

# Shakespeare

## The plays

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays between 1588 and 1611 that are usually divided into three categories – Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. It's important to note that the term 'Comedies' means that rather than necessarily being full of jokes, what characterises these plays is that they are NOT tragedies. They don't culminate in the death of the protagonist (the fulfilment of 'Tragedy') but end with a resolution and restoration of a state in which life can move forward positively, however dark and complex the action has been.

### Comedies

The Comedy of Errors	1592	The Merry Wives of Windsor	1600
The Taming of the Shrew	1593	Troilus and Cressida	1601
Loves Labours Lost	1594	All's Well That Ends Well	1602
Two Gentlemen of Verona	1594	Measure for Measure	1604
A Midsummer Night's Dream	1595	Pericles	1608
The Merchant of Venice	1596	Cymbeline	1609
Much Ado About Nothing	1598	A Winter's Tale	1610
As You Like It	1599	The Tempest	1611
Twelfth Night	1599		

### Histories

Henry VI Pt 2	1590	King John	1596
Henry VI Pt 3	1590	Henry IV Pt 1	1597
Henry VI Pt 1	1591	Henry IV Pt 2	1597
Richard III	1592	Henry V	1598
Richard II	1595	Henry VIII	1612

### Tragedies

Titus Andronicus	1593	King Lear	1605
Romeo and Juliet	1594	Macbeth	1605
Julius Caesar	1599	Antony and Cleopatra	1606
Hamlet	1600	Coriolanus	1607
Othello	1604	Timon of Athens	1607

## Publishing the plays

Publishing practices were very different in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century. Editorial work on textual authenticity was not common and plays were often published in 'unauthorised' versions. Books were printed in 'octavo', 'quarto' or 'folio' form – these terms relating to the number of pages that were printed on a single large sheet of paper before being bound. Eighteen of Shakespeare's plays were published in some form during his lifetime, mainly in 'quartos', some unauthorised and some corrected. All these editions differ from each other in length. In 1623 the plays were brought together and published as 'Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies'. The editors, John Heminge and Henry Condell used manuscripts, prompt copies, and the various and the often contradictory published editions of the plays to produce this First Folio edition. A second Folio edition was published in 1632 and a third in 1663 which included 'Pericles' for the first time and various other texts thought then to be by Shakespeare but since rejected.

The three published versions of 'Hamlet' demonstrate the problems faced by Heminge and Condell. The First Quarto edition, published in 1603 is now known as the 'Bad' Quarto because it is likely to have been written by one of the actors in the company from memory and is 1370 lines shorter than the version published in 1623. The Second Quarto, published in 1605 is 230 lines longer. These discrepancies exist for several reasons:

- There were very few complete texts – actors were only given their own parts with their cues to speak and not the full text of the play. This was to save paper, which was very expensive.
- Plays were written down from memory after being seen by people anxious to make money by their publication.
- Shakespeare made changes to the texts while they were being rehearsed and performed.