

# Shakespeare's plays

## The dating of Shakespeare's plays

We do not know precisely when every play was written and/or performed. More often we have to guess the date of a play by taking into account external and internal evidence – either found in contemporary documents or in the text of the plays. One of the most authoritative attempts at dating Shakespeare's plays was made by E.K. Chambers. The division into phases in the table is largely based on Chambers', but with a few differences.

YEARS	HISTORIES	COMEDIES / ROMANCES	TRAGEDIES
1590-1591	• Henry VI ( <i>Part Two and Three</i> )		
1591-1592	• Henry VI ( <i>Part One</i> )		
1592-1593	• Richard III	• The Comedy of Errors	
1593-1594		• The Taming of the Shrew	• Titus Andronicus
1594-1595		• The Two Gentlemen of Verona • Love's Labour's Lost	• Romeo and Juliet
1595-1596	• Richard II	• A Midsummer Night's Dream	
1596-1597	• King John	• The Merchant of Venice	
1597-1598	• Henry IV ( <i>Part One and Two</i> )		
1598-1599	• Henry V	• Much Ado About Nothing • As You Like It	
1599-1600		• The Merry Wives of Windsor • Twelfth Night	• Julius Caesar
1600-1601			• Hamlet
1601-1602		• Troilus and Cressida	
1602-1603		• All's Well That Ends Well	
1604-1605		• Measure for Measure	• Othello
1605-1606			• King Lear • Macbeth
1606-1607			• Antony and Cleopatra
1607-1608			• Coriolanus • Timon of Athens
1608-1609		• Pericles	
1610-1611		• The Winter's Tale; Cymbeline	
1611-1612		• The Tempest	
1612-1613	• Henry VIII	• Two Noble Kinsmen	

### What is the *First Folio*?

Any assessment of Shakespeare's plays must begin with the so-called *First Folio*, the **first published collection of Shakespeare's plays**. It contains all the plays that are attributed to Shakespeare, with the exception of *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, **36 plays** in all. The title on the frontispiece reads: *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies, Published According to the true Original Copies*. The title indicates that Shakespeare's plays are given not in chronological order, but **according to genre: comedies, historical plays and tragedies**. The *First Folio* came out in **1623, just seven years after Shakespeare's death** and the editors (the men who oversaw publication) were two of his fellow players from the Chamberlain's Men and the King's Men, John Heminges and Henry Condell. The collection was so called because **it was printed as an in-folio volume** (from the Latin *folium*, leaf), that is, a large sheet of paper would be folded once for words to be printed on (which made for two leaves and four pages). Folios were large and expensive books, as opposed to the quartos (from the Latin

*in-quarto*: the original sheet of paper would be folded twice, to make for four leaves and eight pages), the format in which some of Shakespeare's plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* were published when he was alive.

### Why is it so important?

It contains 36 plays by Shakespeare, 20 of which had not been published in his lifetime. This means that without the *First Folio* we would not have more than half of Shakespeare's plays; plays such as *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*. It is thanks to this book that Shakespeare's plays reached the world and enabled actors to take them with them wherever they went.

## THE NEW GLOBE REBUILT

**Sam Wanamaker** Shakespeare's Globe Theatre came to new life thanks to the vision and strenuous efforts of an American actor and director, Sam Wanamaker. He was born in Chicago in 1919, the son of Jewish immigrants from Ukraine, and was already a well-known actor when, in 1952, he decided to settle in England. After acting in and directing several Shakespeare plays, in 1959 he joined the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company at Stratford-upon-Avon.

On his first visit to London, in 1949, Wanamaker had sought traces of Shakespeare's Globe but had been surprised to find only a blackened plaque indicating the original site. He was even more surprised to find that he could raise little interest in rebuilding the Globe among his colleagues and in the British theatrical establishment.

**The New Globe** In 1970, regardless of the general scepticism, Wanamaker launched the Shakespeare Globe Trust. His enthusiasm was contagious: he enlisted the financial help of several philanthropists and lovers of Shakespeare, eventually raising more than ten million dollars for the project. Unfortunately, Wanamaker died in 1993, when the rebuilding of the Globe was near its completion but before the grand opening of 12th June 1997 by Queen Elizabeth II.

Wanamaker's great partner in the enterprise was another non-British, South African architect, Theo Crosby, who also died shortly before the opening of the New Globe. And it is interesting to note that both men had fled their native countries and settled in England in reaction to political and social intolerance at home: the anti-Communist rage in the USA, led by Senator McCarthy in the early 1950s (the so-called 'red scare'), and apartheid in South Africa.



↑ The modern replica of the Globe, named 'Shakespeare' Globe, opened in 1997.

### 1 Complete the text with the missing words.

The *First Folio* is the first (1) ..... edition of Shakespeare's plays. It came out in (2) ..... after the poet's death, and it contains 36 (3) .....

As for the title, Shakespeare's plays are given not in (4) ..... order, but according to genre: comedies, (5) ..... plays and tragedies.

**2 WRITING** Explore Shakespeare's *First Folio* at [www.bl.uk/collection-items/shakespeares-first-folio](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/shakespeares-first-folio) and write down five questions to challenge your classmates.

**3 WRITING** Visit the website of the modern Globe Theatre at [www.shakespearesglobe.com](http://www.shakespearesglobe.com) and write a ten-line description providing details about:

- location;
- activities;
- opening hours;
- prices.