

A Brief History of Drama and Theatre

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INTRODUCTION

Drama and theatre are fundamental aspects of human culture, with roots stretching back to ancient times. Drama specifically refers to the written script or text that forms the basis of a performance. In contrast, theatre encompasses the complete live performance, integrating elements such as acting, directing, stage design, and audience engagement. This overview explores the historical evolution of drama and theatre from their origins up to the 19th century, highlighting significant contributors and developments along the way.

(A). Origins: Ancient Times

The origin of drama and theatre is traceable to various ancient civilisations. In ancient Africa, drama and theatre were deeply rooted in traditional rituals, storytelling and community celebrations. These performances often involved music, dance and masks, serving as a way to connect with the divine and ultimately honour ancestors. In ancient Asia, theatre forms like Noh theatre in Japan and Kathakali in India emerged, characterised by intricate dance movements and elaborate costumes. These forms were often tied to mythology and religious themes. In ancient Egypt, drama and there were integral to rituals and festivals. The “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony, for example, involved dramatic reenactments of mythological stories.

(B). Medieval Period (5th-15th Century)

During the Middle Ages, European theatre was largely influenced by the church. In Europe, Liturgical dramas and mystery plays became popular, often performed in churches or marketplaces. These performances were used to tell stories from the bible to teach morals. In Asia, traditional forms like “Peking Opera” in China and “Kabuki” in Japan continued to evolve, incorporating music, dance and acrobatics.

(C). Renaissance to 19th Century

The Renaissance brought significant changes to European Theatre. In the 16th to 17th Century Europe, the revival of classical drama led to the emergence of playwrights like William Shakespeare. Theatre became a popular entertainment form with the construction of playhouses such as the Globe Theatre. In the 18th to 19th Century, the development of Romanticism and Realism influenced theatre with dramatists like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. The Industrial Revolution and subsequent urbanisation also impacted theatre, leading to new themes and styles. By the 19th century, drama and theatre had evolved significantly, serving as reflections of societal changes and cultural shifts. The stage was therefore set for modern theatre with its diverse forms and styles continuing to captivate audiences globally.

Chronologically, the evolution of drama and theatre started in ancient Greek circa 3rd century BCE. The 5th century BCE however, witnessed the emergence of Greek tragedy and comedy with playwrights like Aeschylus (tragedy), Sophocles (tragedy), Aristophanes, (comedy) and Euripides (tragedy). Around the same 3rd century BCE, the Romance theatre was heavily influenced by Greek theatre but also incorporated elements of Roman culture and entertainment. Playwrights like Plautus and Terence wrote comedies that were popular in Rome. The Roman tragedy was also influenced by Greek tragedy with the works of playwrights like Seneca.

During the Medieval period, 5th to 15th Century, European theatre was heavily influenced by the church. Hence there was Liturgical drama which involved plays being performed in churches, based on biblical stories and themes. There were also mystery plays that equally told stories from the bible.

The Renaissance period witnessed a resurgence of interest in classical drama as well as the emergence of new playwrights, including William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. Shakespeare's plays are still widely performed and studied up till this day.

The Restoration drama (17th CE), refers to the period of English theatre following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. During this period, playwrights like William Wycherley and George Etherege wrote witty plays that satirised the upper class while playwrights like John Dryden wrote tragedies that explored themes of power and morality. Each of these periods saw significant developments in drama and theatre, thus shaping the art form into what we have and know today.

(D). Evolutionary Thread

The history of drama and theatre is marked by a series of artistic movements, each responding to the cultural, social and historical context of its time. This paper will therefore, examine the development of drama and theatre, tracing the evolution of movements like classicism, neoclassicism, romanticism and avant-garde.

