

THE SECOND PERIOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S LITERARY WORK

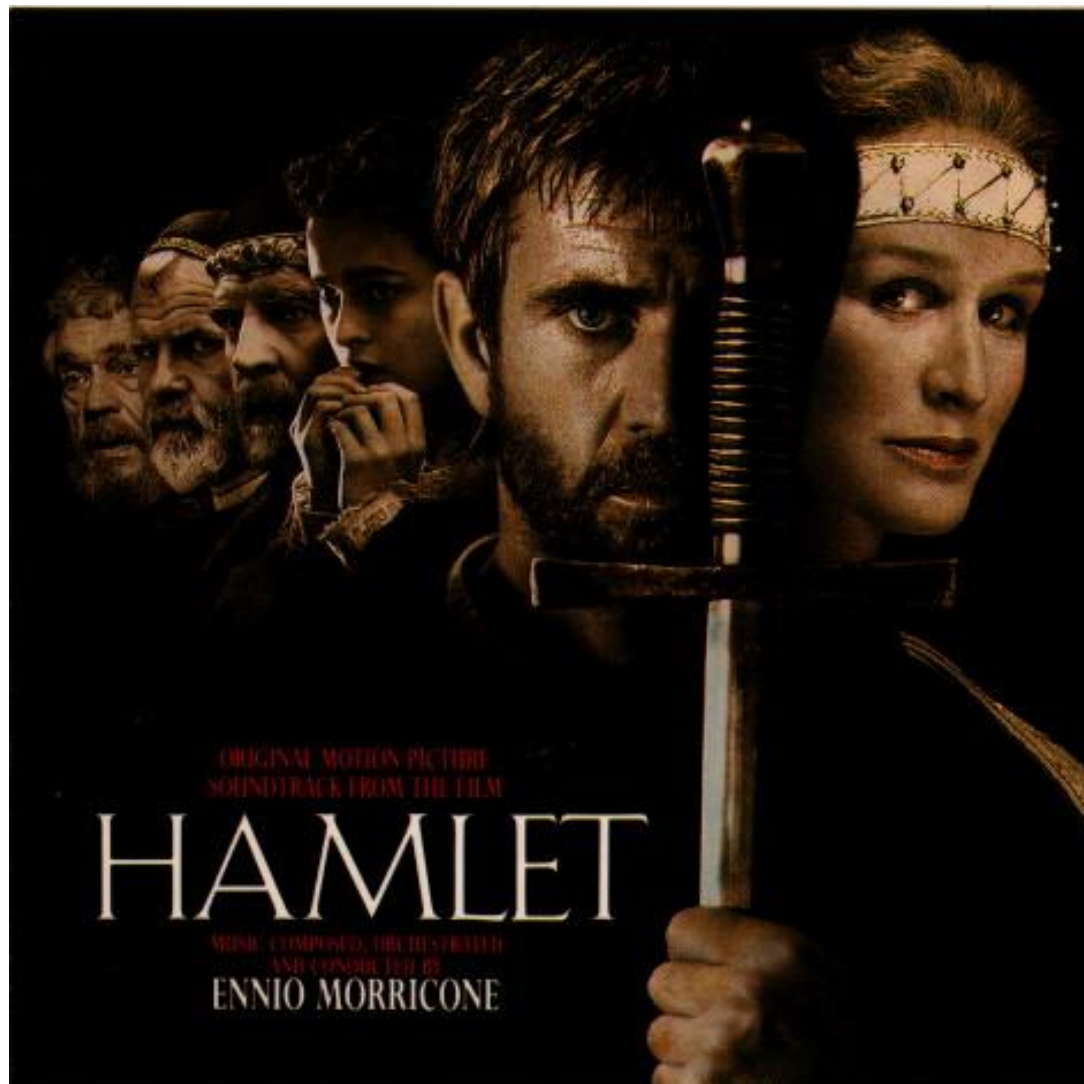
(1601—1608)

- 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*.

