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B.A. Part-I, English (Hons.), Paper-I

DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA

The origin of English drama seems vague. There is no certain evidence of its origin. However, it can be traced back from the century of succeeding Norman Conquest to England on 1066. Originally, the term drama came from Greek word meaning “*action*” or “*to act*” or “*to do*”. William J. Long argues that “*drama is an old story told in the eye, a story put into action by living performers.*” Thus, drama is the form of composition design for performance in the theatre, in which the actors take role for certain characters, perform certain action and utter certain dialogues.

Drama was introduced in England from Europe by the Romans. The ancient Greek and Roman dramas were mostly concerned with religious ceremonials of people. In England, drama had a distinctly religious origin from the church as the part of (religious) services. Apart from its origin, the Latin Church had condemned Roman theatre for many reasons. The oldest existing church drama was “*Quem Quarritis*” trope (*whom are you seeking*), when the three Marys visited the empty tomb of Christ and met angel. Their conversation with angel consists of four sentences in Latin than adapted and performed by the clergy in very simple performance. This simple beginning gradually grew more elaborate. This drama called liturgical drama, in which the story is simply taken from the scripture.

From the liturgical, drama evolved to ***Miracle and Mystery play***. Mindy Ploeckelmann tracks the development of English drama from mystery plays to morality plays and, eventually, to Shakespeare. The very word *Mystery* shows its ecclesiastical origin, since the word comes from the French *Mystere* derived from *ministere*, because the clergy, the ministerium or *ministry ecclesiae*, themselves took part in these plays. In England, the term *Miracle* is used indiscriminately for any kind of religion play, but the strictly speaking the term *Mystery* is applied to the stories taken from the Scriptures narrative, while *Miracles* are plays dealing with incidents in the lives of Saints and Martyrs. The drama appeals to two instincts deeply rooted: 1) The craving for amusement 2) The desire for improvement.

The earliest recorded Miracle play in England was “*Ludus Santa de Katherina*”, which performed in Dunstable around 1110. It is not was not known who wrote the original play, but the first version was prepared by the French school teacher, Geoffrey from St. Albans. By the thirteenth century, the Miracle play began to move outside the church. The plays were performed at moving platform called pageants and the act area called pletea. The stage were divided into three parts; hell, earth and heaven. Hell in the left side, earth in the center and heaven in the right side. The idea of salvation and damnation which later adopted in Dr. Faustus was inherited from this period.

The later development of drama was *Morality play*. The morality play is a genre of Medieval and early Tudor theatrical entertainment. It is a dramatization of personified abstraction generally vice against virtue. In these plays, the characters were allegorical and personified such as death, sin, good and bad angel, seven deadly sins, etc. The purpose of this drama was didactic, to give moral lesson to the audience. The morality plays generally ended with the virtue and win against the evil. The examples of morality plays are “Everyman” and “The Castle of Perseverance.” The introduction of Morality play also introduce so called “interlude”. Interlude is a short version of morality play. It was a short stage entertainment in a sense of humor and was considered as the forerunner of comedies. The example of interlude was “The Four P’s” by John Heywood which was performed around 1497.

The period known as the English Renaissance, approximately 1500-1660, saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. The most famous examples of the mystery play are, Everyman, and the two comedies in English, Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (the first comedy) and the anonymous *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, both belong to the 16th century. The earliest Elizabethan plays include *Gorboduc* (1561) (The first tragedy) by Sackville and Norton and Thomas Kyd's (1558-94) revenge tragedy *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592), that influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. *Gorboduc* was written in blank verse and divided into acts and scenes. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and then James I (1603-25), in the late 16th and early 17th century, a London-centred culture, that was both courtly and popular, produced great poetry and drama.

The **University Wits**, a term coined by George Saintsbury, is used to name a group of late 16th century English playwrights and pamphleteers who were educated at the universities (Oxford or Cambridge) and who became popular secular writers. Prominent members of this group were Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, and Thomas Nashe from Cambridge, and John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, and George Peele from Oxford. Thomas Kyd is also sometimes included in the group, though he is not believed to have studied at university. This diverse

and talented loose association of London writers and dramatists set the stage for the theatrical Renaissance of Elizabethan England. They are identified as among the earliest professional writers in English, and prepared the way for the writings of William Shakespeare, who was born just two months after Christopher Marlowe.

William Shakespeare stands out in this period as a poet and playwright as yet unsurpassed. Shakespeare was not a man of letters by profession, and probably had only some grammar school education. He was neither a lawyer, nor an aristocrat like the "university wits" who had monopolized the English stage when he started writing. But he was very gifted and incredibly versatile. He surpassed "professionals" as Robert Greene who mocked this "shake-scene" of low origins. He was himself an actor and deeply involved in the running of the theatre company that performed his plays. Most playwrights at this time tended to specialize in, either histories, or comedies, or tragedies. Shakespeare is remarkable in that he produced all three types. His thirty-eight plays include tragedies, comedies, and histories.

Other important figures in Elizabethan theatre include Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), Thomas Dekker (c. 1572 – 1632), John Fletcher (1579–1625), and Francis Beaumont (1584–1616). Marlowe's subject matter is different from Shakespeare's as it focuses more on the moral drama of the Renaissance man than any other thing. He introduced the story of Faust to England in his play *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592), a scientist and magician, who is obsessed by the thirst of knowledge and the desire to push man's technological power to its limits. Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) is best known for his satirical plays, particularly *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. Ben Jonson's aesthetics have roots in the Middle Ages as his characters are based on the theory of humour.

A popular style of theatre during Jacobean times was the revenge play, which had been popularized earlier in the Elizabethan era by Thomas Kyd (1558–94), and then subsequently developed by John Webster (1578–1632) in the 17th century. Webster's major plays, *The White Devil* (c. 1609 – 1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612/13), are macabre, disturbing works. Webster has received a reputation for being the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist with the most unsparingly dark vision of human nature.

Other revenge tragedies include *The Changeling* written by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Atheist's Tragedy* by Cyril Tourneur, first published in 1611, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* by George Chapman, *The Malcontent* (c. 1603) of John Marston and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Besides *Hamlet*, other plays of Shakespeare's with at least some revenge elements, are *Titus*

Andronicus, Julius Caesar and *Macbeth*. *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*, a closet drama written by Elizabeth Tanfield Cary (1585–1639) and first published in 1613, was the first original play in English known to have been written by a woman.

During the Interregnum 1649–1660, English theatres were kept closed by the Puritans for religious and ideological reasons. When the London theatres opened again with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they flourished under the personal interest and support of Charles II.

New genres of the Restoration were heroic drama, pathetic drama, and Restoration comedy. Notable heroic tragedies of this period include John Dryden's *All for Love* (1677) and *Aureng-zebe* (1675), and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682). The Restoration plays that have best retained the interest of producers and audiences today are the comedies, such as George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1676), John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). This period saw the first professional woman playwright, Aphra Behn, author of many comedies including *The Rover* (1677).

Therefore, English drama gradually developed from the liturgical drama to Miracle and Mystery plays, continuously to Morality and interlude followed by the influence of classical model and finally evolve to the regular drama forms which are known till today.

Courtesy: Web Source, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow