poet and dramatist appeared to more than fulfil the utmost promise of the time. By right of imperial command over all the resources of imaginative insight and expression Shakespeare combined the rich dramatic materials already prepared into more perfect forms, and carried them to the highest point of ideal development. He quickly surpassed Marlowe in passion, music, and intellectual power ; Greene in lyrical beauty, elegiac grace, and narrative interest ; Peele in picturesque touch and pastoral sweetness ; and Lyly in bright and sparkling dialogue. And having distanced the utmost efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries he took his own higher way, and reigned to the end without a rival in the new world of supreme dramatic art he had created. It is a new world, because Shakespeare’s work alone can be said to possess the organic strength and infinite variety, the throbbing fulness, vital complexity, and breathing truth, of nature herself. In points of artistic resource and technical ability—such as copious and expressive diction, freshness and pregnancy of verbal combination, richly modulated verse, and structural skill in the handling of incident and action—Shakespeare’s supremacy is indeed sufficiently assured. But, after all, it is of course in the spirit and substance of his work, his power of piercing to the hidden centres of character, of touch­ing the deepest springs of impulse and passion, out of which are the issues of life, and of evolving those issues dramatically with a flawless strength, subtlety, and truth, which raises him so immensely above and beyond not only the best of the playwrights who went before him, but the whole line of illustrious dramatists that came after him. It is Shakespeare’s unique distinction that he has an absolute command over all the complexities of thought and feeling that prompt to action and bring out the dividing lines of character. He sweeps with the hand of a master the whole gamut of human experience, from the lowest note to the very top of its compass, from the sportive childish treble of Mamilius and the pleading boyish tones of Prince Arthur, up to the spectre-haunted terrors of Macbeth, the tropical passion of Othello, the agonized sense and tortured spirit of Hamlet, the sustained elemental grandeur, the Titanic force and utterly tragical pathos, of Lear.

Shakespeare’s active dramatic career in London lasted about twenty years, and may be divided into three tolerably symmetrical periods. The first extends from the year 1587 to about 1593-94; the second from this date to the end of the century ; and the third from 1600 to about 1608, soon after which time Shakespeare ceased to write regularly for the stage, was less in London and more and more at Stratford. Some modern critics add to these a fourth period, including the few plays which from internal as well as external evidence must have been among the poet’s latest productions. As the exact dates of these plays are unknown, this period may be taken to extend from 1608 to about 1612. The three dramas produced during these years are, however, hardly entitled to be ranked as a separate period. They may rather be regarded as supplementary to the grand series of dramas belonging to the third and greatest epoch of Shakespeare’s pro­ductive power. To the first period belong Shakespeare’s early tentative efforts in revising and partially rewriting plays produced by others that already had possession of the stage. These efforts are illustrated in the three parts of *Henry VI.,* especially the second and third parts, which bear decisive marks of Shakespeare’s hand, and were to a great extent recast and rewritten by him. It is clear from the internal evidence thus supplied that Shakespeare was at first powerfully affected by “Marlowe’s mighty line.” This influence is so marked in the revised second

and third parts of *Henry VI.* as to induce some critics to believe Marlowe must have had a hand in the revision. These passages are, however, sufficiently explained by the fact of Marlowe’s influence during the first period of Shakespeare’s career. To the same period also belong the earliest tragedy, that of *Titus Andronicus,* and the three comedies—*Love’s Labour ’s Lost, The Comedy of Errors,* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona.* These dramas are all marked by the dominant literary influences of the time. They present features obviously due to the revived and widespread knowledge of classical literature, as well as to the active interest in the literature of Italy and the South. *Titus Andronicus,* in many of its characteristic features, reflects the form of Roman tragedy almost universally accepted and followed in the earlier period of the drama. This form was supplied by the Latin plays of Seneca, their darker colours being deepened by the moral effect of the judicial tragedies and military conflicts of the time. The execution of the Scottish queen and the Catholic con­spirators who had acted in her name, and the destruction of the Spanish Armada, had given an impulse to tragic representations of an extreme type. This was undoubtedly rather fostered than otherwise by the favourite exemplars of Roman tragedy. The *Medea* and *Thyestes* of Seneca are crowded with pagan horrors of the most revolting kind. It is true these horrors are usually related, not represented, although in the *Medea* the maddened heroine kills her children on the stage. But from these tragedies the conception of the physically horrible as an element of tragedy was imported into the early English drama, and intensified by the realistic tendency which the events of the time and the taste of their ruder audiences had impressed upon the common stages. This tendency is exemplified in *Titus Andronicus,* obviously a very early work, the signs of youthful effort being apparent not only in the acceptance of so coarse a type of tragedy but in the crude handling of character and motive, and the want of har­mony in working out the details of the dramatic concep­tion. Kyd was the most popular contemporary repre­sentative of the bloody school, and in the leading motives of treachery, concealment, and revenge there are points of likeness between *Titus Andronicus* and the *Spanish Tragedy.* But how promptly and completely Shake­speare’s nobler nature turned from this lower type is apparent from the fact that he not only never reverted to it but indirectly ridicules the piled-up horrors and extra­vagant language of Kyd’s plays.

The early comedies in the same way are marked by the dominant literary influences of the time, partly classic partly Italian. In the *Comedy of Errors,* for example, Shakespeare attempted a humorous play of the old classi­cal type, the general plan and many details being derived directly from Plautus. In *Love’s Labour 's Lost* many characteristic features of Italian comedy are freely intro­duced : the pedant Holofernes, the curate Sir Nathaniel, the fantastic braggadocio soldier Armado, are all well-known characters of the contemporary Italian drama. Of this comedy, indeed, Gervinus says, “the tone of the Italian school prevails here more than in any other play. The redundance of wit is only to be compared with a similar redundance of conceit in Shakespeare’s narrative poems, and with the Italian style which he had early adopted.” These comedies display another sign of early work in the mechanical exactness of the plan and a studied symmetry in the grouping of the chief personages of the drama. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona,* as Prof. Dowden points out, “ Proteus the fickle is set against Valentine the faithful, Silvia the light and intellectual against Julia the ardent and tender, Lance the humourist against Speed the wit.” So in *Love’s Labour ’s Lost,* the king and his three fellow-