

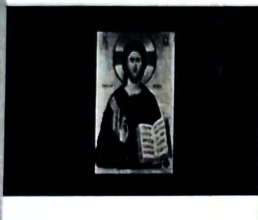
BA I Sem. Literary Terms

MEDIEVAL THEATRE

MIRACLE, MYSTERY AND MORALITIES AND INTERLUDES

Origin of Drama

► The origin of the drama is deep-rooted in the religious predispositions of mankind. Same is the case not only with English drama, but with dramas of other nations as well. The ancient Greek and Roman dramas were mostly concerned with religious ceremonies of people. It was the religious elements that resulted in the development of drama.



Development of Drama

- * After the Norman Conquest in place of Latin, the liturgical play followed the French pattern and finally in place of French, vernacular English was used as the language.
- * The crowds became more interested and they started to throng inside the church. As a result the church yard was opened and finally drama came to the open market place. The organization had begun to pass from ecclesiastical to lay hands.
- * The growing secularization of the drama is reflected in an edict of 1210 forbidding clergy to take part in the plays.



Development of Drama

* From the clergy, control first passed to the religious and social guilds and then to the trade guilds under the general control of the council of the town.

* The guilds were wealthy and out of rivalry became responsible for the productions.

* The four guilds were generally known as Chester cycle, York cycle, Wakefield cycle and Coventry cycle (These cycles took their names after the names of the Towns).

Fisherman's Guild would perform something related to the Flood, the Vintners' Guild would perform the marriage of Canan, and the Barbers' Guild would perform a reenactment of the Last Supper.

DEVELOPMENT OF DRAMA IN THE MIDDLE AGE:

* In the Middle Ages Church had a significant role in the life of community.

* In order to preach the ignorant mass the clergy seemed eager to show them scriptural story in a visible form during special festivals as in Christmas or Easter. The services of the Church were in Latin and few could understand them.

* During the 10th century the Gospel stories being illustrated by the series of living pictures in which the performers acted the story in the dumb shows and in the next age spoke as well as acted the parts. The actors were monks, priests, choir-boys in the service of the church. The plays were performed inside the church.



Development of Drama

Gradually the extension of the cycles led to the evolution of the ambulatory cycle, in which the play was performed on the two decked cart or pageant. This pageant consisted of one enclosed room, which served both as Hell and as a tiring room and a second storey open to the sky on which the action was performed.

* For such oth

Earliest Miracle Play

- ▶ The earliest recorded Miracle play in England was "*Ludus Santa de Katherina*", which performed in Dunstable around 1110. It was not known who wrote the original play, but the first version was prepared by the French school teacher, Geoffrey from St. Albans. The plays were given in Latin or French. The Miracle play attracted so many people and increased its popularity. The plays were before given inside the church began to move to the porch then to the churchyards. But when the plays began interfere the church services and had become too elaborate, the scandalized priest forbade the play in the church. By the thirteenth century, the Miracle play began move outside the church.



Rise of Morality Plays

The Mystery and Miracle Play gave rise to the Morality and Interlude. In the Miracle and Mystery plays, serious and comic elements were interwoven. Now they part; the Morality presenting the serious and the Interlude the higher side of things. The Morality was frankly didactic. The characters typified certain qualities e.g., Sin, Grace, Repentance. The Interlude aimed merely at amusement. *Everyman* and *Four Ps* of Heywood are best examples in this regard. Moralities began to be acted in the reign of Henry VI and like the miracle plays continued to flourish until the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. The morality, as we have said, is a drama in which the characters are allegorical, symbolical, or abstract. The main purpose of the play is didactic. The allegorical characters to be found in some of the earlier Miracle plays owe their importance to religious sources. They are not essential to the story. One of the earliest morality plays was *The Castle of Perseverance*, a drama of the old faith. The spiritual progress of mankind from the day of his birth to the Day of Judgment is set forth in this drama.

