

Appendix A

About Shakespeare

Who was William Shakespeare? Was he a scholar, a poet, an actor, a family man, an Elizabethan gentleman? Was he a genius? Was he even a real person, or is it possible someone else, or several people, created the literary masterpieces we attribute to him?

We know the answers to some of those questions. Shakespeare wasn't a scholar or a gentleman; he was a poet, a playwright, and an actor. He did have a family but lived apart from his wife and children for many years. He was a brilliant craftsman of the English language, surpassed by no one, so many would call him a genius. We don't really know at what age this talent showed itself. Shakespeare had a sound command of Latin grammar and literature, which he almost certainly learned at school, and he probably studied Greek there as well. He also knew a fair amount of history and was comfortable making observations about whatever were the commonly held notions of science and astrology in sixteenth-century England. These subjects he probably did not study at school but learned later on his own in London. Shakespeare's was not an elite education.

There are few details of Shakespeare's life. Apparently no one saw a reason to write them down, and Shakespeare himself left no diary or letters.

Records show William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 and baptized on April 26; and, as it was customary to baptize three or so days after birth, he was probably born on the twenty-third. He died fifty-two years later, in 1616, also in April. His parents were John Shakespeare, a glove maker and local government official, and Mary Arden; he was their eldest son and one of eight children.

We know that Shakespeare was married at nineteen and that less than nine months later he and his wife Anne Hathaway became parents of a daughter, Susanna. We also know that he left the small market town of Stratford sometime after his second two children (twins Hamnet and Judith) were born and made the trip to London, where he lived for the next twenty years, making only occasional trips back to Stratford.

Records exist of some of Shakespeare's London business dealings. In addition to producing a steady stream of plays and poetry, he was also part owner of several London theaters, and he was at least a minor actor in them as well. We know