FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO THE PURITAN AGE

1485 - 1660
ENGLISH RENAISSANCE: even if filtered by the Reformation, it’s a time of expansion of Knowledge, Philosophy, Science and Literature.

THE TUDORS

HENRY VII 1485-1509 - period of financial and governmental stability
HENRY VIII 1509-1547 - ACT OF SUPREMACY declares himself Head of the Church in England
- sentences his chancellor Thomas More to death, accusing him of treason
- marries six times

EDWARD VI 1547-1553

MARY I 1553-1558 - ‘Bloody Mary’ and her husband Philip II of Spain harshly persecute Protestants
- war in France
THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

ELIZABETH I 1558-1603 - the ‘Virgin Queen’ is the leader of a new empire
- highest point of English Renaissance, Golden Age of literature
- Mary Stuart, ‘Queen of Scots’, is imprisoned for twenty years and executed in 1587
- colonization of the New World, consolidation of the maritime power of England.
- English fleet beats the Spanish Armada in 1588, aided by bad weather

JAMES I 1603-1625 - he believes in the divine right of kings
- in 1605 the Gunpowder Plot attempts on his life
THE RISE OF PURITANISM

CHARLES I 1625-1649

- 1628 **Petition of Right** limits his powers in several ways
- He responds by dissolving the Parliament and ruling as an **absolute king**
- 1642 Civil War between the **Royalists** and the **Roundheads**, led by **Oliver Cromwell**
- 1649 King Charles is executed
- Cromwell establishes the **Commonwealth**, a sort of Republic, and makes himself Lord Protector
WHAT IS PURITANISM?

- it’s a **movement** that arose within the Church of England in the 16th century
- it **rejects** any **spiritual authority** except that of the Bible
- **no need of intermediaries** (i.e. priests) between God and the individual
- **extreme austerity** and elimination of entertainment

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RENAISSANCE PROSE

THOMAS MORE  *UTOPIA*  describes an ideal society

FRANCIS BACON  *The New Atlantis*  a study of a fictitious culture dominated by natural philosophers

RENAISSANCE DRAMA

- *Seneca*’s influences
- *Christopher Marlowe* and *William Shakespeare* write plays about the many sides of human nature and England’s history
THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

1576 – construction of the first permanent theatre in Shoreditch

1599 – construction of The Globe, Shakespeare’s theatre in Southwark

- no scenery, rich costumes
- no women on stage until 1660
- it’s a theatre of action, illusion and poetry
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  1564 – 1616

LIFE
- probably born on 23 April into a prosperous family
- probably starts writing his sonnets during the plague in 1592
- becomes a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men company
- dies in 1616; buried in Stratford Parish Church
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WORKS: SHAKESPEARE’S POETRY

He wrote a collection of 154 sonnets. Features:

- are 14 lines long

- have an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme

- are dedicated to a young man and to a mysterious dark lady

- speak about the themes of love and time
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WORKS: SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS

- sources of inspiration: from Holinshed to Plutarch, to the Italian *novelle*
- every play is divided into **five acts**
- the main themes are: **Love, Power, Ambition, War and Death**

Shakespeare wrote **three main types of plays:**

- comedies
- histories
- tragedies
COMEDIES

1593  The Comedy of Errors
      The Taming of the Shrew
1594  The Two Gentlemen of Verona
      Love's Labour's Lost
1595  A Midsummer Night's Dream
1596  The Merchant of Venice
1597  The Merry Wives of Windsor
1598  As You Like It
      Much Ado About Nothing
1560  Twelfth Night
1602  All's Well That Ends Well
1604  Measure for Measure
1608  Pericles
1609  Cymbeline
1610  The Winter's Tale
1611  The Tempest
HISTORIES

1590  Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, 3
1592  Richard III
1595  King John
1596  Henry IV, Part 1
1597  Henry IV, Part 2
1599  Henry V
1613  Henry VIII
TRAGEDIES

1593  Titus Andronicus
1595  Romeo and Juliet
     Richard II
1599  Julius Caesar
1600  Hamlet
1601  Troilus and Cressida
1604  Othello
1604  King Lear
1606  Macbeth
     Antony and Cleopatra
1607  Coriolanus
1608  Timon of Athens
- the unifying theme of the play is doomed **young love**

- though the classical idea of destiny informs the tragedy, the characters try to decide their own fate → **modern tragedy**

- the tragedy plays with the **audience’s emotional involvement**
  → impossibility to change the events

- the **language** is often **lyrical**
Macbeth 1606

- it is a **tragedy of character**: Macbeth’s ambition causes his downfall
- nature of **power** and **historical destiny**
- the witches’ **prophecies** are the motor of the whole plot
- **limits** of human agency
Hamlet 1600

- the meaning of action, power, honour, justice, the restoration of order

- inner corruption can be concealed under the false appearance of a healthy exterior

- Hamlet and his father and mother are literally killed by poison, but society is contaminated by political and moral wickedness

- Hamlet is one of the first truly modern characters in literature → he possesses full self-consciousness
The Tempest 1611

- theme of **MAGIC** both black and white → Sycorax and Prospero
- theme of **POWER**: the power of European culture over non-European ones, the power of language, the power of the artist to create an illusion
- relationship **Prospero/Caliban** reflects relationship **coloniser/colonised**
- Ariel as a **metaphor** for the powers of art and language
JOHN DONNE  1564 – 1616

LIFE
- probably born in 1572
- in 1593 he abandons Catholicism and becomes Protestant
- in 1596 he is a member of Queen Elizabeth’s last Parliament
- in 1601 he marries seventeen-year-old Anne Moore
- becomes dean of St Paul’s
- dies in 1631
JOHN DONNE

WORKS

- Satires, Elegies, Songs and Sonnets → a witty and sophisticated love poetry. In many of his poems a clever mental argument alludes to a kind of hidden eroticism

- Sermons or Meditations, the Divine Poems, in which the soul's relationship to the divine is almost erotic
- it reflects the conflicts of the period

- prose works mainly refers to philosophy, religion and chronicles of the time → Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621

- **John Milton** is the key poet of this age, his *Paradise Lost* can be read as an allegorical commentary on the failure of the English revolution

- the **Cavalier poets**: Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling and Thomas Carew