

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
(1564 - 1616)

DRAMATIC PRODUCTION



- Some critics divide Shakespeare's dramatic production into **three chronological periods**: what are the main features (and the most important plays) of each period?

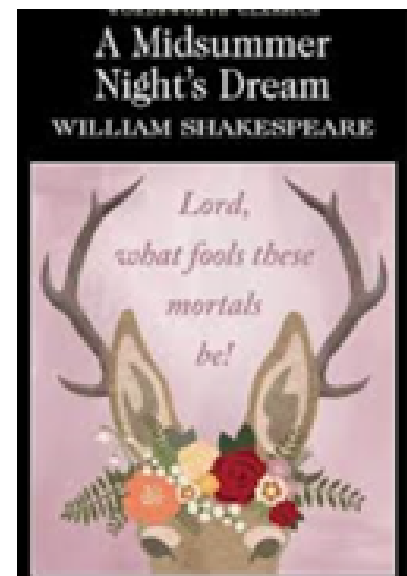
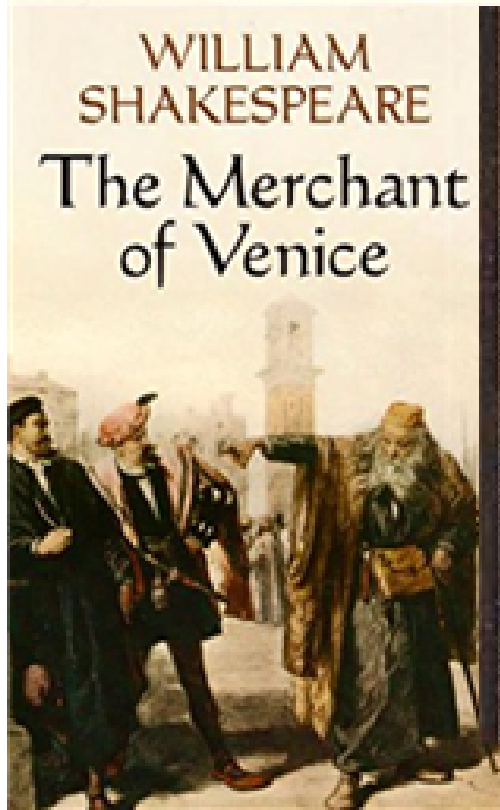


According to some critics, it is possible to divide Shakespeare's **37 plays** into **three chronological periods**, each one with clear features of its own.

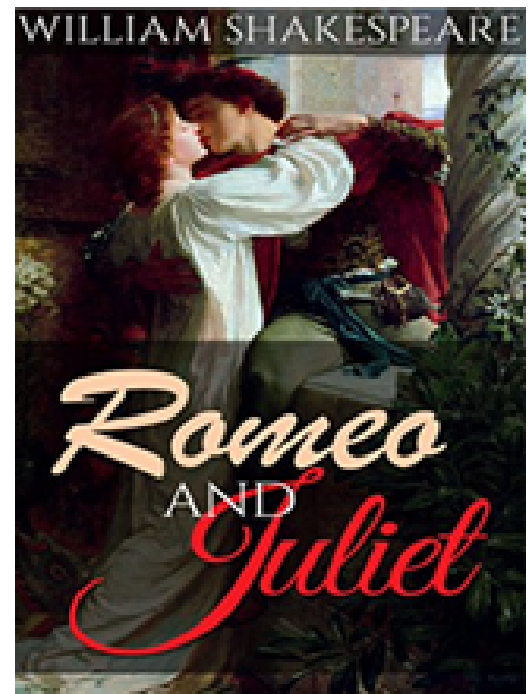


The first period includes **comedies** (for example, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*),

DOVER THRIFT EDITIONS



history plays (for example, the trilogy of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*) and **tragedies** (like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*). In this period, Shakespeare showed great sympathy for human nature and a positive attitude to life. Even when the play has a tragic outcome, life is still presented positively as worth living. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is a celebration of love in spite of its tragic ending.



