

A Brief Study of the Influences of Renaissance on the Developments of Humanism and European Literature

Guizhi Zhang*, Yiming Di

Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, China

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Humanism, European literature, the Renaissance

Abstract: It is often said that the Renaissance was the product of ancient Greek and Roman culture, and it is also developed on the basis of the medieval Christian cultural resources in the sense of cultural development. The change from the way of belief maintenance to the way of rational maintenance in the western world made the way of thinking and the scale of value in the Renaissance mainly take from the ideological resources of Christian culture; the literature in the Renaissance represents the humanistic thoughts formed under the influence of Christian culture and reflects the social reality in the period of great changes. This is a ray of light and strength found in the darkness of the Middle Ages. In this movement, people fully realized the value of human beings and the role of real life, and instead of pursuing God's blessing, they learned to be responsible for their own lives. This paper briefly analyzes the influences of Renaissance on the developments of Humanism and European literature, and the relationship between Humanism and European literature.

1. The Introduction of the Renaissance

The Renaissance, which occurred from the 14th to the early 17th century, was a significant ideological and cultural movement led by the bourgeoisie. It served as a rebellion against feudalism and the influence of the Church in various European countries. This movement is widely spread in many fields of philosophy, literature, art, and natural science. The Renaissance marks a significant transformation in the history of human thought and culture, playing a pivotal role in driving the progress and advancement of both Europe and the world.

The word "Renaissance" is translated from the French word Renaissance (renascor in Latin, rinascimento in Italian), which literally means "rebirth". This word has been used to refer to various phenomena in the West: from some experience in personal life to the cultural characteristics of the entire historical period. While the term "Renaissance" has been used to describe the "revival" or "prosperity" of cultures in various times and regions, such as the Byzantine Renaissance, the Carolingian Renaissance, the American Renaissance, and others, these usages stem from the most widely recognized usage of the term. As a specific noun, "Renaissance" most commonly refers to European culture spanning the 14th to 16th centuries. This particular usage not only encompasses the remarkable accomplishments of European culture during the past two centuries, but also represents a significant turning point in Western cultural history—the conclusion of the medieval era and the onset of the modern era [1,2].

2. The Influence of the Renaissance on Humanism

The Renaissance took some influences on Humanism, which emerged during the Renaissance as the worldview of the emerging bourgeoisie, serving as their ideological weapon in the fight against feudalism and the church. The core of humanistic world outlook is to take “human” as the foundation and affirm that “human” is the center of the universe. Its revolutionary spirit directly challenged the medieval church’s feudal worldview that placed “God” at its center. Its main contents are using human nature to oppose theocracy, taking personality liberation to oppose asceticism, affirming the present life, denying the happiness of the afterlife, opposing obscurantism with reason, opposing the concept of hierarchy with the idea of benevolence and equality, supporting centralization, and opposing feudal separatism. Humanism has a strong impact on the feudal and religious shackles that hinder the development of productive forces, reflecting the initial ideological preparation of the bourgeois revolutionary struggle. As a guiding ideology, it promoted the great ideological liberation movement of the Renaissance and the development of culture and art, and played a great role in historical progress [3,4].

3. The Influence of the Renaissance on European Literature

With the development of the Renaissance, European literature has roughly gone through three stages: early, middle and late stages as follows.

3.1. European Literature in the Early Renaissance

The European literature of the 14th and early 15th centuries represents the early Renaissance and serves as a significant period in Italian literature. The important writers are Petrarca and Boccaccio. Petrarca is the ancestor of modern love poetry. His lyric poem collection *Canzoniere*, written in Italian, sings his true affection for his girlfriend Laura and expresses his ardent demand for human happiness. Therefore, he was considered the first poet to call out the voice of modern people. The majority of the 14-line poems in *Canzoniere* achieved artistic excellence, establishing themselves as an influential poetic style in European literature. Petrarch’s lyrics opened a new way for the development of lyrics in European countries. Petrarca first proposed that “anthropology” and “theology” are two opposite concepts, and as such were lauded as “the father of Humanities”. Under his pen was beautiful affect and pathologies in real life, and the pursuit was a real and happy life, showing a strong humanities spirit [5].

