

Tikrit University

College of Education for Humanities

English Department



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Drama

(English Drama and its Importance)

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English drama and its importance

Why is English drama important?

Communication Skills: Drama enhances verbal and nonverbal expression of ideas. It improves voice projection, articulation of words, fluency with language, and persuasive speech. Listening and observation skills develop by playing drama games, being an audience, rehearsing, and performing.

Which is the first English drama?

-**Gorboduc**: The first English tragedy, **Gorboduc (1561)**, by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, is a chain of slaughter and revenge written in direct imitation of Seneca*.

Gorboduc is notable for several reasons: as the first **verse drama** in **English** to employ **blank verse**; for its political subject matter (the realm of Gorboduc is disputed by his sons Ferrex and Porrex), which was still a touchy area in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, while the **succession to the throne** was unclear; for its manner, progressing from the models of the **morality play** and **Senecan tragedy*** in the direction which would be followed by later playwrights. That is, it can be seen as a forerunner of the whole trend that would later produce **King Lear**. It also provides the first well-documented performance of a play in **Ireland**.

***Seneca**

Born 4 BCE Spain—died 65 CE, Rome [Italy]. Roman philosopher, statesman, orator, and tragedian. He was a Rome's leading intellectual figure in the mid-1st century CE.

What are the elements of Seneca tragedy?

Seneca's Revenge Tragedies dramatized murder, betrayal and blood revenge on the villain or villains. He showed all of the passions in excess such as hate, jealousy and love. He also used many sensational elements such as supernatural phenomena, cruel torture and bloody violence.

How did Seneca influence Shakespeare?

While the influence of Ovid and Plutarch often manifests in direct quotation by Shakespeare, however, the influence of Seneca is more dramaturgical, being observed in the structure of his plays, the themes, and his characters.

What are the characteristics of revenge tragedy?

Revenge tragedies typically consisted of one or more of the following:

- ghosts and the supernatural
- murder
- insanity/mad scenes
- a character seeking revenge against a strong(er) opponent for a real or imagined wrongdoing
- personifications of revenge / the supernatural
- a clear villain (although interestingly the character of Hamlet was a hero seeking revenge)
- onstage violence, often sensational
- blood-filled conclusions
- disguise
- corpses

The characteristics of the Senecan tragedy were:

1. a division into five acts with Choruses—and in the English imitations often a dumb show expressive of the action;
2. a considerable retailing of ‘horror’ and violence, usually, though not always, acted off the stage and elaborately recounted;
3. a parallel violence of language and expression. ***Gorboduc*** is a good example of a Senecan tragedy in English. The fashion, which developed in learned rather than popular circles, was short-lived, and was displaced by a more vital and native form of tragedy. But its elements persisted in Elizabethan drama and may be traced in such plays as ***Tamburlaine the Great*** by Christopher Marlowe.

The Elizabethan dramatists found Seneca’s themes of bloodthirsty revenge more congenial to English taste than they did his form. The first English tragedy, ***Gorboduc*** (1561), by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, is a chain of slaughter and revenge written in direct imitation of Seneca. Senecan tragedy is also evident in Shakespeare’s ***Hamlet***; the revenge theme, the corpse-strewn climax, and such points of stage machinery as the ghost can all be traced back to the Senecan model.

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Notes: BCE (Before Common Era) is a secular version of BC (before Christ). CE (Common Era) is the secular equivalent of AD (anno Domini), which means “in the year of the Lord” in Latin.