CHAPTER TWO

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD: A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION

2.1. The Renaissance: a Historical Background

The term ‘Renaissance’ means rebirth in French and has its origin in the Latin ‘renascentia’. It was used commonly to describe a period of European history that followed the Middle Ages, in which the renewal of interest in the old knowledge of Greece and Rome became an important point of concentration. In this period, arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, and other aspects reached a high level that was not exceeded in any other age. W. R. Goodman defined the Renaissance as follows:

The Renaissance was in essence an intellectual rebirth. It showed itself in the effort of the individual to free himself from the rigid institution of the Middle Ages, feudalism, and the church; and to assert his right to live, to think, and to express himself in accordance with a more flexible secular code.

M. H. Abram stated that:

The Renaissance involved a rebirth of letters and arts stimulated by the recovery and study of text from classical antiquity and the development of new aesthetic norms based on classical model. It also unleashed new ideas and new social, political, and economic forces that displaced the otherworldly and communal values of the Middle Ages, emphasizing instead the dignity and potential of the individual and the worth of life in this world.

This means that the Renaissance period marked a break from the Middle Ages leading towards modern age and that the European people, during this period, became interested in the ideas and culture of ancient Greece and Rome and that is what affected their
intellectual life and brought revolutionary changes in the history of Europe. In addition to that, a new emphasis was placed on individualism and potentialities of the human mind.

It is said that the Renaissance began in Italy and continued during the following centuries spreading to all parts of Europe. In the 15th century, it spread from its birthplace in Florence, first to the rest of Italy then to the rest of Europe. As it spread, its ideas diversified and were adapted into local culture. The Italian ideas had taken three main ways to spread to all parts of Europe, “the Italian scholar and artist in the North; the northern visitor to Italy; and the circulation of books and works of art”.4

Actually, it is important to explain why the Renaissance began in Florence, and not elsewhere in Italy. Scholars had observed many characteristics unique to Florence cultural life and that is what might have caused this movement. Others emphasized the role of the Medici, “a banking family and later ducal ruling house”, in patronizing and activating arts. Lorenzo de Medici (1449-1492) played the role of catalyst for a huge amount of arts patronage. He used to encourage the men of his country to commission works from Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, and Michelangelo Buonarroti. They were the leading artists of Florence. Another group of scholars believed that it was the coincidence that made Florence the birthplace of the Renaissance because the mentioned great men were born in this place.5

Paul Innes stated “this is no coincidence: the Renaissance began in Italy…”6 J. A. Cuddon supported this speech saying that “Italy is customarily taken as the starting place of the Renaissance”, but he went further explaining that historians differed as to when it began. As far as literature was considered, some of them settled in the fourteenth century omitting a considerable part of Dante’s life (1265-1321). Another group preferred the thirteenth century; they cited the Sicilian school, a group of talented poets who flourished at the Palermo Court of the Hohenstaufen monarch from C. 1200.7

Most of the historians agreed to the idea that the Renaissance began in the late thirteenth century considering the writings of Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), in addition to the painting of Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337).8 Richard Dutton has limited the duration of the Renaissance (1300-1600) describing it as the great
discovery of the classical past.\textsuperscript{9} In his book, \textit{The Italian Renaissance}, Denys Hay concluded, “I accept as a fact that there was a Renaissance in the period …between about 1350 and about 1700. I accept that this Renaissance occurred first in Italy … and that it later affected to a greater or lesser degree the rest of Europe.”\textsuperscript{10}

The term Renaissance was first used retrospectively by the Italian art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) in his book \textit{Lives of the Most Eminent Painters}, published in 1550. In this book Vasari was attempting to describe the achievements of the recent artists. These achievements, according to him, represented a revival in the arts after a period of long decay that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{11}

In France, the term Renaissance was first defined by the French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874) in his book \textit{Histoire de France}, for him, it was a development more in science than in art and culture. He confirmed that the Renaissance extended the period from Columbus to Copernicus to Galileo. It meant that it extended from the end of 15\textsuperscript{th} century to the middle of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. In his book, \textit{Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien}, the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) defined the Renaissance as “the period between Giotto and Michelangelo in Italy, which is the 14\textsuperscript{th} to mid-16\textsuperscript{th} centuries.” He believed that the Renaissance represented the emergence of modern spirit of individuality which was stifled in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{12}

Recently, Randolph Starn, the historian in California Berkeley University, was much less keen to define the Renaissance as a historical age or a continued cultural movement. He stated the following:

Rather than a period with definitive beginning and ending and consistent content in between, the Renaissance can be (and occasionally has been) seen as a movement of practices and ideas to which specific groups and identifiable persons variously responded in different times and places. It would be in this sense a network of diverse, sometimes conveying, sometimes conflicting cultures, not a single, time-bound culture.\textsuperscript{13}
William J. Long commented saying that it was better to apply the term Renaissance to the revival of the art depending on the rediscovery and imitation of the classic models in the 14th and 15th centuries rather than to use it to indicate a complete transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world as many writers did. The term "Revival of Learning", according to him, should be used to cover the whole movement, whose essence was, according to Larartine, and as cited in Long’s book, *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World*, that the “man discovered himself and the universe”, and according to Taine, that man who was so long blinded, “had suddenly opened his eyes and seen”. Praveen Bhatia defined the term Revival of Learning as the “gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the middle ages.”

In literature, the major writers of this age were: Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Sanazzaro from Italy; Erasmus from Netherland; Montaigne and Rabelais from France; Lope de Vega and Cervantes from Spain; Sir Thomas More, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare and Sir Francis Bacon from England.

