

Supplement to
SHAKESPEARE

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DEDICATION

To William Shakespeare,
who has set the bar for
all subsequent writers who
aspire toward excellence

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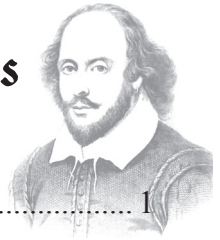


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Introduction



Purpose of This Book

This book is to be used as a supplementary text. It explores and explains the salient differences and similarities of the Elizabethan era's theatrical entertainments (including William Shakespeare's plays and poetry) in comparison with the modern theatrical entertainment experiences (stage, film, television, and electronic) of today's students. These comparisons will enhance and broaden an understanding and appreciation of the performing arts then and now.

What Is an Elizabethan?

An Elizabethan is any native person who lived in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. She was the Queen of England from 1558 to her death in 1603 at the age of sixty-nine. As the daughter of King Henry VIII, she was the epitome and the personification of what was English during that time. If you add a few years before her birth and after her death (forty-five to fifty years of English history), you will have an idea of the general time period.

During Queen Elizabeth I's reign, England's international importance grew politically, economically, and militarily. With the royal navy's overwhelming success against the Spanish Armada of 130 ships in the summer of 1588, spearheaded by Sir Francis Drake, England became the dominant world sea power. It also helped the queen to finalize England's conversion to Protestantism, freeing the country and her Crown from Rome's Catholicism and the Pope's political influence. This left England free to chart its own course in geopolitics.



Was Shakespeare for Real?

Yes. William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in the country town of Stratford-upon-Avon in southwest Warwickshire, located about ninety-five miles northwest of London in central England on the Avon River. A crossroad community, Stratford was noted for its festivals and markets, and it attracted traveling actors who performed in the town hall or in the street. These actors and their staged shows introduced Shakespeare to the magical fantasy of theater, which eventually became his siren song, drawing him to London to pursue a stage career.

Why Do We Have to Study His Seemingly Unreadable Plays?

We study them for personal intellectual growth and appreciation of Western culture. Elizabethan English provided the threshold for our modern American version of the language, even though we now consider theirs antiquated. The Elizabethans laid the foundation for our vernacular. We have them to thank for an expansively flexible yet practical form of verbal and written communication.

We should not let the more obscure words used in those bygone days deter our exploration of Shakespeare's plays, which were written mostly in sing-song, unrhymed iambic pentameter blank verse that helped the actors to remember their lines. Once we get attuned to the rise and fall of the rhythmic sounds, the words will begin to make sense, and the poetry will become pleasing to our hearing. When that happens, we will not only appreciate the beauty of his plays and sonnets, but their impact will become indelible on our psyches.

Shakespeare was a great inventor of words and their unique, insightful combinations, fostering the ultimate emotional effect on his audiences. He sprinkled new words



and new word combinations throughout his plays and poetry. Many have been incorporated into our daily modern language. Most of us are not aware of their sources—for example, jealousy: “green-eyed monster doth mock the meat it feeds on,” from *Othello*; destiny: “star-crossed lovers,” from *Romeo and Juliet*; or daughter ingratitude: “sharper than a serpent’s tooth,” from *King Lear*.

And we all have used some of the following words or phrases: fair play; a foregone conclusion; catch cold; disgraceful conduct; murder most foul; assassination; eventful; lonely; to be or not to be; friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse; a pound of flesh; all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players. Shakespeare wrote them for actors to say on stage 400 or so years ago.

Shakespeare’s plays are still staged and enjoyed worldwide. He is considered the genius of English letters around the globe—and rightly so—despite the detractors who keep bellowing that no one man or woman could be that much of a genius. Ben Jonson, a contemporary playwright, praised Shakespeare after the great bard’s death: “He was not of an age, but for all time,” which should have settled the argument long ago as to whether Shakespeare accomplished what is purported. (Scott McCrea’s 2005 book, *The Case for Shakespeare*, and Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel’s 2007 book, *The Life and Times of William Shakespeare*, document precisely why the naysayers are wrong in claiming otherwise.)

Why Are Shakespeare’s Plays Still Being Performed After 400 Years?

Shakespeare dealt in the universals of human emotions that pertain as much to us today as they did in his time, and they will continue to resonate with audiences long into the future. He truly was a man for all the ages. The proof is



in the continuing acceptance of his work and the constant quoting of meaningful lines from his plays, sonnets, and epic poems. His plays are the only ones from his era still being performed.

