

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIEVAL DRAMA AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA?

The most significant relationship there is between medieval drama and renaissance is that renaissance drama evolved from the already existing medieval drama. Renaissance drama is not necessarily the continuation of the former but a reformation of the already existing.

The germ of medieval drama was religion and it was slowly developed from what was at first a casual accompaniment of public worship. Drama was banned during the fall of the Roman Empire which marked the beginning of middle ages in the 5th century. The church rejected roman drama and closed it because they felt it was evil, barbaric and corrupt. The actors of the roman drama were merged into the body of immoral jugglers, minstrels, folk players who wandered all Christendom.

Between 1225 and 1275, drama was re-introduced into church services. Theatre/drama was reborn within the very institution that helped to shut it down. The rejuvenation of drama in churches happened majorly because the church did not understand the Latin language used in the church services. It was necessary therefore that the service should be given a stronger spectacle and emotional character, and to this end, no effort was spared. The church slowly began dramatizing the bible as a way to give religious instruction to their congregation. Short dramatic readings turned into performing bible stories which turned into full blown performances outside the church.

An example of the 15th century English morality play is 'Everyman'. In the play, God sent death to strike down sinners who have forgotten him. Death finds the main character, Everyman, and tells him he is to begin his journey from life to death. Everyman asks if he can bring someone with him and death agrees. Unfortunately, Everyman could not persuade any

of his friends, who include Fellowship, Beauty, Kindred, Worldly goods to go with him on his journey. Finally, Good deeds say that she would go with him. Together they go into the grave and ascend into heaven. The moral of this story is that good deeds will get everyone into heaven. It is a subtle turn from the straight biblical stories but it allowed for more secular forms of drama.

You might already know the word 'renaissance' means 'rebirth'. In the case of drama, the renaissance which lasted from approximately 1400-1700, was the rebirth of interest in theatre across Europe. The actors of medieval drama were mere citizens who acted leisurely. They were not professional actors but with centralization of the population in the city, the interest in secular drama began to increase. During the ending of the medieval period, a competition arose between the amateur actors; the jugglers, the minstrels etc. and the professional actors which stimulated more interest in acting.

In the 16th century, a new type of play emerged. These short stories were performed at noble households and courts mostly on holidays. These plays started to stir from morality plays and religious subjects to purely secular and temporal plays. These plays began to serve more purposes of entertainment than teaching. The first history plays were written in the 1530's. while it was considered matters of morality and religion, these were handles in the light of reformation. These plays acts the precedents of presenting history in dramatic medium and laid foundation for what would later be elevated by the likes of Malowe and Shakespeare into the English play.

Not only was the reformation taking hold at England but the winds of classical humanism were sweeping in from the continent. Latin texts were 'Englishized' and Latin poetries and plays began to be adopted into English plays. The city of London authorities were generally hostile to public performance but its hostility was overwhelmed by Queen

Elizabeth's taste for plays and the privy councils support. The companies of players maintained the pretence that their public performances were mere rehearsals for the frequent performances before the queen. But while the latter did grant prestige, the former were the real source of the income professional player required.

Along with economic professions, the character of the drama changed towards the end of the period. By the later part of the reign of Charles I, few new plays were being written for the public theatre, which sustained themselves on the accumulated works of the previous decades.

An example of a renaissance drama is 'Macbeth'. The tragedy of the Macbeth is a tragedy by William Shakespeare; it is thought to have been first performed in 1606. It dramatizes the damaging physical and psychological effects of political ambition on those who seek power for its own sakes.

A brave Scottish general named Macbeth receives a prophecy from a trio of witches that one day he will become king Scotland. Consumed by ambition and spurred to action by his wife, Macbeth murders king Duncan and takes the Scottish throne. He is wracked with guilt and fear. He commits many more murders to shield himself from suspicion, he soon becomes tyrant. These indiscriminate killings and war drive Macbeth and his Lady Macbeth to death.

In Macbeth, several renaissance ideas were used; actions, episodes, characters, and themes used renaissance characteristics.

Macduff shows characteristics of renaissance ideas. In renaissance time, people believed that each human being could change the world for the better. Macduff believes this.

Macbeth and his actions are another example of renaissance ideas. The renaissance era was a secular movement. A secular movement is a movement focused more towards non-religious things. People were more concerned with the happiness of their life on earth, less concerned with the church and the afterlife. Macbeth did not care anything about his life on earth and being happy on earth, even after he carried out plans of murder, just to become king.

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DEPT: ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

REG. NO: 2016/232009