

# Daily life in Eizabethan England

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**ZAVRŠNI RAD**

**Pula, 2023.**

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Potpis

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# INTRODUCTION

This work aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on daily life during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, which lasted from 1558 to 1603. Furthermore, the paper sheds light on how this period was a time of poverty and diseases as much as a period of power and wealth. Exploring daily life during this glorious period gives us valuable insights into the social, economic, and cultural developments. The focus will be directed towards the key aspects of Elizabethan society and Queen Elizabeth I. By studying primary sources and literature, this work aims to present the challenges and customs of those living in Elizabethan England. With the research of the world of Elizabethan England, this thesis aspires to prove a profound understanding of an era that significantly influenced the course of British history, literature, and culture.

This thesis has twelve chapters, each serving a specific purpose in examining the daily life of Elizabethan England. The initial two chapters are about the Queen herself and the characteristics of Elizabethan England. Chapter three deals with society in Elizabethan England. Along with the social pyramid, it describes families, a day in the Elizabethan era, country life, town life, life expectancy, the black death, and punishments. Chapters four, five and six explain the conflicts with religion, the schools, and the poor population. Chapter seven characterizes the houses of Elizabethans. Chapters eight and nine explore culinary habits and fashion trends. Chapters ten and eleven discuss cultural aspects of the era, such as the Renaissance and theatre, along with amphitheatres and other entertainments. Chapter twelve defines the legacy of the Elizabethan era.

# 1. THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

This era began on November 17, 1558, when Elizabeth Tudor was crowned as the queen of England. When Elizabeth I ascended the throne, England was on the verge of collapse. Armigal Waad, a royal clerk, categorized the problems facing England during this period. These challenges included issues, such as the financial restraints faced by the queen and the nobility, the instability experienced by the empire, and the lack of capable commanders and soldiers within the kingdom (Kallen, 2013, p. 10).

Before the reign of Queen Elizabeth, England experienced intense religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. The previous monarchs drained the national treasury through costly and unsuccessful wars. Furthermore, foreign trade collapsed, creating financial problems for the English nobility, consisting of approximately fifty to sixty families. Consequently, about 4.5 million of Elizabethans lived in a cruel cycle of poverty, illiteracy, famine, and illness (Kallen, 2013, p. 10).

The Elizabethan age has enduring romantic appeal but also holds significant historical importance. Politically, it marks England's rise to a dominant naval power and the rapid expansion of its commercial and colonial activities. Culturally, it is best known for the remarkable works of William Shakespeare, who is the well-known playwright of that era (Forgeng, 1995, introduction). During this period, England experienced economic prosperity and political dominance. Additionally, the queen was a figure that was admired and imitated throughout Europe. Outside London, England was still an agrarian society, with most of the English population living in the countryside. Northern England was a wild region, poorly connected to trade, and too far away for traveling (Elgin, 2009, p. 5-6).

However, London was thriving with a powerful economy and extensive commercial activity. In the realm of trade, there was significant expansion, particularly in the sectors of fabrics and clothing. Society was marked by a clear division between the nobility and commoners. The development of the middle class, comprising merchants, bankers, builders, and various traders, also increased (Elgin, 2009, p. 6-7). Merchants and traders from all over Europe were coming to London. As a result, London developed into one of the most cultured and prosperous cities in Europe. Life may



have been difficult and short for many Elizabethans, but they laid the foundation for a modern nation that would dominate the world for centuries (Kallen, 2013, p. 40).

### 1.1. Major changes in the Elizabethan era

Many regard this era as a period characterized by significant transformations in England. While English sailors explored Asia, Africa, and America, the London theatre sparked a literary renaissance. Among the most important events that marked the beginning of the Elizabethan Age were the invention of the printing press, improvements in shipbuilding, and the Protestant Reformation (Kallen, 2013, p. 14). The development of the printing press changed the role of books in society. The press was the world's first mass-production machine, and each one could produce about a hundred books in a month. Printers produced encyclopedic works, cheap manuals, religious writings, political pamphlets, calendars, posters, etc. The increasing availability of printing in the late 1450s aligned with the height of the Italian Renaissance. New books about the rebirth of art, music, and literature in Italy helped spark interest in the Renaissance throughout northern Europe. Merchant, writer, and diplomat William Caxton became interested in letterpress printing, and while living in Belgium, he produced the first book ever published in English, a love story entitled *Recuyell of the historyes of Troye* ((1464) Raoul Lefèvre). Increased availability of books sparked a revolution in literacy. By the mid-15th century, over 66 per cent of London's male servants and over 80 per cent of merchants could write at least well enough to spell their names. Less than 25 per cent of adults had this skill in rural areas. Among women, the numbers were not as high. Few women, regardless of religion or social class, could read and write. It is estimated that in the sixteenth century, only about 10 per cent of English women could write their names. By the time Elizabeth ascended to the throne, literacy had emerged as an essential tool for people attempting to enhance their position in social class (Kallen, 2013, p. 14-15).

## 1.2. A transformed nation

Very few subjects of the kingdom believed that the twenty-five-year-old queen could solve the issues that were troubling the country. Over the course of Elizabeth's 44-year reign, England underwent significant transformation, becoming a powerful global force. The Queen resolved conflicts between Catholics and Protestants by persuading Parliament to declare Protestantism the official religion. The financial issues were settled by securing gold and precious gemstones through authorized privateering missions against enemy ships. Elizabeth encouraged foreign trade and maintained internal peace, simultaneously allowing her privateers to explore the vast expanses of the ocean. Consequently, there was a noticeable improvement in the economy, which benefited the nobility. Moreover, this escalating prosperity accelerated the rise of a middle class, which encompassed such professions as merchants, professors, gardeners, lawyers, and craftsmen. Economic expansion during the Elizabethan era resulted in the emergence of the English Renaissance in art, literature, and science. The Renaissance was dominant in the London playhouses, which were always crowded in Europe. Attending plays during the Elizabethan era served to demonstrate sophistication, fashion, and social class. Initially, only the wealthy attended theatrical productions. However, by the end of the 16th century, the entire population participated in watching plays written by famous playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Christopher Marlowe (Kallen, 2013, p. 11).

