



**South Valley University**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**Department of English**

# *Renaissance Era Literature*

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Year**

مقرر الفرقة الثالثة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلية الآداب

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## ***Renaissance Timeline***

### ***1300 - 1400 Proto-Renaissance***

1305 - Giotto completes his work on the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.

1308 - Dante writes his epic poem the Divine Comedy.

1341 - The first great humanist, Petrarch, is named the poet laureate of Rome.

### ***1400 - 1500 Early Renaissance***

1419 - Architect Brunelleschi designs the dome for the Florence Cathedral.

1434 - The Medici family becomes the head of the city-state of Florence.

1450 - Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press.

1453 - The Ottoman Empire captures the city of Constantinople, signaling an end to the Byzantine Empire.

1469 - Lorenzo de Medici becomes head of the city-state of Florence. He is one of the great patrons of the arts.

1485 - Henry VII becomes king of England beginning the reign of the House of Tudor.

1486 - Botticelli completes the painting The Birth of Venus.

1492 - Explorer Christopher Columbus discovers the Americas.

### ***1495 - 1527 High Renaissance***

1495 - Leonardo da Vinci paints the Last Supper.

1498 - Vasco da Gama arrives in India after sailing around the southern tip of Africa from Portugal.

1501 - Michelangelo begins his work on the sculpture David.

1503 - Leonardo da Vinci paints the Mona Lisa.

1508 - Michelangelo begins his painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

1509 - Henry VIII becomes king of England.

1509 - Humanist author Erasmus writes Praise of Folly.

1511- Raphael paints his masterpiece The School of Athens.

1516 - Sir Thomas More publishes his work Utopia on political philosophy.

1517 - Martin Luther posts his 95 theses on the door of the Church of Wittenberg. This signals the start of the Reformation.

1519 - Ferdinand Magellan begins his voyage around the world.

### ***1527-1600 Mannerism***

1527 - Rome is sacked by the troops of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

1534 - Henry VIII separates the Church of England from the Catholic Church of Rome so that he can divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn.

1558 - Elizabeth I becomes Queen of England.

1588 - The Spanish Armada is defeated by the English navy.

1599 - William Shakespeare builds the Globe theatre. He will write many of his great plays over the next few years including Hamlet and Macbeth.

1610 - Galileo discovers the moons of Jupiter.

1618 - The Thirty Years War begins.

# THE RENAISSANCE ERA TIMELINE

## PRE-1400

1100S

In Italy and Northern Europe, several factors paved the way for the Renaissance. These include the growing failure of the Roman Catholic Church to give stability in spiritual and civil life, along with the rise in importance of city-states and national monarchies.

LATE 1200S & EARLY 1300S

The Renaissance in Italy was preceded by a "proto-Renaissance." It was a movement inspired by the work of St. Francis of Assisi. It emphasized the spiritual value of the beauty of nature and focused on serving the poor.

1347

The Black Death started ravaging Europe. Ironically, while it killed a large percentage of the population, the plague improved the economy and allowed the rich people to invest in art and display, as well as engage in a secular scholarly study.



## 1400 - 1492 EARLY RENAISSANCE

Architect Brunelleschi designs the dome for the Florence Cathedral. 1419

The de Medici family became the head of the city-state of Florence. 1434

The printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg. 1450

The city of Constantinople was captured by the Ottoman Empire, which signaled an end to the Byzantine Empire. 1453

Lorenzo de Medici became head of the city-state of Florence. He was among the great patrons of the arts. 1469

Henry VII became king of England, which started the reign of the House of Tudor. 1485

Boticelli completed the painting "The Birth of Venus." 1486

Explorer Christopher Columbus discovers the Americas. 1492



## 1495 - 1527 HIGH RENAISSANCE

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Martin Luther posts his 95 theses on the door of the Church of Wittenberg, which signaled the beginning of the Reformation.

1527

Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor, conquers Rome, which ends the Renaissance as a unified period in Italy. In the latter part of the 1500s, the clash between Classical humanism and Christian theology produced the style of Mannerism, characterized by exaggerated human expressions, postures, and proportions.



## 1527 - 1600 MANNERISM

The Church of England was separated from the Catholic Church of Rome by Henry VIII so that he can divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. 1534

Elizabeth I becomes Queen of England. 1558

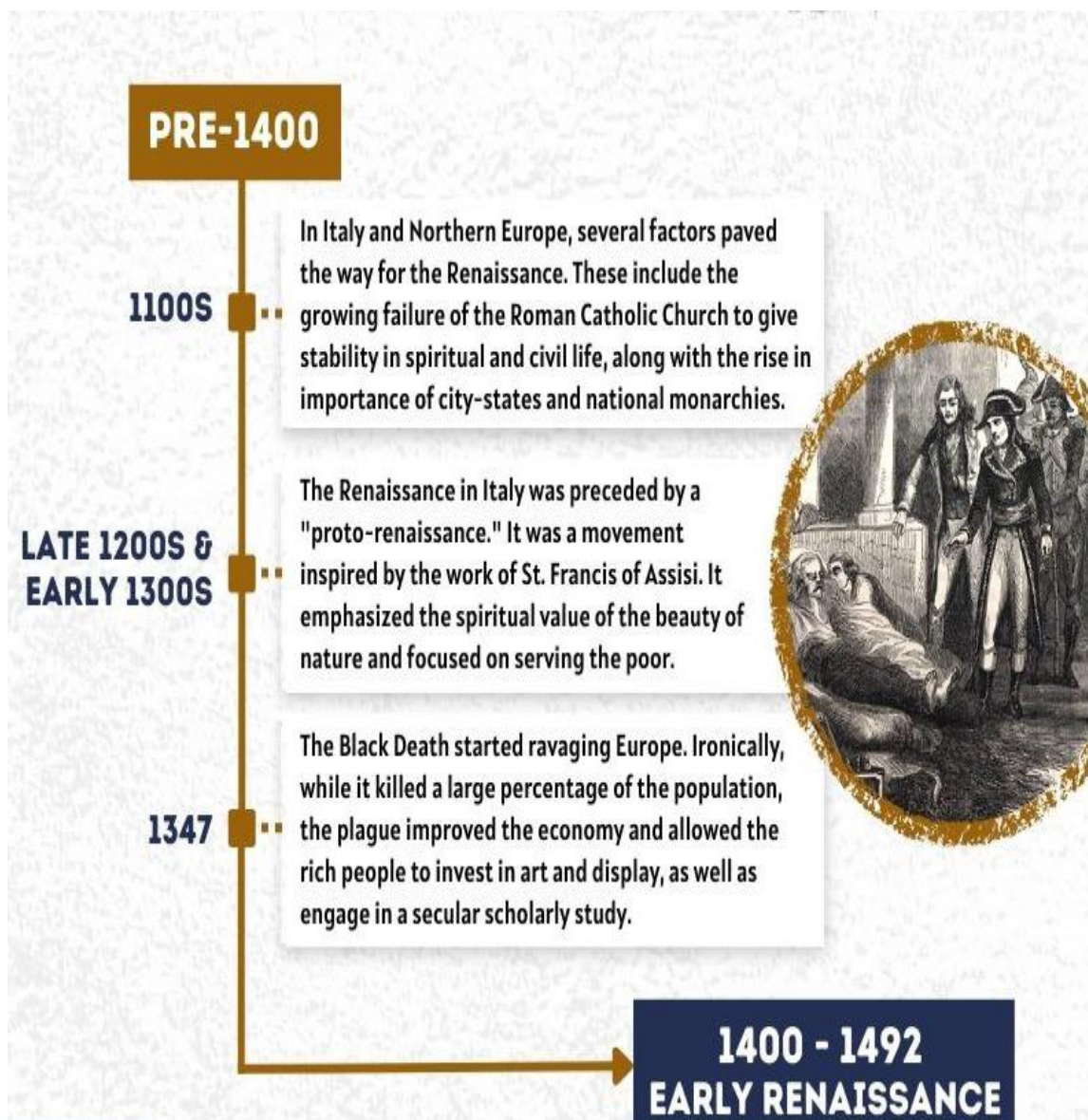
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The Thirty Years War begins. 1618



## Timeline and Key Events of the Renaissance Era



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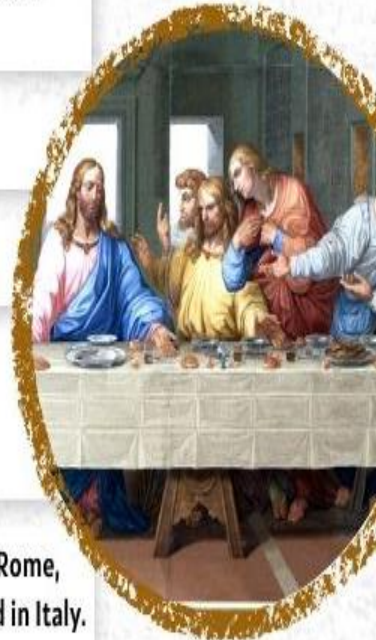
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## **Timeline and Key Events of the Renaissance Era**

### **→ Before 1400: The Black Death and the Rise of Florence**

The Black Death started devastating Europe in 1347. After 12 ships from the Black Sea arrived at the Sicilian port of Messina, the bubonic plague outbreak spread around the world. The majority of the sailors on board had perished, and those who were still alive had severe illnesses and were covered in pus- and blood-oozing black boils. The fleet of “death ships” was swiftly ordered out of the harbor by the Sicilian government, but it was already too late. Over the course of the following five years, the Black Death claimed the lives of over 20 million people in Europe or about one-third of the continent’s population.

Ironically, despite the fact that the epidemic killed a significant portion of the populace, it improved the economy and allowed affluent people to profit from art and exhibition as well as engage in secular scientific research. Francesco Petrararch, an Italian poet who is known as the founder of the Renaissance, passed away in 1374.

By the end of the century, Florence became the center of the Renaissance. A teacher named Manuel Chrysoloras was invited to teach Greek in Florence in 1396, wherein he brought a copy of Ptolemy’s “Geography” with him. After a year, Giovanni de Medici, an Italian banker, founded the Medici Bank in Florence.

He established the wealth of his art-loving family for centuries to come

**→ 1400 – 1450: *The Growth of Rome and the de Medici Family***

At the start of the 15th century, Leonardo Bruni offered his Panegyric to the City of Florence, describing a place where freedom of speech, equality, and self-government reigned. In 1401, Lorenzo Giovanni, an Italian artist, was awarded a commission to create bronze doors for the baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence. Filippo Brunelleschi and sculptor Donatello, on the other hand, traveled to Rome to start their 13-year stay sketching. They studied and analyzed the ruins in Rome. In the same year, the first painter of the early Renaissance named Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone or known as Masaccio was born.

In the 1420s, the Catholic Church's unified Papacy made a triumphant return to Rome and began a massive expenditure on art and architecture there. In 1447, Pope Nicholas V was appointed, and this custom saw major rebuilding. Francesco Foscari became Doge in Venice in 1423, where he would commission art for the city.

In 1429, Cosimo de Medici inherited the Medici bank and started his rise to great power. Textual criticism was used by Lorenzo Valla in 1440 to expose the Donation of Constantine as a forgery. It was a document that had given huge swaths of land

to the Catholic Church in Rome. This was among the classic moments in European intellectual history. Bruneschelli died in 1446. Francesco Sforza became the 4th Duke of Milan in 1450 and founded the powerful Sforza dynasty.

During this period, some of the works include the “Adoration of the Lamb” (1432) by Jan van Eyck, the essay on perspective titled “On Painting” (1435), and “On the Family” (1444), both by Leon Battista Alberti. The latter was used to deliver a model for what Renaissance marriages should be.

### **→ 1451 – 1475: *Birth of da Vinci and the Printing Press***

Leonardo da Vinci, the popular artist, humanist, scientist, and naturalist, was born in 1452. The Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453, which compelled many Greek thinkers and their works to move westward. In the same year, the Hundred Years War concluded, and it brought solidity to northwestern Europe.

In 1554, Johannes Gutenberg published the Gutenberg Bible using a new printing press technology that would transform European literacy. This was one of the key events in the Renaissance era. In 1469, Lorenzo de Medici, known as “The Magnificent,” took over power in Florence. His rule was considered the high point of the Florentine Renaissance. In 1471, Sixtus IV was appointed Pope. He continued the major building projects in Rome, which included the Sistine Chapel.

Some of the important artistic works from this period include the “Adoration of the Magi” (1454) by Benozzo Gozzoli and “The Agony in the Garden” (1465), which the competing brothers-in-law Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna each produced their own versions. From 1443 to 1452, Battista Alberti published “On the Art of Building.” In 1470, Thomas Malory wrote “le Morte d’Arthur.” Marsilio Ficino, in 1471, completed his “Platonic Theory.”

### **→ 1476 – 1500: *The Era of Exploration***

The Age of Exploration occurred in the last quarter of the 16th century, and it witnessed an explosion of essential sailing discoveries. Some of the important events include the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 by Bartolomeu Dias, Columbus reaching the Bahamas in 1492, and Vasco da Gama reaching India in 1498. Italian master architects traveled to Russia in 1485 to aid in the rebuilding of the Kremlin in Moscow.

In Florence’s Dominican House of San Marco, run by the de Medicis, Girolamo Savonarola was appointed prior in 1491. Beginning in 1494, he started preaching reform and becoming the de facto leader of Florence. In 1492, Rodrigo Borgia was appointed by Pope Alexander VI. This was a rule that was considered broadly corrupt. In 1498, he had Savonarola excommunicated, tortured, and killed.

From 1494, the Italian Wars involved most of the major states of Western Europe in a series of conflicts. It was also the year the French king Charles VIII invaded Italy. In 1499, the French went on to conquer Milan and facilitated the flow of Renaissance art and philosophy into France.

Some of the artistic works in this period include the “Primavera” (1480) by Botticelli, the “Battles of the Centaurs (1492) relief and the “La Pieta” (1500) painting by Michelangelo Buonarroti, and the “Last Supper” (1498) by Leonardo da Vinci. It was also in this period when Martin Behaim made “the Erdapfel” or earth apple or potato, which was the oldest-surviving terrestrial globe, from 1490 and 1492.

One of the important writings in this period include the “900 Theses” by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. These are interpretations of ancient religious myths for which he was branded a heretic but survived due to the Medici’s support. “Everything About Arithmetic, Geometry, and Proportion” (1494) was written by Fra Luca Bartolomeo de Pacioli. It included a discussion of the Golden Ratio and also taught da Vinci how to calculate proportions mathematically.

### **→ 1501 – 1550: *Politics and the Reformation***

Political developments had an impact on and were impacted by the European Renaissance by the first half of the 16th century. When Julius II became pope in 1503, the Roman

Golden Age officially began. In 1509, Henry VIII became the ruler of England, while in 1515, Francis I became the ruler of France. Charles V, the last emperor to be so anointed, seized power in Spain in 1516 and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1530. Suleiman “the Magnificent” assumed control of the Ottoman Empire in 1520.

The French claims on Italy ended after the 1525 Battle of Pavia took place between France and the Holy Roman Empire. Charles V’s armies took control of Rome in 1527, preventing Henry VIII from nullifying his union with Catherine of Aragon.

The year 1517, in philosophy, saw the start of the Reformation. It was a religious schism that permanently divided Europe spiritually and was influenced heavily by humanist thinking. Between 1505 and 1508, printmaker Albrecht Dürer made his second trip to Italy. While living in Venice, he created a number of paintings for the German immigrant community. Rome’s St. Peter’s Basilica construction got underway in 1509.

The sculpture “David” by Michelangelo (1504), as well as his paintings “The Last Judgment” and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508–1512), were all finished during this time period (1541). Da Vinci died in 1519 after creating the “Mona Lisa” (1505). The Tempest was painted by Giorgio Barbarelli da Castelfranco (Giorgione) in 1508; the “Donation of Constantine” was painted by Raphael and Hieronymus Bosch created the “Garden of Earthly Delights” (1524). The paintings “The

Ambassadors,” “Regiomontanus,” and “On Triangles” by Hans Holbein (the Younger) were completed in 1533.

Desiderius Erasmus, a humanist, wrote “Praise of Folly,” “De Copia,” and “New Testament,” the first contemporary and critical translation of the Greek New Testament, in 1511, 1512, and 1516, respectively. In 1513, Niccol Machiavelli published “The Prince,” Thomas More published “Utopia,” and Baldassare Castiglione published “The Book of the Courtier.” Diogo Ribeiro finished his “World Map” in 1529, Dürer released his “Course in the Art of Measurement” in 1525, and François Rabelais penned “Gargantua and Pantagruel” in 1532. The “Great Book of Surgery” was authored by Paracelsus, a Swiss physician, in 1536. In 1543, Copernicus published “Revolutions of the Celestial Orbits,” and Andreas Vesalius wrote, “On the Fabric of the Human Body.” In 1544, an Italian monk published “On the Fabric of the Human Body.”

### **→ 1550 and Beyond: The Harmony of Augsburg**

The Peace of Augsburg (1555), which permitted Protestants and Catholics to coexist peacefully in the Holy Roman Empire, temporarily reduced tensions resulting from the Reformation. Philip II became king of Spain in 1556 after Charles V abdicated. Elizabeth I’s coronation as queen in 1558 signaled the start of England’s Golden Age. The Ottoman-Habsburg Wars, which included the Battle of Lepanto, and the St. Bartholomew’s Day



Massacre of Protestants, which occurred in France in 1572, are examples of ongoing religious conflicts.

“A General Treatise on Numbers and Measurement” by Niccol Fontana Tartaglia and a list of ore mining and smelting procedures by Georgius Agricola titled “De Re Metallica” were both published in 1556. In 1564, Michelangelo perished. “The Copy of a Letter” was published in 1567 by Isabella Whitney, the first Englishwoman in history to have penned nonreligious poetry. In 1569, Gerardus Mercator, a Flemish geographer, released his “World Map.” In 1570, the architect Andrea Palladio published “Four Books on Architecture.” The first contemporary atlas, “Theatrum Orbis Terrarum,” was released by Abraham Ortelius in the same year.

An epic poem was first published in 1572 by Luis Vaz de Camoes as “The Lusiads,” and it gained popularity in 1580 with the publication of Michel de Montaigne’s “Essays.” In 1590, Edmund Spenser released “The Faerie Queene,” in 1603, William Shakespeare penned “Hamlet,” and in 1605, Miguel Cervantes published “Don Quixote.”

