

LUC BERGMANS, « Elckerlyc et Everyman »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-8,  
mis en ligne le 11 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsable de la publication

Philippe VENDRIX

### Responsables scientifiques

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



# Elckerlyc et Everyman

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À l'origine de la pièce anglaise, il y a — les spécialistes s'accordent maintenant à le dire — une pièce en langue néerlandaise : *Den Spieghel der Salicheit van Elckerlyc* (Miroir du salut de Tout-Homme). L'auteur de celle-ci était Pieter Dorland van Diest (1454-1507). Écrite vers 1485, la version néerlandaise a été imprimée une dizaine d'années plus tard. La pièce a dû connaître un grand succès de popularité. Nous savons qu'*Elckerlyc* a même obtenu un premier prix à Anvers dans une compétition entre chambres de rhétorique. Très tôt une version anglaise a vu le jour. Au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle un débat interminable a opposé des philologues défendant ou contestant la priorité de la version néerlandaise. En 1902, H. Logeman a pu trancher cette question en faveur de *Elckerlyc*<sup>1</sup>.

## Le nom du protagoniste néerlandais

Une première remarque concernant le nom *Elckerlyc* s'impose. *Elckerlyc* se compose de *elck*, apparenté à *each* en anglais, et *lyc* (prononcé « lique »), qui signifiait « corps » au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il faut cependant

1. H. Logeman, *Elckerlyc, Everyman, De vraag naar de Prioriteit, opnieuw onderzocht* (Gand, 1902).

signaler qu'au cours de l'évolution de la langue néerlandaise, un rétrécissement du sens de *lȳc* a eu lieu, de façon à ce que l'équivalent moderne de *lȳc*, à savoir *lijk* (prononcé avec une diphtongue proche de celle de la seconde syllabe du mot *vermeille* en français) signifie « cadavre », ou, si l'on veut, « body », dans le sens de « dead body ». *Lijk* correspond effectivement à *Leiche* en allemand. S'il est certain que le processus du rétrécissement sémantique n'était pas encore arrivé à terme au moment où Pieter Dorland van Diest écrivait sa pièce, rien ne nous empêche de supposer que l'on commençait à en voir les premiers signes. Il est troublant alors de penser que le nom du protagoniste était déjà porteur d'allusions à la mort.

Observons encore à ce propos que d'autres choix de noms étaient certainement à la disposition de l'auteur. En néerlandais moderne familier existe notamment l'emploi du mot *alleman* (chacun), dont l'étymologie est très proche d'*Everyman*. Ce ne fût cependant pas l'ancêtre d'*alleman* que Pieter Dorland van Diest décida de retenir, mais bien un nom comprenant le mot *lȳc*.

## L'obsession avec la mort selon Johan Huizinga

*Elckerlȳc* est un des nombreux exemples de la fascination, voire l'obsession avec la mort, qui a caractérisé « L'automne du Moyen Âge ». Ce dernier terme est devenu célèbre grâce à l'ouvrage de ce nom, *Herfstij der Middeleeuwen* (1919) écrit par l'historien néerlandais, Johan Huizinga (1872-1945). Dans le chapitre consacré à « La vision de la mort », nous lisons :

Aucune autre époque que le Moyen Âge à son déclin n'a donné autant d'accent et de pathos à l'idée de la mort. Sans cesse résonne à travers la vie l'appel du *memento mori*. Dans son *Directoire de la vie des Nobles*, Denis le Chartreux exhorte le noble en ces termes : « Et quand il se met au lit, qu'il considère ceci : de même qu'il s'étend lui-même sur sa couche il sera bientôt mis par d'autres dans son tombeau »<sup>2</sup>.

On lira avec intérêt les considérations de Huizinga sur le thème de la mort qui a si profondément marqué les esprits aux *xiv<sup>e</sup>* et *xv<sup>e</sup>* siècles, et a trouvé son expression dans les arts et la littérature. On s'étonnera d'autant plus que Huizinga a omis de parler d'*Elckerlȳc* dans ce chapitre.

2. J. Huizinga, *Le déclin du Moyen Âge*, trad. de *Herfstij der Middeleeuwen* par J. Bastin, Paris, Le Club du Meilleur Livre, 1958, p. 125.

## L'émergence de l'idée de Tout-Homme aux Pays-Bas

Très tôt la pensée religieuse des Pays-Bas a commencé à manifester les signes précurseurs de l'idée d'un « Tout-Homme ». Il faut au moins remonter jusqu'au <sup>xiv</sup><sup>e</sup> siècle lorsque le mystique brabançon Jan van Ruysbroeck l'Admirable (1293-1381) écrit *Die Cierheit der gheesteliker brulocht* (L'ornement des noces spirituelles), dans lequel il distingue les trois phases de la vie du chercheur de Dieu : *het werkend leven* (vie du travail, vie active), *het Godbegeerend leven* (vie du désir de Dieu) et *het Godschouwend leven* (vie dans laquelle l'on voit Dieu). Ruysbroeck insiste que la première de ces phases, qui n'a en quelque sorte rien de sublime, est ouverte à tous. Dieu dispense alors librement sa grâce, dans la vie de tous les jours, de sorte que personne n'aura l'excuse d'avoir été privé de ce premier contact. Cette grâce est appelée *een ghemeine licht* (une lumière commune).

Ruysbroeck s'inscrit lui-même dans la tradition mystique des béguines, qui, elles aussi, considéraient que le quotidien était parfaitement adapté à l'éclosion de la vie religieuse. En d'autres termes, Tout-Homme (ou Toute-Femme !) était ainsi appelé(e) à se tourner vers Dieu.

C'est également à Ruysbroeck l'Admirable que la spiritualité néerlandaise doit l'idée de *vie commune*, qui s'articule autour de trois axes : celui de l'intériorisation qui mène vers l'*unisson* avec Dieu, celui du *partage* rendu possible par le contact avec l'inépuisable source de bonté qu'est Dieu même, et enfin celui du *quotidien* comme milieu privilégié de tels échanges. La notion ruysbroeckienne de *vie commune* connaîtra un grand succès, notamment au sein du mouvement de la Dévotion Moderne, qui marquera profondément la vie de l'esprit des Pays-Bas au <sup>xv</sup><sup>e</sup> siècle.

Notons aussi que l'importance donnée à *Deught* (Vertu), seul personnage à suivre Elckerlyc au Jugement, s'accorde parfaitement avec l'esprit de Ruysbroeck, qui explique que la phase de la progression mystique, qui est accessible à tous, est justement celle de la pratique des vertus, dont le Maître donne un catalogue très complet et précis dans le premier livre de *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*. Enfin, nous trouvons chez notre mystique brabançon une description de l'homme humble, qui n'est pas sans évoquer Elckerlyc/ Everyman lorsqu'il ne peut qu'avouer sa pauvreté et s'en remettre à la grâce du Dieu de Justice :

lorsqu'un homme juste réside en sa misère, au plus pauvre de soi, et reconnaît qu'il n'a rien, qu'il n'est rien, qu'il ne peut rien par lui-même [...] et lorsqu'il s'aperçoit aussi qu'il défaille souvent dans les vertus et dans les bonnes œuvres, il avoue ainsi sa pauvreté et sa détresse, et il forme en lui la vallée de l'humilité. Et parce qu'il est humble et dans le besoin, et parce qu'il

avoue ses besoins, il les montre et s'en plaint à la bonté et à la miséricorde de Dieu. Il remarque la sublimité de Dieu, et son abaissement. Et il devient ainsi une profonde vallée :  
Et le Christ est le soleil de la justice et de la miséricorde, qui brille au midi du firmament, c'est-à-dire à la droite de son Père, et rayonne jusqu'au fond des cœurs humbles, car le Christ est toujours remué par la détresse, lorsqu'un homme s'en plaint et la montre humblement<sup>3</sup>.

## Un rapprochement avec *Le Chariot de foin* de Jérôme Bosch

Le peintre néerlandais Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) était un contemporain de Pieter Dorland van Diest. Vers 1500 il a peint *Le Chariot de foin*, qui se trouve actuellement au Musée du Prado. Roger-H. Marijnissen et ses collaborateurs ont eu le mérite de rapprocher ce tableau de la pièce *Den Spiegel der Salicheit van Elckerlyc* dans l'œuvre monumentale, *Hieronymus Bosch*, qu'ils ont consacrée au peintre fantastique<sup>4</sup>.

Ainsi ils illustrent l'image du Christ au ciel sur le panneau central du retable ouvert au moyen des mots prononcés par Dieu au début de la pièce de théâtre:

Je vois aussi que le peuple est aveuglé. Dans leur dépravation, ils se sont détournés de Moi, leur Seigneur. Aux biens de la terre ils se sont attachés. Ils les ont préférés à Dieu, et m'ont oublié<sup>5</sup>.

C'est devant le spectacle des péchés de l'homme que le personnage du Christ semble s'émouvoir ainsi. Ses bras ouverts symbolisent sa crucifixion, mais peut-être aussi son étonnement.