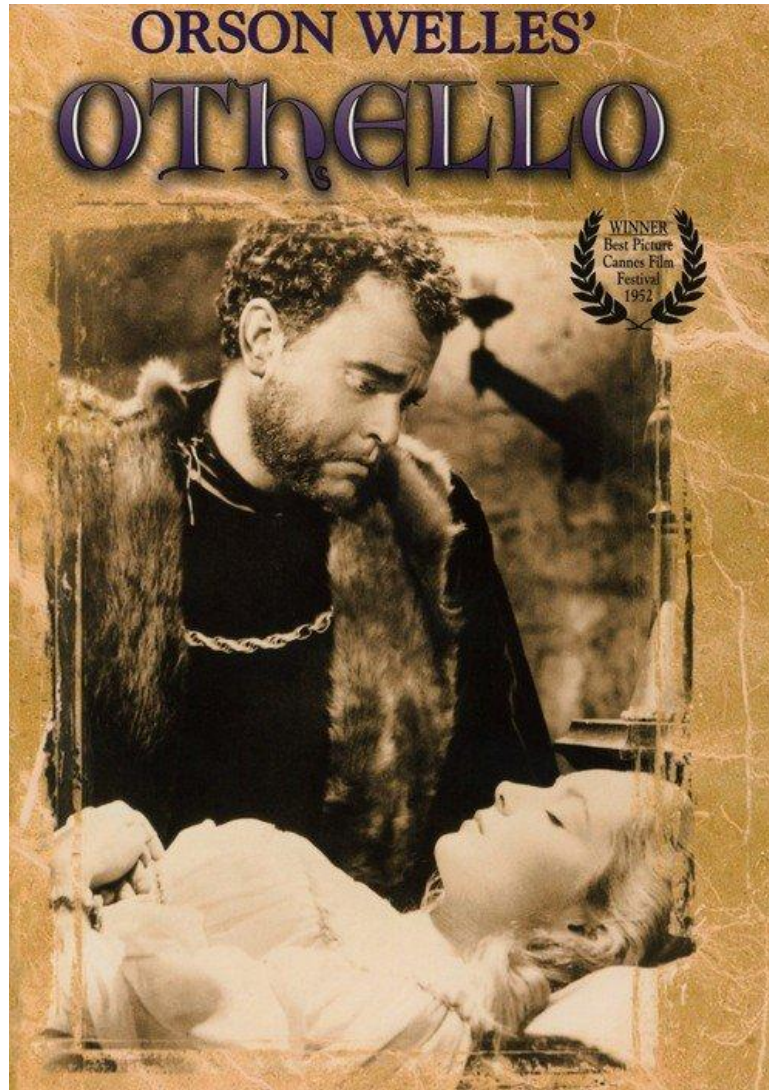
- ◉ Shakespeare showed that people had to look for another and more perfect life. Society could progress and become happy only through struggle. He had faith in man's virtue. In his tragedies the evil forces are victorious only to a certain point, in the end the good wins. Shakespeare's characters are personalities of great depth and unusual intellect. At the same time he 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. He is the product of the environment and history.

During the second period Shakespeare wrote eight tragedies. He also wrote three comedies. These have been named the dark comedies and differ from those written during the first period as they have many tragic elements in them. Shakespeare's greatest tragedies are:

Hamlet Prince of Denmark — 1602

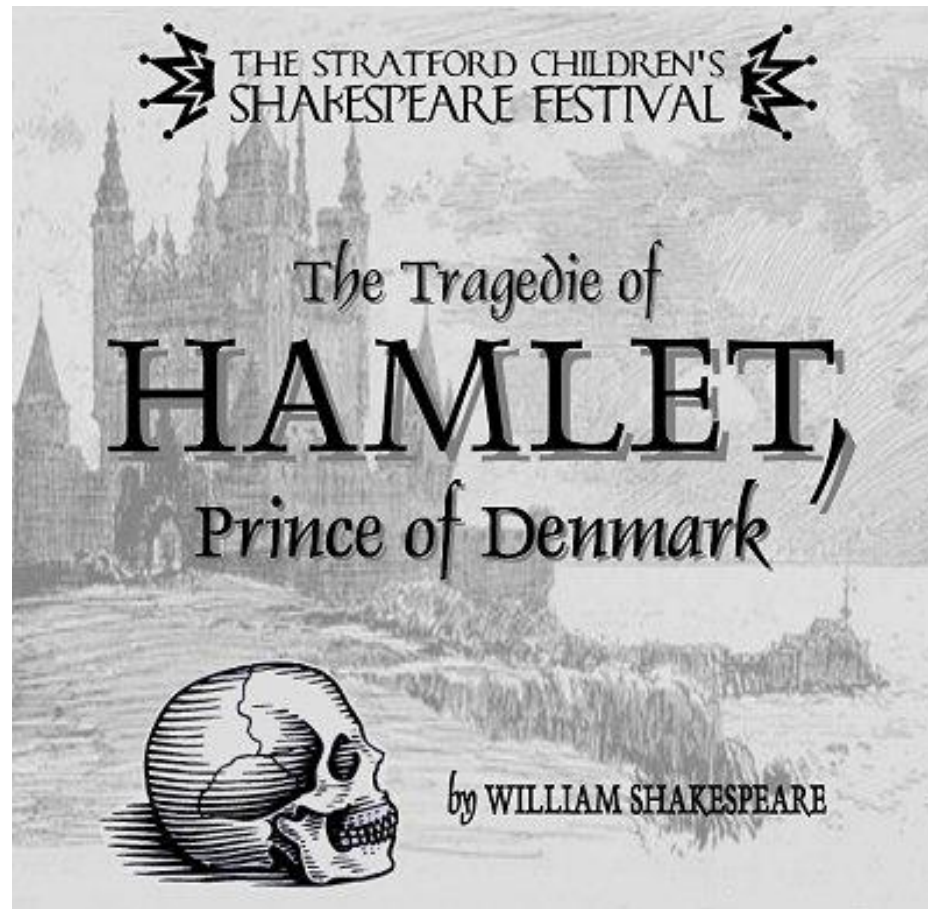


◉ *Othello, the Moor of Venice* — 1604

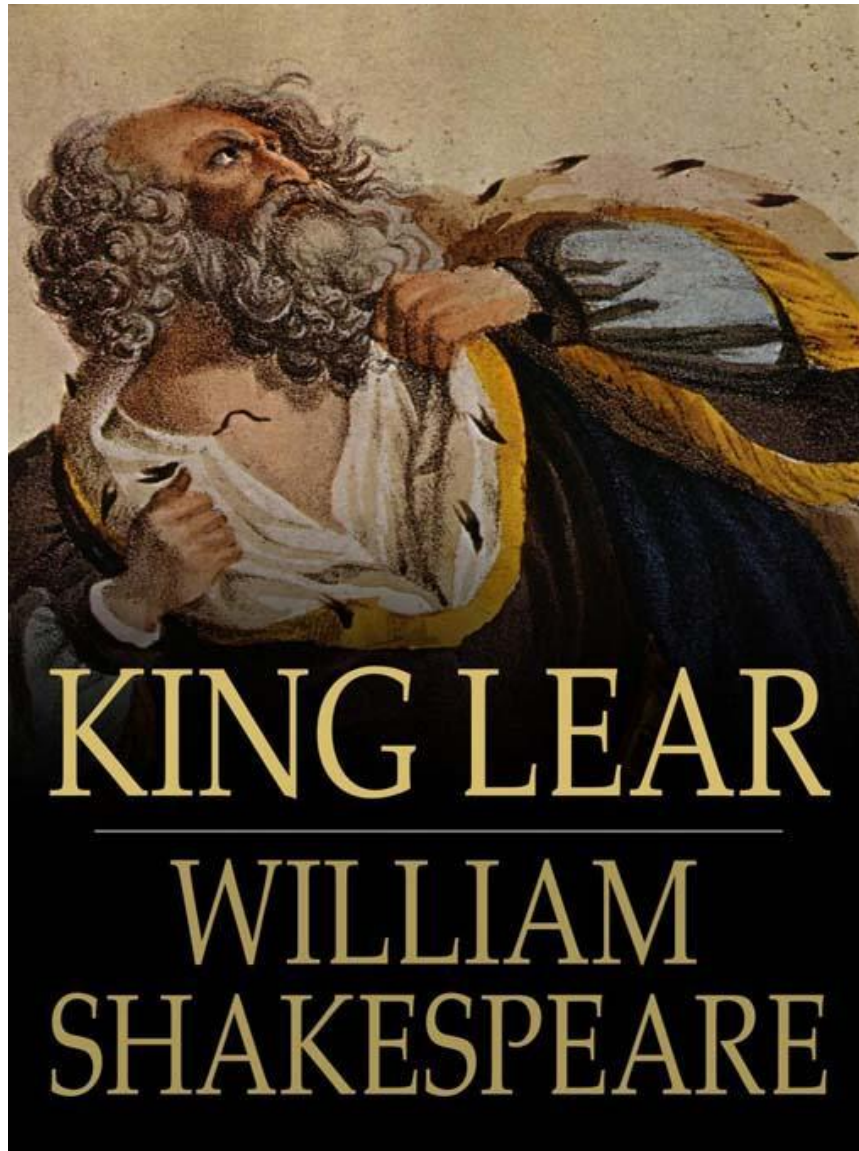


HAMLET

- ◉ *Hamlet* is a philosophical drama, the tragedy of a humanist.



