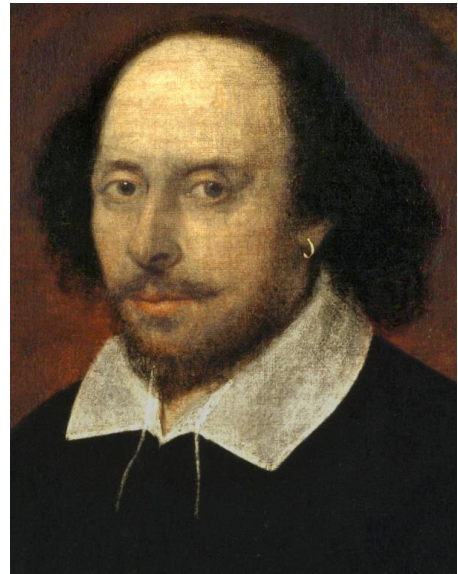


Today and on Wednesday, I will tell you about the greatest writer who ever lived - WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. Today I'll tell you about his life, and then on Wednesday I'll tell you why he was so great.

Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564 - six years after QUEEN ELIZABETH I became Queen. He was born in STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, in Warwickshire. He grew up there, going to the local school, and at the age of 18, in 1582, he married ANNE HATHAWAY, who was 26 years old. They quickly had children - first of all, SUSANNA in 1582, and then twins, HAMNET and JUDITH in 1585. Then nothing more is heard of Shakespeare until 1592, when another writer criticised Shakespeare as an 'upstart crow' who thought he was as good as writing plays as some other playwrights who had gone to university at Oxford or Cambridge. Shakespeare was just a hick from the sticks who didn't know anything. So some time between 1585 (when he was 21) and 1592 (when he was 28), Shakespeare had left his family behind in Stratford-upon-Avon and moved down London, and had got involved with a theatre company and started writing plays.



The plays Shakespeare wrote were initially of two kinds. First, historical plays, focussing on the WARS OF THE ROSES between the House of York and House of Lancaster over who would be the King of England - wars that were eventually won by the House of Lancaster, when HENRY TUDOR, Elizabeth I's grandfather, won the BATTLE OF BOSWORTH FIELD and became King Henry VII in 1485. Shakespeare's most famous historical play from this period was RICHARD III (written in 1592 or 1594) - about the King that was beaten by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field. That play starts with the lines 'Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York'. Such is Shakespeare's influence on our language that when the United Kingdom was going through a terrible winter in 1978 (which paved the way to MARGARET

THATCHER becoming

Prime Minister in 1979), that winter was known as the 'winter of discontent'. The second type of play that



Shakespeare wrote at this time were comedies (do you know the difference between a comedy and a tragedy? - a comedy ends with a marriage, a tragedy ends with a death) - but they weren't that good, relying a lot on mistaken identities and confusions.

In 1595, Shakespeare made a step up as a playwright, producing some amazing masterpieces - the comedy A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, the tragedy ROMEO AND JULIET, and the historical play RICHARD II, about the King whose death really triggered all the events that led up to the reign of Richard III. By this time he was a member of a theatrical group

called the LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN, and all his plays were produced by them. Everything was going really well for Shakespeare, but tragedy struck for him in 1596, when his boy HAMNET died. People wonder about the influence that Hamnet's death had on Shakespeare, and wonder in particular about the links between Hamnet, and one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, HAMLET, which was written in 1600. Unlike Shakespeare, who was a father who lost a son, Hamlet was a son who lost a father - killed by his brother, Hamlet's uncle. The first line in the play is 'Who's there?' and the play is a mysterious one, all about reality and illusion, and the difference between who you really and who you pretend to be. The play also shows Shakespeare firing on all cylinders, writing brilliant line after brilliant line: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy', 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so', 'To be, or not to be, that is the question', 'Goodnight sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest'.



