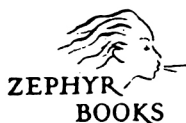


SIX PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
MERCHANT OF VENICE: AS YOU LIKE IT
JULIUS CAESAR: HAMLET
MACBETH

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PREFATORY NOTE

THESE SIX Plays have been selected as being those most commonly read in Schools. The General Introduction is intended to place them in perspective, by relating them intelligibly to their author's life and work. It is intended, also, in that part of it which deals with Shakespeare's language, to ensure, if possible, that his ordinary methods of expression shall be understood. A special Preface has been provided to each play, and the Notes, which are brief, are printed on the page which they explain.

The Prefaces and Notes are based, for the most part, on the Notes and Introductions of Professor Gordon's edition of Shakespeare, of which they sometimes offer an abbreviated version. The section on Shakespeare's Language in the General Introduction has been supplied by Mr. C. T. Onions, Joint-Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and author of *A Shakespeare Glossary*.

The introduction has been revised for the Zephyr edition by Mrs. Margaret Bottrall.

INTRODUCTION

I. LIFE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born at Stratford-on-Avon on April 23, 1564. His father was a prosperous tradesman there and a person of some importance in municipal affairs; but about 1572, when his eldest son, William, was eight years old, he fell into financial difficulties that withdrew him gradually from public life. This would not prevent his son from obtaining a sound elementary education at the free grammar school of Stratford, from which he probably carried away a working knowledge of at least the Latin language. His father's reverses seem to have occasioned his removal from school about his thirteenth or fourteenth year, and his apprenticeship to some trade. When we next hear of him we find him married, at eighteen, to a wife eight years his senior; and a year or two later, if we may believe a likely enough story, prosecuted by a neighbouring landowner and magistrate for poaching on his estate. His position was scarcely enviable. There was little prospect of a livelihood in Stratford; his father, far from being able to help him, could not help himself; and he had a wife and three children to provide for. It was probably at this time, towards the end of 1585, that he left Stratford and set out for London to try his fortunes.

At the time when Shakespeare was born, what we call the Elizabethan drama had not begun. It was not till 1584, when Shakespeare was twenty years old, that John Lyly began to produce those plays that first pointed the way to the new Romantic Comedy; and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which fixed

the type of tragedy and of tragic blank verse for all beginners, did not appear until two or three years later, in 1586 or 1587. It was a moment for genius to profit by.

Shakespeare, on his arrival in London, soon obtained a post in one of the theatrical companies, and set himself to learn the trade of acting. He continued to act till near the end of his life, but his other abilities were quickly recognized, and he proceeded to work at the adaptation of plays for his company. It was about 1590 or 1591, when he was in his twenty-seventh year, that he began to write those plays which we know as his. He was soon marked by the older playwrights, all young men, as a serious rival, and could not escape altogether the enmity that attends success. He began by writing comedy and historical tragedy, being influenced in the one chiefly by Lyly, and in the other by Marlowe. The conceits and word-play of the dialogue in comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen*, the love-disguises of which he became so fond, and his use of songs are open signs of Lyly's influence. In tragedy, on the other hand, as we can see plainly from his *Richard III*, less plainly from his *Richard II*, and to some degree even from the later *Merchant of Venice*, he was a pupil of Marlowe, then at the height of his great reputation.

By 1593, however, a change took place in the ranks of the playwrights. Lyly's last comedy appeared in 1592. Greene died in the same year, and Marlowe in the next. Shakespeare, now a journeyman of his art, had a free field. But in 1593 he chose to appear in a new character, as the author of the *Venus and Adonis*, and, encouraged by its success, published in the following year another love-poem, the *Lucrece*—both dedicated to that generous patron of letters, the young Earl of Southampton. They were received and read with enthusiasm, so that for a number of years afterwards Shakespeare was

