

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

INTRODUCTION

Medieval drama is the drama that arose from the ashes of the collapsed Roman drama while the Renaissance epitomized in the rediscovery of Greek and Roman civilization. The medieval drama is classified under morality play, mystery play and miracle plays while in Renaissance we have the Elizabeth period, the Jacobean and Caroline period. This work tends to discuss the relationship between medieval and renaissance drama.

MEDIEVAL DRAMA

The medieval drama started from the 5th century down to the 15th century. Medieval drama rose from the ashes of the Roman drama. It is important to note that the Roman theatre declined because of the church. The Christian abolished drama and they categorized the actors as prostitutes, thief etc. Medieval drama came after the Greek and Roman drama and was followed by Elizabethan drama. At the last of Roman drama before it allowed to medieval there was that element of infamy which the church opposed seriously.

The Medieval drama was the product of the church which was born out their desire to suppress certain infamous element of past dramatic tradition. The

beginning of medieval drama is traced to the church sermon and masses. Religion occupied an important place in the medieval literature as most of the works used Christian theme such literature as good and evil, heaven and earth etc. These themes were commonly used in a genre called chivalry romance which was generally about the adventures of knight – errant having many heroic and chivalric qualities.

In the ninth century tropes were added to the celebration of the mass. One of such tropes was the *Quem quaeritis* which had its way into the introduction of Easter Sunday mass. *Quem quaeritis* is a Latin word which means “whom you seek” and this was what the Angel at the tomb ask the woman who went seeking for Jesus on the third day. By 975AD, the tropes became a tiny play it was fostered by the Bishop of Winchester England. Ethelwood. He wrote stage direction for a tiny play which was published in *Regularis concordis* an appellation document .

As the tropes grew many scenes were added and they had to look for a setting and they were focused to leave the church. When the tropes became independent of the mass, they got established as secular entertainment through organized groups called mystery cycles. They also had the morality plays which includes *Everyman*. This play does not draw its title from the Bible but is teaches morals and makes use of abstract characters like Wisdom, Knowledge, five-wits etc. the plays were originally produced for a middle-class town audience. There is

also the miracle plays which were based on the lives of saint and the mystery plays that dramatized Bible events. Most of the plays are anonymous and this might seem strange because at that time records were already been kept but this was because they worked for the glory of God and as their play also teaches that worldly ambitions count little in the church. Examples of Medieval plays are *Everyman* second shepherds play which teaches morals.

RENAISSANCE DRAMA

The word Renaissance means “rebirth of knowledge” which shows that knowledge was almost dead. It is a French word which means “rebirth”. After the crusade that the Pope led against Barbarians that wanted to claim the land of Jerusalem, knowledge was then hidden and only obtainable among the cleric. The Renaissance period means a period of “culture rebirth”. It epitomized the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman civilization. The word neoclassical also depicts the Renaissance age. The fall of Constantipole made classical literature to spread in Europe libraries was open and this was also aided by the invention of the printing press. Renaissance started from late 15th century to early 17th century. This age was influenced by the idea of Renaissance art, politics and religion. Drama and poetry were the most popular form of Renaissance literature.

We have English Renaissance which is made up of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline period. There is also the French Renaissance and Italian Renaissance. We have two dramatic form in the Italian Renaissance which are the humanist drama which was dominated by the elite and literary form and the comedian

Renaissance writer explored the social and religious themes. They had religious theme but it was not too religious like the Medieval drama. Their religious themes were often explored with a completely different approach. Writers of the Renaissance period includes: Christopher Marlow who wrote *Doctor Faustus*, William Shakespeare, and John Milton's *Paradise lost etc.*

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE

The Renaissance drama developed out of the Medieval drama. The church during the Medieval period withdraw their assistance from these drama tropes. One of the major reasons why they withdrew their assistance was because they felt that the drama tropes draw people out of the church. In the 15th century Queen Elizabeth banished these tropes from England.

After these tropes came out completely from the church they threw their religious garment and went secular. This became the birth of the Renaissance period. The Constantipole fall and the opening of the Libraries accessible to all led

to the rebirth of knowledge. The Renaissance though still retained some values of the Medieval. Like their drama teaching moral and religion as can be seen in Marlow's *Doctor Faustus*, yet their works were not as religious as the medieval works like *Everyman* or *Second shepherd's play*. Renaissance drama juxta posed the elements of evil and good just like the Medieval drama. They also acted based on stories from the Christian bible and church liturgy of the middle age .

But like the Medieval drama, Renaissance drama was quit secular. Their works especially the Elizabethan tragedy were influence by the roman drama. The language of heroic and scenes of violence in Elizabethan tragedy were derived from the plays of Seneca. They made use of highly placed personages who face catastrophe as a result of their flaw in judgment as heroes like in Greek tragedy. The Renaissance drama also has comic-relief (injection of comedy into relevant part of tragic work to ease pain and tension) in their tragic work. They also had the same structural pattern like in classical tragedy especially in the relation to the reversal of fortune, suffering on the part of the hero, finding moment of recognition or discovery and death.

Renaissance drama also made use of early modern English unlike the medieval drama that was written in old or Middle English. Likewise the theme of Renaissance centers on religion, historical and social issue but the Renaissance age explored religion in a different approach.

It is important to note that, though the Renaissance drama was different from medieval, they still retained a little portion of medieval like the teaching of morals. It was the medieval that gave birth to Renaissance period by pulling away its religious coat and becoming secularized.