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DISCUSS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA.

Introduction

The Medieval and Renaissance periods are two very important periods in human history, and especially in the history of arts in every category: Literature, Music, painting, sculpture, photography, printing, and dance.

Sequel to its importance, several scholars have tried to note down the difference, to enable students of arts and its components to learn the basic differences between these period, there goals, achievements and even their shortcoming.

In this essay, I intend to focus squarely on what these two periods call their drama.

Medieval drama

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., is

called Medieval period and every theatrical performance between these period is called Medieval Drama.

RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Literally, 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth.' Simply put, the rebirth of learning that began in Europe, especially in Italy in the fourteenth century, spread to the north, including England, by the sixteenth century, and ended in the north in the mid-seventeenth century (earlier in Italy). During this period, there was an enormous renewal of interest in and study of classical antiquity.

A Critical look into the major differences between the two dramas

Let me first state it clearly that the Medieval Theatre covers all drama produced in Europe over that thousand-year period and refers to a variety of genres, including liturgical drama, mystery plays, morality plays, farces and masques. Beginning with Hrosvitha of Gandersheim in the 10th century, medieval drama was for the most part very religious and moral in its themes, staging and traditions. The most famous examples of Medieval plays are the English cycle dramas, the York Mystery Plays, the Chester Mystery Plays, the Wakefield Mystery Plays and the N-Town Plays, as well as the morality play, *Everyman*. One of the earliest surviving secular plays in English is *The Interlude of the Student and the Girl*.

Unfortunately, there are few surviving sources on medieval drama of the early and high medieval period due to a lack of surviving records and texts, a low literacy rate of the general population, and the opposition of the clergy to some types of performance. However, by the late period, drama and theatre began to become more secularized and a larger number of records survive documenting plays and performances.

On the other hand, a critical look into the Renaissance period shows that it is indeed more than a "rebirth." We can call it the age of new discoveries, both geographical (exploration of the New World) and intellectual. Both kinds of discovery resulted in changes of tremendous import for Western civilization. In science, for example, Copernicus (1473-1543) attempted to prove that the sun rather than the earth was at the center of the planetary system, thus radically altering the cosmic world view that had dominated antiquity and the Middle Ages. In religion, Martin Luther (1483-1546) challenged and ultimately caused the division of one of the major institutions that had united Europe throughout the Middle Ages--the Church. In fact, Renaissance thinkers often thought of themselves as ushering in the modern age, as distinct from the ancient and medieval eras.

It is worthy of note that Renaissance thinkers strongly associated themselves with the values of classical antiquity, particularly as expressed in the newly rediscovered classics of literature, history, and moral philosophy. Conversely, they tended to dissociate themselves from works written in the Middle Ages, a historical period they looked upon rather negatively. According to them, the Middle Ages were set in the "middle" of two much more valuable historical periods, antiquity and their own. Nevertheless, as modern scholars have noted, extremely important continuities with the previous age still existed.

Research shows that the Renaissance drama grew out of the established medieval tradition of the mystery and morality play. These public spectacles focused on religious subjects and were generally enacted by either choristers and monks, or a town's tradesmen.

Interestingly, at the end of the fifteenth century, a new type of play appeared. These short plays and revels were performed at noble households and at court, especially at holiday times. These short entertainments, called "Interludes", started the move away from the didactic nature of the earlier plays toward purely secular plays, and often added more comedy than was present in the medieval predecessors. Since most of these holiday revels were not documented and play texts have disappeared and been destroyed, the actual dating of the transition is difficult. The first extant purely secular play, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Luces*, was performed at the household of Cardinal Morton, where the young Thomas More was serving as a page. Early Tudor interludes soon grew more elaborate, incorporating music and dance, and some, especially those by John Heywood, were heavily influenced by French farce.

Not only were plays shifting emphasis from teaching to entertaining, they were also slowly changing focus from the religious towards the political. John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (1515), for example, while on the face of it resembling the medieval allegory plays with its characters of Virtues and Vices, was a political satire against Cardinal Wolsey. *Magnyfycence* was so incendiary that Skelton had to move into the sanctuary of Westminster to escape the wrath of Wolsey.

Conclusion

These two periods are important to us, that is why their drama also matter. This is also because they actually shaped what we call modern drama. The knowledge of what their components, achievements, failures, are of almost importance to the people of this generation.

