

**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES**

**TOPIC:**

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDEVIAL DRAMA AND  
RENAISSANCE DRAMA**

**AN ASSIGNMENT PREPARED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE COURSE ELS 140 (INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA)**

**BY**

**EKECHUKWU, CHIAMAKA JUSTINA**

**2015/199189**

**LECTURER: MR. ODOH ONYEKA**

**JULY, 2017**

Drama can be said to be a work of art which delineates human life and activity through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between groups of characters. In Aristotle's definition of drama, he emphasizes the concept of Mimesis which means imitation of human beings in action. He conceives of drama as a story acted out by people on stage before an audience.

The word of "drama" originated from the Greek word, "dran" which means to do or to act. Drama is said to have originated from Greece and the genesis of this was in the sixth century BC during the celebration in honour of Dionysius the Greek god of wine and fertility. On this particular day there were gathered citizens of Athens at the Theatre of Dionysius to watch the first dramatic performance.

The chorus comprising fifty men was performing a dithyramb. In the midst of this performance, one of the chorus members broke away from the group and assumed the position of the god whose activity the chorus has assembled to recount. This individual that broke out of the chorus to play the role of the god came to be known as the first Actor and his name was Thespis

After the era of the Greek drama, drama was taken over by the Romans who had colonized the people of Greece, but the Romans were not enthusiastic about this Art, rather they were more concerned with being conquerors and were

involved in outdoor sports. They produced less drama than the Greeks and the drama they produced were mainly derivatives of Greek drama.

The decline of Roman drama came in the Fifth century when there was the collapse of the Roman Empire. . At the last stage of the Roman drama before it evolved into the medieval drama, there was an element of infamy which entered it and which was vehemently opposed by the church. Some critics referred to it as degenerate theatre and its disappearance during the sixth century was the immediate aftermath of that degeneration.

The Medieval drama was preceded by the Greek and Roman drama and arose from the ashes of the Roman drama. The new drama of the middle ages i. e the medieval drama sprang into being wholly uninfluenced by the drama of the Greeks. This drama was slowly elaborated from what was at first only a casual accompaniment of public worship in the church.

It was birthed in the Christian church who had at first cursed the old form when it was decadent and corrupted, The purpose of this adaption by the church was to first to suppress certain infamous elements of past dramatic traditions and to connect drama with the service so as to make understanding of the word clear and exciting to the people.

Some of the elements of the church drama include: Presentation of drama at the celebration of the Good Friday, the celebration of the mass. e. t. c. There were extended musical passages called “Troupes”. The Troupes were added to the celebration of the mass, one of which was the Quem quaeritis Troupe (“Whom do you seek?”).

When the troupes became independent of the mass, they got established as secular entertainment through organized groups called Mystery cycles. Two most popular dramas that sprang up at this time were the: Mystery plays and the Miracle plays. The Mystery plays dramatized biblical events while the Miracle plays were based on the lives of saints. There was also the Morality plays which allegorized the human struggle to choose between vice and virtue i.e. teaching morals.

The Medieval stage at this time was by no means crude but rather was a stage that was wholly devoted to teaching morals. The Medieval stage was very resourceful and rich borrowing neither from the era that preceded it (the Greco-Roman) nor from the one that followed it (the Elizabethan era). As the years went by, the number of persons that came to watch the drama staged in the church became enormous and the place could not contain the any longer, therefore the drama had to be taken out of the church for this reason and for other reasons.

Some of these other reasons include:

- (1) The Catholic church withdrew its support from this drama because they felt it weakened the church.
- (2) The protestant regarded this drama as a tool for the propagation the catholic doctrine this made Queen Elizabeth 1 to ban it England.

When medieval drama left the church, it did not die completely rather its secular qualities overthrew its religious qualities and this moved into the Renaissance Era.

The Renaissance Era is usually referred to as the period of “rebirth” of Greek classical literature and as a period of great intellectual and artistic achievement. The renaissance is marked with a number of achievements some of which include: The invention of printing, the establishment of universities, and the fall of Constantinople which caused scholars of classical literature to spread all over Europe.

For dramatic literature, the year 1349 and the productions of *Philologia* by Petrarch indicates the beginning of the Renaissance period. Preceding Petrarch is the poet, Dante, whose divine comedy championed an avalanche of advanced ideas on the physical aspects of earth, heaven and hell. The Renaissance age was explosive, diverse, created a host of outrageously different individuals each straining for effect.

It is important to note that in comparison to the medieval drama which was based mostly on the religious practices of the church, the Renaissance age was a break away from this tradition. It was marked with a high sense of individualism unlike the medieval that deal with the communal life.

The Renaissance was also an age of reformation, new knowledge came to be and there was breakthrough in both the sciences and the Arts. In the Renaissance era, the bible left the priest and went to the people. There was also the issue of free interpretation unlike the general interpretation given in the medieval period.

Here we can see the relationship between the medieval and the Renaissance in that the medieval preceded the renaissance period and that the while the medieval was a period of the church and God centered world, the Renaissance broke away from this tradition characteristic with high sense of individualism.