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An Assessment of Cawley's Introduction to his 1961 Edition of Everyman

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As announced, my subject is "An Assessment of A. C. Cawley's Introduction to his 1961 edition of *Everyman*". This choice requires a double approach to the problems raised: the text of *Everyman* and, at the same time, Cawley's text, that is his analysis of the play. Following in the steps of the medieval preacher, I'll try to give my audience an inkling of what I intend to do by choosing an appropriate text for my sermon. I have chosen the Latin saw, *Quis bene amat, bene castigat*, meaning by that that I appreciate Cawley's very sensible analysis, which deals with important points, and often provides suggestive solutions. In places, it raises interesting points which constitute a welcome departure from most previous criticism.

My choice of such an indirect approach to *Everyman* was dictated to me by the particular circumstances which have brought us together today. Indeed it would have been a rash and unprofitable, even slightly unpalatable undertaking, to proceed either to a massive encomium or a general debunking of Cawley's introduction in the sole company of colleagues, all of them experts in the field, and much more learned than I! But it may be of use for our younger auditors to have some of Cawley's choices and

statements clarified and justified, sometimes also criticized, and all the more so because this important text has been by-passed as the set edition for Agrégation candidates. Candidates will naturally wish to consult it, but they must realize that this introduction is, like any other critical text, situated in a critical history and context on which it is dependent, even though it sometimes departs from that context to reach a most welcome originality, an intellectual attitude which is particularly recommended in the case of *Everyman*.

Text and Context

Everyman has indeed no ordinary place in the history of English drama; four original printed texts are known, all belonging to the turn of the fifteenth century (one volume only being complete), which are kept in two different libraries (the British Library and the Bodleian). Nobody knows to what extent these books were known and read at the time, and whether the dialogue was ever staged as a play. Reprinted for the first time in 1773, the play became a nineteenth-century hit in the wake of the Romantic movement, and the Victorian aesthetic and sentimental nostalgia for Gothic art and literature, as the example and symbol of an otherwise little known, if not ignored, English dramatic tradition. Almost at the same time, it was discovered that it was not an English play, but the translation of a Dutch original, a piece of information which is taken for granted as early as 1909, as appears in the introduction (due to "E. R.", i.e., Ernest Rhys) to volume 381 of Everyman's Library, entitled *Everyman with Other Interludes, Including Eight Miracle Plays*: "The Dutch *Everyman*—*Elckerlijk*—was in all probability the original of the English."[1] Surprisingly, in his introduction to a revised edition of the same volume dated 1956, A. C. Cawley is silent about the Dutch origin of *Everyman*, but in his 1961 edition for the Manchester University Press, the same Cawley concludes (regarding the priority of *Elckerlijk*) that the "only arguments which have not been turned inside out are ones based on factual"—meaning textual—"evidence"[2] and so concludes on the priority of *Elckerlijk*. That is also my

1. E[rnest] R[hys], ed., *Everyman with Other Interludes, Including Eight Miracle Plays*, Everyman's Library, vol. 381 (London: Dent, 1909), p. xviii.

2. A. C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. xi; references to this edition, which is also used for citations from the play, are henceforth included within parentheses in my text.

conclusion, and henceforth, when discussing content and dramatic technique, I'll refer to the two texts together as *Elckerlijk-Everyman.*

In fact, this solution to the question of priority is more central than it looks, and it is to be regretted that Cawley didn't draw all the possible conclusions, limiting his remarks as he did to points of detail and the identity of possible translators. It is disappointing to find that in a paragraph on « literary influences and analogues », he transcribes the traditional view of the filiation between the mysteries and the Easter tropes, and Owst's obsolete proposition that the "morality" is "a dramatic development of the sermon":

> It is now accepted by most scholars that the medieval moral plays are a dramatic development of the sermon, just as the New Testament plays of the Corpus Christi cycle are derived from an embellishment of the Easter liturgy and the Old Testament plays from the *lectiones* or scriptural readings appointed to be read at divine service. The moral play, it will be seen, complements the biblical play in much the same way as the sermon complements the other offices of Christian worship. (Cawley, pp. xiii-xiv)

If we accept as evident that *Everyman* is a translation from the Dutch, then we'll have to inquire into the Dutch, not the English, dramatic (and not "literary") tradition, and conditions of performance. Two main points seem to me of paramount importance: to begin with, at the turn of the century, the Low Countries were a land of prosperous cities and the home of prosperous merchants, particularly those involved in the Staple network (the commerce of wool and woven materials). As wealthy societies always pride themselves on their artistic achievements, and vie with one another for cultural pre-eminence, these cities spent an enormous amount of money on poetry and music festivals and other *ébattements*, and particularly on dramatic competitions, called "*Landjuweels*". The competitors were literary societies, or local academies of poetry, called "*Rederyker Kamers*" (Chambers of Rhetoric), and the plays submitted, the "*Spelen van Sinne*" (plays with a theme, or plays with a meaning). The subjects dealt with were not left to the authors' decision, but had to conform to a theme chosen by the municipal authorities. The theme for the 1539 Ghent *Landjuweel*, "What would a dying man put his faith in?", is a question *Elckerlijck-Everyman* seems to answer. But let's not allow our fancy to wander gratuitously! We know that *Elckerlijk* was written for an Antwerp *Landjuweel*, and got a prize there, with honours (*cum palma*), but the date remains unknown. The splendid and celebrated 1496 Antwerp festival would be a tempting choice, but the theme chosen that year, "What was the greatest miracle which God wrought for the saving of Mankind?", would scarcely fit the content of our play. And none of the three plots which have come down to us strikes one as a summary of *Elckerlijk* ("The taking on of human nature", "The shedding of Jesus' blood", "The making of peace between Father and Man").

As for the time of the year in which those festivals were held, we have evidence from a later occasion (*c.* 1560) that they lasted at least a fortnight, and they took place in the course of August—which seems to be a natural choice in a northern climate. We may imagine that the same period was chosen some sixty or seventy years earlier. In the light of these data, Cawley's calling *Everyman* (I would say *Elckerlijk-Everyman*) "a lenten penitential play" (p. xxiii) sounds particularly inappropriate: "penitential" refers to the episode of contrition and confession, which is present in practically all "moral plays", and so not particularly characteristic of the present one; "lenten" is acceptable if it refers to the generally serious and even sombre tone, but erroneous as regards the actual season in which the play was performed. It is also difficult to see why Cawley introduces at this point the well known, or shall we say hackneyed, medieval theme of the "Four Last Things", which is far from typical of *Elckerlijk-Everyman*.

The second point I would like to comment on is the religious situation in the Low Countries at the end of the fifteenth century and beginning of the sixteenth. The different Princes having authority over that land (Charles V, after 1515) had to ward off violent anti-Catholic attacks. The Societies (*Kamers* and others) were often in conflict with the royal and Church authorities. Whereas the farces or the romantic plays aroused no opposition, the serious moral allegories, which sometimes contained satirical attacks on churchmen and the abuses of the Church, did. So, the "*factors*" (the dramatists belonging to the *Kamers*) had to take sides, and their plays often went beyond fulfilling a normal duty of edification to adopt a polemic attitude.

Elckerkijk-Everyman speaks in favour of the Catholic side. Hence, the emphasis on the importance of priests in the control of morals, and in the administration of the sacraments:

> Go to Presthode, I you aduyse,
> And receyue of hym in ony wyse
> The holy sacrament and oyntement togyder. (707-10)
>
> There is no Emperour, Kynge, Duke, ne Baron,
> That of God hath commycyon
> As hath the leest prest in the worlde beynge;
> For of the blessyd sacramentes pure and benygne
> He bereth the keyes, and therof hath the cure
> For mannes redempcyon . . . (713-18)
>
> For preesthode excedeth all other thynge:
> To vs holy scrypture they do teche,
> And conuerteth man fro synne, heuen to reche;

God hath to them more power gyuen
Than to ony aungell that is in heuen.
With v. wordes he may consecrate,
Goddes body in flesshe and blode to make,
And handeleth his Maker bytwene his handes.
The preest byndeth and vnbyndeth all bandes,
Bothe in erthe and in heuen.
Thou mynystres all the sacramentes seuen;
Though we kysse thy fete, thou were worthy.
Thou art surgyon that cureth synne deedly;
No remedy we fynde vnder God
But all onely preesthode.
Eueryman, God gaue preest that dygnyte,
And setteth them in his stede amonge vs to be;
Thus be they above aungelles in degree. (732–49)

Elckerlijk-Everyman even broaches the point of unworthy priests—a moot point in those days—only skilfully to conclude by words of prudent conformism:
I trust to God no suche [i.e., bad priests] may we fynde;
Therefore let vs preesthode honour,
And folowe theyr doctryne for our soules socoure.
We be theyr shepe, and they shepeherdes be. . . . (764–68)

Similarly, the text expresses a total faith in the efficacy of the sacraments:
Here in this transytory lyfe, for the and me,
The blessed sacramentes vii. there be:
Baptym, confyrmacyon, with preesthode good,
And the sacrament of Goddes precyous flesshe & blod,
Maryage, the holy extreme vnccyon, and penaunce.
These seuen be good to haue in remembraunce,
Gracyous sacramentes of hye devynyte. (721–27)

These passages in direct address, which do not really belong to the dialogue of the play and sound rather like a lesson for the spectators' benefit, appear as more circumstantial than necessary to the logic of the argument, and motivated by the desire to mount a Catholic counter-offensive to Protestant attacks.

Rhetorical Devices

In order to make such a response efficacious, *Elckerlijk-Everyman* uses the rhetorical devices at the disposal of professional rhetoricians. A point to be made: convince the spectators that one had to be ready at any given minute of one's life to face the requirements of the Last Judgement. How can one be convincing? You

probably remember what Menenius in *Coriolanus* does when he wants to convince the citizens of Rome of the necessity of magistrates and leaders at the head of a city. Instead of answering one by one their objections and accusations, he says, "I shall tell you / A pretty tale".[3] And he uses the parable of the members of the body that rebelled against the belly. The "pretty tale" told in *Elckerlijk-Everyman* is the parable of the unfaithful friends. The difference is that the story of Menenius is a sort of inset (or tale within), embedded in a historical or chronological fabula (in dramatic form). In *Elckerlijk-Everyman*, the embedded story becomes the be-all and end-all of the play. Here is Cawley's treatment of the point:

> The story element in Everyman is ultimately derived from the Faithful Friend tale, the earliest version of which is found in Barlaam and Josaphat, a collection of christianized oriental tales much used as a source-book by the medieval preacher in search of *exempla.* (p. xviii)

Yet contrary to what Cawley suggests, there is no "story element": the story is at the same time what it is meant to express, since the matter expressed cannot be a narrative, as it is already an artefact or abstract construction, the Christian story of the destiny of the soul.

But what is expressed by the tale of the Faithful Friends? Cawley calls it "an allegorical representation of Everyman's rapid spiritual growth and development" (p. xx). It certainly is allegorical, and was perceived as such even in its popular versions, essentially because of its traditional character. This allegorical nature is made explicit, for instance, in the *Tale of the Three Priests of Peblis*:

> The first frind is bot gude penny and pelfe [i.e., property]
> That many man lufis better than himself . . . (1263-64)
> The secund freind, lat se, quhome we call
> Bot wyfe and barne . . . (1285-6)
> This third freind quhom wil we cal, let sie,
> Nocht ellis bot Almosdeid [i.e., almsdeed]. (1307-08)[4]

But, where is that "spiritual growth" referred to in Cawley's introduction? Everyman is stunned by Death's message—"This blynde mater troubleth my wytte" (102)—and, in total panic, he starts looking for comfort from his "friends". The episode ends in black despair: "O, to whome shall I make my mone . . . ?" (463). Cawley's

3. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. R. Brian Parker, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), I.i.88-89.

4. Davis Laing, ed., *Early Popular Poetry of Scotland and the Northern Border*, 2 vols., rev. ed. W. C. Hazlitt (London, 1895), vol. 1, pp. 165-67.

interpretation is not correct—who has ever witnessed the spiritual growth of an allegorical figure?—and it also smacks of an unpleasant psychological bias.

Now, to return to Everyman's behaviour, there is no growth in the course of his monologue (463-85), but a sudden illumination, revealed by this rhetorical suggestion (which I would describe as somewhat "phoney" (in French "telephone"!)—"I thynke that I shall neuer spede, / Tyll that I go to my Good Dede" (480-81)—underlined by the rhetorical repetition at the preceding line of the initial question: "Of whom shall I now counseyll take?" (479). This illumination is called in Catholic terms, the manifestation of God's Grace. In the same Catholic terms, it also means that Everyman is saved. Yes, he is saved half-way through the play! What's going to happen then? This is when a splendid rhetorical invention intervenes: the story of the False Friends usually stages three characters (as is the case in the Barlaam and Josaphat story): two false and one true. In *Elckerlijk-Everyman*, only the pattern is used, and what is more, extended. After those brief encounters and pathetic partings, which illustrate the panic of unregenerated man, other encounters (and partings) show at once the pathos of the man who knows he is mortal and the serenity of him who is in a "state of grace": "O, all thynge fayleth, saue God alone" (841).

Numerous disquisitions have been written on the meaning of the second batch of "friends": they are usually seen as gifts or natural attributes of man. Cawley mentions that Strength is already present in the *Pride of Life*, the oldest English "Morality" (and is Sanitas—Good Health—so different from Beauty, who also appears in the *Pride of Life*?), but few are the studies of their status, roles and relationships with the human hero.[5] Comparing two other « friends », Good Deeds and Knowledge, Cawley writes: "hardly less important than Good Deeds is her Sister Knowledge" (p. xxi). I really don't see why Knowledge should be less important than Good Deeds, and in what respect, but I do know that they have different relationships with Everyman. How can one state that Knowldge is the less important of the two, when she is given, on her first entrance, the most central (and famous) words in the play, which constitute Knowledge's self introduction?

> Everyman, I wyll go wyth the and be thy gyde,
> In thy moost nede to go by thy syde. (522-23)

This promise, which is repeated some 300 lines later—"Nay, yet I wyll not from hens departe / Tyll I se where ye shall be-come" (862-63)—is an echo of Good Deeds'

5. See also Strength and Beauty in *Orologium Sapientiae*, *The Book of the Craft of Dying* (1490), ed., F. Comper (London, 1917), p. 109.

words: "I wyll not forsake the in dede; / Thou shalte fynde me a good frende at need" (853-54). Their fidelity towards Everyman is the same, but manifests itself in different ways. Knowledge is the counsellor, as described by Good Deeds:

> I haue a syster that shall with you also,
> Called Knowlege, whiche shall with you abyde,
> To helpe you to make that dredefull rekenynge. (519-21)

Good Deeds is more intimately related to Everyman's body and soul, since she will remain with him in the grave: "All fleeth save Good Dedes, and that am I" (873).

Time and Theology

When one considers Everyman's successive meetings with his "friends", that is, with his allegorical friends, only stage time, or performance time, is concerned; no represented time is implied. The meaning is that Everyman relies on the company of Fellowship or his cousin to help him live his life—that he revels in his money, beauty, etc., in this world, in total forgetfulness of his status as *man*, one of God's creatures, with another-worldly destiny, whether happy or unhappy. When Death delivers the message, "A rekenynge [God] wyll nedes have / Without ony lenger respyte" (99-100)—he does not mean, "you are going to die *now*, this next minute", but rather, "Man, you are mortal, and your moral situation must be settled at once, because to-morrow it might be too late", as is illustrated elsewhere by the parable of the foolish virgins.[6] So, Cawley's statement that "*Everyman* is a dramatic and allegorical presentation of the medieval Catholic doctrine concerning Holy Dying" (p. xx) is not really acceptable. The play is not the story of Everyman's death.

In connection with this subject, Cawley, like many other critics, mentions a very well known type of treatise, the *Ars Moriendi*, of which the most popular is Caxton's *Book of the Craft of Dying* (1490), possibly contemporary with our play. In that sort of literature the reference to death is misleading, and the *Ars moriendi* would be better named an *Ars vivendi et moriendi*. This is illustrated by the treatises which put the two words together in their titles; in 1522, for example, the following book was reported to be on sale in a Paris bookshop: *L'art et la science de bien vivre et de bien mourir.*[7] The advice given in the treatise *Orologium Sapientiae* concerns life and not just the hour of death. Cawley himself quotes a passage from Caxton's *Book of the Craft of Dying* describing the five temptations a dying man has to face. The fifth temptation is "the

6. Matt. 25:1-13.
7. Cf. R. Chartier, "Les arts de mourir, 1450-1600", *Annales ESC* 31.1 (1976) : 64.

over grete ocupacyon of outwarde thinges and temporall, as towarde his wyf his children & his frendes carnal / towarde his rychesses . . . " (cited by Cawley, p. xvi). But are the temptations described really temptations of the hour of our death or rather of one's whole life? In fact, the *Ars Moriendi* genre seems to have monopolized the whole of Christian teaching under an arresting, if slightly misleading, heading. One may note that in the *Craft of Dying* the conclusion stresses the impossibility of treating the moment of a man's death in isolation: "to every person that well and surly will die [it] is of necessity that he learn to die, or [i.e., ere] the death come and prevent him.[8]

Critics seem to have found it hard to decide whether the play was about the life or the death of Everyman, and what was meant by the word pilgrimage and its synonyms. On several occasions Cawley is led astray by his impression that *Elckerlijk-Everyman* is telling a story. His first oversight concerns the *Castle of Perseverance*. Indeed, that play follows the course of man's life, but in a most allegoric and symbolical way, very different from the pedestrian linearity we find, for instance, in *Mundus et Infans*. In the *Castle of Perseverance*, Humanum Genus is not "narrowly saved", there is no "wrangling about man's soul", because Humanum Genus' death does not happen *before* the recourse to the Parliament of Heaven. Cawley is wrong to define his religious state by the two words "unhousel'd" and "unanel'd" (p. xxiii), which are borrowed from a play built on a chronological sequence: *Hamlet*.[9] True enough, in the *Castle of Perseverance*, there is a sort of ellipsis regarding the last reconciliation of Humanum Genus with the Deity, but we must assume from his last words that it has been achieved in our absence: "I putte me in Goddys mercy".[10] The Parliament of Heaven, which is a very felicitous choice as a solemn and impressive ending to a processional play like *The Castle of Perseverance*, is not contemporary with the Last Judgement. A Mystery Cycle, the *Ludus Coventriae,* very sensibly from a theological point of view, and very effectively from a dramatic one, situates this episode just before the Salutation and Conception, thus indicating that it is part of the divine plan for the Redemption of Mankind.

The other problem is raised by the numerous mentions of a journey, a pilgrimage or a voyage imposed on man by God at the beginning of the play. Let us note, first, that when God says, "I perceyue" (22), he is not breaking news. This

8. Ed. cit., p. 88.

9. See William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare, 2nd ser. (London: Methuen, 1982), I.v. 77.

10. *The Castle of Perseverance, The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, *EETS 262* (London: Oxford University for the EETS, 1969), l. 3007.

sentence is spoken in the timeless eternity of the Empyrean: it is just the start of the play, not of the action represented. The pilgrimage to which man is called is a figure representing the essentially transitory nature of man's existence: "our lyues and endynge shewes / How transytory we be all daye" (5-6).[11] The voyage is neither life in this world, nor the final jump into the murky darkness of the next, but rather the passage from a state of recklessness or ignorance of the duties of man towards the Deity, to an active awareness of his binding nature—what the Puritans called "conversion" (or "seeing the light") and the Catholics the "coming of Grace". Such a passage, and not physical death, is seen as the caesura between two opposed modes of existence; it does not belong to historical, but to theological time.

Conclusion

As I bring this essay to a close, I realize how much matter I have had to leave aside in this hasty commentary of Cawley's introduction, and I wish to mention two points, which would deserve more detailed consideration:

> 1) As a general remark on the play, Cawley writes: "*Everyman* is completely a product of the medieval world . . . untouched by either Renaissance or Reformation" (p. xix-xx). Clearly not! Medieval plays consider the problem of human salvation from a collective point of view, *Everyman* from a more individual one, under Protestant and mercantile influences.
>
> 2) The other point of disagreement is when Cawley claimes that the "friends" of the first half of the play "bear a strong resemblance to the Vice of the later moral plays" (p. xxi). I can state without hesitation that the Vice of the mid-century interludes of England has nothing to do with the above mentioned characters. Dutch plays have no Vice either, but, at a slightly later period, two *Sinnekens*, whose main role is to provide comedy.

Now, I will willingly agree with Cawley when he writes that *Everyman* "is not a typical morality as far as England is concerned" (p. xiv). One may add that, in its original form, it is not a typical morality as far as the Dutch tradition is concerned, either.

11. See also Heb. 13-14 : For we have here no abiding city, but we seek that which is to come".