



UNCOVERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA DURING ELIZABETHAN AGE

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ABSTRACT

It is accepted among the historians that the Elizabethan age (1558-1603) is considered as the golden age of literature. In that drama as a literary form saw a rise in popularity due to the dramatists like the university wits (a group of dramatists), Shakespeare and many more. Due to its depiction through theatre performance drama began to have its preference over prose. Its share for its popularity can be divided among the writers for their amazing works and the queen for her patronage to them.

KEYWORDS – Elizabethan age, Shakespeare, University Wits, Development

INTRODUCTION

Drama began as a religious ritual. Early plays were performed in church by clergymen during Easter. Drama started evolving from church to noblemen's houses to public places. There was the revival of Corpus Christi festival (1311)- public holiday dedicated to drama.

- **Miracle Plays** – Miracle play also known as Saint's Play, one of three principal forms of vernacular drama of the medieval age in Europe (along with the Mystery play and Morality play) presents a real or fictional account of the life or martyrdom of a saint.

Dates back to 12th century. Example - Harrowing of Hell; St. Nicholas; Raising of Lazarus.

- **Mystery Plays** or the Corpus Christi cycle –

From the late 14th century Mystery and Morality plays were in vogue. These were long cyclical dramas. Mystery plays included themes like creation, fall, redemption and other parts of the Bible. They included Old Testament but the main focus was on Christ. York, Chester, Wakefield, E. Anglia (Coventry) are the main cycles.

- **Morality Plays** –

Morality Plays were Allegorical. One can see the progress of a single universal character from the cradle to the grave and sometimes beyond. Personification of the virtues and vices, good and evil was seen.

Examples - Wisdom, Mankind, Everyman etc.

- **Interludes** – Morality plays transformed into Interludes. It had the patronage of Henry VIII. They were short allegorical, farcical pieces filling intervals. Interludes sometimes considered to be a transition between morality plays and Tudor dramas.

Examples – The four Ps (by John Heywood): Palmer, Pedlar, Pardoner, 'Pothecary.

Renaissance started in Italy. In Italy; people started to take interest in the Greek plays again and that is when theatre emerged and when theatre emerged in Italy there were writers like Moliere who wrote theatrical plays in order to poke fun at people; this same set of ideas spread across Europe and gradually it came down to England. In England many new theatres emerged which were indoor theatres with elaborative set design having curtains which were put between two scenes. And we saw great theatrical artists like Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. And this is how England saw the re-emergence of theatre. Drama grew a lot during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. (1533-1603). Historical plays seem to thrive during this period as the English defeated Spanish Armada and England became intensely patriotic. Playwrights were of practical nature who wanted to make a living of their work. Plays were meant to be acted and not read. If the playwright sold his manuscript, he had no right to it. Elizabethan Theatre used to have, round wooden and roofless building. Three galleries of seats. Main stage was 40 feet wide. Pit (no seats) and 27 feet



projection into the pit. Also had a music room. Plays like Problem Plays or Dark Comedies Included happy endings, had a sombre and tragic tone, cynical and disillusioned attitude to life, Fondness for objectionable characters and incidents, It exposed falsity of romance and had sordid reality e.g. All's well that ends well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida. There was seen some form of antisemitism though the plays like The Jew of Malta by Christopher Marlow and The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare. The use of blank verse, the use of soliloquy was seen a lot during this age.

William Shakespeare (-1616) and his style – The Objectives of the Shakespearean plays was to give pleasure. They were fanciful and imaginative plays. Plays used by audience as a form of escape from everyday life.

Works of Shakespeare –

Comedies – The comedy of errors, Love Labour's Lost, The two gentlemen of Verona, As you like it etc.

Tragedies by Shakespeare – Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth etc.

Tragicomedy by Shakespeare – The Merchant of Venice, The winter's Tale and The Tempest.

UNIVERSITY WITS – Prominent in the 1580s; University Wits is a term used to describe a group of late 16th century English playwrights and pamphleteers who had that education under either Oxford or Cambridge. The university wits transformed the didactic interludes and shapeless chronicle histories into real plays.

The Oxford School – John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Middleton

The Cambridge School – Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe

No University Wit-

Thomas Kyd

WORKS OF THE UNIVERSITY WITS

1. Robert Green (1558-1592) – *Alphonsus King of Aragon, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, Orlando Furioso, A looking glass for London and England etc.*
2. Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) – *Soliman and Perseda, King Leir, Ur-Hamlet, Fair Em etc.*
3. John Lyly (1554-1606) – *Endymion, Campaspe, Sapho and Phao, Midas, Gallathea, Mother Bombie etc.*
4. George Peele (1556-1594) – *The Arrangement of Parsis, The Old Wives's Tale, The battle of Alcazar, King Edward the first aka Edward I etc.*
5. Thomas Lodge (1558-1592) – *The wounds of civil war and A Looking glass for London.*
6. Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) – *Summer's Last Will and Testament, The Isle of Dogs, Dido Queen of Carthage.*
7. Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) – *Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, Edward II, Doctor Faustus, The Tragedy of Dido (with Nash), The Massacre of Paris etc.*
8. Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) – *The Changeling, Women beware Women, The Roaring Girl, A chaste maid in Cheapside, The Revenger's Tragedy etc.*

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