### 2.2. The Main Aspects of the Renaissance

Some of the main aspects of the Renaissance can be elaborated in the following prominent points:

#### 2.2.1. Humanism

The term humanism was coined in the nineteenth century. It referred primarily to the new conception of man in the Renaissance. The idea of an individual was a vital element of this conception.

J. A. Cuddon maintained that humanism as “a European phenomenon was a more worldly and thus more secular philosophy; and it was anthropocentric. It sought to dignify and ennoble man”. Humanism, according to him, helped man to be civilized and to make him realize his potential powers and gifts, and to reduce the difference between
potentiality and attainment. It was a produce of and a counteraction to a specific prevailing skepticism at the same time without dealing with the missing balance that came as a result of the conflict between belief and doubt. Humanism became a type of philosophy which focused on the perfection of a worldly life, but rather than on the preparation for an eternal and spiritual life.\textsuperscript{18}

Humanism was based on the three Renaissance terms. The first was ‘studia humanitatis’ which meant the humanistic studies that included grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral philosophy based on the study of the standard ancient authors of Rome and Greece. The second was ‘humanitas’ which meant the good qualities that made any person, man and woman, human. The third was ‘humanista’. This term was invented during the Renaissance period. Firstly, it appeared in Italy and specifically in Pisa University spreading by the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century to several European vernacular languages and was occasionally used in Latin. It was used to signify “a student, teacher, or scholar of the humanities.”\textsuperscript{19}

Siobhan Keenan stated that humanism was an intellectual movement originating in Italy. This movement heartened the fresh study of classical learning. It was interested in the rediscovery of the lost manuscripts of Greek and Latin. Humanists believed that the knowledge of the ancients and a deep classical education were inevitable to a civilized man. They emphasized the significance of learning as a means to improve one’s self considering man as unique among God’s creations because of his ability to transform himself by learning. Humanists represented great advocates of education. In England, for example, the influence of early humanists such as Sir Thomas More was the direct reason that led to the founding of new grammar schools up and down the country in the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century and that is what made education possible for the sons of citizens and farmers in addition to the members of gentry and nobility. Oxford and Cambridge universities flourished during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{20}

The Renaissance humanists developed an image of ‘man’ more positive and helpful than that of the medieval ascetic Christianity; rather than being a miserable sinner waiting for redemption from a pit of fleshly corruption. Man was a source of endless possibilities,
which developed carefully to achieve an equilibrium of physical, spiritual, moral, and intellectual faculties. During the 16th and 17th centuries, humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus and John Milton combined the elements of Christian and classical culture and the result was what had become known as ‘Christian Humanism’.  

The study of Greek has an important role in Italian humanism; some have argued that the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 caused the escape of many Greek scholars to Italy taking their manuscripts with them and that is what promoted the interest in the classical past and particularly in Plato’s works which were imperfectly known previously. 

Francesco Petrarca was one of the earliest important Italian humanists. He revived interest in Cicero as a model for prose style, and he was also the author of some significant works in Latin and Italian. His Florentine followers, Giovanni Boccacio, Collucio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Lorenzo Valla, carried on translating of important classical works in order to recover the missing manuscripts from classical antiquity. They used to search in monastery libraries for these treasures. Other Italian humanists turned to Plato’s works and the aim was to supply an alternative to medieval Aristotelianism. Marsilio Ficino, Nicholas of Cusa, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola were specifically known for their development of neoplatonic thought. The writings of Niccolo Machiavelli caused a deep impact on the historical and political thought. Through his writings humanism could be linked most clearly to republicanism.

2.2.2. The Reformation

Medieval Church was the main agency; not only for the worship of God, but for scholarship, education, welfare, health care, and a great part of the legal system. The Roman Catholic Church represented the infallible “guide to the conduct of life from cradle to grave. They walked hand in hand with it, instructed by its teachings, corrected by its discipline, sustained by its sacraments, comforted by its promises.”

The Renaissance brought a new spirit of investigation into the ideal of the Church. The religious-minded people used to find fault with the faith of the Church in the light of their new reading of the holy books and that is what led to the gradual schism from the
The religious upheaval of Reformation developed during this period, parts of Europe used to break with the Catholic Church and the aim was to establish “new theologies and religious outlooks”. The religious upheaval of Reformation developed during this period, parts of Europe used to break with the Catholic Church and the aim was to establish “new theologies and religious outlooks”. As the Renaissance rejected Medieval learning, it seemed that the Reformation rejected the Medieval form of Christianity. Roman Catholic Italy was, at least according to some of the radical Protestants, corrupted totally. Moreover, the Medieval Papacy did nothing in order to remove this image, but encouraged it in the eyes of the Protestants.

Many Church men, Catholic humanists, were keen to reform the church from inside. Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was interested in applying the standard humanist education; he developed a critical study of the scriptures. Erasmus developed a simple type of theology of love for Christ. Christianity, for him was primarily “an ethical religion; the philosophy of Christ”, as he named it, was of piety and selfless love. He believed that the ritual and business practices of the Church were serious departures from Christian philosophy. In spite of that, his efforts were directed to reform the Church from within, but his writings became an important foundational text of the Protestantism. Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), the most prominent English humanist during the 16th century, was an unwavering Catholic and that is why he was executed by Henry VIII as a result of not renouncing his tenet. More did not embrace Protestantism, but his ideas which were directed to criticize the policy of the Papacy, the abuses of the Church in general and the indulgence in particular became dependable resource of English Protestantism. It is quite correct to say that More’s writings in addition to that of Erasmus supplied the basic terminology and the key ideas that would be the required fuel of the Reformation. But Martin Luther, who read their writings carefully, was the spark of this movement.

