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REGISTRATION NUMBER:2016/235027

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Assignment: Discuss the relationship between medieval and renaissance drama

The relationship between medieval and renaissance drama: The predominant and connections in these periods

The issue of the relationship between renaissance and medieval drama cannot be easily spelt out but on closer look, one gets to recognize the obvious characteristics and possible connections that prevailed in these eras. This essay extends to discuss the dominant features and connections between the medieval and renaissance drama.

The medieval drama also known as the theatrical performance came into existence in the period between the fall of the western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD. It covers all the drama produced in Europe. This period is marked by the domination and reign of the church. The pope of the Catholic Church ruled in this period, thus the church abolished drama and tagged it "sacrilegious" associating it with other ills of the society. Drama was thereafter seen only among wandering minstrels, mimes and jugglers who were often confronted by the church.

Nevertheless, medieval drama was traced to church sermons and masses which possess dramatic characteristics. They made use of quasi-theatrical activities like the interlude and the street pageant. The medieval drama preceded the Greek and Roman drama after which the Elizabethan drama appeared.

The medieval drama is a product of the church and its burn out of the desire to suppress elements of past dramatic tradition and proper drama for the propagation of the Christian faith which is the reason behind the religious themes in dramatic works of the medieval era. This stage is totally devoted to expounding religious philosophy and was with thrones, trolleys and scaffolds which were in staging plays associated with ascension. The theme is usually a sermonizing one which intends to teach important moral lessons. Most of the plays in this period explored biblical themes.

Writers in this period were unfamiliar with Aristotle and Plato's theories or the classical tragedies. The church granted only the clergy and laity to write. Works written in this period are the English cycle dramas, the York mystery plays, Chester mystery plays and Wakefield mystery plays, the N-town plays, morality plays and Everyman.

Individuals were not given opportunities to write especially on humanistic issues such as love. Only issues affecting the society were discussed in dramatic works of the medieval period. Even though some clergies and laities had their eyes on

young ladies in the church, they were restricted from writing works that were based on love and affection.

Most plays were anonymous because individualism and humanism were hindered by the church. Due to the lack of surviving records of texts, a low literacy rate of the population and the opposition of the clergy to some types of performances, they were few sources of medieval drama of the early and high medieval periods.

However, by the late periods, drama and theatre began to become more secularised and a larger number of records survived documenting plays and performances.

A notable dramatist of this period was Hrosvitha who wrote six plays on Terence comedies.

The medieval period makes use of many literary devices. Allegory is a prominent literary device used to convey the morals that the author had in mind while writing—representation of abstract qualities, events and institutions are thick in much of the works of this time. Prevalent plays in this period were *Piers Plowman*, *Romans de Fauvel*, *Psychonomachia* (battle of souls) by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, and liturgical dramas, mystery plays, morality plays, farces and masques.

The language used in writing in this period was Latin because it was the language of the Roman Catholic Church which was the only source of education in that period.

On the other hand, the Renaissance period was a period of cultural rebirth in the 14th-16th century. This period is also known as the neo-classical age, a period of re-examination of life and the rise of individualism and humanism. It is characterised by a period of the adoption of a humanist philosophy and recovery of the classical antiquity. There was a search for the senses and critical rational spirit. The period focused on self-actualisation and one's ability to accept what is going on in his life. It created a host of outrageously different individuals each striving to make effect thus marking the emergence of individualism. It gave the individual a voice which is contrast to the medieval drama. Individual matters such as love was publicly expressed in Renaissance drama as opposed by the church in the medieval period.

The period broke down religious boundaries and disregarded the popes and Bishops hence its focus was moved from the society to the individual. Love and Romance also broke out.

The Renaissance age was a period of intellectuality, creativity, inventions and innovations. The printing press was created by Johannes Gutenberg which encourage authors to write their local vernacular instead of Greek or Latin classical languages.

The age was influenced by the European intellectual and cultural tendencies. Their writings were influenced by the Greco-roman inspiration which was reflected in themes and the literary forms used. Notable writers in this period are Petrarch, Machiavelli and Ariosto. In northern Europe were Erasmus, and Shakespeare plays.

In summary, the medieval drama preceded the renaissance drama encountered a lot of changes, inventions and innovation thus ushering into the modern drama of today