and metaphors**

- **Figurative Language:** pleases the mind and senses - expresses one idea in terms of another

- **Connotative imagery:** highly suggestive network of pictures and ideas resonating with other images, ideas, themes in play
Early Modern English

Technical difficulties for modern readers:

- Verbs with inflected endings: hath, doth, goeth
- Pronoun problem: thee, thou, thy, thine
- Familiar vs. Formal: thou and you
Vocabulary

Another stumbling block for modern readers:

- Linguistic exuberance of the age
- Shakespeare’s vocabulary: 30,000 words (twice that of the average Am. college student)
- Many of his words have since dropped/changed from common usage: *bisson* (blind), *proper* (handsome), *cousin* (kinsman), *silly* (innocent)
Sentences

- Syntax - arrangement of words in sentence
- Influence of Latin grammar
- Shakespeare created stage pictures out of poetry - issues of verse and prose
  - iambic pentameter
  - rhythm, emphasis
  - characterization
Rhetoric

Renaissance playwrights were committed to eloquence and grounded in study of rhetoric

- **Rhetorical Devices**
- Intertwined with syntax, rhetoric exerts another powerful influence on Elizabethan writing. Rhetoric in its original sense means "the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively."
- The following is a list of some of the more common devices employed for emphasis in Shakespeare:
Translating Latin passages

- To English and back to Latin - had a profound impact on English versification (art of verse-writing)
- Imitation led to creation in poetry of
  - Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Ben Jonson - and of course, Shakespeare
Wordplay

- Tropes: A figure of speech or a rhetorical device that produces a shift in the meanings of words - their names and functions - were known to the average Elizabethan playgoer.

- Renaissance delight in language:
  - taste for copiousness or elaboration
  - pleasure in verbal games
Beatrice enters seeking Benedick - who has just been tricked into believing she is in love with him

- Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner

Benedick returns to the audience

- Against my will I am sent to bid you to come in to dinner--there's a double-meaning in that.
Much Ado About Nothing

- Benedick is mistaken - Beatrice means what she says and no more
- But in a larger sense he is right - Beatrice has yet to acknowledge her attraction to Benedick - and that she has been sent by the same pranksters who fooled him
- Double meanings - pranks and wordplay - are common in Shakespeare
Comedy (Shakespearean)

- Light and humorous drama with a happy ending
- A dramatic composition, or representation of a bright and amusing character, based upon the foibles of individuals, the manners of society, or the ludicrous events or accidents of life; a play in which mirth predominates and the termination of the plot is happy; -- opposed to tragedy.
Tragedy (Shakespearean)

- Drama where the central character(s) suffer disaster or great misfortune
- In many tragedies, downfall results from:
  - Fate
  - Character flaw/Fatal flaw
  - Combination of the two
Monologue

- One person speaking on stage - may be other characters on stage
Soliloquy

- Long speech expressing the thoughts of a character alone on stage.
Comic Relief

- Use of comedy within literature that is NOT comedy, but to provide “relief” from seriousness or sadness.