### **→ *The End of the Renaissance***

Many scholars believe that the demise of the Renaissance was due to several compounding factors. Numerous wars had plagued the Italian peninsula by the end of the 15th century. German, French, and Spanish invaders battling for Italian

territories caused disturbance and instability in the region. In addition to that, changing trade routes led to a period of economic decline and limited the amount of money that rich contributors could spend on the arts.

Later, in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic church repressed authors and artists in a movement known as the Counter-Reformation. Many Renaissance intellectuals shied away from being overly aggressive because it discouraged originality. Additionally, the Council of Trent established the Roman Inquisition in 1545, making humanism and any beliefs that disagreed with those of the Catholic church a crime punishable by death.

Early in the 17th century, the Renaissance movement died out and was replaced by the **Age of Enlightenment**.

## ***From Darkness to Light: The Renaissance Begins***

During the Middle Ages, a period that took place between the fall of ancient Rome in 476 A.D. and the beginning of the 14th century, Europeans made few advances in science and art. Also known as the “Dark Ages,” the era is often branded as a time of war, ignorance, famine and pandemics such as the Black Death. Some historians, however, believe that such grim depictions of the Middle Ages were greatly exaggerated, though many agree that there was relatively little regard for ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and learning at the time.

The word Renaissance literally means ‘new birth’. It was an era spanning the 15th and 16th centuries and a bridge between the Middle Ages and the modern world, which arguably started in the 18th century. The reason it is called ‘rebirth’ is that it was a conscious effort to bring back to life the ideals, art, and accomplishments of the ancient or classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. This ancient era is sometimes called ‘classical antiquity’.

### **➔ *Background of the Renaissance***

- The word ‘renaissance’ is a French word which means ‘rebirth’. The people credited with beginning the Renaissance were trying to recreate the classical models of Ancient Greek and Rome.

- The Renaissance period was the succeeding epoch of the Middle Ages which was the gap defining the classical and modern period. Often branded as the Dark Ages, the Medieval period was characterized by some years with famine and pandemics such as the Black Death.
- The growth in trade and commerce between the East and West set the stage for the Renaissance.
- In 1450, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of movable printing press revolutionized communication and publication in Europe. As a result, publications of humanist thinkers like Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio were printed and distributed to elite and common people.
- During the 14th century, the philosophy of humanism began to emerge in Italy. Humanism emphasizes that man is the center of the universe and that all human achievements in art, literature, and science should be regarded. Instead of relying on the will of God, people began to act according to capabilities.

### ➔ *The Spread of Humanism*

At the turn of the 14th century, a new cultural movement began to take shape in Italy. This was humanism. Humanism promoted the idea that man was the center of his own universe and that advancements in education, classical arts and science should be accepted for the betterment of humankind.

With the Renaissance came an emphasis on humanism and individuality. Writers also started to satirize existing institutions such as the Church, and their works became **secular** (not connected to religious or spiritual matters) , leading to a revival of three types of English literature: *Poetry, Prose and Drama*.

Humanism encouraged Europeans to question the role of the Roman Catholic church during the Renaissance. As more people learned how to read, write and interpret ideas, they began to closely examine and critique religion as they knew it. Also, the printing press allowed for texts, including the Bible, to be easily reproduced and widely read by the people, themselves, for the first time.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther, a German monk, led the Protestant Reformation – a revolutionary movement that caused a split in the Catholic church. Luther questioned many of the practices of the church and whether they aligned with the teachings of the Bible. As a result, a new form of Christianity, known as Protestantism, was created.

Martin Luther published his *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, which he wrote to challenge the Catholic Church. The *Theses* took aim at the corruption of the Church and the idea of the Pope's authority as God's representative on Earth. This led directly to the Protestant split from the Catholic Church.

Among its many principles, humanism promoted the idea that man was the center of his own universe, and people should embrace human achievements in education, classical arts, literature and science. In 1450, the invention of the Gutenberg printing press allowed for improved communication throughout Europe and for ideas to spread more quickly.

In the domain of scientific enquiry, the Renaissance merged art with science. Artists like Da Vinci drew careful and precise depictions of the human body and anatomy. Scientific experimentation was taken up by ordinary people across Europe. So much so, in fact, that the later scientific revolution of the 18th century can be traced to the Renaissance. The likes of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) were scientific radicals of the period, challenging accepted and long-held beliefs about the world and the solar system.

The Renaissance was also a period of exploration and geographical discovery. Europeans explored the whole world between the mid-14th to the mid-17th centuries, mapping it as they went. Voyagers launched expeditions to travel the entire globe. They discovered new shipping routes to the Americas, India and the Far East and explorers trekked across areas that weren't fully mapped.

Famous journeys were taken by Ferdinand Magellan, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci (after whom America is named), Marco Polo, Ponce de Leon, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Hernando De Soto and other explorers.

Humanism celebrated the advancement of humanity, with a renewed interest in the classical Roman and Greek world as its basis. Humanism was preoccupied with 'the humanities': poetry, history, philosophy, and grammar. In its purest form, humanism was about recovering and understanding the world of ancient Greece and Rome.

As a result of this advance in communication, texts from early humanist authors such as those by Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, which promoted the renewal of traditional Greek and Roman culture and values, were printed and distributed to the masses.

Humanism led to people's renewed interest in classical education, including philosophy, history and physics. Before the English Renaissance, people were more focused on heaven and the afterlife in the Middle Ages. They tended to believe that their life was simply a test of their goodness.

During the Renaissance, libraries were made available to the general public for the first time. People from all walks of life were able to gather, debate, share ideas, read and improve

themselves at the public library. Even some of the very rich, who had private libraries, made these available to the public. The Church followed suit, often housing their libraries in impressive buildings designed and built for the purpose. The Renaissance was the era of the democratization of learning.

### ➔ *Art and Culture in the Renaissance Period*

- One of the institutions that began to decline was the Catholic Church. Religion was still important, however. New religions and ways of thinking were being discussed. Martin Luther had broken away from the Catholic Church and was spreading the Protestant religion throughout Europe.
- The revival of classical Roman culture surfaced during the proto- Renaissance period in Italy during the late 13th century. Italian intellectuals such as Petrarch and Boccaccio revived ancient Greek and Roman language and values.
- During the High Renaissance, masters like Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Raphael dominated visual arts. Da Vinci, also known as the ultimate Renaissance Man was best- known for his works such as the Mona Lisa, The Virgin of the Rocks, and The Last Supper.
- Aside from being a painter, Michelangelo was a leading sculptor of the High Renaissance. Among his best pieces were the Pietà and the David. He was also commissioned to do the frescoes covering the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



- Raphael, the youngest of the Renaissance masters was known for his painting The School of Athens which he worked on for three years, the same time when Michelangelo was working on the Sistine Chapel.
- Among the most common subjects of Renaissance art were religious images of the Virgin Mary and ecclesiastical rituals.
- Artists were usually members of a guild and came from wealthy to middle class families.

### ➔ *Economy during the Renaissance period*

During the Renaissance period, the European economy grew exponentially. Population growth, improvements in banking, expanding trade routes, and new manufacturing systems increased commercial activities.

**The House of Medici** was an Italian banking family and political dynasty that gathered prominence under Cosimo de' Medici during the first half of the 15th century. During that time, it became the largest bank in Europe.

It is clear to historians that the Renaissance originated in Florence, Italy. What is less clear is why it started there. There are several reasons given. The first and most important is the role played by the famous Medici family, who were based in the city. Their importance for the Renaissance is related to their generous patronage of the arts (this means support given to

artists in the form of commissions for works of art). Some of the famous artists who benefitted from the patronage of the Medici family included Michelangelo (1475-1564), Botticelli (unknown-1510), and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519).

Although the role played by the Medici family appears to have been central to the flourishing of the arts in Florence, it may be argued that it was more likely that the artists themselves were the reason the arts flourished. So many great artists living at the same time and in the same place is by itself sufficient to explain the phenomenon of an arts explosion in the city and its immediate surroundings. No doubt this was a bit of a chicken and egg situation. Artists needed patronage; patrons needed great artists to commission. One could not have existed without the other.

➔ ***What was specific about the English Renaissance?***

The Renaissance started in Italy in the late 14th Century and spread across Europe, marking the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity. The English Renaissance is normally dated between the 16th and 17th centuries, long after its origins in Italy in the late 14th century. Because of the geographical distance between Italy and England, the developments which happened a century earlier in Italy took a while to reach England.

The period of English history associated with the Renaissance is known as the Elizabethan era (during the reign of Elizabeth I). However, some historians put the beginning of the English Renaissance in 1485, with the rise of the **Tudor dynasty**, while others put it around 1520, during Henry VIII's reign. What is certain is that the second half of the 16th century, during Elizabeth I's reign was the height of the English Renaissance.

### ➔ *Differences between the English and Italian Renaissance*

Although the Renaissance started in Italy, the specifics of the period varied, and England went through its own 'rebirth', which differed from Italy in the following ways:

1. The dominant art forms in England were literature and music.
2. Visual arts, such as drawing and sculpting, were much less significant in England than in Italy.
3. The Renaissance period in England began much later than in Italy. By the 1550s, when the English Renaissance had barely begun, the Italian Renaissance had already moved into Mannerism, known as the Late Renaissance, and the Baroque style.

### ➔ *Elizabethan literature during the English Renaissance period*

Elizabethan literature in the English Renaissance period refers to the works produced during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. In this period, writers such as Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund

Spenser, Roger Ascham, and William Shakespeare flourished. The Elizabethan age saw the rise of poetry, such as sonnets. It was a golden age of drama, and it inspired a wide variety of prose.

### → *DECLINE OF THE RENAISSANCE*

The Renaissance ended in the 17th century. Scholars believe the demise of the Renaissance was the result of several compounding factors.

- By the end of the 15th century, several wars plagued the Italian peninsula, causing great instability in the region.
- There was a period of economic decline after trade routes changed, leading to less funding from wealthy benefactors, as money had to go elsewhere.
- The Counter-Reformation, or Catholic Reformation, meant that the Catholic Church censored artists and writers in response to the Protestant Reformation, thus preventing artists from being creative. As a result, they were producing less.
- In 1545, the Council of Trent introduced the Roman Inquisition. Humanism and all views that questioned the Catholic Church were considered **heresy** (religious beliefs that went against the Church), and heresy was punished by death.

- By the early 17th century, the Renaissance movement died out and gave way to the Age of Enlightenment.

### → *Age of Enlightenment*

An intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

### → *Debate Over the Renaissance*

While many scholars view the Renaissance as a unique and exciting time in European history, others argue that the period wasn't much different from the Middle Ages and that both eras overlapped more than traditional accounts suggest. Also, some modern historians believe that the Middle Ages had a cultural identity that's been downplayed throughout history and overshadowed by the Renaissance era.

While the exact timing and overall impact of the Renaissance is sometimes debated, there's little dispute that the events of the period ultimately led to advances that changed the way people understood and interpreted the world around them. C.S. Lewis, a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature, famously said that there was no English Renaissance, and if there was, it had 'no effect whatsoever.'

**What would you argue? Was there an English Renaissance or not?**

## ***Renaissance Geniuses***

Some of the most famous and groundbreaking Renaissance intellectuals, artists, scientists and writers include the likes of:

- **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519): Italian painter, architect, inventor and “Renaissance man” responsible for painting “The Mona Lisa” and “The Last Supper.”
- **Desiderius Erasmus** (1466–1536): Scholar from Holland who defined the humanist movement in Northern Europe. Translator of the New Testament into Greek.
- **Rene Descartes** (1596–1650): French philosopher and mathematician regarded as the father of modern philosophy. Famous for stating, “I think; therefore I am.”
- **Galileo** (1564-1642): Italian astronomer, physicist and engineer whose pioneering work with telescopes enabled him to describes the moons of Jupiter and rings of Saturn. Placed under house arrest for his views of a heliocentric universe.
- **Nicolaus Copernicus** (1473–1543): Mathematician and astronomer who made first modern scientific argument for the concept of a heliocentric solar system.
- **Thomas Hobbes** (1588–1679): English philosopher and author of “Leviathan.”

- **Sir Thomas More** (1478–1535) When Henry declared himself head of the Church of England in 1531, however, More was forced to choose between his king and his Church. Faithful to the Church until his last days, More resigned his chancellor position and three years later refused to swear an oath endorsing the authority of Henry VIII over the Church of England . More was sent to the Tower of London and was beheaded July 6, 1535.
- **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1343–1400): English poet and author of “The Canterbury Tales.”
- **Giotto** (1266-1337): Italian painter and architect whose more realistic depictions of human emotions influenced generations of artists. Best known for his frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.
- **Dante** (1265–1321): Italian philosopher, poet, writer and political thinker who authored “The Divine Comedy.”
- **Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469–1527): Italian diplomat and philosopher famous for writing “The Prince” and “The Discourses on Livy.”
- **Titian** (1488–1576): Italian painter celebrated for his portraits of Pope Paul III and Charles I and his later religious and mythical paintings like “Venus and Adonis” and "Metamorphoses."

- **William Tyndale** (1494–1536): English biblical translator, humanist and scholar burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English.
- **William Byrd** (1539/40–1623): English composer known for his development of the English madrigal and his religious organ music.
- **John Milton** (1608–1674): English poet and historian who wrote the epic poem “Paradise Lost.”
- **William Shakespeare** (1564–1616): England’s “national poet” and the most famous playwright of all time, celebrated for his sonnets and plays like “Romeo and Juliet.”
- **Donatello** (1386–1466): Italian sculptor celebrated for lifelike sculptures like “David,” commissioned by the Medici family.
- **Sandro Botticelli** (1445–1510): Italian painter of “Birth of Venus.”
- **Raphael** (1483–1520): Italian painter who learned from da Vinci and Michelangelo. Best known for his paintings of the Madonna and “The School of Athens.”
- **Michelangelo** (1475–1564): Italian sculptor, painter and architect who carved “David” and painted The Sistine Chapel in Rome.



## *English Renaissance*

The English Renaissance can be hard to date precisely, but for most scholars, it begins with the rise of the Tudor Dynasty (1485–1603) and reaches its cultural summit during the 45-year reign of the final Tudor monarch, the charismatic Elizabeth I (1558–1603). The period extends into the reigns of the Stuarts, King James I (1603–25) and perhaps that of Charles I (1625–49). The era seethed with incessant political tensions and—never separable from politics—religious rifts between Catholics and Protestants, especially the so-called Puritan sects that fought to reform the Church of England by removing any Catholic or “popish” practices. The Renaissance firmly ends once those tensions boil over into a distinctly different period of revolutionary change and a succession of nation-shaking events: the series of civil wars between Parliamentarians and Royalists, the execution of Charles I, the interregnum of republican-led governments, and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

A period lasting only a century or two but encompassing momentous change, the English Renaissance drastically shaped what being English meant, at home and abroad. As literacy increased and printing accelerated, the English language rose to a place of international prestige, and a distinctly English literature began to be braided from diverse cultural strands: Middle English poetry and medieval mystery plays; ballads, hymns, and popular

songs; translations from classical literatures and contemporary literature from the Continent. As a nation and a fledgling empire, England emerged as an indomitable economic and military force, sending explorers, merchants, and colonists as far as Africa, Asia, and the so-called New World. At the epicenter of England's explosive rise was the rapidly growing city of London, soon to become the largest city in Europe (and eventually the world). With its surging population, flourishing markets and ports, and thriving public theaters, London offered all the excitements of a modern metropolis—as well as all the dangers. The threat of bubonic plague loomed constantly over all of Europe, posing immense risks to a city as densely congested as London, where, every few years, a rampant outbreak forced theaters to close down for months at a time.

16th century England is usually referred to as the English Renaissance, The Golden Age, or Elizabethan Period. With the introduction and development of the sonnet and Drama under the hands of great writers and poets like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Thomas Wyatt, etc. Although literature saw great developments, England under the rule of Elizabeth I, also saw advancements in science, exploration, the arts, and even religion. With the discovery and colonization of the Americas and the other parts of the world England was able to expand its boundaries and power, and the

defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 forever marked England as one of the great powers at sea. And thus The 16th century is labeled The Golden Age.

### ***THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW***

The literary decline after Chaucer's death was due in considerable measure to political reasons. The dispute about the throne, which culminated in the War of Roses, dissipated the energy and resources of the country and finally destroyed in large measure the noble families. The art and literature depended on their patronage. The accession of Henry VII in 1485 brought about a period of quiet and recovery. Henry VII established a strong monarchy and restored social and political order. He curtailed the powers and privileges of barons and patronized the new rich class. The country resumed its power among European nations, and began through them to feel the stimulus of the Renaissance. Caxton's press, which was established in 1476 in London, was the earliest forerunner of Renaissance in England. Rickett remarks: The Renaissance had come with Caxton. It began in London with the publication of English masterpieces that awakened a sense of their national life in the minds of the people.

King Henry VIII, who acceded to the throne of England in 1509, began an era of significant and purposeful changes. He

ruled in the spirit of modern statecraft. He encouraged trade and manufacturers, and increased the wealth of the country. He hastened the decline of feudalism by allowing men of low birth to high positions. Thus the court became the field for the display of individual ambition. Men of talent and learning found honorable place in his court. During his reign England contributed her part to the spread of the new civilization and new learning. Education was popularized. Cardinal's College and Christ Church College at Oxford were founded.

The Reign of Henry VIII also expedited the **Reformation**. In 1534 Henry VII enforced political separation from Rome on the occasion of the annulment of his first marriage. It provided an opportunity for radical theological reforms. The Reformation and various religious and political controversies gave rise to the writing of pamphlets, serious and satirical. The translation of the Bible by William Tyndale and Miles Caverdale is a significant development in English prose. In England there was an important change in religion and politics when King Henry VIII made himself the head of the Church of England, bringing church and state together (1529-39). He cut all contact with Catholic Church and the Pope in Rome, part of a reaction against the Catholic Church in many parts of Europe. Protestantism became more and more important and gave a whole new vision of man's relations with God. The king or queen

became the human being on earth who was closest to God, at the head of the Great Chain of Being which led down to the rest of mankind, animals, insects and so on. The Dutch thinker, Erasmus, wrote of mankind as central to the world, and this humanist concern was the basis of most Renaissance thought.