◉ *King Lear* — 1605



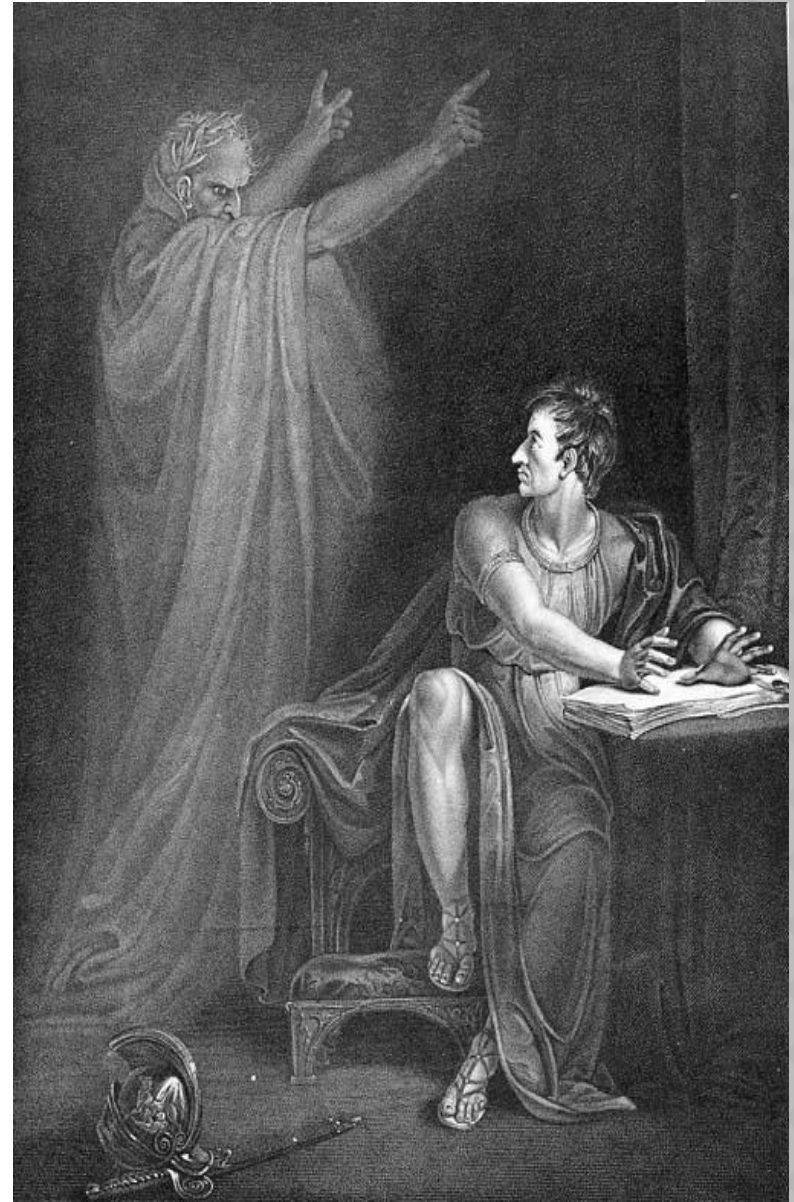
◉ *Macbeth* — 1606



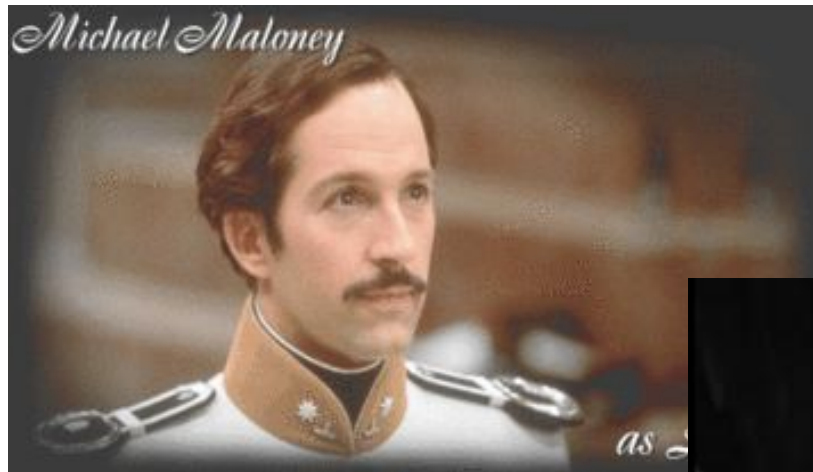
- ◉ Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is at University of Wittenberg. A poor student Horatio becomes his friend. Unexpectedly he learns of his father's death and hurries home to Elsinore. On his arrival Hamlet is shocked by finding his mother married to his uncle, his father's brother, Claudius, who