Classicism is synonymous with creative works that have attained artistic superiority, excellence and being classified as belonging to an established literary tradition. Such plays or creative works focus on the nobility of character and birth. Classicism holds that the language of expression creative works must be elevated, sublime and that plays must not be last more than one revolution

of the sun, meaning that the length of any play must be within twenty four hours. Plays written during the age of classicism were therefore, deemed more classical, superior and artistically excellent than plays of later periods. Classical drama refers to plays of ancient Greeks and Romans. Similarly, plays with Greek or Roman subjects as exemplified by Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is also a classical drama. Classicism also refers to modern tragedies written under the "influence of the critical doctrines of classicism or modeled on Greek or Roman dramatic tradition. Plays like *Gorboduc* (1562) written by Sackville and Norton or Ben Jonson's *Cataline* are described as classical because they are either written on Senecan tragic tradition or based on Roman themes". (Nwabueze, 21)

In summary, classicism has its roots in ancient Greek and Roman religion and cultures. As a literary and artistic movement, it was premised on ancient Greek and Roman ideals of balance, harmony, restraint and order. In drama, classicism preached strict adherence to basic structural principles such as unity of time, place and action. Every Greek classical drama that emerged in ancient Greece circa 5th century BCE was tied to Dionysian festivals. Classical tragic plays explored the themes of human fate, gods and moral dilemmas. Plays used choruses, masks and were performed in amphitheatres.

In Greek theatre, the chorus was made up of a group of performers who sang, danced and commented on the actions of the play. The chorus served to provide background information in a narrative context, on plays. It also provided or offered reflections on the play's themes or characters' actions. The chorus also helped to heighten emotional impacts of the play through songs and dance. The relevance of the chorus was summarily to provide a connection between the audience and the play's themes thereby, shaping the dramatic structure. Quoting Nwabueze, the importance of the chorus in Greek tragedy lies in their functions which include "building up the tragic atmosphere of the action of the play; they help to serve as moderator, modulating the tone of the play; because of the fine poetry in the choral songs, they help to bring poetic relief to very high emotions; they provide social and historical background of the play, filling pertinent gaps in time and space; since the members of the chorus are usually composed of the good citizens of Greece, the chorus serves as the spectator of the play and the interpreter of the action of the play". (27)

Neoclassicism

Neoclassicism was an artistic and literary movement that arose in the 17th century, France, during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715). This period featured the works of renowned playwrights like Racine and Moliere. It was marked by clarity of poetic language. Neoclassicism emphasised verisimilitude, otherwise, plausibility or likeness to truth, in drama. This concept of verisimilitude was based on truth in the concept of the three goals of reality, morality and generality. The rules of the movement included the unities of time, place and action, otherwise, the three unities, the aim being to enhance dramatic plausibility and coherence. Neoclassicism therefore, emphasised decorum, purity of dramatic forms, the main purpose of drama, the five-act structure.

Romanticism

Romanticism as artistic movement began to emerge in Europe around 1770s -1780s (late 18th century). But it flourished in the early 19th century. Its emphasis was on emotion, nature, individualism and sometimes, the supernatural or the exotic. The key figures of the Romantic movement in England include William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. In France, we have Victor Hugo and Francois Rene de Chateaubriand. In Germany, there are writers like Goethe and Schiller who played key roles in early Romantic movements.

Romanticism started in Germany in the late 18th century. It had exponents like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Their literary circle is known as *Storm and Stress*. Romanticism is a revolt against classism and its choking rules. It advocates freedom of expression and liberation of the artistic genius. For the duo, the writer should not be constrained by the three unities but should follow the promptings of the rules. Another major characteristic of the Romantic spirit is its creation of idealised heroes who lives in perfect harmony and symbiosis with nature and who have no human failings as it were. What is the fault of Romeo and Juliet? Nothing! That is about the perfect character. Shakespeare in his time did not conform to any rules. Romanticism made conscious inroads into England with the writings of the English genius, Wordsworth, Coleridge and others.

The themes of Romantic literature include the celebration of nature's beauty and power; emphasis on feelings and intuition; focus on the individual experience and the importance of creativity and imagination.

France equally got a taste of the Romantic movement with the writings of Victor Hugo, notably his *Hernani* (1830), a pivotal play in establishing Romantic drama in France. It helped to shape French Romantic theatre, highlighting drama's emotional and historical aspects. This is apart from boosting Hugo's fame arising from the controversy generated by the play's premiere between Classicists and Romantics.

Another important contributor to the Roman spirit was Richard Wagner. He initiated the form called total theatre or music drama which is also known as total artwork, blending music, drama and visual arts. He therefore sees his theatre as the art form of the future, as he conceives of ultimate truth as being perceivable only through the evocative functions of music.