Le Christ était venu sur terre pour enlever le péché du monde. Bosch retrace l'origine du mal. Sur le panneau latéral gauche, l'on voit la chute des anges rebelles ainsi que différentes scènes avec Adam et Ève, dont la tentation et l'expulsion du paradis. Voilà les raisons de la venue du Christ. Mais à regarder le panneau central, c'est à se demander à quoi ont bien servi l'incarnation, l'enseignement du Christ et l'immolation du Rédempteur. Dans cette scène avec une foule de petits personnages excités et violents, le désordre moral de ce monde semble à son comble. Autour du

3. M. Maeterlinck, « *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles* » de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable traduit du flamand et accompagné d'une introduction, 1891, réédition Bruxelles, Le Éperonniers, 1990, p. 106-107.

4. Voir R.-H. Marijnissen, K. Blockx, P. Gerlach, H.-T. Piron, J.-H. Plokker et V.H. Bauer, *Hieronymus Bosch*, trad. de la version néerlandaise par M. Elskens, M. van Schoute et L. Decaestecker, Bruxelles, Arcade, 1975, p. 62, 91 et 155.

5. Marijnissen et al., p. 167.

chariot de foin, on se piétine, on s'entretue. Non seulement l'humanité est restée sourde et aveugle devant le message du Christ, mais l'homme a persévéré dans le péché. Il s'est endurci. Sa méchanceté s'est aggravée. L'étonnement des diables fait écho à celui du Christ. Effectivement, sur le panneau latéral droit, on voit les diables en train d'entreprendre des travaux d'agrandissement en Enfer. On n'avait pas prévu tant de monde !

Particulièrement frappant est le fait que les auteurs d'Elckerlyc et d'Everyman avancent que l'homme soit tombé dans un état de bestialité. Chez Bosch, ce sont de véritables monstres combinant dans leurs apparences divers traits animaux, qui vont littéralement tirer le chariot en enfer. Ce genre de représentations apparaît également dans la littérature populaire de l'époque, où les vices sont symbolisés par des bêtes monstrueuses. Le thème des biens terrestres et éphémères que l'homme prend obstinément pour éternels est très dominant dans nos deux pièces de théâtre. Il joue évidemment un rôle crucial dans *Le Chariot de foin* où le foin même, symbole de futilité, provoque la violence et la folie ainsi que toute cette marche insensée en direction de l'Enfer.

Le plus troublant reste cependant le personnage qui figure sur les panneaux extérieurs du retable. Nous avons affaire à un voyageur qui avance avec grande peine. Les auteurs de *Hieronymus Bosch* l'ont justement rapproché d'Elckerlyc, le pèlerin en marche vers la mort<sup>6</sup>. Notons à cet égard que cette figure, qui nous interpelle, perd de son individualité par l'effet de la grisaille et se prête ainsi d'avantage à une interprétation dans le sens d'un Tout-Homme avec lequel nous devons nous identifier.

Ce personnage détourne le regard pour éviter de voir une scène chargée d'érotisme ainsi qu'une scène violente. Il est permis de penser ici à Elckerlyc/Everyman quitté par des proches, qui étaient parfaitement prêts à le suivre dans la débauche, voire même de commettre des crimes avec lui, mais qui le laissent seul, lorsqu'il leur demande de l'accompagner vers son ultime destin. Que le personnage de Bosch regarde la mort en face est clairement indiqué par les ossements et les corneilles au premier plan. Dernier détail hautement significatif : il s'agit pour Tout-Homme d'éviter l'Enfer à l'heure de la mort. Au moyen de son bâton, le pèlerin essaie de garder à distance un chien agressif, qui a l'air d'un vrai petit cerbère.

6. Marijnissen et al., p. 62.

## Un rapprochement avec le Jugement Dernier de Rogier van der Weyden

Le polyptique du *Jugement Dernier*, commandé vers 1440 par le Chancelier Rolin pour décorer l'autel de la « grand'chambre des pauvres » de l'Hospice de Beaune, appartient aux œuvres maîtresses de l'École des Primitifs flamands. Le peintre, Roger de la Pasture (1399/1400-1464) était originaire de Tournai. Il néerlandisa son nom et devint peintre officiel de la ville de Bruxelles. Il doit ainsi être considéré comme appartenant pleinement à l'aire culturelle brabançonne, à laquelle nous devons également rattacher Pieter Dorland van Diest. Si l'œuvre picturale précède de deux générations l'œuvre littéraire, elle est susceptible néanmoins de mettre en lumière certains aspects fondamentaux d'*Elckerlyc/Everyman*.

Le premier de ses aspects nous semble être l'idée de l'homme comme seul responsable de son salut. L'abandon est un des thèmes majeurs des deux versions de la pièce de théâtre. Tout-Homme se dirige vers le Jugement, dépouillé et accompagné seulement de Duecht (Vertu) dans la version néerlandaise, ou Good Deeds (Bonnes Œuvres) dans la version anglaise.

Ce dépouillement, cette confrontation avec soi-même et avec sa propre responsabilité sont évoqués de façon poignante dans la pesée du *Jugement Dernier* de Beaune. La nudité devant Dieu et son Jugement est mise en évidence. De plus, la Vertu (ou les Vertus) paraissent, ici comme dans *Elckerlyc*, déterminantes pour le Jugement. « Le plateau de la balance s'élève, soulevant doucement vers le ciel la petite figurine confiante qui a nom "virtutes" (en lettres dorées au-dessus de sa tête) »<sup>7</sup>. Frappante dans ce Jugement Dernier est l'absence quasi-totale de diables. C'est le poids des péchés (cf., dans la version anglaise, les propos de Good Deeds : « To your soules heuynes »<sup>8</sup>) qui tire la balance vers le bas et qui provoque la chute en Enfer. Rogier van der Weyden rompt ici avec une tradition qui veut que la balance penche du côté du bien. Il rompt aussi avec la tradition d'une sorte de bagarre entre anges et diables<sup>9</sup>, qui après tout ne ferait que détourner le regard de la responsabilité de l'homme dans ce qui se passe au Jugement Dernier.

Le deuxième aspect est directement lié au rôle du prêtre dans *Elckerlyc/Everyman*. C'est grâce au prêtre – que l'on ne verra pas – que le protagoniste peut se préparer à

7. E. Gondinet-Wallstein, *Un retable pour l'Au-delà*, [Paris], Mame, 1990, p. 110.

8. *Everyman*, ed. A. C. Cawley, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1961, v. 505.

9. Il s'agit d'une bagarre telle qu'on la retrouvera à nouveau dans *Le Jugement Dernier* de Gdansk par Hans Memling, inspiré de celui de Van der Weyden. Contrairement au dernier, Memling donne la position traditionnelle à la balance.



la mort et au Jugement. L'apparition d'une figure personnifiant la prêtrise n'aurait eu en soi rien de choquant dans une moralité, mais en rangeant ce personnage parmi ceux que l'on ne voit pas, les auteurs donnent une importance d'autant plus grande à l'action du prêtre et couvrent ce dernier de mystère.

De la même façon, Rogier van der Weyden introduit dans le retable de Beaune un personnage dont le rôle est caractérisé par l'efficacité de son intervention ainsi que par la rigueur de l'exécution d'un rituel. En même temps, il s'agit d'un personnage en retrait, comme renfermé dans le secret divin. C'est l'ange Michel. Ses gestes sont précis. L'aiguille de la balance indique son regard impassible : « La main gauche de l'archange s'écarte de la balance, attentive à ne pas fausser le jugement, à n'exercer aucune influence, si légère soit-elle »<sup>10</sup>. Il n'est pas étonnant dès lors que Saint Michel porte l'habit du prêtre, et non pas la cuirasse<sup>11</sup>. Tout comme l'archange, le prêtre de nos deux pièces de théâtre est à la fois indispensable et doté d'un pouvoir qui reste impénétrable pour l'homme.

10. Gondinet-Wallstein, p. 113.

11. Il portera à nouveau la cuirasse chez Hans Memling.



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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *Identity and the Seven Sacraments in Everyman*

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*Everyman* belongs to a tradition of Christian literary tragedy in which a charted journey takes the allegorical mankind protagonist away from a state of moral ruin and near-despair toward redemption and life in union with the Lord. *Everyman* differs from most of the moral drama of the early sixteenth century in that the focus of the play is on the last stage of the tri-partite pattern (innocence-sin-redemption) that typifies the majority of the increasingly secularised moral plays of the period. The purpose of this paper is to explore the way in which Roman Catholic Christian doctrine is embodied in the art of the play, and to examine the extent to which *Everyman* depends on the sacraments for its creation of an *Everyman* character who acts in accordance with what O. B. Hardison has called a “sacramental psychology”.<sup>1</sup> The structure of *Everyman* participates in the fall-rise movement of the Mass, which progresses from a state of sorrow to one of joy, as death is overcome, heralding a new birth achieved through reconciliation and salvation. Analogously, as John Cunningham puts it, “The reluctant jour-

1. O. B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 289; quoted by John Cunningham, “Comedic and Liturgical Restoration in *Everyman*”, *Comparative Drama* 22 (1988): 162.

ney of Everyman's contrite soul toward God as judge becomes a glad pilgrimage toward God as Savior".<sup>2</sup>

In the opening lines of the play, the Messenger reminds the audience of the transitory nature of human life and of the necessity to remember one's mortal being and to bear in mind the fact of life's ending: "The story sayth: Man, in the begynnynge / Look well, and take good heed to the endynge, / Be ye never so gay" (10-12).<sup>3</sup> This is the Messenger's advice, given as the audience is drawn into the didactic play-world to witness the lesson taught to a certain Everyman (and to every man in general), when the day of reckoning comes and one is obliged to give an account of one's good deeds.