better known as a love-poet than as a dramatist. His *Sonnets*, which were nearly all composed by the end of 1594, and which soon became widely known in manuscript, confirmed and extended this reputation. He grew to be intimate with the noble playgoers of the time and a favourite dramatist at the Court. This favour may have had something to do with the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was very probably written to celebrate some noble marriage, and it contains the famous compliment to Queen Elizabeth, the 'fair vestal throned by the West' (II. i. 157 f.). This play was possibly followed by the two comedies *All's Well* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and in 1597 he went back to English history, producing the two parts of *Henry IV*, and soon afterwards, what was almost his last play of the sort, *Henry V*. The superiority of these over the earlier historical plays, in maturity of observation, in strength of diction, and variety of character, is apparent to every reader. Shakespeare had found himself.

All this time his reputation was growing both inside and outside the theatre, and his worldly position was becoming more secure. His good fortune he shared with his family, raising it from poverty considerably above the position it had held in Stratford some thirty years before. He bought a good house and some land there, procured a coat of arms for his father, and began regularly to visit his native town.

In 1599 he became a shareholder in the new Globe Theatre. This healthy interest, which he never lost, in the substantial rewards of life, extorts the admiration even of those who never read his plays. It was about this time (1598—1601) that he wrote his three best comedies, full of the geniality of well-being—*Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. The change which presently began, of which *Julius Caesar* (1599) is the light prelude, has led biographers to entitle

this the beginning of his 'tragic period': a dubious way of intimating the striking fact that from about 1601 until the production of *Cymbeline* in 1610 Shakespeare's work was almost entirely in tragedy. Besides his two other Roman plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, and the grim comedy of *Measure for Measure*, he produced in close succession his four great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*. It is futile to look for an explanation of this in unknown facts of his life. The obvious fact is that Shakespeare, then approaching middle life, at that point rose and grappled with the sternest problems of human existence—problems which youth and high spirits could no longer shirk or solve with banter. The strain of those few years must have been enormous; and it is pleasant to find him, in his three latest plays, *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, returning to romantic themes, and investing them with that calmness of meditative fancy which fits the close of an active life. His active life was over. In 1611, the year probably in which *The Tempest* was produced, he retired to Stratford, and lived quietly there until his death, in 1616, at the age of fifty-two. His best epitaph is still his friend Ben Jonson's eulogy, and the expressed love and affection of his fellow actors.

II. ORDER OF THE PLAYS

No one order has satisfied everybody, and this is due to the nature of the evidence, which is not exact enough to give more than probable conclusions. But though critics differ about the probable date of this play and that, on the general order or grouping of the plays they are fairly well agreed. The evidence on which they proceed is of two kinds, external and internal, and we will consider them in turn, referring

for more detailed examples of their use to the short prefaces prefixed to the six plays.

(i) EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.—There is not much external evidence, and still less that is worth anything. What there is may be roughly classified under three heads: (1) date of publication or of entry in the register of the Stationers' Company; (2) references to the performance of the plays in stage or other records or diaries; (3) other references in contemporary works.

(1) *Date of publication, &c.*—This applies only to the sixteen plays which were published in Shakespeare's lifetime. The rest, including three of the plays in this volume—*As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*—were not published till seven years after his death. The year of publication, of course, need never be also the year of composition; but the dates of publication of a series of works by the same author will usually give at least the order in which they were composed. It is not so here, and the reason is simple. A play became the property of the playhouse authorities for whom it was written, and publication of their repertory was not as a rule what they desired. When they did dispose of plays to the publishers it was for business reasons of their own, and at dates determined by the vicissitudes of the playhouse. What they had to fear was the pirate, the procurer of surreptitious manuscript, and the too complaisant publisher who asked no questions: though this obscure conjunction of piracy and complaisance was probably rarer than is sometimes alleged. What is clear is this, that the publication of a play at one date rather than another was largely a matter of luck.

