

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA.**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

English renaissance drama grew out of the established medieval tradition of the mystery and morality plays. These spectacles focused on religious subjects and were generally enacted by either choristers and monks or a towns traders, men (as later seen lovingly memorized by Shakespeare's mechanicals in *A midsummer Night's Dream*).

**INTRODUCTION**

At the end of the fifteenth century, a new type of play appeared. Those short plays and revels were performed at whole households and at courts 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.

Medieval drama in England as elsewhere, owes nothing to the tragedy and comedy of insolent Greece and haughty Rome. Before the Christian era began these were already closed

accounts. The plays of Seneca were probably intended for readers only. Imitation, of course, as defined is a fundamental instinct of humanity. It shows itself already in the Seasonal **“ludi”** of the folk, who call the leaders of their revel kings and queens. But it is rare to find in medieval writer any consciousness of an analogy between classical drama and the performances familiar to him in his own day. Very occasionally, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a play is called a comedy. But normally this term and that of tragedy stand, as they stood for Dante, for varieties of narrative poetry with a cheerful and melancholy note respective. Nor is the term **“Theatre”** normally applied to medieval stage. It first appears at Exeter in 1348. **“Drama”** was not an English word until the sixteenth Century.

The human impulse to **“mimesis”** made a fresh start, where perhaps it might have been least expected in the midst of ecclesiastical liturgy itself. This in the western church had reached its final development by the beginning of the tenth Century, with the sacrificial Mass as its central feature, and the office of readings and praise and prayers, which in the greater church and monasteries at least, extended over the eight hours of the day from **“Matins”** to **“compline”**. There was much singing, often divided between the priest and a choir, or between two parts of the choir in what was called **“antiphon”**. This naturally tended to approximate to the form of dialogue. The ritual was especially elaborating on the feast days, which in their succession from the Annunciation to the Ascension commemorated the main incidents in the life of the founder of Christianity. On these occasions it often included symbolical ceremonies, some of which are already traceable in the church of Jerusalem during the fourth century, although others are first recorded later than the emergence of drama itself. At the annunciation the deacon might hold a palm branch while he read the gospel, or a figure representing Gabriel might be lowered from the

roof. At Christmas a “**praesepe**” or crib, might be used as an altar, perhaps with a Mary and Joseph at its side. St Francis, at Greccio in 1223, introduced a live ox and ass. At the Epiphany a mechanical star suspended from the roof. At purification which was also the presentation of Christ in the temple might be carried into the church a lighted candle to symbolize the light of the world, or a gospel book, or an image of the son and his mother. On palm Sunday came a procession with palm branches to celebrate the entry in Jerusalem, sometimes with a gospel book or a litter to represent the savior, or in Germany a wooden figure of Christ on an ass, known as “**palmesel**”. All these could not be regarded as true drama, because they lack the essential element of impersonation, in which the actions and words are not those of the performer himself but of another whom he represents. That he usually also assumes the outward appearance and dress proper to that other is perhaps less essential. Impersonation is generally accompanied in drama by dialogue, but opinions differ as to whether that is necessary feature.

Some of these liturgical practices were taken up into the drama as it developed. But for its main origin we must look not to them but to the musical elaboration of the mass itself, and here as I have written elsewhere. We can trace church music, had its full share in the literacy and artistic movement of the ninth century, which is known as the “**Carolingian renaissance**”.

Furthermore, on the miracle plays were developed from antiphonal elements of the mass and were one means of teaching sacred history, whether Christ or his saints at a popular level; one means of teaching church doctrine, again at a popular level. In early years both kinds may have been written by secular clergy in close touch with the people. Four great cycles of miracle plays have survived and some plays out of cycle but the remains of early morality drama are exceedingly scanty.

The earliest morality text that survived are the “**The Castle of perseverance**” and the fragmentary “**pride of life**”. They belong to the early years of fifteenth century, and they are among its most impressive works. The castle of perseverance comprises in its massive structures all the leading themes which recall singly in other moralities but not elsewhere together. The play traces mans kind of life from youth to age and represent the conflict for his soul between the virtues and vices.

Similarly in “**Everyman**” the latter is depicted in its most impressive of this kind it is the concentration upon this limited theme, together with the dramatic aptness of the allegory, the somber devotional treatment, and choice keeping of the diction.

Finally, it is important to note that religious drama eventually declined as a result of a number of factors. Firstly, the catholic church withdrew its support for them because, it felt that it weakened the church, it is important to note that medieval drama did not die completely. The truth is that the secular qualities of medieval drama over threw its religious qualities and pushed the development of renaissance drama into mainstream.

The Renaissance literally means “**Rebirth**” it was the period of knowledge rebirth. It was a period that marked the rediscovery of past heritage, an age which epitomized in the discovery of Greek and Roman civilization. As a reaction against the medieval theatrical tradition, the Renaissance involved a complete review of theatre from the points of view of literature, architecture, scenery, and production. This complete review of the theatre implied evolution of new theatre conventions. In Italy and France, playwrights must adhere strictly to very similitude conceived then to mean having the appearance of truth with reference to everyday occurrence. Characters created must have sense of decorum interpreted to mean faithfulness to tradition. As a

matter of convention, attempts were made to avoid consciously, the mixture of grave and ridiculous events in one play. Playwrights equally aspired to achieve unity of place, action, and time in their plays and as well ensured that their plays conform to the five act structure rule.

For dramatic literature, the year 1349 and the production of "**phidogia**" by Petrarch indicates the beginning of the renaissance age. Preceding Petrarch is indicate the beginning of the Renaissance age. Preceding Petrarch is the greatest medieval 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.

The word neo-classical was also used to depict the renaissance age, especially in France. The neo-classical age went back to the ancients, particularly Greece and Rome, to revive or adapt their practices. This gave rise to the use of perspective scenery. This period was a period of the re-examination of life. It was this state of affairs that gave rise to the spirit of humanism which is usually associated with the Renaissance age.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the relationship between the medieval drama and renaissance was that the latter was teaching morals or being didactic and Renaissance evolving due to the rebirth of enlightenment was teaching on mundane issues or more like secular issues.

## **Works Cited**

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