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(11) B.A. Part I (English Honours)

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WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

At the time of Shakespeare's death twenty-one plays existed in manuscripts in the various theaters. A few others had already been printed in quarto form, and the latter are the only publications that could possibly have met with the poet's own approval. More probably they were taken down in shorthand by some listener at the play and then "pirated" by some publisher for his own profit. The first printed collection of his plays, now called the First Folio (1623) was made by two actors, Hemming and Condell, who asserted that they had access to the papers of the poet and had made a perfect edition, "in order to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive". This contains thirty-six of the thirty-seven plays generally attributed to Shakespeare, Pericles being omitted.

This celebrated First Folio was printed from playhouse manuscripts and from printed quartos containing many notes and changes by individual actors and stage managers. Moreover, it was full of typographical errors, though the editors alleged great care and accuracy; and so, though it is the only authoritative edition we have, it is of little value in determining the dates, or the classification of the plays as they existed in Shakespeare's mind.

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, a careful reading of the plays and poems leaves us with an impression of four different periods of work, probably corresponding ~~with~~ with the growth and experience of the poet's life. These are: (I) a period of early experimentation. It is marked by youthfulness and exuberance of imagination, by extra-

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vagance of language, and by the frequent use of rimed couplets with his blank verse. The period dates from his arrival in London to 1595. Typical works of this first period are his early poems, 'Love's Labour's Lost', 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', and Richard III. (II) A period of rapid growth and development, from 1595 to 1600. Such plays, as 'The Merchant of Venice', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'As you Like It' and Henry IV all written in this period, show more careful and artistic work better plots, and a marked increase in knowledge of human nature. (III) A period of gloom and depression, from 1600 to 1607, which marks the full maturity of his powers. What caused this evident sadness is unknown but it is generally attributed to some personal

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experience, coupled with the political misfortunes of his friends, Essex and Southampton. The Sonnets with their note of personal disappointment, 'Twelfth Night' which is Shakespeare's "farewell to mirth" and his great tragedies, 'Hamlet', 'Lear', 'Macbeth', 'Othello' and 'Julius Caesar' belong to this period. (iv) A period of restored serenity, of calm after storm, which marked the last years of the poet's literary work. 'The Winter's Tale' and 'The Tempest' are the best of his later plays, but they all show a falling off from his previous work and indicate a second period of experimentation with the taste of a fickle public.

The end. //

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