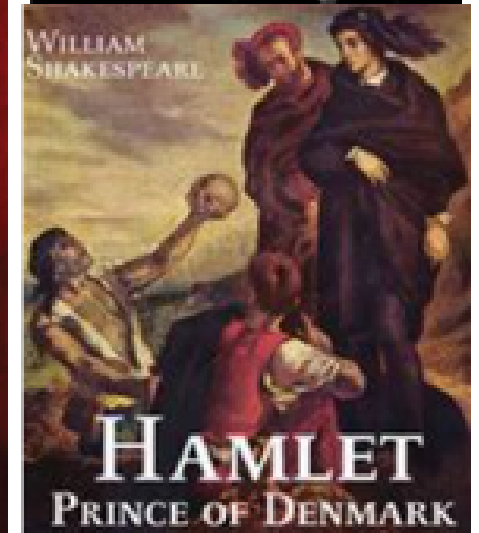
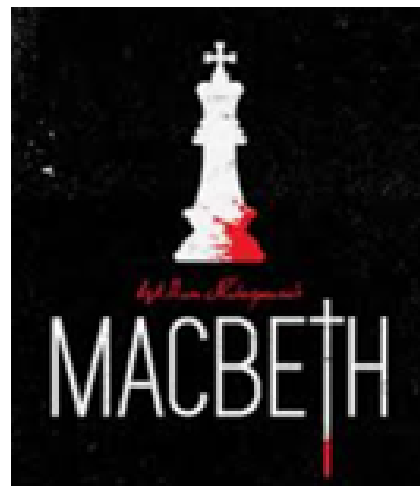
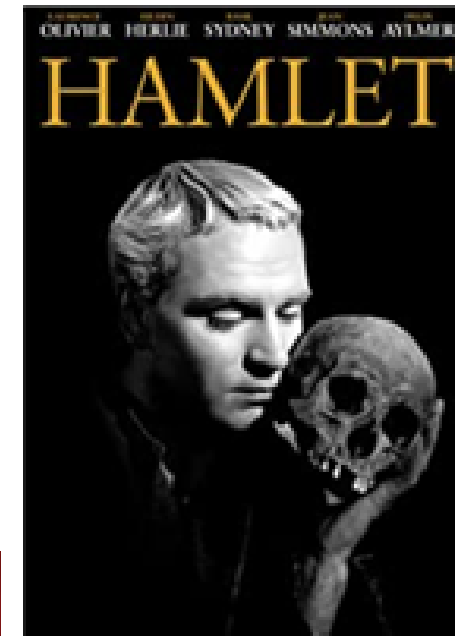
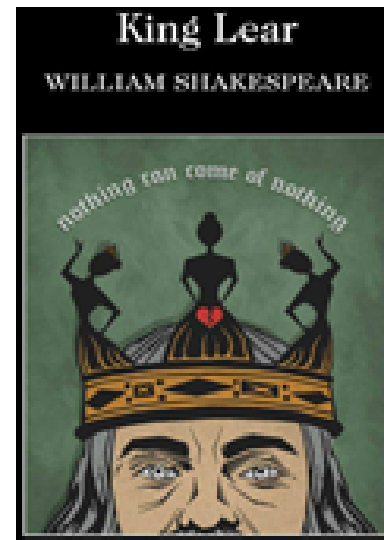
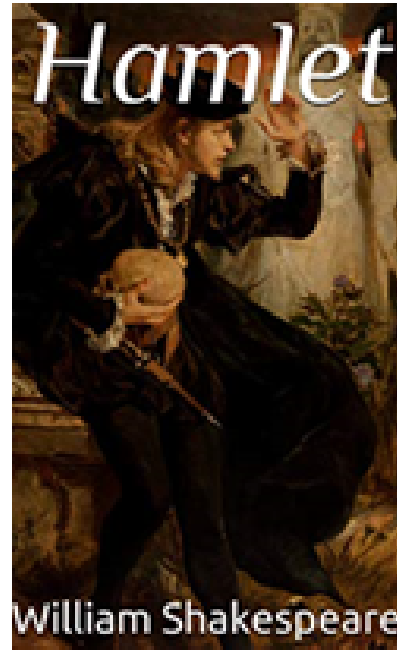
Then Shakespeare entered a period in which his works reflected a **gloomier, more pessimistic vision of life**. Traditional human values, such as love, friendship and honour, fall apart; family and society are broken and destroyed by betrayal, violence and war.

Man seems to live in a godless, chaotic universe, easy prey to **a cruel fate**.

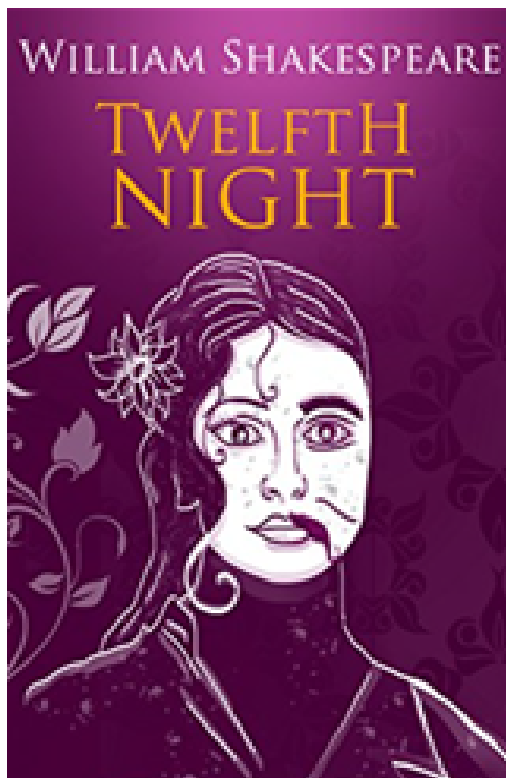
This is the period of Shakespeare's "four great tragedies": *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.



The Tragedy of
OTHELLO
The Moor of Venice
by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Even if they are not tragedies, the other plays of this period (like *The Twelfth Night* and *All's Well that Ends Well*) also contain an obscure, bitter streak which reveals the pessimistic outlook of the playwright.



In the final period of Shakespeare's productive life the most representative work is his last play, *The Tempest* (1612).

THE
TEMPEST
William Shakespeare



In *The Tempest* Shakespeare seems to have reached a new serene and detached vision of the world after a period of sad experience.

Prospero is the play's main character and (according to most critics) Shakespeare's spokesman.



Prospero is a learned man who uses his magic powers to take a terrible revenge on the enemies who usurped his throne and threatened the lives of his daughter and himself. But in the end all is revealed as an illusion; no one is actually hurt, enemies are forgiven and divided lovers are happily united.



Prospero says he will destroy the books that contain the secret of his magic and **retire** to a quiet life of meditation.

Like his character, **Shakespeare** gave up the magic of his art and **retired from the theatre in the same year: 1612.**

He returned to Stratford-upon-Avon, the town where he was born.



- Ben Johnson, a contemporary writer, said that **"Shakespeare was not of an age, but for all time"**: what does it mean?

William Shakespeare was an extraordinary playwright. In his works, literature and popular culture combine.

He was able to write comedy and tragedy, history and farce, with a personal vision which could speak to all kinds of people throughout the ages and all over the world.

Shakespeare wrote about all classes of men and women in every conceivable situation, social and political.

And he created an unequalled range of characters, portraying the complexities of emotion and reason.

In his plays, he was able to explore the depths of human nature like no one before him.