During Henry's reign the court emerged as a great patron of learning, art and literature. The atmosphere of peace and calm which began to prevail after long turmoil and chaos paved the way for extraordinary development of literary activity.

Edward VI ruled from 1547 to 1553. The reign of Queen Mary from 1553 to 1558 was marred by religious conflicts. She restored Roman Catholicism in England. Creative activity was arrested during her time but it was replenished with much greater vigor in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558 – 1603).

Daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, Queen Elisabeth(1533-1603), became the symbol of the Golden Age, the period of stability from 1558 to 1603. Following her mother's execution, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate by parliament (1537), and suffered a lonely childhood, much of it spent in the company of her young brother Edward. She was rigorously educated, studying Latin and Greek. The accession of her sister as Mary I in 1553 increased the insecurity of Elizabeth's position, she was an opponent of religious extremism, she was

seen as natural focus for the protestant faction. Accused of involvement in Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion, she was imprisoned in Tower before being placed under house arrest at Woodstock (1554).

At her accession in 1558 Elizabeth inherited a nation deeply divided by religious strife. She set about restoring the moderate Anglicanism of her father: Mary's grants to the Roman Catholic orders were reclaimed; the Anglican service was reintroduced (1559). Economic reforms included the calling in of the debased coinage of the previous three reigns. Elizabeth appointed as her chief secretary William Cecil, who remained her trusted advisor and friend until his death in 1598. Parliament, anxious to secure the Protestant succession, urged her to marry but she refused, although throughout her reign she used marriage as a diplomatic counter in her relations with France. She conducted romantic relationships with a number of men, for example, with Robert Devereux, earl of Essex.

As prudent financially as she was cautious diplomatically, Elizabeth financed government from her own revenues and called Parliament to vote supplies only 13 times during her reign. Her management of Parliament was marked by a willingness to compromise and demonstrated a political skill lacking in her Stuart successors. By her evident devotion to the welfare of her subjects, she helped create a national self-

confidence that bore fruit in the last 15 years of her reign, notably in literature and in the works of such writers as Marlowe, Spencer and Shakespeare.

Being the last monarch of the House of Tudor, Elizabeth was a Protestant (a term used for those who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church). Her predecessor, Mary I (on the throne 1553-1558), had been a repressive Catholic, married to the most fanatically Catholic sovereign in Europe, Philip II of Spain). Although Elizabeth cut the ties with Rome, her tolerance and her ability to compromise won her the loyalty of both Catholic and Puritans (Protestant reformers who insisted on simplicity in religious forms). In 1588 Philip's attempt to conquer England led to the defeat of great Spanish fleet known as the Armada. Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596), a national hero, was one of the commanders of the English fleet. This victory was a great triumph for Elizabeth and through her nation. England's enemies, Spain in particular, were defeated, and the English controlled the seas of the world, exploring and bringing valuable goods from the New World. This was closely linked with the Renaissance search for new ways of believing, new ways of seen and understanding the universe.

The Renaissance was the beginning of the modern world in the areas of geography, science, politics, religion, society and art. London became not only the capital of England, but also the

main city of the known world. And English, in the hands of writers like Shakespeare, became the modern language we can recognize today. The invention of printing meant that all kinds of writing were open to anyone who could read. Many new forms of writing were developed. But the most important form of expression was theatre. This was the age of Shakespeare, and the Golden Age of English Drama.

→ **Some key events, and characteristics to keep in mind**

**The Renaissance**, meaning rebirth, was a period in European history taking place between 14th century and 17th century. Although started in Italy with its root and beginning in 13th century, it soon spread through Europe.

**Reformation** was a division in Christianity started by Martin Luther in 16th century. The division resulted in conflict and war in Europe. And England got involved when King Henry VIII (1509-1547) converted from Catholicism to Protestantism, one reason for his conversion was that he wanted a divorce from Catherin of Aragon because she hadn't given him a son. So the King converted to Protestantism and appointed himself the head of the church, and got his divorce. Later he married Jane Seymour, who gave him a son and heir to the throne of England, Edward VI, who also became the first monarch to be raised as a Protestant.



**The Printing Press** was first brought to England by William Caxton in 15th century. It played a big role in the spread of literature and literacy in England especially, in 16th century.

**Patronage** became one of the ways with which writers made money. This was like sponsorship, where a rich person would pay a writer to write. This sometimes limited the writer within the limits of what the sponsor's beliefs were, and so his writings reflected the values of the sponsor, or what the sponsor wanted to read, or watch.

### ***The Effect of Renaissance on English Literature***

The impact of the Renaissance on English Literature is an increased willingness of writers to satirize existing works. The most significant impact of the Renaissance on English literature was seen in the changes of perception of human beings. For example, the words of Williams –

*Now he looked inward into his own soul,  
Seeking the meaning of experience in term of his free  
individuality.*

The Renaissance brought about a new spirit in English literature in all its aspects. The thirst for classical learning also gave a new impetus to literature. All the forms of literature were developed during this period:

## 1) Impact on Drama

The Renaissance scored its first clear impact on English drama in the middle of the sixteenth century. During the Renaissance, drama became more secularized and reached crowning glory in the hands of University Wits such as Marlowe, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Among the University Wits, Marlowe has been called – “The true child of the Renaissance.” The heroes in his plays show an infinite desire for knowledge, wealth and power. Shakespeare introduced all the forms of drama. He wrote historical and romantic plays. His greatest achievement was in the field of tragedy. Ben Jonson introduced a new kind of drama known as comedy of humor. In his plays, the social evils and lust for money are shown that found in the English society. The tragic plays of blood and revenge were introduced by John Webster in this age.

### → Examples

**Marlowe's** Doctor Faustus, Tamburlaine, Jew of Malta and Edward II

**Shakespeare's** Macbeth, Othello, Hamlet, King Lear and A Mid Summer Night's Dream

**Ben Jonson's** Alchemist, Everyman in His Humour and Volpone.

## 2) Impact on Poetry

In Poetry, the spirit of Renaissance can be seen in the works of Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare and etc. this form became a fashionable and handy tool for the great poets of this age. Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey were the pioneers of the new poetry in England. They both gave English poetry a new sense of grace, dignity and harmony. They did their best to imitate Italian Renaissance.

Wyatt has introduced the sonnet in English literature. Though in his sonnets Wyatt did not employ regular iambic pentameters, yet he created a sense of discipline among the poets of the era. According to David Daiches. *Wyatt's sonnets represent one of the most interesting movements toward metrical discipline, found in English literary history*

Surrey's works are characterized by exquisite grace and tenderness. He was a better craftsman and gives greater harmony to his poetry. Surrey employed blank verse in English literature with the translation of the fourth book of The Aeneid.

### → Examples

**Shakespeare's** 154 sonnets

**Sidney's** Astrophel and Stella

**Spenser's** Amoretti

**Milton's** Paradise Lost

### 3) Impact on Prose

Italian wind brought the seeds of the novel in English literature. The most important prose writers who exhibit well the influence of the Renaissance on English prose are Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, Lyly, and Sidney. In the 15th century, the prose writings of Bacon are true spirit of the Renaissance. He is called the father of English essays. His essays provided the best worldly wisdom in the era of Renaissance.

#### → Examples

**Sir Thomas More's** Utopia

**Malory's** Morte – de – Arthur

**Erasmus' Praise and Folly**

**Browne's Religio Medici**

The Renaissance makes a great effect on the development of English literature. In 1564, the Italian Renaissance was over but the English Renaissance had hardly begun. The age of Shakespeare was the era of Renaissance in England. It was an important movement that illuminated the whole English literature. Classical language and learning were popularized. Paradise Lost is the last great triumph of the Renaissance.

We can distinguish ***different periods of literature of English Renaissance***. During **The first period** the first scholars and humanists appeared, they studied and investigated the

antique philosophy, literature. In Oxford and Cambridge Universities the first generations of the English humanists were trained, the development of the book printing was of importance for humanistic culture. The first English printer William Caxton (1422-1491) learnt the art of printing at Cologne in the early 1470-s (Guttenberg in Germany in 1440). In 1470-s he returned to England. In 1577 the first book was issued from his press at Westminster, Earl 'Rivers' "Dictes and Sayengs of the Phylosophers". Between them and his death Caxton produced about 80 complete volumes, including Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales", and also found time to work on translations.

In this period the English humanistic literature was mainly of theoretical character, Thomas More (1478 – 1535), was the most outstanding writer of the first stage of English Renaissance. He was Lord Chancellor of England from 1529-1532), scholar and saint. He trained as a lawyer, entered parliament in 1504. He resigned in opposition to Henry VIII's religious policies and was arrested for refusing to swear the oath to the Act of Succession and thereby deny papal supremacy. He was convicted on the perjured evidence of Sir Richard Rich after a remarkable self-defense and was executed. He was canonized in 1935. Thomas More was a renowned scholar and a friend of Erasmus, his writings including 'Utopia' are a description of an ideal society. His main work "Utopia" was

written in 1516 in Latin, the international language of those times. The book consists of two parts and is written in the form of dialog between Thomas More and a seaman Rafail Hitlodey, the traveler all over the world. The political system of Europe of those days was sharply criticized in the conversations of the authors and Hitlodey; the wars of conquest, cruel legislative power against poor, the problems of enclosures were discussed (The extensive enclosure by landlords of the peasants fields was used for sheep farming, the peasants were turned out of their lands by landlords). On this concern Rafail Hitlodey, the seaman, considered that “Sheep devour (eat up) people”. The antithesis to the political system of Europe is the ideal life on the island Utopia, in Greek it means “nowhere”. The picture of life and the society on the island Utopia is imaginary, not real: the political system is democratic, the labour is the main duty, there is no money at all, but there is an abundance of products; all the citizens are equal in rights and compose successfully the mental and physical work. We still use the word “utopia” to determine something unreal, i.e. unreal society.

**The second period**, the so called **Elizabethan** is the time of flourishing the English Renaissance literature, the time of creating of the new literary forms: Shakespeare’s masterpieces are created in this period.

**The third period** – the time after Shakespeare's death, it was the time of declining the English Renaissance literature.

The English Renaissance covers a long span of time, which is divided for the sake of convenience into the following three periods:

- i) The Beginning of Renaissance (1516 – 1558).
- ii) The Flowering of Renaissance (1558 – 1603). It is actually called the Age of Elizabeth.
- iii) The Decline of Renaissance (1603 – 1625). It is also termed the Jacobean Age.

Let's see these literary periods through different perspectives.

## ***THE ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEOAN AGES***

Both the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods in the history of English literature are also known as The Age of Shakespeare. This span of time is the golden age of literature. It extends from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. It was an age of both contemplation and action. It was an era which was illustrious for the unprecedented development of art, literature and drama. John Milton calls England, during this age, as —a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.

→ *Let's see the main characteristics of this age.*

### ***Political Peace and Stability***

Elizabeth brilliantly framed and followed the policy of balance and moderation both inside and outside the country. A working compromise was reached with Scotland. The rebellious northern barons were kept in check. She, therefore, could successfully establish peace in traditionally disturbed border areas. Under her able administration the English national life rapidly and steadily progressed.



### ***Social Development***

It was an age of great social contentment. The rapid rise of industrial towns gave employment to thousands. Increasing trade and commerce enriched England. The wealthy were taxed to support the poor. This created the atmosphere for literary activities.

### ***Religious Tolerance***

It was an era of religious tolerance of peace. Upon her accession she found the whole nation divided against itself. The north was largely Catholic, and the South was strongly Protestant. Scotland followed the Reformation intensely. Ireland followed its old traditional religion. It was Elizabeth who made the Anglican Church a reality. Anglicanism was a kind of compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Both the Protestants and the Catholics accepted the Church. All Englishmen were influenced by the Queen's policy of religious tolerance and were united in a magnificent national enthusiasm. The mind of man, now free from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. An atmosphere of all pervading religious peace gave great stimulus to literary activity.

### ***Sense and Feeling of Patriotism***

It was an age of patriotism. Queen Elizabeth loved England ardently and she made her court one of the most brilliant courts in Europe. The splendour of her court dazzled the eyes of the people. Her moderate policies did much to increase her popularity and prestige. Worship of the Virgin Queen became the order of the day. She was Spenser's Gloriana, Raleigh's Cynthia, and Shakespeare's —fair vestal throned by the West. Even the foreigners saw in her —a keen calculating intellect that baffled the ablest statesmen in Europe. Elizabeth inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the Faery Queen. Under her administration the English national life progressed faster not by slow historical and evolutionary process. English literature reached the very highest point of literary development during her period.

### ***Discovery, Exploration and Expansion***

This is the most remarkable epoch for the expansion of both mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought and great action. It is an age which appeals to the eye, the imagination and the intellect. New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The great voyagers like Hawkins, Frobisher, Raleigh and Drake brought home both material and intellectual

treasures from the East and the West. The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imagination of writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the illustrious development of dramatic literature. Drama progresses in an era of action and not of speculation. It has rightly been called the age of the discovery of the new world and of man.

### ***Influence of Foreign Fashions***

Italy, the home of Renaissance, fascinated the Elizabethans. All liked to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were not only found of Italian books and literature, but also of Italian manners and morals. Consequently the literature of England was immensely enriched by imitating Italian classics.

### ***Contradictions and Set of Oppositions***

It was an age of great diversity and contradictions. It was an age of light and darkness, of reason and of unreason, of wisdom and of foolishness, of hope and of despair. The barbarity and backwardness, the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages still persisted. Disorder, violence, bloodshed and tavern brawls still prevailed. Highway robberies, as mentioned in Henry IV, Part I, were very common. The barbarity of the age is seen in such brutal sports as bear baiting, cock and bull fighting, to which numerous references are found in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite the advancement of science and learning

people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts. In spite of great refinement and learning it was an age of easy morals. People did not care for high principles of morality and justice. Bribery and international delays of justice were common evils. Material advancement was by fair means or foul, the main aim of men in high places. Hardly anyone of the public men of this age had a perfectly open heart and very few had quite clean hands. In spite of the ignorance and superstition, violence and brutality, easy morals and lax values, Elizabethan Age was an age in which men lived very much, thought intensely and wrote strongly.

### ***ELIZABETHAN POETRY***

The English poetry of Renaissance developed under the influence of Chaucer's traditions, folk songs and Italian verse forms. Many imitators of Chaucer appeared after his death in 1400, but few are of great interest. More than a century had to pass before any further important English poetry was written. Queen Elizabeth ruled from 1558 to 1603, but the great Elizabethan literary age is not considered as beginning until 1579. Before that year two poets wrote works of value.

It was the renaissance in the sixteenth century which gave birth to a variety of style and encouraged experimentation in English literature. For the first time the poets experimented with

Italian style and created sonnets. The term modern was never used before, however with the change in the structure and form, the term “Modern English Poetry” was used to identify these newly developed poems. Courtly poets Wyatt and Surrey introduced new style, rhythm and form in English poetry which was identified as the modern English poetry since they were the first reformers in English metre and style and changed the traditional style.

This era witnessed the birth of modern English poetry in the expert hands of Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Shakespeare, Sidney etc., While lyrical style was predominant, but not the only form of the era, the poets experimented with early blank verse and also introduced the epic form and the dramatic or conversational poetry by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Donne and Phillip Sydney which were highly appreciated and read even today.

Renaissance in the sixteenth century connotes to the idea of achieving liberation from the authority of Church. According to the French historian Michelet, renaissance the discovery of the world and the discovery of man, by man, or Revival of Learning, re-awakening was due to the study of the ancient classics such as Greece and Rome. Earlier the books and manuscripts were sealed for common men. Before the renaissance the books were for gentleman, monks, court and Church. This movement

helped in familiarizing common people with the classical art and culture.

Italy was the first home for Renaissance which helped in inculcating humanistic spirit. Spencer laid the foundation of new poetry with his invention of fresh vocabulary, new stanza forms as well as humanistic theme and sensuous imagery. Soon Bacon adapted the syntax which was predominant in Latin poetry. Bacon used the Latin syntax to produce clear, self-conscious as well as precise prose style. New forms developed and thus gave birth to unique craftsmanship that enriched the English poetry with new forms such as sonnets, elegy, and pastorals enriched poetry (Hanscom, 2003). Thus English poetry experienced renewal through 'Humanism' in poetry after a prolonged period of sterility. Courtly Poets Sir Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey took the responsibility of reviving poetry by embracing the model and stimulus from Italy (Daiches, 2004). Under the influence of fourteenth century Italian poet, Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) the father of sonnet, who used the form to idealise love. Thus after studying Italian literature extensively, Wyatt was the first poet to introduce the particular form in English. Soon sonnet matured in the hands of other poets and evolved as one of the most popular verse forms of the Elizabethan period. The 14 line poetry, sonnet was first

developed in Italy in the twelfth century and then transferred to French and later in English poetry.

One of the literary historians called Elizabethan age as a nest of singing birds about the composition of poetry in this period. There were many poets who contributed to develop this form of literature and it reached the peak of its development. The poets not only adopted and innovated the forms of poetry and wrote on the varied themes. The poetry of Elizabethan era mirrors the spirit of Age. It reflects the spirit of conquest and self-glorification, humanism and vigorous imagination, emotional depth and passionate intensity. Sublimity was considered to be the essential quality of poetry. Spenser, Shakespeare and Marlowe had the immense power to exalt and sublimate the lovers of poetry.

All varieties of poetic forms like lyric, elegy, ode, sonnet etc. were successfully attempted. Thematically, the following main divisions of poetry existed during this period:

### ***Love Poetry***

The love poetry is characterized by romance, imagination and youthful vigour, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Daniel's *Delia*, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and his sonnets are noticeable love poems of this period.

### ***Patriotic Poetry***

The ardent note of patriotism is the distinctive characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. Warner's *Abbican's England*, Daniel's *Civil Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *The Barons War* and *The Ballad of Agincourt* are some memorable patriotic poems.

### ***Philosophical Poetry***

Elizabethan age was a period both of action and reflection. Action found its superb expression in contemporary drama. People thought inwardly. The tragedies of Shakespeare represent this aspect of national life. Brooke's poems, *On Human Learning*, *On Wars*, *On Monarchy*, and *On Religion* have philosophical leanings.