Avant-Garde:

Avant-Garde is a French coinage used in military circles to stand for advanced guard but was adopted by the theatre and is used to stand for any intellectual, literary or artistic movement which advocates for a break with tradition. In other words, Avant-Garde emphasised breaking with conventions, experimenting with forms in arts like visual arts, literature and music. Avant-Garde is an all-embracing term for all the 20th century experimental movements.

The movement's key features include pushing boundaries, experimenting with new forms, new techniques; challenging traditional norms in art, literature and music. It also laid emphasis on

originality and innovation. Avant-Gardism manifested in various forms like Surrealism, Dadaism and Cubism.

(E). The Birth of Western Drama:

The origins of Western drama are rooted in ancient Greece, specifically in the festival of Dionysus. In the 6th century BC, a pivotal moment in the history of theatre occurred when a chorus member known as Thespis stepped out of the procession and mounted the altar stone, assuming the role of Dionysus. By doing so, Thespis transformed the storytelling and praise chant into a dramatic performance, becoming the first known actor in history.

The festival of Dionysus was an annual event held in honour of the Greek god of fertility and wine. The performance, featuring a chorus of fifty men singing and dancing to the dithyramb, was a key part of the festival. The audience, comprising over 15,000 citizens of Athens, would gather in the Theatre of Dionysus, situated on the south side of Acropolis.

Thespis' audacious move to assume the role of Dionysus marked a significant turning point in the evolution of drama. By impersonating the god and engaging with the chorus, Thespis created a new form of storytelling that would lay the foundation for Western drama. His innovation paved the way for the development of tragedy, comedy and other dramatic forms that flourished in ancient Greece, leaving a lasting impact on the world of theatre. As the first actor therefore, Thespis set the stage for future generations of performers, playwrights and directors who would continue to shape the art form. The legacy of Thespis lives on in the countless dramatic performances that continue to captivate audiences around the world.

Roman drama was heavily influenced by Greek drama, with Roman playwrights creatively adapting Greek originals, infusing them with musical elements and Roman flair. For instance, Plautus reworked Greek comedies, adding witty wordplay and humour, while Terence refined adaptations that showcased suspense, irony and complex characters. Some notable Greek plays that were adapted by Roman playwrights include Aeschylus' works entitled *Prometheus Bound*, a tragedy that explores the themes of power and rebellion and *The Persians* which is a historical drama that recounts the Persian wars; Sophocles' plays *Ajax*, a tragedy that tells the story of the hero, Ajax's fall, *Antigone*, a tragedy that explores the conflict between individual conscience and state law and *Oedipus the King*, a tragedy that unravels the mystery of Oedipus' past. By blending Greek ideas with Roman sensibilities, these playwrights created innovative works that entertained Roman audiences and left a lasting impact on Western drama. The period of Renaissance saw resurgence in theatre, with the development of Commedia dell'arte and the works of Shakespeare. The 18th up to the 19th century therefore, saw the rise of sentimental comedy and melodrama while the 19th century was marked by the development of Romanticism and Realism in theatre.

(F). Origin of Traditional African Drama

The notion that Africa had no drama and theatre is fictitious. The most common form of drama and theatre in Africa is the traditional drama and theatre, popularly referred to as folk drama or theatre. In the traditional setting, story-telling is a predominant feature. The stories told were not inherited from foreign traditions, cultures and fables. This is because in the African setting when

families assemble during moonlit nights, there is dramatic pattern with the head of the family as the story teller and the chief actor while the other members of his family-his wives and children, and even his neighbours and their families are members of the audience or the spectators. These stories have their social functions and are not told for the mere fun of it.

Traditional African drama refers to indigenous African performing arts rooted in local cultures, traditions and community practices. While these forms have historical roots and distinct characteristics, they may have evolved over time and could incorporate various influences, including interactions with other cultures. The roots of African drama and theatre are mainly in religious festivals, ritual and folklore. However, unlike the modified European theatre which has distanced itself from its functional roots, African drama and theatre live alongside modernity, consistent, yet relevant while relying on dance and mime which helps it to possess and retain its freshness that is an emergent outcome of its distinctive use of other independent performing art forms. The roots of African drama lie in various religious rites, rituals, festivals and artistic practices across Africa. Early humans sought to understand and influence their surroundings, grappling with natural phenomena. With limited written records on ritual drama, it is thought that the desire to connect with and appease the supernatural led people to bridge the spiritual and physical worlds. They envisioned supernatural beings in human-like terms-with emotions, thoughts and a mysterious, invisible presence.

