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QUESTION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA.

The fifth century witnessed the collapse of the Roman Empire and the eventual ascension of the Christian church into power. With the decline of Rome, drama also declined for a long time. The Christian church abolished drama and categorized actors with prostitutes, thieves, and undesirable elements in the society. Hence there was no record of play writing from the death of Seneca to the beginning of the middle ages.

Medieval drama, therefore, arose from the ashes of Roman drama. At the last stage of Roman drama just before it evolved into Medieval drama that was that element of infamy which entered it and which was vehemently opposed by the church. That was why some critics describe it as degenerate theatre and its

disappearance during the barbaric invasions of the 6th century was the immediate aftermath of that degeneration. The drama that emerged after the degeneration was the product of the church, born out of the desire to suppress certain infamous elements of the past dramatic tradition, an act of the desire to fashion drama, dramaturgy and service along ecclesiastical lines for the propagation of the christian faith.

The beginning of medieval drama is, therefore 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 troops, gave birth to the new form of drama prevalent during the medieval era. The medieval drama continued to grow with the addition of many scenes to church services. Sometimes, it became necessary for the medieval church to look for what is regarded as setting. The church façade became converted as setting. It was when the façade proved unable to contain the teeming masses that came to watch these plays that medieval drama was forced to leave the church and seek existence outside it. The two most popular vernacular dramas that sprang up during this period were the mystery plays, which dramatized biblical events and the miracle plays which were based on the lives of the saints. The medieval stage at the time when drama was with the church by no means crude, but it was a state that was holy devoted to expanding religious philosophy and nothing else. The medieval

stage was replete with thrones, scaffolds, trolleys and other contrivances used in staging plays having to do with the Annunciation and the Ascension.

Further on this idea of stage resourcefulness and richness, the medieval stage and drama could neither be compared with the Graeco-Roman tradition, nor could it be compared with what follows it from the Elizabethans to the modern. It specifically rose out of the desire to propagate faith true drama and so many things, including theatricality and thoughts, were subsumed under it. Religious drama eventually declined as a result of other factors. First the Catholic Church withdrew its support for them because it felt that it weakens the church. In 1548, was outlawed in Paris. Second, Protestants regarded as a tool for the propagation of the catholic doctrine. As a result, Queen Elizabeth 1 banned it in England in 1569. Finally it is important to note that medieval drama did not die completely. The truth is that the secular quality of medieval drama over threw its religious qualities and thus paved the way to the development of renaissance drama.

While **Renaissance** drama is a period of cultural rebirth. It was a period that mark the rediscovery of past heritage, an age which epitomize in the rediscovery of Greek and Roman civilization. The renaissance age is marked with a number of inventions, the invention of printing, the establishment of university and the fall Constantinople which caused scholars of classical literature to spread all over

Europe. The invention of printing press made it possible for classical literature to be printed and taken to Western Europe. The renaissance age was explosive, diverse, created a host of outrageously different individuals. The word neo-classical was also used to depict the Renaissance age especially in France. In short, the renaissance period was a period of re-examination of life. It was this state of affair that gave rise to the spirit of humanism which is usually associated with renaissance age.

Both the **M**edieval and **R**enaissance drama are periods that focused on religious practices, civilization and reformation from the dark ages. The Renaissance drama is also a period that came to rejuvenate the secular qualities of medieval drama.