Boccaccio loved life and opposed asceticism and advanced his thinking a step further than Petrarca. His representative work *Decameron* developed the ancient folk legends, satirized the priestly class bitterly, and deeply criticized the class inequality and the gender inequality in the feudal society. Therefore, it was called a monument of free thought. *Divine Comedy* is a representative work of Dante, in which he expresses his flagellation of the church’s corruption and chongism over classical culture, with the budding of humanities, and is known by Engels as the last poem of the Middle Ages, while at the same time being an initial Museum of a new era [6].

3.2. European Literature in the Middle Renaissance

The European literature spanning from the second half of the 15th century to the first half of the 16th century is referred to as mid-Renaissance literature. German national spirits rose only after Martin Luther carrying out religious reform and translating the Bible into German. Some writers in relation to humanism expressed their ideological sentiment against feudal restrictions and striving for freedom in some of their works and works written in Latin, such as Erasmus’ *Moriae Encomium*,

which exposes the degradation of the church through the self-confession of the fool, mocks the hypocrisy of the monks, criticizes the struggle for power and affirms the pleasure of human life. Münzer wrote some political papers that mercilessly attacked the Catholic and feudal rulers [7,8].

3.3. European Literature in the Late Renaissance

During the latter half of the 16th century, while some countries entered the late Renaissance at the dawn of the 17th century, Spain and England experienced a pinnacle of success in humanist literature. Spain's dramas, novels and poems flourished and became the "golden age" in the history of Spanish literature. The great Cervantes became the national pride of Spain, and the representative work *Don Quijote de la Mancha* became a world famous-work. Through *Don Quijote's* adventures, the novel comprehensively depicts the social life of Spain during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, effectively capturing the artistic portrayal of *Don Quijote*. On the one hand, it ruthlessly satirizes knight literature and on the other hand, it eulogizes humanist thought. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* has a great influence on the development of European long stories. The most important writers of this period in England were "Talented University" writers: Spenser, whose creation led to the formation of national drama in England and paved the way for the emergence of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's creation became a jewel on crown of the humanist literature. Spenser's long poem *The Faerie Queene* tells the story of a 12-day dinner held in the palace every year by the Fairy Queen. Long poems adopt symbolic means and praise moral and ethical concepts. At the same time, it also reflects the Renaissance spirit of adventure, optimism and admiration for life. Shakespeare's dramatic creation represented one of the most glorious times. In his lifetime, he created thirty-seven scripts, which praised the humanist ideal of life, exposed the sins of the feudal forces and the primitive accumulation of capital, and expressed the social ideal of the rule of a sage monarch with vivid and rich plots, vivid language and flesh-like artistic models. His dramatic creation is recognized as the beginning of modern drama. Shakespeare's plays and poems have exerted a substantial and wide-ranging influence on the development of modern world literature. During this period, three outstanding artists of the late stage of Italy's Literary Revival appeared: DaVinci, Raffaello and Michelangelo. The art of Italy had never been prosperous before [9-11].

4. The Relationship between Humanism and European Literature

4.1. The Expression of Humanistic Thought in European Literature

Humanism affirms and praises human. It advocates the liberation of personality and the free development of people, and opposes the church to depreciate people, the authority of God, and the feudal autocracy; affirms the present life and people's requirements for happiness and enjoyment, and opposes afterlife and asceticism; advocates freedom and equality, and opposes the feudal concept of nobility and hierarchy; advocates rationality and science, and opposes mysticism and obscurantism; supports the central royal power, and opposes feudal separatism. These thoughts have been fully expressed in humanistic literature. Some humanist writers went beyond the confines of the bourgeois worldview, criticizing bourgeois egoism and shedding light on the transactional nature of relationships based on wealth. They exposed the brutality of the initial accumulation of capital, revealing private property as the root of social evils, and proposed the social ideal where labor and its products belong to the entire society [12].

