

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

The Bard

William Shakespeare was **baptised** in **Stratford-upon-Avon** on **April 26th 1564**. Probably he was born three days before on the **23rd of April**. He was the **son of Mary Arden of Wilmcote and John Shakespeare**, a wool and leather dealer. Shakespeare **probably attended Stratford's excellent free grammar school**, but there are no records of this. On **Nov. 2 1582**, church authorities gave permission for him to marry **Anne Hathaway** of the neighbouring village of Shottery. *He was 18 years old, and she was 26; probably she was pregnant.* On **May 26, 1583**, their **daughter Susanna** was baptised in Holy Trinity. Twins, named **Hamnet and Judith**, were baptised on **Feb. 2, 1585**.

No records have been found for the **years between the twins' baptism and 1592**. In that year a disappointed author and critic, **Robert Greene** published an article saying Shakespeare **was "an upstart crow"** Greene's comment is the only hostile allusion to Shakespeare that exists. He may have been jealous of Shakespeare's success.

In the time between the baptism of his twins and this unpleasant mentioning Shakespeare has moved to the City of Theatres, **London**. He begins with his **comedies** "**The Comedy of Errors**" (*Komödie der Irrungen*) and "**The Two Gentlemen of Verona**" (*Die beiden Veroneser*). His first **historical dramas** were "**Henry VI**", "**Richard III**" and "**King John**".

Shakespeare was an **actor as well as a writer**. He was associated with a group of other actors that included the day's leading comedian, **Will Kempe**, and a leading tragedian, **Richard Burbage**. In **1592-94 a plague epidemic** forced the closing of the London theatres. In this unintentional pause Shakespeare writes the first of the so called **problem pieces** discussing philosophical problems: "**Venus and Adonis**" and "**The Rape of Lucrece**" (*Die Schändung der Lucretia*). "**Titus Andronicus**" was again a **comedy**.

After the ending of the plague in **1594** Shakespeare, Will Kempe and Richard Burbage joined a group surrounding the very rich **Lord Chamberlain**. They were known,

after their nominal patron, as the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN. Shakespeare had no rival as a dramatist and was already known in the entire country. After the [historical drama](#) "Richard II" he again writes some of his famous [comedies](#): "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (*Ein Sommernachtstraum*), followed by "The Merchant of Venice" (*Der Kaufmann von Venedig*) and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (*Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*). "Henry V" is the last of his [historic dramas](#) for a long time.

He now begins with his [first tragic love story](#): "Romeo and Juliet". By the way "Romeo and Juliet" is besides "Othello" his best and therefore most complicated written piece. The next [tragic love story](#) is "Julius Caesar". I cannot say, what kind of piece "Much Ado About Nothing" which is in German known as "Viel Lärm um nichts".

Shakespeare has already been successful enough to have enough money to participate in the creation of the new "Globe Theatre" which is from now on the **home theatre for him**.

In **1599 and 1600** he writes his last [comedies](#): "As You Like it" (*Wie es Euch gefällt*) and "Twelfth Night" (*Was ihr wollt*).

With "Hamlet" begins the period of the [great tragedies](#). The [Love Tragedies](#) "Othello", "Antony and Cleopatra", "Coriolanus" and "Timon of Athens". "Macbeth" and "King Lear" are his famous [ironical tragedies](#). This darker period is also reflected in the [comedies](#) "Troilus and Cressida", "All's Well That Ends Well" (*Ende Gut Alles Gut*), and "Measure for Measure" (*Maß für Maß*) around **1601-04**. It is thought that Shakespeare was only part author of "Pericles", which is grouped with the other plays of around **1608-11** - "Cymbeline", "The Winter's Tale", and "The Tempest". During 1613 it is thought that Shakespeare **collaborated with John Fletcher** on 'Henry VIII' and 'Two Noble Kinsmen'. He had already retired to Stratford after he had sold his **shares of both theatres about 1610**, even of the Blackfriars Theatre which he had bought only two years before. **On the 23rd of April 1616 Shakespeare finally died in Stratford**. In his lifetime he has written **37 pieces**.

By the way there is a **hypothesis** that Shakespeare has never lived or that he at least may not have written all these pieces. One theory says that Shakespeare has in fact been three writers: Edward de Vere, the Duke of Oxford and William Stanley, Duke of Derby. But I actually do not care whether this is true or false.

MACBETH

In the first scene the **Three Witches meet to make plans**. They plan to **meet after the battle** and before sunset on the heathen **to meet Macbeth**. Afterwards they disappear in the mist.

In the next scene **King Duncan, his sons - Donalbain and Malcolm - and the nobles Lenox and Banco appear**. A soldier tells them, that the generals **Macbeth and Banco have triumphed** over the king of Norway in a glorious battle.

Again the scene changes. We will **read** through this because it is of fatal importance for the rest of the tragedy.

After the three witches have left **Banco and Macbeth**, the two knights **meet the nobles Rosse and Angus** sending the best wishes and the **deep gratitude from Duncan to Macbeth**. Macbeth is informed that he will be granted the **principality of Cawdor**. As soon as he returns to the king he will be the Thane of Cawdor, as the witches have predicted.

In his castle **Duncan appoints Macbeth to Thane of Cawdor**. But in the meantime he **proclaims his oldest son, Malcolm, to be his heir to the throne**. So after the death of Duncan it will be Malcolm and not Macbeth who will ascend to the throne.

