hand, and, as their writings show, were well acquainted with recent Italian literature. But the dramatic element in that literature extended far beyond the circle of regular plays, whether tragedies, comedies, or pastorals. It in­cluded the collections of short prose stories which appeared, or were published for the first time, in such numbers during the 16th century, the novels or novelettes of Ser Giovanni, Cinthio, Bandello, and their associates. These stories, consisting of the humorous and tragic incidents of actual life, told in a vivid and direct way, naturally attracted the attention of the dramatists. We know from the result that Shakespeare must have studied them with some care, as he derived from this source the plots and incidents of at least a dozen of his plays. Many of the stories, it is true, had already been translated, either directly from the Italian, or indirectly from French and Latin versions. Of Cinthio’s hundred tales, however, only two or three are known to have been rendered into English ; and Shakespeare derived the story of Othello from the untranslated part of this collection. Many of the Italian stories touched on darker crimes or more aggra­vated forms of violence than those naturally prompted by jealousy and revenge, and are indeed revolting from the atrocities of savage cruelty and lust related so calmly as to betray a kind of cynical insensibility to their true character. Shakespeare, however, with the sound judg­ment and strong ethical sense that guided the working of his dramatic genius, chose the better and healthier materials of this literature, leaving the morbid excesses of criminal passion to Webster and Ford. But the Italian influence on Shakespeare’s work is not to be estimated merely by the outlines of plot and incident ho borrowed from southern sources and used as a kind of canvas for his matchless portraiture of human character and action. It is apparent also in points of structure and diction, in types of character and shades of local colouring, which realize and express in a concentrated form the bright and lurid, the brilliant and passionate, features of southern life. The great majority of the *dramatis personne* in his comedies, as well as in some of the tragedies, have Italian names, and many of them, such as Mercutio and Gratiano on the one hand, Iachimo and Iago on the other, are as Italian in nature as in name. The moonlight scene in the *Merchant of Venice* is Southern in every detail and incident. And, as M. Philarète Chasles justly points out, *Romeo and Juliet* is Italian throughout, alike in colouring, incident, and passion. The distinctive influence is further traceable in Shakespeare’s use of Italian words, phrases, and pro­verbs, some of which, such as “ tranect ” (from *tranare),* or possibly, as Rowe suggested, “traject” *(traghetto),* are of special local significance. In the person of Hamlet Shakespeare even appears as a critic of Italian style. Referring to the murderer who in the players’ tragedy poisons the sleeping duke, Hamlet exclaims, “ He poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name’s Gonzago : the story is extant and written in very choice Italian.” In further illustration of this point Mr Grant White has noted some striking turns of thought and phrase which seem to show that Shakespeare must have read parts of Berni and Ariosto in the original. No doubt in the case of Italian poets, as in the case of Latin authors like Ovid, whose works he was familiar with in the original, Shakespeare would also diligently read the translations, especially the translations into English verse. For in reading such works as Golding’s Ovid, Harrington’s Ariosto, and Fairfax’s Tasso, he would be increasing his command over the elements of expressive phrase and diction which were the verbal instruments, the material vehicle, of his art. But, besides studying the translations of the Italian poets and prose writers made available for English readers,

he would naturally desire to possess, and no doubt acquired for himself, the key that would unlock the whole treasure-house of Italian literature. The evidence of Shakespeare’s knowledge of French is more abundant and decisive, so much so as hardly to need express illustration. There can be little doubt therefore that, during his early years in London, ho acquired a fair knowledge both of French and Italian.

But, while pursuing these collateral aids to his higher work, there is abundant evidence that Shakespeare also devoted himself to that work itself. As early as 1592 he is publicly recognized, not only as an actor of distinction, but as a dramatist whose work had excited the envy and indignation of his contemporaries, and especially of one so accomplished and so eminent, so good a scholar and master of the playwright’s craft, as Robert Greene. Greene had, it is true, a good deal of the irritability and excitable temper often found in the subordinate ranks of poetical genius, and he often talks of himself, his doings, and associates in a highly-coloured and extravagant way. But his reference to Shakespeare is specially deliberate, being in the form of a solemn and last appeal to his friends amongst the scholarly dramatists to relinquish their connexion with the presumptuous and ungrateful stage. In his *Groatsworth of Wit,* published by his friend Chettle a few weeks after his death, Greene urges three of his friends, apparently Marlowe, Lodge, and Peele, to give up writing for the players. “ Base-minded men, all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned ; for unto none of you like me sought those burs to cleave ; those puppets, I mean, who speak from our mouths, those anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they have all been beholding ; is it not like that you, to whom they have all been beholding, shall (were ye in that case that I am now) be both of them at once forsaken ? Yes, trust them not *; for* there is an upstart Crow, beautified in our feathers, that, with his *tiger’s heart wrapt in a player’s hide,* supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and, being an absolute *Johannes fac totum,* is, in his own conceit, the only Shakescene in a country. Oh that I might intreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions.” This curious passage tells us indirectly a good deal about Shakespeare. It bears decisive testimony to his assured position and rapid advance in his profession. The very term of reproach applied to him, “Johannes Factotum,” is a tribute to Shakespeare’s industry and practical ability. From the beginning of his career he must have been in the widest and best sense a utility man, ready to do any work con­nected with the theatre and stage, and eminently successful in anything he undertook. In the first instance he had evidently made his mark as an actor, as it is in that character he is referred to by Greene, and denounced for going beyond his province and usurping the functions of the dramatist. Greene’s words imply that Shakespeare not only held a foremost place as an actor, but that ho was already distinguished by his dramatic success in revising and rewriting existing plays. This is confirmed by the parodied line from the *Third Part of Henry VI.,* recently revised if not originally written by Shakespeare. This must have been produced before Greene’s death, which took place in September 1592. Indeed, all the three parts of *Henry VI.* in the revised form appear to have been acted during the spring and summer of that year. It is not improbable that two or three of Shake­speare’s early comedies may also have been produced before Greene’s death. And if so, his resentment, ns an academic scholar, against the country actor who had not