

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DRAMA IN MALAYSIA:  
A STUDY OF IT'S DEVELOPMENT, THEMES AND  
STYLES.

by

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ABSTRACT.

Malaysian English drama is relatively new in this country, having really gathered impetus only in the 1960s onwards. Prior to that, the only drama which existed apart from traditional forms was the Bangsawan, a popular transitional theatre of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Amateur productions of Western plays no doubt went on among the British who had, beginning from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, colonized parts of the Malay peninsular. With the coming of the Japanese in 1941, English drama was completely prohibited while Bangsawan continued on a subdued note. When the British returned after the war in 1945, these two theatre forms were reinstated. While Bangsawan transited into Sandiwara, a more modern style of drama, English drama continued to be in the hands of the British.

When Malaysia obtained independence from British rule in 1957, there was a strong desire, especially among the intellectual elites, to assert their identity in every field. In theatre, local talents felt that now was the time to Malaysianise English drama. In 1959, a completely Malaysian amateur group, The Literary and Dramatic Association (LIDRA), was formed in the Universiti Malay campus. In 1966, the formerly all British Malaysian Arts Theatre Group (MARTG) was subjected to a coup d'etat whereby a group of theatre enthusiasts headed by Syed Alwi took control of the whole group. The Malaysian Drama Council, also formed by theatre enthusiasts