

# **LECTURE 3**

# **ENGLISH LITERATURE**

# **OF THE RENAISSANCE**

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**MA., senior lecturer: Sartbayeva E.K.**

# REVISION: LECTURE 2

Historic background: England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

2. The Literature of the 14 century:

- William Langland
- John Wyclif

3. Geoffrey Chaucer: Life and Works

- Life and literary activities
- "The Canterbury Tales"
- Chaucer's contribution to literature

4. The Literature of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

- Folk – songs and ballads.
- The Robin Hood ballads.

- **Lecture 3. English Literature of the Renaissance**
- **1. Pre-Renaissance period: ideology of humanism**
- **2. Pre-Renaissance literature:**
- **3. Thomas More: Life and Work ("Utopia")**
- **4. The Renaissance in England.**
- **5. The predecessors of William Shakespeare**
- **-Philip Sidney**
- **- Edmund Spenser**
- **-Christopher Marlowe**
- **6. Theatre and Drama of the Renaissance**
- **7. Shakespeare's Junior Contemporaries**

**The main concepts: humanism, Pre-Renaissance, predecessor**

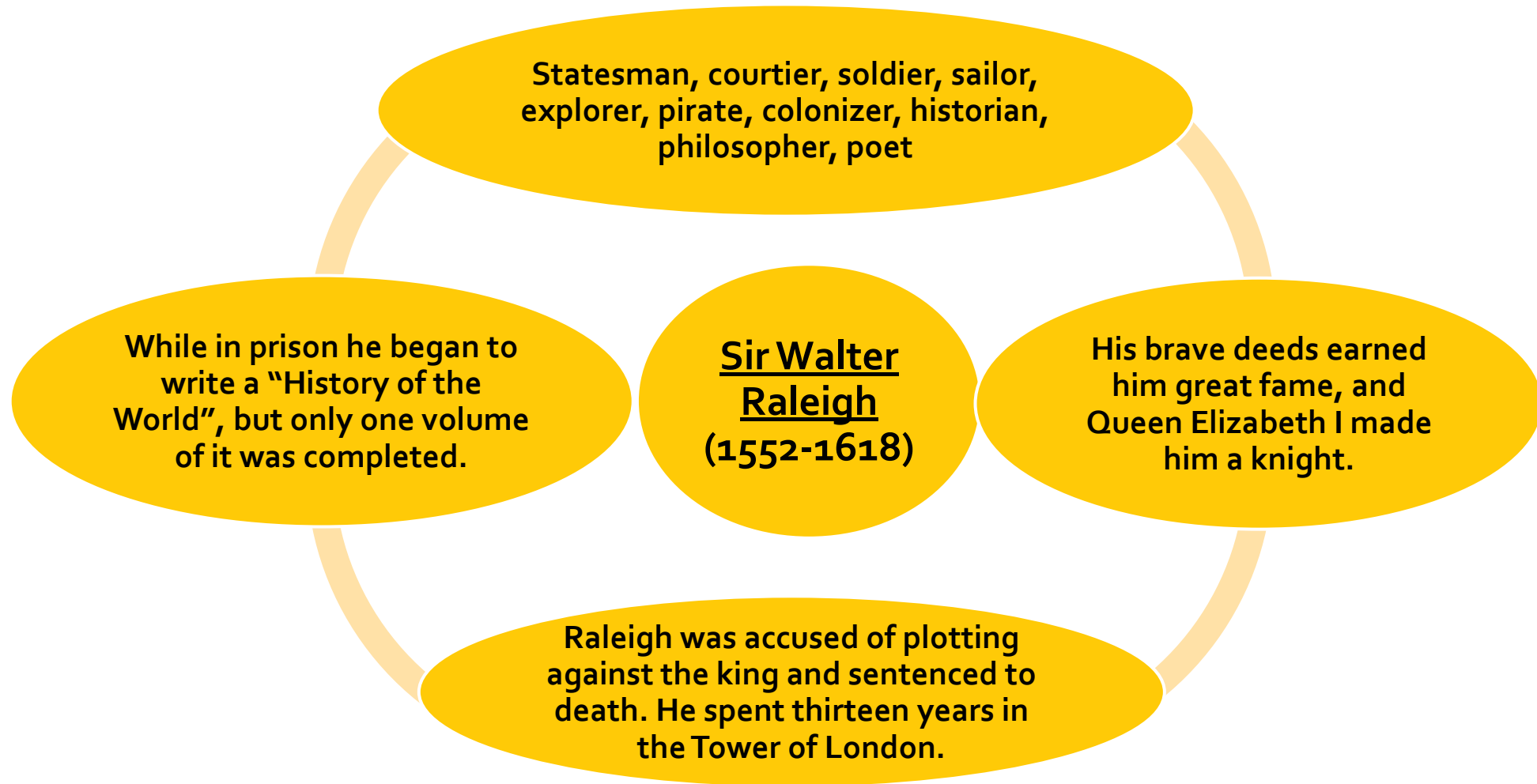
# Pre-Renaissance period: ideology of humanism

