

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

BORN

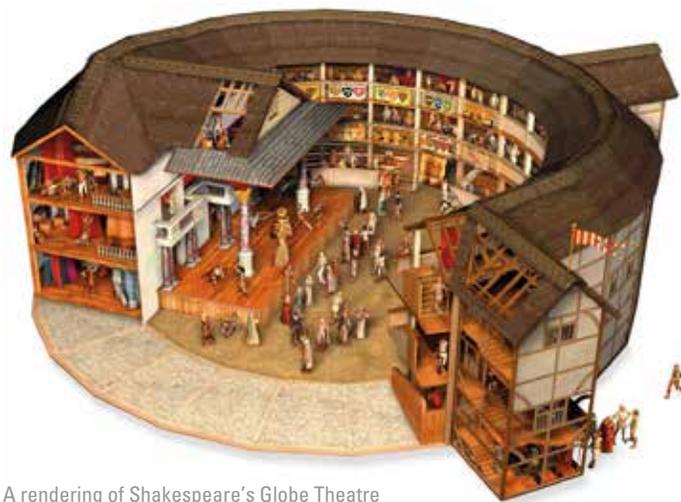
Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire, about 100 miles northwest of London. April 23, 2014 marked the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth! His parents were John and Mary Shakespeare. His father John was a whittawer, someone who made and worked with leather goods such as purses, belts, and gloves. William Shakespeare had seven brothers and sisters. He was the third son.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. They had three children. Daughter Susanna was born in 1583, and twins Judith and Hamnet born two years later.

CAREER

Shakespeare produced most of his work between 1589 and 1613. He wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and some other short verses. By the early 1590's, records indicate that Shakespeare was a managing partner with The Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting

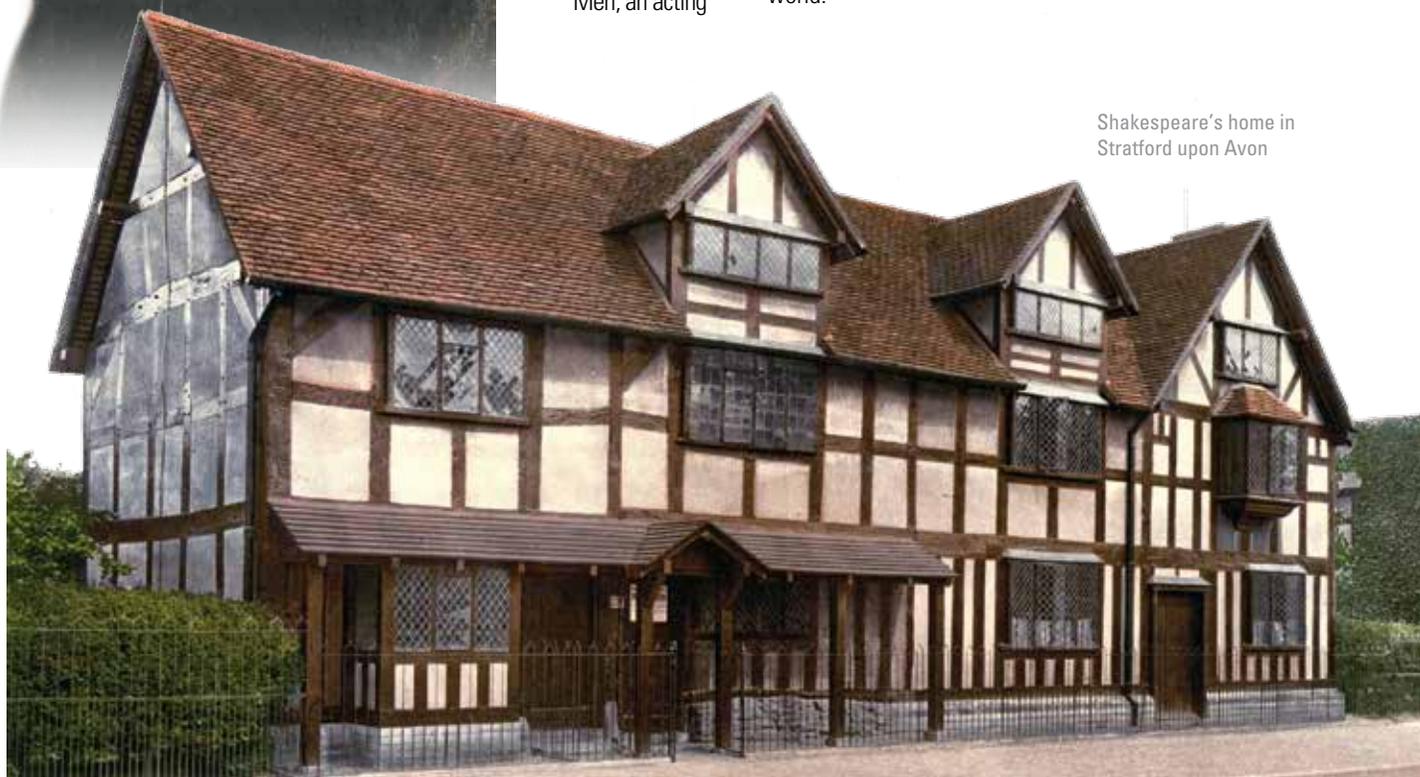
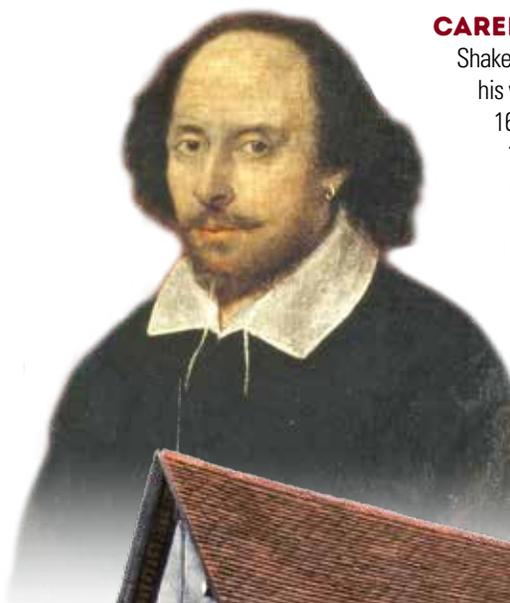


