

**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND**

**LITERARY STUDIES**

**TOPIC: *discuss the relationship  
between Medieval Drama and  
Renaissance Drama***

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DRAMA**

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

The Medieval Period lasted between 476 - 1500.

Medieval drama was fuelled by religion, and was slowly changed from what seemed like a public worship. The fall of the Roman Empire resulted in the decline of the theatre. Dramatic performances was banned and theatres were closed. The church felt that drama as they knew it during the Roman Empire, was barbaric and evil.

However, sermons and other religious practices were carried out in Latin - a language many did not understand. As a result of this, the church started dramatizing the Bible. This became a medium of giving religious instruction to the congregation.

Not long after the long dramatic reading {trope} turn into performances such as acting out the passion of the cross during Easter and the nativity during

Christmas ,which in turn ,turned out to be full blown performances outside the church.

Overtime, it moved away from the church, although the themes were still religious and the act itself closely monitored by the church. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was out of the church control, humour was incorporated, it began to represent the common people altitude and language more and more. They began using ancient and historical events as their references. The language used was now the general language understood and spoken by the people.

However, three types of plays emerged overtime, these were the mystery play; it originated from the feast of Corpus Christian holy day decree by Pope Urban iv which turn out to be a major religious holiday by 1350 as the holiday grew in popularity, it was transferred into a multi-day pageants. The play were based on Biblical stories and often performed in series known as a cycle, it could start from the Angels fall to the Judgement day. The most important aspect of such plays was to show the fall and the redemption of man it could take all day or multiple days to go on.

The second one was miracle plays, they dramatizes the lives ,legends and the miracles of Roman Catholic St. it

flourished in France ,some of the St. often portrayed were the virgin Mary ,St. George ,St. Nicholas amongst others.

The third one was the Morality play which flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it emphasises ethics and salvation. Its focus is placed on the common man .the main character often represent all humanity e.g. **Everyman**, **Mankind**, amongst others. The main character will have to take a conscious decision against temptation to be saved, thereby showing man's free will, a fight between vice and virtue. It uses allegory to make the message clear to the people, vices and virtue are given human attributes E.g. **The Seven Deadly Sins in the Castle of Perseverance**, **Mercy and Mischief in Mankind** amongst others.

Renaissance drama can be defined as a cultural intellectual and artistic movement. It bridges the gap between the middle ages and the Modern Period. the English Renaissance is dated from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is an age eulogies with the rediscovery of Greek and Roman civilizations. Moreover, the introduction of the printing press was amongst the major event in this period, establishment of tertiary institutions, the fall of Constantinople which resulted in

the spread of classical literature scholars. The writers in this period explores religious and social theme, the religious themes explored was given an entirely different approach from the medieval one. E.g. Milton Paradise Lost, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. The era was diverse and explosive with each individual making effort to make an impact. The term neoclassical is also use to depicts the renaissance age, in a nutshell, the Renaissance era was a period of re-examination of life it gave rise to Renaissance Humanism {it stresses reason and depart from the church traditional image of man as a weak and fallen creature}

They are two different period in history, their differences ranges from language to style and scope of literature. The literature in the renaissance was characterised by scientific progress and humanism movement while the medieval drama was characterised by Christianity and chivalry.

The Medieval started from the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and ended in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century while the Renaissance drama started from late 15<sup>th</sup> century and ended in late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The medieval literature was written in old English and Middle English and the later was written in early modern English. It subject matter was often

religious and meant for the instruction of the congregation. while the renaissance drama explore the social and religious themes in a much lighter tone .the medieval literature uses Christian themes such as **death and resurrection ,good and evil , heaven and hell** while the renaissance drama extol **scientific discoveries** .

Wars Occurred during both Ages that is The Hundred Years War. Between France and England {England's attempt at colonising the France}. And during the Renaissance era, the war between Spain and England.

The flood of literature in both ages such as The Canterbury Tales that revealed corruption of the church and society during the medieval age and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus ridicules man's self-conceited idea of his being at the helm of affairs. Conflicts in government in both ages such as the assassination of Harold of England by William of Normandy and the reign of the incompetent James I.

The relationship between science and the church during the modern period and the Middle Ages, The church played a key role in moulding the peoples lifestyle while the advent of scientific discoveries help the people during the modern period to challenge religious beliefs.

One cannot be expected to suggest a “line” between medieval and Renaissance traditions in drama, since each periods clearly builds on the other.