- **The Renaissance, or the Revival of Learning**, was the period when European culture was at its height. The coming of this great and glorious epoch, which **lasted from the 14<sup>th</sup> century till the 17<sup>th</sup> century** was caused by complex economic and social conditions.
- At that time **the feudal system** was being destroyed by the bourgeoisie. The old social order was coming to an end and the new class was rapidly gaining strength. Feudal domains, once almost independent, came under one-man power. In opposition to feudal discord, absolute monarchy came into being This led to the forming of nations in the true sense of the word, and as a natural consequence, to the **creation national languages**.

- **This new outlook was called Humanism.** It could not accept the old theological views, and took the art and science of ancient Greece and Rome for its basis, The term **“the Revival of Learning”** meant the **revival of ancient art and culture.** When in 1452 the Empire of Byzantium ceased to exist, a number of Byzantine scholars fled to Europe and began teaching the Greek language and literature, , which up to that time was unknown there. The time demanded positive, rational knowledge.
- **Renaissance was represented in astronomy by Copernicus, in medicine by Vesalius and Servetus, in philosophy by More, Montaigne and Bacon; in philology by Erasmus of Rotterdam.** Great geographical discoveries were made by Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Fernando Magellan and many others. Leonardo da Vinci put forth a new theory and practice of art.
- 16<sup>th</sup> century humanists critical spirit eventually brought them into conflict with the church. The greatest of the European humanists were Dutchman Erasmus and the English writer Sir Thomas More.

- **The Humanist** – the word was first used by Italian scholars to refer to a teacher of the humanities – the language and literature of Ancient Rome and Greece. The aim of such teachers was to bridge the gap between the '**classical**' period and their own. Through education, they would make the religious, philosophical and moral beliefs of the day healthier, and strengthen their country in the arts.
- The movement has its origins in the creative activities of the Italian poet and scholar Petrarch and reached England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Humanists assert the capacity of humans for fulfillment through a life based on reason and a man's command of scientific knowledge.

# Pre-Renaissance Literature



- **Raleigh was much interested in science and literature.** He organized an “**academy**”, a circle in which atheistic views were discussed. Its members included Walter’s friends: **Thomas Harriot (1560-1621)**, the most distinguished English mathematician and astronomer before Newton; Christopher Marlowe, the greatest English dramatist before Shakespeare; Edmund Spenser, the foremost poet of the time and Ben Jonson, the most influential playwright and poet of his period.
- **Walter Raleigh was an outstanding poet** himself. Much of his poetry is lost, and we know only about thirty poems written by him. They are full of profound wisdom, written with great elegance and simplicity of style, and are remarkably expressive. **His best poems and prose works are “The Lie”, or “The Soul’s Errand” and “The Discovery of the Empire of Guiana” (1596).** He denounced the cruelty, hypocrisy and social inequality of his time. Even if he had written nothing else, this poem alone would be sufficient for us to consider him a major poet of the Pre-Renaissance.



