

THE RENAISSANCE AND GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER THE POETRY OF RENAISSANCE*Qadirova Dilnura*

Abstraction: We know the Renaissance means re-birth. From about 1500 to 1600 the world was reborn in many ways. The Renaissance began in Italy, especially in art and architecture, in the fifteenth century. As England became the most powerful nation in Europe in the late sixteenth century, new worlds were discovered and new ways of seeing and thinking developed. Columbus discovered America in 1492, Copernicus and Galileo made important discoveries about the stars and planets, Ferdinand Magellan sailed all round the world. The Renaissance was worldwide. The Renaissance period cultivated a new change in art, knowledge, and culture. It changed the way the citizens thought, with first the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature, and art, as well as the new discoveries in travel, invention, and style.

Key words: Renaissance, re-birth, protestantism, religion, Erasmus, hierechy, notably, cultivated, literature, philosophy, humanistic.

In England there was an important change in religion and politics when King Henry VIII made himself the head of the Church of England, bringing church and state together (1529-39). He cut all contact with Catholic Church and the Pope in Rome, part of a reaction against the Catholic Church in many parts of Europe. Protestantism became more and more important and gave a whole new vision of man's relations with God. The king or queen became the human being on earth who was closest to God, at the head of the Great Chain of Being which led down to the rest of mankind, animals, insects and so on. The Dutch thinker, Erasmus, wrote of mankind as central to the world, and this humanist concern was the basis of most Renaissance thought. The Tudors inherited much of the medieval view of the world which consisted of numberless but linked 'degrees' of being, from the four physical elements (air, fire, earth and water) up to the pure intelligence of angels. Also, the whole universe was governed by divine will; Nature was God's instrument, the social hierarchy a product of Nature. Everything had their natural place in the unity of the whole: both within the family and state (which it is believed, should be governed by a single head). At the same time, this order, which was founded on Nature, existed for man's benefit, and man was an integral part of it. His godlike qualities had, unfortunately been ruined by the Fall (as described in the Bible) and he was constantly troubled by such things as wars and plaques. Nevertheless, provided that he treated this world as preparation for the next, and, with the help of human reason, he kept his body subject to his soul; he had it within his powers to enjoy civilized happiness. Daugther of Henry VIII and Anne

Boleyn, Queen Elisabeth(1533-1603), became the symbol of the Golden Age, the period of stability from 1558 to 1603. Following her mother's execution, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate by parliament (1537), and suffered a lonely childhood, much of it spent in the company of her young brother Edward. She was rigorously educated, studying Latin and Greek. The accession of her sister as Mary I in 1553 increased the insecurity of Elizabeth's position, she was an opponent of religious extremism, she was seen as natural focus for the protestant faction. Accused of involvement in Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion, she was imprisoned in Tower before being placed under house arrest at Woodstock (1554). At her accession in 1558 Elizabeth inherited a nation deeply divided by religious strife. She set about restoring the moderate Anglicanism of her father: Mary's grants to the Roman Catholic orders were reclaimed; the Anglican service was reintroduced (1559). Economic reforms included the calling in of the debased coinage of the previous three reigns. Elizabeth appointed as her chief secretary William Cecil, who remained her trusted advisor and friend until his death in 1598. Parliament, anxious to secure the Protestant succession, urged her to marry but she refused, although throughout¹ her reign she used marriage as a diplomatic counter in her relations with France. She conducted romantic relationships with a number of men, for example, with Robert Devereux, earl of Essex. As prudent financially as she was cautious diplomatically, Elizabeth financed government from her own revenues and called Parliament to vote supplies only 13 times during her reign. Her management of Parliament was marked by a willingness to compromise and demonstrated a political skill lacking in her Stuart successors. By her evident devotion to the welfare of her subjects, she helped create a national self-confidence that bore fruit in the last 15 years of her reign, notably in literature and in the works of such writers as Marlowe, Spenser and Shakespeare. Being the last monarch of the House of Tudor, Elizabeth was a Protestant (a term used for those who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church). Her predecessor, Mary I (on the throne 1553-1558), had been a repressive Catholic, married to the most fanatically Catholic sovereign in Europe, Philip II of Spain). Although Elizabeth cut the ties with Rome, her tolerance and her ability to compromise won her the loyalty of both Catholic and Puritans (Protestant reformers who insisted on simplicity in religious forms). In 1588 Philip's attempt to conquer England led to the defeat of great Spanish fleet known as the Armada. Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596), a national hero, was one of the commanders of the English fleet. This victory was a great triumph for Elizabeth and through her nation. England's enemies, Spain in particular, were defeated, and the English controlled the seas of the world, exploring and bringing valuable goods from the New World. This was closely linked with the Renaissance search for new ways of believing, new ways of seen and understanding the

