

A Story of Hamlet and its Author Kona Mahmud

William Shakespeare is usually considered the greatest dramatist and finest poet the world has ever known. No other writer's plays and poetry have been produced so many times or in so many countries or translated into so many languages. One of the major reasons for Shakespeare's popularity is the variety of rich characters that he successfully creates, from drunkards and paid murderers to princes and kings and from inane fools and court jesters to wise and noble generals. Each character springs vividly to life upon the stage and, as they speak their beautiful verse or prose, the characters remind the viewers of their own personalities, traits, and flaws. Shakespeare also made his characters very realistic. The dramatist had an amazing knowledge of a wide variety of subjects, and his well-developed characters reflect this knowledge, whether it is about military science, and the graces of royalty, seamanship, history, the Bible, music, or sports.

In Shakespeare's time, few biographies were written, and none of the literary men of the Elizabethan Age was considered important enough to merit a book about his life. The first portfolio of his works, collected as a memorial to Shakespeare by members of his own acting company, was not published until 1623, seven years after his death. His first biography was written one hundred years later. As a result, many of the facts of Shakespeare's life are unknown. It is known that he was born in Stratford-on-Avon in England, sometime in early 1564, for his Baptism is recorded on April 26 of that year. His mother Mary had eight children, with William being the third. His father, John Shakespeare, was a fairly prosperous glovemaking and trading merchant who owned several houses in Stratford and became the town's mayor when Shakespeare was a boy. The young Shakespeare probably studied in the local grammar school and hunted and played sports in the open fields behind his home.

The next definite information about William Shakespeare is that the young man, at age 18, married Anne Hathaway, who was 26, on November 28, 1582. In 1583, it is recorded that Anne gave birth to their oldest child, Susanna, and that twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born to the couple in 1585. By 1592, the family was living in London, where Shakespeare was busy acting in plays and writing his own dramas. From 1592 to 1594, the plague kept most London theaters closed, so the dramatist turned to writing poetry during this period, and his poems, which were actually published unlike his plays, became popular with the masses and contributed to his good reputation as a writer. From 1594 to the end of his career, Shakespeare belonged to the same theatrical company, known first as Lord Chamberlain's Men and then as the King's Company. It is also known that he was both a leader and stockholder in this acting organization, which became the most prosperous group in London, and that he was meeting with both financial success and critical acclaim.

In 1554, Shakespeare was popular enough as an actor to perform before Queen Elizabeth. By 1596, he owned considerable property in London and bought one of the finest houses in Stratford, known as New Place, in 1597. A year later, in 1598, he bought ten percent of the stock in the Globe Theatre, where his plays were produced. In 1608, he and his colleagues also purchased The Blackfriars Theatre, where they began to hold productions during the winter, returning to the Globe during the summer months. Throughout the rest

of his life, Shakespeare continued to purchase land, homes, and businesses. He obviously was a busy man between handling his business ventures, performing on the stage, and writing or collaborating on the thirty-seven plays that are credited to him.

Shakespeare's most productive years were from 1594 to 1608, the period in which he wrote all of his great tragedies, such as Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Romeo and Juliet. During these fourteen years, he furnished his acting company with approximately two plays annually. After 1608, it appears he went into semi-retirement, spending more time in Stratford and creating only five plays before his death on April 23, 1616. He was buried before the altar in the Stratford Church, where his body still lies today. Many literary students and visitors make a pilgrimage to this shrine each year in order to honor William Shakespeare, still recognized after 400 years as the world's greatest poet and dramatist.

The King of Denmark is killed by an apparent snakebite while sleeping in the garden. His brother Claudius assumes the throne and marries the widowed Queen, Gertrude, within weeks of the King's death. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark and the dead King's son, mourns for his father and anguishes over his mother's hasty remarriage, considering it as unnatural as incest.

The play opens outside the castle grounds, where three guards have been witnessing the appearance of a Ghost who looks like the dead King. They ask the Prince and his friend Horatio to come see the Ghost. Prince Hamlet speaks to the apparition, who claims to be the spirit of his dead father. In a private conversation, the Ghost tells Hamlet that Claudius, in fact, murdered him. The Ghost asks Hamlet to avenge his murder. Hamlet takes his responsibility to seek vengeance for his father very seriously, perhaps too seriously.

Hamlet is in love with Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius (the Lord Chamberlain); however, the father commands Ophelia to reject Hamlet's advances. Polonius and his son Laertes believe Hamlet will never marry Ophelia since her rank is beneath his. Although Ophelia is very much in love with Hamlet, she is an obedient child; as a result, she complies with her father's commands. Satisfied that his sister is now safe, Laertes goes off to France in pursuit of a good time. Ophelia and her father are left to look after one another. When Hamlet feigns madness in order to observe the new King and his mother, Polonius tells the King that Hamlet's madness is because of unrequited love for Ophelia. He orders Ophelia to return Hamlet's advances to test this theory. Hamlet spurns Ophelia, however, breaking her heart.

The King begins to suspect that Hamlet knows about the murder, but Hamlet is hesitant and full of anxiety over how to proceed. When at last he moves to punish Claudius, he accidentally kills Polonius. Ophelia, on hearing the news of her father's death, loses her mind and drowns in the river. Claudius, now more fearful than ever that Hamlet will eventually expose him, makes arrangements for Hamlet to die. Hamlet, however, escapes Claudius' plans and returns to Elsinore to exact revenge.

Laertes, now seeking revenge against Hamlet on behalf of his father and sister, challenges Hamlet to a duel. Secretly, he has conspired with Claudius to make sure Hamlet dies in the battle. The sword he uses is poisoned, as is Hamlet's drink. During the duel, the Queen accidentally drinks the poisoned cup and dies. Hamlet and Laertes are both seriously wounded. Before dying, Laertes confesses all to Hamlet, telling him the

details of Claudius' plot against him, including the fact that he will die shortly from the poison. Hamlet kills Claudius, and then implores his friend Horatio to tell the world the truth about the tragedy. Horatio lives to clear Hamlet's name, and the Prince of Norway comes to restore order to Denmark.