

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA
FACULTY OF ART
DEPARTMENT: ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES
AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT OF THE COURSE: INTRODUCTION TO
DRAMA (ELS 140)
TOPIC:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND
RENAISSANCE DRAMA.
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2016/232241
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JULY, 2017.

Introduction

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. Nwabueze (2011).

Drama involves imitation, impersonation, and a deliberate interest in costume, speech production, gesticulation and rhythmic movement.

John Dryden, in his definition of drama, states that "a play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, reproducing the passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind."

Medieval and Renaissance literature were influenced by two completely different eras in human history.

During the Middle Ages, (A.D.1066 - 1500) the toils of daily life affected the mindset of those at this time. As a result, these ideas found its way into the making of medieval literature. However, after the great rediscovery of the classical civilization during A.D. 1500 - 1600, men began creating what is now looked upon as Renaissance literature. Though they are both forms of writing, their history as a part of society greatly differed from contrasting philosophies of life, leading to two different personalities.

Medieval Drama

During the Middle Ages, a great emphasis was placed on the blend of fantasy and reality. Though the characters were given human characteristics, their personality transcended to these fictitious figures (God, saints, and revered leaders). Furthermore, there was a religious overtone hidden in these works. Because only monks could hand-copy these manuscript in monasteries, only a few were made available to the rich and noble.

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 medieva era: *The Quem Quaeritis* is a Latin word for "whom do you seek?" which was one of the musical passages known as trope. It is added into the introduction to the celebration of Easter Sunday mass.

It is important to note that Medieval drama did not die completely. The secular qualities of medieval drama overthrew its religious qualities and thus paved way to the development of Renaissance drama.

Renaissance Drama

The term Renaissance is used to describe a period of great intellectual and artistic achievement. Renaissance is a French word which means "rebirth." The Renaissance period is a period of cultural rebirth.

Renaissance drama, centered in England, evolved out of the morality and mystery plays of the Medieval era. While these earlier plays attempted to teach a lesson and were often performed by monks or tradesmen, the Renaissance dramas moved toward entertainment.

Renaissance drama developed around the 15th Century and was at first often performed as short plays at court or in the homes of nobles. The playwrights of the era, such as Shakespeare and Marlowe, were not intellectuals and wrote to entertain rather than instruct.

The subjects of Renaissance plays often included comedy, and some, such as Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (1515), also included: political satire.

Conclusion

Whereas Medieval dramas were really amateurish endeavours in which clergy or various trade guilds participated, the Renaissance theatre was composed of professional actors, among whom were those who specialised in tragic roles and others in comic roles. These actors were not members of a guild, a requirement for workers, so they placed themselves under the patronage of royalty; in this way, they would be considered servants and, therefore, be allowed to perform.