

Trace the *Growth of English Drama in the Mediaeval Period with Reference to Mystery Plays, Miracle Plays, Morality Plays and Interludes.*

(Part-1)

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From the 'tropes' to the 'wagons', from Latin to vernacular, from ritualism through sponsorship to professionalism, from the church-ventricle through the 'stations' to the stage: the evolution of the English drama posits a complexity far more unbreakable than that of the non-English. The earliest English drama in the fag-end of the Anglo-Saxon Age was intrinsically related with the rituals of the Church services at Christmas and Easter, as the ritual miming of such elemental religious themes from Birth to Resurrection. These were called 'tropes'. However, in the 12th century, these 'tropes', performed in Latin in church itself with a conscious religious aim, moved out of church, ousted Latin for English and assimilated humour. These were the 'Miracle Plays'. The allegorical habit of the mediaeval mind helped to emerge another form of drama, the 'Morality Plays', when the Miracle Play was still in this heyday. However, the moralities tended to become less allegorical and more realistic, and gradually evolved into the 'Interludes' towards the end of the 15th century.

The Miracle Plays developed rapidly in the 13th century. The name 'Miracle' is often used interchangeably with 'Mystery'. However, whereas 'Miracle Plays' are based on saints' lives, the 'Mystery Plays' deal with the Bible. The Harrowing of Hell, Mary Magdalene, The Conversion of St. Paul are plays belonging to this category. The establishment of the feast of

Corpus Christ in 1264, to be held in summer provided a hospitable atmosphere for the performances, which began to be given on wagons, called 'pageants'. There was ample play of humour: Noah's wife was made a scolding shrew, Herod was the ranting figure of melodrama and Satan came with yelling and belabouring of devil, whose parts were taken by small boys. Gradually, the clergy lost control over these plays and they went into the sponsorship of the trade guilds.

The 'Morality Plays' are improvements over the 'Miracle Plays' in the sense that the author had to invent the story, with original plots and clash of characters representing personified abstractions of different virtues and vices. The comic element was chiefly confined to the Devil and his servant the Vice who teased the former to the amusement of the audience. The earliest complete extant Morality play is The Castle of Perseverance. The best 'Morality' play, Everyman delineates Everyman's journey on the summon of Death, accompanied by Strength, Discretion, Five Wits, and his entrance into the 'heavenly sphere' accompanied by Good Deeds only.

The end of the 15th century was the emergence of the Interludes, plays interposed between the courses of a banquet or between two long plays, truer to life and more regular in form, with a considerable amount of fun. It marked the transition from the mediaeval religious drama to the Tudor secular drama. These plays were instruction though amusement. The masterly John Heywood's The Four P's has a lying competition among a Palmer, a Pedlar, an Apothecary and a Pardoner, in which the Palmer wins by declaring that he has never seen a woman out of patience.

With the turning of the wheel from religion to politics on the wake of the Reformation, and with the surge of Classicism and New Learning on the wake of the

Renaissance, tragedies and comedies in English came into existence in the later Tudor England.

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