The term, 'the Renaissance' usually refers to the period 1500-1700 during which there was a rebirth and rediscovery of the classical arts and philosophies in western Europe. When applied to England, however, the word has a slightly different meaning. In 1485, Henry, Earl of Richmond, became King of England and ushered in a long period of peace and tranquility, much different from the chaos of the Wars of the Roses that preceded this period. A decade after Henry ascended his throne, the art of printing from movable type was introduced to England by William Caxton. Because of this, literacy began to spread rapidly for the first time and books came into demand. Seven years after Henry became king, Columbus discovered America and the exploration of the new world began bringing with it increased trade and commerce as well as spreading prosperity.

Because of the domestic tranquility in England, the arts came to the forefront of public life as royal patronage and skillful authors combined to usher in a new age of enlightenment and culture. In the religious and political spheres as well, a new spirit was felt which came from the continent, but had its own particular development in Britain.

This is the period on which we focus our attention in this class. To fully understand it, we must be aware of all the influences listed above because literature is part of the society of the times in which it is written. In the next fourteen, we will be considering the literature of that era (claimed by some to be unequalled in any other time or place) against a backdrop of those aspects of society which shaped and influenced its development in an attempt to understand its content, significance and meaning.

Our text will provide a wide choice of works for discussion in class as well as research in papers:

- John Hollander & Frank Kermode, eds.: THE LITERATURE OF RENAISSANCE ENGLAND.
- Wm. Shakespeare: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The course work will include:

- Fifteen quizzes; each worth ten points. The lowest score will be dropped.
- Three Hour Exams; each worth 100 points for a total of 300 pts.
- One short paper worth 100 points.
- One long paper worth 175 points.
- Two assigned oral reports on some aspect of the readings 100 pts.
- Numerous extemporaneous reports assigned on the day they are given 50 pts.
- Class participation = 50 pts.

Topics for the oral reports will be assigned as we discuss the works which they will cover. The papers will be over background issues as well as the literature itself depending on your interests. Conferences will be held later to help arrive at these topics. Class participation will sometimes include brief 'reactions' asked for randomly during the period.