What Does His Slower-Moving World Have to Do with Ours?

A lot. Yes, the pace of life in our time is faster, and yes, our world is ever-more-dangerous with its devastating weapons and rampant terrorist activists, and yes, we have a larger, more diverse population spread across land and sea. But people don't change with the ages all that much. Some of us still love without reservation or seek revenge with eventual disastrous results to all involved. Some of us are ambitious and want to be successful, while the lazy want security and subsistence through the efforts of others. Some of us still seek redress for wrongs perpetrated against us, and many prefer justice and stability over chaos and turmoil.

That is why we can learn more about ourselves by studying Shakespeare's plays and poetry—as if he wrote them for us to enjoy as much as he did to entertain his Elizabethan contemporaries. Humans will always covet the basics of life, and they will always act like people do, and have done through the ages, no matter when and where they live on earth.

Why Is Shakespeare So Popular Today?

Shakespeare was one of the first Elizabethan playwrights (and some Shakespearean experts consider him the best) to present three-dimensional characters in conflict with their human needs and desires. The depth of characterization in his plays is striking. An example of this is the character Hamlet. He is still being discussed and argued about some 400 years after the play was first performed on a stage around the year 1600.

Hamlet's humanity is attractive to audiences, since he is us in every way, shape, and form. He mourns, feels betrayed, and wants justice but cannot get himself to perform the necessary act: revenge for his father's murder. Thus, he broods over his self-imposed inaction. This intrigue on all sides—for, against, and by Hamlet—helps to hang a tapestry of indecision on him woven with confusion and human frailty until the play's action-packed ending, which is wrought with physical conflict and the finality of death.

Conclusion

Don't be intimidated by William Shakespeare's fame. Although long gone, he remains one of us. Let this supplemental text of theatrical comparisons help you become part of his growing fan base of admirers. Age is not an impediment. Shakespeare's fans (of all ages) live in almost every country on earth, and their numbers are continually growing.

Festivals honoring Shakespeare's work are presented every year to the joy of appreciative audiences worldwide. The global acceptance of his work is phenomenal. His plays are best appreciated first on stage, television, DVD, and film for their visual effects. Then, when you read a play of his, you will be more readily able to understand it. You'll see the scenes in your mind's eye. I can almost guarantee that it will build a fondness for anything Shakespearean. I know; I am a lifelong fan and student of his work, which I appreciate even more as I continue to learn and dig deeper into what makes his plays tick. I continue to take college seminars and classes on Shakespeare, and wherever and whenever I can, I attend presentations of his plays. When I'm in the mood for straight poetry, I read his sonnets. They are available on the Internet, free of charge, for your reading pleasure.

Astute Comments on Shakespeare:

*What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man's work, has he not remembered? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy?
What lover has he not outloved?
What sage has he not outseen?*

REPRESENTATIVE MEN, V, 1850, R. W. Emerson

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage.

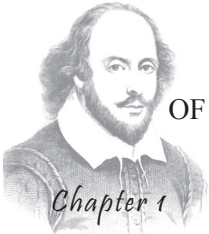
PALLIDAS TAMIA, 1598, Francis Meres

The English tongue is mightily enriched, and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent habiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser... Shakespeare...

PALLIDAS TAMIA, 1598, Francis Meres

When he describes anything you more than see it; you feel it.

OF DRAMATIC POESY, 1668, John Dryden



Chapter 1

Shakespeare's Life and Work

Early Life

Shakespeare played many parts in real life—like his many characters. He was a son (the third of eight children), a



student, a husband, a father, an actor, a poet, and a playwright. He grew up in a substantial home on Henley Street in the small town of Stratford that was adjacent to the river Avon. His father was a glover, and Stratford-upon-Avon was the center of the glove industry. Shakespeare apprenticed himself to his father in the glove-making business.

Shakespeare's elementary education was similar to, although more intense than, what we experience in America at that age in life. He learned the ABCs and how to read and write in English, and he mastered basic arithmetic, the same as we do here and now as children. He was an attentive student and loved reading. Shakespeare was naturally curious and innately intelligent, two positive character traits needed to succeed as a writer, an occupation which requires a detail-oriented mindset to do the extensive research necessary to write about myriad subjects—as he did so aptly.