## 2. ELIZABETH I

Upon Elizabeth's ascension to the throne, many of her subjects were dissatisfied, concerned that her reign would accelerate the downfall of an already unstable nation. Others were displeased with another woman as their ruler, particularly after the unsuccessful reign of her half-sister, Mary. Motivated by a desire to conquer this prejudice, Elizabeth wisely intended to prove that a woman can be capable ruler. Her reign, lasting a remarkable duration of forty-five years, emerged as the longest recorded in history up to that time (Price-Groff, 2001, p. 12). William Lance describes: "Elizabeth was a born actress, and the court was the stage on which she played the great productions – both comedies and tragedies – of her reign. But every actor needs a supporting cast and audience, and both roles were filled by the attendants, courtiers, servants, and hangers-on who swarmed about the queen wherever she was. They were there either to serve Elizabeth or to serve those who served her – and in so doing to serve their own interests as well" (Lace, 2003, p. 22). Maids of Honor were almost always present by her side. She maintained close relationships with them because they attended to her personal needs, such as bathing and dressing. In addition to the female attendants, she also had male grooms of the Privy Chamber, gentlemen pensioners, and members of the Privy Council as part of her inner circle at court. They primarily originated from the most prestigious noble families in England. A large group of staff members, including butlers, maids, cooks, dressmakers, grooms, laundresses, and other servants, managed the daily work of the court. Within the approximately fifteen hundred people who comprised Elizabeth I's court, there were also musicians for entertainment, soldiers for protection, and clergymen for religion (Lace, 2003, p. 22-23).

### 3.1. The coronation of Elizabeth I

On January 15, 1559, at Westminster Abbey, one of the most elegant ceremonies in English history took place. Elizabeth rode through the streets of London in a plush carriage at the head of the cavalcade, which contained one thousand nobles, government officials, and relatives. The grand procession was a journey from the

Tudor palace in Hatfield to London. After she was presented as the new queen by the lord mayor, she spoke to the assembled crowd: "Be ye ensured that I will be as good to you as ever a Queen was unto her people... And persuade yourselves that for the safety and quietness of you all I will not spare if need be to spend my blood" (Kallen, 2013, p. 28). Cheering filled the streets, and church bells echoed through the air when she was officially crowned at Westminster Abbey. People welcomed the new queen with great enthusiasm, as if they had predicted a prosperous era of literature, trade, and exploration. However, it is essential to note that not all Elizabethans experienced such blissful times. Most of the queen's subjects were impoverished and lacked education. Like their ancestors, they earned low wages and endured long, exhausting daily work (Kallen, 2013, p. 28 - 29).

### 3.2. Parliament and the Queen

Elizabeth's choices required the approval of Parliament, which consists of two main branches: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The House of Lords included nobles and clergy, while the House of Commons included wealthy businessmen and landowners. However, there was a consistent lack of agreement between Elizabeth and Parliament. She desired their approval of her commands, yet they frequently held opposing opinions. This conflict arose due to differences in religious beliefs and the fact that Elizabeth remained unmarried (Price-Groff, 2001, p. 40 - 41).

The relationship between Parliament and the Tudor monarchs was consistently unsteady. Henry VII, the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth, rarely convened Parliament and used it for law-making purposes only. However, his son Henry VIII effectively used Parliament to secure funds for his military expeditions. Additionally, Henry VIII attempted to manipulate priests and bishops through Parliament. The Tudor monarchs strategically took advantage of Parliament to strengthen their policy. Therefore, this increased the authority of the Parliament. Despite the possibility of eliminating Parliament, the Tudor monarchs retained it for two primary reasons. First, they relied on Parliament for financial resources, and second, they required the support of merchants and landowners. Elizabeth followed in the steps of her grandfather and

attempted to avoid using Parliament after her Reformation Settlement of 1559. Members of Parliament had significant rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom to meet and speak to the monarch. Following the mentioned Settlement, the Tudor monarchs recognized the necessity of seeking alternative sources of money to reduce their reliance on Parliament. Elizabeth used highly unwise strategies such as selling "monopolies". Moreover, she engaged in the sale of official government positions. As a result, concern arose regarding Parliament's authority, leading Parliament to assert its right to deliberate on these matters. By the 17th century, it became evident that Parliament would challenge the authority of the monarchy (McDowall, 1989, p. 79-80).

## 4. SOCIETY

England had a population of over 3 million when Elizabeth became the queen. By the time she died, the population had increased to 4 million. While most people lived in rural areas, cities, particularly London, were experiencing significant growth. England was ethnically and culturally diverse because of many foreign immigrant settlers. Although certain countries were under English rule, they retained their regional dialects (Forgeng, 1995, p. 8).

The country's thriving economic system and reputation for religious tolerance made it appealing to foreigners. Consequently, many people immigrated from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and the Netherlands to live in London. Because of religious tolerance, there was a diversity of races and religions, such as Jews from the European continent and African Muslims. English natives often referred to immigrants as strangers and a source of complaint. They blamed immigrants for the overcrowded apartments and lack of employment. Moreover, they were also being held responsible for spreading diseases such as the plague and smallpox (Kallen, 2013, p. 41).

### 4.1. Social pyramid

At the top of the hierarchy was Elizabeth, the monarch. As everyone else was beneath her, she commanded loyalty and obedience from each person (Price-Groff, 2001, p. 39). Elizabeth wore precious gems and gold to avoid any misconception about her status. The next social group are merchants who primarily resided in London. Merchants aspired to attain the prestigious position of Lord Mayor of London, which required election by the aldermen. The Lord Mayor held enough influence to oppose the monarch's authority. Livery companies played a significant role within the merchant community. While London housed around one hundred companies, twelve of them, known as the "Great companies," held dominance over the city's commerce. Apprentices were under merchants on the social scale. Unfortunately, their lives were not always pleasant as they were not entitled to receive a payment. It was challenging for apprentices to secure employment outside the livery company hierarchy. The available jobs included positions, such as governors, servants, maids, ship captains, or working in rural areas. Those who were impoverished found themselves at the

lowest level of the social pyramid and often had to rely on themselves for survival (Picard, 2016).

When Queen Elizabeth became the ruler of England, the country was no longer a feudal society. However, feudal and manorial systems still influenced the social structure. Feudalism played a role in establishing the hierarchy of nobility. Among these nobles were included noblemen, knights, squires, and ordinary gentlemen. The monarch owned most of the land in the country. The gentry, consisting of knights, squires, gentlemen, and their families, were a significant part of society and held power in their local areas. The central government relied heavily on their support (Forgeng, 2010, p. 10 – 12).

