

# The Impact of Renaissance on English Literature

## ✧ Introduction

The Renaissance is an event that drew a clear line between medieval and the modern world. The Renaissance brought innovation to English literature which was mainly concentrated on mystery plays that were religious in nature. Shakespeare's plays, written during the Renaissance, are the commentaries and a reflection of the Renaissance's emphasis on humanism. For example, Hamlet includes the theme of the father – son relationship, guilt and some others. Hudson said –

### **The Renaissance aroused the intellect and the aesthetic faculties**

In a broader sense Renaissance was the beginning of intellectual movement. Renaissance is greatly applied to the revival of arts, literature and education in Europe under the influence of Greek and Latin.

## ✧ Origin of Renaissance

Renaissance is derived from the Italian *Renescientia* means *rebirth*. The French historian Jules Michelet used Renaissance for the first time. Italy was the cradle of Renaissance. It began in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, spread to England by 16<sup>th</sup> century, and ended in the mid – seventeenth century. And also, the term *Humanism* sprang from it.

## ✧ Meaning of Renaissance

The Renaissance means rebirth. The French historian Jules Michelet used the word for the first time. Renaissance means –

## The discovery of the world and the discovery of man, by man

In other words, it was a psychological revolution which took place in European society. Renaissance is sometimes known as the revival of learning.

### ✘ 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 become 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 humour. 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

These are a few examples of the dramas of the Renaissance age.

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

With these few poetry of Renaissance era, England becomes a nest of singing birds.

### 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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

#### ✦ Conclusion

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.

