

**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA  
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**TOPIC:  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE  
DRAMA**

**AN ASSIGNMENT  
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## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

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 and monks, or a town's tradesmen (as later seen lovingly memorialised by Shakespeare's 'Mechanicals' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

At the end of the fifteenth century, a new type of play appeared. These short plays and revels were performed at noble households and at court, especially at holiday times. These short entertainments called "interludes" started to move away from the didactic nature of the plays towards purely secular plays, and often added more comedy than was present in the medieval predecessors, since most of these holiday revels were not documented and play texts have disappeared and been destroyed, the actual dating of the transition is difficult. The first extant purely secular play, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucreces*, was performed at the household of Cardinal Morton, where the young Thomas More was serving as a page. Early Tudor interludes soon grew more elaborate, incorporating music and dance, and some, especially those by John Heywood, were heavily influenced by French farce.

Not only were plays shifting emphasis from teaching to entertaining, they were also slowly changing focus from the religious towards the political. John Skelton's *Magnificence* (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. *Magnificence* was so incendiary that

skelton had to move into the sanctuary of west minister to escape the wrath of Wolsey.

The first history plays were written in the 1530's, the most notable of which was John Bale's king John. While it considered matters of morality and religion, these were handled in the light of the reformation. These plays set the precedent of presenting history in the dramatic medium and laid the foundation for what would later be elevated by Marlowe and Shakespeare into the English History play, or chronicle play, in the latter part of the century. Not only was the reformation taking hold in England, but the winds of classical humanism were sweeping in from the continent. Interest grew in the classical antiquity, especially in the universities Latin texts were being "Englyshed" and Latin poetry and plays began to be adopted into English plays writers were also developing English tragedies for the first time, influenced by Greek and Latin writers. Among the first forays into Greek and Latin writers. Among the first forays into English tragedy were Richard Edward's Damon and Pythias (11564) and John pickering's new interlude of vice containing the history of Herestes (1567) the most influential writer of classical tragedies, however, was the Roman play write Seneca, whose works where translated into English by jasper Heywood, son of playwright John Heywood, in 1589.

Seneca's plays incorporated rhetorical speeches, blood and violence, and often ghosts; components which were to figure prominently in both Elizabethan and Jacobean.