#### 4.2. Family

In the 16th century, the relationships between spouses in wealthy families were often distant. They lived in a large house where each spouse had a bedroom and servants. Their parents arranged their marriages for economic or political reasons rather than basing them on love or affection. Initially, there may not have been emotional connections between the husband and wife, but parents hoped they would develop feelings over time. If there were no emotions between the partners after a while, the husband was permitted to seek sexual relationships outside his marriage. Expectations for happiness in marriage were low, resulting in minimal disappointment. Elizabethans accepted this type of marriage because of the high mortality rates among adults. Due to these high rates, the need for companionship within marriage was not essential. Relationships between parents and children in the upper classes were also distant. The high rates of infant mortality indicated that parents did not form close bonds with their children. As children grew older, the bond between them and their parents developed (Stone, 1979, p. 81 – 83).

Childbirth occurred in the household and was a social event of great significance for women. Hospitals were reserved for those suffering from serious medical conditions despite the potential risk of death for mothers. Baptizing children served a dual purpose. First, it served a religious purpose, and second, it served as a meaningful ritual for giving a name and welcoming a child into a social community (Forgeng, 2010, p. 43 - 45).

#### 4.3. Daily routine in the Elizabethan era

A day in the Elizabethan era started early in the morning, signaled by the ringing of church and civil bells. People relied on specific times of the day, such as the dawn, sunrise, midday, sunset, dusk, midnight, and the crowing of the rooster since clocks were expensive. Mornings were chilly, and people used cold water to wash their faces. Wealthy had servants that would use a fire to warm water and clothes for their masters. Children commonly asked their parents' blessings and said morning prayers. After breakfast, people would go to work, which would be interrupted by midday dinner. In the summer, people in rural areas might take a half-hour rest mandated by law. During the summer, bedtime was around 9 PM, while during the winter, it was around 10 PM. The wealthy had special nightshirts, while ordinary people slept in underwear, with men in breeches and women in smocks. They might also wear hats to keep their heads warm. These activities were part of the daily routine of working people. Daily activities were important in determining the social position of an individual (Forgeng, 2010, p. 73 - 76).

The working days were from Monday to Saturday, with Saturday afternoons off. For schoolchildren, Thursday afternoon was a half-holiday. Thursday and Sunday were reserved for large meals such as roasts. The law required each Elizabethan to attend church every Sunday because it was the Sabbath. During church services, women and men typically sat in different sections, although this was not strictly enforced (Forgeng, 2010, p. 76 - 78).

#### 4.4. Country life

Over 90 per cent of the Elizabethan population resided in rural areas, which were under a feudal system established in the eleventh century. Wealthy nobles known as the Lord of the Manor were in charge of these rural areas. These lords possessed broad lands, such as farmlands, forests, and pastures filled with sheep, and even entire villages. This land was divided among a small number of wealthy nobles. The lords resided in large houses, while the unskilled peasants who worked on their land lived in small, one-room houses. Peasants received protection, legal support, and the right to farm a small amount of land from the lord in exchange for their labor. Skilled laborers, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and artisans, could own their own shops.



The villages were of a small size, consisting of only five or six streets. Each street held a market called "cheap" that took place weekly or biweekly. However, the organization of these markets had to be authorized by the local lord of the manor (Kallen, 2013, p. 29).

At the local markets, Londoners had access to a variety of fresh food options, including beef, fish, poultry, fruits, and vegetables. Farmers were engaged in the sale of livestock such as sheep, cattle, and pigs, as well as fish and seafood. The market worked six days a week, from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Some traders even extended their selling hours into the evening. However, the market was not the only option for consumers. Numerous small shops offered various items such as cheeses, spices, salt, sugar, and baked goods such as bread, pies, and fruit tarts (Kallen, 2013, p. 39).

Yeomen were the wealthiest villagers. They were landowners who earned a minimum annual income of 40 shillings, equivalent to at least 6 pounds. Additionally, leaseholders with sufficient land could be considered yeomen. They held a dominant position in the village community. They participated in roles such as village constable or parish churchwarden. On the other hand, husbandmen referred to those who cultivated their own land, similar to modern-day farmers. Husbandmen were tenants with smaller land holdings but still sufficient to sustain a family. Cottagers were the smallest landowners. They possessed a cottage where their family resided, with an acre or two of land. At the bottom of the rural social hierarchy were servants and laborers without their own place of residence (Forgeng, 2010, p. 16 – 17).

#### 4.5. Town life

During the start of the Elizabethan era, only 8 per cent of the English population resided in urban areas. That percentage was relatively small, given that the population consisted of 5,000 people. However, when the feudal system broke down during Elizabethan era, many peasants migrated from rural areas to London for better living conditions. By the year 1600, the population in London had climbed to approximately 250,000 inhabitants. The problem was that the population was expanding rapidly while the city's boundaries remained unchanged (Kallen, 2013, p. 31).

The Thames was London's main highway (Dodd, 1961, p. 37). As a result, the area was filled with numerous vessels, such as barges, ferries, rowboats, and sailboats, resulting in a crowded waterway. Along the riverbanks were fishermen, while

on the water, watermen operated boats, serving as taxi drivers of that time by ferrying passengers for a fee. London's winding and narrow streets were originally old footpaths from the medieval period. During that era, such streets were bustling with horses pulling various types of carts, wagons, and carriages (Kallen, 2013, p. 31).

Pollution was a significant issue in London, resulting in a highly unhealthy living environment for its residents. The presence of untreated sewage and poor-quality food and water led to various diseases. These unsanitary conditions attracted pests like rats, lice, and flies, effectively spreading these diseases to the population (Kallen, 2013, p. 33). As a consequence of pollution, the availability of uncontaminated water was rare outside rural areas. If people were lucky, country towns and villages had the privilege of possessing either a river or wells that remained unaffected by sewage (Dodd, 1961, p. 45).

