

Module: Literary Texts

Level : 2nd year

Teacher: Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Lecture 3: English Renaissance

1. What is the Renaissance?

The Renaissance was a revival of classical learning and a flowering of arts and culture starting in Italy and spreading throughout Europe in the 14th through early 17th centuries. “Classical learning” refers to the study of ancient Greek and Latin writers, mathematicians, and philosophers. Scholars began to focus less on Christian-related writings and more on pre-Christian art and thought.

2. Socio-historical context

The English Renaissance, which spanned roughly from the late 15th century to the early 17th century, occurred against a backdrop of significant socio-historical changes. Several key factors shaped the context of this period:

1. Printing Press:

The invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century had a profound impact on the dissemination of knowledge. Books became more accessible, leading to a wider distribution of classical texts, religious writings, and works of literature.

2. The Tudor Dynasty:

The reigns of the Tudor monarchs, particularly Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I played a crucial role in the socio-political context of the English Renaissance. The stability provided by the Tudor monarchy allowed for cultural and intellectual flourishing.

3. The Protestant Reformation:

The English Reformation, spurred by Henry VIII's desire for an annulment and the subsequent establishment of the Church of England, resulted in the separation from the Roman Catholic Church. This had profound implications for religious and cultural life in England.

It was Queen Elizabeth who made the Anglican Church a reality. Anglican Church was a kind of agreement between Catholics and Protestants. It tried to settle down the things between both. It was accepted by both, the Catholics and the Protestants. All the English

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nation was impressed by the religious policy of the Queen. This policy has maintained tolerance in society.

4. Cultural Exchange and Exploration:

The age of exploration and discovery opened up new trade routes and brought England into contact with different cultures. This exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives influenced literature and the arts.

5. Scientific Advancements

The Renaissance witnessed advancements in science, with figures like Copernicus and Galileo challenging traditional views of the cosmos. This spirit of inquiry and curiosity extended to literature, philosophy, and the arts.

3. Characteristics of English Renaissance Literature

Wonders of love and Beauty

Renaissance has been the age of wonders. It also has a love for beauty. This was the time when the strong foundations of religion began to shake. Science, art and literature began to rise up. Religion was not as strong as it used to be. Printing press has brought literature and knowledge to everyone's threshold. Books were in common man's access. The world was viewed differently by the writers and the readers. Curiosity aroused and man became the centre of the universe. The man took imaginative plight and wrote wonderful pieces of literature.

Humanism

The humanistic philosophy got renewed along with all cultural interests and classical things. Greece and Roman writings came to Europe and man was the center of humanistic philosophy. The Middle Ages are often regarded as The Dark Ages because of unkind happenings. Plagues, wars and fires made these Middle Ages as Dark Ages. This made people focus on heaven and afterlife. This made people believe that this life is a test of their goodness. If one is good and does good deeds, he is considered to go to heaven. So whatever the Middle Age Europeans did, they did not do for now but for an afterlife. But wars, plagues and unpleasant happenings brought great impact on people's life. Their attitude toward life

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has changed. They started living a new life. Everything around them has changed. They began enjoying their life. They started focusing on their present life. They were no more interested in the soul. Man and his body were significant instead of soul and essence.

Getting classical education has become the interest of the people. They were interested in studying, history, philosophy, literature, physics and geometry. Virgil's *Aeneid* is the epic that has allusions in abundance. This was about the War of Troy and the start of Rome. Why did it appeal to the people? It appealed because of its political bodies.

The political body of Elizabethan England mattered the most to Shakespeare. He loved and stood-in for the political body of Rome. He wrote his bloodiest play, with the title of *Titus Andronicus*, which is about the problems of Elizabethan England. His dramas have political conflicts which represent the political condition of the age.

Magic and Religion

In rural England, people were under the spell of magic. In order to resolve the issues of their head and heart, they sought refuge in magic. Their aim was to purify their souls. It does not mean that witches do exist in reality. At that time, people believed in them. Even today, in the backward corners of the world, people do believe in magic and amulets.

This panoply of religions, provided the literature, which was full of such superstitious things. Greek and Roman myths were very popular at that time, and poets and playwrights were obsessed with these myths. They used such myths in abundance. For example, the themes of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* are those ideas on which Christianity put stress. But the play itself comes out of the myth of *Pygmalion*. And allusions from classical literature brings life to the play.

Patriotism

Sense and feeling of patriotism is another characteristic of the English Renaissance. This age is considered to be the age of patriotism. The Queen loved her country passionately and her court was the best court of Europe. Her court was so sumptuous that it dazzled the eyes of the people. She had moderate policies which made her popular in her masses. She was known as the Queen Virgin, wedded to the nation.

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In Spencer's *Faerie Queen*, she is Gloriana. In Raleigh's work, she is Cynthia. England made progress swiftly during her times. The literature witnessed its highest period during her reign.

4. Timeline of the Movement

❖ Publication of the Gutenberg Bible 1454-1455

The Gutenberg Bible is the very first publication in the Western world. The exact date of the publication is not obvious but one thing is sure that it set foundations of the English Renaissance.

❖ More's Utopia was Written in 1516

Thomas More's exploration of Utopia; The perfect kind of society, a quest for new lands. It is a great book to read. It is also regarded as the finest piece of literature of the age of quest and exploration.

❖ Martin Luther Started the Anti-Catholic Church Movement in 1517

Martin Luther stood up against the Catholic Church. A new kind of thing named Lutheranism appears.

❖ Copernicus Navigated Revolution of Sun in 1543

In this year comes Copernicus's Revolutions of the Celestial Orbits Earth. Now the sun does not move. The earth does. It is the planetary body which moves around the sun.

❖ Queen Elizabeth Came to The Throne in 1558

Queen Elizabeth, who never married but was wedded to the nation, occupied the throne. She refused to marry. Her time is known as the golden period in the history of England.

❖ Marlow and Shakespeare Were Born in 1564

Marlowe and Shakespeare were born this year. Marlowe is known as the greatest Elizabethan dramatist. He paved ways for Shakespeare and others. He was stabbed to death in an inn and his career ended just after it started. After Marlow, Shakespeare took the torch and led the crew.

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❖ First Theatre in 1576

The year when the first theatre was built. It was the first permanent kind of theatre.

❖ Fight Between English and Spanish Armies in 1588

It was the year when English fleet forced the Spanish Armada to kneel down before them. A lot of lives ended on both sides. The power scale bent towards England after this.

❖ Spenser's Faerie Queen in 1590

Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queen was performed in the court of the Queen and it was a big hit.

❖ Death of Shakespeare in 1616