

BA Part 1 English Hons

Growth and development of English Drama

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Drama is a performing art .In England it was intended to enable people to understand the ideas contained in the Bible .Since majority of the people were illiterate they were unable to imbibe the ideas disseminated by the Holy Bible. Thus drama was introduced to convey the message to the masses which were preserved in the classics .Initially dramatic performances were performed inside the premises of the church .Even people associated with the church were shortlisted to perform different roles assigned to them .The subject matter of the drama was strictly confined to the Bible itself.

Gradually a large number of people gathered inside the premises of the church to watch the dramatic performances and it was almost impossible for the church authorities to accommodate such a huge gathering. Thus drama was set free from the shackles of church and it was staged outside the premises of the church acquiring secular credentials. The earlier forms of drama were entirely religious in nature and content. They included the miracle plays, the mystery plays and morality plays. The characters were basically round characters representing human qualities like humility, modesty, chastity and avarice.

The credit to introduce first English tragedy in England goes to Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton who wrote Gorboduc in 1561

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after the manner of Senecan drama of revenge. In the same manner Nicholas Udall compiled the first English comedy *Rolph Roister Doister*. But the drama acquired the true intent and colour at the hands of the university wits who received formal education in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge particularly the basics of classical drama popularized by Aristotle in his critical treatise *Poetics* and thus the name university wits was assigned to them. The university wits catered more to the interest of the masses who craved more for romantic drama showing their stern opposition with the classical form of drama where the dramatist had to follow the principles of three unities and had no liberty to forge out a new way. The admirers of the romantic drama or humanism which they propagated since they insisted that the interest of the common masses should be given top priority, opposed tooth and nail any attempt to impose rules of classical drama for dramatic composition and instead they insisted that the dramatist should be at liberty to introduce those elements within the periphery of drama which were intended to amuse people thus refusing to follow the beaten track of classical drama. It provided the opportunity for the new form of drama which is called romantic drama to emerge at the forefront forcing the classical drama to the background. The seeds of romantic drama are noticed in the works of the university wits which saw its heyday or full flowering in the dramas of Shakespeare. The basic difference between the classical and the romantic drama is that while the former laid more stress on following the rules and regulations which included the principles of three unities of time, place and action the later expressed stern opposition with the classical rules and regulations and catered more to amuse people even at the cost of violating the rules of classical drama.

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Christopher Marlowe was the most significant dramatist of this group who wrote the tragedy Doctor Faustus. Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Lodge, George Peele, Thomas Kyd and John Lyly also contributed significantly to the repertory of English Drama. They were instrumental for making radical changes in the existing form of drama by introducing Blank verse as the mode of the composition of drama. They also brought about a vital change in the art of characterization replacing flat characters by round characters thus enabling them to take decision which was seldom available to the dramas of the Preceding period.

English society witnessed vital changes by the time Shakespeare emerged at the helm of affair. It was the rain period of queen Elizabeth (1556 – 1603). English society witnessed vital changes on socio-political and religious hemisphere peace and order was restored in society under the able leadership of Queen Elizabeth who cemented friendly relationship with neighbouring countries thrive by leaps and bound. New discoveries and inventions were made in the field of science and navigation. Painters like Michael Angelo and Leonardo da vinci emerged at the fore front who insisted that a man paints with his mind not with his hand. In this way the background for the emergence of a new man was already prepared and it goes to the credit of Shakespeare who capitalized on these advantages and beautifully carved out a new man who is capable of meeting all the challenges which come to his way and emerge victorious out of a complete mess. This image of a new man is successfully carved out in the tragedies of Shakespeare like Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet who no longer submit to the wishes of others rather they follow the dictates of their own mental faculty. Overall SHAKESPEARE HAS WRITTEN 36 dramas and 143 sonnets which are sufficient testimony to his literary craftsmanship.

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