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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND  
RENAISSANCE DRAMA

There was truly a gradual decline of dramatic art at the Medieval following the fall of Roman and Greek theatre and drama could merely be seen at this period in the church that monopolised it. However there was rejuvenation of the features of drama characterised with the classics at the renaissance age. This paper aims at pointing out the areas the both dramas relate. We shall look into the following qualities of impersonation, mimetic, archetypal, thought and interlude as they share them in common.

Impersonation involves the use of dramatic character to represent the action intended to imitate. Thespis in Greek theatre of his time played the role of the god Dionysus but Solon in his ignorance that drama is a mere representation, confronted Thespis and exposed that he was not Dionysus. The plays or dramas at medieval and renaissance all

thrive by impersonation. The celebration of mass at medieval age was dramatic as the priest imitated Jesus. The Quem Quaeritis trope at Easter was enactment of the angel that appeared at tomb, met the three Marys and asked them who they sought. The church then was used as the setting until the audience that came watching the play grew that the place of the play had to be built detached from the church.

Like the renaissance plays that also have themes, the lessons imbedded in the medieval plays are mostly moral. It thus ranges from the moral play to miracle play, the mystery play, etc. all which are drawn from the bible. It could be said that while the medieval plays are the mostly the community effort of the church and they were utilitarian, the renaissance were more artistic.

However, the two are mimetic. The actions they represent are portrayed with the use language which is what makes it literature. Both have thought which the language conveys. Though abstract, thought are made visible with such language as imagery symbolism, metaphor, etc. like renaissance plays, medieval plays too are mimetic

owing to its ability to literarily represent such virtues as good and bad allegorically in morality plays like *Every Man*.

Archetypal is another quality renaissance and medieval share in common. They can be said to be prototype in that they echo other known work of art and besides, portray universally acceptable theme like death. *Quem Queritis* imitated the angel and the three Marys who inquired into the disappearance of the body of Jesus Christ who died and was buried. Jesus could be said to be an innocent azazel whose death has a universal outlook. Some Renaissance plays echo characters and events in the Bible. In Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, the Devil here is represented as Mephistopheles. There is the universal theme of fall in the character of Faustus in his quest sequence. It echoes the Biblical fall of Adam in his quest for knowledge too beyond the order of the great chain of being. That is the lot of Macbeth in his quest to be above all- his eventual fall and death.

Finally, medieval and renaissance share in common interlude which was featured in both. It is known that the English Renaissance was a period which was heralded by Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* –

1587 and terminated with the death of Shakespeare in 1616. The development of English Renaissance started with the brief dramatic entertainment called interludes. The interlude was popular drama of the late medieval age, and was not merely doctrinal but mixed comic scenes with serious ones. It provided the link between moral religious drama and the secular drama of the Elizabethans.

### **Conclusion**

The attempt made in this paper is to show the relationship between medieval and renaissance plays through the elicitation of impersonation, mimesis, archetype, thought and interludes which they share in common as literary work.