# Pre-Renaissance authors and texts

<p><b><u>Sir Thomas Wyatt (1509-1542)</u></b>. Imitation of Petrarch sonnet. Sonnets – abba abba cddc ee.</p>	<p><b><u>Ben Johnson (1572-1637)</u></b>: Comedies of humours – social satires where ‘humours’ were distorted human qualities such as foolishness, egotism and greed are made into people. The Alchemist.</p>
<p><b><u>John Lily (1554-1606)</u></b>: Prose romance “Eupheus”, plays “Endimion”, “Campaspe”.</p>	<p><b><u>Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)</u></b>: Leviathan- metaphor for the ideal Commonwealth. The basis of all knowledge is sensation and motion. Our appetites are our reactions to external motions and serve self-preservation.</p>
<p><b><u>Cristopher Marlowe (1564-1593)</u></b>: Creator a blank verse. Plays “Edward II”, historical drama “Doctor Faustus”.</p>	<p><b><u>Robert Herrick (1591-1674)</u></b>: follower of Ben Johnson.</p>
<p><b><u>John Webster (1578-1632)</u></b>: Creator of the revenge tradition dating from Seneca and very popular in the Jacobean theatre (revenge tragedy and the tragedy of blood). “The duchess of Malfi”.</p>	<p><b><u>John Bunyan 1628-1688)</u></b>: “The Pilgrim’s Progress”- the allegory in the the form of a dream in which Christiran flees from the City of Destruction and sets out on a pilgrimage through the River of Death to the Celestial City (heaven).</p>

- The death of King Richard III, the last of the Plantagenets during the battle of Bosworth in 1485 and the end of the Wars of the Roses, marked the decline of feudalism in England. The new dynasty of the Tudors and its first king, Henry VII, established absolute monarchy. This policy was continued by his son, Henry VIII, who was the first patron of humanists in England.
- During his reign music and poetry flourished at this court, foreign scholars, artists, and musicians came to England. Among them were the great Dutch scholar, **Erasmus of Rotterdam** (1466-1536) and the great German painter Hans Holbein t (1497-1543). Music was represented by Italians and Frenchmen. With literature the case was different because many of the ideas of the Renaissance were popularized by English poets and dramatists. 16<sup>th</sup> century humanists critical spirit eventually brought them into conflict with the church. The greatest of the European humanists were Dutchman Erasmus and the great Englishman and the greatest men of the period, the most prominent of these writers Sir Thomas More.

# Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) & Henry Howard (1517 – 1547)

- The outstanding poets of the period were Thomas Watt and Henry Howard. Both made important contributions to English poetry. Wyatt was diplomat and wrote some beautiful lyrics and songs, and is also remembered for introducing the sonnet into English verse.



**Sir Thomas Wyatt  
(1503-1542)**



- **The sonnet is a verse form which was very popular during the Renaissance.** It was brought to perfection by the great Italian poet **Francesco Petrarca** (1304-1374) or Petrarch (in English). It is a poem of fourteen lines divided into two quatrains (4-line groups) and two tercets (3-line groups). **The rhyming of the quatrains is abba abba.** The rhyming of the tercets, according to Petrarch, is either cc deed, cde cde, or dcd dcd. But the difficulty of composing sonnets is not only in the difficult form: in a classical sonnet a thought is put forth in the first quatrain and another, contradicting it, in the second; they intersect in the first tercet, and a solution is reached in the second tercet, in the last line of the sonnet.

- Among the foremost English masters of the sonnet during later centuries were **John Milton, William Wordsworth, John Keats (1795-1821), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Oscar Wilde.**
- **Thomas Wyattt** in his sonnets modified the Petrarchan model, changing the rhyming of the tercets. **His sonnet scheme is as follows: 'abba abba cdd cee'.**

- **Another form of the sonnet**, purely English, **was invented by Surrey**. It consists of three quatrains and a couplet: **'abab cdcd efef gg'**. Shakespeare's sonnets were written after this pattern, and for this reason such sonnets are generally called Shakespearean. However the real creator of the form was Surrey. Another great innovation of Surrey's was his translation of two books of Virgil's "Aeneid". He rendered them into blank verse (unrhymed five-foot iambics).

# Thomas More's life and work (1478-1535)

He became a Member of Parliament in 1504, and very soon brought upon himself the displeasure of Henry VII after persuading the members of Parliament not to vote to the king the huge sum of money

was born in London and studied at Oxford, after which, like his father and grandfather, he became a lawyer and later, a judge.

During a diplomatic mission to Flanders he began writing "Utopia", which was printed in Belgium in 1516 under the supervision of his close friend Erasmus. The famous satire by Erasmus, "Praise to Folly", was dedicated to More.