#### 4.6. Life expectancy

The presence of pollution significantly influences the length of one's life. In comparison to present times, people living in urban areas experienced significantly shorter lifespans in the past. This was particularly evident among the population residing in the impoverished parts of London, who typically only lived until their mid-twenties. On the other hand, Elizabethans from the middle class, such as merchants, scholars, and government officials, enjoyed an average lifespan of ten years longer. Those residing in castles, palaces, and mansions had even higher life expectancies, often reaching their fiftieth birthday. In 16th century England, it was considered an achievement for a woman to celebrate her fortieth birthday. Notably, Queen Elizabeth herself lived until the age of sixty-nine. Disregarding the social hierarchy, people did not hold hope for a long life. Elizabethans were threatened with natural disasters such as regular droughts, storms, and starvation around the country due to crop failures. Women routinely died during childbirth due to poorly developed medicine. The mortality of infants was high, and young men usually died in war (Kallen, 2013, p. 33-34).

#### 4.6.1. The Black Death

However, the most significant cause of mortality was the bubonic plague, commonly known as the Black Death, which resulted in the death of approximately one-third of the population. This disease was transmitted by rats and fleas, which spread various illnesses. Fleas, which resided on black rats, would infect humans through bites. Once the plague entered the bloodstream, a person would experience symptoms within a few hours, including enlarged armpits with large, dark swellings known as buboes. The outbreak of the plague originated in Central Asia and quickly spread across Europe, eventually reaching England in July of 1348. Within a span of four years, approximately half of the population lost their lives due to the disease. Mortality rates in England stood at around 20 per cent. During this period, the plague affected everyone, taking their lives, regardless of their social class (Kallen, 2013, p. 34).

Due to many deaths occurring within a short period of time, a problem emerged regarding the management of the deceased. Authorities were compelled to promptly address the issue of disposing of the accumulated bodies scattered everywhere. After wrapping the victim in a fabric known as a winding sheet, the bodies would be buried in mass graves referred to as "pest pits" without burial rituals. Alongside the plague, people also died from contracting typhus, which spread because of lice and fleas. Thousands of people were killed by other diseases such as tuberculosis, syphilis, scurvy, malaria, and smallpox. Even Queen Elizabeth contracted smallpox but quickly recovered, unlike Lady Sidney, who got infected while caring for the queen (Kallen, 2013, p. 35). However, even with the plague and other diseases, England still had a high birth rate, and the population of the Elizabethan era regularly increased (Kallen, 2013, p. 38).

#### 4.7. Punishments

Punishments held great importance in Elizabethan society due to the absence of a dedicated law enforcement system. Public hangings aimed to educate the youth about appropriate behavior (Forgeng, 2010, p. 38). During the Elizabethan era, punishment was strictly enforced and applied to serious crimes committed within the

country. These crimes included acts like treason, murder, and a variety of other crimes, such as manslaughter, rape, sodomy, arson, witchcraft, burglary, and robbery. The predominant method of execution was hanging. Cases of poisoning and heresy were punished through a stricter method, such as burning at the stake (Forgeng, 2010, p. 36).

During this period, traitors were subjected to hanging and quartering. Following their execution, the body parts of the victims were prominently displayed throughout London. The head was placed at the entrance of London Bridge as a warning. In cases where a woman faced the death penalty, she had the opportunity to plead her belly, asserting her alleged pregnancy. This claim would grant her a few additional months to live, as it was believed that it would be wrong to cause harm to both the mother and her unborn child. Conversely, for men, a concept known as the 'benefit of clergy' existed. In the period before the Reformation, literacy was primarily held by those in religious positions, particularly priests. Hence, if a man was found guilty of a crime, he could assert his ability to read and claim his book, leading to his transfer to church authorities, who would impose more tolerant punishment (Picard, 2016).

## 5. RELIGION

When Elizabeth ascended the throne, matters of religion were unsettled, and she intended to resolve the religious issue once and for all. The first time Parliament assembled under Elizabeth's reign, it approved an act named The Act of Supremacy of 1559 or the full name: "An Act restoring to the Crown the ancient jurisdiction over the state ecclesiastical and spiritual, and abolishing all foreign power repugnant to the same" (Kallen, 2013, p. 38). The act denotes that Elizabeth was the head of the church and declared its autonomy from the pope in Rome. All individuals serving as religious officials, educators, and former students were required to swear an oath that the queen held the ultimate authority in governance, spirituality, and religious affairs within the jurisdiction. The Act of Uniformity was introduced in 1559, declaring that the English Book of Common Prayer would be officially recognized as the prayer book for the Anglican Communion. This resulted in the replacement of Catholic prayer books with Protestant rituals and rites. The Book of Common Prayer was originally published during the reign of Edward VI. Those who disagreed with this book could face severe punishment, such as life imprisonment. Additionally, the Act mandated that all men must attend church once a week or face a fine of twelve shillings, which is equivalent to twenty-five dollars nowadays. With a series of commands, Elizabeth tried to enforce the new laws. Every preacher during the sermon had to remind people that the queen was the highest power under God. They burned, smashed, or covered with whitewash all Catholic shrines, paintings, altars, statues, and stained-glass windows so that no memories of them would remain. All these laws and injunctions were called the Elizabethan Religious Settlement. The resolution of religious conflicts was largely accomplished through the acceptance of Protestantism as the dominant religion and the prohibition of Catholic masses and monasteries (Kallen, 2013, p. 38).

## 6. SCHOOL

Elementary teaching had been part of the job of the chantry priest during medieval times. The priest either taught himself or paid someone to do it for him. The need for elementary education was ignored for the most part. Only children whose parents were powerful, or wealthy could send their child to grammar school. There was also “petty school” in Elizabethan terms or a separate preparatory school where children had to learn the letters (Dodd, 1961, p. 93).

Boys from wealthy backgrounds typically started attending school around the age of six. Formal education would begin at petty schools, which parish ministers organized. Since these schools were led by priests, a strong religious influence was present. Initially, children were taught the alphabet and how to pray before moving to catechism. In order to enforce discipline, schoolmasters were allowed to physically discipline students for misbehavior or academic failure. Although the boys primarily attended, the girls also had the opportunity to participate (Forgeng, 2010, p. 52 - 53).