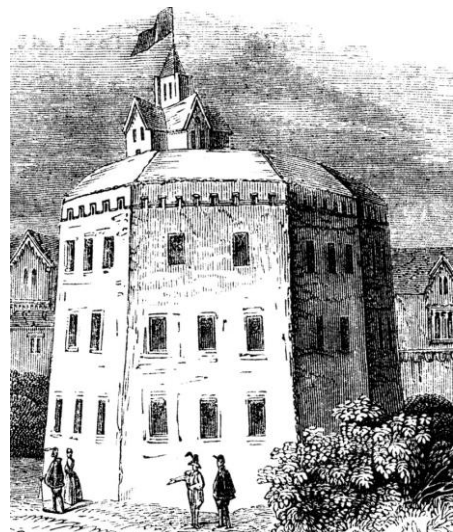
A year before Hamlet was written, in 1599, Shakespeare had a brilliant year, writing the historical plays HENRY V and JULIUS CAESAR. I have already given you a clip of one of the most famous speeches in Julius Caesar (on May 20) - here is a clip of the greatest speech in Henry V and one of the greatest speeches ever written: the ST CRISPIN'S DAY speech, just before the battle of AGINCOURT (pronounced 'Ajin - cor'):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x26GN6rQbZI>

That's from a film of Henry V made in 1944 - and there's a reason why that film was made then. Britain was then in the middle of fighting WORLD WAR II, and the makers of the film wanted people living through the war to be inspired by Shakespeare's words. And to show how enduring Shakespeare's appeal is, here is the same speech set completely in the modern day, in the American army, in the film 'Renaissance Man':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHYeDqEngxU>

1599 was also the year Shakespeare and the rest of the Lord Chamberlain's men built the GLOBE THEATRE and put their plays on there. The theatre was burned down in 1613, but was then rebuilt in 1997 - over 350 years later. And just as the theatres in Elizabeth's time would be closed down when London was hit by the plague, the Globe Theatre is currently closed down, and we have to hope it will open up as soon as possible.



In 1601, Shakespeare wrote his greatest comedy - TWELFTH NIGHT - but after that concentrated on tragedies and more historical plays. The death of Elizabeth I in 1603, with the result that the Scottish (and first Stuart king) JAMES I became King of England, led Shakespeare to write the 'Scottish play' about a Scottish king called MACBETH, and also the masterpiece KING LEAR, which on the face of it is about the dangers of a kingdom being divided up, instead of being united - but like Hamlet, is extremely mysterious and shows Shakespeare thinking about the

possibility of good existing in an evil world. Shakespeare's play OTHELLO is also about evil, about a man called IAGO (pronounced 'Eye - ah - go') who cannot stand to see his friend's happiness and decides to destroy it.

Shakespeare also played a part in producing an English translation of the Bible, which became known as the KING JAMES BIBLE, because King James I ordered that it be produced. Here's a funny fact about the King James Version of the Bible. Shakespeare sometimes signed his name 'Shakspeare' - with 4 letters in the first syllable, and six in the second. If you turn to Psalm 46 in the King James Bible, and count 46 words from the start, you get the word 'shake'. If you count 46 words from the end, you get the word 'spear'. Did Shakespeare put his name in the Bible? He was certainly was enough of a genius to do it.

Perhaps because of the Globe burning down, Shakespeare suddenly retired from writing plays, left London and returned to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613. His last proper play was THE TEMPEST, about a wizard who is forced to live on an island by his brother, and then tries to get his revenge on his brother by summoning up a storm that destroys the brother's ship. The last speech in the play begins 'Now my charms are overthrown, and what strength I have mine's own, which is most faint'. Maybe Shakespeare retired because he felt that he was losing his ability as a playwright, and it is true that the three plays Shakespeare wrote before The Tempest were not his strongest - but he had done more than enough to enjoy his retirement. But sadly it was cut short after just three years, with Shakespeare dying in 1616, just three days before his 52nd birthday. But in dying when he did, he died on SAINT GEORGE'S DAY, April 23, which is the day devoted to the patron saint of England. An appropriate day to die on, for someone who was definitely England's greatest writer, and as we will see on Wednesday, did so much for the English language.

PSALM XLVI.
 1 To the chief musician for the sons of Korah, A Song upon Alamoth.
 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.
 3 Though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.
 4 There is a river, the stream whereof shall make glad the city of God: the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.
 5 God is in the midst of her: he shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right timely.
 6 The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.
 7 The LORD of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.
 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, which he hath made in the earth.
 9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth: he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.
 10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.
 11 The LORD of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

