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**Faculty of letters & Foreign Languages**  
**Department of English Language and Literature**

**Class: L1**

**Module: Literary Text**

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**2<sup>nd</sup> semester**

**Lecture Three: The Renaissance Period**  
**Elizabethan Age (1558-1603)**

**Tutorial Outcomes**

By the end of this tutorial, students will be able to:

- Outline the historical and cultural contexts of the Renaissance Period, particularly the Elizabethan Age.
- Identify and analyze key literary works and their prevailing features during the Elizabethan Era.
- Discuss the significance of major authors such as William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser.

**Prerequisites**

Before delving into the Renaissance Period, please consider the following questions:

- What were the key historical events and cultural shifts that marked the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance?
- How did the Renaissance spirit influence the literature and arts of the Elizabethan Age?
- What are the defining characteristics of Elizabethan literature, and how do they reflect the values and beliefs of the time?

**Terminology Used in This Tutorial**

- **Humanism:** A philosophical stance that emphasizes the potential and agency of human beings, focusing on reason and empirical evidence.
- **Renaissance:** A period in European history marking the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, characterized by a revival of interest in classical art and literature.
- **Secularism:** The principle of separation of the state from religious institutions.

## **Introduction**

The Renaissance, which began in 1453, significantly impacted English life and literature after 1500. The Renaissance Period, spanning from the early 16th century to the Restoration in 1660, is characterized by the spirit of rebirth and innovation that defined its literature. This 160-year period is divided into four sub-periods, named after their respective political rulers: the Elizabethan Age (1558-1603), the Jacobean Age (1603-1625), the Caroline Age (1625-1649), and the Commonwealth Period (1649-1660). This lecture focuses on the Elizabethan Age, a pivotal era within the broader Renaissance Period.

### **1. Elizabethan Age (1558-1603)**

Named after Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 to 1603, this era is often celebrated as the Golden Age of English literature. The Elizabethan Age saw a flourishing of arts and culture, driven by political stability and economic prosperity. This period produced some of the most iconic works in the English language, marking a high point in English literary history.

### **2. Influencing Factors of the Literature**

Several factors contributed to the literary flourishing of the Elizabethan Age:

- **Political Stability:** Queen Elizabeth I's accession ended royal problems and political unrest, leading to national prosperity through religious and social stability.
- **Religious Reformation:** This inspired religious open-mindedness and secularism, fostering a more diverse intellectual environment.
- **Anglicanism:** Introduced by Elizabeth I to resolve religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, Anglicanism brought stability and prosperity to England.
- **Land Discoveries:** The land discoveries of the previous decades brought unprecedented wealth and resources.
- **Renaissance Ideals:** The Renaissance, with its emphasis on classical Greek and Roman wisdom, strongly influenced England. Scholars like Erasmus and John Colet promoted humanism and Renaissance ideals, fostering intellectual and artistic growth.
- **Nationalism:** A strong sense of nationalism pervaded English society.

- Prevailing Ideals: Factors such as humanism, liberal religious views, scientific curiosity, social contentment, intellectual progress, and boundless enthusiasm further enriched literary creations.

### **3. Major Authors and Their Works**

The Elizabethan Age was marked by a constellation of talented writers:

- Thomas More (1478-1535): Authored *Utopia* (1516), a seminal work of political philosophy written in Latin, envisioning an ideal society.
- Norton (1532-1584) and Sackville (1536-1608): Collaborated on *Gorboduc* (1562), the first English tragedy.
- Edmund Spenser (1552-1599): Known as "the poet of poets," Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queen* (1590) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579), influencing many subsequent English poets with his artistry.
- Nicholas Udall: Penned *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553), the first English comedy.
- Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586): Known for *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), a critical treatise, and *Arcadia* (1590), which laid the groundwork for the English novel.
- John Lyly (1554-1606): One of the "University Wits," known for works such as *Campaspe* (1584), *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Midas* (1589), and *Euphues* (1579).
- Thomas Kyd (1557-1595): Another of the "University Wits," notable for *The Spanish Tragedy* (1585).
- Robert Greene (1558-1592): A "University Wit," known for *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589) and *James IV* (1591).
- George Peele (1558-1598): Another "University Wit," wrote *David and Bethsabe* (1599) and *Arraignment of Paris* (1584).
- Francis Bacon (1561-1626): Known as a natural philosopher, Bacon authored *Essays* (1597).
- Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593): A "University Wit," famous for *Tamburlaine the Great Parts I & II* (1587-1588), *The Jew of Malta* (1589), *Edward II* (1591), and *Doctor Faustus* (1592).
- William Shakespeare (1564-1616): Arguably the greatest English dramatist, celebrated for his profound understanding of human psychology, wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

- Thomas Nashe (1567-1601): A "University Wit" known for *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).
- Ben Jonson (1573-1637): A neoclassicist, known for plays such as *Every Man out of His Humour* (1600) and *Every Man in His Humour* (1601), adhering to classical dramatic rules.
- Beaumont (1584-1616) and Fletcher (1579-1625): Collaborated on *Philaster* (1611), *A King and No King* (1611), and *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610).

#### **4. Prevailing Literary Features**

The Elizabethan Age was characterized by:

- **Artistic Genius:** An extraordinary display of artistic talent across various literary forms.
- **Dramatic and Poetic Innovation:** Novelty in dramatic and poetic forms and techniques.
- **Renaissance Influence:** The Renaissance spirit served as the pivotal influence, largely inspired by Italian, French, and Spanish Renaissance literature.
- **Romantic Enthusiasm:** A style marked by romantic enthusiasm.
- **Male Dominance:** The dominance of writings produced by men from all social classes.
- **Literary Excellence:** An age of fine poetry, incomparable drama, and fine prose.
- **Shift in Perspective:** A shift from emphasizing fate to emphasizing free will.
- **Language Development:** The development of the English language to a stable and standardized form.
- **Character Diversity:** A range from Platonic idealism or pleasant romance to coarse realism.
- **Pursuit of the Extraordinary:** A pursuit of the remote, the wonderful, and the beautiful.
- **Romanticism:** A unique form of romanticism that foreshadowed the Romantic Age of 1798.
- **Literary Criticism:** The emergence of literary criticism due to the increase of analytic spirit among intellectuals.

## **Practice**

Compare and contrast the themes and styles of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. How do these plays reflect the intellectual and cultural currents of the Elizabethan Age?

## **References**

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