Early humans believed incomprehensible events were controlled by superior forces (gods). Each natural element, phenomenon or human activity had a governing god. To gain the favour of that god, people made efforts to please and accommodate what they thought the god wanted or desired. For example, before war they would do a mock battle to guide the god toward their desired outcome. For a good harvest or hunt, they would repeat actions from past successes. Since gods were invisible, people used dances, stylised movements, poetry and songs to get their attention. These acts of appeasement evolved into a kind of theatre. With repeated performances based on need, these acts became ritualised; rituals, after all, are repetitive actions.

Religious rituals are actions people perform to create a space where humans and spirits meet, so gods or spirits act on human requests and concerns. These rituals were serious and solemn, potentially impacting the tribe's future. Because rituals deal with uncontrollable forces that inspire reverence and awe, people used tried-and-trusted methods to connect with and get the gods' attention. If a request was not answered, like a sick son not recovering, early humans might blame the situation on a faulty ritual earlier performed to appease the gods. They would then repeat the ritual, carefully following established procedures.

Drama, no doubt evolved from imitation of action (mimesis). Man is therefore, a mimetic being. He likes to be someone else. Available literature on the origin of mimesis in African drama or in the African context has it that mimesis is tied to traditional practices like rituals, festivals and storytelling where actions, movements and narratives mimic or represent aspects of life, nature or the supernatural. Mimetic elements like mimicking hunting movements to ensure a successful hunt or reenacting battles for spiritual favour. These mimetic practices in rituals and festivals laid groundwork for dramatic performances in African contexts.

In Africa, stories about animals abound. However, most of these stories serve didactic functions or purposes, especially stories involving tricky animals like the tortoise, hare, spider, as the protagonists in such stories. The actions of these animals are similar to the actions or behaviours of humans. In the real sense however, their actions are used to ridicule or critique human actions. Storytelling in African cultures is a vital part of African traditions. It is used as a vehicle to transmit or pass down history, morals, myths and other cultural values from generation to generation. The dramatic elements involved in storytelling are the voice which can be modulated during storytelling, gestures, mimicry and audience interaction. These elements have the capacity to blur the line between narration and performance. Storytelling has contributed to the development of African drama with stories being told and enacted or performed in ways that engage the audience. There is the single narrator in African drama who sometimes acts out the roles, switching from character to character as he tells the story. The more a story is able to perform this task of role switching, the more proficient he is said to be.

Festivals are significant to the evolution of African drama. Festivals are significant in many African cultures where harvests, gods, ancestors or community events are celebrated. Festivals involve music, dance, storytelling and often times, dramatic performances. Festivals incorporate certain elements like masquerades, enactments of myths or re-enactments of historical events blending entertainment with cultural and spiritual significance. These festivals contributed to the evolution of traditional African drama with dramatic performances emerging from or being part of festival celebrations. Festivals are the most common communal activities in Africa, up till the recent times. There are different kinds of festivals which include festivals of rites of passage, feast of the farming season (new yam festivals) and festivals of ancestor veneration and deity worship.

The functions of traditional drama include religious functions, educational functions, moral functions, political functions, entertainment functions and social functions.

(G). Evolution of the Physical Theatre

The earliest known permanent theatre was built in Athens, Greece, in the late 6th Century BC. Called the Theatre of Dionysus, it hosted dramatic competitions like the City Dionysia, where Thespis is said to have won the first recorded prize for tragedy in 534 BC. The City Dionysia festival was an annual event which held in March. Later, plays known as Lenaea were added to the Athenian festival calendar and typically held in January, every year. The earliest physical theatres of this period were constructed with wood which were usually renovated and admirable changes added to the architectural designs before the festival. By the 4th Century BC, and with advent of modern architecture, the faces of the theatres were transformed from wood to marble and stone.