In 1532 More refused to take the oath to the king, which would have meant his recognizing Henry VIII as head of the Church of England.

In 1529 More was made Lord Chancellor of England (highest judge to the House of Lords).

# “Utopia”

The word “Utopia” is formed of Greek words meaning “no place”, “nowhere”. The work is written in Latin and divided into two books.

Book I contains a conversation between More himself, the Flemish humanist Petrus Aegidius, and a veteran sailor Raphael Hythloday, formerly a traveling companion of the famous Amerigo Vespucci. The conversation deals with social and economic conditions in Europe and in England. Hythloday in Greek stands for “a teller of lies”, More gave him this name, obviously, to avoid being accused of free-thinking.

Book II is dedicated to Hythloday’s description of the island of Utopia, which he visited during one of his journeys. It is a state that has achieved absolute social and economic harmony by replacing private property by common property.



- In the book *More* attacks all that was typical of contemporary English life: the parasitism of the nobility, the uselessness of the clergy, the vices of the monarchy itself. At that time common land was being enclosed; the peasants were being driven off their lands and brought to poverty; the fields were being turned into pastures for sheep. The increase in the production of wool was profitable to the merchants, because the famous English wool was the chief article of export at that period. This gave *More* an opportunity to put the following words into Hythloday's mouth: **"Your sheep, that were so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I hear it said, have become such great devourers and so wild, that they swallow the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses and cities"**.

- In this happy country all are contented with simple necessities and are employed in useful labour. Since the wants are few and everyone must labour, no one need work more than six hours a day, and the rest of the time may be devoted to education and recreation. Utopia knows no money: there is no need of it there. Everything is paid for the general welfare. Gold is considered to be something indecent: chamber pots are made of it. Neither laziness nor greed are known. No post in Utopia is hereditary, every official is elected. In Utopia war is never waged. Criminals are punished by slavery, not by death, even for the greatest misdeeds. It is one of the oldest laws of the Utopians, that no man can be punished for his religion. Every man may try to express his views by modest argument.. It may seem strange to us that More put slaves in his ideal system, but they were either condemned convicts or prisoners of war who refused to surrender and were captured by force. Slaves belonged to the state, slavery was not hereditary, and every slave became free if he worked honestly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEkbos8TMZw>

- **Utopia Character List**

- **Thomas More** is the author of Utopia. He is a character in his own work. In the opening letter to Peter Giles, More explains that he is writing a record of a conversation that he and Giles had with a man named Raphael Hythloday. More does not do much speaking.
- Hythloday is the main speaker. In the opening and closing letters to Peter Giles, More reveals aspects of his character. More is very clever and he makes several jokes and puns in attempts to be humorous. In the closing letter to Giles, More makes it clear that Utopia is a fictional place that does not actually exist.

- **Peter Giles**

- a friend of the author, Giles was a printer and editor, also serving as the Clerk of Antwerp. In Utopia, Giles meets More when the Englishman travels to Flanders (present-day Belgium). Giles introduces More to Raphael Hythloday and Utopia is a narration of Raphael's words to Giles and More.

- **Raphael Hythloday is** a fictional character. Though Giles and More are actual people, Hythloday is entirely fictional. Raphael is the name of a Biblical angel but the name Hythloday means "peddler of nonsense." Hythloday brings good news of the ideal society, found on the island of Utopia. Unfortunately, the island does not exist. Hythloday is a Portuguese man who sailed on the fourth voyage of Amerigo Vespucci. Vespucci was actually a sailor and discover (after whom America is named).
- **Hythloday is the main character in Utopia** and he is distinct and unique from the others. Hythloday is very wordy and he speaks in long sentences. It's difficult for the other characters to get a word in edgewise. At the same time, Hythloday tends to be pretty dogmatic in his views. He is an absolute fan of Utopia: he praises all of their customs, criticizing nothing. Hythloday can seem very sensible at times, despite his ridiculous traits. In discussing court politics, Hythloday is wiser than More, realizing that the fickle shifting views of a king's flattering advisers can make the court an unpleasant adventure for the well-intentioned honest adviser. More rejects Hythloday's advice and learns his lesson the hard way.

