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The Relationship Between Medieval Drama and The Renaissance Drama.

Drama which is one of the genres of literature can be said to be the only genres that is reenacted on a stage for the visual pleasure of its audience. Attempts on its definition have been made by many critics and scholars throughout the ages, but the most widely recognised definition seems to be that of Aristotle in his *poetics*, where he says that, 'tragedy (drama) is the representation of action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornaments, the several kind being found in separate parts of the play, in the form of action not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions'. Analysing this definition, we realise that Aristotle sees drama as the representation (mimesis) of men in action and not the men themselves and the subject matter must be serious. 'Serious' here means that it must be about the Noble or royal class, (acts about the kings, queens, about wars, conquests etc). For him, tragedy is acts about men that are higher and better than we are while comedy is acts about men that are lower and worse than we are. It must also be of a certain magnitude, (not too big or too small), should have a beginning, middle and an end for it to be regarded as complete and should be meant for reenaction on a stage, and not just for pleasure derived from reading. Again, it must through pity and fear, have medicinal effects on the audience (catharsis).

It is evident that from the above definition, that Aristotle merely propounded his view of drama (tragedy) through his study of the Greek drama and tragedy of his age. But because of the many transformations and phases that drama has undergone, part of this definition have been considered unacceptable. Some believe that tragedy should be as a result of a man's quest for knowledge which will result in him deviating from an acceptable chronological order in the universe. Others believe tragedy to be that of the common man fighting and on a quest to assert his position in a society that has displaced him. In as much as drama has undergone many epochs, they are all interconnect and interrelated because each succeeding era has some features from its predecessor and also, the rise and fall of one has paved way for the rise and birth of another. The various ages includes; greek period, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance to mention but these till the present age. This essay tends to study and outline the relationships between the Medieval era and the Renaissance. But before digging into the key subject, it is of utmost importance to explain the birth and nature of drama in both eras.

The Medieval/Middle Age drama witnessed the collapse of the Roman theatre in the 5th Century and the ascension of the church into power. The church used their power to abolish the theater and thus, drama, because they regarded it as sacrilegious and a pagan practice. This made drama at that period to be dependent on the activities of jugglers, mimes and minstrels of which they are not

even allowed to perform freely. Quasi drama activities here was street pageants and interludes and some crafted lines of the scripture which were performed during masses became the drama itself. The church did these to propagate the christian faith and doctrine. The infused mimesis and other dramatic elements into the sacred activities in some occasions which includes; Good Friday, Palm Sunday celebration of mass, etc and these can be said to mark the rebirth of drama in this era. Some tropes of which one of them is *Quem Quaeritis* (whom do you seek) were added to to the celebration of mass. These drama activities were later moved out of the church into the town hall, thus, its Independence from the mass and metamorphosis into secular entertainment. This led to be birth of categories of plays like, mystery plays, morality and miracle plays. Its decline and fall due to a number of factors which includes; withdrawal of the church from it because it weakens them, its ban from England by Queen Elizabeth among other things gave birth to Renaissance theater and drama.

Renaissance, otherwise known as the age of rebirth. And for something to be reborn, it means that the thing was once dead. So this period saw to rebirth of drama which the church turned into a thing of evangelisation and catechisation and to to which the queen has outlawed what little was left of it in England. This era which the rise of great writers like Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe developed its own ideal drama which infused into it some features of both Greek and the Medieval drama. But they introduced comic relief parts and sub plots. This era which embarked on the search for knowledge established a chronological order of Existentials of the world starting from the Creator of the Universe down to the plants of the earth. Likewise their capabilities and powers. They later constructed their tragic hero to be one who, in his quest for knowledge tangles with the chronological order of the Existentials. Just like the protagonist in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*..this period did a little bit of moral plays but in combination with profane and secular ideas. They never tied it to the apron string of the church as the Medievals did theirs.

Having established the meaning and nature of drama in both periods, one will realize that both epochs have more differences than similarities. But the focus of this essay is on the latter.

Among other relationships, the end of Medieval period ushered in the Renaissance era. Queen Elizabeth banned the medieval drama in England. This is because, according to them, it is a tool for the propagation of the Catholic doctrines. So, it was outlawed in 1548.

Another relationship which the two epochs tend to share is in the discussion of interlude in drama. Interlude which is said to mean an intervening episode in a play, an entertainment in-between the acts and scenes. It was the popular drama of the Medieval age because of the inclusion of some tropes into the liturgical celebration. It was not merely based on doctrine but has the combination of comic scenes with serious ones. Thus, this provided a link between the moral religious drama of the Medieval and the secular drama of the Renaissance.

Furthermore, the University Wit, (group of graduates) wrote plays which the Boy's Corporation acted out on a stage. They are also, a couple of people who share a common ground in their University background and draw on their academics to write on the different categories of drama, especially classical, interlude and folklores, which the Renaissance employed and expanded on.

Another relationship which can be traced to both is in the issue of the changes that took place during the transition of Medieval to Renaissance. These changes are in their different ideas on the theme that should dominate the stage. The pedagogic nature of drama which was dominant in the Medieval shifted to having entertainment function in the Renaissance era. It also shifted from religious nature in Medieval to political in the Renaissance age.

During the performance of the plays in the Renaissance period by the Tudor school of drama, the playwrights of that age combined the techniques of the Roman drama with the dramaturgical techniques of the Medieval theatre of which one of them is serious and moral teaching and the knowledge of restitution of sins.

Certain elements of Medieval's morality and miracle plays have been transfused and infused into the Elizabethan secular ones. This is depicted in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* where Faustus in his quest for more powers, ventures into a journey of no reversion. He ends up destroying himself by choosing pride, lechery, sloth, gluttony, over good deeds and submission to the good and normal ways the universe has set the order of things to be. The same is applicable to the Medieval moral play of *Everyman*, where Everyman, when he is summoned to give account for his works on earth realises that he has neglected good deeds over beauty, fellowship, etc. The two attempts at teaching moral but that of Faustus is constituted in a more secular way than Everyman, and this can be regarded as the relationship they both share.

As stated earlier, Medieval and Renaissance have more differences than they have of similarities, but all the same, this write-up has tried to point out their relationships in relation to their theme, their belief in the reward of bad deeds, use of interlude having a moral and pedagogic purpose, in reference to two drama texts..