If a boy from a wealthy family wanted to receive a scholarship, he had the opportunity to attend a grammar school, which typically lasts between 5 and 10 years. Students would complete this level of education by the age of 14 to 18. At grammar school, the curriculum consisted of learning the Latin language and literature and subjects such as history, theology, geography, and science. Additionally, students could choose to study languages like French, Greek, or Hebrew. The students were organized into groups called forms and would study in a single room without desks. Grammar schools were primarily attended by boys, and it was uncommon for girls to receive this type of education. School days were typically quite long, lasting from 6 A.M. to 5 P.M. It is worth mentioning that even Queen Elizabeth possessed advanced knowledge of Greek and Latin. In Elizabethan England, there were only two universities, Oxford and Cambridge. All students were boys who attended a four-year course of study for a Bachelor of Arts. This program included two terms of grammar, four terms of rhetoric, and five terms of logic, along with three terms of arithmetic and music. Doctoral degrees were available in divinity, civil law, and medicine, requiring seven to twelve years of study to obtain one (Forgeng, 2010, p. 57 – 59).

## 7. THE POOR

Religious changes had a significant impact on the population, particularly those who were less privileged. Prior to Henry VIII's closure of Catholic monasteries, monks played a crucial role in providing clothing and food to the poor. However, following this event, the poor population was left to care for themselves as their numbers continued to grow annually. The number of people living in England during the Elizabethan era was growing, leading to an excess of workers and lower wages. As the population increased, there was a greater need for food and housing, causing prices for these necessities to rise. By the 1580s, approximately one-third of England's population lived in poverty. Within this group were military veterans, beggars, the disabled, the sick, and criminals, who were all seeking employment, and most of them were homeless. The poor were viewed as a danger to society, resulting in them being subjected to harsh punishments. This was a result of a law enacted by Parliament in 1547 that targeted people who declined to engage in work. Not all towns imposed punishments. However, some towns used various penalties against the poor, including physical discipline, deprivation of liberty, forced labor, banishment, and execution. In order to address the issue concerning poverty, Parliament implemented a set of laws referred to as the Poor Laws in 1563 and 1572. While some people thought that the poor deserved the consequences imposed by these laws, the majority of English citizens argued that they should receive help, particularly those who were unable to work due to sickness, old age, or other challenging situations. Since the Poor Laws made poverty a local responsibility, each country was required to collect a tax called a poor rate from the local lords of the manor. The collected money provided essential provisions such as food, clothing, housing, and medical support to those in need. Governments organized special care for orphans, the elderly, and the sick in larger cities. Furthermore, wealthy families, driven by religious beliefs, felt morally obligated to help children and often funded their education. In 1597, the Act for the Relief of the Poor was introduced to address once again the challenges faced by individuals who were financially disadvantaged. The responsibility of collecting funds to support the poor was delegated to the national government this time. An official known as the overseer of the poor was appointed to assess the required amount of money, establish the rate at which it would be collected, gather the funds, and subsequently distribute

them. This Act also dictates that parishes must build houses for the homeless and provide schooling for impoverished children (Kallen, 2013, p. 38-40).



## 8. HOUSES

The reason houses held a great importance is explained by Arthur Herbert Dodd: “The great house stood for the revolutionary aspect of the age; the small country house for its continuity with the English past. Yet the new type of house, great or small, made a great impression on contemporaries” (Dodd, 1961, p. 55). Average London houses were made of wood, brick or stone with low roof and two or three stories in height. As the population of London increased, many Tudor homes were consisted of small apartments. Consequently, numerous people were forced to share a single toilet or privy. Moreover, those who could not afford proper accommodation had to live in rudimentary dwellings made from wood scraps, dirt, and animal hides.

People greatly depended on a complex network of pipes, conduits, and waterwheels to receive water, which held great importance. While there was a free public fountain where water was accessible, it could not be consumed due to its saltiness and pollution (Kallen, 2013, p. 32-33). Several chimneys adorned houses, serving as indicators of warmth and comfort. The chimney signified a sense of sophistication and elegance, contributing to the diverse allure of Elizabethan residences (Dodd, 1961, p. 56). Even in the middle of London, houses had gardens with purpose of providing a variety of vegetables such as cucumbers, spinach, lettuce, beans, cabbage, carrots, and peas (Forgeng, 2010, p. 167).

## 9. DIET

The food consumed during Elizabethan times met the standards set by the Renaissance and garnered significant interest from travelers from other countries. However, food production during this time involved many challenges and uncertainties, as agriculture required extensive labor and was prone to be affected by natural disasters. Despite successful harvests during Queen Elizabeth I's rule, periods of hunger and high death rates still occurred. Leftovers from meals consumed by aristocratic families were given to the servants, and once they were finished, the remaining food was distributed to the poor. Breakfast often included a hastily consumed snack or was entirely skipped until the main meal of the day, known as dinner, which typically occurred in the late morning. Pottage was a common breakfast option, as were leftovers from the previous day. The midday meal took place around 11 A.M. or noon for commoners, whereas the privileged classes typically enjoyed their main meal in the evening between 6 P.M. and 9 P.M. (Forgeng, 2010, p. 163-164).

The Elizabethan calendar played a crucial role in shaping the diet of Elizabethans. Specifically, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays were designated as fish days, resulting in Elizabethans eating fish almost a third of the year. As the Act of 1563 claims: "Fish days were for the better maintenance and increase of the Navy... and not for any superstition... (nor) for the saving of the soil of man" (Picard, 2016).

As markets were all controlled by the Lord Mayor, only freemen of London could sell in them. Markets in London were open six days a week, from 6 to 11 in the morning and 1 to 5 in the afternoon. On Sunday mornings, and customers could buy only milk, fruits, and vegetables. If a woman did not wish to attend the market, she would have to wait for a street seller to arrive. Such sellers provided a range of commodities, including fish, fruits, vegetables, sausages, and baked apples. Understanding proper etiquette at the dining table held considerable significance. Elizabethans would typically carry a small knife for use during meals, as forks were not yet commonly used. Each person would have access to a spoon, as well as water and a towel to clean their hands before sitting down. Knowing seating arrangements was essential, particularly in wealthy households where the placement of the salt cellar on the table dictated the seating position of the master, guests, and family members. Typically, the salt cellar was positioned at the top of the table, while lower-class people would occupy

seats closer to the bottom. Beer was a preferable choice to water due to its safer consumption, with wine being reserved for more formal occasions. When wine was being consumed, a servant would present a glass to the person, who would then drink from it before returning it to the servitor (Picard, 2016).