4.2. The Artistic Methods of Expressing Humanistic Thought in European Literature

Humanistic literature has abandoned the representation methods of medieval literature such as

symbols, allegories and dreams, learned and inherited the creation principle of simple materialism of ancient Greek and Roman literature “imitation theory”, advocated literature “reflecting nature”, emphasized the educational role of literature and art, and expressed the vivid realistic spirit. His works combine realism and romanticism, reflect real life with rich imagination and exaggeration, and have a strong sense of the times and the ideal color of the emerging class. It focuses on depicting the environment and the characters’ actions within their respective settings. Against the backdrop of a broader social context, it portrays a range of idealized characters representing the emerging bourgeoisie and highlights the ambitions and intrigues of the feudal bourgeoisie in intense conflicts.

4.3. The Genres of Expressing Humanistic Thought in European Literature

In terms of poetry, there are sonnets and double rhyme poems; in terms of novels, there are mature short stories and novels; In terms of drama, the strict boundary between tragicomedy and comedy since ancient Greece has been broken, with the emergence of tragicomedy, pastoral drama and historical drama. In addition, essay style prose is also a new genre in this period. These genres have had a great impact on modern literature.

4.4. National Language of Expressing Humanistic Thought in European Literature

Humanist writers departed from the singular Latin model traditionally employed since the Middle Ages, instead embracing their own ethno-linguistic literary traditions. This has both given the literary work a breath of national form and national style that is acceptable to the wider population, has significantly contributed to the formation and development of national languages in each country, and has also positively influenced the formation and stability of recent European ethnic countries.

5. Conclusion

The Renaissance liberated people’s minds and fueled the development of natural science and fueled the revision of capitalism, as well as new route opening and colonial expansion, and, at the same time, the art of literature. However, humanities itself also has limitations in its times and stages. It places too much emphasis on the individual, easily creating subjective autonomy or extreme individualism. The humanities movement, a luxury movement supported by the noble family, was the product of a combination of Italian hedonic and classical culture, which was itself noble in style and fundamentally unrelated to the popular population. During the Renaissance, the mainstay of European literature was humanities literature. Humanities literature is secular literature that expresses humanities ideas. It is centred on a person’s dust life and has a civil life as an important descriptor. Humanities literature discards the creative approach of medieval dreams and symbols, with a conscious use of realism approaches that portray real life realistically. Humanities literature, often written with vernacular Colloquials, sets the model for the formation of national linguistic and Ethno logical literature across nations. The Renaissance movement is a massive culture creating movement in which, under the banner of rejuvenating classical culture, there has been a boom in the literature and the rise of recent philosophy and natural science, with the emergence of a population of Gigants that will forever flash in the history of human culture.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported in part by a grant from The Education Department Henan Province

(General Research for the 2023 Education Science Plan of Henan Province; No. 2023YB0089).

References

- [1] Johnson P. (2007). *The Renaissance: A short history (Vol. 1)*. Modern Library.
- [2] Liu J. J. (2007). *Christianity and European Renaissance literature*. *Foreign Literature Studies*. 05: 144-150.
- [3] Copson A. (2015). *What is humanism? The Wiley Blackwell handbook of humanism*, 1-33.
- [4] Liu Z. L. (2010). *Humanism literature in the Renaissance*. *Market Modernization*. 12: 191.
- [5] Zhang C. N. (1991). *The historical background of the Italian Renaissance*. *Journal of University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* . 05: 18-26.
- [6] Chen Y, & Zhang H. Y. (2014). *An analysis of the characteristics of literary works during the European Renaissance*. *Forward Position*. ZC: 186-187. doi:10.14129/j.cnki.forwardposition.2014.zc.078.
- [7] Curtius E. R. (2013). *European literature and the Latin middle ages*. In *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press.
- [8] Han J. M. (2021). *A distinctive history of European literature*. *Contemporary Comparative Literature*. 02: 267-273.
- [9] Chen D. F. (2010). *Value of European literature in the perspective of New Historical*. *Journal of Jiamusi Vocational Institute*. 04: 4-5.
- [10] Hallam H. (1847). *Introduction to the literature of Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*.
- [11] Langford R., & West-Pavlov R. (Eds.). (1999). *Marginal voices, marginal forms: diaries in European literature and history (Vol. 34)*. Rodopi- Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft.
- [12] Norman R. (2013). *On humanism*. Routledge.