

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

English Renaissance drama came out of the established Medieval tradition of the mystery and morality plays. These public spectacles focused on religious subjects and were generally enacted by either choristers and monks, or a town's tradesmen.

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 Lucreces*, 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.

In *Macbeth* by Shakespeare, several Renaissance ideas were used. Actions, episodes, characters, and themes used Renaissance characteristics. There were allusions that referred to Greek and Roman times and characters who showed characteristics that were encouraged in the Renaissance era. Characters did things just as people did in their time and thought the same about it.

In *Macbeth*, Macduff shows characteristics of Renaissance ideas. In Renaissance times, people believed that each human being could change the world for the better. Macduff believed this. Macduff knows that Scotland is in miserable shape. He knows that Macbeth is a bad ruler, but at one point he believes that Malcolm, as well, would be just as bad of a ruler. He wants to help Scotland but does not know how. Macduff says "O nation miserable with an untitled tyrant bloody-scepter, when shalt thou see thy wholesome days again, since that the truest issue of thy throne by his own interdiction stands accursed and does blaspheme his breed?". What Macduff means by this is that he is sorry for the way Scotland is now, and he knows that it is because Macbeth is ruling. He says that Macbeth is cursed, and wonders when Scotland will recover again. Macduff wants to change things for the better for Scotland and cares for Scotland's well being.

Macbeth and his actions are another example of Renaissance ideas. The Renaissance era was a secular movement. A secular movement is a movement focused more towards non-religious things. People were more concerned with the happiness of their life on earth, and less concerned with the Church and the afterlife. Macbeth did not care anything about the afterlife, only about his life on earth and being happy on earth. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth planned on killing Duncan so that they could become King and Queen. Before Macbeth killed Duncan, he was afraid. He was afraid that he would fail in killing Duncan and get caught, being only afraid of punishment on earth. He was not afraid of the afterlife, and how much worse it would be than punishment on earth. Lady Macbeth reassured him by telling him her fool-proof plan for the crime, and that they could never get caught. Macbeth only wanted to become king...

In the other hand there is world of medieval period in *Everyman* by Anonymous The social reality of a historical period gets reflected in the literature of the time. The idea that literature reflects society is applicable to medieval drama. It was a time when imaginative literature was seen with

suspicion. However, drama was profitably employed to teach moral and religious lessons.

It was a period when religion occupied the central place in the lives of the people. The church played a pivotal role in the life of an ordinary person. The questions of salvation were at the center of religious discussions. Religion ruled over everything else. The drama of the period dealt with religious themes to disseminate messages of Christianity and it informed people of their position in the world. A life of sins with lust for the pleasures of the material world was discouraged and people were urged to uphold Christian virtues and moral life to ensure salvation for themselves after death. To teach these religious and moral lessons the play wrights used the literary device called allegory through which religious themes were dramatized indirectly. The presence of these elements makes *Everyman* a typical medieval play.

Basically an allegory is a device in which characters do not represent human beings but the abstract qualities. Medieval age was a superstitious and an age with a great degree of religiosity. *Everyman* uses abstract qualities like Beauty, Knowledge as characters. It is a kind of personification. It upholds the teachings of church and Christianity. It allegorizes many virtues and is didactic in tone. It is different from other plays as it lacks hilarity and comicality. During the medieval period, it was held that man is corrupted by birth because he is already fallen due to original sin. So, *Everyman* carries the burden of this sin. The penalty for sin is either death or damnation. Life is a journey which either leads to damnation or salvation. So man is in a dangerous condition. The main point of morality plays was to make it clear that man has to make extra efforts to transcend these aspects of himself. At that time people undertook many pilgrimages to overcome their sinful nature. *Everyman* has to do this journey too. This journey will do much to uplift the people from debased ground.

Death comes to *Everyman*, but he is not prepared. He has to give an account of his deeds both sinful and moral. So far as the account is concerned, one's virtues would be on the side of moral account and the sins and vices would be on the side of sinful account. Whichever side weighed heavier the person will be punished or rewarded accordingly. Unprepared, *Everyman* goes to Knowledge, Beauty, Wit, Strength, and Kinship but none of them comes to his aid. He is all alone. It shows *Everyman* had paid attention to the worldly things that were perishable. He had not devoted himself to God and morality. It shows the danger of damnation. *Everyman* had not done enough to be graced with salvation. He had paid so little attention to good deeds that is very weak as character representing a virtue. The process through which *Everyman* passes is typically Christian. He had committed sins, repents for it, confesses and makes the path to salvation wider now. After confession Good Deeds becomes stronger and is ready to accompany him. Nothing we have done in our life will be useful for salvation except Good Deeds. The tone is clearly moral and religious. All those things are virtues that can be converted into assets and liabilities to help change one's spiritual state. However, all these things are subservient to good work. *Everyman* praises a virtuous life. There is a conflict within *Everyman* among different qualities. Man comes to this world, disadvantaged and he has to make extra efforts to get salvation is the clear cut moral lesson the play tries to impart. *Everyman* allegorically stands for every Christian and urges them to live a virtuous life to get salvation. *Everyman* is thus a typical medieval play.

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.

In the 16th century, the rise of the professional theatre led to the suppression of the old medieval

guild performances. In France, a decree of 1542, which forbade the Confreres de la Passion to continue playing at the Hotel de Bourgogne, stated that:

"The entrepreneurs as well as the players are ingonrant people, mechanical artisans, knowing neither A nor B, who have never been educated and who have neither eloquent speech nor proper language nor the accents of decent pronounciation . . . These illiterate people, with no understanding in such affairs, os squalid conditions, like a carpenter, a constable, a tapster maker, a fishmonger, have played in the Acts of the Apostles."

The decree was renewed in 1548, while still later, in 1615, the comedians of this same Hotel de bourgogne, bent on the ruin of these Confreres de la Passion, who had persisted in their theatrical activity, declared that "This confrere has neither received nor produced anything but coarse artisans. . . who in consequence are incapable of public honour or responsibilities and unworthy of the title of bourgeoisie, through the reasoning of the Ancients, who made slaves walk with the artisans."

The comedians of the Hotel de Bourgogne, who would end up by having the establishment awarded to themselves for their own productions, aimed to destroy what remained of medieval theatre. why? Because the latter was a matter of popular spectacle. And because the Confrerie was not made up of professionals.

They showed a typical Renaissance disdain for humble people, and an equally typical Renaissance obsession with ancient history. The difference between medieval and Renaissance theatre was the difference between the amateur and the professional, the common people acting out plays for their contemporaries, and the professional actors who disdained the common man.