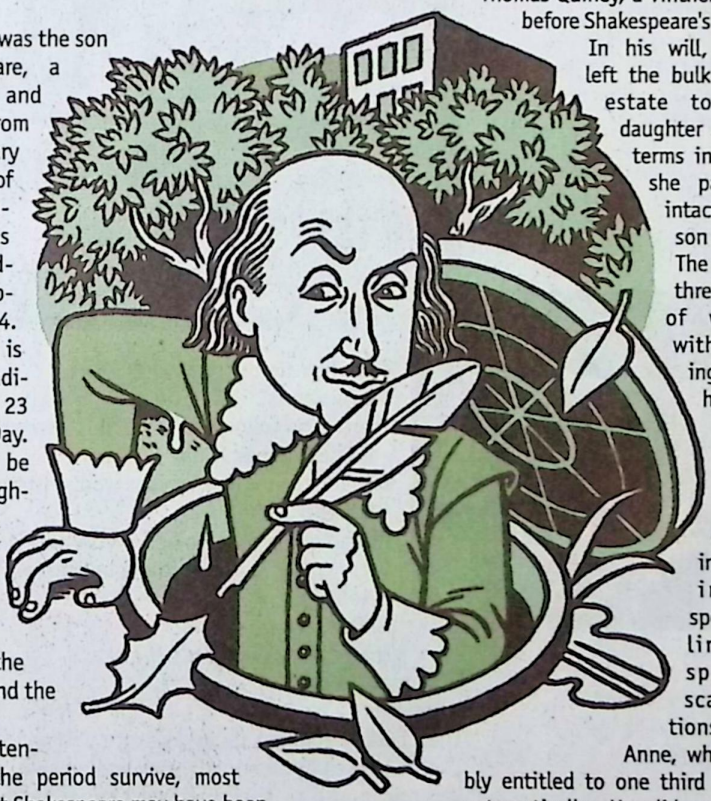
published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare was a respected poet and playwright in his own days, but his reputation did not rise to its present height until the nineteenth century. The Romantics, in particular, acclaimed Shakespeare's genius, and the Victorians worshiped Shakespeare with a reverence that George Bernard Shaw called "bardolatry". In the twentieth century, his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Early life

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, a successful glover and alderman originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised on 26 April 1564. His actual birthdate is unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, St George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an eighteenth-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing because Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.



Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare may have been educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter of a mile from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but the curriculum was dictated by law throughout England, and the school would have provided an intensive education in Latin grammar and the classics.

Later years and death

Rowe was the first biographer to pass down the tradition that Shakespeare retired to Stratford some years before his death; but retirement from all work was uncommon at that time, and Shakespeare continued to visit London. In 1612 he was called as a witness in a court case concerning the marriage settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613 he bought a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory; and from November 1614 he was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law, John Hall.

After 1606-1607, Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and none are attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the house playwright for the King's Men.

Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and was survived by his wife and two daughters. Susanna had married a physician, John Hall, in 1607, and Judith had married Thomas Quiney, a vintner, two months before Shakespeare's death.

In his will, Shakespeare left the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna. The terms instructed that she pass it down intact to "the first son of her body". The Quineys had three children, all of whom died without marrying. The Halls had one child, Elizabeth, who married twice but died without children in 1670, ending Shakespeare's direct line. Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife, Anne, who was probably entitled to one third of his estate automatically. He did make a point, however, of leaving her "my second best bed", a bequest that has led to much speculation. Some scholars see the bequest as an insult to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance.

Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death. The stone slab covering his grave is inscribed with a curse against moving his bones.

(All spotlight photos have been taken from the Internet)