Neither Erasmus nor More wanted to follow the course of events that led to the Protestant Reformation believing that the unity of the Christendom was more important than anything else, nor did Martin Luther when he reacted against the Church corruption. He fixed his famous ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg on the first of November 1517 thinking that he was opening up some topics for academic debate, but his thoughts sparked a mass upheaval.
Luther’s disagreement with the policy of the Papacy finally led to challenge many of essential dogmas of the Church and that is what led him and his followers to look for schism from the Catholic Church in protest, hence they were called the Protestants. The Reformation was of high political importance, it split Europe into Protestant and Catholic countries which fought each other during this period. It was not bloodless. Reformation occurred with a lot of violence and killing. The result was that the Protestantism destroyed the institute that had unified all parts of Europe so long under the Pope; nevertheless there was also national conflict with Papacy that had little to do with Protestantism.31

The tenet of Protestants believed that salvation could not be insured by the Church, but through a direct relationship with God achieved by reading the Bible.

Faith (based on the word of the Bible) was alone thought competent to save, and salvation itself was regarded as a direct transaction with God in the theatre of the individual soul, without the necessity of the intermediation by Church, priest or sacrament.32

That is why Protestantism could be seen as an extreme manifestation of the Renaissance Individualism. Some Protestants believed that after Adam’s fall in Eden, human nature was completely corrupted as far as human spiritual capabilities were concerned and that is why humans were not able to contribute to achieve their salvation through good deed, for example, but through faith in God’s grace.33

Reformation could be defined, according to the view point of the supporter, as “a return to pure Christianity _cleansing the church of all the corruption and idolatry that had accumulated over the centuries.” Catholic Church described it as a “damnable heresy.” According to the perspective of the later ages, Protestant Reformation was “a major factor in the break- up of Western Christendom, the secularization if society, the establishment of princely ascendency over the church and, consequently, the identification of religion and nationalism.”34

In England, the ideas of John Wyclif (1320-1384) and the Lollards, his followers, planted the seeds of the challenge to many practices and dogmas of the Roman Church.
They argued that “the Bible was the only sure basis of belief, and that it should be translated into the vernacular.” They rejected the transsubstantiation, the power of clergy, and the advocacy of clerical marriage. But the independence from the authority of the Papal was caused by a man “who had so stoutly defended the Catholic sacraments against Luther…” He was, of course, Henry VIII. Based on his desire to annul his marriage, the English Reformation seemed to be more of a political than a theological disagreement. The fateful decision was the only way that extricated the King by giving him the right to divorce his Queen, Catherine of Aragon, who was not able to bear a son. In addition to the fact that Catherine produced no heir, Henry started to tire her especially when he fell in love with Lady Anne Boleyn. The King, on the one hand, hoped that the Pope would save him from this dead lock stalemate persuading himself that he had the right in his side. The Pope, on the other hand, could not afford to confront the tide of hostility that would be produced by the divorce and that is why he refused. As a reaction to this situation, Henry made a statement that he became the Head of the English Church.

The schism had been asserted in 1533 as a preamble of the act of the parliament which declared the advent of the English Reformation. The Parliament cut off future legal references with the Catholic Church of Rome and stated that “England was ruled by one supreme Head and King.

In this respect, it is very important to mention that in the *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum* (1539), Reginald Pole claimed that Machiavelli’s *The Prince* was the inspiration that made Henry resolute to break with Rome and confiscate the property of English monasteries. Pole regarded *The Prince* as a “It was the secret ideology behind the Henrician State, and had been privily transmitted to the King by Cromwell, so that Henry was acting under the influence of a book he perhaps hadn’t even read.”

It was true that England officially broke with the Roman Church as a result of the King’s divorce and the foundation of “an autonomous Church of England”, and that is what affected badly the transaction between Italy and England and put it in disjointure period. But the religious establishment called “the Anglican Church” embraced many features of the old Church including selected Protestant theological principles. The result
was a type of political and theological compromise which remained the subject of heated discussion for the following centuries.\textsuperscript{42}

2.2.3. The Technological Inventions

In considering the Renaissance, one has to shed light on the numerous advancement of technology. The most important event in this field was the invention of printing which strongly promoted education. Before this invention, education had been controlled entirely by the Church. In the Renaissance, however, secular education began to appear and from the time of the Reformation schools of grammar were founded. Many of them remain even now.\textsuperscript{43}

Previously, multiple copies of a manuscript had to be written by hand and it was a difficult task. Later books were made by using “the Process of wood engraving”, which demanded a craftsman to cut away the background and raise the area to be printed. When a page was ready, it would be inked and a sheet of paper was put over it to be pressed carefully for an imprint.\textsuperscript{44}

In 1436, Johann Gutenberg, a German, improved an olive press to create a printing press machine. He used the screw, a tool used to press olive for producing oil, to force a printing block onto a sheet of paper under it. Gutenberg developed metal type for each of the twenty six characters in the Roman alphabet and developed a process by which he was able to move these characters around on a printing plate and that is what became called a movable type printing press. It was able to save time by printing more copies in no more than a few weeks and made distribution of printed works speedy.\textsuperscript{45}

Printing on paper by Gutenberg’s machine made books cheaper and available to the public for the first time. A large number of textual information brought to all parts of Europe in order to please the needs of the people. This was on the increase as a result of the increase in the number of the learned people and that is why education was no longer monopolized by the Church.\textsuperscript{46}

Technology of printing was brought to England by William Caxton in 1476. He set up a printing press in Westminster, and published Chaucer’s \textit{Canterbury Tales} and
Malory’s *Le Mote D Arthur* in addition to many other books.\(^{47}\) The effects of printing were wide spread in English and the old monasteries were replaced by school and universities.\(^{48}\)