¹ The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, ed. D. Norbrook and H. Woudhuysen (1993);

universe. Elizabethan literature in the English Renaissance period refers to the works produced during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. In this period, writers such as Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Roger Ascham, and William Shakespeare flourished[2]. The Elizabethan age saw the rise of poetry, such as sonnets. It was a golden age of drama, and it inspired a wide variety of prose. The Renaissance was the beginning of the modern world in the areas of geography, science, politics, religion, society and art. London became not only the capital of England, but also the main city of the known world. And English, in the hands of writers like Shakespeare, became the modern language we can recognize today. The invention of printing meant that all kinds of writing were open to anyone who could read. Many new forms of writing were developed. But the most important form of expression was theatre. This was the age of Shakespeare, and the Golden Age of English Drama. We can distinguish three periods of literature of English Renaissance. The first period covers the end of the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries. In England the first scholars and humanists appeared, they studied and investigated the antique philosophy, literature. In Oxford and Cambridge Universities the first generations of the English humanists were trained, the development of the book printing was of importance for humanistic culture. The first English printer William Caxton (1422-1491) learnt the art of printing at Cologne in the early 1470-s (Guttenberg in Germany in 1440).[3] In 1470-s he returned to England. In 1577 the first book was issued from his press at Westminster, Earl ‘Rivers’ ”Dictes and Sayengs of the Phylosophers”.

Between them and his death Caxton produced about 80 complete volumes, including Chaucer’s “The Canterbury Tales”, and also found time to work on translations. In this period the English humanistic literature was mainly of theoretical character, Thomas More (1478 – 1535), was the most outstanding writer of the first stage of English Renaissance. He was Lord Chancellor of England from 1529-1532), scholar and saint. He trained as a lawyer, entered parliament in 1504. He resigned in opposition to Henry VIII’s religious policies and was arrested for refusing to swear the oath to the Act of Succession and thereby deny papal supremacy. He was convicted on the perjured evidence of Sir Richard Rich after a remarkable self-defense and was executed. He was canonized in 1935. Thomas More was a renowned scholar and a friend of Erasmus, his writings including ‘Utopia’ are a description of an ideal society. His main work “Utopia” was written in 1516 in Latin, the international language of those times. The book consists of two parts and is written in the form of dialog between Thomas More and a seaman Rafail Hitlodey, the traveler all over the world. The political system of Europe of those days was sharply criticized in the conversations of the authors and Hitlodey; the wars of conquest, cruel legislative power against poor, the problems of enclosures were discussed (The extensive enclosure by landlords of the peasants fields was used for sheep farming, the peasants were turned out of their

lands by landlords). On this concern Rafail Hitlodey, the seaman, considered that “Sheep devour (eat up) people”. The antithesis to the political system of Europe is the ideal life on the island Utopia, in Greek it means “nowhere”. The picture of life and the society on the island Utopia is imaginary, not real: the political system is democratic, the labour is the main duty, there is no money at all, but there is an abundance of products; all the citizens are equal in rights and compose successfully the mental and physical work. We still use the word “utopia” to determine something unreal, unreal society. The second period, the so called Elizabethan one covers the second half of the XVI century and the beginning of the XYII. It is the time of flourishing the English Renaissance literature, the time of creating of the new literary forms: Shakespeare’s masterpieces are created in this period. The third period – the time after Shakespeare’s death and up to 1640 (the forties of the 17th century), it was the time of declining the English Renaissance literature.[4]

In The Canterbury Tales book, we see a group of pilgrims complete a storytelling contest on their way to Canterbury Cathedral. As we read further, we will realize the reasons for these stories and how they relate to late medieval England’s concerns. According to the varying personalities of the storytellers, the stories also range from lessons in morality, human nature, mischief, and even desire.

The narrative starts with a gathering of people preparing for a journey at Tabard Inn in London. Their destination was the shrine of St. Becket in Canterbury, and this pilgrimage was a yearly occurrence for them.

Chaucer is amongst the people preparing for this journey. The host suggests they all take turns telling a story as they travel, and whoever tells the best take would receive a free meal upon their return to London. There are about 24 tales, which led to the speculation that Chaucer did not finish because the story noted some people who made the journey but didn’t tell a tale. The Knight, the Man of Law, the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Franklin, the Prioress, the Nun’s Priest, the Parson, the Merchant, and the Second Nun all tell morality tales. Those who told tragic tales upset the host and were told to tell more light-hearted tales.

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