



# Introduction to the Age: Elizabethan to Jacobean (1558-1625)

**Author – Dr. Devender Pratap (Assistant Professor of English at Govt. Girls College  
Pilibangan District Hanumangarh)**

**Abstract :** The period from 1558 to 1625 encompasses two significant eras in English history: the Elizabethan Era and the Jacobean Era. These epochs are marked by profound cultural, political, and artistic developments that shaped the course of English literature and society. The Elizabethan Era began with the accession of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558 and ended with her death in 1603. This period is often referred to as the Golden Age due to its remarkable flourishing of arts and literature, which was significantly supported by Elizabeth's patronage. The era coincided with the English Renaissance, a time when England experienced a cultural revival influenced by classical ideals from ancient Greece and Rome.

In this study, the researcher has mentioned the writers and their major works in Elizabethan age (1558-1603). The researcher has mentioned almost nineteen writers and their famous works. By reading this research paper, any general reader can easily understand that who are the major writers of the age and what are their famous works. The language and method of presenting the data are very easy. The researcher also has mentioned the major contributions of this era's writers. As we know that University Wits also fall in this era, thus the researcher has mentioned them and their works too. S. Dutta (2014) declared that The University Wits is a phrase used to title a group of late 16th-century English pamphleteers and playwrights who were studied at the universities Cambridge and Oxford. They appeared famous worldly writers. This era has reminisced for its richness of drama and poetry. This era ended in 1603. Elizabeth turns out to be one of the greatest prominent royals in English history, mainly after 1588, when the English beat the Spanish Armada which had been sent by Spain to reestablish Catholicism and defeat England. All the way through the Elizabethan age, English literature has changed from a shell into a delightful being with imagination, creativeness, and boundless stories. It was not

**Keywords :** Elizabethan Age (1558-1603), Major Writers, Major Works, Contribution in Specific Genre, University Wits.

**Article :** The Elizabethan period from 1558 to 1603 is considered a golden age, as works of literature like plays by Shakespeare flourished under Queen Elizabeth I's reign. The transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean age (1558-1625) marks a significant period in English history, characterized by profound changes in politics, culture, literature, and society. This era is named after Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 until her death

in 1603, and King James I, who ruled from 1603 to 1625. Below is a detailed exploration of this transformative period.

The Elizabethan Age has seen so exceedingly because of the contrasts with the eras before and after. It was a brief era of mostly internal peace between the English Reformation, with battles among Protestants and Catholics, and the fights amongst parliament and the monarchy that would engulf the seventeenth century. The protestant-catholic divide was established, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement and parliament were still not tough enough to challenge royal absolutism.

Throughout the Elizabethan age, English literature has changed from a shell into a delightful being with imagination, creativeness, and boundless stories. It was not about mystery or miracle plays and the poetry was not nearby religion and the principles addressed in the Church. The influence of personal beliefs or feelings, rather than facts increased and examining various features of life increased with the embellishment of plentiful authors. L. Arbaoui (2012) mentioned that Elizabethan literature placed a great basis for English literature and influenced hundreds and thousands of writers of the following literary eras. It is for this purpose, the Elizabethan period is known as the wonderful age of English literature.

The reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) is often described as England's 'golden age' – a period in which new worlds were discovered, the arts flourished, and the religious turmoil that had defined the regimes of previous monarchs was replaced by comparative stability. The last chapter of the Tudor dynasty, Elizabeth's reign would go on to eclipse those of her father and half-siblings, and – more than four centuries after her death – she is still regarded as one of the nation's greatest rulers. The life and times of the Virgin Queen, looking at how her unconventional background – as the daughter of the ill-fated Anne Boleyn – would go on to shape the type of ruler she became. Below, we shine a spotlight on the experiences of ordinary Elizabethan men, women and children, and the sights and smells that would have dominated life in the Elizabethan era during the latter half of the 16th century, as Dr Nicola Tallis answers key questions about everyday life – from sport to personal hygiene – during England's so-called 'golden age'.

