

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RENAISSANCE AND MEDIEVAL THEATRES

We will briefly look at what each of them stood for individually before looking into the relationship between them.

English Renaissance theatre encompasses the period between 1562 and 1642. This is the style of plays of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. The phrase Elizabethan theatre is used at times improperly to mean English Renaissance theatre although in a strict sense "Elizabethan" only refers to the period of Queen Elizabeth's reign, which ended with her death in 1603.

Along with the economics of the profession, the character of the drama changed towards the end of the period. Under Elizabeth, the drama was a unified expression as far as social class was concerned: the Court watched the same plays the commoners saw in the public playhouses. With the development of the private theatres, drama became more oriented towards the tastes and values of an upper-class audience. By the later part of the reign of Charles I, few new plays were being written for the public theatres, which sustained themselves on the accumulated works of the previous decades.

Looking at the genres of this period, they include the history play, which depicted English or European history. For example, some works of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe were historical. Tragedy was a very popular genre. Comedies were common too.

The medieval period in Europe (A.D. 476-1500) began with the collapse of Rome, a calamity of such magnitude that the years between then and the beginning of the Crusades in 1095 have been traditionally, if erroneously, called the Dark Ages. Historians used this term to refer to their lack of knowledge about a time in which no great central powers organized society or established patterns of behavior and standards in the arts. Drama, in this era so much involved religion as regarded Christianity. The church were not in support of drama, but later accepted it as some biblical stories like "the of Christ" needed to be dramatized. Drama was very important during religious festivals like Christi Corpus.

The actors in this era did not think of themselves as specialists or professionals; they were simply monks or nuns who belonged to the church. Most of their plays were religious which were staged within and outside the church.

Now, the relationship between these two periods (Renaissance and Medieval) are so evident. Medieval theatre actually gave birth to the Renaissance theatre as there were demands of more sophisticated plays that should encourage professionalism.

Both the Renaissance and medieval periods had only or mainly males in the theatres. Female parts were played by adolescent boy players in women's costume.

As for Renaissance period, costumes were used to recognise characters as there is his class consciousness between the upper class and lower class. The colour purple in costumes were reserved for the recognition of the royalties. Many of the playwrights of these two eras did not pass through formal education. Also playwrights in these eras dealt with the natural limitation on their productivity by combining into teams of two, three, four, and even five to generate play texts; the majority of plays written in this era were collaborations, and the solo artists who generally eschewed collaborative efforts, like Jonson and Shakespeare, were the exceptions to the rule.

They both involved risks. The level of realism achieved by medieval plays was at times startling. In addition to visual realism, medieval plays involved a psychological level of participation on the part of both audience and actor. Sometimes they demanded that the actors suffer in accord with the characters they played. Some records attest to characters playing Christ on the cross having to be revived after their hearts stopped, and at least one Judas apparently was hanged just a little too long and had to be resuscitated. As for Renaissance theatre, actors' lives were subject to the same levels of danger and earlier mortality as all who lived during the early modern period--for example, Christopher Marlowe was killed in an apparent tavern brawl, while Ben Jonson killed an actor in a duel. Several probably were soldiers.