

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RENAISSANCE AND MEDIEVAL DRAMA

English Renaissance drama grew out of the established Medieval tradition of the mystery and morality plays (see Medieval English Drama). 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 memorialized 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 the move away from the didactic nature of the earlier plays toward 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.