- **Utopus** is the ancient conqueror who built the Utopian state. 1760 years before Hythloday's visit to Utopia, Utopus conquered the brutish people and separated the area into its own island by cutting through the narrow isthmus that connected Utopia to the mainland. Most of the laws, institutions, and values passed down by Utopus remained in place 1760 years later, when Raphael visited.

- **Cardinal John Morton**

- Cardinal John Morton appears in Hythloday's story regarding his last visit to England. Morton is a kind, generous, and thoughtful character. He was also a real person, serving as the former Chancellor to King Henry VIII (the same king that More served). The Cardinal is notably fair and able to bring together many different people for long, meaningful conversations. Many also speculate that the Cardinal appears as a gesture to More's respect for the Church, as he often criticizes throughout *Utopia*. The presence of the benevolent Cardinal would have helped defend More should anyone accuse him of contradicting or challenging the Church's influence.

- **King Utopus**

- King Utopus is the only character in *Utopia* who is from Utopia and mentioned by name. He is the founder of the city, and More describes his development of Utopia in terms very similar to the founding of England and the mythological background of King Arthur. That King Utopus is the only named Utopian in the text is significant because it underscores More's project of portraying a world where individual accomplishment is insignificant compared to communal growth. Furthermore, by describing King Utopus similarly to the founders of Britain, More suggests that these two places (one fictional, one real) are not so different in their origin stories.



# Utopia Themes

- ◆ **Common Welfare vs. Private Interest;**
- ◆ **Uniformity and Dissent;**
- ◆ **Civic Virtue and the Moral Education of Citizens;**
- ◆ **Parody vs. Factual Representation;**
- ◆ **Exploration Through Philosophy and Travel;**
- ◆ **Pride;**
- ◆ **Power;**

# The Renaissance in England: The predecessors of William Shakespeare

The most brilliant period English literature was in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; it is usually but inaccurately called the Elizabethan age after Queen Elizabeth I who reigned from 1558 to 1603, but must be remembered that many authors of that time, including Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, wrote their greatest works after her death.

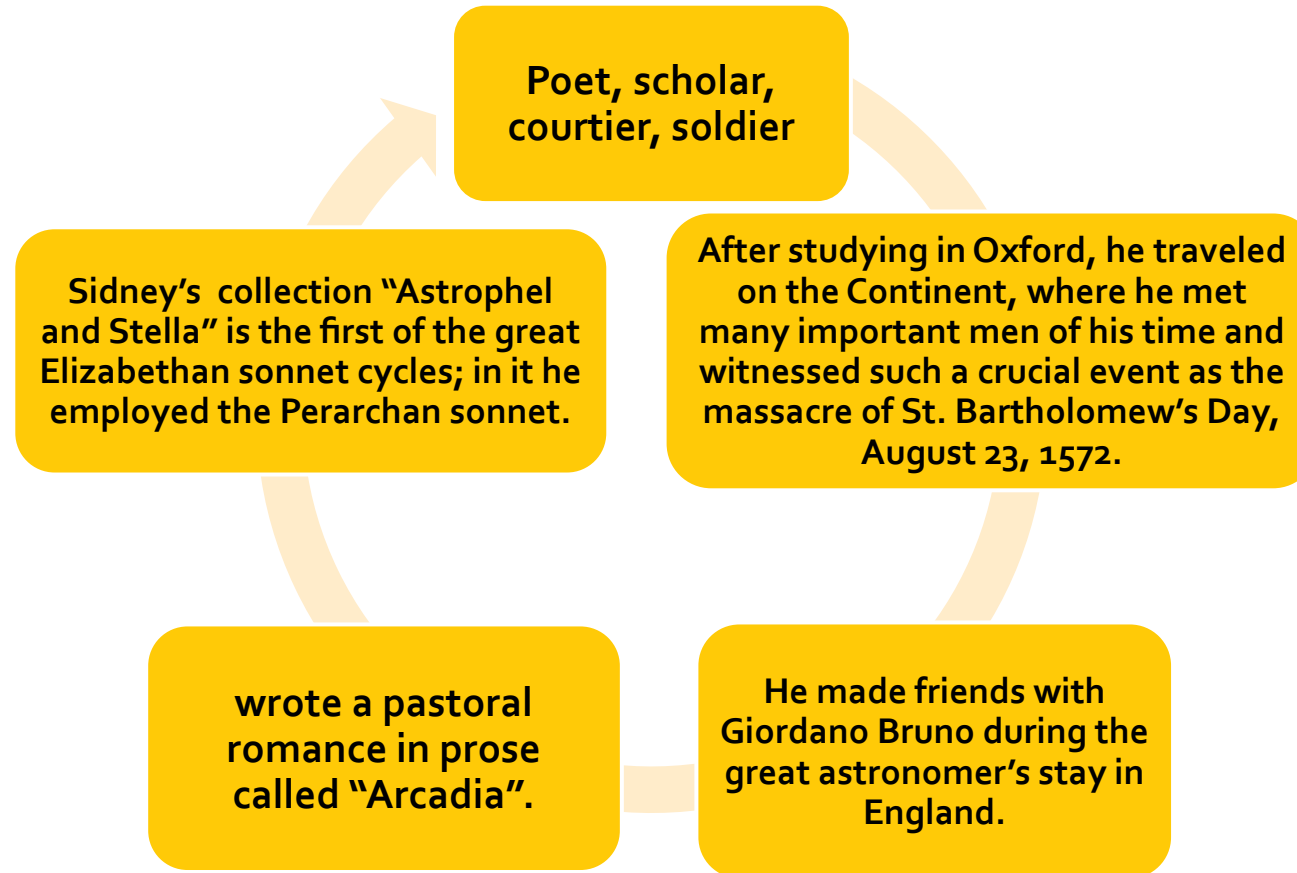
England had become a great world power; the peak of the country's development was reached in 1588, when the Spanish Armada, an enormous fleet sent by King Philip II to conquer England, was defeated. England had established wide commercial contacts with many nations, including Russia and rich trading companies had been organized.

Prose in the Renaissance may seem less important than drama and poetry. But in fact, Renaissance prose is important in several ways: it helped to form the modern English language, and it gives the earliest examples of many forms of writing which later became very popular.

The foremost poets of the period were Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser.

The English people were now a great nation, and the English language, enriched and already standardized, was now, except for the spelling, not like Modern English. However works of the Renaissance or Elizabethan age, especially those in verse, can still be read as living literature and enjoyed more than anything else written in English.

# Philip Sidney (1554-1586)



- **Sidney died a hero.** In 1586 he was in the Netherlands with an English expeditionary corps: the English were allies of the Dutch and helped them in their struggle against the Spanish invaders. In the Battle of Zutphen Sidney was mortally wounded. Tormented by pain and thirst, he was putting an almost empty bottle to his lips when he saw a common soldier looking longingly at him; Sidney passed the bottle and said, "Thy necessity is greater than mine." Several days later he died, and all England mourned for him.
- All the works of Sidney were published some years after his death- at the time it was "not quite the thing": for an author of noble birth to print his poems; it was enough to circulate them in manuscript among close friends. (The poems of Wyatt and Surrey were published only in 1557).
- Yet Sidney was the author of the most important works of prose fiction of his age, of the most important piece of literary criticism and of the most important sonnet cycle. His works, when published, had a great influence on all English Literature of the time.

# Edmund Spenser (1552 -1599)

- The future poet attended the merchant Tylors' School and later went to Cambridge as a **"sizar"** (a poor student who paid less for his education than others and who had to serve the richer students during meals). **"The Shepherd's Calendar"** is written on the form of verse dialogues in a rural setting in the manner of Virgil. It is a mixture of nature songs, satires, laments and praise of Queen Elizabeth.
- **"The Shepherds' Calendar"** consists of twelve eclogues, or dialogues, between shepherds (one for each month of the year). Though pretending to represent simple life, it is really a running commentary on contemporary affairs, and at times becomes didactic or satirical. Probably the most important of these is "October", which deals with the problem of poetry in contemporary life and the responsibility of the poet. The work is also interesting for the amazing variety of meter and stanza displayed in it.

- In 1580 Spenser became secretary to Lord Grey, the cruel Lord Deputy of Ireland, and lived in that country, except for two brief visits to England, until shortly before his death. In Ireland he became the owner of an estate, where he lived in comparative obscurity. In 1594 Spenser married the lady whom he commemorated in his love sonnet cycle "Amoretti". In 1598 the great Irish rebellion broke out, during which Spenser's castle was burnt. Shortly after this, Spenser, a poor and broken man, came to London with his wife and children and soon died in a cheap lodging - house.

