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COURSE: INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA (ELS 140)

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE
DRAMA.**

Relationship here means connection or association i.e. the condition of being related. The word 'Drama' originated from the Greek word, 'dran' which means to do or to act. It encompasses all written play irrespective of form or genre therefore; Drama is a work of art which delineates human life and activity through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between groups of characters.

Medieval drama refers to dramatic performances in the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD and the beginning of the Renaissance in approximately the 15th century AD. Medieval drama arose from the ashes of Roman drama. The beginning of medieval drama is traceable to the medieval church sermon and mass which had some dramatic characteristics. The human impulse to indulge in mimesis which received impetus from the religious tropes, gave birth to the new form of drama prevalent during the medieval era. Greek drama here was buoyant, full of ideas and was essentially theatrical. It was furnished by the great traditions of the Dionysian and the phallic songs.

In the medieval drama, the religious rituals of the church had dramatic elements that advanced the rebirth of drama, that is, renaissance drama. Such elements include the

symbolic events during Good Friday and such other things as the garb of the priest, the church space and the celebration of the mass.

Because of the addition of many scenes, 'Setting' came about. The Church façade became converted as setting but because it couldn't contain the teeming masses that came to watch, they were forced to leave the church and seek existence outside it. They got established as Secular entertainment through organised groups called 'Mystery Cycles'. The most popular vernacular drama during this period are the mystery plays (dramatized bible events) and Miracle plays (based on lives of saints). Mystery plays can be said to be one of the most important genres of medieval drama, which developed right from the 'Quem quaeritis'-trope: the mystery (miracle) play, treating the life of Christ or of saints and/or re-enacting certain stories from the Bible.

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 influence. Many bishops considered drama a godless activity, a distraction from the piety that the church demanded of its members. During the great age of cathedral building and the great ages of religious painting and religious music from the seventh century to the thirteenth -drama was not officially approved. Therefore, it is a striking irony that the rebirth of drama in the Western world should have taken place in the heart of the monasteries, developing slowly and inconspicuously until it outgrew its beginnings.

Morality Plays were never part of any cycle but developed independently as moral tales in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century on the Continent and in England. They do not illustrate moments in the Bible, nor do they describe the life of Christ or the saints. Morality play is introduced to teach moral lessons through allegorical characters. The medieval stage is wholly devoted to expounding religious philosophy and nothing else while the renaissance

drama was explosive, diverse, created a host of outrageously different individuals each straining for effect.

Obviously, with the drama leaving the Church, Renaissance drama started. The renaissance period is the period of cultural rebirth. It is the period that marked the rediscovery of past heritage, an age which epitomise in Greek and Roman civilisation like medieval drama which was preceded by Greek and Roman drama and followed by Elizabethan drama. The renaissance age is marked with a number of inventions which includes printing, the establishment of universities and the fall of constainople which caused scholars of classical literature to spread all over Europe. In medieval drama, stage music and lightening became sophisticated. The Renaissance period was a period of re-examination of life. It was this state of affairs that gave rise to the spirit of humanism which is usually associated with the renaissance Age.

For Dramatic literature, the year 1349 and the production of Philologin by Petrarch indicates the beginning of the Renaissance age. Preceding Petrarch is the greatest medieval poet, Dante, whose comedy championed an avalanche of advanced ideas of the physical aspect of hell, heaven and earth. Unlike the medieval period, music shifted from the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church to the secular life of Europe which is accredited to the invention of the printing press in 1440. It enhanced the role of musicians and composers.

In conclusion, most of the practises in the renaissance age was handed over from the medieval age especially the music inventions. Both Medieval and Renaissance drama explored the concept of religion as they centered on concepts such as religion, chivalry and courtly love.