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THE REFLECTION OF HUMANISM IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POETRY AND DRAMA

Mirzarahimova Sevinch Abdurahim qizi

mirzarahimovasevinc@gmail.com

+998992097039

Scientific advisor: **Khazratkulova Ezoza Ismat qizi**

khazratkulovae@gmail.com

Annotation. This article explores the reflection of humanism in English Renaissance poetry and drama, focusing on how classical ideals of individual dignity, rational inquiry, and artistic balance shaped the literary culture of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Through the analysis of poets such as Edmund Spenser and dramatists like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, the study highlights the transformation of medieval worldviews into Renaissance humanist perspectives. The research demonstrates how English writers adapted Italian and classical humanism into a distinctly English moral and artistic framework [1].

Introduction. The English Renaissance, spanning roughly from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, marked one of the most transformative periods in English cultural and intellectual history. It was during this time that the influence of humanism—a movement emphasizing the value of human potential, reason, and classical learning began to dominate European thought [1]. In England, this intellectual revolution found expression through literature, particularly in poetry and drama, where writers explored the complexities of human experience, moral choice, and individual freedom. Humanism represented a shift from the medieval focus on divine authority to a more anthropocentric worldview, placing humankind at the center of inquiry and creativity [2]. The revival of classical antiquity inspired English authors to emulate Greek and Roman ideals of beauty, virtue, and rhetorical elegance, adapting them to the Christian moral context of Tudor and Elizabethan England. Literature became the means through which these new values were disseminated and debated.

Poetry during the English Renaissance was deeply influenced by humanist principles, emphasizing the harmony between intellect, emotion, and moral reflection [1]. Writers such as Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced Italian sonnet forms into English literature, imitating Petrarch's fusion of classical thought and emotional introspection. This poetic innovation reflected a belief in the creative potential of the individual and the dignity of human emotion. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* exemplifies the humanist ideal of moral and intellectual refinement. Spenser integrates classical allegory and Christian virtue,





presenting a vision of the human soul's quest for holiness and reason [2]. His poetic structure mirrors the Renaissance fascination with order, proportion, and moral balance, demonstrating how literature could instruct as well as delight. The emphasis on virtue, beauty, and human potential reveals Spenser's debt to both Plato and Aristotle, key figures in Renaissance humanist curricula. The lyric poetry of Sir Philip Sidney also captures the humanist spirit through its self-awareness and philosophical depth. In *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney unites classical poetics with personal emotion, transforming love into an intellectual and moral experience. His critical work, *The Defence of Poesy* explicitly connects poetic creation with human dignity, asserting that poetry "teaches and moves" better than philosophy or history because it appeals to the full range of human faculties [1]. If poetry represented the intellectual ideals of humanism, drama embodied its living expression. The English stage became a mirror of human nature, where characters were defined by their choices, passions, and reasoning rather than by divine predestination [2]. Playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare redefined the boundaries of dramatic art, blending moral inquiry with psychological realism.

In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the tragic hero's insatiable thirst for knowledge and power reflects the central humanist dilemma: the tension between human aspiration and moral limitation. Faustus's pursuit of unlimited knowledge, though condemned, illustrates the Renaissance fascination with the intellectual capacities of humankind [2]. The play dramatizes the conflict between medieval fatalism and Renaissance self-determination, making it one of the clearest literary articulations of humanism's ambivalence.

William Shakespeare further developed these humanist themes, creating characters of remarkable psychological depth and individuality. In *Hamlet*, for example, the protagonist's introspection and moral reasoning embody the Renaissance ideal of man as a thinking, self-conscious being. Hamlet's famous reflection: "What a piece of work is man!" - summarizes the essence of humanism: admiration for human intellect and creativity, tempered by awareness of human frailty [3]. Shakespeare's plays as a whole demonstrate an unparalleled understanding of human motives, reflecting a belief in the complexity and dignity of the human condition. The legacy of humanism in English Renaissance literature extends far beyond the sixteenth century. By celebrating the potential of the human mind and emphasizing moral autonomy, Renaissance writers laid the groundwork for modern individualism and secular thought [3]. Their synthesis of classical learning and Christian ethics fostered a rich cultural dialogue that continues to influence Western literary and philosophical traditions. Humanist values also reshaped the relationship between literature and education. The humanist





curriculum centered on grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and moral philosophy encouraged authors to view writing as both an art and a moral vocation [2]. Through poetry and drama, English humanists sought to refine not only language but also the soul, believing that art could elevate the human spirit toward virtue and wisdom.

Conclusion. English Renaissance poetry and drama provide a vivid reflection of humanism's intellectual and moral ideals. In the works of Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, literature becomes a celebration of human intellect, imagination, and ethical responsibility. These writers transformed classical ideas into living art, expressing the beauty and complexity of human existence. The humanist movement thus redefined English literature as a space for inquiry, self-expression, and moral vision a legacy that continues to shape the modern understanding of humanity [3].

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