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## Introduction

Drama is one of the oldest and most dynamic forms of literary and artistic expression. Rooted in performance, it presents human experience through dialogue, action, and conflict, often intended for the stage. Over time, drama has evolved across different historical periods and cultural contexts.

## Greek Drama

Ancient Greek drama, is a theatrical culture that flourished in ancient Greece between 550 BC and 220 BC. Tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play were the three dramatic genres to emerge there. Tragedy and comedy were viewed as completely separate genres, and no plays ever merged aspects of the two.

Aristotle's Poetics contain the earliest known theory about the origins of Greek theatre. He says that tragedy evolved from dithyrambs, songs sung in praise of Dionysus at the Dionysia each year.

Aristotle defines tragedy as:

is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.

Elements of tragedy according to Aristotle are: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. The plot is the arrangement of incidents in a serious, complete action of significant magnitude.

Greek tragedies, such as those by Sophocles, focused on human struggles with fate, justice, and choice, posing profound philosophical and ethical questions through complex characters and dramatic conflict. Sophocles' plays, such as *Oedipus the King*, explore the tension between fate and free will, highlighting a character's moral responsibility for their actions.

## **Renaissance Drama**

The period known as the Renaissance, which spanned from the 14th to the 17th century, was a time of great cultural and intellectual growth in Europe. This era brought about a revival of interest in the arts, literature, and learning, and had a profound influence on the development of theatre. Playwrights like Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson are the distinguished figures of English Renaissance theater.

Humanism and classical influences were key factors in shaping Renaissance theatre. Humanism, a cultural and intellectual movement that emphasized the potential and achievements of human beings, played a significant role in the development of Renaissance theatre. Humanist scholars studied and translated classical texts, particularly those of ancient Greek and Roman playwrights such as Euripides, Sophocles, and Plautus. These classical influences provided Renaissance playwrights and theatre practitioners with a rich source of inspiration, as well as a framework for understanding the elements of drama, including plot development, character, and the use of language. Moreover, the revival of classical learning during the Renaissance led to a renewed interest in the ideas and philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome. This intellectual and artistic revival, known as the "rebirth" of classical antiquity, had a profound impact on the themes and subjects explored in Renaissance theatre. Playwrights drew on classical mythology, history, and literature to create works that reflected the humanist ideals of the time, such as the importance of individual agency and the exploration of human emotions and experiences. In addition, the influence of classical rhetoric and oratory can be seen in the use of language and dialogue in Renaissance drama, reflecting the humanist belief in the power of language to persuade and move audiences. Overall, humanism and classical influences were fundamental to the artistic and intellectual landscape of Renaissance theatre, shaping its themes, styles, and literary conventions.

Renaissance drama was poetic drama. It was marked by the use of blank verse<sup>1</sup> and the rich poetic language which elevated the dialogue and allowed for emotional expression and philosophical reflection. Poetic language was represented in soliloquies and asides by which characters are allowed to speak their thoughts aloud, revealing inner motives, doubts and plans. Asides were used to speak directly to the audience, creating intimacy and dramatic irony.

During the Renaissance, various forms of the tragedy emerged: Tragedy of circumstance, Tragedy of miscalculation, Revenge tragedy. Most tragedies of circumstance deal with some form of a monarch who is born into a certain circumstance rather than choosing it. In other words, the tragedy in this type revolves around circumstance rather than a character's decision. On the other hand, the basis of tragedy of miscalculation lies directly in a choice made by a character. Revenge tragedies often combine elements of both circumstance and miscalculation.

### **Christopher Marlow**

The most important dramatist before Shakespeare among the University Wits<sup>2</sup> was Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe revolutionized English drama through his use of blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), sometimes called “**Marlowe's mighty line.**” His outstanding works are *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Edward II*. Marlow's plays are an epitome of what the Renaissance people felt and lived in a sense that each of these tragedies reflects the Renaissance spirit and revolves round Man who is consumed by lust for power. Marlowe emerged at a time when drama was shifting from

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<sup>1</sup> Blank verse is poetry written in unrhymed but metered lines, most commonly iambic pentameter, which consists of ten syllables per line in an unstressed-stressed pattern. It mimics natural speech, making it a flexible and widely used form for plays, epic poems, and dramatic monologues.

<sup>2</sup> The term "University Wits" is used to refer to a distinctive group of English playwrights and pamphleteers who were active during the late 16th century. They received their education at prestigious universities, notably Oxford and Cambridge, and their academic background greatly influenced their writing styles and content. These writers were noteworthy not only for their contributions to English literature and drama but also for their shared educational background, having received their formal education at esteemed universities, particularly Oxford and Cambridge. The influence of their academic training was a pivotal factor in shaping their writing styles and the themes they explored.

religious morality plays to secular, human-centered narratives. His plays reflect Renaissance ideals such as:

- Human ambition and individualism
- Questioning of religious and political authority
- Interest in classical antiquity
- Exploration of the human psyche and passions

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592) is one of the most powerful Renaissance plays exploring the conflict between medieval theology and Renaissance humanism. At the heart of the play is Faustus, a scholar whose desire for unlimited knowledge and power leads him to make a pact with the devil—selling his soul for 24 years of service from Mephistopheles. While the play contains strong Christian morality, it is deeply influenced by Renaissance humanism, a philosophical and cultural movement that emphasized the value, agency, and potential of human beings.