

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Drama is a type of literature telling a story, which is intended to be performed to an audience on the stage. Generally, while drama is the printed text of a play, the world *theatre* often refers to the actual production of the text on the stage. Theatre thus involves action taking place on the stage, the lighting, the scenery, the accompanying music, the costumes, the atmosphere, and so on. The history of drama is deeply rooted in religious annals of history. The history of drama has spanned through centuries down to the 21st century. Drama as we envisage it today has evolved through the ages; each age engraving indelible marks on this magnificent branch of literature. Drama had its origins from Greece through the actions of Thespis during the festival of Dionysius. This essay, focuses on the theatrical performance which existed between the fall of the Western Roman Empire, called the Medieval period, in the 5th century A.D. and the beginning of the Renaissance in approximately the 15th century A.D. This essay, also discuss on the relationship between the medieval and renaissance drama.

Medieval Drama

The medieval period in Europe (A.D. 476-1300) began with the collapse of Rome, a calamity of such magnitude that the years between then and the beginning of the crusades in 1095 have been traditionally, if erroneously called the Dark

Ages. Medieval drama refers to theatrical performance in the period between the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century A.D. and the beginning of the Renaissance in approximately the 15th century A.D.

The major institution to profit from the fall of the Roman empire was the Roman catholic church, which in the ninth and tenth centuries enjoyed considerable power and influenced. Many bishops considered drama a godless activity. During the great age of cathedral building and the great ages of religious pointing and religious music, drama was not officially approved. Faced with the problem of explaining a new religion to a largely illiterate population, churches in the Early Middle Ages began staging dramatized versions of particular biblical events on specific days of the year. These dramatizations were included in order to vivify annual celebrations. Symbolic objects and actions (vestments, altars, censers, and pantomime performed by priests) recalled the events which Christian ritual celebrates. These were extensive sets of visual signs that could be used to communicate with a largely illiterate audience.

Medieval drama was for the most part very religious and moral in it's themes, staging and traditions. There are three types of medieval drama, Namely: mystery play, miracle play and morality play. Each play depicts different things.

Mystery plays are one of the earliest form of plays developed in Europe. It is religiously based, so they're mostly focused on representation of bible stories

adding an antiphonal song. The plays are represented in Latin on church property and depict the lives of Adam and Eve, the creation, the murder of Abel, the last judgement and much more. It reached the light of popularity in the 15th century.

Miracle plays, also called **saint's play**, one of the three principal kinds of vernacular drama of the European middle Ages, presents a real or fictitious account of the life, miracles, or martyrdom of a saint.

Morality plays, also called morality, an allegorical drama popular in Europe especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, in which the characters personify moral qualities (such as charity or vice) or abstractions (as death or youth) and in which moral lessons are taught. The action of the morality play centres on a hero, such as man kind, whose inherent weakness are assaulted by such personified diabolic forces as the seven sins but who may choose redemption and enlist the aid of such figures as the four daughters of God (Mercy, Justice, Temperance, and truth). Some plays in the medieval drama include, *Querolus* by Vitalis of Blois,

Renaissance Drama

The word Renaissance, literally meaning "Rebirth" in French, first appeared in English in the 1830's.

The Renaissance was a period in European history, from the 14th to the 17th century, regarded as the cultural bridge between the Middle Ages and modern

history. It started as a cultural movement in Italy in the late medieval period and later spread to the rest of Europe, marking the beginning of the Early modern age. The intellectual basis of the Renaissance was its own invented version of humanism, derived from the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy, such as that of Protagoras, who said that “man is the measure of all things”. This new thinking became manifest in art, architecture, politics, science and literature. In the 15th century, the Renaissance spread rapidly from its birthplace in Florence to the rest of Italy and soon to the rest of Europe.

The period is characterized by a rebirth among English elite of classical learning, a rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman authors. The period is also characterized by widespread religious wars, geographical discovery and colonization, and major reforms of states. The period marks the high water mark of English literary accomplishment. It is the age of William Shakespeare, John Milton, John Donne, and Katherine Philips. Queen Elizabeth I was fluent in classical Greek, wrote poems in Latin hexameter, and produced beautifully polished English prose.

Plays in the Renaissance period include; Romeo and Julieth, Antony and Cleopatra and Julius Caesar.

Relationship between the Medieval and Renaissance Drama

The medieval drama, gave rise to the Renaissance drama; changing political and economic factors greatly affected theatre at the end of the middle ages and the beginning of the modern era - Renaissance period.

The medieval and Renaissance theatre both staged their plays for an audience; they actors, performed in a particular place in the midst of a crowd of people. The medieval and Renaissance drama, began in Europe; they were both European plays, the medieval theatre covers all drama produced in Europe over that thousand years. Renaissance humanist did not reject Christianity; many of the Renaissance's greatest works were devoted to it, and the church patronized many works of Renaissance art.

The medieval drama was for the most part very religious and moral in it's themes, staging and traditions; it accommodated only biblical characters, but the Renaissance drama, involves creativity and talent; it gave individuals the opportunity to produce and write plays out of their imagination, and not necessarily from the bible. Medieval theatre differed from the Renaissance theatre for it emphasized spectacle. The dramas were performed with spectacles. The spectacle of the later medieval theatre made it necessarily to have detailed stage directions. Unlike the medieval drama, Renaissance scholars employed the humanist method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art. The major characteristics of the Renaissance drama are,

Humanism: In some ways humanism was not a philosophy but a method of learning. In contrast to the medieval scholastic mode, which focused on resolving contradictions between authors, humanists would study ancient texts in the original and appraise them through a combination of reasoning and empirical evidence.

Art: Renaissance art marks a cultural rebirth at the close of the medieval drama of the middle ages and rise of the modern world; one of the distinguishing features of Renaissance art was its development of highly realistic linear perspective.

Science: The rediscovery of ancient texts and the invention of printing democratized learning and allowed a faster propagation of ideas, unlike in the medieval theatre where the invention of printing had not yet taken place.

Self-awareness: By the 15th century, writers in Italy were well aware of the transformations that were taking place and were using phrases such as *modi antichi* (in the antique manner) or *alle romana et alla antica* (in the manner of the Romans and the ancients) to describe their work. This wasn't so in medieval theatre.

To summarize it all, medieval drama was mainly religious, the mystery plays which told stories from the bible and miracle plays which told stories from the lives of the saints. These were very popular forms of drama, normally performed by members of the medieval guilds. Renaissance drama is focused on secular matters, humanism, less focus on religion, more on materialistic things like art and ordinary human beings.