God is then overheard by the audience having a moan about the contemporary sinful state of the world. He is highlighted as being, in turn, God the Father, God the Son, and God come to judgement as a Doomsday Christ-figure. God, functioning as an expository character, describes the religious landscape of the day, wherein man was seen to traffic as a theologically determined being, unlike the modern individual, whose being is biologically and psychologically determined, and bound by social influences and constraints. As God ends his long speech, and beckons his messenger Death onto the stage, it becomes clear that the play will be about Doomsday and the judgement pronounced upon those who live "without fere" (62) of God. God's main complaint throughout his expository monologue is that mankind has disappointed him in not accepting the "grace" or sonship that he had proffered all: "I hoped well that euery man / In my glory sholde make his mansyon, / And therto I had them all electe" (52-54). One important aspect of the play's message is that the divine gift of "mercy" (58) is expressed and implemented in the form of the seven sacraments.

God expresses his discontent with the way mankind has largely ignored this gift and that "fewe there be that asketh it hertly" (59). God points out the way man bases his identity on earthly goods and pleasures, neglecting all thought of the after-life: "Euery man lyueth so after his owne pleasure, / And yet of theyr lyfe they be nothyng sure" (40-41). As the play unfolds, the embodied doctrine concerning the sacraments comes to the fore as a controlling device in creating the dramatic character of Everyman, who personifies the entire human race, as well as, at times, an individual human being. In him is conflated the judgement each individual

2. Cunningham, p. 168.

3. I cite, by line numbers given parenthetically, *Everyman*, ed. A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

will meet at death with the Last Judgement, when the destiny of the soul will be decided. The pilgrimage that he is invited to undertake before coming to judgement is staged as a form of preparation for his death and for the reception he is likely to be given beyond. So observes Cunningham, who goes on to remind us that this strongly resembles the Christian's preparation for receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist: entering the sacramental presence of Christ when such a rite is carried out is analogous to entering the heavenly presence of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

*Everyman* begins with metaphors depicting a world in a state of spiritual sickness. Mankind, because of the priority given to worldly goods, is on the brink of what Cunningham terms "moral death"; because, in any case, "eche lyvng creature / For Adams synne must dye of nature" (144-45), and since "In worldely ryches is all theyr mynde" (27), "they leve of aungelles the heavenly company" (39). The danger is that "In theyr lyfe and wycked tempestes, / Veryly they will become moche worse than beestes, / For now one wolde by enuy another vp ete" (48-50). The character Everyman is endowed with the qualities of the universal sinner, but also with attitudes particular to his personal moral death: like the majority of his contemporaries, he is "combred with wordly ryches" (60) but is told by a personal contact, Goods, that his love for worldly possessions has marred his chance of providing a satisfactory record in his book of reckoning:

For bycause on me thou dyd set thy mynde,  
Thy rekenyng I haue made blotted and blynde,  
That thyne accounte thou can not make truly. (418-20)

When Death accosts Everyman, he is unable to answer the questions, "Whyder arte thou goynge / Thus gayly? / Hast thou thy Maker forgete?" (85-86). His hand goes to his pocket, as he thinks he can rid himself of the disconcerting intruder by bribing him with a substantial amount of money. Death underlines the fact, once again reiterating God's words and those of the Messenger, that life and worldly goods are only lent to Everyman (161-64). Death tells him to be ready shortly, casting Everyman into a state of despair, whereupon he insincerely and briefly turns to God, whom he invokes casually, as if swearing, but then to earthly companions. The pilgrimage that will lead him to contrition and to turning back to God begins with a dramatic enactment of the stripping of the self. The road to contrition and ensuing salvation involves loss of a kind which enables Everyman to find himself through a final

4. See Cunningham, p. 164.

5. Cunningham, p. 167.

reconciliation with God. The playwright/translator goes on to demonstrate how far every man's existence is lent to him by God; the life and goods which he deems to confer identity upon an individual are shown to be of no value in the divine order. Everyman finds this out as he tests each of his boon companions in turn.

It is interesting to note how proverbs, tenets of worldly wisdom, are put to the test. First, Fellowship, his friend "in spote and playe" (201), reveals how "a good frende at nede" (229) cannot in fact keep his promise, ironically fulfilling his own words in the proverb, "for he that wyll saye, and nothyng do, / Is not worthy with good company to go" (237-38); in fact, he brings Everyman to the realisation that the reverse is true, as is proved by the inverted form of the saying: "in prosperyte men frendes may fynde, / Which in aduersyte be full vnkynde" (309-10). Everyman still continues his journey, knocking at the door of earthly companions instead of directing his steps towards heaven. Kinship's ties, he feels, lie deeper and will not snap, "for kynde wyll crepe where it may not go" (316). Once again, Everyman is brought to the brink of despair, as he comes to the doleful realisation, "Lo, fayre wordes maketh fooles fayne; / They promyse, and nothyng wyll do, certayne" (379-80). The question that he finally asks himself is, "What frende were best me of to prouyde?" (385). At this stage, however, he does not turn to God, but again to the riches that he has loved all his life. He hopes to find consolation in Goods. We witness the further stripping of fleshly self, and a kind of flaying process is in progress. Another proverb is put to the test, as Everyman wrongly thinks that his book of reckoning can be cleared with the help of money: "'money maketh all ryght that is wronge'" (413). Everyman is made to realise that his excess of love for earthly riches has damned him. His uncharitable ways have brought his soul to its present state of ruin, to this really "grete sorowe and care" (434), as Goods is prompt to tell him. He also learns that the exterior trappings that he has hoarded up cannot be taken with him, because like his life, they are "lente" (440). Goods admits to him that his very *raison d'être* is to destroy the soul of man—"mannes soule to kyll" (442)—and hardly to comfort or save anyone. Goods appears like the Vice-character of the more conventional moral play, a prototype of the Faustian Mephistopheles whose role is made explicit in the lines that Everyman pronounces in soliloquy at the turning point of the play: "For my Goodes sharply dyd me tell / That he bryngeth many in to hell" (474-75).

As Everyman learns of how little value are the things of this world, he turns to Good Deeds, the mediator between the temporal and the spiritual. Having recognized that life is not all that matters, Everyman moves out of the category of



those “Lyuynge without drede” (24), who had provoked God’s anger. Earlier God bemoaned that few people asked “hertly” (59) for the mercy that he readily granted; from this point on in the play, an ascending journey is charted, as Everyman learns to plead for mercy “hertly”, and the moral drama’s basic pattern of sin, contrition and forgiveness is worked through.

Everyman’s recognition of the perilous state of his soul is the pivot on which the play begins to turn towards a comic resolution and saving grace. This occurs when he is able to say, “Than of my selfe I was ashamed, / And so I am worthy to be blamed” (476-77). Becoming aware of his need for spiritual aid, his soul turns toward God. In true medieval fashion, God is ready to intervene. Divine intervention first initiated the movement from attrition to contrition, when God, the alpha and omega, source of all life, paradoxically sent Death to instil new life into Everyman. Despite man’s degenerate state, God’s “ryghtwysnes” and “sharpe rod” (28) remain instruments of correction and instruction, as well as of punishment.

The construction of a new identity for Everyman is dramatised by heavy borrowing from the Roman Catholic liturgy. After Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods refuse to go with him, and Good Deeds, too weak, refers him to Knowledge, we realize how the rising structure of the play accords with the orthodox Augustinian doctrine of penance, which specifies that salvation cannot be obtained by Good Deeds alone. The fact that Everyman cannot read anything in his book of reckoning is due to his despair, as Good Deeds points out: “There is a blynde rekenynge in tyme of dystres” (508). Good Deeds is weighed down by Everyman’s sins (“sore bounde” [487] by the “heuynes” [505] of his “workes and dedes” [503]) but is nonetheless willing to help in giving guidelines on how to receive the sacraments. For his own and Adam’s sin, Everyman must come to a “general” (20) and “dredfull rekenynge” (521). If, at the beginning of life, Everyman was cleansed of sin by baptism, when he turns to Good Deeds, we learn that his “rekenynge” is “blynde” (508).<sup>6</sup> If he dies in this state, Death’s “darte” will “blynde” his “syght” entirely, causing him to dwell in hell, separated from his Creator (76-79).