### ***Satirical Poetry***

It came into existence after the decline of the spirit of adventure and exploration, of youthful gaiety and imaginative vigour towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Donne's *Satires* and Drummond's *Sonnets* are some fine examples of this type of poetry. In the reign of James I life's gaiety was lost. A harsh cynical realism succeeded. Poetry had grown self-conscious. Poetry had crept under the shadow of the approaching civil conflicts.



## → Poets of the Age

Wyatt and Surrey traveled widely in Italy. They brought to England the Italian and classic influence. They modeled their poetry on Italian pattern. They are the first harbingers of the Renaissance in English poetry. They are the first modern poets. The book that contains their poems is *Songs and Sonnets*, known as the Tottle's Miscellany. The brief introduction of the major poets of the age is necessary to be discussed along with their remarkable works.

Thus it can be said after studying from the great works of literature that Wyatt wrote lyrics but Surrey tried his hands with blank verse. While Wyatt picked the Italian style and wrote sonnets, Surrey developed unrhymed pentameters (or blank verse) later perfected by Dryden and Milton. Thus the poetry of England during the Renaissance developed under the influence of Chaucer, folk songs and Italian form. Poets experimented with simple themes like life of ordinary men and women, relationship between sexes the treachery and hypocrisy of courtly life (Evans, 2002). The poetry no longer remained limited within the genteel society or was written with a purpose of educating gentlemen. Instead the new forms developed, sonnets and lyrics appeared and collection of poems was published in "*Tottel's Miscellany*" to help common men read the finest lyrics of the time. The book contained about 40 poems by

Surrey and 96 poems by Wyatt. According to (Daiches, 2004), Wyatt is studied only for the freshness and pathbreaking style he brought with him from Italy and not for his poetic genius. His poetry was ordinary in approach and content. However, the English poets picked his style of fourteen lines and continued writing. Thus the finest sonnets by other poets such as Shakespeare and Sidney were penned in the same era.

### ***I. Sir Thomas Wyatt.***

With the older poet, Thomas Wyatt (1503- 1542), the modern English poetry begins in the sixteenth century. Wyatt along with the 'courtly makers' who followed him soon exercised their talent in language by translating the works from foreign models as well as experimented with a variety of lyric measures, that helped in restoring English metrics, the combination of flexibility as well as regularity which was lost after the age of Chaucer (Baker and Biester, 2003). In the hands of Wyatt English poetry experienced rapid shift from the stage of language also known as Middle English to the stage known as Modern English where these poets specially Wyatt and Surrey, essential craftsmen who treated the conventional subject matter in a unique manner which is disciplined yet flexible poetic style. They borrowed, translated as well as imitated from Italian as well as French poets (Daiches, 2004).

Wyatt brought to English poetry grace, harmony and nobility. He followed the Italian models and attempted a great variety of metrical experiment – songs, sonnets, madrigals and elegies. He was the first poet, who introduced sonnet, which was a favorite poetical form in England with Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold and many others. He first of all introduced personal or autobiographical note in English poetry. Wyatt's true ability as a poet is revealed not by the sonnets but by a number of lyrics and songs that he composed.

## ***II. Earl of Surrey***

Surrey is a disciple of Wyatt rather than an independent poetical force. His sonnets are more effective than those of Wyatt. The former followed the Petrarchan pattern of sonnet, whereas the latter modified it and made it typical English. The Petrarchan form is perhaps more impressive, the modified English form the more expressive. Shakespeare followed the English pattern of sonnet, introduced by Surrey. He was the first poet to use blank verse in his translation of Aeneid.

## ***III. Thomas Sackville***

Sackville was a great humanist whose only contribution to England poetry is The Induction. He has a sureness of touch and a freedom from technical errors which make him superior to Wyatt and Surrey.

#### ***IV. Sir Philip Sidney***

Sidney was the most celebrated literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. As a man of letters he is remembered for *Arcadia* (a romance), *Apology For Poetry* (a collection of critical and literary principles) and *Astrophel and Stella* (a collection of sonnets). These 108 love sonnets are the first direct expressions of personal feelings and experience in English poetry. He analyses the sequence of his feelings with a vividness and minuteness. His sonnets owe much to Petrarch and Ronsard in tone and style.

#### ***V. Edmund Spenser***

Edmund Spenser is rightly called the poet's poet because all great poets of England have been indebted to him. C. Rickett remarks, —Spenser is at once the child of the Renaissance and the Reformation. On one side we may regard him with Milton as —the sage and serious Spenser, on the other he is the humanist, alive to the finger tips with the sensuous beauty of the Southern romance.

Spenser's main poetical works are:

- The *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579), two eclogues, March and December, are prescribed in your syllabus for detailed study.

- Amoretti (1595), a collection of eighty eight Petrarchan sonnets
- Epithalamion (1595), a magnificent ode written on the occasion of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle
- Prothalamion (1596), an ode on marriage
- Astrophel (1596), an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney
- Four Hymns (1576) written to glorify love and honour
- His epic, The Faerie Queen (1589 – 90).

Spenser's finest poetry is characterized by sensuousness and picturesqueness. He is a matchless painter in words. His contribution to poetic style, diction and versification is memorable. He evolved a true poetic style which the succeeding generations of English poets used. The introduction of Spenserian stanza is Spenser's most remarkable contribution to poetry. He is great because of the extraordinary smoothness and melody, his verse and the richness of his language, a golden diction which he drew from every source – new words, old words, obsolete words. Renwick says, —Shakespeare himself might not have achieved so much, if Spenser had not lived and laboured. Dryden freely acknowledged that Spenser has been his master in English. Thompson referred to him as —my master Spenser. Wordsworth praises him as the embodiment of nobility, purity and sweetness. Byron, Shelley and Keats are his worthy followers. The Pre-Raphaelites were inspired by

Spenser's word-painting and picturesque descriptions. Therefore he is aptly called Poet's poet.

### ***VI. Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman***

The Hero and Leander was left incomplete due to Marlowe's untimely death. It was completed by Chapman. This poem is remarkable for felicity of diction and flexibility of versification. The poets show great skill in effectively using words and images. Besides completing Hero and Leander, Chapman also translated Iliad and Odyssey and composed some sonnets.

### ***VII. William Shakespeare***

Shakespeare is not only the greatest dramatist in the English language, but also the greatest poet. His 154 sonnets are love poetry, addressed to a man and to a woman. The man was Shakespeare's young patron, a nobleman from whom he received inestimable help. Platonic friendship between men was cultivated during the Renaissance; artists were also expected to write, paint and compose for their patrons, but these poems, never intended for publication, transcend the conventions and give us unique insight into Shakespeare's emotional life. The woman of the sonnets, the "Dark Lady" though neither beautiful, good nor kind, enslaved his soul, and took his innocent young patron as her lover, thus tormenting the poet doubly.

Shakespeare composed many beautiful sonnets and two long poems – Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece . In the former the realistic passions are expressed through equally realistic pictures and episodes. It is remarkable for astonishing linguistic beauty. The latter is a contrast to the former. Having painted the attempts of an amorous woman, Shakespeare now proceeded to represent the rape of a chaste wife.

### ***VIII. Ben Jonson***

Ben Jonson was a pioneer in the field of poetry. His poetic work consists of short pieces, which appeared in three collections – Epigrammes, The Forest and The Underwood. He is a first-rate satirist in Elizabethan poetry. The spirit of satire looms large in these three collections of his poetry. He presents vivid sarcastic portraits in ten or twenty lines. His moral satires were nobler in tone and more sincere in expression than of Hall or Marston. Ben Jonson was the first English poet to write Pindaric odes. His Ode to Himself is a fine example of this genre. His poetic style is lucid, clear and free from extravagances. He is also the forerunner of neo-classicism, which attained perfection in the works of Dryden and Pope. To Celia, Echo's Song and A Song are his memorable lyrics.

## ***IX. John Donne***

As the pioneer of the Metaphysical Poetry, Donne stands unrivalled. His contribution to poetry will be discussed along with the metaphysical Poetry. (For detailed study refer unit 2 of this book.) Apart from the above major poets, there are few poets whose names need to be mentioned. They are Joseph Hall, John Marsten, George Wither, and William Browne because they contributed or verse satire to the literature of Elizabethan period.

### ***Elizabethan Sonnets and Sonneteers***

The sonnet originated in Italy in the fourteenth century. It is particularly associated with the name of Petrarch, though it had been used before him by Dante. It was originally a short poem, recited to the accompaniment of music. The word sonnet is derived from the Italian word —sonnettoll, meaning a little sound or strain. In course of time it became a short poem of fourteen lines with a set rhyme scheme. The sonnets of Petrarch and Dante were love sonnets. Petrarch addressed his sonnets to Laura and Dante to Beatrice. It enjoyed great popularity in Italy during the fifteenth century.

16th century poetry mainly focused on sonnets and experimentation with other meter forms in English. Sonnet is a subjective poem, a type of lyrical poem which was written to express the personal feelings and emotions of the poet.



Subjective poetry underwent decline in the medieval period. In the sixteenth century it regained importance due to the Renaissance (the human feelings, emotions and art forms were given importance). In the middle age the main emphasis was on the religion and morality, but with Renaissance came the change.

Perhaps the most recognizable form in Renaissance poetry was the sonnet. The word sonnet is derived from the Italian word “sonetto,” which means a “little song” or small lyric. In poetry, a sonnet has 14 lines, and is written in iambic pentameter. Each line has 10 syllables. It has a specific rhyme scheme, and a Volta, or a specific turn. It was perfected by the 14th-century poet Petrarch. The sonnet was brought to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt, when he started translating the works of the Italian poet Petrarch. And later it was developed and shaped into English and popularized by the likes of Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, Shakespeare, Marlowe, and others.

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the religion and morality, but with Renaissance came the change.

*Features of Petrarchan sonnet* were, **firstly**, the poet idealized his mistress. She is worshipped as an epitome of beauty. The beauty of the lady is mesmerizing and is often compared to the Classical Goddesses. She is virtuous and time and gain referred to as Aphrodite or Venus. **Secondly**, the dominating themes of the poetry were, the lover would constantly woo his lady however she rarely responds or reacts to his call. Love is treated in a spiritual way. **Thirdly**, the poet relies strongly on the figures of speech with specific focus on figures of speech and allusion while depicting in the poems.

**Wyatt**, the first English sonneteer followed the Petrarchan form however brought in changes in the English setting and incorporated greater liveliness and occasional humor which was not present in the Italian sonnets. With **Spenser** in Amoretti the style matured and in the hands of Sir Philip Sidney a note of psychological complexity first came in poetry. **Sydney's** conflict between ideal public role and yearning for lady love became one of the mostly used themes in the sonnets of the later time. **Shakespeare** however, deviated from in style from his predecessors, dedicated about 126 sonnets to the fair youth where the identity was ambiguous. While the classical poets wrote poetry as a means for immortalization, Shakespeare

immortalizes the youth and beauty of his friends through the sonnets.

Following the Petrarchan pattern they have further shown how the poet would often suffer from frustration and despair due to their love by the mistress. Shakespeare too has referred to the similar mood of melancholy and despair which was depicted dramatically.

Other poets of the time followed the structural division of the sonnet used by Petrarch, the octave and sestet, a few like Wyatt and Spenser experimented with three quatrains and a couplet. However, it was Shakespeare who studied various styles and popularized the form of fourteen lines with a new rhyme scheme that other Elizabethan sonneteers never used.

**Italian or Petrarchan** sonnet was introduced by 14th century Italian poet Petrarch. There are 14 lines of iambic pentameter divided into the “octet” or the first 8 lines and the “sestet” (the next six). There is a turn or “Volta,” between the octet and sestet. Here the poet gives a different perspective or argument and it occurs between the octet and the sestet.

**Spenserian** Sir Edmund Spenser was the first poet who modified the Petrarch’s form, and introduced a new rhyme scheme which is specific to Spenser, and such types of

sonnets are called Spenserian sonnets. It consists of has 14 lines, three quatrains, and a couplet.

**Shakespearean** has 14 lines, three quatrains, and a couplet that's considered a conclusion to the poem. It is generally written in iambic pentameter, in which there are 10 syllables in each line.

The sonnet becomes a very important poetic form in Elizabethan writing. The sonnet, a poem of fourteen ten-syllable lines, came from the Italian of Petrarch. The first examples in English were written by Sir Thomas Wyatt, and the form was then developed by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, they are often mentioned together, but there are many differences in their work. Both wrote sonnets, which they learned to do from the Italians; but it was **Wyatt** who first brought the sonnet to England. **Surrey's** work is also important because he wrote the first blank verse in English. Surrey's blank verse is fairly good; he keeps it alive by changing the positions of the main beats in the lines.

**Sir Thomas Wyatt** was a popular member of the court of Henry VIII (1509 – 1547) and was often sent on diplomatic missions overseas. However, he was twice arrested, once in 1536 with the fall of Anne Boleyn, Henry's second queen, and again in 1541 with the fall of his patron, Thomas Cromwell.

Perhaps his first arrest was because he had been Anne's lover before her marriage to the king. Whatever the reasons, he was fortunate to regain the king's favour. On the second occasion he was charged with treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Wyatt's verse, essentially English but much influenced by Italian verse forms, was written to be passed – and sometimes sung – among friends at court.

**Sidney** came as close as anyone could to embodying the Renaissance Man ideal Soldier, scholar, poet, critic, courtier and diplomat, he lived a life of both thought and action, adept at not only the gentler pursuits of life, but the harder ones as well. He was fatally wounded in a battle in Holland - instead of taking the water offered to him, however, he passed it to another wounded man, saying, «Thy necessity is greater than mine.»

The publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* marks the real beginning of Elizabethan sonnet. His sonnets clearly show the influence of Petrarch, Ronsard and Watson. Petrarch wrote his sonnets for his beloved Laura. Sidney's sonnets express his ardent passion for his beloved Penelope, the Stella of his sonnets. His sonnets are effusions of personal passion. These sonnets are remarkable for their sincerity. He was the first English poet to indicate the lyric capacity of the sonnet. Sidney followed the Petrarchan scheme of sonnet.

In the history of the development of the sonnet sequence the role of Stella is very important. She is one of the first heroines in the line of female characters of the English lyrical poetry. But nevertheless Stella differs greatly from the traditional female image of the Italian sonnets. She is noble, devoted to her moral duty. In the sequence, Sydney harmonizes his personal tone of voice with both myth and narrative; he tells about development of her love and presents this female character as a positive one. Her virtue is based not on the dream about Paradise love but on the understanding of her moral duty. She is not an ideal image; she is real lively, vivid female character, the predecessor to the Dark Lady of Shakespearean sonnets written later in 1609.

### **Astrophil and Stella, Sonnet 39**

#### **Come Sleep**

Come Sleep! O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,  
The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,  
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,  
Th' indifferent judge between the high and low.  
With shield of proof shield me from out the prease  
Of those fierce darts despair at me doth throw:  
O make in me those civil wars to cease;  
I will good tribute pay, if thou do so.  
Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,  
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,  
A rosy garland and a weary head:

And if these things, as being thine by right,  
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,  
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

**Spenser's** Amoretti, a collection of 88 sonnets is memorable contribution to the art of sonnet writing. They are addressed to Elizabeth Boyle, whom he married. So an intimate, personal or autobiographical note runs in all of them. Spenser's sonnets are unique for their purity. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse.

### **Amoretti, Sonnet 34**

#### **Like as a ship**

Like as a ship, that through the ocean wide,  
By conduct of some star, doth make her way,  
Whenas a storm hath dimmed her trusty guide,  
Out of her course doth wander far astray:  
So I, whose star, that won't with her bright ray  
Me to direct, with clouds is overcast,  
Do wander now, in darkness and dismay,  
Through hidden perils round about me placed;  
Yet hope I well that, when this storm is past,  
My Helice, the loadstar of my life,  
Will shine again, and look on me at last,  
With lovely light to clear my cloudy grief.

Till then I wander careful, comfortless,  
In secret sorrow, and sad pensiveness.

**Shakespeare** is the greatest writer of the sonnet form. His sonnets are the most precious pearls of Elizabethan lyricism, some of them unsurpassed by any lyricism. The form he chose was not the Italian or the Petrarchan form. He preferred the Spenserian pattern, consisting of three quatrains, each rhyming alternately, and rhyming couplet to conclude. Thomas Thorpe printed a collection of 154 sonnets of Shakespeare in 1609. It was dedicated to a —Mr. W.H. and to a Dark Lady. The poet loved both of them dearly. The poet makes every allowance for the man, his youth, his attraction, his inexperience. He feels more bitterly towards the woman. She, he feels had turned his friend from him in sheer wantonness of spirit. He prefers the companionship of his friend to the company of the mistress.

Some of his sonnets are conventional literary exercises on conventional themes. His sonnets are noticeable for rare beauty of images and the flawless perfection of style and versification.

The Age of Shakespeare was the golden age of sonnet. Each poet contributed something new to the art of sonnet writing. The average Elizabethan sonnet illustrates the temper of the age. It bears graphic witness to the Elizabethan tendency to borrow from foreign literary sources.



## Sonnet 18

### Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
    So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

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summer's day?  
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By chance, or nature's changing  
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Nor lose possession of that fair  
thou ow'st;  
Nor shall Death brag thou  
wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time  
thou grow'st;  
So long as men can breathe or  
eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives  
life to thee.

## PARAPHRASE

Shall I compare you to a  
summer's day?  
You are more lovely and more  
constant:  
Rough winds shake the beloved  
buds of May  
And summer is far too short:  
At times the sun is too hot,  
Or often goes behind the clouds;  
And everything beautiful  
sometime will lose its beauty,  
By misfortune or by nature's  
planned out course.  
But your youth shall not fade,  
Nor will you lose the beauty that  
you possess;  
Nor will death claim you for his  
own,  
Because in my eternal verse  
you will live forever.  
So long as there are people on  
this earth,  
So long will this poem live on,  
making you immortal.

## ***ELIZABETHAN PROSE***

The Age of Elizabeth was also conspicuous for the remarkable development of prose, which was variously written with great stylistic and linguistic excellence. The following prose genres developed during this period.

