



GREAT FIGURES OF THE RENAISSANCE AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN WORLD LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Literature, a body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter.

Key words: critic, eyeball, zany, rebirth, veneration, status quo politically, lyrics. epochs.

Introduction. The Renaissance was a period between the 1300s and 1660. The word "Renaissance" comes from the French word for "rebirth," referring to the movement's origins following the Dark Ages and the new interest in and rediscovery of Greek and Roman texts that inspired the minds of the time.

Renaissance literature moved away from the art of the Middle Ages and became more open to new ideas, such as the previously derided pagan art of Rome and Greece. This was possible due to the movement away from purely religious themes, which had been the norm for hundreds of years. Religion and faith still played a major role in literature, but did not act as the single central theme. The main genres were poetry and drama, though comedies and satires also existed.

Discussions and results. Writers in this period tended to believe that humanity was capable of great deeds on Earth, rather than just working for a reward in the afterlife. Both humanism and Puritanism worked to overthrow the cultural norms of old religion in favor of new ideas that helped humanity, though they went about it in very different ways.

Renaissance authors wrote plays, poetry, and songs, and many of them came to be known as some of the greatest English writers of all time.

William Shakespeare: Widely considered one of the greatest playwrights of all time, Shakespeare was so well-respected for his work that a specific type of sonnet, the Shakespearean sonnet, is named after him. During his life, he wrote dozens of

plays and coined more than 1,700 words still used in English today such as "critic," "eyeball," and "zany."

Edmund Spenser: Spenser is best-known today for his epic poem *The Faerie Queen*, widely acknowledged as one of the best in the canon. The poem was a glorification of England and its language. Later writers like Lord Byron and Percy Shelly would be directly inspired by him.

John Milton: Milton was a Puritan writer who wrote *Paradise Lost*, another poem often ranked as one of the greatest in history. His work was infused with his religious beliefs while also embracing some of the newer thoughts of the Renaissance, such as the ability of humans to achieve great things.

During the Renaissance, literature examples from poetry to plays showed a wide range of people who had more focus on themselves and less on how they were merely pawns of society.

The Renaissance, a period named after the French word for "rebirth," was a period in which primarily poems and dramas were written. These explored the world as seen through the eyes of humanism and science following the Dark Ages. Poetry was often set to music in lyrics, and it became more common to create art for art's sake, not just as an act of veneration.

Writers such as William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and John Milton wrote many of the works that are still the standards by which much of English literature is judged. Shakespeare, for example, famously created new words, over 1,700, which we still use today.

For much of the 18th century, a new way of thinking became increasingly common in both Western Europe and the American colonies of North America. Known as both the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, this period was very different than earlier epochs of European history. Independent thought was embraced, skepticism ran freely through work, and new values, including an emphasis on science, became quite common among the educated classes. Not surprisingly, this Enlightenment found its way to the literary world as well. Let's review some characteristics of Enlightenment literature.

For centuries, literature skirted the boundaries imposed by powerful political leaders and the Roman Catholic Church. Even in the years of the Reformation, writers were still unclear as to how to treat the new denominations. However, during the Enlightenment, figures of authority were now fair game. While there was still the risk of imprisonment, writers were much more willing to challenge the ideals held by political and religious elites. This was especially encouraged by the latest scientific findings of the day. While Galileo may have been stymied by the Church,

new thought leaders like Bacon and Newton were willing to write whatever they could prove through the use of reason.

The Enlightenment saw literacy rates all over Western Europe and North America rise greatly. More and more people were reading and becoming educated. Therefore, it is no surprise that there was a great deal of celebration of the idea of an educated person. In England, this was most clearly seen in the work of Samuel Johnson, who wrote one of the first dictionaries in the English language. In it, he provides not only definitions, but a fair amount of social commentary as well.

Elsewhere, the idea that someone could be educated was also widely celebrated. Rousseau, for example, argued that the only way to have a proper society, one that would adhere well to his social contract, was to make sure that citizens were educated in the liberal arts. The fact that the vast majority of universities in North America today still require a general education sequence in the liberal arts is in no small part because of Rousseau.

Finally, the Enlightenment saw a massive increase in the amount of satire produced by writers. Shakespeare may have gotten a few snide remarks into the dialogue of many of his plays, but never before had entire works been created that served no purpose other than to poke fun at the powerful. In this, few could match the abilities of Jonathan Swift. His *Gulliver's Travels* poked fun at the British and French governments, while his *A Modest Proposal* brought the very real issues of Irish children starving into the English mindset.

Conclusion. Literature, like many other fields, was greatly changed during the Enlightenment, a period during which independent thought was embraced, skepticism ran freely through work, and new values, including an emphasis on science, became quite common among the educated classes. The same feelings that allowed for the great scientific minds of the Age of Reason to boldly present their theories also allowed for a new set of literary geniuses to press the boundaries of what was acceptable. As a result, a society that was becoming newly literate found a great deal of moral support from an intellectual elite that thought education was the key to a better world. At the same time, these great minds also produced works that challenged the status quo politically, most notably through the use of satirical works.

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