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**COURSE: INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA (ELS 140)**

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

### **INTRODUCTION**

Remarkably, these two periods in the history of English literature is very monumental that they lay the foundation for the present day literature. The focus of this study is to examine critically the relationship existing between these two periods.

#### **WHAT IS THE MEDIAVAL PERIOD?**

According to the Norton English Anthology, the medieval period which is also known as middle ages lasted from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merged into the Renaissance and the age of discovery.

Medieval drama was mainly religious, the mystery plays which told stories from the Bible and miracle plays which told stories from the lives of the saints. These were very popular forms of drama, normally performed by members of the medieval guilds.

There are three types of Medieval Drama: Mystery Play, Miracle Play, and the Morality Play. Each play depicts different things..

In the 16th century, the rise of the professional theatre led to the suppression of the old medieval guild performances. It is the time period referred between the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th Century A.D and the beginning of the Renaissance around 15th Century A.D. It covers all drama produced in Europe over the 1000 year period. Medieval Drama covers religions and gives morals to its audience.

It was a period of rediscovery of past heritage; the rediscovery of Greek and Roman civilization. It was a period that marked inventions such as:

1. The invention of printing which made it possible for classical literature to be printed and taken to Europe.
2. The establishment of universities.
3. The fall of Constantinople, this caused scholars of classical literature to spread all over Europe.

## RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Wikipedia, (2017) asserts that the Renaissance is a French word which means “rebirth”. This period, therefore means the period of cultural rebirth which began in Italy during the 14<sup>th</sup> century and reached its height in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and spread to the rest Europe in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Renaissance drama is sometimes called **Elizabethan drama**, since its most important developments started when [Elizabeth I](#) was Queen of England from [1558](#) to [1603](#). But this name is not very accurate; the drama continued after Elizabeth's death, into the reigns of [King James I \(1603–1625\)](#) and his son [King Charles I \(1625–1649\)](#). Shakespeare, for example, started writing plays in the later years of Elizabeth's reign, but continued into the reign of James. When writing about plays from James's reign, scholars and critics sometimes use the term **Jacobean drama**; plays from Charles's reign are called **Caroline drama**. (These names come from the [Latin](#) forms of the two kings' names, "Jacobus" for James and "Carolus" for Charles.) But for the subject as a whole, terms like English Renaissance drama or theatre are more accurate.

The year [1576](#) was a key date in this subject, since that is when the first permanent theatre building was built in [London](#). It was called simply ‘The Theatre’ because it was the only place of its kind in England at the time. Before 1576, plays were acted in public

halls, large houses, in inns and public squares and courtyards and other open spaces, by troops of actors that mostly travelled around the countryside between cities and towns. Once the actors had a permanent place to act plays, they could develop their art without the constant need to travel. The Theatre was followed by other theatres in the London area; there were the Curtain, The Rose, the Swan, the Globe, and others too. More plays were written by more playwrights to fill these theatres.

English Renaissance drama grew and developed until [1642](#), when it suddenly stopped. In the early years of the [English Civil War](#), the [Puritans](#) who were fighting King Charles gained control of London and the region around it. The Puritans were against play-acting; they thought it was sinful and immoral. On September 2, 1642, the Puritans forced the London theatres to close, and to stay closed for most of the time until [1660](#). Then the [English Restoration](#) brought a new king, [Charles II](#), who let the theatres re-open. In the 18-year gap between 1642 and 1660, English society had changed a good deal, and a new style of drama rose up in the Restoration era; it is usually called **Restoration drama** or **Restoration theatre**.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA.

Medieval era and renaissance era are two distinct periods in [history](#). There are distinct differences in the language, style and scope of literature during these two periods. The literature in the medieval era was characterized by Christianity and chivalry whereas the literature in the Renaissance was greatly influenced by the progress of art and sciences and the emergence of humanism. This is the main difference between Medieval and Renaissance literature.

Medieval Drama	Renaissance Drama
It is the drama that belongs to the middle ages,	It is the drama from the 15 <sup>th</sup> to the early 17 <sup>th</sup>

(5 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> ) century which gave birth to renaissance drama.	century.
It centers on religious themes.	It explored religion in a different approach.
It is written in old English and modern English	It is written in early modern English
It is centered on concepts such as: religion, chivalry and courtly love.	It involves religion, historical and social issues.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the Renaissance period was a period of the re-examination of life. It was the state of affairs that gave rise to the spirit of humanism which is usually associated with the Renaissance Age. While the medieval period which is also known as middle ages lasted from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merged into the Renaissance and the age of discovery.

### Works cited

Wikipedia ,(2017) free encyclopedia. Retrieved from [www.wikipedia.com/englishperiods](http://www.wikipedia.com/englishperiods) on 17/7/2017.

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