- One day I wrote her name upon the strand
- But came the waves and washed it away;
- Again I wrote it with a second hand,
- But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.
- “Vain man,” said she, “that dost in vain assay
- A mortal thing so to immortalize!
- For I myself shall like to this decay,
- And eke my name be wiped out likewise.”
- “Not so (Quoth I), let baser things devise
- To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
- My verse your virtues rare shall eternize.
- And in the heavens write your glorious name,
- Where, whenas Death shall all the world subdue,
- Our love shall live, and later life renew.”
- (“Amoretti” Sonnet LXXV. Modernized spelling)

- **“The Faerie Queen”** – allegorical romance combining the medieval Arthurian legend with religious and Platonic idealism and political commentary. It is not the story about the adventures of the knights that attracts us, but the passages that describe nature, or picturesque allegorical scenes. Here, for example, is a procession of the seasons:

- So forth issued the seasons of the year:
- First, lusty spring, all dight in leaves of flowers
- That freshly budded and new blooms did bear
- (In which a thousand birds had built their bowers,
- That sweetly sung, to call forth paramours):
- And in his hand a javelin he did bear,
- And on his head (as fit for warlike stoures)
- A gilt engraved morion he did wear;
- That, as some did him love, so others did him fear.
-



- Some of the rhymes in the extract are imperfect, in that they are rather visual, than audible. The reason is as follows. In medieval English the spelling and the pronunciation of the words, as a rule, coincided. Later, when the language began to change, some words that were spelled alike began to be pronounced quite differently, but rhyming such words (for instance, 'love' and 'move') has remained a tradition in English versification.
- **The stanza of "the Faerie Queene"** was constructed by Spenser and is called the Spenserian stanza after him. It is a nine-line stanza, the last line is in six-foot iambics, while the others are in five-foot iambics. Its rhyming scheme is ababbcbcc. Many other poets used it: Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats.



# Christopher Marlowe (1563-1593)

- He was born two months before Shakespeare.
- In 1580 he went to Cambridge on a scholarship. Many details of his life are unknown to us, but it is almost certain that in his student days he went to the Continent on a secret official mission to establish contacts with the French Protestants, the allies of England against Catholic reaction.
- While yet a student, Marlowe wrote his first tragedies: "Dido, Queen of Carthage" (possibly in collaboration with Nashe), the story of which was adopted from Virgil, and the first part of "Tamburlaine the Great". After that, his life remains unknown to us. There is a supposition that for a brief period he was an actor, but, after breaking his leg and becoming lame, he devoted all his energy to literature. After "Timberlaine" he became a successful dramatist.

- During the six years left to him he wrote five more plays: the second part of "Tamburlaine", "The Massacre at Paris", two major tragedies: "The Jew of Malta" and "The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus" and a chronicle history play "Edward II". Among his non-dramatic works his translations of the Roman poets Ovid and Lucan must be mentioned; he had also begun a long poem "Hero and Leander", which was finished after his death by the poet and dramatist George Chapman (1559-1643), famous for his translations of Homer's poems.
- Marlowe was also the author of a small poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love", which is probably the most beautiful lyrical piece written during the English Renaissance.

- Among the great merits of Marlowe was his reform of dramatic verse. In 1561 the first English play written in blank verse was produced; that was “Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex”, a tragedy by two scholarly nobles, Sir Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset. The verse of this play was dull, harsh and crude. It was Marlowe who gave wings to the meter: under his pen blank verse became grand, sonorous and capable of expressing emotion. The poetic imagery employed by Marlowe is monumental, highly coloured, and in perfect accord with the ideas of his tragedies.
- As we already know, an outstanding feature of Renaissance ideology was the belief in man, himself the master and creator of his destiny. Marlowe’s tragedies portray heroes who passionately seek power- the power of absolute rule (Tamberlaine), the power of money (Barabbas, the Jew of Malta), and the power of knowledge (Faustus). Marlowe delights in the might and the strong will of his heroes. But there is another side to all these characters.