becomes 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 catch the conscience of the king". The King now understands that Hamlet knows his secret. Hamlet watches the behaviour 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. 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 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.

Doubt thou
the stars are fire;

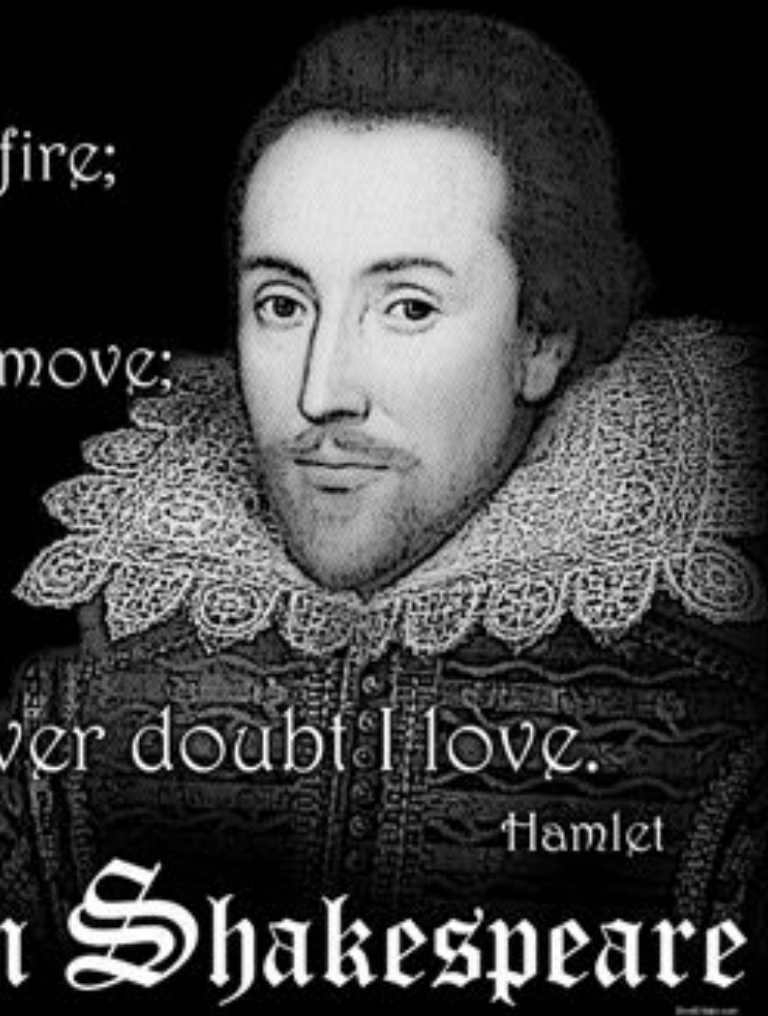
Doubt that
the sun doth move;