### **→ Prose in Early Renaissance**

The prose of early Renaissance consists largely of translations. The writers of this period were educationists and reformers rather than creative writers. The following major writers need to be considered in a nutshell:

#### ***Sir Thomas More***

He was one of the early humanists and the first prose writer of great literary significance. His famous work *Utopia* was written in Latin, but it was translated into English in 1551 by Ralph Robinson. It is the —true prologue of Renaissance. It shows the influence of Plato. *Utopia* has been called —the first monument of modern socialism. Thomas More extols democratic communism – people's state, elected government, equal distribution of wealth and nine hours' work a day. In it we find for the first time the foundation of civilized society, the three great words – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. More advocates religious tolerance. In English literary history Thomas More is not

remembered for his contribution to style but for the originality of his ideas.

### ***Sir Francis Bacon***

Bacon occupies a dominant place in English prose. He wrote varied type of prose. He is philosophical in *The Advancement of Learning*, historical in the *History of Henry VII*, and speculative in *New Atlantis*.

Bacon occupies a permanent place in English prose due to his *Essays*, ten in number, which appeared in 1597. The second edition and the third edition raised the number to 38 and 58 respectively. They are on familiar subjects and they represent the meditations of trained and learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear and aphoristic style. Bacon began the vogue of essay writing in English. His essays introduced a new form of literature into English literature.

He was the first English writer who employed a style that is conspicuous for lucidity, clarity, economy, precision, directness, masculinity and mathematical plainness. His images and figures of speech are simple and clearly illustrate the ideas that he wishes to communicate.

## ***Ben Jonson***

Ben Jonson wrote aphoristic essays which are compiled in *The Timber of Discoveries* which was published posthumously about 1641. His essays are moral and critical. Jonson's style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness and strength. He treats a subject in a simple and plain manner.

### ***ELIZABETHAN DRAMA***

The period marks the real beginning of drama. It is the golden age of English drama. The renewed study of classical drama shaped English drama in its formative years. Seneca influenced the development of English tragedy, and Plautus and Terence directed the formation of comedy. The classical drama gave English drama its five acts, its set scenes and many other features. Regular English tragedy, comedy and historical play were successfully written during this period. Another dramatic genre, which emerged during this period, is tragic-comedy, which mixes lamentable tragedy with pleasant mirth.

Historical plays too were written during this period. Famous among the early historical plays are – *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (1590), *Tragedy of Richard, the Third* (1590 – 94), *The Victories of Henry the Fifth* (1588) and *the History of Lear* (1594).

## ***Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare***

William Shakespeare was not of an age but of all ages. He wrote 37 plays, which may be classified as tragedies, comedies, romances or tragic-comedies and historical plays. The period of Shakespeare's dramatic activity spans twenty four years (1588 – 1612) which is divided into the following four sub-periods:

i) The First Period (1588 – 96): It is a period of early experimentation. During this period he wrote Titus Andronicus, First Part of Henry VI, Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Richard II and Richard III and King John. His early poems The Rape of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis belong to this period.

ii) The Second Period (1596 – 1600): Shakespeare wrote his great comedies and chronicled plays during this period. The works of this period are The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, The Twelfth Night, Henry IV, Part I & II, and Henry V.

iii) The Third Period (1601 – 08): It is a period of great tragedies Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear Othello, Julius Caesar, and of somber and better comedies All's Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure and Troilus and Cressida.

iv) The Fourth Period (1608 – 1613) : Shakespeare's last period begins with Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, Henry VII and Pericles. What distinguishes Shakespeare's last period is the reawakening of his first love romance in Cymbeline, The Tempest and The Winter's Tale.

### → **Shakespearean Comedy**

Shakespeare wrote comedies, history plays and tragedies. The comedies can have classical or contemporary sources: Shakespeare always transformed his material, giving old conventions life in a new world, and through fusion and innovation creating forms all his own. A Midsummer's Night's Dream is peopled with spirits and fairies of English folklore, never before found in drama; in the history plays and in the tragedies he creates out of traditional stereotypes comic figures such as Falstaff and the fools, thereby giving an entirely new dimension both to the stock figures and to the genre. The sparkling brilliance of the dialogue, the poetic quality of the songs, the inventiveness of the plots, the wit of the satire are irresistible. Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, A Midsummer's Night's Dream are among the great achievements. In some of the comedies, such as Much Ado About Nothing or The Merchant of Venice he stretched the genre to its limits, bringing them to the brink of tragedy.

Shakespeare raised the relatively new genre of comedy to heights it has rarely since attained.

Shakespeare's comedies celebrate human social life even as they expose human folly. By means that are sometimes humiliating, even painful, characters learn greater wisdom and emerge with a clearer view of reality. Some of his early comedies can be regarded as light farces in that their humor depends mainly upon complications of plot, minor foibles of the characters, and elements of physical comedy such as slapstick. The so-called joyous comedies follow the early comedies and culminate in *As You Like It*. Written about 1600, this comedy strikes a perfect balance between the worlds of the city and the country, verbal wit and physical comedy, and realism and fantasy.

After 1600, Shakespeare's comedies take on a darker tone, as Shakespeare uses the comic form to explore less changeable aspects of human behavior. *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* test the ability of comedy to deal with the unsettling realities of human desire, and these plays, therefore, have usually been thought of as "problem comedies," or, at very least, as evidence that comedy in its tendency toward wish fulfillment is a problem.



## ***EARLY COMEDIES***

Shakespeare remained busy writing comedies during his early years in London, until about 1595. These comedies reflect in their gaiety and exuberant language the lively and self-confident tone of the English nation after 1588, the year England defeated the Spanish Armada, an invasion force from Spain. The comedies in this group include *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

### **→ *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS***

Antipholus of Syracuse, newly arrived in the island state of Ephesus, awaits his servant Dromio. The pair are as yet unaware that their twin brothers, separated from them in a shipwreck soon after their births, are still alive and living in Ephesus. Confusion quickly ensues, as the newcomers are repeatedly mistaken for the island-dwelling pair, and vice versa. Shakespeare's quick-paced comedy has much in common with the modern genre of farce: the play features frequent quick entrances and exits, mistaken identities, marital disharmony, and a good measure of slapstick. Just before this scene the Syracusan Antipholus has met with Dromio of Ephesus, and mistaken him for his own servant,

resulting in a beating for the poor Ephesian, who has naturally not completed the task set for his Syracusan twin. When the latter finally arrives, and claims no knowledge of this incident, he too receives a beating. Things quickly become even more complicated with the arrival of the disaffected Adriana, in pursuit of her wayward husband, Antipholus of Ephesus... Shakespeare based the plot of *The Comedy of Errors*, a farce performed in 1594, on classical comedies by Plautus. It was published for the first time in the First Folio of 1623. The play, Shakespeare's shortest, depends for its appeal on the mistaken identities of two sets of twins both separated in their youth. The comedy ends happily with the reunion of both sets of twins, after a bewildering series of confusions. Shakespeare makes his play more complex than Plautus's by the addition of the second set of twins, twin servants to the twin brothers of the main action, and the play displays the young Shakespeare's formal mastery of the comic form and anticipates themes and techniques of his later plays.

### **→ *THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA***

One of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* follows the romantic fortunes of

Proteus and Valentine, the gentlemen of the title. The changeable Proteus, having left his lover Julia in Verona with promises of affection, has traveled to Milan at his father's request. There he has fallen for Silvia, who is engaged to his friend Valentine. Unknown to Proteus, Julia has followed him to Milan, dressed as a page-boy. In this scene she watches as Proteus pretends to help Thurio, another suitor for Silvia's hand, to win Silvia's love by serenading her; the deceitful Proteus then remains behind to plead his own suit. Despite Silvia's obvious disinterest, and her strong disapproval of his disloyal behaviour towards both his friend and his lover, he persists, falsely claiming that both Valentine and Julia are dead. Although the situation presented is painful, there is much humour in the scene when staged, deriving from the hoodwinking of Thurio, the outrageous nature of Proteus's vain attempts to woo the exasperated Silvia, and the bitter irony in Julia's sharp wit, demonstrated in her double-edged comment to the Host that Proteus "plays false"—not, as the confused Host takes it to mean, in his music, but in his love.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, which appears as the second comedy in the First Folio, was probably first performed about 1594. Shakespeare's first attempt at romantic comedy, it concerns two friends, Proteus and

Valentine, and two women, Julia and Sylvia. The play traces the relations of the four, until the two sets of lovers are happily paired off: Proteus with Julia, and Valentine with Sylvia. Much of the humor in the play comes from a clownish servant, Launce, and his dog, Crab, described as “the sourestnatured dog that lives.” Shakespeare probably wrote the part of Launce for comic actor Will Kemp.

### **→ *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW***

The Taming of the Shrew (1593?) was first published in the First Folio in 1623. This comedy contrasts the prim and conventional Bianca, who grows willful and disobedient over the course of the play, with the shrewish Katherine, who is finally tamed by Petruchio, her suitor and, finally, husband. Yet Katherine and Petruchio are clearly well matched in style and temperament, and Katherine’s speech at the end on the importance of obedience may be delivered with an obvious sense of how far this is from what she believes or even from what Petruchio really wants. Kiss Me Kate (1948), a musical based on The Taming of the Shrew, proved popular on stage, as did a motion-picture version of Shakespeare’s play in 1953 with actors Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. However, unless the action is played with its possible ironies

clearly apparent, audiences today will likely find the play's ostensible values difficult to take, especially the belief in the need to tame a wife.

### **→ *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST***

King Ferdinand of Navarre and his companions, the lords Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine, have sworn a vow, at the king's suggestion, that they will forego the society of women and the pleasures of love for three years, in order to devote themselves to study. A pre-arranged state visit from the Princess of France and her ladies, forgotten by the king, forces them to revise the terms of their vow to allow for the necessity of meeting with the women, and soon all four men are in love. As befits the courtly setting and the scholarly aims of the young men, the language and wit of *Love's Labour's Lost* are sophisticated and refined, but despite the literary atmosphere of the play, the comic possibilities of the stage are not neglected. In Act I V, Scene 3, Berowne—the only one of the lords to have protested at the impossibility of maintaining the vow—is attempting to write a sonnet to his beloved, when he is disturbed by the arrival of the king and forced to hide. From his vantage point he spies on the other men, as one by one they enter to reveal—to both the on-

and off-stage audiences—their own lovestruck attempts at poetry. Through the style of the young men’s verses Shakespeare parodies the poetic fashions of the day for images of hunting and melancholy, but it is the structure of the scene that provides the greatest humour. The multiple eavesdropping is exquisitely executed, and as each man emerges to berate the others for breaking their vow, the audience has the pleasure of knowing that Berowne, too, is forsworn, and likely soon to be discovered. While Berowne is in the middle of a self-confident assault on his companions’ treacherous promise-breaking, Costard and Jaquenetta make a perfectly timed entrance with an incriminating letter. Love’s Labour’s Lost was first published in 1598 and was the first published play to have “By W. Shakespeare” on its title page. The play’s slight action serves as a peg on which to hang a glittering robe of wit and poetry. It satirizes the loves of its main male characters as well as their fashionable devotion to studious pursuits. The noblemen in the play have sought to avoid romantic and worldly entanglements by devoting themselves in their studies, and they voice their pretensions in an artificially ornate style, until love forces them to recognize their own self-deceptions. The play’s title anticipates its unconventional ending: The women refuse to

marry at the end, demanding a waiting period of 12 months for the men to demonstrate their reformation. “Our wooing does not end like an old play,” says Berowne; “Jack hath not Jill.”

## ***MIDDLE COMEDIES***

Although very different in tone, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* from the mid-1590s provide evidence of Shakespeare’s growing mastery of the comic form and his willingness to explore and test its dramatic possibilities. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* represents Shakespeare’s first outstanding success in the field of romantic comedy. *The Merchant of Venice* is in its main plot another example of a romantic comedy, but the presence of Shylock disrupts the comic action, haunting the place even after he has disappeared from it.

### **→ *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM***

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, first performed probably in 1594 or 1595 and first published in 1600, presents a happy blend of fantasy and realism, and may have been intended for performance at an aristocratic wedding. The comedy weaves together a number of separate plots involving three different realms: one inhabited by two pairs of noble

Athenian lovers; another by members of the fairy world—notably, King Oberon, Queen Titania, and the mischievous Puck; and the third by a group of bumbling and unconsciously comic townspeople who seek to produce a play for wedding celebrations. These three worlds are brought together in a series of encounters that veer from the realistic to the magical to the absurd and back again in the space of only a few lines. In Act III, for example, Oberon plays a trick on Titania while she sleeps, employing Puck to anoint her with a potion that will cause her to fall in love with the first creature she sees on waking. As it happens, she opens her eyes to the sight of Bottom the weaver, adorned by Puck with an ass's head. Yet the comic episode of the Queen of the Fairies "enamored of an ass" echoes the play's more profound concerns with the nature of love and imagination. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* weaves together a number of separate plots: an argument between the fairy king and queen; a royal wedding in Athens; the love affairs of four young Athenians; and the efforts of a group of common workmen to produce a play for the state wedding celebrations. Act I, Scene 2, introduces the workmen as they begin their production and assemble for the distribution of parts; Bottom the weaver's desire to steal the stage and play



every role contrasts comically with Snug's timidity. They meet to begin their rehearsals in Act 3, Scene 1, and Shakespeare's portrayal of this early amateur dramatic society at work has charmed audiences for many years. As the summer night moves towards its conclusion the many strands of the plot are increasingly woven together. Here Bottom is drawn into the middle of the conflict between Oberon, the fairy king, and his queen Titania. The sleeping Titania has been bewitched with a magical flower so that she will fall in love with the first man she sees on waking. Stumbling across Bottom and his companions in the forest near Titania's bed, Oberon's servant Puck decides to ensure that the queen's humiliation—and thus his master's revenge—are complete, by transforming the unwitting weaver into an ass.

### **→ *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE***

The Merchant of Venice, first published in 1600 though seemingly written in 1596 or 1597, shares the lyric beauty and fairy-tale ending of A Midsummer Night's Dream. But the strong characterization of the play's villain, a Jewish moneylender named Shylock, shadows the gaiety. Shakespeare drew the main plot from an Italian story in

which a crafty Jew threatens the life of a Christian merchant. Its composition may have arisen from a desire by Shakespeare's acting company to stage a play that could compete with *The Jew of Malta* (1589), a tragedy by English dramatist Christopher Marlowe, performed by a rival company, the Admiral's Men. In the play Shakespeare sets motifs of masculine friendship and romantic love in opposition to the bitterness of Shylock, whose own misfortunes are presented so as to arouse understanding and even sympathy. While this play reflects European anti-Semitism of the time (although Jews had been banished from England in 1290 and were not formally readmitted until 1656), its exploration of power and prejudice also promote a critique of such bigotry. As Shylock says, confronted by the double standards of his opponents: «He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason?—I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer

as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that». (Act III, scene 1)

### ***MATURE COMEDIES***

The romantic plays *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Twelfth Night* are often characterized as joyous 30 comedies because of their generally happy mood and sympathetic characters. Written around 1599 and 1600, they represent Shakespeare's triumph in the field of high comedy. These mature comedies revolve around beautiful, intelligent, and strong-minded heroines, a type anticipated by the quick-witted heiress Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Nothing quite like these plays appears in earlier English drama, and Shakespeare never wrote anything like them in later years. They present a contrast to the satiric comedy that was coming into fashion at the time, and many critics believe they demonstrate not only Shakespeare's mastery of his art but also his congenial temperament in the sympathy he reveals toward his characters.

## → **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING**

The war of wit between the independently-minded lovers-to-be Beatrice and Benedick has made *Much Ado About Nothing* one of the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies with modern audiences. The pair's favored status has a long history: in his copy of Shakespeare's published works, Charles I amended the play's title to read "Benedicke and Betteris". Nevertheless, their relationship is, in as far as the structure of the play is concerned, only a subplot to the conventional romance played out by their counterparts, Claudio and Hero. In this, the first scene of the play, the two intertwining stories are set up, and Beatrice and Benedick soon look set to steal the show. Leonato, his daughter Hero, and niece Beatrice await the return of the men who have been away at war. On their arrival, the quick-witted Benedick is soon involved in a "merry war" with the sharp-tongued Beatrice. In spite of their rivalry, the couple's inability to think of much except for each other soon reveals to the audience, if not to themselves, the true nature of their feelings. Meanwhile, Claudio, much honored for his valour on the battlefield, confesses his love for the beautiful Hero, and, having confirmed that she is worthy of him, accepts the support of Don Pedro, the Prince of Arragon, in obtaining

her hand in marriage. The witty comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, written about 1599 and first published the following year, concerns two pairs of lovers. In the play's main plot, the war hero Claudio is deceived into believing Hero has been unfaithful and calls off their wedding, until he is forced to recognize his error and take her as his wife. The subplot, a "merry war" of words and wit between Beatrice and Benedick, has long delighted audiences. Although the two outwardly dislike each other, the audience soon comprehends the real affection between the two. One of the play's most popular characters is the bumbling village constable Dogberry, who finally exposes the plot that has deceived Claudio. In 1993 a film version was released, starring Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson.

### **→ *AS YOU LIKE IT***

In *As You Like It*, written about 1599 but not published until the 1623 First Folio, Shakespeare draws a rich and varied contrast between the strict code of manners at the court and the relative freedom from such structure in the countryside. Yet it also satirizes popular pastoral plays, novels, and poems of the time. Those popular but sentimental works presented rural life as idyllic and its inhabitants as innocents

not yet corrupted by the world. In Shakespeare's play the rural world is far from perfect, and the characters are not always what they appear. Rosalind and Celia have disguised themselves as men when they flee the court for the forest, but other characters not disguised are self-deceived. In the forest, however, true identities are re-established. A number of love matches mark the conclusion, and the play ends in a parade of lovers marching two-by-two, like "couples coming to the Ark." Even the melancholy Jacques, who remains outside the play's concluding harmonies, expresses his benevolent hopes for the lovers, as the comic logic promises all "true delights." The nobleman Orlando falls in love with the lady Rosalind. Rosalind, disguised as a boy named Ganymede, then comes across Orlando in the forest and urges him to pretend that "Ganymede" is Rosalind. Orlando plays along, oblivious to the fact that he is indeed speaking to Rosalind. Other characters who appear in this scene are Rosalind's cousin Celia, disguised as the boy Aliena, and the nobleman Jaques, whom Rosalind teases for his somberness.

