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COURSE: INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA (ELS 140)**

**TOPIC: A DISCUSSION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

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INTRODUCTION

Drama has been said to have passed different eras or period which has helped to sharpen all that makes it up to be drama. However, there is a notable period in which drama was made to face its own death by those in the society as at that time, who could determine the dos and don'ts due to their positions. And drama was considered a crime against morality just like prostitution, theft and other undesirable elements in the society. This period was called the medieval period. The renaissance period on the hand brought about a rebirth of drama, freedom to perform in theatres any sort of play was allowed.

THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The medieval period is the period that marked the collapse of the Roman Empire and the eventual ascension of the Catholic Church into power. The pope raised an army of light called the crusade that won the war and made the church to become the highest institution in the world. Therefore, the medieval drama can be defined as the drama which took place in this era where the Catholic Church took over and then "abolished drama and categorized actors with prostitutes, thieves and other undesirable elements in the society" (studies in dramatic literature page 35). Drama during this period was kept alive only by wandering minstrels, mimes and jugglers. Other theatrical activities were also kept alive by the interlude (a short dramatic piece staged during banquets by vagabond players) and street pageant which was staged for the royalty.

Theatre as a whole was considered a crime. This was because the last stage of Roman Drama just before it revolved into medieval drama had an element of infamy which was vehemently opposed by the Church. Some critics even described it as the degenerate theatre (i.e. morally unacceptable theatre). This drama that emerged after this degeneration was the product of the

church, born out of the desire to suppress certain infamous elements of the past dramatic traditions and out of the desire to fashion drama to go in line with the propagation of the Christian faith. The beginning of the medieval drama is therefore traceable to the medieval church sermons and mass which had dramatic characteristics.

In the 9th century, a trope called Quem Quaritis which is Latin for “whom do you seek”, found its way into the introduction to the eastern Sunday mass. This trope became a tiny play. This brought about an increase in the number of people who came to watch the plays. And the church which served as a façade for theatre could not contain the number of people. So, the medieval drama was forced to leave the church, and seek existence outside it. With the drama leaving the church, the curve towards the renaissance started.

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Renaissance is a French word which means “rebirth”. For something to be reborn, it means that it was dead initially. This tells us that knowledge was almost dead before this period. The Renaissance period means the period of cultural rebirth. Therefore, the drama which emerged during this period is regarded as the Renaissance drama. Drama was included in this rebirth as most of the plays that were written by the Greek and Roman playwrights were translated and the works of the Greco-Roman were once again revived.

There were three things that influenced drama during this period and they were; the influence of monarch in power, major events that occurred in this period, major writers and their pre-occupations. The division of this period into three parts w also influenced drama. The first part of the division was the Elizabethan period and it marked the beginning of innovative plays such as pastoral plays, romantic comedies and history plays. It helped to develop novelty in dramatic

literature and also produced excellent and talented playwrights. In this period, actors had to come under the direction of a patron in order to prevent them from keeping an acting troupe. But this was different from the other two divisions which was called Jacobean and Caroline period because they marked the beginnings of the change in the Elizabethan drama.

While Elizabethan drama dealt mainly with scientific and philosophical issues as of that time, the other two divisions which was later rolled into one age, had similarities such as having plays that were considered more sensational, violent and even melodramatic than that of Elizabethan drama. They both had plays which increased its technical skills in order to thrill the percipients (i.e. the name that should be used to address the people who come to watch plays according to Aristotle). Drama during this period developed the tragic-comic element. And the playwrights used exposition more skillfully, expressing action into tight and swiftly moving episodes.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE PERIOD

The relationship the renaissance period however shares with the medieval period is that the renaissance period is the aftermath of some factors that made the medieval period to decline. Such factors include:

1. The exit of the Quem Quaeritis trope who just like other tropes became independent and established secular entertainment through organized groups called Mystery cycles.
2. The Protestants regarded them as a tool for the propagation of the catholic doctrine. This made Queen Elizabeth I to ban it in England.
3. The fact that catholic church withdrew its support for them because it felt that it weakened the church
4. The presence of morality plays which no longer borrowed names from the bible although it had some of themes gotten from the bible.

Therefore, Medieval period can be regarded as a mother whose flaws brought about the birth of a type of drama which went against her principles by one of her own, the Quem Quaeritis who had once helped this mother, the Medieval drama to flaunt her beauty.

REFERENCE

Emeka Nwabueze 2010, studies in dramatic literature.