The ritual dithyramb, a performance method that had no recorded date in the history of Greek theatre held in this theatre. It was the performance method that produced Thesis when he suddenly stepped out of the procession, assumed the role of the god, Dionysus, in whose honour the dithyramb was organised. That was the beginning of imitation or mimesis and impersonation in theatrical enactments. According to Nwabueze, "... the best preserved Greek theatre is the theatre

of Epidarus, the theatre of Dionysus is the most historically ubiquitous. This is a result of its historical link with the great Greek playwrights : Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides”. (15)

(H). Major Pioneers and Proponents of Drama and Theatre

The evolution of drama and theatre has been shaped by numerous influential figures who have made significant contributions to the art form and have left indelible mark on the art form, shaping its development and influencing generations of artists till date. They include:

Aeschylus (525/524 BCE-456/455 BCE)-Father of Greek Tragedy

Aeschylus is renowned for his groundbreaking works in Greek tragedy. His plays, such as *The Persians* and *The Oresteia* showcased his mastery of dramatic storytelling and exploration of complex themes. Aeschylus’ innovative use of the second actor expanded the possibilities of dramatic interaction, paving the way for future generations of playwrights.

Sophocles (496 BCE-406 BCE)-Master of Dramatic Complexity

Sophocles built upon the foundations laid by Aeschylus, introducing the third actor and further enriching the dramatic landscape. His iconic plays, which include *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*, continue to captivate audiences with their intricate plots and nuanced character development. Sophocles’ works often probe the human condition, exploring the tensions between fate, free will and individual conscience.

William Shakespeare (1564 CE-1616 CE)-The Bard of the English Language

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language. His plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, are timeless masterpieces that have continued to inspire and influence artists to this day. His works are characterised by their poetic language, complex characters and exploration of universal themes such as love, power and mortality.

Carlo Goldoni (1707 CE-1793 CE)-Comedy Maestro

Carlo Goldoni was a celebrated Italian playwright and librettist known for his witty comedies. His plays such as *The Servant of Two Masters*, showcased his ability to craft engaging characters, clever dialogue and humorous plot twists. Goldoni’s works often satirised the social conventions of his time, offering insightful commentary on the human experience.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 CE-1781 CE)-German Literary Giant

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was a German playwright, critic and philosopher. He played a significant role in shaping German literature. His plays such as *Nathan the Wise*, promoted tolerance, wisdom and humanity while his critical works like *Laocoon* explored the relationship between art and literature. Lessing’s contributions to drama and theatre have continued to inspire artists and scholars alike.

(I). Renaissance Drama and Theatre

Renaissance drama and theatre thrived between 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. Renaissance drama saw a revival of classical Greek and Roman themes and forms. The term Renaissance therefore, refers to a period of great intellectual and outstanding achievements. In the French language, Renaissance means “rebirth”. When applied to drama and theatre therefore, it means a period of cultural rebirth, marked by the rediscovery of past heritage, with emphasis on the Greek and Roman civilizations. The age of renaissance was a period that witnessed a number of technological inventions such as the printing machines which facilitated the printing of Classical literature; establishment of Universities and the fall of Constantinople which occurred in 1453 when the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. The fall is historically said to have influenced trade routes as Europeans sought alternatives to Ottoman-controlled path while its influence on European politics had significant geo-political implications for Europe. The fall is sometimes linked to spurring Renaissance exploration and learning as scholars fled to Europe. The year 1349 being the year of the production of *Philologia* by Petrarch marked the beginning of the Renaissance age in literature. The Renaissance period was a period for the re-examination, re-assessment or reviewing of life, hence the emergence of the spirit of humanism which is usually associated with the age of Renaissance.

