

E-CONTENT

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Closet Drama

Closet dramas are plays with a difference because unlike any other forms of dramas these are written to be read. They are not performed on stage. These forms of dramas derive their aesthetic values not from their theatrical performance but the way they are written. Thus, these dramas are unique in their style and manner.

This form of drama was made popular by the Romantics during the Romantic era that is in the 19th century. Although a close study of this genre reveals that Fulke Greville, Samuel Daniel, Sir William Alexander, and Mary Sydney wrote closet dramas during the heydays of popular tragedies that is in Shakespearean and Jacobean Age.

When the English government banned public performance between 1642 and 1660 play reading acted as an apt substitute. The playwrights of the time with "propagandist aims" against parliament started writing plays as an act of revolution. Thomas Killigrew is one such dramatist who turned to closet drama to express himself and his ideas.

During the Restoration in 1660, few authors continued to write closet drama, as they believed that the form "served a cultural function distinct from that of commercial drama". Samson Agonistes, (1671) by John Milton is an example of early modern drama which was never written to be staged. (en.m.wikipedia.org)

Writers like Robert Browning and Goethe popularised this genre in the 19th century. The study of the history of English literature of the early 1800s reveal that most plays that were performed were 'melodramas' or 'burlesque.' Serious writers such as Browning and Byron wanted to upraise the dramatic art form. They thought to try something refreshing and so turned towards the writing of closet dramas. Romantics by nature were radicals and inborn revolutionist, it is a known fact that historical events such as the American and French Revolutions influenced these writers.

Writers like S.T. Coleridge and Robert Southey working together wrote a play on the French Revolution called *The Fall of Robespierre, (1794)*. *The Borderers*, the only play written by William Wordsworth also deals with French Revolution. These Romantic playwrights used the plays as a tool, a medium, to put forward their radical political and social views and as a result contemporary theatre houses were reluctant to produce them. Thus, closet drama became a popular medium of their expression.

Another factor responsible was the monopoly of the two most popular theatres in England, *Drury Lane* and *Covent Garden*. The 'Licensing Act' was passed from 1737 to 1843 which made these theatre houses stronger. It stated that the only plays produced between September to June had to be performed at one of the two theatres. The social circumstances paved the way to make closet drama a popular medium of self-expression for as Byron believed that these dramas enabled the writer to have full control over his or her play and it was free from the 'judgment' of others.

The Romantics held imagination as something holy and pious. Therefore, there is nothing better than a play which could be read and then imagined on the stage of the mind. These writers believed that the reader's own inner interpretation is more authentic and of much greater value than the interpretations that depend on the actions performed by the actors on the stage.

The women writers of the early modern period wrote closet drama to express their deepest thoughts. This form of drama provided a woman the ability to "engage in political discourse without exposing her views to an indiscriminate public," as she could avail the liberty to choose her readership. (en.m.wikipedia.org) Margaret Lucas Cavendish, who is the writer of fourteen folio volumes, practised this genre to depict her philosophy, she is one of the most famous women writers of closet drama.

Web Links

study.com › academy › lesson › closet-drama-definition-e.

[en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Closet_drama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closet_drama)

Reference

Straznicky, Marta (2004). *Privacy, Play Reading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1500–1700*.

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