## 10. FASHION

Throughout Europe, most people wore similar clothing made from the same fabric (Elgin, 2009, p. 7). In England, the ascension of the queen marked the beginning of a new era characterized by sophistication and refinement. Members of society showcased their wealth by showing off their garments and possessions. The trend began in the royal court and gradually spread among the aristocracy, minor nobility, and later the middle classes. Fashion rapidly evolved within the court, with notable changes in the sleeve and neckline details, while the overall silhouettes remained untouched. Clothing played a significant role in Elizabethan lives, with men placing greater importance on it than women. Wearing appropriate clothing was crucial for achieving success in court or business. Some people went to extremes, financially draining their families to buy clothes. New fashion arrived late in reaching far-flung regions, often spanning months or even years, due to a lack of ways of spreading the trends. Additionally, work and lack of money were the reasons why the working class did not engage in the current fashion (Elgin, 2009, p. 9).

The queen always had to be the most stylish person in court, often changing her outfit multiple times in one day. All her clothes needed to be kept clean in case she decided to wear them. Interestingly, Elizabethan women's clothing had to maintain a stiff structure despite many fabrics being lightweight and soft, such as silk and satin. The basic silhouette of the era was determined by the farthingale<sup>1</sup>, while the bodices were designed to fit tightly to the body. Ruffs, which varied in shape and size, could be worn in various styles depending on a person's age and social status. Traditionally, royal, and noble individuals would wear purple and bright red as these colors were hard to obtain and expensive (Elgin, 2009, p. 11 - 14).

Men used fashion to show off narrow waists, broad chests, and long legs. They wore stockings, also known as 'hose'<sup>2</sup> (Elgin, 2009, p. 19-21). The size of men's shirts represented their quality, as larger shirts were considered to indicate better quality (Elgin, 2009, p. 22).

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<sup>1</sup> "It was a series of concentric hoops sewn into an underskirt, increasing in size from waist to floor. Originally, these would have been made of wire, rope, or, a little later, whalebone" (Elgin, 2009, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> It was a confusing term because sometimes these referred to upper hose breeches, nether hose, or stockings (Elgin, 2009, p. 19-21).

As there was not special bridal dress, some women would have a new gown sewn for themselves, which they would later wear on other formal occasions. On the other hand, certain women chose their finest clothes. Due to its symbolic association with fertility, many brides wore green dresses. In addition, they styled their hair loosely, decorated with flowers and a bridal wreath made of roses and rosemary (Elgin, 2009, p. 31). Like today, widows would wear somber black attire for the period following their husband's death. They would remove their wedding ring if they chose to remarry (Elgin, 2009, p. 33). Ordinary people's fashion was conventional and functional, characterized by durability and minimal embellishments. They wanted to present themselves with a neat appearance (Elgin, 2009, p. 34).

## 11. RENAISSANCE

Renaissance means “rebirth”, or rebirth of ideas from Latin, Greek and other cultures of the ancient world (Holmes, 1996, p. 7). Throughout Europe, improvements have been made in various disciplines, such as art, architecture, literature, science, music, philosophy, and politics. One of the most crucial things about the Renaissance is that there is no country where the Renaissance did not occur. Along with the rapidly growing numbers of schools and universities, one of the significant movements was the Reformation. A renegade from Germany, Martin Luther protested against too much power of the Church. He argued that the Church needed reform because of the amount of corruption. In addition, he claimed that the Bible should be available in all languages, not just Latin. The Renaissance was characterized by intellectuals skilled in music, art, and science. This era had a profound impact on culture, particularly in areas such as painting, sculpture, and architecture (Dickson, 2017).

### 11.1. English Renaissance

The Renaissance arrived in England during the mid-1500s and brought significant accomplishments, particularly in the field of literature. Famous poets like Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser successfully adapted Italian poetic styles into English verse. Additionally, well-known playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare emerged as significant figures. Their theatrical works were characterized by a level of sophistication and psychological impact. The education they received at grammar schools played a significant role in shaping the London public theatre scene (Dickson, 2017). As William Shakespeare is the most famous playwright of the Elizabethan era, Thomas Thrasher claims: “Shakespeare is both a product of Renaissance England and an embodiment of it.” (Thrasher, 1999, p. 9). In English-speaking culture, he contributed to language, literature, and drama. He changed English drama from the rigid formalism of traditions from Greece and the Romans to more realistic works (Thrasher, 1999, p. 9 – 10).

Elizabethan England was filled with immigrants, who were frequently the subject of criticism from the native Elizabethans. However, these immigrants played a crucial role in enriching and advancing the Elizabethan culture in various fields such as art,

science, and literature. A notable example is the Venetian glassmaker Jacob Verselyn, whose innovative techniques transformed the production of glass and gave birth to Renaissance-style glass. Queen Elizabeth herself was the chief buyer. Additionally, there were other immigrant artisans who left a significant mark on Elizabethan society, including Belgian diamond cutters, French hatmakers, and Italian perfumers (Kallen, 2013, p. 41 – 42)

## 12. THEATRE

Theatrical productions during the Elizabethan era were popular among the public. These productions featured designed stage sets, extravagant costumes, and a wide range of props. The earliest plays in the English language were medieval mysteries and comedies, commonly referred to as mummers. These mummers were typically performed by amateur groups on special occasions, such as religious holidays. Over time, these mummers developed into more sophisticated five-act plays, coinciding with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Initially, these performances were staged in innyards that were primarily used to accommodate horses. As the name suggests, innyards were situated within inns, which served as guesthouses providing lodging for travelers and serving alcoholic beverages. James Burbage was the leading promoter of plays in innyards, such as London's Bull Inn and the Cross Keys. Attendance to these plays cost a small fee, which was shared the inn owners. The cast was formed solely of males, who skillfully portrayed characters of both genders. Before the play, their job was to build temporary stages and set up seats for people. After the play, it was also their task to clean up the food waste, broken beer glasses, and other garbage left by the audience (Kallen, 2013, p. 45 – 46).