(J). Italian Renaissance

Italian Renaissance took place from the 14th to the 17th century. Activities during this period were concentrated in Italy, particularly in the cities of Florence, Venice and Rome. The Italian Renaissance’s areas of focus were on human potential, individualism and classical learning. Other areas of emphasis include artistic innovations which enabled Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael to push boundaries in art. In Science, scientists like Galileo proved their mettle and made their marks while in literature, writers like Petrarch influenced literature. Economically, city-states like Florence thrived, fostering culture. Many events led to the emergence of the Italian Renaissance. The events include economic prosperity which led to increased economic activities in city-states like Florence and Venice. The discovery of classical text made access to Greek/Roman literary text possible and in turn fueled humanism. Artists and scholars had the support of wealthy families like Medici. During economic activities earlier referred to, Henry the Navigator led Portuguese explorations along Africa’s coast. This made it possible for people to meet, interact and cross-fertilise ideas. In 1492, Johann Gutenberg invented the movable type printing machine which enhanced the availability of texts and other materials from Classical sources.

In Italian Renaissance, there were two main types of dramatic forms: the humanist drama which was literary in form and was dominated by the elites and the popular theatre also known as *commedia cellaret*. Despite political fragmentation among city-states like Venice and Florence, the Italian Renaissance witnessed significant cultural achievements in drama and literature.

(K). Humanist Drama

Italian Renaissance Humanism revived interest in classical Greek/Roman drama. Its focus is individual characters, emotions, dilemmas. Dramatists explored themes of human potential,

morality and politics; they also imitated the Greek satire plays, renaming them pastorals which was popularised by Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1590), Giovanni Battista Guarini's *The Faithful Shepherd* (1590), Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Giangiorgio Trissino's *Sofonisbosa*. It is recorded that the most skillful comedy of that era was Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Mandrake*. Comedies of Italian Renaissance had three characteristics of *Improvisation*, *Spontaneity* and *Characterisation*.

Improvisation: Comedies involved actors improvising lines/dialogue based on a scenario (canovaccio), thereby allowing for creativity and resourcefulness, even when actors had to work from a plot outline that was made up of both dialogue and action.

Spontaneity meant that plays that had elements of spontaneity had the capacity to engage audiences with lively, dynamic performances since acting was fresh, spontaneous, requiring a great deal of concentration.

Characterisation meant that comedies featured stock characters like Pantalone in *Commedia dell'Arte*, with distinct traits. Characters were people with great looks and witty, with a great fashion sense. They wore no masks. It will instructive to note that characters are categorised into masters and servants. The captain, a braggart and a coward made the three types of masters.

The first known poet and scholar of the Italian Renaissance age was Francesco Petrarch. He was a key figure in Italian Renaissan It is believed that Petrarch's humanistic play entitled *Philologia*, a masterpiece of art, ushered in the Italian Renaissance. He was only preceded by the globally acclaimed Medieval poet, Dante, whose work, *Divine Comedy* was reputed to have championed several advanced ideas on the physical aspects of the earth, heaven and hell. The Renaissance age was "explosive, diverse, created a host of outrageously different individuals, each straining for effect". (Nwabueze, 40)

The main theme of Italian Renaissance drama was romance, even though it was obscene to treat such a subject matter. Italian comedies mainly featured issues like mistaken identities and disguise, thus giving us insights into the Italian society of that era. It is also instructive to note that costumes used in Italian Renaissance theatre were richly decorated and formed part of the setting. The Italian Renaissance theatre underwent robust changes in the areas of well developed theatre architecture, improved scenic designs and advancement of the opera.

(L). The Commedia

The Commedia being a public and professional theatre can be described as the progenitor of street theatre. It was a truly developed theatre that catered for the entertainment needs and demands of common audiences. Thus we had *Commedia dell'arte* (otherwise comedy of professional players), *Commedia al'improvviso*, (learned comedy), *Commedia a soggetto* (comedy developed from a plot, theme or subject), and *commedia erudite* (comedy for the learned). These dramatic performances dealt with social and political issues. The plays for instance, treated the theme of man's inner conflict that pits his personal selfish desires against his sense of social responsibility. They addressed the interests of all categories of people in the society, ranging from the poor masses to the learned aristocratic class. For the aristocratic audiences, performance for them was during

social functions or occasions. It was however, very popular with all categories of audience. The major sources of commedia included the Atellan farce, said to be a preservation of medieval wandering mimes; the Byzantine mimes, which practitioners fled to the West after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The last source of the commedia was the improvisations of the comedies of Plautus and Terence featuring characters like Zannis, comic characters, the Magnificent-a comic old man also referred to as Pantalone; the Dottier, usually a Doctor of Laws but also sometimes referred to as the Gratian and the Captain, a Spanish captain, a braggart warrior who always boasts of his valour, conquests, and skillful use of arms. Costume was standardised with masks that were distinct from others.