## → ***THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR***

The Merry Wives of Windsor is among the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies. Firmly English in its character and setting, it draws its inspiration from the popularity of Sir John Falstaff in Shakespeare's earlier history plays, Henry I V, Parts I and II, and from the body of folk tales and ribald fabliaux, popular in medieval and early modern England, that featured jealous husbands, wily wives, and lecherous and greedy old men. Falstaff, down on his luck, has been attempting to seduce both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, in order to gain access to their finances. Neither woman is impressed by his advances, which they regard as an assault on their honour, and together they concoct schemes to humiliate him in revenge. In Act 3, Scene III, Falstaff arrives for a supposed love-tryst with Mistress Ford. The two women have planned to trick him into thinking that Ford, known for his jealousy, is about to return home so that Falstaff will be forced into the trap they have set. The plan goes even better than the women could have hoped when Ford—who has earlier heard Falstaff bragging of his seduction attempt—arrives in person, but is unable to discover the secret. Mistress Ford is thus revenged not only on Falstaff and his dishonorable intentions, but also on her own distrustful

husband, who is shamefully forced to admit that he has done wrong in doubting her. The comic potential of the situation is further exploited by the presence of Mistress Page's husband, together with the comically accented French doctor Caius and Welsh cleric Evans, as witnesses to Ford's humiliation. In its tone, situations, breakneck pace, and the opportunities it offers for slapstick and physical humour, it is perhaps Shakespeare's most farce-like comedy. The *Merry Wives of Windsor*, written probably in 1599 but first published in 1602, is Shakespeare's only comedy of middle-class life. The "merry wives," Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, outwit Shakespeare's greatest comic invention, Sir John Falstaff, who had first appeared in *Henry I V*. Falstaff's unsuccessful efforts to seduce the two wives and their comic revenge upon him make up the main plot of the play. The comedy also includes the story of Anne Page, who is wooed by two inappropriate lovers, but who finally is united with Fenton, the man she loves. According to an early 18th-century tradition *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written at the request of Queen Elizabeth I, who wished to see "Falstaff in love" following his comic appearance in both of the *Henry IV* plays.



## → **TWELFTH NIGHT**

Twelfth Night is the most mature of Shakespeare's romantic comedies and one that recalls his own earlier plays. It was written probably in 1601 and was published for the first time in the Folio of 1623. We know it was performed in the winter of 1602 at the Middle Temple, one of London's law schools. It is a play of great emotional range, from farcical misunderstandings (based on a set of separated twins, as in *The Comedy of Errors*) to poignant moments in which a woman in disguise must serve the man she loves (as in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*). The play ends with lovers happily paired, but with the ambitious Malvolio isolated (like Jacques in *As You Like It* or Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*) and swearing to "be revenged upon the whole pack of you." The comedy may have been written specifically for presentation at a festival of Twelfth Night, which occurs 12 nights after Christmas Eve and was once a time for mirth and merrymaking, marking the end of the Christmas revels. The play's outrageous antics, especially for Sir Toby Belch, reflect in spirit the outrageous behavior permitted at Twelfth Night celebrations during the Middle Ages. Yet there is a darker side to Twelfth Night. Not only is Malvolio unreconciled to the community at the end, but Sir Andrew,

Antonio, and the clown, Feste, all stand apart from the final celebrations, and Feste's final song reminds the audience of how far our day-to-day world is from the idealization of comedy.

### ***PROBLEM COMEDIES***

Three plays—*All's Well That Ends Well*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Measure for Measure*—written soon after the mature comedies are usually called by modern critics “problem plays,” a term first coined for them in 1896. The problem comedies touch on complex and often unpleasant themes and contain characters whose moral flaws are graver and more difficult to change than the shortcomings of the characters in the farces or the joyous comedies. Little of the light-hearted humor of the earlier comedies, nor the easy satisfactions of their endings, appears in these plays. They are, however, emotionally rich and dramatically exciting, and have become increasingly successful on stage and stimulating to readers.

#### **→ *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL***

*All's Well That Ends Well*, written about 1603 but not published until the 1623 Folio, adheres to the conventional pattern for comedy, as its title promises, ending with the reunion of a separated couple. But the reunion is deeply

troubled and troubling. The callow, cowardly, and ungenerous Bertram is finally successfully paired with Helena, but they have reached that point through a process that has humiliated each. He immediately flees to Italy, and she must trick him to consummate the marriage. At the end they accept each other, but the ending is appropriately hedged with conditionals: "All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,/ The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet." The stability of even this muted resolution is itself unsettled by the King's offer to Diana, a young woman Bertram has tried to seduce, to choose a husband for herself. At best this offer reveals how little the King has learned and at worst it threatens to start the dispiriting action all over again.

### **→ *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA***

Against the backdrop of the Trojan War, Prince Troilus has become infatuated with Cressida. The young woman is niece to Pandarus, one of the lords whom Troilus knows well from the battlefield. Cressida has long admired Troilus but has been wary of showing her affection. However, when Pandarus steps in and arranges a secret tryst between the pair, she consents. As Act 3, Scene II of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* begins, Pandarus awaits the arrival of

Troilus, who is eagerly anticipating his meeting with Cressida. Pandarus fetches her in and fusses around the pair, making preparations for their night together. The play is complex —critics have long argued over its genre, whether it is tragedy, comedy, or something different —and this scene demonstrates some of its ambiguity. Although on the surface the action is that of a romantic union, the talk is more of fear, falsehood, folly, doubt, and shame, than of love. Moreover, the presence of Pandarus undercuts any illusion that this is an idyllic, generous-spirited loveaffair, despite Troilus’s apparent concern with integrity, truth, and constancy. As the young couple walk in together to the bedchamber prepared for them, Pandarus joins their hands to seal the “bargain” of their love: instead of a priest to join them in the mutual service of marriage, they have only a businesslike “pander”, or pimp, able to guarantee only temporal concerns. Critics always have had trouble classifying Troilus and Cressida (written about 1602) as a tragedy, a history, or a comedy. In many ways it qualifies as all three, and its earliest readers did not seem to know what kind of play it was. The editors of the First Folio placed the play at the beginning of the section of tragedies; the 1609 quarto titles the play *The Famous Historie of Troylus and Cresesid*; and the prefatory note in

that edition considers the play one of Shakespeare's comedies and worthy of comparison with the best of the classical comic playwrights. Some critics believe that Troilus somewhat resembles the satiric comedy in fashion at the time it was written. The play has two plots. The first, a dramatic version of the siege of Troy by Greek armies during the Trojan War, and the second, which gives the play its name, a rendering of the medieval legend of the doomed love between Troilus, son of the king of Troy, and Cressida, daughter of a Trojan priest who defects to the Greek side during the war. The legend inspired a number of other works, including the tragic poem Troilus and Criseyde (1385?) by Geoffrey Chaucer. Shakespeare's play, however, brilliantly combines the two plots in a withering exploration of the realities of both chivalric honor and romantic love.

### **→ *MEASURE FOR MEASURE***

Sex, death, and justice are the central concerns of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. The Duke of Vienna has disguised himself as a friar so that he can move freely among his subjects, leaving the severe Angelo as acting head of state. Angelo begins to act upon the harsh laws that govern moral purity in Vienna, which the Duke had left

unregarded. Claudio, now sentenced to death for having gotten his fiancée, Julia, pregnant, waits in jail, hoping that his religious sister Isabella's attempt to plead for his pardon will succeed. In Act III, Scene 1, the Friar-Duke is speaking with Claudio when Isabella arrives to tell her brother of Angelo's offer of mercy: if Isabella will consent to sleep with Angelo, Claudio will be freed. Claudio, fearing death, begs her to give up her virginity; Isabella, proud of her virtue and fearing eternal punishment, urges him to die with honour. Their conflict, passionately argued, throws the issues at stake into a sharper relief than any rhetorical debate between Flesh and Spirit, and the straining of the brother-sister bond between them makes the scene painful to watch; there appears to be no possible solution. Only the intervention of the Duke prevents a total estrangement of the pair, though his remedy—that Angelo's abandoned wife stand in for Isabella in the device of the bed-trick—is in itself morally perplexing. In this, the scene mirrors the play as a whole: even once the Duke has returned to government at the close of the play, and provided formal resolution by uniting the various couples, the questions that have been raised throughout Measure for Measure remain unanswered. What are the essential differences between love and lust,

sex and marriage? And which is it more important to maintain: law or liberty, innocence or life? Measure for Measure (written about 1604 but not printed until the 1623 Folio) raises complex questions about sex, marriage, identity, and justice but does not offer the comfort of easy solutions. Like the other problem plays, it stretches the normal limits of the comic form. In the play the Duke of Vienna sets out in disguise to test the virtue of his unruly subjects, and leaves a harsh deputy, Angelo, in charge. Although the deputy reveals himself a hypocrite and couples are successfully united at the end, the questions that the play raises remain unanswered. At the very end Isabella remains silent at the Duke's proposal of marriage, leaving open the question of whether she is overcome with joy or with horror, whether the proposal promises future happiness or a mere recapitulation of Angelo's earlier intimidations. The play's most likely source was *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), a twopart play by English author George Whetstone. Shakespeare's additions and 36 changes, however, create a far more disturbing play, which increasingly has found enthusiasm from critics and audiences in its anticipation of modern questionings: Can one find a middle ground between law and liberty? Is sexual desire constructive or

transgressive (an overstepping of proper limits)? Can morality be legislated?

→ **Shakespeare's Historical Plays**

The historical plays were immensely popular in Elizabethan England. They reflected the spirit of the age. The people were intensely patriotic and were very proud of the achievements of their ancestors or the foreign fields. The newly awakened spirit of patriotism and nationalism enables the people to take keen interest in the records of bygone struggle against foreign invasion and civil disunion. Shakespeare's historical plays span a period of 350 years of English history, from 1200 to 1550. His famous historical plays are Henry VI, Parts I, II & III, Richard II, Richard III, King John, Henry IV, Parts I & II and Henry V. Shakespeare's historical plays are suffused with the spirit of patriotism. They show his love for authority and discipline. He considers law and authority necessary for civilized life, he fears disorder for it leads to chaos.

History plays, sometimes known as chronicle plays (after the "chronicles" from which the plots were taken), were a highly popular form of drama in Shakespeare's time. By 1623, every English monarch from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth I had been represented in a play, as the English past served as an important repository of plots for the dramatists of the burgeoning



theater industry of Elizabethan England. The plays not only offered entertainment but also served many people as an important source of information about the nation's past. In 1612 English dramatist Thomas Heywood claimed that such plays "instructed such as cannot read in the discovery of all our English Chronicles."

The Elizabethans considered history instructive but did not always agree on the particular lessons it taught. Sometimes history was thought to be a branch of theology, the record of God's providential guidance of events, and sometimes it was seen solely as the record of human motives and actions. Sometimes history was valued because it was an accurate record of the past, and sometimes because it provided examples of behavior to be imitated or avoided. History plays became increasingly popular after 1588 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, so clearly the interest in English history reflected a growing patriotic consciousness.

The history plays, written between 1590 and 1613, are based on Holinshed's *Chronicles of England*. They are reflections on the dangers of Shakespeare's own time and products of the sense of nationhood to which England's history and astonishing rise in the world had led. When he began these plays, Elizabeth's reign was drawing to a close; the question of her succession was unclear; a recurrence of civil war did not

seem unlikely. Political advice offered by her subjects was something Elizabeth did not appreciate, so plays set in the past were a useful medium for a playwright concerned about the ambitious nation's future. The breakdown of civil society, the terrors of civil war caused by rivalry for the throne, or by the brutality, vice or weakness of the monarch are dominant themes. The attributes of good rule are presented directly or indirectly: it is a leitmotif that without the loyalty of the subjects, there can be no government, and that furthermore that loyalty must be earned by the sovereign through wise leadership carried out for the good of the nation. These lessons emerge from the history plays through elements of extravagant melodrama, hilarious comedy, exquisite 19 poetry and stark tragedy. That the transition of 1603 from the last of the Tudors to the first Stuart king from Scotland was so unexpectedly peaceful may well have increased the popularity of these plays. Among the most interesting are Henry IV, Richard II, King John.

Shakespeare wrote ten plays listed in the 1623 Folio as histories and differentiated from the other categories, comedies and tragedies, by their common origin in English history. Eight of Shakespeare's history plays recreate the period in English history from 1399, when King Henry IV took the throne after deposing King Richard II, to the defeat of Richard III in battle in 1485. Henry IV was the first English king from the house of

Lancaster. The history plays cover the conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York, known as the Wars of the Roses, from 1455 to 1485. The final event is the victory of Henry VII over Richard III in 1485, ending the rule of the York dynasty and beginning the Tudor dynasty. The eight plays devoted to this period, listed in the chronological order of the kings with the dates of their composition in parentheses, are Richard II (1597); Henry IV, Parts I and II (1597); Henry V (1598); Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III (1590-1592); and Richard III (1592-1593). As their dates indicate, Shakespeare did not write the plays in chronological order. He wrote the second half of the story first, and only later returned to the events that initiated the political problems.

The two remaining Shakespeare history plays are King John (1596) and Henry VIII (1613). King John, beginning soon after John's coronation in 1199, was seemingly reworked from an anonymous, older play on the same subject. It treats the English king's failed effort to resist the power of the pope, a theme of obvious relevance in England after the Protestant Reformation. Henry VIII, probably co-written with English dramatist John Fletcher, is a loosely connected pageant of events in Henry's reign, ending with the prophecy of the birth of Elizabeth and her succession by King James.

Shakespeare's main sources for the events of the history plays were the Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1577; 2nd ed. 1586, which Shakespeare used) by Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall's Chronicle (1542). Although Shakespeare took situations from these and a few other historical sources, he selected only such facts as suited his dramatic purposes. Sometimes he ignored chronology and telescoped the events of years to fit his own dramatic time scheme. Above all, he used the power of his imagination and language to mold vivid and memorable characters out of the historical figures he found in his sources.

The overall theme of the history plays is the importance of a stable political order, but also the heavy moral and emotional price that often must be paid for it. Shakespeare dramatized the great social upheaval that followed Henry IV's usurpation of the throne until the first Tudor king, Queen Elizabeth's grandfather, restored peace and stability. In addition to chronicling the often violent careers of England's great kings, Shakespeare's history plays explore the extreme pressures of public life, the moral conflicts that kings and queens uniquely face, and the potential tragedy of monarchy.

## ***EARLY HISTORIES***

The four plays that dramatize the Wars of the Roses, the turbulent period from 1422 to 1485, are possibly Shakespeare's earliest dramatic works. These plays, Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III and Richard III, deal with disorder resulting from weak leadership and from national disunity fostered for selfish ends. Richard III, however, closes triumphantly with the death of Richard and the ascent to the throne of Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty and grandfather of Queen Elizabeth.

### **→ *HENRY VI***

Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III, chronicle the troubled reign of Henry VI, during which time England is reduced from a position of influence and status within Western Europe, earned by his father, Henry V, to a state that is all but torn apart by civil war. A pious man but not a gifted ruler, Henry VI was beset by opposition from the House of York, culminating in the Wars of the Roses, which disturbed English soil for 30 years. In Part III, Act 2, Scene V, Shakespeare poignantly illustrates the personal torment that inevitably arises from the public conflict of civil war: the upsetting of the order of the state has upset the natural order of kinship, so that father is set against son, and son against

father, in a war that “profits nobody”. The despairing Henry is powerless to do anything but sit by and lament as he observes the tragic grief of men whom, as king, he should have had the authority and ability to lead and protect, as a shepherd does his flock. The three parts of Henry VI chronicle the troubled reign of that king, from the death of his father in 1422 to his own death in 1471. During that time England was all but torn apart by civil strife following the death of Henry V. Part I deals with wars in France, including combat with Joan of Arc, and had early success on stage, performed 15 times in 1592 alone. Parts II and III, revealing Henry VI as a weak and ineffectual king, treat England after it has lost its possessions in France and factionalism at home erupts into full-fledged civil war. Today, the Henry VI plays, if staged at all, are likely to be seen in condensed adaptations or confluations (combination of parts) as in English director John Barton’s Wars of the Roses in 1963 at Stratford-upon-Avon.

### **→ RICHARD III**

Richard III begins where Henry VI, Part III leaves off and completes the sequence begun with the Henry VI plays. It presents a fictionalized account of Richard III’s rise and fall,

from the time he gains the crown through murder and treachery to his death at the Battle of Bosworth Field, which ends the Wars of the Roses and brings the Tudor dynasty to power. The story of Richard's rise and fall derives from an account by English statesman Thomas More, written about 1513. As presented by Shakespeare, Richard is an eloquent, intelligent man, who is morally and physically deformed. Richard dominates the stage with a combination of wit and wickedness that has fascinated audiences and made the part a popular one among actors.

### ***LATER HISTORIES***

Shakespeare wrote his most important history plays in the period from 1596 to 1598, plays that reveal both his dramatic mastery and his deep understanding of politics and history. The so-called second tetralogy (four related works), consisting of Richard II, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V, encompass the 23 years immediately prior to those portrayed in the Henry VI plays. The last three plays of the second tetralogy constitute Shakespeare's supreme achievement in writing histories, focusing on the development of Prince Hal (in the two parts of Henry IV) into England's greatest medieval hero—King Henry V.

## → **RICHARD II**

In 1601, on the day before beginning his unsuccessful revolt against Queen Elizabeth I, the earl of Essex commissioned a group of actors to perform a play about Richard II at the Globe Theatre, believed by many critics to have been Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The performance was controversial, since Elizabeth disliked any connection made between herself and the earlier monarch, who had come to a tragic end. In 1599 the archbishop of Canterbury, acting on her behalf, had ordered the destruction of a book concerning King Richard and Henry Bolingbroke, who had taken over Richard's throne to become Henry IV: the book had borne a dedication to Essex and the potential for comparison was deemed too dangerous. It is thought unlikely, however, that Shakespeare had any such direct political purpose in mind, and the actors who undertook the 1601 performance were not punished along with the conspirators. In one of the contentious episodes, Act 4, Scene I, Richard, resigned to his fate, sends news of his abdication of the throne to his stronger opponent, Bolingbroke, and those assembled with him. The bishop of Carlisle, who voices opposition, is silenced and arrested for treason, just before Richard arrives to hand over the crown. Although self-indulgent, Richard's



melancholy is poignantly expressed, and while the forceful, plain-speaking Bolingbroke seems a more natural leader, the contrasting presentation of the pair is not entirely unsympathetic to Richard's plight.