### 12.1. Amphitheaters and Private Playhouses

By the end of the 16th century, people from all social statuses enjoyed theatrical plays. A typical innyard could accommodate up to five hundred attendees. These performances had grown into highly popular social events in London. In 1576, Burbage built The Theatre, the city's first amphitheater, in response to its wide popularity. Within a decade, London counted over twelve amphitheaters, although the majority were situated outside the city boundaries. These amphitheaters, capable of housing from fifteen hundred to three thousand people, surpassed the capacities of innyard venues. This is the description of the amphitheater of Stuart Kallen: "It was circular or octagonal in shape, about 100 feet (30.5m) in diameter, and surrounded by a structure made from timber, stone, nails, and plaster. The stage was set on one side of the amphitheater at the edge of an open yard. Yards were surrounded by galleries of seats that rose up three levels" (Kallen, 2013, p. 46). The attached figure below (Figure 1)



illustrates the Elizabethan theatre. The pit yard was designated for customers who paid a single penny, allowing them to stand close to the stage but had to stand during the play. This area was exposed to the sky, leaving the audience in rain and snow. For an additional penny, people could gain access to seating in the gallery, while the most luxurious seating option was the lord's room, which commanded a price of six pennies. These rooms were situated near the stage and had separate entrances, providing an exclusive experience and the opportunity for post-show interactions with the actors and playwrights (Kallen, 2013, p. 46).

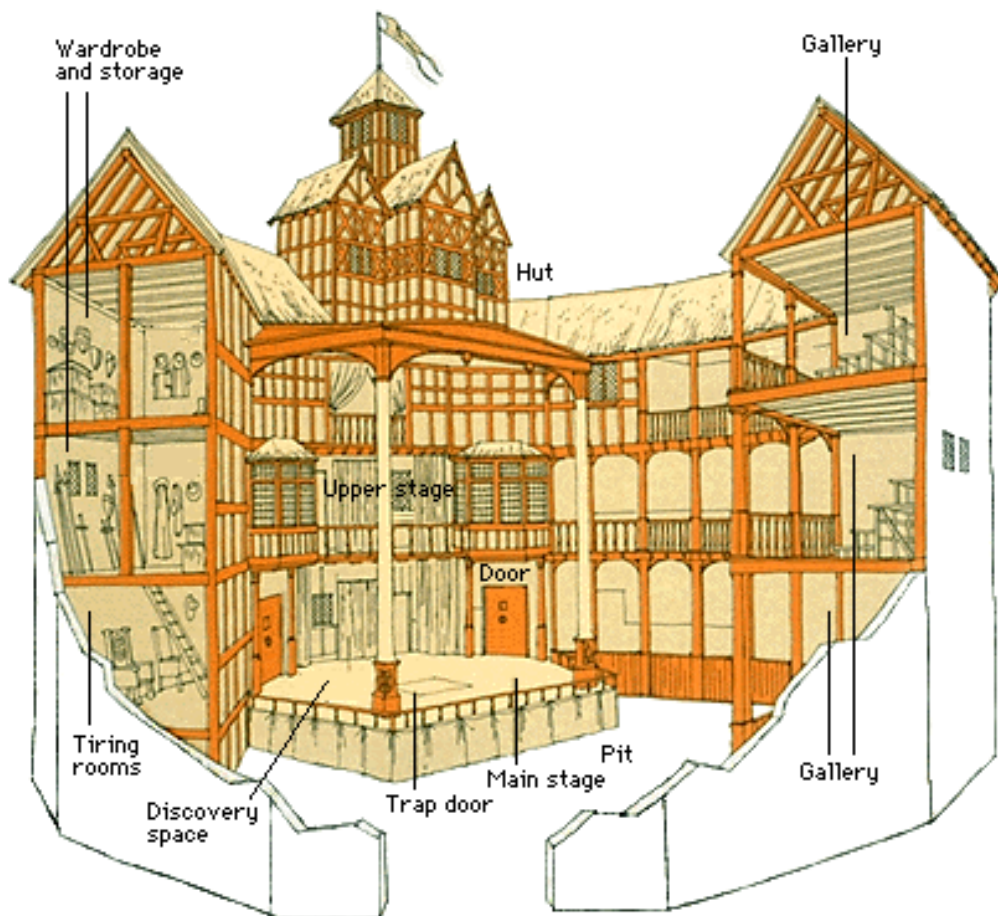


Figure 1: Elizabethan Amphitheatre

Amphitheaters proved to be conducive for hosting large gatherings during the warm summer months. However, they were unsuitable for chilly winters. Theatre producers constructed indoor playhouses as an alternative, enabling them to accommodate actors and viewers comfortably and shield them from harsh weather conditions. Due to that change, performances were held all year. The price of fees increased, reaching up to twenty-six pennies due to the reduced seating capacity compared to amphitheaters. By lighting candles for evening shows, playhouses

provided a more visual experience. The space of these venues also allowed artists to make more captivating scenery. Moreover, playwrights were granted the opportunity to compose works of poetic nature. People were additionally offered food and beverages, creating a more enhanced experience. The improved acoustics within the indoor setting further amplified the clarity of the actors' dialogues, enhancing the overall enjoyment for the audience (Kallen, 2013, p. 46-48).

One of the greatest open-air theatres was The Globe. The theatre was opened in 1599 and worked for 14 years until it tragically burned. A new Globe Theatre emerged swiftly after its destruction and continued its activity until 1642. The architectural design and features of the Globe mirrored those of its contemporaneous playhouses. (Figure 1) The most famous theatres from that time were the Globe, the Theatre, The Curtain, the Rose, and other open-air venues. (Rasmussen, DeJong, 2016). Other famous playwrights of that time were Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, and Ben Jonson (Picard, 2016).

## 12.2. Other entertainments

In the Elizabethan era, people from all social backgrounds, both wealthy and poor, engaged in music. Melodies could be heard everywhere, on farm fields, in taverns, in Sunday church services and plays. Elizabethans skillfully played instruments like woodwinds, flutes, and bagpipes, as well as stringed instruments such as violins, harps, and citterns (Kallen, 2013, p. 47).

Audiences had a strong interest in watching diverse animal fights, including those between dogs and horses, bears and English mastiffs, and mastiffs and bulls. Bears were famous in London and even had names like popular football stars. Betting was a common passion among the people, and the first lottery originated in 1567, offering a prize worth approximately 5,000 pounds. It is ironic that tobacco initially emerged as a medical cure for coughs and colds, but it soon became widely adopted as a popular activity. Moreover, cannabis and opium were used for the relief of earaches and other types of pain. Football and wrestling were prominent sports during that time (Picard, 2016).

