

The Renaissance

Queen Elizabeth I ruled England at the height of the Renaissance period. During her reign (1558–1603) poetic genius flowered in England as never before.

Edmund Spenser was a master of verse. Spenser's great work was a long poem called *The Faerie Queene* (first published in 1590). The poem tells of the quests of the knights in the realm of Queen Gloriana. Gloriana was a fairy-tale version of Queen Elizabeth herself. Although Christopher Marlowe died at the young age of 29, his plays reveal a brilliant talent. One of his most powerful dramas is *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (published in about 1604).

William Shakespeare is usually regarded as one of the greatest of all English writers. He is best known for his plays, though he wrote poems as well. Although almost all his plays retell stories first told by others, they are still creations all his own. His stories still affect audiences hundreds of years later, and his language has become part of everyday speech.

Ben Jonson was overshadowed by Shakespeare but is also acclaimed as a playwright. His works are carefully patterned after ancient Greek and Roman drama. In comedies like *Volpone* (1606) he made fun of much of what he saw in society. After the great days of Shakespeare and Jonson, England's drama declined. In 1642 the theaters were closed by order of the government.

One of the highlights of England's Renaissance was the Authorized, or King James version of the Bible (1611). James I ordered the new translation and it was carried out by a group of 47 scholars.