Richard II is a study of a sensitive, self-dramatizing, ineffective but sympathetic monarch who loses his kingdom to his forceful successor, Henry I V. As a model for this play Shakespeare relied heavily on Marlowe's chronicle play Edward II (1592) with its focus on a personality ill-suited for the demands of rule. The play was a success on stage and in the bookstalls, but until 1608 the scene of Richard relinquishing his crown to Henry Bolingbroke, in Act 4, was omitted from the printed versions because it portrayed the overthrow of a monarch.

### **→ HENRY IV**

Henry IV, Parts I and II, continue the quartet of history plays begun with Richard II and ending with Henry V. In the Henry IV plays, however, Shakespeare makes much use of comedy, particularly in the portrayal of Sir John Falstaff, to provide light relief and to offer parallels to, and a level of commentary on, the main plot. In Richard II, King Henry IV had usurped the throne from Richard; in Henry IV, Part I, he

finds himself facing rebellion from both his subjects and his own son and heir, Prince Hal. Hal is the real focus of the plays: together they trace his development from a seemingly wayward youth, enjoying the company and influence of an ignoble fatherfigure, Falstaff, to the loyal son and future king who will prove triumphant in Henry V. The first scene presented here, taken from Part I, shows Hal idling with Falstaff and his friends; yet even though he agrees to join in their plan to commit a robbery, his final speech begins to set the stage for the transformation that is to come. The second scene, the deathbed scene from Part II, movingly portrays the moment at which Hal is reconciled to his true father, and takes up his destiny: the crown of England. In the two parts of Henry IV, Henry recognizes his own guilt for usurping the throne from Richard and finds himself facing rebellion from the very families that had helped him to the throne. His son, Prince Hal, is, however, in many ways the focus of the plays, which trace the prince's development from a seemingly wayward youth, enjoying the company and influence of the fat knight Falstaff and other drinking cronies, to the future king who proves triumphant in the play Henry V. Many critics consider Henry IV, Part I to be the most entertaining and dramatic of the Henry plays with its struggle between King

Henry and his rebellious nobles, led by the volatile Hotspur. The king's fears for his son prove unfounded when Prince Hal leaves the tavern to take his place on the battlefield, where his defeat of Hotspur in combat proves his readiness to assume the burdens of rule. Shakespeare makes much use of comedy in the plays, particularly in the portrayal of the fat knight Falstaff, whose irrepressible wit has long been the major source of the plays' remarkable popularity. The comedy, however, neither dominates nor is subordinated to the historical plot, but is brilliantly intermingled with it, commenting often witheringly on its actions and values. At the same time the comedy insists that history is something more spacious than a mere record of aristocratic men and motives.

### **→ HENRY V**

Henry V was the last history play that Shakespeare wrote, until he returned to the genre with his collaboration on Henry VIII late in his career. Henry V celebrates the great military and political achievements of the king in his victories over France, but also allows other angles of vision upon his accomplishments that may well raise doubts about their moral cost. While the Chorus speaks the lofty rhetoric of

heroic idealization, the comic plot reveals a world of baser motive, which parallels and comments on the historical action. *Henry V* may well have been the first play performed at the Globe Theatre in the summer of 1599. In the history play *Henry V*, Shakespeare's rhetoric successfully creates a heroic vision of the English king and his people in their fight against the French. The use of a formal chorus, as here at the beginning of Act 3, further emphasizes the epic thrust of the play. Patriotic—almost jingoistic—in sentiment, the play has become a symbol of popular nationalism, and was famously presented in this manner in the classic 1944 film by Laurence Olivier, during World War II. In Act 3, Scene 1, Henry delivers a rousing speech to rally his troops in readiness for the battle at Agincourt; the time has come for bravery: "The game's afoot!" British actors Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson share a scene in the 1989 film *Henry V*, which Branagh also directed. After defeating French forces at the battle of Agincourt, Henry, who speaks no French, courts French princess Katherine, who speaks no English.

→ **Shakespearean Tragedy**

Shakespeare's tragedies are among the most powerful studies of human nature in all literature and appropriately stand

as the greatest achievements of his dramatic artistry. Attention understandably has focused on his unforgettable tragic characters, such as Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. Yet the plays also explore and extend the very nature of tragedy itself by discovering within it a structure that derives meaning precisely from its refusal to offer consolation or compensation for the suffering it traces.

The tragedies are generally regarded as Shakespeare's supreme achievement. Many of the main figures are kings and queens, as in Greek tragedy, or at least patricians - ordinary citizens are not yet considered appropriate vehicles for edification. Despite the upsurge of national pride evident in the history plays, there is only one Scot (in Macbeth) and one Briton (in King Lear) among the main figures: the others are Danes (in Hamlet), an Egyptian (in Anthony and Cleopatra), a Moor (in Othello), Romans (in Julius Caesar), Venetians, Veronese (in Romeo and Juliet). However, we do not remember Hamlet because he is a Dane, or a king's son, but because of his personality. During the Tudor age the fate of the nation depended to a greater extent than in medieval times on the personal character of the rulers; it is therefore not surprising that drama produced the greatest literary individuals the stage had ever seen. The tragic fate of these individuals is not caused by external forces outside their control but is of their own making:

their downfall is caused by specific features of character or weaknesses exposed under exceptional circumstances. The tumultuous nature of his time had made Shakespeare acutely aware of the precariousness of fortune and how quickly the veneer of civilisation could disintegrate under adverse conditions. He has given us character studies of extraordinary psychological depth of men and women struggling in vain to extricate themselves from the traps and nets of their passions, their blindness, or even their self-awareness. For four hundred years his works have fascinated readers the world over, perhaps more so than ever before in our century with its unmatched progress, hubris and barbarism.

### ***EARLY TRAGEDIES***

Shakespeare wrote his first tragedies in 1594 and 1595. But he left the field of tragedy untouched for at least five years after finishing *Romeo and Juliet*, probably in 1595, and turned to comedy and history plays. *Julius Caesar*, written about 1599, served as a link between the history plays and the mature tragedies that followed.

#### **→ *TITUS ANDRONICUS***

*Titus Andronicus*, thought to have been Shakespeare's first tragedy, moves at a frantic pace through successive sensational episodes of violence and revenge. Returning

from war against the Goths, the Roman general Titus sacrifices Alarbus, son of Empress Tamora of the Goths, in honour of the death of his own sons during the campaign. The sacrifice, together with Titus's involvement in the selection of the new emperor of Rome, triggers a chain of violent acts that does not cease until both families have been slaughtered. At the conclusion of the play, only Lucius, Titus's one remaining son, is left to bring about a restoration of order. At the point that has been reached in Act 3, Scene i, Titus is pleading in vain with the Roman tribunes to free two of his sons, who have been wrongly accused and sentenced to death for the murder of their brother-in-law. Titus's misery is compounded by the arrival of his brother Marcus, who has found Titus's daughter, Lavinia, raped and mutilated—her tongue and hands cut off so that she cannot identify her attackers. Titus is then tricked into cutting off his own hand by Aaron, Tamora's lover, who convinces him that it is the only way to save his sons. The horrifying scene reaches its climax when the hand, together with the heads of the young men, is delivered back to Titus, leaving him hysterical, and vowing revenge. The bloody violence in the play reaches outrageous, even ridiculous, extremes—yet there is dignity in the verse with which Titus, Marcus, and

Lucius express the depth of their grief. The earliest tragedy attributed to Shakespeare is Titus Andronicus (published in 1594). In its treatment of murder, mutilation, and bloody revenge, the play is characteristic of many popular tragedies of the Elizabethan period (see Revenge Tragedy). The structure of a spectacular revenge for earlier heinous and bloody acts, all of which are staged in sensational detail, derives from Roman dramatist Seneca. It probably reached Shakespeare by way of Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1589). Shakespeare's gory tragedy proved highly successful in Shakespeare's time. But later audiences found the violent excesses of Titus Andronicus absurd or disgusting, and only recently has the play's theatrical power been rediscovered. From the 1960s on, many directors and critics have recognized in the play's daring exploration of violence concerns that go beyond the merely sensationalistic to address some of the deepest fears and 43 preoccupations of the modern world.

### **→ *ROMEO AND JULIET***

In the famous balcony scene from the tragedy Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare, Juliet Capulet emerges from her bedroom to muse upon the young man she has just met



and fallen in love with, Romeo Montague. He, much taken with her, overhears her thoughts with pleasure while hidden below. A longstanding feud between the Capulets and Montagues keeps the young lovers apart. *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) is justly famous for its poetic treatment of the ecstasy of youthful love. The play dramatizes the fate of two lovers victimized by the feuds and misunderstandings of their elders and by their own hasty temperaments. Shakespeare borrowed the tragic story of the two young Italian lovers from a long narrative poem, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) by English writer Arthur Brooke. Shakespeare, however, added the character of Mercutio, increased the roles of the friar and the nurse, and reduced the moralizing of Brooke's work. The play made an instant hit; four editions of the play were published before the 1623 Folio, demonstrating its popularity. The play continues to be widely read and performed today, and its story of innocent love destroyed by inherited hatred has seen numerous reworkings, as, for example, in the musical *West Side Story* (1957) by American composer Leonard Bernstein. The balcony scene (Act 2, Scene II) from *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the best-known scenes in Shakespeare's plays, and is almost certainly the most frequently parodied. Juliet's line

“O Romeo, Romeo!— wherefore art thou Romeo?” is perhaps as well known as Hamlet’s famous question, “To be or not to be...?”, but is often misunderstood. Romeo, having fallen for Juliet at a party he gatecrashed, has made his way to her window to woo her. There he overhears her talking aloud of her own love for him, and her concern about the fact that he is a Montague, born of a family that are enemies to her own household: “wherefore”, or “why”, she asks herself, could he not have been born with any other name? The celestial imagery that Romeo uses to describe Juliet, and her use of beautiful images from nature — a rose, the sea — develop a richly romantic atmosphere. However, at the same time, Juliet’s concern for the danger facing Romeo should he be found, and the interruptions of the nurse, who almost discovers their secret meeting, build up dramatic tension, foreshadowing the tragedy that will eventually engulf these “star-crossed lovers”.

### **→ JULIUS CAESAR**

The great English dramatist William Shakespeare showed his mastery of the art of rhetoric in this excerpt from *Julius Caesar* (1599). The scene, the funeral of Roman ruler Julius Caesar, opens with a well-received speech by Marcus

Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins. Brutus, who was highly respected by the people of Rome, argues that Caesar had become overly ambitious. Here, Roman statesman Mark Antony replies with a virtuoso address that turns the crowd against Brutus, but leaves the impression that Antony is a noble bystander, rather than a cunning agitator. *Julius Caesar* was written about 1599 and first published in 1623. Though a serious tragedy of political rivalries, it is less intense in style than the tragic dramas that followed it. Shakespeare based this political tragedy concerning the plot to overthrow Julius Caesar on *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by 1st-century Greek biographer Plutarch. Plutarch's *Lives* had first appeared in English in 1579, in a version produced by Thomas North from a French translation of the original. The North translation provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with a great deal of historical material. Shakespeare followed Plutarch closely in *Julius Caesar*; little of incident or character appears in the play that is not found in the *Lives* as well, and he sometimes used North's wording. Shakespeare's play centers on the issue of whether the conspirators were justified in killing Caesar. How a production answers that question determines

whether the conspirator Brutus is seen as sympathetic or tragically self-deceived.

### ***MATURE TRAGEDIES***

Since first performed in the early 1600s, the title role in William Shakespeare's Hamlet has remained a favorite of many actors because of the emotional complexity of Hamlet's personality. Nowhere is this complexity more apparent than in Hamlet's famous soliloquy in Act III, Scene 1. The soliloquy is a monologue in which a character reveals inner thoughts, motivations, and feelings. Shakespeare used the technique often, and his soliloquies are poetic and rich in imagery. In Hamlet, a play about a man whose mind may be his fatal flaw, the form reaches its highest level.

The tragedies Shakespeare wrote after 1600 are considered the most profound of his works and constitute the pillars upon which his literary reputation rests. Some scholars have tied the darkening of his dramatic imagination in this period to the death of his son in 1601. But in the absence of any compelling biographical information to support this theory, it remains only a speculation. For whatever reason, sometime around 1600 Shakespeare began work on a series of plays that in their power and profundity are arguably unmatched in the achievement of any other writer.

## → **HAMLET**

Hamlet, written about 1601 and first printed in 1603, is perhaps Shakespeare's most famous play. It exceeds by far most other tragedies of revenge in the power of its ethical and psychological imagining. The play is based on the story of Amleth, a 9th-century Danish prince, which Shakespeare encountered in a 16th-century French account by Francois Belleforest. Shakespeare's Hamlet tells the story of the prince's effort to revenge the murder of his father, who has been poisoned by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, the man who then becomes Hamlet's stepfather and the king. The prince alternates between rash action and delay that disgusts him, as he tries to enact the revenge his father's ghost has asked from him. The play ends in a spectacular scene of death: As Hamlet, his mother, his uncle, and Laertes (the lord chamberlain's son) all lie dead, the Norwegian prince Fortinbras marches in to claim the Danish throne. Hamlet is certainly Shakespeare's most intellectually engaging and elusive play. Literary critics and actors turn to it again and again, possibly succeeding only in confirming the play's inexhaustible richness and the inadequacy of any single attempt finally or fully to capture it.

At the opening of the drama, Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, has returned home after the death of his father, the king. Shortly after the funeral, Hamlet's mother remarried Hamlet's uncle Claudius, who succeeded his father on the throne. In the following scenes from the first act, Hamlet is visited by his father's ghost, which tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius. Hamlet then vows to avenge his father's death, and forces his friends Horatio and Marcellus to swear never to tell what they saw or heard that night. British actor Laurence Olivier played the title character in the Academy Award-winning motion picture *Hamlet* (1948), based on the play by William Shakespeare. Olivier is considered by many people to be one of the most famous stage and film actors in history. He produced, directed, and acted in a series of films based on plays by Shakespeare, including *Henry V* (1946), *Hamlet*, and *Richard III* (1962).

*Hamlet's Soliloquy, Act III* In this excerpt from the tragic play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, Hamlet reveals that his self-doubt and inability to avenge his father's death have led him to the brink of suicide. A British actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company recites the well-known soliloquy "To Be or Not to Be."

## **→ OTHELLO**

Othello was written about 1604, though it was not published until 1622. It portrays the growth of unjustified jealousy in the noble protagonist, Othello, a Moor serving as a general in the Venetian army. The innocent object of his jealousy is his wife, Desdemona. In this domestic tragedy, Othello's evil lieutenant Iago draws him into mistaken jealousy in order to ruin him. Othello is destroyed partly through his gullibility and willingness to trust Iago and partly through the manipulations of this villain, who clearly enjoys the exercise of evil-doing just as he hates the spectacle of goodness and happiness around him. At the end of the play, Othello comes to understand his terrible error; but as always in tragedy, that knowledge comes too late and he dies by his own hand in atonement for his error. In his final act of self-destruction, he becomes again and for a final time the defender of Venice and Venetian values.

## **→ KING LEAR**

King Lear was written about 1605 and first published in 1608. Conceived on a grander emotional and philosophic scale than Othello, it deals with the consequences of the arrogance and misjudgment of Lear, a ruler of early Britain,

and the parallel behavior of his councilor, the Duke of Gloucester. Each of these fathers tragically banishes the child who most has his interests at heart and places himself in the power of the wicked child or children. Each is finally restored to the loving child, but only after a rending journey of suffering, and each finally dies, having learned the truth about himself and the world, but too late to avert disaster. King Lear is arguably Shakespeare's most shocking play; the scenes of Lear with his dead child and of Gloucester having his eyes struck out are horrible images of the world's cruelty. But the 47 play offers moving if ineffective examples of love and compassion: Even if these emotions are incapable of redeeming this world, they are discovered as infinitely precious in their very defeat.

### **→ *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA***

Antony and Cleopatra was written about 1606 and first published in 1623. It deals with a different type of love than that in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies, namely the middle-aged passions of the Roman general Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Their love, which destroys an empire, is glorified by some of Shakespeare's most sensuous poetry. Antony and Cleopatra, like the other two



plays that close Shakespeare's tragic period—*Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*—depicts events from ancient history and draws on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. The action in the play shifts from Egypt to Rome to Greece and back to Egypt and includes a battle at sea. In the process the play contrasts the luxuriant atmosphere of Egypt with the strict military code of Rome, and the cold and calculating Roman general Octavius with the passionate but ill-advised Antony. The contrasts between Roman rigor and Egyptian luxury are at the heart of this play, which keeps them in provocative balance and offers "no midway/Twixt these extremes at all."

### → ***MACBETH***

*Macbeth* was written about 1606 and first published in 1623. In the play Shakespeare depicts the tragedy of a man torn between an amoral will and a powerfully moral intellect. *Macbeth* knows his actions are wrong but enacts his fearful deeds anyway, led on in part by the excitement of his own wrongdoing. In securing the Scottish throne, *Macbeth* deadens his moral intelligence to the point where he becomes capable of increasingly murderous (and pointless) behavior, although he never becomes the monster the moral

world sees. At all times he feels the pull of his humanity. Yet for Macbeth there is no redemption, only the sharp descent into a bleak pessimism. Human existence, as he sees it (or as he has made it, at least for himself), amounts to nothing:

«Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing». (Act V, scene 4)

Shakespeare's Macbeth is a study of the evil that is in every human heart, and of one man's downfall as he willfully gives way to its temptations. Returning from battle, Macbeth is greeted by three witches, who tell him that he will one day become king. As a reward for his military successes, he then receives the title of Thane of Cawdor from King Duncan, confirming part of the witches' prophecy. Once Macbeth arrives back at his estate, Lady Macbeth spurs her husband's ambition forward, and together they hatch a plan to kill the king and thereby hasten Macbeth's accession to the throne. In Act 2, Scene II, Lady Macbeth is waiting while

her husband carries out the murder. When he enters in disarray, the murder weapons still in his bloodstained hands, she takes it upon herself to frame Duncan's grooms for the killing, and to ensure that her husband's guilt is concealed. The Lady's purposeful activity provides a stark contrast to Macbeth's almost paralytic state as he becomes locked into an obsessive contemplation of the bloody deed. Lady Macbeth berates him for allowing such fearful imaginings to distract him, but to a 17th-century audience Macbeth's account of his inability to say "amen" to the grooms' prayer clearly illustrates the real peril of his soul. Transfixed by the horror of his crime and the power that it promises, he consciously rejects the possibility of repentance, salvation, and an eternal future for the man that he has been—he chooses to know himself no longer, but instead to "know" only the deed and the power it will bring, and so he becomes the very embodiment of his crime: the bloody, usurping tyrant. Ultimately Macbeth brings about his own downfall, deliberately yielding himself to the destiny suggested by his prophetic encounter with the witches — fleeting kingship and eternal damnation.