The other important technological inventions one has to take into consideration were in sailing. The changes in this field brought great benefits. The improvements in navigation played a significant role in developing new maps and charts.\(^{49}\) By 1569, Gerardus Mercator (1512-1594) published a map which was the first to design the curvature of the earth onto a flat printing surface. This map enabled the sailors to make better plan for their voyage than before depending on the longitude and the latitude lines fixed on the map.\(^{50}\)

The ameliorations that took place in sailing ships contributed to swifter and safer travel. The developed keels and movable sails enabled the navigators to go to more distant land and as a result new trading routs were found and that is what increased trade competition and widened the barter of wares.\(^{51}\)

### 2.2.4. The New Discoveries

The new discoveries asserted that the Renaissance was not merely a rebirth or a rediscovery of old knowledge, but also an age of new discoveries which were of high importance for the western civilization. The geographical discoveries of the Renaissance, wherein one could see “the extension of the physical horizons,” were very important. In the late 15\(^{th}\) century, Columbus and Cabot discovered America, and Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope. These explorations did more than expand the geographical limits of the known world. During the sixteenth century, more and more ships crossed the Atlantic to come back with riches and wonderful things. Men were no longer in need of the past for glories. Literature was greatly influenced by these discoveries. The magic world of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, was a product of fresh imagination created by the new voyages.\(^{52}\) Although the English were not pioneers in the discovery of the new world, England was widely affected by the discoveries. During the following centuries the English became great colonizers,
merchants and adventurers.\textsuperscript{53} England became a major trading nation as a result of its new geographical position. The discovery of the new continent made England the centre of main trade routes and that is what encouraged overseas trade as a transitional phase to set “the foundation of the British Empire”.\textsuperscript{54}

There were other scientific discoveries. Owing to the scientific study of ancient texts, scientific thinkers such as Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo, William Harvey, and Johannes Kepler worked hard in order to increase the knowledge while attempting to refine the earlier thought of astronomy. The Christian theology and astronomy of the Middle Ages were Ptolemaic, based on the astronomy of Ptolemy of the second century, and portrayed “a stationary earth around which rotated the successive spheres of the moon, the various planets, and then the fixed stars.” Heaven, according to this theory, occurred above the spheres and Hell occurred either at the center of the earth as in Dante’s \textit{Inferno} or below the system of the spheres as in John Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost}. In 1543, Copernicus published his new theory concerning the astronomic system. He proposed a new system in which the sun is the centre of the universe and earth is not stationary, but is just planet orbiting the sun.\textsuperscript{55} Copernican theory changed radically the old view of the cosmos which had dominated the antiquity and Middle Ages.

2.3. The English Renaissance

The English Renaissance was a cultural and artistic movement in England that expanded in the period from the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century to the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century. It was much influenced by the pan-Europe Renaissance. This period of English cultural history is sometimes called the Age of Shakespeare or the Elizabethan Age. W. R. Goodman stated that the Age of Shakespeare was most suitable in spite of that Shakespeare’s literary career began at the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Shakespeare’s works, according to Goodman, represented the real political, social, and literary tendencies of the age as a whole. He was the supreme literary genius of his age and that is why it is better to designate this period as the Age of Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{56}
In England, no field was untouched by the revolution caused by the Renaissance. English literature was marked by the achievements of poets such as Edmund Spenser. They concentrated on the production of works that demonstrated an increased interest in understanding the English Christian belief, as in the allegorical representation of the Tudor Dynasty in the *Faerie Queen* and the reinforming of mankind’s fall from Paradise in *Paradise Lost*. William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe wrote a considerable number of outstanding plays. They represented the theoretical representation of the English ways of life and their take on it. During this time, philosophers such as Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon published their ideas concerning humanity and the aspects of perfect society.57

The English Renaissance embraced almost all the characteristics that the Renaissance had throughout Europe. The main differences among them were in the time of flourishing and the quantitative blend of elements, but it was also a consequence of the power each nation attained at the same time. The main peculiarities of English Renaissance as compared to the Renaissance of Italy and France can be summed up by the following points:

1. The Renaissance began in Italy earlier than its beginning in England.58
2. The renewal of influenced literature in England slower than in Italy and France because Humanism in England had no clear influence on poetry and prose for a long time. The maturity of the national language was still imperfect. Prose was in need for a strong tradition and glorious precedents, and the best English humanists, still used Latin in their writings. The two books which appeared in England in this time and attained to European fame, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna* (1620), were both written in Latin. In regard to poetry, it had, since Chaucer, been irregularized and regained no balance and measure until Spenser’s works started in 1579. The previous years of 16th century presented no more than a series of imperfect experiments, the ground which was won and lost.
in consequence, English literature had its flowering season when the magnificent Italian literature had already entered on its decadence, when France had produced Rabelais and Ronsard and his Pleiad, and Montaigne’s essays were appearing. Malherbe was nine years old when Shakespeare was born. It was therefore in a generation enriched by all the substance of France and Italy that England realized for the first time her high literary ambition.59

3. English Renaissance held more aloof from plastic arts than in Italy and France. It occurred in England where there were no pictures or even statues except those which were bought from outside. It had therefore a much more inward and moral effect than of a similar movement on the continent. It was able to reach its triumph after Reformation when the Anglican religion had spread throughout England and was beginning to be tinged with the Calvinism.

