

*The Second
Period
(1601-1608)*

Shakespeare's dramatic genius was at its highest in the second period of his literary work, when all of Shakespeare's famous tragedies appeared. In the plays of this period the dramatist reaches his full maturity. He presents great human problems.

Shakespeare proves that it is not enough to be clever in order to achieve happiness, that human relations derive from social problems. He shows the social injustice and suffering of man. Something must be done to change the world, the laws of man and his morals. This is particularly stressed in the great tragedies of Hamlet and King Lear.

Shakespeare showed that people had to look for another and more perfect life. Society could achieve progress and happiness only through struggle. He had faith in man's virtue. In Shakespeare's tragedies the evil forces are victorious only to a certain point, in the end the good wins.

Shakespeare's characters are personalities of great depth and unusual intellect. At the same time he has created real, ordinary men

Each tragedy portrays some noble figure caught in a difficult situation. A man's tragedy is not individual, it is spread to other people as well.

In ancient tragedies man was helpless. His life depended on fate. Shakespeare's man acts in a concrete social and political world.

During the second period Shakespeare wrote the following tragedies:

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark — 1602

Troilus and Cressida— 1603

Othello, the Moor of Venice — 1604

King Lear— 1605

Macbeth — 1606,

Algotu and Cleopatra — 1607

Coriolanus — 1608

Timon of Atheus — 1608.

He also wrote a few comedies:
All's Well that Ends Well — 1602
Measure for Measure — 1604
Pericles, Prince of Tyre —
1608.

These have been named the dark comedies and differ from those written during the first period as they have many tragic elements in them.

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SARAH-BERNHARDT (HAMLET.)

Shakespeare's
greatest
tragedies are
Hamlet, Othello,
King Lear and
Macbeth



Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Hamlet is a philosophical drama, the tragedy of a humanist. It is the most widely staged, read and discussed of all Shakespeare's tragedies.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is at the University of Wittenberg. A poor student Horatio becomes his friend. Unexpectedly Hamlet learns of his father's death and hurries home to Elsinore. On his arrival Hamlet is shocked at finding his mother married to his uncle, his father's brother, Claudius, who becomes King of Denmark.

The scene is laid in Denmark. It is night. Several soldiers are on guard. They are talking about the ghost that appears near the castle every night. The soldiers start to speak to him, but the ghost does not answer and disappears. They tell Hamlet about the ghost. Soon Hamlet comes and sees the ghost. In the ghost he recognizes the image of his father. The ghost beckons him and in spite of Horatio's warnings Hamlet follows him.

The ghost tells Hamlet that his father has been treacherously killed by his brother Claudius. Claudius poured some poison into his ear while he was asleep in the garden. Having married Queen Gertrude he inherited the throne. The ghost calls on Hamlet to avenge his father's death.

Hamlet is overwhelmed. He takes an oath to avenge his death. So Hamlet pretends to be mad and makes biting remarks to the Queen, King and all the courtiers.

Polonius, one of the Queen's courtiers, has two children, a daughter Ophelia and a son Laertes. Hamlet loves Ophelia, but he puts aside his love and simulates madness to conceal his plans.

Hamlet's mother thinks it is only her unfaithfulness that has made him mad, and Polonius thinks Hamlet's love for his daughter is the only reason. Ophelia in her natural simplicity admires Hamlet, but in her blind obedience to her father she avoids him. Seeing the change in Hamlet, her heart nearly breaks with pity and sorrow. Hamlet wants to force the King to admit his crime When a company of actors visits the castle, he arranges a play in which the actors perform the scene of a king's murder.

**Hamlet wants to make sure of
the King's guilt. He says:
*"the play's the thing wherein I'll
catchy conscience of the king"***

And so he does. The King now understands that Hamlet knows his secret. Hamlet watches the behavior of the Queen and the King and becomes sure of the treacherous murder of his father. In confusion the King and Queen leave the performance. Soon Hamlet is called to his mother. He can't forgive her because she has married his father's murderer, and Hamlet tells her what he thinks of her. The Queen is frightened, she calls for help. During all this time Polonius stays hidden behind the curtains.

On hearing the Queen's cry for help he makes a move behind the curtains. Hamlet thinks that it is the King and kills him. The death of Polonius by Hamlet's hand is at the same time a crushing blow to Ophelia. She becomes insane and drowns herself. The death of Polonius gives the King grounds for sending Hamlet out of the kingdom. On board a ship Hamlet goes to England under the care of two courtiers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

They are given letters to the English court which read that Hamlet should be put to death as soon as he lands in England. Hamlet, suspecting some treachery, secretly gets the letters, and changes his name for the names of the courtiers. Soon after that their ship is attacked by pirates and Hamlet is taken prisoner but then he is set free. When Hamlet gets home the first thing he sees is the funeral of Ophelia.

On learning of Hamlet's return the King thinks of a plan to do away with Hamlet. He persuades Laertes to challenge Hamlet to a duel and advises Laertes to prepare a poisoned weapon. In the duel Laertes inflicts a mortal wound on Hamlet. And then Hamlet and Laertes exchange swords and Hamlet wounds Laertes with his own poisoned sword.

At that moment, the Queen, who is also present at the duel, cries out that she is poisoned. She has drunk out of a glass of poisoned wine which the King prepared for Hamlet. The Queen dies. Laertes, feeling his life go, tells Hamlet that Claudius is the cause of all the misfortunes. With his last strength Hamlet kills him with his spear and both of them die.

Hamlet's last words are addressed to his friend Horatio whom he asks to tell his story to the world, as if commanding others to continue the struggle after his death.