Doubt truth
to be a liar;

But never doubt I love.

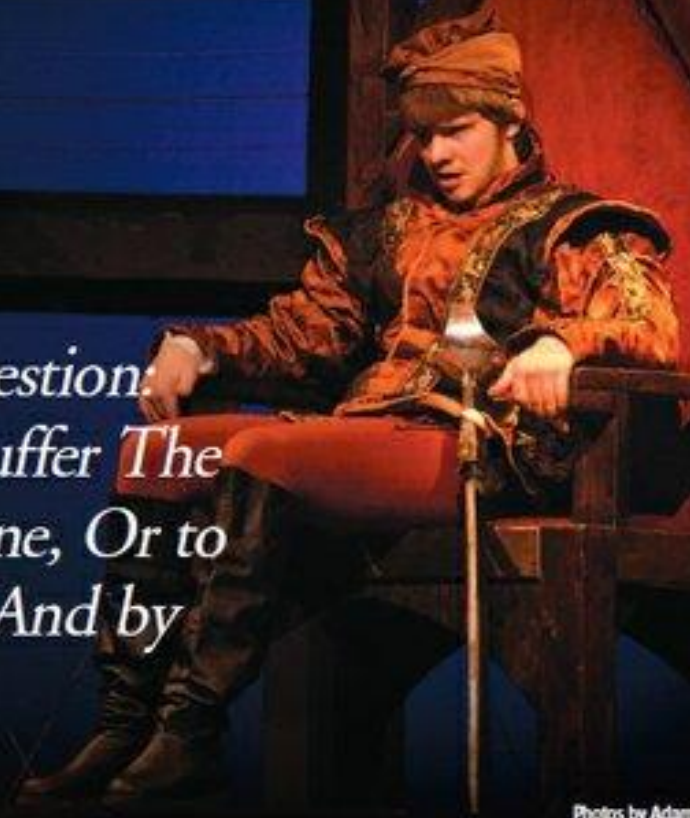
Hamlet

William Shakespeare



Hamlet

*'To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The
slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to
take arms against a sea of troubles, And by
opposing end them?'*



Photos by Adam Lapierre

THE IMAGE OF HAMLET.