The Registers of the Stationers' Company in London are very useful for our purpose. Every work, before it could be set up in type, had to be licensed by two suitable persons, and after licence was usually entered in the registers at Stationers' Hall. These notes and entries are particularly valuable because the dates they give are sometimes much earlier than the dates of actual publication. Innumerable causes might delay the issue of a book long after the process of licensing and registration; indeed, this very process was sometimes used by playhouse managers as a weapon of defence against premature or piratical publication. A manager who had influence with the supervising authorities could sometimes induce them, in registering a play, to add an injunction 'staying' or arresting its publication. The check on the printer in such cases was not the law, but the displeasure of the Company; and it does not seem to have been very effective. On August 4, 1600, for example, *Henry V*, *Much Ado*, and *As You Like It* were all prohibited in this way; yet the first two were printed and published very soon after.

(2) *References to performance*.—The evidence here is drawn from such sources as the records of the Master of the Court Revels or of the Inns of Court, the diary of Philip Henslowe, the theatrical manager, or of Dr. Forman, the playgoer, &c.

(3) *Other contemporary references*.—One of the most useful sources of information here is Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598), a dull treatise which contains a list of Shakespeare's plays up to date. We profit also by the not entirely friendly interest which led the playwrights of the time to allude to passages in each other's plays. Ben Jonson, for example, jeers at Caliban in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and Beaumont

parodies Banquo's ghost in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1611).

The sorts of evidence we have considered, taken singly, are unsatisfactory, as giving only outside dates for composition. Taken together, however, they correct each other, and narrow very considerably the limits of time within which a play can have been composed. In using them some caution is necessary. We must be careful not to regard all references to plays of a certain title as references to the same play. There were a number of plays of the same name, either quite different plays on the same subject, or different adaptations of one original. For example, there was a *Julius Caesar* as early as 1589; yet Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was probably composed not earlier than 1599. There was a *Hamlet* as early as 1589, and one is mentioned in 1594 and 1596. But we cannot infer that any of these was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as we have it; we cannot even prove that the *Hamlet* of any one of those years was the *Hamlet* of any other. The same diffidence is necessary in dealing with a contemporary reference to a character or situation familiar to us only from one of Shakespeare's plays; for it may be a reference not to the play, but to some well-known novel or chronicle from which Shakespeare himself drew. Finally, it must be remembered that topical passages were often added to plays in their later appearances. This is too often forgotten, even in the limited number of cases where the fact can be proved.

(ii) INTERNAL EVIDENCE.—The data here are more satisfactory and much more instructive. They are open to any reader of the six plays in this volume. These include specimens of Shakespeare's work at every important stage of his development.

The evidence may be classified under three heads: (1) choice and treatment of subject; (2) style; (3) versification. Before examining these, however, we will look at a fourth head, which is similar in kind to the external evidence already considered, viz. datable allusions in the plays to contemporary persons or events, or borrowings from contemporary books of known date. It is of great use to us in dating *Henry V*, for example, to find in the Prologue to Act v an explicit reference to Essex's Irish expedition of 1599, or in dating *Macbeth* to discover, in the vision of the 'two-fold balls and treble sceptres' (iv. i. 121), a reference to the triple sovereignty of James I. Evidence of this sort, however, must be used with great caution. Titania's picture of the disordered seasons, for example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 88 f.), which is usually said to refer to the bad seasons of 1594 and 1595, may equally be imaginary. Further, it is proper to remember, what has already been pointed out, that in the constant adaptation of plays at this time a topical allusion may always have been inserted at some later appearance, and not even necessarily by the author.

