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THE REFLECTION OF HUMANISM IN ENGLISH RENASSANCE POETRY AND DRAMA

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Abstract. This study explores the manifestation of humanism in English Renaissance poetry and drama, emphasizing the influence of classical ideals on literary thought and style. Humanism, which centered on human dignity, rationality, and creative capacity, significantly shaped the works of figures like Shakespeare, Marlowe, Spenser, and Sidney. Their writings mark a shift from the medieval, religion-dominated worldview to a human-oriented vision that values intellect and moral independence. The research argues that Renaissance poetry and drama not only mirrored humanist philosophy but also helped spread its intellectual and cultural energy throughout English literature.

Key words: Renaissance, humanism, poetry, drama, writers, English literature

INTRODUCTION

The English Renaissance, which extended from the late 1400s to the early 1600s, was a time of exceptional artistic and intellectual flourishing. It symbolized a movement away from the medieval focus on divine authority toward a worldview that celebrated reason, creativity, and individual identity. At the center of this cultural rebirth stood humanism, an intellectual movement inspired by ancient Greek and Roman ideas. Humanism placed great importance on human experience, moral reflection, and the belief in humankind's innate capacity for achievement. This paper examines how English Renaissance literature mirrors humanist philosophy. It aims to reveal how poets and dramatists of the era redefined humanity, celebrated intellectual independence, and challenged traditional moral constraints thereby shaping the foundations of modern Western literary culture.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

The research relies on theoretical, contextual, and textual analysis to trace the influence of humanism on English Renaissance literature. At its heart lies Renaissance humanism, a revival of classical languages, learning, and philosophy emphasizing human worth, intelligence, and moral liberty. As discussed in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, English humanism was more than imitation; it was an original adaptation that





transformed national thought, education, and artistic expression. Methodologically, this study first outlines the philosophical background of humanism through significant scholarly sources on European intellectual history. It then situates the English Renaissance within the broader European revival, highlighting the impact of humanist education and classical studies. Literary analysis focuses on the works of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare writers whose creations embody the key humanist ideals of virtue, curiosity, and self-knowledge. For instance, Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* defends poetry as a means of moral and intellectual refinement, while Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* illustrates the power of literature to nurture virtue and wisdom. Shakespeare, through plays like *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, dramatizes the moral dilemmas and rational struggles of human life affirming that humanity has the capacity to control its destiny.

English humanism developed in two major stages: an initial scholarly phase in the late 1400s, influenced by thinkers such as Erasmus and Thomas More, and a second, more creative phase in the 1500s when humanist ideas were translated into poetic and dramatic art. The grammar schools and universities of the time taught rhetoric, philosophy, and classical languages an education system that deeply marked Renaissance writers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Between 1500 and 1650, humanist principles flourished in England, largely shaped by the Italian Renaissance and wider European intellectual movements. Humanism advanced the belief in reason, moral choice, and creative excellence. Thinkers like Erasmus, Thomas More, and Roger Ascham argued that education was key to improving both individual character and society as a whole. More's *Utopia* serves as an early example of English humanism, envisioning a rational, just, and educated community. The invention of the printing press by William Caxton in 1476 accelerated the spread of humanist learning, making classical and modern works widely available. Academic reforms at Oxford and Cambridge introduced the studio humanitatis a curriculum emphasizing language, philosophy, and rhetoric, all aimed at shaping virtuous and thoughtful citizens. Under this influence, English writers placed human experience at the center of their work, while still acknowledging divine order. Shakespeare's characters, for example, are portrayed as self-conscious and psychologically complex individuals, distinct from the allegorical figures of medieval literature. Likewise, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* promotes humanist virtues such as discipline, justice, and self-awareness through its symbolic heroes.

The Renaissance worldview also strengthened anthropocentrism the notion that humans occupy a central role in creation. First developed by Petrarch in Italy, this concept was reinterpreted by English authors who emphasized humanity's moral and intellectual significance. The Elizabethan





era, supported by Queen Elizabeth I's patronage of the arts, became a "Golden Age" where writers like Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare fused classical learning with English culture, moral sensibility, and a growing sense of national identity.

CONCLUSION

As literary critic Stephen Greenblatt suggests, the Renaissance represented a profound "rediscovery of the self." English Renaissance poetry and drama reflect this intellectual awakening by portraying humanity in all its complexity capable of moral reasoning, emotion, and creativity. Thinkers such as Thomas More, Philip Sidney, and William Shakespeare gave voice to humanist ideas by uniting classical wisdom with psychological insight and individual expression. Ultimately, the English Renaissance can be seen as a cultural revolution that placed human reason, imagination, and freedom at the heart of literary creation and modern thought.

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