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DEPT. ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE
DRAMA**

Discuss the relationship between medieval and Renaissance Drama.

Abstract

Renaissance drama grew out of the established mediaeval tradition of the mystery and morality plays. The medieval theater focused on religious subjects and were generally enacted by the church choristers and monks. Medieval (the middle ages) and renaissance (age of re-birth) are two distinct but well related periods in dramatic history. Although renaissance thinkers often tried to dissociate themselves from the middle ages, important continuities with their recent past, such as belief in the Great Chain of Being, were still much in evidence.

INTRODUCTION

In establishing the relationship between dichotomous variables, it is pertinent to go beyond stating the similarities between them. In other words; distinction should be drawn between similarities' and relationship' that exist

between the dichotomous concepts. In essence, examine the relationship between medieval and renaissance drama goes beyond mere similarities; in addition to their similarities, it encompasses the connection and inter-relation between them; how much the formal (medieval) influence the latter (renaissance).

According to the renaissance thinker, the valuable historical periods; antiquity and their own. However, modern scholars have noted extremely important continuities with the previous age still existed. Such continuities existed in the area of techniques employed for dramaturgy. Dramatic techniques developed in the medieval period were put to good use in the renaissance theater. For example, the colorful and dramatic devil characters that stalked the mystery plays were transformed to sophisticated villains in renaissance drama. In the medieval drama of Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus", the devil, Mephistopheles behaves like a smooth tudor lawyer while Iago in the Elizabethan drama of William Shakespeare's "Othello" is suspected of having cloven hooves.

Besides the fact that the early renaissance plays, like the medieval plays, were neither public nor truly professional, there also tend to be continuity of themes employed in the medieval. The themes that permeate the medieval plays such as man's supplication to God; consequences of man's greediness and villainy were critically explored in the early renaissance plays but in a grand style. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and Shakespeare's "Macbeth" are both ruined by their insatiable quest for more; seeking above what is due to them by nature. The quest for a super-human knowledge leads Faustus to sell his soul to the devil. Macbeth's quest for power finally leads to his destruction. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus represents the medieval drama while Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' represent the renaissance drama and yet certain themes/motifs cut across both, to show how much the medieval has influenced the renaissance contrary to the widely held belief that the medieval and

the renaissance contrary to the wide held believe that the medieval and the renaissance are two wide parallel lines that can never meet. It is important to note here that many scholars have argued Christopher Mallowe: Doctor faustus' is not a medieval drama and should be classified under renaissance drama. Others have argued otherwise. However, that is not the topic of this work.

Having examined the relationship that existed between the medieval and renaissance drama. We will attempt to define medieval and renaissance drama for clarity's sake. The medieval is same as the Middle ages while the renaissance is same as the age of rebirth. Dramas/plays written or staged in the 5th – 15th century is classified as medieval drama arose out of the desire to fashion drama, dramaturgy and service along ecclesiastical lines for the propagation of the Christian faith. With the drama leaving the church, a pace for the renaissance was set. Yet, medieval drama did not completely go into extinction because the secular qualities of medieval drama overthrew its religious quality and paved the way to the development of renaissance drama. At the beginning of the renaissance, the drama left the monopoly of the church and was monopolized by the aristocrat. The plays were neither public nor truly professional