

Renaissance Drama – Second Year – 2022-2023

What do we mean by the term ‘Renaissance’?

Literally, it means ‘**rebirth**’.

What is the definition of ‘Renaissance’?

Renaissance is the revival of the arts and high culture under the influence of classical models, which began in Italy in the fourteenth century and spread throughout most of Europe by the end of the sixteenth.

Why was the Renaissance important?

The Renaissance was an era of cultural, artistic, political, and economic “rebirth” following the Middle Ages. It is credited with bridging the gap between the Middle Ages, also known as the “Dark ages”, and modern-day civilization. It is extremely significant because it changed the way people thought about and viewed the world around them.

Literature in the Renaissance:

The dominant forms of English literature during the Renaissance were **poetry** and **drama**.

- Most Renaissance drama was **poetic drama**. This meant it was written in **verse**, and each play had **poetic unity**, combining themes as well as recurrent images to create a coherent and satisfying work of art.

What was the aim of Renaissance drama?

Renaissance drama aimed to **attract, entertain, educate, and move its audience**.

What was the Renaissance known for?

The Renaissance was known for a renewed interest in classical antiquity, a rise in humanist philosophy which is a belief in self, human worth, and individual dignity, and radical changes in ideas about religion, politics, and science.

A Comparison of the Medieval Times and the Renaissance:

In medieval times, literature usually dealt with religious topics. Most writers used a formal, impersonal style, and wrote in Latin. Their work could be read only by a few highly educated people.

In contrast, Renaissance writers were interested in individual experiences in the real world. Writing about secular, or non-religious, topics became more common. Writers used a more individual style and expressed thoughts and feelings about

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life. Most importantly, by the end of the Renaissance, most writers were writing in their own languages, instead of in Latin. As a result, far more people could read their work. As the Latin classics were re-introduced to European audiences, the traditional Latin structure of **the five-act play** was introduced into English drama.

Morality plays: (They mainly appeared between the late medieval times and the Renaissance)

A **morality play** is a play on repentance where Vices and Virtues are presented as characters in the play.

The task of the vices is to tempt the main character from the path of virtue with all kinds of worldly delights. Morality plays usually traced the fortunes of the central character (often given a generalized name like Mankind or Everyman) in his fall from grace, through a life in sin towards eventual salvation or damnation.

- Some plays that concluded in **salvation** are called ‘merciful’ moralities.
- However, newer Protestant theology offered a more severe view of wrongdoing. The punished sinner was seen as an example to demonstrate God’s righteous judgment and was therefore doomed to **damnation**.

Ideals of Renaissance:

1. Humanism: Middle Ages had seen the church and God as the measure of all things. During the Renaissance, a belief that humans and their activities are significant emerged.

2. Individualism: A belief in the importance of the individual and in the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence emerged.

3. Skepticism: A belief in questioning the world and the environment around them emerged. This led to trying new topics in literature.

4. Secularism: Writers moved away from being concerned with the next life or religion. They became concerned with the belief in the importance of this life on Earth.

5. Classicism: During the Renaissance, there was a return to the literature of the Greeks and Romans.

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New Topics and Styles of Writing:

During the Renaissance, literature was also changed by the rebirth of interest in classical ideas and the rise of humanism. The topics that people wrote about changed. So did their style of writing and the language in which they wrote.

Elements of the Renaissance Drama:

They include supernatural elements, the appearance of angels and ghosts, magic, and violence.

English Renaissance

When did the English Renaissance take place?

The English Renaissance took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What was the period of greatest activity in English drama?

In English drama, the period of greatest activity and artistic achievement was from the late 1580s to the 1620s, covering the last part of **the Elizabethan period** (Elizabeth I reigned from 1558 to 1603) and **the Jacobean period** (the reign of James I, 1603–25).

What was the task of the playwright?

The task of the playwright was to create a virtual reality.

How did the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights use drama?

The Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights used drama as a means of self-expression, spreading knowledge and ideas, and as a daring commentary upon the political, religious, and cultural shifts of the times. They also used drama as a medium of philosophical reflection upon what it means to be human.