## → **CORIOLANUS**

In *Coriolanus* Shakespeare explores the conflicts between public and private life, between personal needs and those of the community, and between the pressures of individual honour and family ties. Previously a respected Roman general, Coriolanus has been banished from the city as a result of political unrest within the state. To satisfy his desire for vengeance against those he feels have betrayed him, he has joined with his former enemy, the Volscian leader Tullus Aufidius, and is preparing to fight against Rome. Coriolanus rejects the pleas of friends sent from Rome to persuade him to change his course of action, and believes himself capable of operating independently of and unaffected by others. However, in Act 5, Scene 3, his mother, wife, and young son are sent to plead with him on behalf of Rome, and Coriolanus's pride is finally overcome, ultimately leading to his downfall. Shakespeare's last tragedies, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*, both set in classical times, were written in 1607 and 1608 and first published in the 1623 Folio. Because their protagonists appear to lack the emotional greatness or tragic stature of the protagonists of the major tragedies, the two plays have an austerity that has cost them the popularity they may well merit. In *Coriolanus*

Shakespeare adapts Plutarch's account of the legendary Roman hero Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus to the tragedy of a man who is arrogant and rigid, even in his virtue "too noble for the world." If Coriolanus in his integrity refuses to curry favor with the populace, he also reveals his contempt for the citizenry. The isolating pride of this great but flawed individual prevents him from finding any comfortable place in the community. Finally, he is banished from Rome, and he seeks revenge against the city. Eventually his wife, mother, and young son are sent to plead with him to spare Rome, an action that reveals the relatedness to his others he would deny. The play powerfully explores the conflicts between public and private life, between personal needs and those of the community, and between the pressures of individual honor and family ties and national ties.

### **→ *TIMON OF ATHENS***

Timon of Athens, written about 1608 and first published in the 1623 Folio, is a bitter play about a character who reacts to the ingratitude he discovers by hating all of humanity. Through his generosity to friends and flatterers, Timon bankrupts himself and then finds these same people unwilling to assist him in his poverty. His withering

misanthropy follows. As in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores the relationships between financial ties and ties of friendship. Shakespeare probably found some of the material for his play in Plutarch's *Lives*, where anecdotes about Timon appear in the life of Marc Antony and the life of the Greek politician and general Alcibiades. He perhaps also found material in a dialogue, *Timon, the Man-Hater*, by the Greek writer Lucian, which had been adapted into an anonymous English play, *Timon*, and probably performed around 1602 in one of the London law schools, known as Inns of Court.

- *The main **characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy** are as follows:*

i) **Tragic Hero:** Shakespearean tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero or the protagonist. It is, indeed, a tale of suffering and calamity resulting in the death of the hero. It is concerned always with persons of high degree, often with Kings or princes or with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus and Antony. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not only great men, they also suffer greatly, their calamity and suffering are exceptional. The sufferings and calamities of an ordinary man are not worthy of note, as they affect his own life. The story of the prince like Hamlet, or the King like Lear, or the generals

like Macbeth or Othello has a greatness and dignity of its own. His fate affects the fate of a whole nation or empire. When he falls from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast of the powerlessness of man. His fall creates cathartic effects on the audience.

Shakespeare's tragic hero is endowed with noble qualities of head and heart. He is built on a grand scale. For instance, Macbeth has —vaulting ambition, Hamlet noble inaction, Othello credulity and rashness in action, and Lear the folly and incapacity to judge human character. Owing to this —fatal flaw the hero falls from a state of prosperity and greatness into adversity and unhappiness, and ultimately dies.

ii) **Tragic Waste:** In Shakespearean tragedy we find the element of tragic waste. All exceptional qualities of the protagonist are wasted. At the end of the tragedy, the Evil does not triumph. It is expelled but at the cost of much that is good and admirable. The fall of Macbeth does not only mean the death of evil in him, but also the waste of much that is essentially good and noble. In Hamlet and King Lear the good is also destroyed along with the evil. There is no tragedy in the expulsion of evil, the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good.

iii) **Fate and Character:** The actions of the protagonist are of great importance as they lead to his death. What we do feel

strongly as the tragedy advances to its close is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and that the main source of these deeds is character. But to call Shakespearean tragedy the story of human character is not the entire truth. Shakespeare's tragedies, as Nicoll points out are —tragedies of character and destiny. There is a tragic relationship between the hero and his environment. A. C. Bradley also points out that with Shakespeare —character is destiny is an exaggeration of a vital truth. Fate or destiny places the protagonist in just those circumstances and situations with which he is incapable of dealing. The flaw in the character of the protagonist proves fatal for him in the peculiar circumstances in which cruel Destiny has placed him. The essence of Shakespearean tragedy, therefore, is that Fate presents a problem which is difficult for the particular hero at a time when he is least fitted to tackle it. The tragic relationship between the hero and his surroundings is a significant factor in Shakespearean tragedy. So, both character and destiny are responsible for the hero's tragic end.

iv) **Abnormal Psychology:** Some abnormal conditions of mind as insanity, somnambulism and hallucinations affect human deeds. Lear and Ophelia become victims of insanity. Lady Macbeth suffers from somnambulism and her husband Macbeth from hallucinations.



v) **The Supernatural Element:** The supernatural agency plays a vital role in Shakespearean tragedy. It influences the thoughts and deeds of the hero. In the age of Shakespeare ghosts and witches were believed to be far more real than they are today. It is the supernatural agency that gives the sense of failure in Brutus, to the half formed thoughts of guilt in Macbeth and to suspicion in Hamlet. Supernatural agency has no power to influence events unless by influencing persons

vi) **Chance:** In most of Shakespeare's tragedies chance or accident exerts an appreciable influence at some point in the action. For instance it may be called an accident the pirate ship attacked Hamlet's ship, so that he was able to return forthwith to Denmark; Desdemona drops her handkerchief at the most fatal of moments; Edgar arrives in the prison just too late to save Cordelia's life.

vii) **Conflict:** Conflict is an important element in Shakespearean tragedy. According to Aristotle it is the soul of tragedy. This conflict may arise between two persons, e.g. the hero and the villain, or between two rival parties or groups in one of which the hero is the leading figure. This is called the external conflict. In Macbeth the hero and the heroine are opposed to King Duncan. There is also an —inner conflict, an inward struggle, in the mind of the hero and, it is this inner conflict which is of far greater importance in the case of the Shakespearean tragedy.

In it there is invariably such as inner conflict in the mind of one or more of the characters. In Macbeth, according to Bradley, we find that —treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm: here is the outward conflict. But these powers and principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth of himself; here is the inner. ||

viii) **Catharsis:** Shakespearean tragedy is cathartic. It has the power of purging and thus easing us of some of the pain and suffering which is the lot of us all in the world. Compared to the exceptionally tragic life of the hero before our eyes, our own sufferings begin to appear to us little and insignificant. In a Shakespearean tragedy the spectacle of the hero's sufferings is terrible and it arouses the emotions of pity and terror. It is truly cathartic, as it purges the audience of the emotions of self-pity and terror.

ix) **No Poetic Justice:** Shakespearean tragedy is true to life. So, it excludes —poetic justice which is in flagrant and obvious contradiction of the facts of life. Although villainy is never ultimately triumphant in Shakespearean tragedy, there is yet an idea that the fortunes of the persons should correspond to their deserts and dooms. We feel that Lear ought to suffer for his folly and for his unjust treatment of Cordelia, but his sufferings are out of all proportion to his misdeeds. In Shakespearean tragedy we find that the doer must suffer. We also find that villainy never

remains victorious and prosperous at the end. Nemesis overtakes Macbeth and all evil characters in Shakespearean tragedy.

x) **Moral Vision:** Shakespearean tragedy is not depressing. It elevates, exalts and ennobles us. Shakespeare shows in his tragedies that man's destiny is always determined to a great extent by his own character. He is an architect of his own fate. It always reveals the dignity of man and of human endeavour over the power of evil, which is ultimately defeated. Shakespearean tragedy ends with the restoration of the power of the good.

### → **Shakespeare's Last Plays**

Toward the end of his career, Shakespeare created several experimental plays that have become known as tragicomedies or romances. These plays differ considerably from Shakespeare's earlier comedies, being more radical in their dramatic art and showing greater concern with reconciliation among generations. Yet like the earlier comedies the tragicomedies end happily with reunions or renewal. Typically, virtue is sorely tested in the tragicomedies, but almost miraculously succeeds. Through the intervention of magic and art—or their emotional equivalent, compassion, or their theological equivalent, grace—the spectacular triumph of virtue that marks the ends of these plays suggests redemptive hope

for the human condition. In these late plays, the necessity of death and sadness in human existence is recognized but located within larger patterns of harmony that suggest we are “led on by heaven, and crowned with joy at last,” as the epilogue of *Pericles* proposes.

Shakespeare’s last plays known as dramatic romances form a class apart. His last four plays – *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* are neither comedies nor tragedies. All of them end happily but all fetch happiness to shore out of shipwreck and suffering. These last plays have a lot in common. It is appropriate to call them —dramatic romances or tragicomedies. They contain incidents which are undoubtedly tragic but they end happily. Shakespeare’s last plays breathe a spirit of philosophic calm. They are stories of restoration, reconciliation, moral resurrection and regeneration.

### → ***PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE***

*Pericles* exists only in a somewhat corrupted text, an unauthorized version probably “pirated” by Shakespeare’s contemporaries—created from notes taken during performances and published in order to capitalize on its great popularity. The play is also thought by critics to have originally been a collaborative effort between Shakespeare and another author. Its central themes, however, are

characteristic of the tragicomic romances of Shakespeare's late period. As in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, the play focuses particularly on the relationship between father and daughter. Its backdrop of the sea further recalling the exotic atmosphere of *The Tempest*, while its concern with separation and reunion is reminiscent of Leontes' estrangement from and reconciliation with his wife and daughter in *The Winter's Tale*—although, unlike Leontes, Pericles is innocent of any blame for the separation. Here, in Act 5, Scene i, after a series of adventures, King Pericles, believing his wife and daughter to be dead, has fallen into a deep depression and has not spoken for three months. His ship comes to rest near Mytilene. There, he is welcomed by the governor, Lysimachus, who, hearing of the King's plight, introduces him to a girl whose beauty and virtue he believes may help to effect a cure. The cure is indeed successful, as the girl is discovered to be Pericles' long-lost daughter Marina. The romantic tragicomedy *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* was written in 1607 and 1608 and first published in 1609. It concerns the trials and tribulations of the title character, including the painful loss of his wife and the persecution of his daughter. After many exotic adventures, Pericles is reunited with his loved ones; even his supposedly dead wife

is discovered to have been magically preserved. The play's central themes are characteristic of the late plays. *Pericles* focuses particularly on the relationship between father and daughter, as do *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Its backdrop of the sea also recalls the setting of *The Tempest*, while its concern with separation and reunion is reminiscent of *The Winter's Tale*. However, *Pericles* is innocent of any blame for the disruption of his family, unlike Leontes's estrangement from his wife and daughter in *The Winter's Tale*. Although *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* was a great success in its own time, the play exists only in a somewhat corrupted text. It did not appear in the First Folio, and critics have long debated how much of it Shakespeare actually wrote. Some believe the play was a collaborative effort between Shakespeare and another author, usually thought to be George Wilkins. *Pericles* is based on a medieval legend, *Apollonius, Prince of Tyre*, which had many English retellings, from *Confessio Amantis* (*Confessions of a Poet*) by John Gower in the late 14th century to a prose novella by Laurence Twine written in the 1570s.

## → **CYMBELINE**

Cymbeline was written about 1610 and first published in the 1623 Folio, where it appears as the last of the tragedies. Like the other late plays, Cymbeline responds to the fashion of the time for colorful plots and theatrical display. It is packed with adventure, plot reversals, and dramatic spectacle, and was perhaps intended to exploit the mechanical resources of Blackfriars, the new indoor theater of Shakespeare's company. One stage direction instructs that "Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle he throws a thunderbolt." This bit of staging was far better suited to the indoor theater than to the Globe, where the play was also performed. The play has three interrelated plots: one concerns Imogen's love for her husband, Posthumus, and his jealousy; another involves the long-lost sons of King Cymbeline; and the third concerns Britain's challenge to the power of Rome. The three plots marvelously come together in the play's astonishing conclusion, as characters move from error to truth, from skepticism to faith, and from hatred to love. Confusion and loss are replaced by clarity and gain, as families and nations are reunited and are again at peace. At the play's end, the comic order is, as the Soothsayer says, "full accomplished." King Cymbeline ruled

at the time of Jesus Christ's incarnation. If the Soothsayer's words seem to echo Christ's "consummatum est" (it is finished), it may be because the achievement of harmony in the play offers a secular (worldly) reflection of the patterns of Christian salvation history.

### → ***THE WINTER'S TALE***

The Winter's Tale was written about 1610 and published for the first time in the 1623 Folio. In The Winter's Tale, as in Cymbeline, characters suffer great loss and pain and families are driven apart, but by the end most of what has been lost has been regained. This poignant romance revolves around the estrangement of Leontes, King of Sicilia, from his wife and daughter. In a sudden fit of jealousy Leontes becomes convinced that his wife, Hermione, has been conducting an affair with his friend Polixenes. Believing the daughter she bears is not his own, he orders the child to be abandoned abroad. The first three acts deal with Leontes's jealousy, his persecution of Hermione, the death of his son, Mamillius, the loss of his daughter, Perdita, and the recognition of his error and subsequent repentance. In the middle of the play a speech by Time marks the change of fortunes that lead to the reconciliation and renewal of the



final scene, with its spectacular revelation that Hermione, long thought dead, in fact still lives. Shakespeare borrowed the plot for *The Winter's Tale* from *Pandosto, the Triumph of Time* (1588), a romance in prose by English writer Robert Greene. One of Shakespeare's last plays, the beautiful, poignant romance story of *The Winter's Tale* revolves around the estrangement of Leontes, King of Sicilia, from his wife and daughter, and their eventual reconciliation. In a sudden fit of jealousy Leontes becomes convinced that his wife has been conducting an affair with his friend Polixenes and orders the daughter she bears to be abandoned abroad, believing the child is not his own. The first scene presented here shows the humiliating trial to which Leontes then subjects his wife, Hermione, and his tragic realization—too late—that he has made a grave error. Guided by Hermione's servant Paulina, he enters a 16- year period of mourning and repentance. The fourth act of the play follows the girl, christened Perdita, as she grows up in the Bohemian countryside, before her chance return to her father's court, where her true identity is gratefully discovered. Finally, in the second scene given below, Paulina leads Perdita to view her mother's statue, where the penitent Leontes is granted an even greater miracle of grace and reconciliation. The statue

awakes, and the three are finally reunited. “A sad tale’s best for winter”, perhaps, but as this tale reveals, spring follows winter, and the hope of renewal is thus ever present.

### **→ *THE TEMPEST***

The *Tempest*, perhaps the most successful of the tragicomedies, was written about 1611 and published for the first time in the 1623 Folio. The play’s resolution suggests the beneficial effects of the union of wisdom and power. In this play Prospero is deprived of his dukedom by his brother and banished to an island. But he defeats his usurping brother by employing magical powers and furthering a love match between his daughter and the son of the king of Naples. At the play’s conclusion, Prospero surrenders his magical powers. In this surrender some critics have seen Shakespeare’s own relinquishment of the magic of the theater. In spite of the appealing sentimentality of this idea, *The Tempest* was not Shakespeare’s last play, and it is worth remembering that Prospero gives up his magic only to return to the responsibilities of rule he had previously ignored.

«Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep». (Act I V, scene 1)

The closing lines of English dramatist William Shakespeare's tragicomedy *The Tempest* (1611?) are often interpreted as Shakespeare's own farewell to the theater. The play is thought to be the last written solely by Shakespeare. It tells the story of Prospero, magician and former duke of Milan, who has been exiled and shipwrecked on an island. *The Tempest* is a masterful meditation on authorship and the process of creation, and on the ephemeral nature of art and life. As Prospero turns and addresses the audience in the epilogue, the voices of character, actor, and author emerge and intertwine. *The Tempest* is without doubt reflective in tone, especially on the end of life, in its concerns with remembrance and forgiveness, the loss and limitation of power, and the need for the reconciliation of the past, present, and future.

## → **LATE COLLABORATIONS**

Although *The Tempest* probably was Shakespeare's final solo creation, he is thought to have continued to work as a collaborator on several plays, including *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The historical drama *Henry VIII*, also known as *All Is True*, was probably written about 1613 with English dramatist John Fletcher, and first published in the 1623 Folio. It dramatizes events from Henry's reign leading to the birth of the future Queen Elizabeth I, presenting an implied history of the Reformation in a series of scenes on the fall from greatness of some characters (the Duke of Buckingham, Catherine of Aragon, and Thomas Cardinal Wolsey) and the rise of others (Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cranmer). At the end of a performance at the Globe on June 29, 1613, the theater's thatched roof caught fire and the building burned to the ground.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably the last play Shakespeare wrote, was written jointly with John Fletcher about 1613. Both men's names appear on the first published edition in 1634. Scholars generally attribute to Shakespeare most of acts one and five and to Fletcher the bulk of the play's middle. The play tells of the competition of two friends, Palamon and Arcite, for the love of one woman, Emilia. She

is the sister of Hippolyta, who was queen of the Amazons and wife of the Greek hero Theseus. The story is taken from The Knight's Tale, part of Chaucer's influential 14th-century masterpiece The Canterbury Tales.