A rendering of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

company in London. After the crowning of King James in 1603, the company changed its name to The King's Men. By 1599, Shakespeare and his business partners built their own theatre on the bank of the South Thames in London. They called it The Globe. The Globe was destroyed by fire on June 29, 1613.

DEATH

Shakespeare is believed to have died on April 23, 1616, and was survived by his wife. 2016 marked the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and there were many events and celebrations planned throughout the world.



Shakespeare's home in Stratford upon Avon

SHAKESPEARE'S JULIUS CAESAR

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY WAS WRITTEN AND PERFORMED IN ENGLAND AT THE NEW GLOBE THEATRE IN 1599 AD.

It is a remarkably accurate depiction of the scenes and description of the events and speeches of those present as recorded by Plutarch in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*.

The Roman Republic was an ancient state that was centered around the city of Rome. Prior to the Republic, Rome was a monarchy, ruled by kings. The Republic began around 509 BCE and lasted until the establishment of the Roman Empire in 27 BCE.



A map showing the reach of the Roman Empire at the time of Caesar's death in 44 BCE

A republic is a system of government in which the power rests with the citizens who are entitled to vote and is carried out by representatives chosen directly or indirectly by them.

In Rome, the government system consisted of two consuls who were elected by the citizens and advised by the Senate. However, the consuls and the Senate were made up of appointed people, usually under the control of powerful families. Such people were called patricians, from the word *patres* or fathers.

The remaining citizens had no political authority. They could vote but could not hold a position of power. These people were referred to as plebeians from the word *pleb*, or common people.

The division between the two unequal classes and the tensions between the two continued to grow, especially as the poorer plebeians provided most of the manpower (women did not serve and could not vote) of the Roman armies. In 494 BCE, the plebeians went on strike and refused to participate until they were given representation. It worked and they were rewarded with an assembly of their own—the Concilium Plebis or Council of the Plebs.

In the case of civic emergency, a dictator could be elected. However, once the emergency had passed, power went back to the Senate and the assemblies.

Julius Caesar was a great military hero who was praised for both his military skills and his ability to lead. After leading Rome to an important victory against the Gauls and in a civil war against Pompey, Caesar returned to Rome as a powerful leader. As a leader, he instituted a number of reforms that made him popular with the citizens. He gave grain to the urban poor; he limited the terms of the provincial governors while increasing the size of the Senate. He created a new calendar (still in use today), and provided both gladiatorial games and banquets as entertainment. He created public works projects that offered jobs and built a public library. Such was his power that the Senate named Caesar dictator for life in February 44 BCE. Many believed that Caesar as dictator was a threat to the Republic. To name him dictator for life was unconstitutional under the system of government. Fears that Caesar's rule would quickly turn to tyranny and the Republic would be destroyed led to Caesar's assassination on March 15, 44 BCE. This is the year in which Shakespeare's play is set.

At the time of the first performance, the Tudor dynasty and Queen Elizabeth had been in power for many years. The Queen was aging and was childless. She refused to name an heir to the throne. Many scholars believe that Shakespeare's depiction of *Julius Caesar* was a veiled warning to citizens and rulers alike to "beware the Ides of March." For as we see at the end



The "Darnley Portrait" of Elizabeth I from around 1575

of the play, those committed to saving the republic no matter what cost are the ones who suffer most and the republic itself is lost. Shakespeare offers no solutions; rather, the play presents a time of confusion, of uncertainty and of political crisis.