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Lecture No-13
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Topic-Morality
Plays

A later development of the English drama is the Morality play. In this type of early drama, the characters are personifications of abstract qualities. The drama is based on moral allegory. It implied a greater severance (separation) from the religious themes of the mystery and miracle plays and afforded a larger scope for the exercise of the creative imagination.

The Devil and his attendant, the Vice, Friendship, Beauty, wealth, strength and other abstract qualities are prominent characters in most of the Morality plays. One of the earliest Morality plays is the Castle of Perseverance. The best known Morality plays belong to the earlier half of the sixteenth century. These depict the spiritual struggles of man. Human life is treated as battle-ground for the virtues and vices, until they are led to the judgement-seat of God. The best known of English Morality plays is Everyman. It is a classic of English Morality plays, written about the time of King Edward IV. It depicts man's progress through life. Everyman is called before the tribunal of God to give an account of his life. Everyman asks his friends to accompany him, but all his companions - Friendship, Relationship, wealth, Beauty, strength, worldly goods and the five senses abandon him. Only the good remains true to him. The central figure, Everyman, is symbolic



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of humanity. This play enjoyed great popularity. 102

Morality play makes a valuable contribution to the growth of drama. Firstly, it showed the way to plot-construction based on character. Secondly, characters, though abstractions, are given human qualities. The most impressive contribution is that of the good accompanied by vice.

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Interludes

Side by side with the Morality play in its later evolution, another form of drama known as the interlude appeared. Such plays were called Interludes probably because they were played in the intervals of banquets and entertainments. Interludes were light and humorous in character. They were later introduced between the acts of long and boring Miracles and Moralities. They were often based on themes of topical interest. The best known writer of the Interlude was John Heywood.

Though English drama had its origin in the church with the clergy, it was developed in the market-place and at the hand of the people. As its themes became more and more secular in tone, it was taken over from the guilds and corporations by professional players and in this way English drama began to explore the passions and interests of actual men and women and the ground was prepared for the efflorescence of Elizabethan drama.

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