The only possibility for Macbeth to make the full prophecy become reality is **to get Duncan and Malcolm somehow out of his way**.

To celebrate the victory and the new Thane of Cawdor **Duncan and his attendants visit the castle of Inverness**, the home castle of Macbeth.

In **Inverness Lady Macbeth has received a letter from her husband**. In this letter Macbeth tells her about the prophecy and that it has partly already become truth. **The prophecy evokes some kind of greed in her**. She suddenly thinks that it has always been the **destiny of her husband to become the king of Scotland and her destiny to be the queen on his side**.

After Duncan, his sons, Banco and the rest of the attendant have arrived in Inverness, she **begins to persuade Macbeth to kill the king**. She **reproaches Macbeth to be no man, but nothing more than a foolish coward**. In the end Macbeth agrees.

During the night Lady Macbeth gives the guards a **soporific**. Macbeth than stabs the king with the daggers of the guards.

After the murder **Macbeth desperately tries to clean his hands from the blood of the king**. He now realises what horrible crime he has committed. But Lady Macbeth manages to calm down her husband.

The next morning the murder is discovered. The **guards are suspected to have committed the crime**, but before they can be questioned Macbeth slays them.

The two **Sons of Duncan fear to be also murdered** as their father has been and flee to England. **Their escape is taken as a proof** that they have killed the king and Macbeth is declared the new king of Scotland.

After he has ascended the throne Macbeth remembers the **prophecy of The Witches**. They had predicted to Banco: "**Thou shalt get kings, though be none**". Macbeth now fears that the sons of Banco could one day get the throne he now sits on. Therefore he **hires two killers**. Banco is killed but his son Fleance manages to escape the murderers. So it is still possible that the prophecy can one day become reality.

Macbeth panics. **Banco appears to him as a ghost during a banquet** with all his friends. Everyone is surprised by the strange behaviour of Macbeth but Lady Macbeth manages to save the day. In the evening **Lady Macbeth suddenly discovers blood** on her hands from the murder of Duncan and she can not wipe it off.

After the appearance of Banco Macbeth slowly becomes a ruthless tyrant. Many **nobles of Scotland leave for England** to get the rightful heir to the throne back. One of them is **Macduff**. To make him pay for his treason **Macbeth kills all of Macduffs family** - no one survives. Macduff becomes the bitterest enemy of Macbeth and swears not to rest till he has destroyed Macbeth.

Because of **server doubts Macbeth visits the Three Witches** to ask for their advice. Again they give him three prophecies:

1. **Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff; Beware the Thane of Fife**

2. None of a woman born shall harm Macbeth

(Keiner, den eine Frau geboren hat, soll Macbeth schaden)

3. Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until the Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him.

(Macbeth soll niemals besiegt werden, bis der große Wald von Brinham gegen ihn zum hohen Berg von Dunsinane kommen wird)

Meanwhile the **king of England has sent an army lead by Siward** to Scotland to request the throne for Malcolm.

When the army arrives in Scotland **Lady Macbeth commits suicide**. She could not stand it, that her **hands had been stained with blood**.

Macbeth is obviously not impressed by the death of his wife but prepares the resistance to the english army.

The **English army moves to the Great Birnam wood** and cuts down trees to use them as coverage during the attack. So when they commence the attack the **wood virtually walks up to the walls on Dunsinane hill**. Again a prophecy of the witches has become truth.

The **soldiers of Macbeth flee** because they all know the prophecy and that Dunsinane will fall. **Macbeth fights alone** against the English army **knowing that only a man, who is not born by a woman, can defeat him**.

Macbeth meets Macduff and a fight between the two enemies commences. Macduff has been born by a **Caesarean** (= "Kaiserschnitt") and therefore is not born by a woman. **When Macbeth remembers this he his slain by Macduff**.

Macbeth is beaten, his kingdom destroyed and **Malcolm ascends to the throne**.

Interpretation

Shakespeare believed in the good and that it is stronger than evil. The life and the tragic end of Macbeth prove this attitude.

In the beginning **Macbeth is an admired, popular general of the Scottish army, well known for his courage and his loyalty**.

But then **succumbs the temptations** of the witches promising an **easy way to success**. He **resigns to the temptations of evil, when he slays the classical good king - personified by Duncan**. Though he is a strong warrior and a man who had to stand many crises, Macbeth **cannot endure the guilt for this murder**. From this day on Macbeth has to desperately **fight for not becoming insane**. His **humanity**, that helped him so much in the early years of his rule, slowly but surely is **suppressed and replaced by malice**. He becomes a **ruthless tyrant** always **regretting the terrible crime he has committed**. In the end he is nothing more than a **insensitive, spiritually crippled tool of evil** trying to take as many as possible with him into death.

In the final showdown, good against evil, Macduff against Macbeth, inevitably good triumphs against evil, as it has been foreseen by the sources of all evil - the witches.

So the hero of this tragedy - Macbeth - has become an anti-hero because of his lack of resistance against the temptations of evil. **In the end Shakespeare's conviction of the superiority of good triumphs and the old balance of good and evil is restored.**

Shakespeare is the most successful writer of all times. For more than **350 years** he has dominated the theatres of the western world. Though his pieces may be old and partly outdated they **have not lost their genius and their timeless humorous or tragic moments**. The impressive **contrasts** and the **magnificent style** of writing of Shakespeare have influenced many writers after him. **He truly is not for an age, but for all the time.**