(1) *Choice and treatment of subject.*—In one striking case Shakespeare's choice of a subject gives quite exact conclusions, as when he chose to work up the history of Macbeth and the Scottish crown, with an eye to James I, a descendant of Banquo. The general value, however, of this part of the inquiry is that it gives material for a more or less convincing scheme of Shakespeare's dramatic development. How it does this may be seen to some extent from the latter part of the preceding Life; and more profitably from an intent and rapid reading of the plays. We find him choosing in his early years subjects of light comedy or of unmingled historical tragedy, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Richard II*. As he grows older, his subjects for

comedy and history, and his treatment of them, become more humorous and imaginative. In *As You Like It* he leaves the business of towns and courts, and shows us the heartiness of life without its disguises; in histories like *Henry IV* and *Henry V* he admits us not only to splendid battles of rhetoric and arms, but to a view of all the humours of man. When English history gave him no more subjects to his hand, he turned to the ampler history of Rome, and with the help of Plutarch produced his best work in historical tragedy — *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. Of these three plays the first was written at the beginning and the others just after the close of that period of six or seven years within which the great tragedies were composed; and this is abundantly evident from the way in which their subjects are conceived and handled. The subjects of his latest plays are, as a rule, no guide to their date. They are in essentials the ordinary subjects of romantic comedy, such as he had used before. It is his treatment of them that tells us when they must have been written.

(2) *Style*. — Just as we can trace the development of the dramatist in the choice and treatment of his subjects, so we can trace the ripening of his style from the eager, whimsical exuberance of the early plays, when he was still an apprentice to his art and under the influence of other men, into the rapid, intense, sometimes feverish and hasty writing of plays like *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, where all the resources of his language become almost too slow and dull for his thought. His latest work is full of passages where the thought seems to struggle against the obstinacy of the fixed forms of speech, and all the sweet fluency of his early diction is gone. There are great faults and great beauties in the impatient style of writing, as managed by a man of genius; but, though the question is interesting, we will not discuss it here. We are

content to discover, on grounds of style, the impossibility of reading *Macbeth* without seeing that it is a late play, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without seeing that it is early.

(3) *Versification*.—The tests of versification are in a certain sense surer than these others, since they are more mechanical. The verse in the successive groups of plays becomes more supple, and more adequate to dramatic expression; and these modifications can be to some extent tabulated. When Shakespeare began to write, blank verse was still a new fashion. We need not be surprised, therefore, when we read an early play like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to find, first, that large parts of it are not in the new blank verse measure, but in the familiar form of rhyming couplets; and, second, that the blank verse lines betray at every turn their association with these couplets. They tend to run in pairs like their neighbours, though unprovided with the proper justification of such a tendency, which is rhyme. In this way the chief dramatic advantage of blank verse was lost, viz. the freedom which it gives of continuous speech, the power to go on or to pause with the sense, unharassed by thought of the rhyme on which, at every line end, the voice must rest. To gain this advantage, to shake off the bondage of the couplet, took Shakespeare some years. Constant variation of metrical pause, however, and the running on of the clause beyond all couplet limits, completely altered, in time, the character of the verse. The disuse of rhyme was a natural part of this change: it is very seldom used in the later plays except for special purposes, such as to mark the end of a scene. We begin, besides, to have much more prose, which was found to be useful for various and, at first sight, contradictory purposes: not only for lowering the dramatic pitch, and for expressing the rich colloquial ease of Shakespeare's later comedy of character, as in *Henry IV*,

but for expressing, in a way impossible in the regular structure of verse, the wild and broken language of frenzy or madness, as in *Othello* and *Lear*. In *Hamlet* the vigour and loose-jointedness of prose were found to fit it for the very highest flights of the imagination. The same desire for the subordination of the forms of verse to dramatic requirements produced other variations which may or may not be called irregularities: frequent extra syllables, for example, not only at the end, but also within the line, as in *Macbeth*, iv. iii. 30, 33. In such a play as *The Tempest* we notice the common use of trisyllabic feet. This is a mark of lateness, and is part of the general loosening of the verse which Shakespeare effected. His fondness for 'weak endings' in his latest plays—that is, for accented unemphatic monosyllables, such as conjunctions or prepositions, at the end of the line—is due to the same cause. *The Tempest* has many examples of this use, and the result is the assimilation of the verse, as far as its form will possibly permit, to the rhythm of emphatic conversation.