4. Protestantism was spread all over England and that is what caused her to break with the Middle Ages more decidedly than Italy and France, but English literature remained closer to Medieval literature than that of mentioned countries. The truth was more surprising because literature in Italy and France became a less direct expression of national sentiments in England than anywhere else. English literature, according to Emile Legouis, was almost imported from France and consisted of translations and adaptations. It had not really assumed a national shape, even the great English poet, Chaucer, was essentially French.60

5. The Italian humanism, according to Mary Thomas Crane, was often classified as pagan in contrast to that of the northern Renaissance because of three reasons:
   a- It grew out of opposition to the logical, exegetical and stylistic practices of the late Medieval Church.
   b- It advocated a return to classical texts without sharing to the same extent northern concerns to make them compatible with Christianity.
   c- Italian humanism also seemed ‘pagan’ in its emphasis on the virtuous secular life in the context of the political controversies of Italian cities rather than (as in the north) on reform of the Church.61
2.4. English Drama: from the Beginning to the Renaissance

In the pre-conquest period of the history of English literature there was nothing that could be described as drama. Later on, after the Norman Conquest, dramatic elements were found and that is what could be seen as an origin of English drama. The Medieval period was of speed development in the native drama establishing a good background for Renaissance drama and specially the distinguished period of English drama, Elizabethan drama. The rise of English drama from its origins in the liturgical plays to its golden age can be explained in the following headings:

2.4.1. The Beginnings: Miracle and Mystery Plays

The Performance of a Latin play in honour of St. Katherine, at Dunstable about 1110 was the first mention of any dramatic representation in England and that is why this date can be considered as a starting point of English drama. A type of religious drama, which developed out of liturgy of Church, had already found itself in France, by the time of the Norman invasion and soon detected its way to England.62

As in other Catholic countries of Europe, drama raised in England as a result of the attempts of the clergy to tutor the unlettered masses the dogmas of their religion, Christianity, by dramatizing the service of the Church during Christmas and Easter. The plays were in Latin. The actors were the priests and the language employed was of liturgy.63

Church was the place in which drama should have been reborn because the following reasons:

1. The life of people at that time was completely dominated by Christianity and that is why any aspect of culture was obliged to be affected by it.
2. The Christian festivals and rituals include dramatic material.64
3. Many events of the religious history were suitable for drama.65

The plays told religious stories and were acted inside the Church itself and then in the churchyard. These early plays were called Miracle plays. In France, any play dealing
with the lives of saints was called Miracle, while the name Mystery was given to the play dealing with a subject taken from the Bible. In England, this distinction, according to William J. Long, was almost unknown, “the name Miracle was used indiscriminately for all plays having their origin in the Bible or in the lives of saints…” The name Mystery was not used until a long time after religious plays had passed.66

A factor of considerable significance that increased the popularity of those plays was the institute of the festival of Corpus Christ in 1264. This festival used to take place in summer, so the plays could be acted easily and the open-air performance come to be a vogue. A main development had taken place, drama moved from the inside to the outside of the Church and that is what led to the fact that the clergy lost control over the plays.67

Priests were not allowed to take part in the public performance and as a result, the language of the plays changed from “the Latin understood by a few to the vernacular English understood by all, and the drama came under secular, as opposed to religious, control.” But the plays remained telling religious stories.68

The religious drama in England did not reach its apex till the 14th century. Henceforth, at the festival of Corpus Christi, Miracle plays were performed in nearly all the large towns in great connected sequences or Cycles “arranged to exhibit the whole history of the fall of man and his redemption…” The plays acted in Corpus Christi festival were sometimes named “collective mysteries.” They were apportioned among the Trading Guilds, as a new authority instead of the Church, of different towns. These plays were in four cycles, depending on the city where they are acted; “the Chester cycle of 25 plays; the Coventry, of 42; the Wakefield, of 31; and the York, of 48.”69

As the Corpus Christi festival started to be celebrated with a pageant, the plays were given on roaming platforms which themselves came to be named pageants.70 Each platform was of two parts, the first was curtained off for dressing, and the other part was for acting. It was on wheels. The starting point might be the entrance of the town where the actors would act their play, and then moved the platform to the next station where they would act again. Each group was preceded and followed by other groups acting their play and that is why there were groups performing in every part of the town. The actors
were not professional and the plays were often written by members of the groups. The whole series of plays called a cycle.\textsuperscript{71}

Although the Miracles or Mysteries were religious and serious in intention, it is quite correct to say that the English comedy was born in them as a result of the natural tendency of the characters of the play to become recognizably human in their behaviour. “However serious the main story might be, neither actors nor audience could resist the temptation to enjoy the possibilities of a situation…”\textsuperscript{72} In \textit{Noah’s Flood} in the Chester plays, “Noah’s wife was made a comic figure, for she was shown very realistically as scolding woman refusing to enter the Ark deriding Noah’s prophecy of destruction.”\textsuperscript{73} She was in need for a great deal of persuasion in order to go inside the ark.

In this respect, some definitions can be added to the explanation of the Miracle and Mystery plays. As regards Miracle play, on the one hand, Chris Baldick defined this type as “a kind of Medieval religious play representing non-scriptural legends of saints of the Virgin Mary”.\textsuperscript{74} Martin Gray stated that the Miracle play was “a form of late Medieval drama. Dramatisations of saint’s lives and miraculous events and legends.”\textsuperscript{75} Mystery Play, on the other hand, was defined by Baldick as “a major form of popular medieval religious drama, presenting a scene from the Old or New Testament”.\textsuperscript{76} He added that it seemed that it had developed gradually from the Latin liturgical drama into civic occasions in the vernacular languages usually performed on a holy feast day, Corpus Christi, from 1311 onwards. Gray maintained that a Mystery Play was a “dramatisation of the Old and New Testaments which evolved steadily from about the tenth century onwards. Originally performed in Latin by priests, the form developed as it moved out of the church precinct, adopted the vernacular and was gradually taken over by the various guilds of tradesmen in the large towns.”\textsuperscript{77}