By age eleven, Shakespeare was studying grammar, logic, and rhetoric. He also mastered Latin and could read Roman authors in that language. By age fifteen, his formal education ended, yet Shakespeare continued to school himself within the natural world around him, familiarizing himself with every forest, valley, river, and stream, as well as all of the different animals living in the Stratford area. Country traditions and local folktales and fairytales also played a large part in his life. Being intelligently alert to his environment, he was a keen observer of the townspeople who performed the Morris dances and the Mummer plays during the many local festivals (some lasting two weeks) and the holiday celebrations, which were held under the auspices of the local authorities, religious and secular. Nothing went unnoticed or unused later in Shakespeare's life when he became an actor, a poet, and a playwright. Every scrap of knowledge and every meaningful experience were burned into his fertile brain with its active memory bank, becoming

grist for his creative mill. He used this combination of accumulated formal and informal knowledge to make his plays come alive.

Adult Life

At age eighteen, during summer and autumn, Shakespeare wooed and then wed in November, 1582, an older woman, twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. Ironically, she was illiterate. Shakespeare went from young husband to father not long after the marriage. Daughter Susanna Shakespeare was born in May, 1583. And in 1585, Anne gave birth to fraternal twins, Hamnet and Judith. Still in his early twenties, Shakespeare was a married father of three children, but he lessened the responsibility by living with his parents in their spacious house on Henley Street, which was also home to Shakespeare's younger siblings.

Not much is known about Shakespeare's life for nearly a decade after his twins were born. It is speculated that besides being an apprentice in his father's glove business, he worked in a lawyer's office, taught school, and served in the queen's army. But the lure of acting must have drawn him to a life on the stage, first as an actor and subsequently as a playwright. It is reported that he joined a visiting troupe of actors in Stratford that needed a replacement for a dropout actor. The identity of the troupe is unknown and adds to the legend.

Note: See the Afterword for more details about Shakespeare's life as documented by author Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel in her book *The Life and Times of William Shakespeare*, published in 2007. She covers his whereabouts during the "lost" seven years from 1585 to 1592 regarding his religious activism, his sudden leaving of Stratford-on-Avon, his travels to Rome, and his advanced schooling in Europe at a Jesuit College for English Catholic

youths in Flanders, refuting claims by critics that Shakespeare didn't have any advanced schooling.

By 1592, Shakespeare was in London and was pursuing an acting career while his wife and children remained in Stratford with his parents and siblings. In London, Shakespeare made friends with a fellow Stratfordian citizen who was a printer. His name was Richard Field, and he played a pivotal role in launching Shakespeare's career as a poet, publishing his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* in 1593, and his early sonnets as well. While consorting with the booksellers in London, Shakespeare spent much of his free time reading everything from English poetry and history to literature from Italy, France, and Spain. This self-education remained an important part of his life, and the acquired knowledge proved beneficial in his writing.

Not long after he established himself in London theater, Shakespeare had to go back to touring with a troupe of actors because of a deadly plague outbreak. Shakespeare was not the greatest actor in his company. He was what is considered a supportive character player who generally has fewer lines than the lead actors and helps them tell the play's story to the audience. But his connections with the other players and the theater promoters, his acting, and his poetry publishing experiences helped him evolve into a playwright. When he wasn't acting, he was researching and writing.

Two years later the theaters reopened, and the actors returned to London. Shakespeare joined a company called Lord Chamberlain's Men (formed in 1594) as a combination actor and playwright-in-residence—and the rest is history.

The Acting and Writing Life

Shakespeare created 37 plays and more than 1,000 different characters. His plays ranged from comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*),

which are filled with lovers' quarrels and mistaken identities, to tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*), which show the dark side of the human psyche, revealing deeds of revenge, greed, and murder.

Besides the long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, which tells a tale from classical mythology, Shakespeare wrote *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, which relates a story from ancient Rome. His most famous body of poetry is his sonnets—all 154 of them. A recurring theme in the sonnets is the love between a young man and a “dark lady.”

Shakespeare wrote quickly, revising the lines in his plays only when necessary. Under pressure to create new work constantly, he became more playwright than actor with the Lord Chamberlain's Men and later with the King's Men. The audiences clamored for new plays—and he delivered year after year during a twenty-year career span.

By 1607, Shakespeare semi-retired and spent more time back home in Stratford with his family, creating his final plays, the romances *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*. During the year 1613, he wrote *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in collaboration with John Fletcher. A lost play, *Cardenio*, was also written by the pair. Fletcher seems to have been Shakespeare's handpicked successor as the prime playwright for the King's Men.

