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Shakespeare's Dramatic Career
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As we know that Shakespeare is one of the best dramatists in the world but especially, I am going to explain his dramatic career. Shakespeare's active dramatic career in London lasted about twenty years and may be divided into three symmetrical periods. The first extends from the year 1587 to 1593-94; the second period from this date to the end of the century; and the third period from 1600 to 1608, soon after which time Shakespeare ceased to write regularly for the stage, was less in London and more and more at Stratford. Some modern critics add to the fourth period, including a few plays which from internal as well as external evidence must have been among the poet's latest productions. As the exact dates of these plays are unknown, this period may be taken to extend from 1608 to 1612. The three dramas produced during these years are, however, hardly entitled to be ranked as a separate period. They may be regarded as supplementary to the grand series of dramas belonging to the third and greatest epoch of Shakespeare's productive power.

To the first period belong Shakespeare's early tentative efforts in revising and partially rewriting plays produced by others that already had possession of the stage. These efforts are illustrated in the three parts of Henry VI, especially the second and third parts, which bear decisive marks of Shakespeare's hand, and were to a great extent recast and rewritten by him.

It is clear from the internal evidence thus supplied that Shakespeare was at first powerfully affected by "**Marlowe's mighty line.**" This influence is so marked in the revised second and third parts of Henry VI as to induce some critics to believe Marlowe must have had a hand in the revision. These passages are, however, sufficiently explained by the fact of Marlowe's influence during the first period of Shakespeare's career. To the same period also belong the earliest tragedy, that of Titus Andronicus, and the three comedies -- **Love's Labour's Lost, The Comedy of Errors, and the Two Gentlemen of Verona.** These dramas are all marked by the dominant literary influences of the time. They present features obviously due to the revived and widespread knowledge of classical literature, as well as to the active interest in the literature of Italy and the South. Titus Andronicus, in many of its characteristic features, reflects the form of Roman tragedy almost universally accepted and followed in the earlier period of the drama. This form was supplied by the Latin plays of Seneca, their darker colours being deepened by the moral effect of the judicial tragedies and military conflicts of the time. The execution of the Scottish queen and the Catholic conspirators who had acted in her name, and the destruction of the Spanish Armada, had given an impulse to tragic representations of an extreme type. This was undoubtedly rather fostered than otherwise by the favourite exemplars of Roman tragedy. The Medea and Thyestes of Seneca are crowded with pagan horrors of the most revolting kind.

It is true these horrors are usually related, not represented, although in the *Medea* the maddened heroine kills her children on the stage.

But from these tragedies the conception of the physically horrible as an element of tragedy was imported into the early English drama, and intensified by the realistic tendency which the events of the time and the taste of their ruder audiences had impressed upon the common stages. This tendency is exemplified in *Titus Andronicus*, obviously a very early work, the signs of youthful effort being apparent not only in the acceptance of so coarse a type of tragedy but in the crude handling of character and motive, and the want of harmony in working out the details of the dramatic conception. Kyd was the most popular contemporary representative of the bloody school, and in the leading motives of treachery, concealment, and revenge there are points of likeness between *Titus Andronicus* and the Spanish Tragedy.

But how promptly and completely Shakespeare's nobler nature turned from this lower type is apparent from the fact that he not only never reverted to it but indirectly ridicules the piled-up horrors and extravagant language of Kyd's plays.

The early comedies in the same way are marked by the dominant literary influences of the time, partly classic Italian. In the *Comedy of Errors*, for example, Shakespeare attempted a humorous play of the old classical type, the general plan and many details being derived directly from Plautus. In *Love's Labour's Lost* many characteristic features of Italian comedy are freely introduced: the pedant Holofernes, the curate Sir Nathaniel, the fantastic braggadocio soldier Armado, are all well-known characters of the contemporary Italian drama. Of this comedy, indeed, Gervinus says, "the tone of the Italian school prevails here more than in any other play. The redundance of wit is only to be compared with a similar redundance of conceit in Shakespeare's narrative poems, and with the Italian style which he had early adopted."

These comedies display another sign of early work in the mechanical exactness of the plan and a studied symmetry in the grouping of the chief personages of the drama. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as Prof. Dowden points out, "Proteus the fickle is set against Valentine the faithful, Silvia the light and intellectual against Julia the ardent and tender, Lance the humourist against Speed the wit." So in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the king and his three fellow-students balance the princess and her three ladies, and there is a symmetrical play of incident between the two groups. The arrangement is obviously more artificial than spontaneous, more mechanical than vital and organic.

But towards the close of the first period Shakespeare had fully realized his own power and was able to dispense with these artificial supports. Indeed, having rapidly gained knowledge and experience, he had before the close written plays of a far higher character than any which even the ablest of his contemporaries had produced. He had firmly laid the foundation of his future fame in the direction both of comedy and tragedy, for, besides the comedies already referred to, the first sketches of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and the tragedy of *Richard III*, may probably be referred to this period.

Another mark of early work belonging to these dramas is the lyrical and elegiac tone and treatment associated with the use of rhyme, of rhyming couplets and stanzas. Spenser's musical verse had for the time elevated the character of rhyming metres by identifying them with the highest kinds of poetry, and Shakespeare was evidently at first affected by this powerful impulse.

He rhymed with great facility, and delighted in the gratification of his lyrical fancy and feeling which the more musical rhyming metres afforded. Rhyme accordingly has a considerable and not inappropriate place in the earlier romantic comedies. The Comedy of Errors has indeed been described as a kind of lyrical farce in which the opposite qualities of elegiac beauty and comic effect are happily blended.

Rhyme, however, at this period of the poet's work is not restricted to the comedies. It is largely used in the tragedies and histories as well and plays even an important part in historical drama so late as Richard II.

Shakespeare appears, however, to have worked out this favourite vein and very much taken leave of it, by the publication of his descriptive and narrative poems, the **Venus and Adonis**, **the Lucrece**, although the enormous popularity of these poems might almost have tempted him to return again to the abandoned metrical form.

The only considerable exception to the disuse of rhyming metres and lyrical treatment is supplied by the Sonnets, which, though not published till 1609, were probably begun early, soon after the poems, and written at intervals during eight or ten of the intervening years. Into the many vexed questions connected with the history and meaning of these poems it is impossible to enter. The attempts recently made by the Rev. W. A. Harrison and Mr. T. Tyler to identify the "dark lady" of the later sonnets, while of some historical interest, cannot be regarded as successful. And the identification, even if rendered more probable by the discovery of fresh evidence, would not clear up the difficulties, biographical, literary, and historical, connected with these exquisite poems.

It is enough to say with Prof. Dowden that in Shakespeare's case the most natural interpretation is the best, and that, so far as they throw light on his personal character, the sonnets show that "he was capable of measureless personal devotion; that he was tenderly sensitive, sensitive above all to every diminution or alteration of that love his heart so eagerly craved; and that, when wronged, although he suffered anguish, he transcended his private injury and learned to forgive." His dramatic life is not so great but it's flexible too.