

Renaissance (1500-1660)

By KnowledgeMerger.com

The word Renaissance implies the rebirth of culture and learning. Renaissance was initially started at Italy in the late 14th century. The European scholars and writers found that Renaissance was doing good at Italy. So, at around 1500 they brought the Renaissance literature in England. This age is one of the most important in the History of English Literature.

There are several factors for the coming of Renaissance literature in England. The first primary factor is the introduction of the printing press. It made it possible for the writers to produce written works. Secondly, the 'plague' in England has passed and the hundred years' wars were over. The productivity of people at that time had increased as people lived longer because they weren't dying or fighting. Moreover, for a century and a half, after Chaucer passed away the English literature became stagnant in England. The standard of literature became low. So, people have to adopt Renaissance which was doing really great in Italy.

Talking about the famous writers, the first person to come on the list is William Shakespeare. Besides him, there are few other writers who gained popularity due to their writings like, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson etc. Shakespeare coined a lot of words by his own. According to scholars, he is responsible for coining around 1700 words. His works are said to be universal for which it got more prevalent. He made the English vocabulary damn rich. A word which we use widely, 'beautiful' was coined by Shakespeare. It's hard to imagine such an indispensable word not being used before him. He also came up with a genre called, 'Tragi-Comedy' which implies the merging through two micro niches, tragedy and comedy. His famous plays are Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, Merchant of Venice etc.

According to some scholars, Marlowe and Shakespeare were rivals in this field. People also suspected Marlowe to be a secret agent of Queen Elizabeth. One of his most famous work is 'Dr. Faustus', where he talks about the tragical history of the life and death of Doctor Faustus. He also wrote 'The Jew Of Malta' which got popular during that period. He died when he was 29. The third popular dramatist or playwright was

Ben Jonson. He is well known for his satirical plays. Some of the famous works of him are Volpone, The Alchemist etc.

Elizabethan Era (1558-1603)- This era was the period of new ideas and new thinking. Various other works like fine arts endured support and assistance from the Queen. Due to the Queen's support and patron, the works of that time came to be known as 'Elizabethan'. This period is generally regarded as the greatest in the history of English literature. The age saw a great flourishing in literature. The poetries and dramas were prospered more, in particular. Three most important and remarkable writers of that period are William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson.

There were three types of Sonnet - Shakespearean Sonnet, Petrarchan Sonnet, and Spenserian Sonnet. Sir Wyatt brought Sonnet from Italy which was later popularized in England. Later, they gave a different style to the sonnets. It was being changed by Shakespeare. He divided the Sonnet into 3 quatrains summed by a couplet. Shakespeare, in his career, wrote 154 sonnets. He dedicated 126 of them to a young man and the others to a woman.

Even though this age produced a lot of prose works, essentially it was an age of poetry. Moreover, the theatre became central to the Elizabethan era. During that era, drama shifted from religious to secular.

The first English comedy was 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' and the first tragedy was 'Gorboduc'. They came in this period. One of the biggest comedy play written at that time was 'Every Man in his Humour'.

Some of the characteristics or features of play are:

Plays were presented quickly. The actors use their voice, bodies expressively to convey feeling and meaning.

Plays were generally performed at the time of the afternoon. It is because there were no light facilities available. Special effects were a part of the show.

Women were not allowed to perform as there was the existence of gender inequality. The males only played as females.

The Wealthy people bought the best seats. Sometimes they even sat

on the stage itself.

Even the illiterates could understand the play.

The theatre is also seen as a good mode of business in that period.

Jacobian Era (1603-1625) - Jacobian Era comes just after the Elizabethan era. The two primary contributions of this age in English literature are the Revenge play and Metaphysical poetry. Revenge play signifies the plays where the victim is retaliated or avenged. These types of plays often result in the death of both the murderer and the avenger. These types of plays were extremely popular during the Elizabethan and the Jacobean era. Some of the best writers of plays of this kind are Thomas Kyd, Shakespeare etc.

Secondly, there was the wide popularity of metaphysical poetry. The term 'metaphysical poetry' was coined by Samuel Johnson. This type of poetry is witty and ingenious. They are also highly philosophical. Some of the topics on which metaphysical poems are written are love, existence, life etc. Similes, metaphors, imagery and other literary elements are used in writing these poems.

One of the greatest lyricists of that era was John Donne. He was famous for his unconventional and metaphysical style of poetry. He wrote short sonnets and love poems. Two of his most popular poems are - The Sun Rising and The Canonization.

Caroline Era (1625-1649) - This era coincided with the age of Charles I (1625-1642). During that time, a civil war was fought between the supporters of the king (Cavaliers) and the supporters of the parliament (Roundheads).

Some of the prominent writers of that era are George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Katherine Philips, John Donne etc.

Puritan Age (1625-1660)

The half-century between the years 1625 and 1675 is known as the Puritan age. The age is named 'Puritan Age' because of the Puritan dominance in England for the first time. Furthermore, the greatest literary figures of that time were Puritans. One remarkable figure was John Milton. Some of his popular works are:

- Paradise Lost (1667)
- Paradise Regained (1671)
- On Shakespeare (1632)
- Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce (1643) etc.

Milton became most famous for the poem, Paradise Lost. It was a poem with religious beliefs.

The Puritans closed the Theatre which was given much importance in the Elizabethan era. There was a Civil war during that period. One group of people supported the King (Cavaliers) and the other supported the Parliament (Roundheads). The ones supporting parliament won. So, as a result, Charles I was removed and Oliver Cromwell came into power. To sum up in one line, 'The Puritan age starts with Charles I beheaded and Oliver Cromwell into the rule'. Cromwell built a commonwealth of members which didn't last long. After him, Charles II from France came into power and Restoration began.