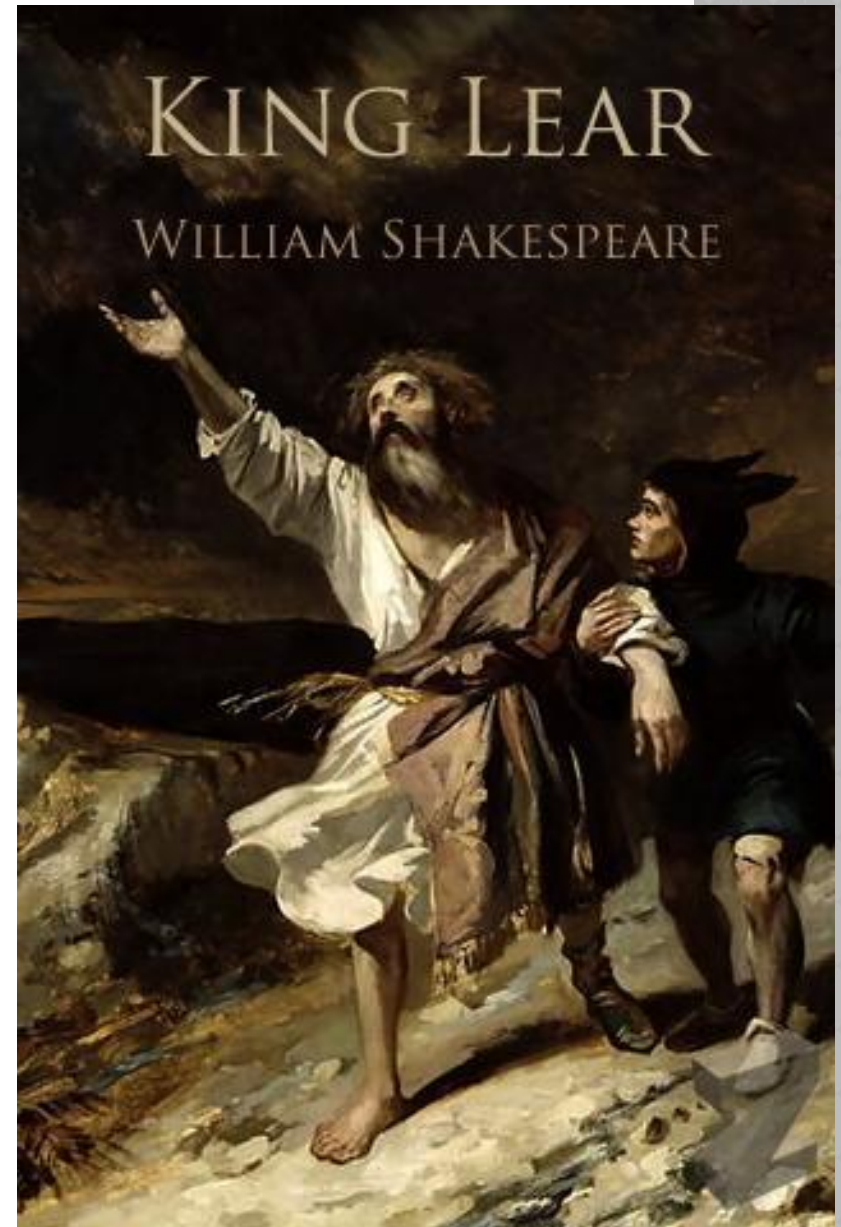
- ◉ *Hamlet* is one of the most difficult tragedies to interpret. No work of world literature has caused so many explanations as *Hamlet*. The reason for it is Hamlet's behaviour. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a typical man of the Renaissance – well educated and noble, open-hearted, clever and generous. He loves life; he believes in man and is full of hopes and noble desires. But suddenly his father is murdered by his uncle, and his mother becomes his wife thus helping Claudius to become king. Hamlet grieves that injustice triumphs over justice, that cruel rulers are tyrannizing the people, that his beloved country has become a prison. The contradiction between his noble ideals and reality is one of the reasons for Hamlet's disappointment.



- ◉ As a character Hamlet is many-sided. He is courageous. He does not fear to look the truth in the face. He knows that revenge is easy. But it is not merely revenge that Hamlet seeks. He feels that he “was born to set the world aright” and this can be done only by exposing the very roots of the reigning evil. Therefore he decides to unveil the crimes of Claudius to the people and to establish the reign of justice in Denmark. So Hamlet’s capacity for action, decisiveness and initiative are one part of his nature. On the other hand he doubts, put things off, falls into complete pessimism, avoids action. Hamlet meditates on the problems of life and death, struggle and irresolution, love and hatred. His meditations are well reflected famous monologue or soliloquy “To be or not to be?” He passionately seeks the key to the understanding of life. He is ready to devote his life to the task “to set the world aright”, though he foresees “a sea of troubles” before him, which cannot be overcome. Hamlet hesitates because he is afraid to take a false step which might lead him against humanist ideals.
- ◉ So Hamlet is not a fighter by nature, he is a learned man, philosopher. Hamlet decides to be, to act — to fight and to conquer. At the end of the tragedy he achieves his aims. His victory is that he has overcome his own doubts.
- ◉ Hamlet is one of the greatest characters in world literature and the play is the internal drama of a human soul.