For the most part, Elizabeth I was extremely well-loved, especially at the beginning of her reign; her accession was greeted with heartfelt enthusiasm by many of her subjects. People liked the fact that she was young, like her father had been when he became king, and Elizabeth definitely had the common touch. We can see this during the procession that took place prior to her coronation, when she took the time to engage in the pageants that were staged in her honour on the streets of London.

Elizabeth remained pretty popular throughout her time on the throne and was considered quite an accessible monarch; she went out most years on a summer progress that took her to various parts of her realm, which gave her subjects an opportunity to see and admire their queen. And Elizabeth's popularity really soared after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Of course, she wasn't liked by everyone, and there were plots at various points in her reign to unseat her, some involving her own subjects.

Under Elizabeth I, England saw a period of relative stability, expansion, and artistic achievement. Known for her strong leadership, Elizabeth helped consolidate Protestantism in England, fending off both internal religious conflict and external threats, most notably the Spanish Armada in 1588. Her reign marked a "Golden Age" of culture, marked by:

Elizabethan England was greatly influenced by the Italian Renaissance, bringing a renewed focus on individualism, exploration, and scientific inquiry. The Elizabethan era is perhaps most renowned for the flourishing of English drama. William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson produced enduring works that deeply explored human nature, complex emotions, and social issues. Shakespeare's contributions to English literature and language have had a lasting global impact. Figures like Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh exemplify the spirit of exploration, with England establishing its first footholds in the New World. This era laid early foundations for the British Empire.

The Elizabethan Age is viewed so highly because of the contrasts with the periods before and after. It was a brief period of largely internal peace between the English Reformation, with battles between Protestants and Catholics, and the battles between parliament and the monarchy that would engulf the seventeenth century. The Protestant Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement and parliament was still not strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

### **Political Context**

During Elizabeth's reign, England enjoyed relative peace and stability after the tumultuous Wars of the Roses. The establishment of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement helped mitigate religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, fostering a sense of national unity. Elizabeth's military successes, notably against the Spanish Armada in 1588, further solidified her power and England's status as a formidable naval power.

### **Historical Context**

#### **The Elizabethan Era (1558-1603)**

**Queen Elizabeth I:** Elizabeth I's reign is often regarded as a golden age in English history. Her leadership brought stability after the tumultuous reigns of her predecessors, and she is credited with the establishment of Protestantism in England.

**Political Stability:** Elizabeth's policies fostered a sense of national identity and pride. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 solidified England's status as a formidable naval power.

**Cultural Flourishing:** The period saw a flourishing of the arts, particularly in literature and drama, with figures like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson emerging as prominent playwrights.

The literary landscape flourished during this era with notable figures such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser emerging as key contributors. The period is characterized by the development of various literary forms, including drama, poetry (notably the sonnet), and prose. Shakespeare's works, particularly his plays, exemplify the artistic achievements of this time.

An Apology for Poetry' is a work of literary criticism. It was written in around 1580 and first published in 1595, after his passing away. The Sidney Psalms Sidneian Psalms' or The Sidney Psalms' was a sixteenth century translation into English of the Psalms. It was the great work of Mary Sidney and Philip, aristocratic siblings who were greatly influential Elizabethan writers.

#### **The Jacobean Era (1603-1625)**

**King James I :** Upon Elizabeth's death, James VI of Scotland ascended to the English throne as James I. His reign marked the beginning of the Stuart dynasty.

**Union of Crowns:** James's accession united the crowns of England and Scotland, leading to a new sense of British identity.

**Political Challenges:** James faced significant challenges, including conflicts with Parliament over issues of taxation and governance, which would later contribute to the English Civil War. The Jacobean period was marked by political uncertainty and social unrest, exacerbated by events such as the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. This conspiracy aimed to assassinate James I and blow up Parliament, reflecting deep-seated tensions within English society regarding religion and governance. The era also saw significant economic challenges, including rising debts inherited from Elizabeth's reign. James's belief in the divine right of kings and his sometimes unpopular decisions (such as the lavish spending and peace with Spain) began to create friction with Parliament, sowing seeds for future conflict. Additionally, religious tensions persisted, highlighted by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, an attempt to assassinate James and blow up Parliament.