2.4.2. Morality Plays

By the reign of Henry VI, the Miracle play was gradually replaced by a new type of drama named morality play. It “is a drama in which the characters are allegorical, symbolical, or abstract the main purpose of the play being didactic”.\textsuperscript{78}
The morality play, unlike the Miracle play, focused on the moral problems that faced mankind and its centre was always occupied by a male character. The plot and the character in this type of drama were used as a means to explain an abstract moral lesson. *Everyman*, perhaps the most famous of the Morality plays, was a story of the end of Everyman’s life in which God taught death to inform the hero that he should be taken from this world. Everyman looked for a friend to attend him, but no one would do so except Good Deeds. The moral lesson of this play was that everyone would die and he had to be careful preparing for his death.79 In this type of plays, virtues and vices were shown on the stage as symbolic creations with much liveliness and “abstractions such as Justice, Mercy, Gluttony, and Vice were among the commonest characters.80

A later introduction of much significance was the so named Vice, whose main role was to tease the Devil. He sometimes achieved huge popular success by jumping on the back of the Devil, “sticking thorns into him, belabouring him with a dagger of lath, and making him roar with pain”.81 He represented the preferable comic character.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, according to John Peck, and Martin Coyle, owed a lot to the tradition of the Moralities, and particularly in the figure of the Vice, the comic tempter, who established the main base of the presentation of such characters as the character of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Like the Moralities both Shakespeare and his contemporaries deal with events on a cosmic scale as good and evil, heaven and hell battle for people’s souls. The difference, however, is that in the Morality plays this battle takes place in a world where God’s order is still visible: in the more secular world of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that order, like the order of society itself, is altogether more precarious and uncertain.82

As in Miracle plays, most of the old Morality plays were of unknown date and origin. Of the best known writers of Moralities were John Skelton, who wrote *Magnificence*, and Sir David Lindsay, the poet of the Scotch Reformation. A new element entered in the Morality plays with these men, they denounce the Church abuses
and the state by introducing “living personages thinly disguised as allegories; so that the
stage first became power in shaping events and correcting abuses”.

2.4.3. The Interlude

The Interlude was the last predecessor of drama proper. A short play flourished
during the sixteenth century, introducing real characters of humble rank such as citizens
and friars, and the allegorical figures were absent.

Interlude was frequently corresponding in length to the one act play, and was often
acted in the halls of great houses as a part of amusement presented at a dinner in honour
of the guests. Occasionally it was used as a comic discussion between the serious parts
of a sacred play. The aim was to relax the tension of the audience, or was as a part in
vaudeville of necromancy. During the period of religious struggles, it was used as a
means of propaganda. The groups of actors, at the time of flourishing of the interludes,
became professionals.

According to William Henry Hudson, it was not an easy task for anyone to
differentiate accurately between Moralities and Interludes. He indicated that there was

some confusion regarding the exact scope and proper use of this word,
for many so called interludes are only modified forms of the morality;
but in its more specific sense it seems to mean any short dramatic
piece of a satiric rather than of a directly religious or ethical character,
and in tone and purpose for less serious than the morality proper.

Some of the Interludes resembled the Moralities in their didactic intent and that is why
they were sometimes called ‘moral interludes’, while others were closer to the farce.

The Interludes were closely linked with the names of John Heywood (1497-1580),
the most popular author of this genre. The Four PPs (early 1540s) was a play of a
discussion in which a pedlar, an apothecary, and a palmer set the tone for the realist
comedy. They exchanged racy tales then they entered into final competition as to which
of them would be able to tell the biggest lie. It was justly the most amusing specimen of
its class.
Heywood’s Interludes stood midway between the Moralities and regular dramas. The Moralities was a sermon in disguise; the interlude aimed at amusement and entertainment. The Interlude was left to Heywood, in the reign of Henry VIII to give this type of plays a definite place not only in literature but in the evaluation of drama.  

2.4.4. The Masque

Another dramatic form was developed in England called the Masque. It included poetic drama, dance, and song, in addition to the music. Its structure was always simple and the plot and the action were slight. As usual the plot included mythological and allegorical elements, and sometimes, there was a sort of discussion. The prologue of the Masque introduced a group of masked actors who were known to the audience. They entered in disguise or perhaps in some kind of decorated vehicle. Cuddon defined the Masque as “a fairly elaborate form of courtly entertainment which was particularly popular in the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I, as it was in Italy (where the masque first acquired a distinctive form), and in France.”

Ben Jonson, with the help of the architect Inigo Jones, perfected the genre by producing some of the most celebrated masques during the first quarter of the 17th century, but the best known Masques were Milton’s Comus, acted at Ludlow Castle in 1634, and that of Juno and Ceres in Act IV of Shakespeare’s The Tempest (C.1611).

