**Four Periods of Shakespeare’s Dramatic and Poetic Career**

English playwright and poet, recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists, Shakespeare’s plays communicate a profound knowledge of the wellsprings of human behavior, revealed through portrayals of a wide variety of characters. His use of poetic and dramatic means to create a unified aesthetic effect out of a multiplicity of vocal expressions and actions is recognized as a singular achievement, and his use of poetry within his plays to express the deepest levels of human motivation in individual, social, and universal situations is considered one of the greatest accomplishments in literary history.

Although the precise date of many of Shakespeare’s plays is in doubt, his dramatic career is generally divided into four periods: The First Period up to 1593, the Second Period from 1594 to 1600, the Third Period from 1601 to 1607, and the Fourth Period from 1608.

**The First Period:** This period is also known as ‘In the workshop’ or ‘The period of early experimentation’. Shakespeare was in the process of learning his craft by acting, and then revising and modifying the existing plays. So his early plays are characterized by immaturity and crudity. There is superficiality in theme, treatment and characterization. But at the same time these works are characterized by more youthful exuberance of imagination, by extravagance of language, and also by use of puns, conceits etc. The works of the period are: Titus Andronicus, Henry VI, Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, Loves Labours Lost, Comedy of Errors, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Richard II. Moreover he composed two long poems during this time that are Venus and Adonis, and The rape of Lucrece.

 **The Second Period:** This period is known as ‘In the world’ or ‘The period of growth and development or ‘The period of great comedies and chronicle plays. The works of this period show a rapid growth and development in the mind of this great writer. The works reflect a deeper knowledge of human life and human nature. This period is sharply marked by an atmosphere of mirth and gaiety, a frank enjoyment of life, a perfect blend of humour and romance. The style of the works is fully free from the crudeness and affection of the earlier plays. The use of rhyme is abandoned and his blank-verse shows greater and greater ease and elasticity. Some of the works of this period are: As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, King John, Henry IV, Henry V, The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, A Midsummer Nights Dream.

**The Third Period:** Known as the period of ‘Out of the depths’ or ‘The period of gloom and depression’ or ‘The period of great tragedies and somber or bitter comedies’, this period spreads from 1601 to 1607. During this period Shakespeare’s mood grew gloomy, pessimistic and even cynical and his dark comedies best reflect this mood of Shakespeare. This period marks the full maturity of powers of intellect and wisdom in him. The darker side of human experience occupies his attention in this period. The sins and weaknesses of men form theme of his plays of this period. Shakespeare’s works of this period are: All’s Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, and Julius Caesar.

**The Fourth Period:** This period is also known as ‘On the heights’ or ‘The period of restored serenity’ or ‘The period of the later comedies or dramatic romances’. In this period the temper of Shakespeare has changed from bitter and gloomy to serene and peaceful. A tender and gracious tone is seen in his works of this period. The evil is controlled and conquered by the good in his works of this fourth period. But at the same time they also show a decline of Shakespeare’s dramatic powers. Carelessness in construction of theme and characterization, and also decline in style and versification can be seen in his works of this period. Some of the works of this period are: Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winters Tale, and The Tempest.

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