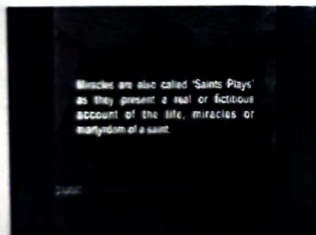
Miracle Plays

- ▶ From the liturgical, drama evolved to *Miracle* and *Mystery* play. In France, Miracle used to represent the life of the saints and Mystery used to represent any scene taken from the scripture. 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.

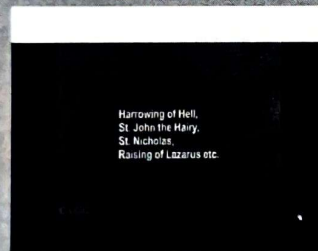
Development

- Though these kinds of plays were performed at first inside the church, gradually through the hands of four notable cycles they come to the open market. All the cycles more or less took the materials from the episodes of the Old and New Testaments.
- Their aim was to reveal to the common crowd the entire story of the human world from the *Creation* to the *Resurrection*.
- The productions of these plays were rather crude. There was very little stage property. There was a very few scenery and the dramatic effect was mainly brought out by means of some symbols. The actors were almost amateurs. But the audience was very responsive to the appeal of the play.

Miracle plays



Miracles are also called 'Saints Plays' as they present a real or fictitious account of the life, miracles or martyrdom of a saint.



Harrowing of Hell, St. John the Baptist, St. Nicholas, Raising of Lazarus etc.

Examples of miracle plays

Cycles of Drama

- **York Cycle:**
 - It consists of forty-eight (48) plays (though according to records 55 plays were acted).
 - They were performed from the 14th to 16th century. The plays were written in the Northumbrian dialect. They had dramatic life, and were on the whole reverent in tone. The plays deal with-
 - *Creation of the World, Fall of Lucifer, Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Life of Christ, Crucifixion* etc.
- **The Wakefield Cycle (The Towneley plays):**
 - The plays were acted at Waulkton near Wakefield. The plays are entitled as *Towneley Hall* in Lancashire.
 - The Cycle consists of thirty-two (32) plays.
 - The most important:

Interludes

◦ As a development of the morality play that drew on the legacy of the minstrel, interludes (from Latin *interludium*) were performed in Europe by small companies of professional actors during the 15th and 16th centuries. The term covers a wide range of entertainment, from simple farces performed on small stages in public places to dramatic sketches performed at banquets in the halls of the nobility. In both cases the plays were purely secular and more concerned with ideas than with morals. They were called *Fasnachtsspiele* in Germany and *kluchtspelen* in the Netherlands; they were also performed in Italy and Spain, but most interludes came from France, where they were known as *soties*, and from England. These pieces usually dealt with the antics of foolish or cunning peasants, exploring the relationship between master and servant or husband and wife. In England the move toward professionalism was accelerated by a law that subjected "all players of farces, minstrels and other entertainers" to be whipped if they did not have the patronage of a member of the nobility.

Examples of Interludes

◦ It was a short play that introduced real characters, usually of humble rank, such as citizens and friars; there was an absence of allegorical figures; there was much broad farcical humour, often coarse; and there were set scenes, a new feature in the English drama. It will be observed that the interlude was a great advance upon the morality-play'.

◦ * The Interlude aimed at amusement and entertainment. The most notable Interlude is John Heywood's '*The Four P's*'.

◦ * The Four P's:

◦ * It is written in doggerel verse.

◦ * It describes a lying-match between a Pedlar, a Palmer and a Potycary.

◦ Each one makes a trial of their skill in that direction. The Potycary tells the story of his visit to Purgatory and to Hell to recover a lost soul. Finally the Palmer tells that he has traveled through many towns and cities throughout Christendom. He has seen five hundred thousand women yet in all the places he has been he had never seen or heard of "any woman out of Patience!"

◦ Finally the Palmer is awarded the prize.

◦ Other interludes are- *Johan, The Play of Weather, The Husband etc.*