Good Deeds sends Everyman to Knowledge, who then recommends that he go to the “hous of saluacyon” (540), the Church, to find Priesthood, whom, by the sacrament of ordination, Christ “setteth... in his stede amonge vs to be” (748). For, as is held by the Roman Catholic church, a priest “handeleth his Maker bytwene his handes” (739) and

6. On the “[m]etaphors of uncleanness and blindness”, cf. Cunningham, p. 166.

. . . of the blessyd sacramentes pure and benygne  
 He bereth the keyes, and therof hath the cure  
 For mannes redempcyon—it is euer sure—  
 Whiche God for our soules medycyne  
 Gaue vs out of his herte with grete pyne.  
 Here in this transytory lyfe, for the and me,  
 The blessyd sacramentes s vii. there be:  
 Baptym, confyrmacyon, with preesthood 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 deuynyte. (716-27)

The author makes it clear that the sacraments are a continuing remedy (“soules medycyne”) with which the priest, compared to a surgeon, is able to cure “synne deedly” (744). The priesthood is eulogized and defended by the character Five Wits. The necessity to reinforce Roman Catholic doctrine seems to have been felt in the period because of Lollard hostility to the sacramental system, especially in that region deemed to be a cradle of drama, East Anglia, where historians have documented the appearance of several baptismal fonts depicting the seven sacraments.<sup>7</sup>

Everyman is told by Knowledge that the necessary grace comes from the sacrament of penance, which he approaches by way of Confession and the garment of contrition. The different rites of the sacrament of penance—contrition, confession, absolution, satisfaction—are all woven into the play. When Everyman is led to confession by Knowledge, he is told: “Aske God mercy, and he wyll graunt truely. / Whan with the scourge of penaunce man doth hym bynde, / The oyle of forgyueness than shall he fynde” (570-72). For the medieval Christian, repentance was crucial to the operation of grace; without it no one may see God. Everyman implores God’s mercy and protection from Death, his enemy, and asks the intercession of Mary, that he may “Of your Sones glory... be partynere” (603) by means of His passion. After this, he scourges himself, and as a sign of the genuine repentance of Everyman, Good Deeds suddenly recovers (632) and promises to accompany him on the rest of his journey (633).

The next stage involves putting on the garment of contrition, which symbolizes sorrow for sin, hence his increased detachment from the things of this world. However, to speak of Everyman’s change of heart—for it is literally in these terms that the play presents his experience—is to be unduly negative, and to

7. See Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *Seeable Signs: The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments, 1350-1544* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1994), pp. 92-94.

neglect the text's presentation of the effect of penance as a virtual conversion, that is, the constitution of a new and positive identity. This must begin with contrition, a term which Thomas Aquinas applied in full cognizance of its figurative sense: "the breaking of something which is hardened".<sup>8</sup> Alexander of Hales conceived of contrition as involving the annihilation of the self, followed by God's annihilation of his or her guilt in the remission of sin. For Saint Bonaventure, contrition was a condition of conversion and the possibility of a "new life". The rhetoric of "contrite hearts", of the need to be "heartily" sorry for one's sin, survived through the Reformation into the *Book of Common Prayer*, and on good authority. For behind it lay the biblical rhetoric of conversion—Saint Paul, of course, with his image of the new man, but also the Old Testament, notably Psalm 51:17 ("A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise") and Ezekiel 11:19: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh".

Everyman himself figures his penance in essentially the same terms when he thanks Knowledge for providing him with a scourge, saying, "This hath reioysed and lyghted my herte, / Though the knottes be paynful and harde, within" (575-76). And in this light we may give full measure to the joyous effusions he utters. These are not mere formulas but affirmations of a new identity, sealed next by the key sacrament of the Eucharist. The fact that the character is seconds away from his stage-death should not obscure, though it must render dramatically ironic, the sense of new life achieved by this obtaining of a heart of flesh—the same flesh that, nevertheless, is grass. And behind this idea, in turn, is that of the recovery of Everyman's identity as *imago dei*—a God whose visible sorrow in his opening monologue foregrounded the failure of his erring creature to ask mercy "hertly".

8. My discussion here draws on the article "Contrition" in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, gen. ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 157-58.





Sarah CARPENTER, « Dramatising Death in *Everyman* »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-12,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsable de la publication

Philippe VENDRIX

### Responsables scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN & André LASCOMBES

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *Dramatising Death in Everyman*

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The title of this paper might seem excessively literal. Of course *Everyman* dramatises death, since the coming of death is what the play famously and centrally concerns. But the aim of this paper is to explore both those terms a little more fully. What is “death”, or rather what is the conception of death, that the play presents? And how does it “dramatise” that – how does it embody the idea of death in performance? In order to explore this, I aim to look a little beyond the play itself. *Everyman* does not stand alone: it is part of a rich and wide tradition of representing or exploring death in the late middle ages – through literature, through visual images, and through drama. As one part of that tradition, the play is both very conventional, drawing on writing and images that have been widely established; but also to some extent independent and unusual, playing off and sometimes almost playing against the dominant traditions of representation.

So what does the action of the play present? In one way it is very simple: we have an allegorical enactment of the death of “Everyman”, a representative and ordinary late-medieval Christian. In constructing this dramatic action, *Everyman* is drawing on, but imaginatively re-embodiment, one strand of the



popular writings about death of the later fifteenth century. The *Ars Moriendi*, the “art of dying”, or as it is called in English the book of “the art and craft of dying” or “the crafte for to deye for the helthe of mannes soule”, was a hugely popular text throughout Europe in the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> [Fig. 1] It was a book of advice for those on their deathbeds, or contemplating their deathbeds, or helping others who were dying, explaining to them or reminding them how to prepare for death and judgement in order to avoid damnation. The *Ars Moriendi* focuses primarily on the last days of the dying Christian. It offers encouragement and warning, ways for the sick person to understand death, prayers and meditations to prepare the soul. Parts of its advice on how to prepare for death come very close to the issues raised in *Everyman*. So, for example, William Caxton’s 1490 English version explains that the

temptacyon that most troubleth the seculers and worldly men, is the overgrete ocupacyon of outwarde thinges and temporall. as towarde his wyf his children & his frendes carnall / towarde his rychesses or towarde other thynges / which he hath most loved in his lyf.<sup>2</sup>

*Everyman* clearly closely follows this sequence in the first part of the play, dramatising the protagonist’s encounters with Kindred, Fellowship and Goods, and the movement of the action to turn away from such worldly concerns. The *Ars Moriendi* goes on to urge the dying man to “set symply and all from hym alle outwarde thynges & temporell”. It explains that by turning from temporal concerns to God the dying Christian:

satsfyeth for alle his venyalle synnes / And that more is he bryngeth some thyng for to satsfye for the dedely synnes / But it happeth not ofte that ony be founde be he seculer or regular / that hopeth not but to escape fro deth.

Here, too, we find echoes of *Everyman*, who at first tries frantically to escape from death, yet learns to clear his book of reckoning by making satisfaction for his sins.

So *Everyman* is in many ways working very closely with the tradition of the *Ars Moriendi*. Yet by re-casting the advice of the prose treatise into allegorical and dramatic action, the play both expands and enriches its exhortation. In one way, the

1. See John Raymond Shinner, ed., *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 525-36, and Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

2. William Caxton, *Here begynneth a lityll treatise shorte and abredged spekyng of the arte [and] crafte to knowe well to dye* ([Westminster]: W. Caxton, 1490), sig. A4<sup>v</sup>. Accessible on EEBO, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>.

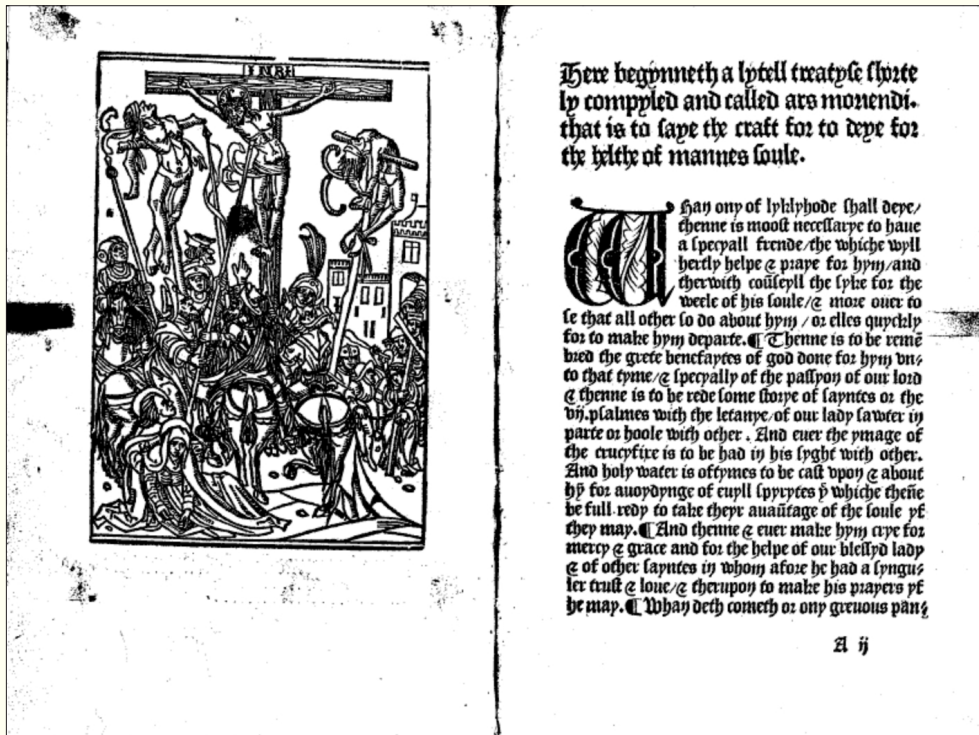


Fig. 1 – *Ars Moriendi* printed by Wynkyn de Worde, 1497.

play makes the encounters of the dying man more material, and so more vivid and immediate than the *Ars Moriendi*, by personification. Everyman does not just think about his family, friends or possessions; he meets, discusses and argues with them. They acquire a life of their own alongside his. But this use of allegory also works to open up and challenge the straightforward and literal deathbed scene of the *Ars Moriendi*. The use of allegory raises questions about the scope of the action, of what is represented.