## Literary Developments

### Drama

**Shakespeare's Influence:** Shakespeare's works continued to be performed and published during the Jacobean era. His later plays, such as "Hamlet," "Othello," and "King Lear," reflect deeper psychological insights and complex characters.

**Jacobean Playwrights:** The period saw the emergence of other notable playwrights, including John Webster, whose works like "The Duchess of Malfi" and "The White Devil" explored themes of corruption, revenge, and moral ambiguity.

**Tragedy and Comedy:** The Jacobean era is marked by a shift towards darker themes in tragedy, while comedies often became more satirical and critical of society.

Jacobean literature is characterized by its darker themes, focusing on corruption, power struggles, and human nature's complexities. Playwrights like Shakespeare, who continued to write during this period, produced some of their most famous tragedies, such as Macbeth (1606). Other notable writers included Ben Jonson, whose satirical works critiqued contemporary society, and John Webster, known for his revenge tragedies like The Duchess of Malfi (1614).

**Literature and the Arts:** Literature continued to thrive, but the Jacobean era's works were often darker in tone, reflecting growing societal anxieties. Shakespeare's later tragedies (e.g., Macbeth, King Lear) and the emergence of revenge tragedies by writers like John Webster and Thomas Middleton underscored themes of power, betrayal, and death.

**King James Bible:** One of the most influential achievements of this period was the King James Bible (1611), a masterful English translation that not only shaped religious practice but also the English language itself.

**Scientific and Intellectual Development:** Thinkers like Francis Bacon advanced the scientific method, contributing to the broader intellectual revolution that would culminate in the Enlightenment.

### Poetry

**Metaphysical Poets:** The late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods saw the rise of metaphysical poetry, characterized by its intellectual complexity and use of conceits. Poets like John Donne and George Herbert explored themes of love, faith, and mortality.

**Sonnets and Lyric Poetry:** The sonnet form remained popular, with poets such as Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser influencing the genre.



## Social and Cultural Changes

### The Role of Women

**Women in Society:** The period saw a complex view of women, with traditional roles being challenged. While women were often confined to domestic spheres, some, like Queen Elizabeth I, wielded significant power.

**Literary Representation:** Female characters in literature began to reflect a wider range of experiences and emotions, though they often remained subject to societal constraints.

### Religion and Politics

**Religious Tensions:** The Elizabethan era was marked by Protestant-Catholic tensions, which continued into the Jacobean period. James I's attempts to unify religious factions were met with resistance.

**The Gunpowder Plot (1605):** This failed assassination attempt against James I by a group of Catholic conspirators highlighted the ongoing religious strife and led to increased persecution of Catholics.

### Scientific and Philosophical Advancements

#### The Scientific Revolution

**Emergence of New Ideas:** The period coincided with the early stages of the Scientific Revolution, with figures like Francis Bacon advocating for empirical methods and scientific inquiry.

**Philosophical Thought:** The works of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes began to emerge, laying the groundwork for modern political philosophy.

**Conclusion:** The transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean age represents a pivotal moment in English history, marked by significant political, cultural, and social transformations. The literary achievements of this period, particularly in drama and poetry, continue to resonate today, reflecting the complexities of human experience and the evolving nature of society. The interplay of power, religion, and artistic expression during this time laid the foundation for subsequent developments in English literature and culture, making it a crucial era in the broader narrative of English history.

### References:

1. L. Arbaoui (2012). *The concise history of English literature, the Elizabethan Period*.
2. Erne, L. (2005). *Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe*.
3. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Shakespeare is copyright 1990-1993 by World Library INC.
4. Bryan, M. B. (1974) *Recent Studies in Campion*.
5. Dutta, S. (2014) *The University Wits: Their Contribution to English Drama*.