Shakespeare died at age 52 on April 23, 1616—the same date of his birth—but his death is a mystery. He had been out eating and drinking with a couple of friends, the eminent writer Ben Jonson and the accomplished poet Michael Drayton, and in the next day or so, he was dead. According to the records of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, as well as the musings in a diary by the Reverend John Ward fifty years later in 1666, his night of frivolity was the cause—Shakespeare “drank too hard and contracted a fever.” He was buried on the 25th of April.



To this day there are some interested parties who believe that Shakespeare's death, which was shrouded in secrecy, was the result of a conspiracy. But author Hildegard Hammerschmidt-Hummel has found evidence of an immunity disease as the true reason for his demise.

Shakespeare's Greatest Plays

Shakespeare always produced at least three copies of each of his plays, with the help of a scribe to make legible copies. (Every word back then was written by hand, of course.) The first copy (the original) was kept in a trunk for safety's sake. The second copy was cut up into roles and pasted onto scrolls, then handed out to the assigned players. No actor had a complete script. The third copy was used as the promptbook, which was important for rehearsals. It contained entrance and exit cues for the actors, as well as prompts for music and prop changes.

Shakespeare's most frequently performed plays are *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*. His other plays that have proven popular over the centuries are *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest*. Some of the biggest stars of stage and screen do not feel that their careers are complete until they do a Shakespearean play, and this was the consensus among popular actors of his time as well. Shakespeare's characters are complicated and challenging for the actors and actresses who want to stretch their talents to play Hamlet or Richard III, Othello, Desdemona, King Lear, Falstaff, Prospero, Macbeth, or Lady Macbeth (Who can resist playing her?). Supporting characters like Bottom, Ariel, Touchstone, Iago, Caliban, Puck, Shylock, the amusing constable Dogberry, or the irreverent, smart-aleck, grave-digging clown in *Hamlet* test actors' skills as well.

Publishing for Posterity

During his lifetime, Shakespeare published his epic poems and some sonnets, but several of his plays were pirated and published by others. Copyright protection was unheard of in those days; further, Shakespeare did not own his plays because they were written for the acting company, which technically owned them instead. Similarly, present-day writers do not own the copyrights for creative projects commissioned under work-for-hire contracts by employers or clients. However, copyright laws protect owners of the works from piracy today.

How did Shakespeare's plays get published legitimately? After his death in 1616, his acting company friends and fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell did the editorial work required, gathering, sorting, and editing his manuscripts for official publication. The first folio of Shakespeare's plays was published in 1623, and the first printing consisted of about a thousand copies, of which about 240 are still in existence. The original *First Folio Shakespeare* sold for about a pound, which is equivalent to about fifty dollars today. What a copy is worth in today's currency is speculative, but a folio in mint condition is purported to be worth about a million dollars.

Eighteen of Shakespeare's plays appeared in the first authorized printing. The title page states that it contains all of his comedies, histories, and tragedies truly set forth according to their first original copies. The plays in the *First Folio* were probably based on original scripts or promptbooks still in possession of the acting company and most likely were copied out for the printer. Still, the *Folio* edition contained many errors. The later *Quatro Shakespeare* editions contained even more errors. This has only added to the controversy surrounding Shakespeare and his works that continues into this age.

Shakespeare Is Everywhere

Shakespeare's plays, poetry, and songs are on film, television, DVDs, CDs, and stages worldwide, including festivals honoring his life and creative works. Bookstores across the globe have sections filled with titles about him, pro and con, as well as collections of his plays and poetry. Schools of all levels teach him continually. There are student summer camp workshops on him, his works, and his times, including the Elizabethan theater. Tourists even make pilgrimages to his birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Shakespeare is entertaining to an ever-growing fan base. People all over the world revere his intelligence and creativity. No other author, playwright, or poet—dead or alive—matches the ardor of Shakespeare's diverse admirers.

CHAPTER COMPARISON SUMMARY

Elizabethan England

1. The genius of Shakespeare is evident in his plays and poetry; the artistic scope of his work overall is phenomenal, and it is considered by many to be matchless. His present worldwide popularity and praise is concrete evidence of his continuing literary stature.

Modern America

1. No American writer of serious fiction or nonfiction, playwright or poet, past or present, has produced a body of work equal to Shakespeare's in size, content, and creative excellence.