We might look at this through the handling of time in the play. The stage action unfolds comfortably in the linear “real time” of the duration of the performance: we have a steady progression from the message brought by Death, through Everyman’s preparations, to the moment when his body and soul part. But what is the “imagined time” of the play? Is the action thought of as happening within the intimate moment of death, the final minutes of Everyman’s life and consciousness, expanded into a play by the possibilities of theatrical representation? Or does it, more naturalistically and more closely to the *Ars Moriendi*, cover a few days or weeks of illness and decline?

Or might we, in another way, see the play expanding even further as a refracted dramatisation of the whole of Everyman's life? The coming of Death in the play forces him, and us, to look back over his life, to reassess, re-evaluate what he has been, who he has become. Death provokes a crisis of self-awareness, a rethinking of his own self. In this way the play presents death in part as a means of exploring life. As Everyman faces his own mortality, that causes him, and us, to re-think what life is and how it is to be lived. Everyman finds his values questioned: his faith in his friends, family and possessions is challenged. His actions are re-assessed, as he learns how to release and strengthen his Good Deeds; and his faith is reinforced, through understanding the processes of confession and penitence. So (and this is of course a truism) the play is not, or not only a play about death; it becomes a play about the whole of life and how it should be lived. It takes up, but then moves beyond the spiritual advice of the *Ars Moriendi*. It takes the audience beyond the moments of dying, to reflect on how to live.

So *Everyman* draws on but also transforms the teaching of the *Ars Moriendi*. But written literature was not the only means of meditating on death in the fifteenth century—not even the most influential. The significances of death were also powerfully explored in the many traditions of visual representation. The *Ars Moriendi* itself acknowledged the importance of these images. Many versions of the treatise were illustrated, and at least one points out that

in order for this material to be fruitful to everyone, and so that no-one will be barred from contemplating it but may learn from it how to die well, it is offered to them both in writing, to serve the literate, and in pictures, to serve the literate and illiterate alike.<sup>3</sup>

Pictures are also a way to teach about death. One image commonly illustrating the *Ars Moriendi* was a picture of a deathbed.<sup>4</sup> [Fig. 2] In this the dying man is helped to fix his eyes on the crucifix, while devils try to distract him. His soul, represented as a small naked child, is taken up to God. This pictorial story of death was famously developed by Hieronymus Bosch in the picture now commonly called *Death and the Miser*. [Fig. 3] Bosch's more elaborate visual representation echoes the dramatic action of *Everyman* at least as closely as the prose of the *Ars Moriendi*, although in very different ways: In his painting the worldly man lies in bed gazing at Death who comes through

3. Shinnars, ed., p. 526.

4. For example, *Here begynneth a lytell treatyse called ars moryendi* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1506). Accessible on EEBO.



Fig. 2 – Deathbed, from *Ars Moriendi* printed Wynkyn de Worde, 1506.

the door with his lance. A representation of the worldly man's younger self loads riches into a chest, while devils try to distract him to think on the gold and treasure. An angel meanwhile urges the dying man to ignore these worldly things and turn his eyes to the crucified Christ, appearing at the window above. Apart from the devils, who were traditionally seen as always attending a deathbed but rather unusually do not appear in *Everyman*, this picture sums up a good deal of the overall action of the play in one vivid image. It is both a literal image of a deathbed, yet also a sharply personified summary of a process—of worldly preoccupation, the approach of death, recognition of mortality, and the need to turn to God.

It should not be surprising if *Everyman*, as a drama, draws at least as heavily on the contemporary visual traditions of representing death as on literary works like the *Ars Moriendi*. When we explore this connection further, we can see how the play both interacts with and yet plays partly against contemporary traditions. In the Bosch picture we see not just a dying man, but Death itself, personified as a “character”. So



Fig. 3 – Hieronymus Bosch, *Death and the Miser*, c. 1490-1500.



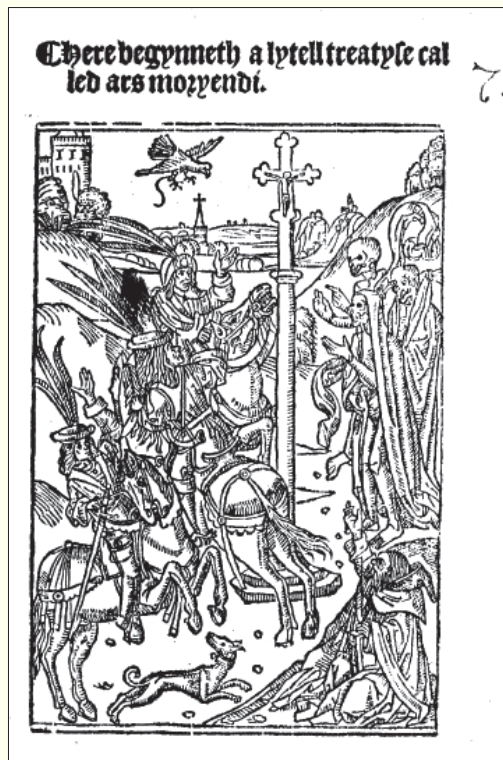


Fig. 4 – The Three Living and the Three Dead from *Ars Moriendi*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde, 1506.

“Danse Macabre”.<sup>6</sup> The Dance of Death often involved a mix of image and text. It presented skeletal figures inviting members of each social class to join them in a dance. [Fig. 5] Most famous was the Dance of Death in the cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris, but the motif was very widely represented. The levelling effect of death – the fact that it strikes all without respect for class, gender or age—is perhaps analogous to the name and characterisation of the protagonist of the play as “every man”. In England, a version by John Lydgate, said to be translated from the Holy Innocents, was made for St Paul’s Cathedral. The encounter between Death and the Burgess in Lydgate’s version shows how closely *Everyman* relates to the dance of

the moment of death, or, as it may be, the moment of awareness of death, is represented as a personal encounter between individuals. Most of the visual traditions of death imagery at the time do focus on this moment of encounter, where the human subject “meets” Death. So, for example, the *Ars Moriendi* often has as its frontispiece an illustration of the story of the Three Living and Three Dead. [Fig. 4] The picture represents three wealthy young men meeting with three skeletons or corpses. The pictures themselves rarely include words, but traditionally the corpses address the young men with this challenge: “As you are now, so once were we; as we are now, so you shall be.”<sup>5</sup>

The most famous of these visual traditions of meeting Death is probably the “Dance of Death” or

5. See, for example, the De Lisle Psalter in the British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=472>.

6. James Midgley Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow: Jackson, 1950).



Fig. 5 – The *Danse Macabre*, from La Chaise Dieu, Haute Loire.  
Personnage effacé/le bénédictin/le jeune bourgeois/la chanoinesse/  
le marchand/la moniale bénédictine/le sergent à verge/le chartreux.

death.<sup>7</sup> [Fig. 6] The figure of Death summons the Burgess, pointing out how foolish he is to gather all his wealth only for it to pass to others:

For yowre tresoure / plente & largesse  
From other hit came / & shal vn-to straungeres  
He is a fole / that yn soche besynesse  
Wote not for hom / he stuffeth his garneres.



Fig. 6 – Woodcut from the *Danse Macabre* of Guyot Marchand, Paris 1485 (Right, Death and the Burgess).

7. Lydgate, *Dance of Death*, <http://www.dodedans.com/Epaul.htm>.

[For your treasure, plenty and largesse  
It came from others, and it will pass to strangers.  
He is a fool that in such business  
Does not know for whom he is filling his storehouse.]

The Burgess laments his loss, realising how wealth is only lent, not given:

There-fore / wise is no creature  
That sette [h]is herte / on gode that mote disseuere  
The worlde hit lente / & he wille hit recure  
And w[h]o moste hathe / [l]othest dieth euer.  
  
[Therefore no creature is wise  
That sets his heart on goods that he must part from.  
The world lent it, and the world will take it back,  
And he who has most is always most loath to die.]