(M). The Intermezzi

Intermezzi were simply musical entertainments between acts of plays or ceremonies in Italy. It was a between-the-acts entertainment performed during operas and full length plays of the Italian Renaissance. The Intermezzi developed from the need to entertain the audience while set changes were going on. This was known as the interlude. Interludes are short dramatic pieces that were usually performed between courses of a banquet in England in the Middle Ages.

(N). Opera

Opera is a unique blend of drama and music, where music takes the centre stage, but often without spoken dialogue. This art form was born in the late 16th century, with Jacopo Peri's (1561-1633) *Dafne* in 1597, marking a pivotal moment. However it was Claudio Monteverdi who crafted one of the earliest and most influential operas. The genre gained popularity with the establishment of the first public opera house in Venice in 1637, paving the way for opera's enduring impact on the world of performance.

(O). The English Renaissance

The English Renaissance started in late 15th to early 17th century, but flourished significantly during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The era saw groundbreaking works by Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare, shaping English literature.

Shakespeare's plays remain the cornerstone of English literature and theatre, studied and performed globally. Marlowe's works like *Doctor Faustus* shaped Elizabethan drama and influenced later playwrights. Both playwrights' enduring relevance lies in their explorations of human nature, power and morality have continued to resonate.

(P). Elizabethan Drama

The Elizabethan era (1558-1603) witnessed a boom in English theatre. During this period, great and renowned playwrights like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe wrote and created complex and impactful plays which themes that explored politics, love, tragedy and history. Other notable playwrights that emerged during the period were Ben Jonson, John Ford, Thomas Middleton and Beaumont and Fletcher.

Elizabethan drama ushered in innovative plays like romantic comedies, history plays, revenge and murder dramas, court comedies and pastoral plays. In conclusion, the Elizabethan age introduced enduring novelty in dramatic literature.

(Q). Jacobean and Caroline Drama

The successors of Elizabeth 1 who passed away in 1603 were James 1 and Charles 1. The reign of these two successors provoked some fundamental changes in dramatic literature and is integrated into a single Age that is known as the Jacobean and Caroline Age. Jacobean drama (1603-1625), produced playwrights like John Webster who wrote dark, intense plays of post-Elizabethan era while Caroline drama (1625-1649) saw drama becoming more refined and court-oriented under Charles 1.

(R). The French Renaissance

The French Renaissance took place in the 16th century. The period witnessed growth in arts, literature and humanism. There were two main types of drama during the French Renaissance Age. One was the mysteries that dramatised sermons on the teachings of the Bible while the second was Medieval Farce which softened the sermons of the mysteries, using the Farce technique. The first recorded drama of the French Renaissance Age was *Cleopatre Captive* published in 1552 and written by Etienne Jodelle. It had few characters and made extensive use of the chorus. The publication in 1561 of the *Poetics Libri Seplem* (otherwise, *Seven Books of the Poetics*) by Julius Scaliger which introduced the Aristotelian influence on the French theatre, paving the way for French neoclassical ideal; and the introduction of the National Theatre by Alexander Hardy are the major two factors that contributed to the development of French drama during the Renaissance. The French neoclassical Age was associated with the period of censorship and subjecting dramatic literature to strict rules and regulations. The three most important scholars and playwrights of the Neoclassical Age were Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673) and Jean Racine. Poquelin later assumed the stage name of Moliere.

Conclusion

The historical odyssey of drama and theatre from ancient times to the 19th century testifies to the power of human creativity and the enduring impact of performance on the society. From the tragedies of ancient Greece to the realism of the 19th century, drama and theatre have evolved, adapted and transformed, reflecting the values, norms and concerns of their time. Drama and theatre remain potent mirrors to human experience, captivating and provoking audiences with their timeless relevance. Their lasting impact is a testament to the profound and transformative influence of performance, continually reshaping man's perceptions of himself and the world. As drama and theatre continue to evolve, their relevance as powerful mirrors of the society and catalysts for change and human expression remain unwavering.

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