

# UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA

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COURSE CODE: ELS 140

COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

DEPT: ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

## ASSIGNMENT

SHOW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND  
RENAISSANCE DRAMA

LECTURER

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Renaissance literally means 'Rebirth'. The renaissance period marks the revival of European art and literature under the influence of classical models in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The renaissance drama is also called Elizabethan drama because its development started when Elizabeth I was queen of England from 1558-1603. After her death, the drama continued under the reign of king James 1 and his son King Charles. This periods are referred to the Jacobean (Jacobus Latin words for James) and Caroline ( Carolus Latin name for Charles) drama respectively. Renaissance drama marks the beginning of modern Europe influenced by monarch.

Medieval period occurs in the early middle ages approximately from 476-1500

Medieval drama in its origin is unlike the Greek drama because of its religiosity. The fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the fall of theatre. Drama was seen as evil and barbaric by the church and was therefore banned and theatre closed. During this period, people were interested in the things of God and church services were held in Latin which was not understood by most congregation. Most people could neither read nor write and had no experience of the bible stories. For this reason, the church began to dramatize the bible as a way to give religious instruction to the congregation and this turned into a full blown performance even outside the church. This way, drama finds its way into the medieval period.

## **MEDIEVAL DRAMA**

Medieval drama started in church as a result of illiterate congregation who are desperate to learn the things of the church. Some of the major events that occur in this period are:

- Church service was interrupted by drama to show biblical event like the nativity, passion play during Easter and Christmas. This performance was acted by the clergy inside the church. Scenes would be played in different

areas of the church where mansions are set up and the congregation would move from scene to scene.

- In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, plays are moved outside the church as they grow in scope.
- Three plays emerge overtime: mystery, Miracle, and morality. The text of plays changes from Latin to English as they are performed and produced by local trade guilds instead of the clergy.
- The plays used Christian themes such as death and resurrection, good and evil, and heaven and earth. The code of chivalry and courtly love were also famous themes of the medieval drama.
- The plays gradually moved from the influence of the church even though the themes still focus on religion, and the content monitored by the church, the plays becomes more secular such that by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the plays were out the church's control.
- Morality plays peak in 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century.

Medieval drama is known for its highly stylised character and action, its verse dialogue and its religious themes. Drama developed roughly from the 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the authors were anonymous and there are very few surviving texts. As the play moved away from the church they took on more and more the attitude of the common people. Humour found it way into the storytelling.

The actors were amateurs, either local or nearby townspeople. Actors were men from European. Costumes were decidedly medieval in nature with added on pieces such as angel wings and devil horns.

## MEDIEVAL COSTUMES

- Two coats and a pair of hose for Eve stained.
- A coat and hose for Adam, stained
- A coat with hose and tail for the serpent, with a white hair(wig)
- A face (mask) and hair for the father
- Two hairs for Adam and Eve
- A rib coloured red.

Three types of plays grew out of this time period; Mystery, Miracle, and morality. All three flourished in different areas of Britain and Europe and yet had a short life. In England, for example, the plays were either changed or banned as Protestantism came into power.

An example of medieval morality drama is *Everyman*

## RENAISSANCE DRAMA

The renaissance drama was a cultural and artistic movement which bridges the gap between middle ages and modern history. The introduction of the printing press was a major event in this period which leads to the flourish of renaissance literature.

English renaissance drama grew 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 or monks.

At the end of the fifteenth century, a new type of play appeared. These short stories and revels were performed at noble households and at court. These short entertainments, called “*interludes*” started the move away from the didactic nature of the medieval drama towards purely secular plays, and often added more comedy than was present in the medieval predecessors. This play shifts emphasis from teaching to entertainment, they also change focus from religion to political. John Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* (1515), for example, while on the face of it resembling the medieval allegory plays with its characters of virtues and vices, was a political satire against *cardinal wolsey*.

The history plays were written in the 1530’s, the most notable of which was *John Johan*. While it considers matters of morality and religion, these were handled in the light of the Reformation which later laid foundation for what Marlowe and Shakespeare elevate into the English history play, or chronicle play.

The Elizabethan period flourished during the English Renaissance. It marks the beginning of innovative plays, especially romantic comedies, history plays, revenge-murder dramas, court comedies, and pastoral plays. Thus the Elizabethan age did not only usher in excellent and talented playwrights but also introduced novelty in dramatic literature. The Elizabethan drama was concerned with the exploration of the grave moral, philosophical, and scientific issues of the times, and raised questions about man’s nature and his place in the universe.

Jacobean and Caroline drama have significant similarities on practice. The age saw to the development of plays with serious subject matter but with happy ending. This tragic-comic element,

already introduced by Guarini in the Italian Renaissance, is exemplified in the dramatic works of Beaumont and Fletcher.

The period also subjugates intellectual interests and complex characterization to thrills and spectacular theatrical entertainment often experienced in Senecan tragedy. Secondly, because the plays lacked substance, technical skills were increased to ameliorate it. Finally, the plots were tightly developed. The playwrights of this age used exposition more skilfully, compressing action into tight and swiftly moving episodes. Unlike the Elizabethan drama, the plays were considered violent, more sensational, and more melodramatic.

The English Renaissance drama saw to the establishment of the master of Revels, a licenser of all plays and acting troupes. Williams Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, George Herbert are some notable figures in renaissance drama

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

- The literature in medieval was characterised by Christianity while the literature of renaissance was greatly influenced by art and science.
- The renaissance drama has no limitation unlike the medieval drama that places their plays strictly on morality.
- Unlike the medieval drama, renaissance drama enjoy freedom
- The renaissance drama has an unquenchable quest for knowledge while in the medieval drama, the church place a limit to what to be known.
- Medieval drama is church- centred while renaissance drama is Man-centred.
- The renaissance drama is adventurous unlike the medieval drama

### **SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

- Both renaissance and medieval periods are dramatic in nature.

- Both are geared towards teaching morality.
- Both are knowledge seeking.
- Both are humorous in nature.
- Both uses interludes for dramatic entertainment

## REFERENCE

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