This is very close to Death's admonition to Everyman. Everyman is foolish to trust in his wealth, says Death,

For as soone as thou arte go,  
Another a whyle shall have it, and than go ther-fro,  
Even as thou hast done.  
Everyman, thou arte made! (165-68)<sup>8</sup>

The play is not directly dramatising the dance, but is clearly very familiar with its ideas and images.

Most of the visual traditions of representing death present the encounter of Death and the human individual as a moment of shock and fear. These are horrifying encounters, when individuals are suddenly faced by the fact of their own mortality. They respond with fear, reluctance and distress. The images seem designed to shock the viewer out of complacency, along with the unfortunate recipient of Death's message. What especially reinforces this sense of shock and horror is the way that Death is visually represented. It is noticeable that in all these images death is figured as either a skeleton, or a near-skeletal corpse. His skull-like face and gaunt or decaying body are terrifying in themselves, and also a startling reminder of the physicality of mortality. Death also often carries a spear, reinforcing the sense of violence, suddenness and fear surrounding the encounter. The poster for this conference sums up exactly this mood of sudden, violent, horror.

Even in static pictures, this encounter already seems 'dramatic': an intense moment of frightening conflict between two individuals. It is not surprising that the coming of death was presented not only in pictures but on the stage – in processions,

8. References, given within the text, are to *Everyman*, ed. A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

shows and plays of various kinds.<sup>9</sup> When it came to these dramatic performances, that dominant medieval icon of Death as the skeleton, often shrouded, perhaps carrying a spear, was clearly carried over into theatrical costume. In various sixteenth-century inventories of players' clothes in England we find "Deathes cote", "deathes face", and "dethes cootes / hoose dobled & hedd all in one".<sup>10</sup> Some stage costumes which reflect this tradition actually survive. A particularly famous version of the *Dance of Death*, painted at Bern in the early sixteenth century, was dramatised in 1637, and the canvas costumes and masks are displayed in the City Museum.<sup>11</sup> The costumes have skull-masks and body-suits of canvas with feet and hoods attached, painted to appear like skeletons or decaying corpses.

The appearance of Death on stage in this particular costume seems designed to reinforce the sense of terror and horror that the pictures suggest. An early Spanish spectacle, played at the coronation of Ferdinand of Aragon in 1414, included a spectacle of Death as

[a] man dressed in tight-fitting yellow leather so that his body and head looked like those of a skeleton, quite cadaverous, without substance, without eyes – he looked so ugly and terrifying – and with his hands he gestured in every direction, beckoning now to some, now to others to come.<sup>12</sup>

Closer in time to *Everyman* we hear about a carnival show of *The Triumph of Death* in Florence in 1511, which involved

masks painted behind and before like skulls, including the throat, most realistic but a horrid and terrifying sight.<sup>13</sup>

When Death appears as a character in medieval English drama, he continues both the horrifying appearance and the aggressive attitude to the dying man he comes

9. Phoebe S. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987); Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 247–50.

10. *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, ed. Alan H. Nelson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 146–47, 161, 197, 220.

11. Bern, Historisches Museum, no 743. Reproduced in Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 249.

12. Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1983), pp. 138–39, quoting N. D. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage: From Medieval Times until the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 119.

13. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, ed. and trans. A. B. Hinds (London: Dent, 1927), p. 178.



to summon. In one mystery cycle where Death appears to summon Herod, he is clearly dressed as a corpse: “I be nakyd and pore of array / and wurmys knawe me al a-bowte”. He threatens: “Wher I smyte ther is no grace, / For aftere my strook man hath no space / To make amendes for his trespase”.<sup>14</sup> In *The Castle of Perseverance* (c.1425), Death threatens the audience as well as the hero of the play, Humanum Genus, that is, Mankind: “Ye schul me drede everychone; / Whanne I come ye schul grone”.<sup>15</sup> Like Death in the Herod play, he strikes Mankind without warning; yet Mankind instantly recognises his horrifying assailant. The terrifying skeleton is a familiar figure, who strikes fear where he comes, and allows no escape and no delay. These dramatic corpse-like Deaths offer the protagonists and the audience a vision of their future selves, worm-eaten and decayed. They provoke, we assume, a pleasurable theatrical terror; but they also ideally shock the spectators into a reflection on their own mortality.

So the author of *Everyman* is creating his play in the context of a very well-established tradition. Death, in performance, is hideous and frightening, sudden, violent and inescapable. Audiences, and later readers, of the play knew what Death looked like as a character, and how he behaved. But it looks as though the playwright did not passively adopt this tradition, but played off it in quite powerful and subtle ways. The text of *Everyman* gives no specific guidance about Death’s appearance, although there is an allusion to his spear or “dart” (76). But the woodcut which prefaces the printed versions of the play shows a very traditional skeletal Death, suggesting that this was certainly how he was envisaged by readers, and almost certainly also by audiences of the play. [Fig. 7]

If this is the case, then the animated corpse of Death is used in *Everyman* with a kind of chilling subtlety which matches the sensitivity of the play as a whole. *Everyman* does not greet Death with the horrified recognition of, for example, Mankind in *The Castle of Perseverance*, which we might expect as the obvious response to the familiar walking skeleton. Initially he does not seem to recognise Death at all, or even to notice his inhuman appearance: when Death challenges him, he says simply, “I knowe the not. What messenger arte thou?” (114). *Everyman*’s apparent unconsciousness of whom he is talking to at this point seems likely to intensify the

<sup>14</sup> *The N-Town Play*, ed Stephen Spector, *Early English Text Society* SS 11-12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Play 20, ll. 190, 272

<sup>15</sup> *The Castle of Perseverance, The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS 262 (London: Oxford University for the EETS, 1969), l. 2787.

response of the audience, who are all too aware of the horrifying identity of Death as they watch Everyman's innocent uncertainty. There are other differences too, especially those of tone. Unlike other dramatic figures of Death this one is, verbally, surprisingly non-aggressive in his encounter with Everyman. Although he does point out to Everyman the dangers of his position and the impossibility of escape, his language suggests a gentle, almost compassionate tone, which contrasts with the grim inexorability of his message and appearance:

<i>Everyman.</i>	Dethe, yf I sholde this pylgrymage take...
	Sholde I not come agayne shortly?
<i>Dethe.</i>	No, Eueryman, and thou be ones there,
	Thou mayst neuer more come here,
	Trust me veryly ...
	What, wenest thou thy lyfe is gyuen the,
	And thy worldely gooddes also?
<i>Everyman.</i>	I had wende so veryle.
<i>Dethe.</i>	Nay, nay, it was but lende the. (146-52, 161-64)

This spectacle of the confused and human Everyman being addressed with such stern but oddly gentle intimacy by a horrifically costumed Death's head adds an extra poignancy to an already powerful encounter. It is as if Death's terrifying appearance gains in power from Everyman's oblivion, as the audience read the sign he cannot see.

So altogether, in Everyman's initial encounter with Death the playwright is drawing on the traditions, and yet also adapting their tone and the scope of their reference. We might ask why the playwright makes these adaptations. It may be partly just to exploit the power of the stage. The tension of the encounter, in which the audience know and see more than the protagonist, is very theatrically compelling. But it also



Fig. 7 – *Everyman*, printed by John Skot, 1528.

seems to help the play to open up. It moves beyond the intense but limited moment of encounter with mortality (which we find in the pictures), and even beyond the advice to those on their deathbeds (which we find in the written traditions). Because, unusually, in this play the coming of Death is not the end of the story. Even though Death, in a traditional manner, refuses Everyman's pleas for more time to prepare, and tells him there can be no respite or delay, he in fact then withdraws, simply telling Everyman to 'make the redy shortely' (181). The play then moves on to explore the more existential questions Everyman faces now that he has been confronted with the fact of his own mortality. What does he invest value in (family, friends or possessions)? What has he done himself, which might define his spiritual identity, and how can he liberate his good actions? Can he take responsibility for his own sins through the sacrament of penance? Then, in the second half of the play, he learns first to draw on his own qualities of mind and of body (Beauty, Strength, Discretion); but then to let these go, too, and find that his final identity lies even beyond them. Death himself does not return, even when Everyman's soul finally leaves his body.

So this play is, as it says, about the summons of Death. But in the end it is not so much about the summons itself as about how that summons might be understood. It is about Everyman's experience once he has recognised the summons, and how that might help him to shape his own life, and us to shape our own. The dramatic figure of Death is a very important part of that process, and provides a highly intense theatrical encounter. But in many ways it is the pretext for the play, not its central or only subject.

Jean-Paul DÉBAX, « *An Assessment of Cawley's Introduction to his 1961 Edition of Everyman* »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p. 1-10,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsable de la publication

Philippe VENDRIX

### Responsables scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN & André LASCOMBES

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *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*—*Elckerlijck*—was in all probability the original of the English.”<sup>1</sup> 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 *Elckerlijck*) that the “only arguments which have not been turned inside out are ones based on factual”—meaning textual—“evidence”<sup>2</sup> and so concludes on the priority of *Elckerlijck*. 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 *Elckerlijck-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 *Elckerlijck* 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 *Elckerlijck* (“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 *Elckerlijck-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 *Elckerlijck-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.