2.4.5. The Appearance of Regular Drama

The Middle Ages were dying and Interludes led drama into a new age. The direct influence of the revival of learning played the role of a key element that led English comedy and tragedy together to pass out this primary step of development towards their artistic forms. Many plays began to appear which indicated a great development. In spite of that they were not very good, but “these early experiments in play-writing are of great importance historically, because they provided a kind of ‘Dame School’ for English dramatic genius, and did much to prepare the way for the regular drama.”
The plays became longer and they were classified into tragedies and comedies, in addition to a new type which was named chronicle. The comedies did not generally appear very amusing to a modern audience. The tragedies were copies of Roman models or bloodthirsty plays. The chronicles or the history plays were no more than a series of unlinked scenes to the point that they were difficult to follow. A few years later, Shakespeare used the same style of clarification in writing his plays.96

The first tragedies took over very different elements from Seneca; “violent and bloody plots, resounding rhetorical speeches, the frequent use of ghosts among the cast of characters, and sometimes the five act structure.”97

The first regular English tragedy was *Gorboduc*. It was also called *Ferrex* and *Porrex*, written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. It was acted in 1562 at the Christmas revels of the Inner temple.98 It was remarkable not only as the first tragedy, but as a first play which was written in blank verse. This play was acted two years before Shakespeare’s birth.99

The story of *Gorboduc* was about a British king who divided the kingdom in his life between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. A conflict arose between them. Ferrex, who was the mother’s favourite, was slain. The mother carried her revenge out and killed the murderer, her other son. The enraged people revolted and killed both the father and the mother. Although the play included many murders, “the play is cold and lacks movement and drama”. It was better for the author to express ideas than to present the play with characters.100

Though the comedies relied too much on Latin comic writers such as Plautus in addition to the Italian models, they showed, to a considerable extent, the growth of the English mumming element. They mixed verve and prose, humour was created by a primitive character, “but the best of them had verse and high good-humour, and they were distinguished by some worthy songs and ditties”.101 The first true English play of a regular plot, divided into acts and scenes, was the comedy of *Ralph Royster Doyster*. It was written by Nicholas Udall, the head master of Eton, and later Westminster school, and was first performed by his schoolboys before 1556.102
According to William Henry Hudson, it was written about 1550 and divided into acts and scenes of the Latin styles. Its proud hero used in an entertraining way to deal with the wooing of Dame Custance. Nevertheless, the play was greatly indebted to Plautus and Terence, “it is everywhere reminiscent of the older humors of the miracle plays and the moralities”.  

The histories or the chronicle plays arose as “a healthier native breed of historical plays.” Consisting of both tragic and comic elements, these plays represented dramatized form of the early chronicles. They were predecessors of Shakespeare’s historical plays. This combination of the two types, comedy and tragedy was not compatible with the classical drama. The University Wits were interested in this form and the best examples were Peele’s *Edward I*, Marlowe’s *Edward II*, and Greenes’ *James IV*. “It was but natural that Shakespeare following these University Wits, made attempts in this form”.  

2.4.6. Elizabethan Drama  

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I was one of the great periods of English history, perhaps the greatest one. It was known as the Elizabethan Age. In this age, England became a unified nation that was able to be firm and stable against the states like Spain which was planning to attack England. It was an age of great and famous men, of explorations and discoveries, of poetry and music, of revival of learning, and above all mature drama. English drama reached its climax, “a height which has never been surpassed.” “The chief literary glory of the great Elizabethan age was its drama, but even before it several plays appeared which showed that a great development had taken place.”  

Elizabethan drama was preliminarily influenced by three elements; the native tradition, the Latin and Italian drama. These elements could be found in almost every Elizabethan plays. The mystery, miracle, morality, and interlude represented the development of the native tradition. Seneca was the model for tragedy, and Plautus and Terence supplied the hinterland suggestions for comedy. English tragedy, in particular,
was not developed out of liturgical plays, but from Seneca’s model. His tragedies were marked by fear, exaggerated character-drawing, violence and rhetorical language supported by emotional hyperboles. His impact was felt for the first time in the Latin plays of the universities in general and Cambridge in particular. He became the first classical playwright and all his works had been translated into English. Many of the future dramatists such as Marlowe and Peele were students in the university when Seneca’s impact was strong. *Gorboduc* was the first English play that embodied Seneca’s form. This play was followed by Gascoigne’s *Jacosta* (1566) and Hughes’ *Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588). The most significant play that followed Senecan form was Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedie* (1589), and followed by Daniel’s *Cleopatra* (1593) and *Philotas* (1604). Shakespeare’s *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *Richard III* presented strong influence of Seneca. This influence could be also felt in the works of late Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatists such as Webster, Tourneur, and Marston.109

Seneca’s tragedies were well known and widely read during Elizabethan Age. They were written to be read rather than to be acted, with a dialogue similar to the formal speech than everyday speech. The theme was always revenge, and the actions were always peppered by ghosts and other strange events.110

The other great influence was that of the Italian politician Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527). It seemed that the Elizabethan dramatists were gripped by Machiavelli’s doctrine of political power according to which the ruler had to use whatever he wanted in order to maintain his power.111 This case will be elaborated with details in the next three chapters.

After the appearance of the regular plays, the English drama developed through the works of young men who were scholars fostered by Oxford and Cambridge universities. They represented the pre-Shakespearean dramatists and they were known as the University Wits. In order to understand the importance of the role of this group, it is better to start with the state of English drama before them. It was an unstable and chaotic art. There were two recognized traditions of dramatic art. On the one hand, there was the active native tradition, represented by the popular dramatists, which was distinguished by
being devoid of the artistic discipline of the Greek and Roman drama. On the other hand, there was the tradition set by the group who represented the imitators of the classical drama. The works of this tradition largely exhibited awareness of the Greek and Roman drama, but they did not possess the vigour of the purely native plays. W. R. Goodman differentiated between the popular and the classical traditions. “The classicists had form, but no fire; the popular dramatists had interest, but little sense of form. Thus the drama was struggling between the well-formed chill and a structureless enthusiasm.”

The University Wits were able to unite the form with the fire. They united the classical conception of drama with keenness and warmth of the popular. They succeeded in achieving the task because of plenty of fire that they had as all being hedonists in addition to the sense of form that they acquired by training in classical learning. “While retaining in their dramatic works the vigour of the popular native tradition, they gave them that literary grace and power…” The University Wits did much in order to establish Elizabethan drama. The works of those playwrights, “coming just before Shakespeare”, were of special importance. They worked hard to pave the way for Shakespeare to found the suitable background for the expression of his innovation.

