

## INTERLUDE

### Interlude in English Literature

The interlude was a short dramatic form that appeared in England during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It marked a transitional stage between the medieval morality plays and the later Elizabethan drama. The word interlude literally means “a play between,” and originally referred to brief performances staged between the acts of longer entertainments, banquets, or court festivities. Over time, however, the interlude developed into an independent form of drama.

Interludes were typically short, humorous, and secular in nature, differing from the religious themes of miracle and morality plays. They were performed not only in royal courts and noble households but also in schools, inns, and market places. The purpose of an interlude was primarily entertainment, though some carried moral, political, or social satire. The characters were often drawn from real life—such as priests, peasants, and courtiers—rather than allegorical figures, making the interlude more realistic and closer to modern drama.

One of the most famous writers of interludes was John Heywood, who is often called the “father of the English interlude.” His works such as *The Play of the Weather*, *The Four P's*, and *Johan Johan* are noted for their lively dialogue, humor, and satirical tone. These plays mocked human follies, clerical corruption, and social pretensions, reflecting the changing spirit of the Renaissance.

Interludes were important because they bridged the gap between medieval religious drama and the secular comedies of the Renaissance. They introduced realistic characters, witty dialogue, and situations taken from everyday life. This evolution paved the way for the development of English comedy and helped prepare audiences for the more sophisticated plays of the Elizabethan age, including those of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Definition:
  - The term *interlude* means “a play between.”
  - Originally referred to short performances presented between the acts of longer entertainments, at banquets, or during court festivities.
  - Later developed into an independent short play of its own.
- Period and Background:
  - Popular in late 15th and early 16th centuries.
  - Served as a link between the medieval morality plays and the Renaissance drama.
- Nature and Features:
  - Short, lively, and often humorous plays.
  - Secular in tone, unlike the religious miracle and morality plays.

- Contained realistic characters instead of allegorical figures.
- Written mainly for entertainment, though some had moral, social, or political messages.
- Used simple plots and witty dialogue.
- Performed in courts, noble households, schools, and public places.
- Themes:
  - Satire on social manners, clerical corruption, and human folly.
  - Reflected the spirit of the early Renaissance, focusing on human life and worldly issues.
- Major Playwrights and Examples:
  - John Heywood – regarded as the *father of the English interlude*.
    - Famous works include:
      - *The Four P's*
      - *The Play of the Weather*
      - *Johan Johan*
- Importance in English Drama:
  - Marked the transition from religious to secular theatre.
  - Introduced realism, comedy, and human characters.
  - Prepared the ground for Elizabethan drama, especially the comedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.