*Elckerlijck-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 beyng;  
For of the blessyd sacramentes pure and benygne  
He bereth the keyes, and therof hath the cure  
For mannes redempcyon . . . (713-18)

For preesthode exceedeth all other thyng:  
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)

*Elckerlijck-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:  
 Bapty[m], 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, *Elckerlijck-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”.<sup>3</sup> And he uses the parable of the members of the body that rebelled against the belly. The “pretty tale” told in *Elckerlijck-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 *Elckerlijck-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 freind 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)<sup>4</sup>

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. I, 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 *Elckerlijck-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 thyng 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 Knowledge 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 systre 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.<sup>6</sup> 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*.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup>

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 *Elckerlijck-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*.<sup>9</sup> 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”.<sup>10</sup> 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).<sup>11</sup> 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 claims 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".







Francis GUINLE, « The Rituals of Passage in *Everyman* »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-8,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsable de la publication

Philippe VENDRIX

### Responsables scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN & André LASCOMBES

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *The Rituals of Passage in Everyman*

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In his study of the English Morality Play, Robert Potter expresses the idea that “the traditional morality play is not a battle between virtues and vices, but a didactic ritual drama about the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>1</sup> However, the conflict present in the plays which he calls “morality plays” often takes the form of a struggle, if not a battle, which is the dramatic representation of a tension between the sinful nature of man and his fate—which, according to Catholic doctrine, is to be saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in *Everyman*, God expresses the idea that all shall be saved:

I hoped well that every man  
In my glory sholde make his mansyon,  
And thereto I had them all electe. (52-54)<sup>2</sup>

Salvation, however, can only occur given certain conditions linked to what Robert Potter describes as the ritual of Penance. He says:

The morality play is acted out on the stage of a world where man is born to rule, bound to sin, and destined to be saved. To its audiences, and to their consciences, the plays reveal that the fall out of

1. Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 57.

2. All references to the play are from A. C. Cawley's edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

innocence into experience is unavoidable, theologically necessary, and solvable, through the forgiveness of sins.<sup>3</sup>

That it is man's destiny to be saved is, indeed, evinced by the conclusions of the plays Robert Potter categorizes as "moralities". Because this term has been questioned by critics, I will, from now on refer to these plays as "moral plays". However, these plays differ considerably in their approach and representation of a common subject, as well as in their structure. *Everyman*, which was once considered as the most representative moral play, is now often viewed as an exception when compared to such plays as *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, or *Youth*, or other moral interludes. Indeed, it is said that it lacks the dramatic tension usually provided by the active agents of temptation, agents representative of the World, the Flesh and the Devil, as characters engaged in plots and subterfuge to bring about the fall of the protagonist, often trying to reverse a situation established by the agents of salvation, or, indeed engaging in fights against them, as when, for instance, Riot, Pride and Lechery, with the help of Youth, put Charity in fetters.

This, however, does not mean that dramatic tension is absent from *Everyman*, and anyone who has seen the play may witness to the fact that it does exist, but it simply lies elsewhere, in an action which presents a double ritual.

Although the notion of "pilgrimage" is evoked several times in the play through the repetition of the word "pylgrymage" (eight times)<sup>4</sup> or "pylgrym" (once)<sup>5</sup> the play does not dramatize what is usually understood as the "Pilgrimage of Life", but rather the "Pilgrimage of Death". In that sense, of course, the play is linked to the various treatises usually called *Ars Moriendi*, which seem to have flowered during the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. As Helen Thomas rightly suggests:

This advice on how to learn to die was based not on a fear of death itself, but on the Church's fear of man's "undisposed dethe" or sudden death while not in a state of grace.<sup>6</sup>

However, we cannot rightly say that *Everyman* simply dramatizes such treatises. Indeed, if we follow Phoebe Spinrad in her analysis of the stages of the *Ars Moriendi*, we can see the analogy with the play; the "temptation" stage, in particular, is very

3. Potter, p. 57.

4. Ll. 68-146-331-550-565-673-784-818.

5. L. 629.

6. Helen Thomas, "Some Analogues of *Everyman*", *Mississippi Quarterly* 16.2 (1963): 97. For an analysis of the six stages of the *Ars Moriendi*, see Phoebe Spinrad, "The Last Temptation of *Everyman*", *Philological Quarterly* 64.2 (1985): 185-94.

subtly traced throughout *Everyman's* journey. Yet, because this stage represents the various temptations awaiting man at Death's door, the dying man being assailed by the devil's last attempts at damning his soul, we might expect a struggle, in the presence of agents of sin, as, indeed, we find in other moral plays. Yet this is not the case, and even if we can see the relationship between Goods and the World, Beauty and the Flesh, or Five Wits and the Devil, yet they are not shown as tempters, but simply as elements that *Everyman* must leave behind and learn to do without, since none of them can help him reach eternal bliss. The insistence, then, is less on temptation than on instruction. Since the play follows a fairly strict Catholic doctrine, the possibility of salvation is present from the start, and the comic structure of the play ensures that this "Pilgrimage of Death" will eventually be turned into a "Pilgrimage to Eternal Life". This is achieved by the double ritual which closely follows the two-stage structure of the play.

Naturally, the sacramental rites of Confession, Penance and Extreme Unction, which figure in the second part of the play, form the Catholic expression of the last rite of passage embodied by Death and the grave. However, in order to reach this rite and effect the passage with success, *Everyman* has to undergo a primary ritual during which he suffers a mock death, an experience which eventually leads him to knowledge. Although *Everyman* is "every man", for the spectator, he is a character, an individual embodiment on stage. In the text, the change from "they", in God's speech, to "he" in Death's speech, as *Everyman* approaches, causes the spectator to see an individual being subjected to an ordeal. Death is presented as a messenger, but he soon becomes a guide, instructing *Everyman*, answering his questions, initiating *Everyman's* journey. His role is also to isolate *Everyman*, to separate him from the community of the living. To *Everyman's* question, "Shall I haue no company fro this vale terrestriall / Of myne acqueyntaunce, that way me to lede?" (155-56), Death's answer leaves little doubt as to the issue:

Ye, yf ony be so hardy  
That wolde go with the and bere the company. (157-58)

Once Death has departed, *Everyman* is left alone on stage and bemoans his lonely state. At that stage, he is aware of his isolation, yet he has to experience it more deeply in order to understand what it really means. Indeed, in his monologue, he not only rejects God, giving way to a form of despair, but also turns to worldly companions to help him in his need:

Alas, I may well wepe with syghes depe!  
Now haue I no maner of company  
To helpe me in my iourney, and me to kepe;  
And also my wrytynge is full vnredy.

How shall I do now for to exscuse me?  
I wolde to God I had neuer be gete! (184-89)

Having thus blasphemed against God and His creation, he proceeds to break the second and third Commandments when he takes the name of the Lord in vain (“Lorde, helpe, that all wrought” [192]), when, in fact, he turns to Fellowship for help, then to Kindred and Cousin, and finally to Goods. Albeit true to their nature, these false friends abandon Everyman, who then finds himself alone for the second time. The notion of “mock death”, always present in rites of passage, is represented first by Everyman’s encounter with Death. Although Death refuses to give him any respite, he does not strike him dead immediately, but simply states that he may strike at any moment:

Naye, thereto I wyll not consent,  
Nor no man wyll I respyte;  
But to the herte sodeynly I shall smyte  
Without ony advysement.  
And now out of thy syght I wyll me hy.  
Se thou make the redy shortely,  
For thou mayst saye this is the daye  
That no man lyvyng may scape a-way. (179-83)

The very same notion of “mock death” is also implied in the way Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin and then Goods abandon Everyman, while evoking his “former” life. Take, for instance, Fellowship’s proposal:

And yet, yf thou wylte ete & drynke & make good chere,  
Or haunt to women the lusty company,  
I wolde not forsake you whyle the daye is clere,  
Trust me veryly. (272-75)

The idea of “life” being left behind is expressed in Everyman’s question and Kindred’s answer:

*Everyman.* Now shewe me the very effecte of your mynde:  
Wyll you go with me, or abyde be-hynde?  
*Kynrede.* Abyde behynde? / Ye, that wyll I, and I maye!  
Therfore farewell tyll another daye. (365-68)

At this stage, one might think that Everyman is now ready for the actual passage, having been separated from the community of the living, and having undergone reduction to a form of *tabula rasa*. However, his second monologue starts as a repetition of the first (compare, for instance, “To whome were I best my complaynt to make?” [196] and “O, to whome shall I make my mone / For to go with me in that heuy iournaye?” [463-64]), and then proceeds by taking stock of the situation. Still, Everyman seems to have learnt something, since his moan is not turned against God but against himself, and since what he is looking for now is a new guide:

Than of my selfe I was ashamed,  
 And so I am worthy to be blamed;  
 Thus may I well my selfe hate.  
 Of whome shall I now counseyll take? (476-79)

It has, of course, been noticed by the critics that this monologue marks a turning point in the play. What Everyman has left behind, so far, is presented as external elements of his “former life”. What he has to shed now is linked to his being. That he should turn to his “Good Deeds” depends on doctrine, but also on the fact that “Good Deeds” provides a connection between the external and internal movement. Good Deeds were exercised during his life, but come entirely from him; moreover, they affect his eternal life. In other words, they have an action and an effect on both sides of the passage. What follows next is a dramatization of two of the Last Rites: first Confession, then Penance. Everyman’s knowledge of his sins brings him to acknowledge and to repent them. In his speeches he now really turns to God, to the Redeemer, and to at least one intercessor: Mary (581-604). This suffices to restore his Good Deeds. Like any initiate, before he enters the heart of the mystery, he is deprived of his clothes and given a new garment (that of Contrition). At this point, more “companions” are introduced to him. However, they are presented as “counseylours” rather than mere companions. Without false promises, it is also made clear to him that they will eventually leave him. The limit is clearly put by Beauty:

<i>Strengthe.</i>	And I, Strength, wyll by you stande in distres, Though thou wolde in batayle fyght on the grounde.
<i>V. Wyttes.</i>	And though it were thugh the worlde rounde, We wyll not departe for swete or soure.
<i>Beaute.</i>	No more wyll I vnto dethes houre, What so ever thereof befall. (684-89)

The scenes between Everyman and his new companions represent a fairly close dramatization of the *Ars Moriendi*, bringing Everyman step by step to his grave, with “helpe and comferte” (676).

