

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract: The Renaissance period in English literature, roughly spanning the late 15th to early 17th centuries, marked a revival of classical learning, humanism, and artistic creativity. This study examines the main characteristics, influential writers, and cultural shifts that defined the English Renaissance. Through literary analysis and historical interpretation, the research identifies how classical ideals, humanist philosophy, and linguistic innovation shaped English literature during this transformative era.

Keywords: Renaissance, humanism, classical influence, drama, poetry, Shakespeare

Introduction: The Renaissance, meaning “rebirth,” was a European cultural movement that began in Italy and later spread to England during the late 1400s. It represented a revival of interest in classical Greek and Roman texts, a shift toward human-centered philosophy, and a new emphasis on individual creativity. In English literature, the Renaissance produced some of the most influential writers in history, such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson. The aim of this paper is to explore the defining characteristics of the English Renaissance and analyze how historical, philosophical, and artistic developments shaped literary expression.

Methods: This research is based on qualitative analysis of primary Renaissance texts combined with secondary scholarly literature. Works including Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* were examined to identify key themes such as humanism, individualism, and classical imitation. Historical sources were also used to contextualize literature within the broader cultural developments of the 16th century.

Results:

3.1 Revival of Classical Learning

Renaissance writers drew heavily on Ancient Greek and Roman literature. This classical influence led to new poetic forms, dramatic structures, and philosophical ideas.

3.2 Rise of Humanism and Individualism

Humanism emphasized human potential, reason, and dignity. Literary characters became more complex, exploring psychological depth and personal identity.

3.3 Flourishing of Drama and Theatre

Under Queen Elizabeth I, the English theatre experienced unprecedented growth. Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson transformed drama through rich language, universal themes, and innovative character development.

3.4 Expansion of the English Language

The Renaissance significantly expanded the English vocabulary. Writers invented new words, borrowed from Latin and Greek, and experimented with expressive forms.

Discussion: The findings show that the English Renaissance was a period of vibrant intellectual and artistic growth. The revival of classical texts encouraged writers to explore philosophical questions about human nature, morality, and destiny. Shakespeare’s complex characters, such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, reflect the Renaissance interest in the human mind.

Spenser blended classical mythology with English nationalism, while Marlowe explored ambition and human limits in *Doctor Faustus*. The Renaissance also marked a transition from medieval religious thought to a more secular worldview. However, tensions between new ideas and traditional beliefs created internal conflicts that appear in many literary works.

Conclusion: The Renaissance period in English literature was a golden age of imagination, learning, and artistic expression. It introduced new forms of drama and poetry, expanded the English language, and explored human identity in profound ways. The influence of classical learning and humanism shaped the works of major writers whose contributions remain central to English literature today. The Renaissance continues to represent a foundational moment in the development of Western literary and cultural history.

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