THE STORY OF KING LEAR

- ◉ *King Lear* is a family tragedy set against the background of the social and political life of late Middle Ages. It is a play about the clash between cruelty, selfishness, ambition on the one hand, honesty, justice and humanity on the other.



- ◉ The tragedy takes us back to the days of ancient Britain. Lear is portrayed as a big feudal landowner. In the course of long years of glorious rule his heart has become filled with pride and complete absence of doubt in the righteousness of his own ways. He is 80 and is ready to divide his kingdom and give all affairs of state over to his three daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Goneril is married to the Duke of Albany, and Regan to the Duke of Cornwall. Two foreigners — the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France are seeking the hand of his youngest daughter Cordelia.



- Lear is going to give away his beloved daughter to one of them. At this moment the old man is full of pride – the pride of a king and a father. He decides to test his daughters: the greatest share will be given to the daughter who will best express her love for him. Goneril and Regan declare that they love him more than their honour, beauty and health. The King is pleased and gives them each one third of the kingdom. Cordelia is ashamed to repeat these words of flattery, for she loves truth and honesty. Her answer is different:

Good, my Lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd
me: I

Return those duties back as are
right fit (=as ought to be done),
Obey you, love you, and most
honour you.

Why have my sisters husbands, if
they say

They love you all? Happily, when I
shall wed,

That lord whose hand must take my
plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care
and duty:

Sure I shall never marry like my
sisters,

To love my father all.



- ◉ The King spoiled by flattery is hurt and disowns her. No one dares to defend the unhappy Cordelia except the King's counsellor Kent, and King of France who asks her to go with him to France.
- ◉ Now Lear will live in turn with Goneril and Regan. His two elder daughters insult him, shut the door on him and let him out in a thunderstorm. Lear is surprised to see that their attitude to him has changed. From this moment on his heart has no peace. He is only a poor, old, weak and despised man. The family respected and obeyed him only because he was in power. With Lear's degradation the poet shows that the feudal order is breaking up. His two eldest daughters represent the new class. They are selfish, cruel, false, vulgar, full of plots. Their hearts are hardened.

- ◉ The King's mind has clouded over, but under hard trials in suffering and pain he goes through a moral evolution and becomes humane. He understands the injustice of the order he once represented. He understands his mistake.



- ◉ Shakespeare is a great master of plot. In *King Lear* we find a double plot. On the one hand the author reveals the family tragedy of King Lear, on the other hand he shows the fate of the Earl of Gloucester. Gloucester has two sons Edgar and Edmund. The latter is his illegitimate son. The consciousness of having no rights has made Edmund a cynical man. His aim is to get his brother's lands and power. By a treacherous letter he succeeds in setting his father against Edgar, whom Gloucester disinherits. Edgar has a courageous heart, but he has to run away to escape danger.



- In the meantime Cordelia has sent troops to England to win back her father's kingdom. She finds her father in the field near Dover. Old Gloucester helped his master to reach this place because he knew of Cordelia's intention. Edmund told Cornwall this secret, and Gloucester's eyes were plucked out. Edgar, disguised as a beggar, helped him to reach Dover where Gloucester died. The British troops under Edmund's command win the French army, and Edmund orders Cordelia to be hanged.



- ◉ Goneril and Regan are in love with Edmund. In a fit of jealousy Goneril poisons her sister Regan, she herself commits suicide when her husband learns about her plot. Wishing to avenge his father Edgar kills Edmund. So the evil forces do not triumph, but light comes too late. King Lear finds Cordelia, but she is dead. He dies over her lifeless body. Edgar and the Duke of Albany are with him at this moment.



- ◉ The story of King Lear with its horrors, cruelty and crime, as used by Shakespeare, showed the despotism of the age.



When sorrows
come, they come
not single spies,
but in battallions.

William Shakespeare

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