

**J.M.S. COLLEGE, MUNGER**  
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**B.A. Part-I, English (Hons.), Paper-I**

**INFLUENCE OF THE RENAISSANCE ON THE GROWTH OF  
ENGLISH DRAMA**

The inclination towards classical elements made it inevitable that humanist interest in the Latin and Greek classics should also manifest itself in the field of Tragedy. The favourite classical writer of tragedies among English humanists was Seneca, the Latin writer of violent tragedies.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the Italian, wrote his plays based on the philosophy of stoicism and revenge; there were no comic elements found in his plays. The English writers were much influenced by the revenge tragedy of Seneca. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, Gascoigne, etc. were the first to adopt the elements of Seneca and it was expanded by many playwrights that followed. These plays were completely artistic and were not related to Church.

The first English tragedy, *Gorboduc* by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, is thus essentially Senecan both in plot and plan. It is a tale in five Acts of a divided kingdom, civil war and the resultant effects of split authority in the State. It follows the classical manner in being sententious, theatrical and supremely dull. Nonetheless, *Gorboduc* has historical importance in that it is the first English tragedy, more so because it is a maiden triumph in blank verse.

The influence of the Renaissance was felt very strongly in the fields of drama and poetry. It is clear from the nature of content found in the Interludes that the move away from the didactic nature of the earlier plays toward purely secular plays was quite prominent in them. Not only were plays shifting emphasis, from teaching to entertaining; they were also slowly changing focus from the religious towards the political and broad humanistic themes. Around the 1530's, the first **History Plays** came to be written, the most notable of which was John Bale's *King Johan*. While it considered matters of morality and religion, these were handled in the light of the Reformation. These plays set the precedent of presenting history in the dramatic mediocre and laid the foundations for what would later be elevated by Marlowe and Shakespeare into the English History Play, or Chronicle Play, in the latter part of the century.

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