Of course it must always be remembered in using these metrical tests, first, that verses are often scanned differently by different people, since a line may be fluid and admit of more than one scansion which satisfies the ear; and second, that no mechanical test of what is not a mechanical product can be relied on to give absolute truth.

For the convenience of readers, and as the natural conclusion to this section, we print here a list of the plays and poems of Shakespeare in their supposed order of composition. Few of the dates assigned are certain, but most can be shown to be approximate; and the order, though conjectural, is based upon reasonable evidence. The abbreviated titles in brackets are the titles used in the notes of this edition.

I. ? 1589—1595

Titus Andronicus (<i>Tit. Andr.</i>) ¹ ? 1589	Second and Third Parts of Henry VI (2, 3 <i>H. VI</i>) ¹ 1592
First Part of Henry VI (1 <i>H. VI</i>) ¹ ? 1590	Richard III (<i>R. III</i>) }
Comedy of Errors (<i>C. of E.</i>) } 1590—1	Lucrece (<i>Lucr.</i>) } 1593
Two Gentlemen of Verona (<i>T. G. of V.</i>)	Richard II (<i>R. II</i>) }
Love's Labour's Lost (<i>L. L. L.</i>) 1591—2	Sonnets, mostly written by King John (<i>K. John</i>) } 1594
Venus and Adonis (<i>V. and Ad.</i>) 1592	Midsummer Night's Dream (<i>M. N. D.</i>) }
	Romeo and Juliet (<i>R. and J.</i>) 1595

II. 1596—1600

Merchant of Venice (<i>M. V.</i>)	Much Ado about Nothing (<i>Much Ado</i>) 1598—9
All's Well that Ends Well (<i>All's Well</i>) } 1596	Henry V (<i>H. V</i>) } 1599
Taming of the Shrew (<i>T. of Sh.</i>) 1597	Julius Caesar (<i>J. C.</i>) }
Henry IV (<i>H. IV</i>) 1597—8	As You Like It (<i>As</i>) } 1600
Merry Wives of Windsor (<i>M. W. of W.</i>) 1598	Twelfth Night (<i>Tw. N.</i>) }

III. 1601—1609

Hamlet (<i>Ham.</i>) 1601—2	Macbeth (<i>M.</i>) 1606
Troilus and Cressida (<i>Tr. and C.</i>) } 1602—3	Timon of Athens (<i>T. of A.</i>) ¹ 1607
Measure for Measure (<i>M. for M.</i>) }	Antony and Cleopatra (<i>Ant. and Cl.</i>) } 1607—8
Othello (<i>Oth.</i>) 1604	Pericles ¹ (<i>Per.</i>) }
Lear 1605—6	Coriolanus (<i>Coriol.</i>) 1609

IV. 1610—11

Cymbeline (<i>Cymb.</i>) 1610	Tempest (<i>T.</i>) 1611
Winter's Tale (<i>W. T.</i>) 1610—11	Henry VIII (<i>H. VIII</i>) ¹ ? 1613

¹ Only in part by Shakespeare.

III. SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

The diction of Shakespeare is essentially the diction of his time. But he stands apart from his contemporaries by reason of a power of invention and manipulation that is only his. The Elizabethan age was conspicuously an age of adventure and experiment, and this is true of its language as it is of its other modes of activity. The Elizabethan freedom in the use of words and constructions is of an almost infinite variety; it reaches its height in the writings of Shakespeare, because in him medieval exuberance, having as it seems its last fling, comes into play with the new linguistic wealth amassed under the Tudor dynasty. With what proportion of new words and new meanings he enriched the literary language of England we can never exactly know. When we find that the word *dwindle*, for example, is not known before his date, we begin to see what are the possibilities, and an examination in the light of the evidence collected in the *Oxford English Dictionary* will show how much our language owes to his creative and acquisitive power even in this one field.¹ In this section this element of his diction will be first dealt with, and afterwards some points will be set out which may in the main be brought under the grammatical categories.

§ 1. The free transference of words to other than their original parts of speech is one of the features of the period in which Shakespeare lived.

In the dark *backward* and abysm of time (*T. I. ii. 49.*)

Here we have an undoubted example of Shakespeare's daring in this kind. Another is *hush* as death (*Ham. II. ii. 508*).

There are many instances of the conversion of adjectives

¹ The evidence has been made more accessible in the *Oxford Shakespeare Glossary*.

or verbs into nouns which are now obsolete or unfamiliar, but which were current English of the Elizabethan era. Such are *exclaim* = exclamation (*R. II*, I. ii. 2), *in few* = in short (*Ham.* I. iii. 126).

§ 2. Certain collective uses of nouns, or adjectives used absolutely, with the definite article, were admitted more freely in Elizabethan times than in ours. Two of Shakespeare's deserve special attention: *the general* = the general body of the people, the public, the multitude (*J. C.* II. i. 12), which he was the first to bring into currency; and *the subject*, a collective singular = the people of a state (*Ham.* I. i. 72, I. ii. 33 *his subject*).

§ 3. In his use of **epithets** Shakespeare allowed himself all the liberty that the linguistic genius of his time would sanction. Occasionally he comments upon a usage, as in the famous passage in *Ham.* II. ii. 109—11 where Polonius carps at the word *beautified*. It seems as if the old man is objecting to a newfangled term that had come into vogue recently and was regarded by the older generation as an affectation.

Adjectives now normally capable only of a passive sense were in Shakespeare's time freely used with active force. This is most frequent with words in *-able*, *-ible*. Thus *defensible*, which now means only 'that can be defended', is used by Shakespeare in the sense of 'capable of making a defence' (*H. V*, III. iii. 50). Similarly *tuneable* means tuneful, musical, in

More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear (*M. N. D.* I. i. 184),

and *disputable* = disputatious, contentious, in *As*, II. v. 35. The word *artificial* belongs to another category. Though its current modern sense of constructed by art is used by Shakespeare and perhaps gained its vogue from him, he employs it also in the active sense of constructive, creative:

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
 Have with our needs created both one flower
 (M. N. D. III. ii. 203—4.)

On the other hand, adjectives now capable of active force only, such as those formed with the suffix *-ive*, may have passive meaning. Thus, *unexpressive* is used for inexpressible (*As*, III. ii. 10), and *insuppressive* for unsuppressible (*J. C.* II. i. 134). *Plausible* in the sense of plausible is peculiarly Shakespearian; with the '*plausible* manners' of *Ham.* I. iv. 30 may be compared the '*plausible* words' of *All's Well*, I. ii. 53. Adjectives in *-less* come under the same head; thus *sightless* has the meaning of invisible twice in *Macbeth* (I. v. 50, I. vii. 23); this may be exactly paralleled by *viewless* in

To be imprison'd in the *viewless* winds
 (M. for M. III. i. 122.)

Similarly, *careless* = uncared-for in *M.* I. iv. 11, and *cureless* = incurable in *M. V.* IV. i. 142.

Among the adjectives in *-ble*, the word *sensible* needs to be considered apart. Its history dates back to Chaucer, and its double meaning, active and passive, is already illustrated in his writings. Shakespeare uses it in at least five ways, which all occur in the plays included in this volume. Besides the current modern meaning of abounding in good sense, there are the following uses:

(1) Capable of physical perception, endowed with feeling or sensibility, sensitive, as in *M. N. D.* v. i. 184, and (construed with *of*) *J. C.* I. iii. 18.

(2) Involving one of the senses, as in

the *sensible* and true avouch
 Of mine own eyes. (Ham. I. i. 56—7.)

(3) Exhibiting emotion, as in *M. V.* II. viii. 48 (affection