Every Elizabethan had the opportunity to engage in rabbit chasing as a recreational activity. However, fox hunting was considered a communal obligation and often resulted in financial rewards from local funds. Football was violent game. Arthur Herbert Dodd describes the rules of Elizabethan football: "With few rules, unlimited teams, no line, no 'gate', and a minimum of penalized fouls, whole villages or districts challenged each other, and there were few matches that did not bring their tool of casualties, from broken heads to broken necks." (Dodd, 1961, p. 112). While football often led to violent incidents or conflict, tennis was played in indoor environments for relaxation and enjoyment (Dodd, 1961, p. 114).

### 13. THE LEGACY OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

On March 24, 1603, the death of Queen Elizabeth I marked the end of the Tudor dynasty. English society had undergone many significant changes under her reign. The country might have become a worldwide power, but the Queen did not enjoy widespread popularity among her subjects at the time of her passing. This lack of affection can be attributed to the nation's poor economic state, as many individuals were struggling to survive due to the substantial national debt. While the nobility resented the burden of high taxes, others faced difficulties such as unemployment, crime, scarcity of food, and lack of housing. As a result, some Elizabethans even expressed their joy by engaging in celebrations in the streets to mark the Queen's death (Kallen, 2013, p. 69 - 70).

Protestant subjects adored her, while Catholics called her a “hater of God and man.” However, the queen showed a genuine concern for her people. She became one of Europe’s most admired monarchs, triumphing over prevailing prejudices regarding female leadership at an old age (Price-Groff, 2001, p. 97 – 98).

Claire Price-Groff is in his book quoting biographer Alison Weir: “Few queens have ever been so loved. Under her rule, her people grew ever more confident in the belief that they were a chosen nation, protected by Divine Providence, and this confidence gave rise, in the years after the Armada, to the flowering of the English Renaissance.” (Price-Groff, 2001., p. 100). Regardless of the reactions of the people, the queen is still respected for her long reign.

## 14. CONCLUSION

The Elizabethan era was a truly influential time in English history. It witnessed momentous transformations in the realms of politics, religion, and society under Queen Elizabeth's rule. Additionally, the nation experienced a boost in trade, colonization, and naval power, leading to economic prosperity and political dominance. Queen Elizabeth successfully resolved the religious conflicts that had been troubling the country for a long time. Her coronation was a momentous ceremony, with many people joyfully welcoming their queen with cheers and church bells. However, not everyone in the country had an easy life, as some subjects struggled to survive. The living conditions in cities were harsh due to heavy pollution, resulting in a shorter life expectancy for those living in impoverished areas. The Renaissance period played a crucial role in advancing education, science, and art and even influenced the Church and literature. Theatre became a popular form of entertainment, with the famous playwright William Shakespeare contributing significantly to the era. Queen Elizabeth is remembered as a magnificent ruler. Nonetheless, she faced challenges she could not entirely overcome, especially in her relations with Parliament. At the end of her reign, she had led the country into substantial debt, which resulted in some people celebrating at the time of her death. This pattern can be observed throughout history, even with great rulers such as Charlemagne, who had a glorious reign but a troubled economy. Ultimately, it reveals that every period in history has its own complexities and challenges in daily life.

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## 16. ABSTRACT

The Elizabethan era began on November 17, 1558, with Elizabeth I's rise to the throne. It was a time of dramatic changes for England. Despite the initial challenges of financial instability, religious conflicts, and parliamentary disputes, young Elizabeth managed to resolve these issues. Simultaneously, she enhanced trade, the economy, and political affairs. The era saw remarkable changes brought on by factors such as religion, the Renaissance, and the printing press, which collectively improved the nation. England's reputation for religious tolerance and promising economic prospects attracted immigrants from all over Europe, although it caused some discomfort among the native English residents. Nevertheless, these immigrants had a profound influence on the English culture of the time, leaving a memorable impact. During the Elizabethan era, England underwent a significant transition from a feudal society, where most of the population lived in rural areas, to one facing the challenges of rapidly expanding, polluted cities. At the outset of the era, England's population reached over 3 million, a number that continued to grow despite considerable mortality rates. The devastating impact of the Black Death claimed the lives of about 20 per cent of the population. The cultural Renaissance that blossomed in England during this time can be primarily attributed to the European influence of the Renaissance. The mid-1500s witnessed a flourishing of literature, science, and the arts, with well-known playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare creating sophisticated drama. These profound changes served as the root of England's enduring status as a global power.

**Key words: Elizabethan England, Queen Elizabeth I, society, daily life, Renaissance**



## 17. SAŽETAK

Elizabetinsko doba je započelo 17. studenog 1558. godine, kada je Elizabeta I. stupila na prijestolje. Bio je to početak jedne slavne ere čiji su početak obilježili financijski problemi i vjerski sukobi, kao i sukobi s parlamentom. Elizabeta je većinu tih problema riješila uz unaprjeđenje trgovine, gospodarstva i politike. Dramatične promjene vezane uz vjeru, renesansu i razvoj tiskarstva pridonijele su transformaciji nacije. Engleska je postala poznata po vjerskoj toleranciji i rastućem gospodarstvu, pa je tako privukla imigrante iz cijele Europe. Iako ih Englezi nisu voljeli, značajno su utjecali na elizabetinsku kulturu. U to vrijeme Engleska više nije bila feudalno društvo, ali je preko 90 posto ljudi živjelo u ruralnim područjima, dok su ostali živjeli u zagađenim gradovima. Početkom elizabetinske ere broj stanovnika je iznosio više od 3 milijuna. Unatoč visokoj stopi smrtnosti i činjenici da je crna kuga ubila 20 posto ljudi, broj stanovnika se redovito povećavao. Napredak u književnosti, znanosti i umjetnosti dogodio se zahvaljujući renesansi. Bilo je to razdoblje koje je utjecalo na sve zemlje u Europi tog vremena. Ostvarena su velika postignuća dolaskom renesanse u Englesku sredinom 15. stoljeća. pisci poput Christophera Marlowea, Bena Jonsona i Williama Shakespearea napisali su neke od najutjecajnijih dramskih tekstova. Sve te promjene položile su temelj državi koja je do danas ostala svjetskom silom.

**Ključne riječi: elizabetinska Engleska, kraljica Elizabeta I., društvo, svakodnevnica, renesansa**