Although the University Wits looked to the ancient drama of Greece and Rome and combined its form in their plays, they never imitated the classical form slavishly. They kept for themselves sufficient freedom in spite of using the well-recognized elements of this form such as the accurate differentiation between the species such as comedy and tragedy, the observation of the three unities time, place, and action, and the reporting of the main events to the audience by using the dialogue of the dramatist personae. The University Wits founded on the English stage a type of Romantic drama which was adopted by Shakespeare later, but was not a pale copy of the classical drama.

The most important member of the University Wits was Christopher Marlowe. Others were George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, John Lyly, and Thomas Kyd. Peele wrote *David and Batshsheba* and the *Arraignment of pario*. Greene’s best play was *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. His fame came as a result of a small book he wrote, *Groatsworthof Wit*. In this pamphlet, he expressed his spite for Shakespeare. Lodge
wrote in various plays with the sole exception of *The Looking Glass of London*, in coordination with Geene. Shakespeare himself borrowed from Lodge’s novel *Rosalynde* for his comic play *As You Like*. John Lyly was the innovator of Euphism which had considerable impact on Shakespeare. Bastard Euphism was marked by Shakespeare in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. He drew genius Euphism in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Though it is not certain that Thomas Kyd belonged to a university, he wrote along with the University Wits. The distinguished play *Hieronymo* and its sequel *The Spanish Tragedy* were his main works. There is no doubt that the best among this group was Christopher Marlowe. The main plays he wrote were *The Jew of Malta, Doctor Faustus, Tamburlaine*, and *Edward II*. His greatest achievement was the use of the blank verse which Shakespeare later perfected. Marlowe’s problem was the lack of humour and artistic proportion.\(^{116}\)

Marlowe adopted literature as a profession. He joined the Lord Admiral’s players. His plays were written within five years (1587-1592). He had no tendency to write comedies. All of his plays were tragedies, even the comic scenes within some of them might have been written by someone else but not Marlowe himself.\(^{117}\)

Admittedly Shakespeare occupied the top position among the playwrights of his time. He was not associated with any university. It is said that he received only secondary education. His plays reflected an outstanding genius to the point that many people suspected that someone of high education was the writer, but not Shakespeare. Thirty-seven plays were written by Shakespeare. They can be divided into comedies, tragedies, and histories.\(^{118}\)

Shakespeare was connected with four of his contemporaries either by the works quality of works or by personality. They were Ben Jonson, John Marston, Chapman, and Dekker. Ben Jonson wrote many excellent plays. Among them were *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, but his fame rose as a result of his work *Everyman in his Humour*. He was distinguished by his subtle observation of the foibles and follies of human beings. His plays reflected a variety of wit, worldly knowledge, and subtle character analysis as well. John Marston wrote many plays, but the best among them was *Antonia and Mellida*. 
Chapman wrote a fine comedy *All Fools* in addition to a tragedy *Busyd Ambois*. He was Jonson’s close friend who shared his beliefs and literary skill to a considerable extent. Thomas Dekker was closer to Shakespeare than to the other three writers. He achieved a large number of dramatic works in collaboration with other writers.¹¹⁹

Shakespearean drama was a whole new method of speaking about the human. It showed human beings in their different roles and business. Each role presented a specific aspect of what was meant by being a greedy merchant, a brave prince or a jealous lover. Shakespeare explored human weakness creating more complete characters better than ever shown before on the English stage. His exploration of human ambition, greed, lust, and madness was without parallel in English literature at all. Shakespeare founded specific frames of entity and behaviour for women. Characters such as Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, the Countess in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* “represent unconventional women in that they are not the dependent, weak women of Elizabethan drama.” In many cases they pushed men into works out of their plans. Shakespeare’s comedies depended on themes of love, friendship, mistaken identities as well as some very rude language and comic situations.¹²⁰

The main features of Elizabethan drama can be summarized as follows:

1. The comedies used Italian or Latin comedies as a source.
2. Comedies were often romances or congratulatory works in praise of a patron or monarch.
3. Love and its tribulations were the main themes in Shakespeare’s comedies.
4. History plays and chronicles were common.
5. Seneca was the model for tragedies.
6. Tragedies were melodramatic, full of emotional speeches and scenes, and used a great deal of stage spectacles.
7. Tragedies were concerned with the darker side of human characters: immorality, greed and cruelty. They also touched upon the melancholic aspect of human life (a theme shared with Jacobean drama).
8. Politics and history interested almost all the playwrights.¹²¹
Notes


18. J. A. Cuddon, pp. 402-403
22. Richard Dutton, p. 29.
32. M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, pp. 265-266


39. Andrew Sanders, p. 84.


46. Ibid


54. Paul Innes, p.81.


60. Ibid, pp. 200-201.
70. R. D. Trivede, p. 90.
71. R. F. Clarke, pp. 24-25.
77. Martin Gray, p.187.


82. John Peck and Martin Coyle, p. 98.


84. Edward Albert, p. 66.


87. R. F. Clarke, p. 31.


89. Chris Baldick, p. 171.


94. Martin Gray, p.171.


96. R. F. Clarke, p. 31.


98. Edward Albert, p. 67.


100. Emile LeGois, p. 240.
101. Edward Albert, pp. 67-68.
103. William Henry Hudson, p. 41
104. Edward Albert, p. 67-68.
110. Martin Stephen and Philip Franks, p. 22.
118. R. F. Clarke, pp. 33-34.
120. Pramod K. Nayar, pp. 64-67.
121. Ibid, PP. 56-57.