Much has been said about the next step, which is Everyman’s going off stage for the first time to receive the “holy sacrament and oyntement togyder” (709), that is, the Extreme Unction. This episode has been seen as a digression to bring in a criticism of bad priests and point to some need to reform the Church, a reform which, as Murdo William McRae puts it, should come from within.<sup>7</sup> We must bear in mind that the Church had been under this kind of criticism for some time and

7. Murdo William McRae, “Everyman’s Last Rites and the Digression on Priesthood”, *College Literature* 13 (1986): 307.



that the Reformation movement had already started when *Everyman* was written, and was well on its way when it was first published in England. McRae tries to explain *Everyman*'s absence from the stage for these Last Rites, and argues that the very tension between "V. Wyttes' lofty valuation of priests" and Knowledge's condemnation of "sinful priests" is the cause of his absence:

That is, it might be in keeping with the goal of the *devotio moderna* to show *Everyman*, every Christian man, to receive the last rites from a character who represents V. Wyttes' lofty evaluation of priests. But in this possible encounter, the play's universalizing allegory would then teach that every penitent Christian is always attended by an exemplary priest, a lesson which all that Knowledge says about sinful priests would deny. Were *Everyman*, on the other hand, to receive the last rites from a Presthode such as Knowledge describes him, then V. Wyttes' veneration of that office would seem incongruous. This second possibility would make the allegory defeatist, even cynical, for the play would then teach that all Christians seeking their final rites are always attended by priests who serve only their own mercenary desires, never the needs of the faithful.<sup>8</sup>

However, it seems that the text makes a distinction between "preestes", who might be good or bad, and "presthode" as instituted by God, and which implies the necessary presence of the Church to minister the sacraments. If, as I believe, this is the case, then McRae's argument does not really hold water. Confession is the sacrament which includes Penance and Reconciliation<sup>9</sup> and it is fully staged in *Everyman*. However, this is the sacrament which leads to the actual heart of the rite, that is to say the Eucharist, here followed by the Extreme Unction, since we are dealing with the passage from earthly life to eternal life. The first official document which lists the seven sacraments is the Profession of Faith of the Emperor Michael Paleologus for the second council of Lyon in 1274. This is what we can find about the Extreme Unction in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1524 In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of "passing over" to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." [140] The sacrament of Christ once dead and now risen, the Eucha-

8. McRae, pp. 307-8.

9. The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Confession (Penance and Reconciliation), Anointing of the sick (Extreme Unction), Holy Orders (Ordination), and Matrimony.

rist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father. [141] 1525 Thus, just as the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form a unity called “the sacraments of Christian initiation,” so too it can be said that Penance, the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as viaticum constitute at the end of Christian life “the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland” or the sacraments that complete the earthly pilgrimage.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of sacrament as “mystery” is at the heart of the Eucharist, and the Extreme Unction marks the last stage before the passage. In that sense, it seems that their stage representation would transgress the realm of fiction by bringing the actual ritual on stage. Such moments of mystery, it seems, would either take place off stage, or be represented as a metaphor.<sup>11</sup> This is the case, for instance in *Youth*, when the text dramatizes the mystery of transubstantiation at the moment of Youth’s conversion.<sup>12</sup> For what the stage, or acting area, represents is not the locus of mystery, but the locus of the actual passage, whereas the near off stage represents earthly life or eternal life, depending on the different parts of the play.

It is often said that the voice of Christ during the sacrifice is heard in Everyman’s last words. Indeed, according to Saint Luke, these are Christ’s last words: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”<sup>13</sup> Everyman speaks the same words twice in the play, once in English, and then in Latin:

In to thy handes, Lorde, my soule I commende (880)

*In manus tuas, of myghtes moost*

For ever, *Commendo spiritum meum.* (886–887)

It seems that the words “of myghtes moost”, interpolated by Everyman in the Latin text, come from the widely known, though apocryphal, Gospel of Nicodemus, which has the same phrase in different forms in the four manuscripts of the Middle

10. Catechism of the Catholic Church: <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/heal2.html#VIATICUM>.

11. The same applies to Matrimony. The actual rite was never shown on stage, and what is represented is the celebrations around the rites, such as a masque or a wedding feast.

12. See *Youth*, in *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), ll. 689–703. Voir Francis Guinle, “*Youth* : les limites de la parodie et de la satire”, in “*Divers toytes mengled*”. *Études sur la culture européenne au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance en hommage à André Lascombes* (Tours: Publications de l’Université François-Rabelais, 1996), pp. 125–36.

13. Luke 24–46. I quote from the Authorised Version (1611). This tradition is not found in the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark or John. It is, however, present in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

English version: “of mightes maste” (*Galba*); “of myghtes mast” (*Harley*); of myght mast” (*Sion*); “of myghtes most” (*Additional*).<sup>14</sup> Christ’s voice is thus heard in Everyman’s, and this may give us the opportunity to investigate the play in terms of voices, by which I mean musical voices.

Somehow, the question of voices has to do with the paradox of One and Multiple voices. The music of the Middle Ages, which eventually leads to that of the Renaissance, is an attempt at finding a resolution to this paradox: how can a polyphonic composition (multiple voices), sound like one piece (one voice), and not simply like a collection of voices? From the earlier polyphonic compositions, the conduit or organum to the motet, and then to the polyphonic compositions of the sixteenth century (sacred polyphonic music, freemen songs, madrigals, ayres, chansons polyphoniques, etc.), several techniques will be used. A few of these are illustrated in the treatment of the voices in *Everyman*.

At the beginning of the play, Everyman’s voice and Christ’s are united in what I suggest would be the Gregorian tenor (“teneur”): this is achieved through Christ’s sacrifice, as recalled in God’s speech. It is clear, however, that this Gregorian tenor has been replaced by a secular tenor sung by Everyman. Indeed, it had become usual in religious compositions to dispense with a Gregorian tenor and replace it by a secular composition. Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin and Goods are mere ornamental voices, which do not actually “follow” Everyman’s voice and no longer come into consonance with him. Instead, as with the purely ornamental voices, they come into false relation with the tenor. What has to be restored is the Gregorian tenor, accompanied by consonant voices: this is achieved after the ritual of Penance, when Everyman’s new companions duly accompany him to the grave. When, eventually, they leave him, Everyman’s voice becomes the true tenor, now joined again with Christ’s voice, as it were in unison. In turn, it becomes the tenor of a celestial choir when Everyman’s soul is received with “grete ioy and melody” (892).

14. For the texts and an account of these manuscripts, see *The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. William Henry Hulme, EETS Extra Series C (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1907), esp. pp. 64–65.

Peter HAPPE, « Is *Everyman* a Morality Play? An Exploration of Genre and Provenance »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-12,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

### Responsable de la publication

Philippe VENDRIX

### Responsables scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN & André LASCOMBES

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *Is Everyman a Morality Play?* *An Exploration of Genre and Provenance*

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Jean Michel's *Le Mystère de la Passion* was performed in 1486 down the Loire at Angers in 1486. It was largely derived from Arnoul Gréban's *Le Mystère de la Passion*, but the process of derivation involved a fascinating method by which two large one-day sections of Gréban's four-day play were expanded line by line by Michel, so that the old text is still embedded in the new and yet the new takes on a different identity. That process in itself is a sort of model for what I am going to consider about *Everyman*, as you will see. Moreover, Michel's play was printed at least thirty times in the next half century, for, as with *Everyman*, we are here right at the beginning of the process of printed drama. But there is yet another way in which I might reflect Michel's work. It begins with a Prologue Capital—of 888 lines. This takes the form of a sermon in four chapters, each one of which is devoted to one of the words in the phrase VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST. I originally thought that I would imitate Michel in my paper and divide the question IS *EVERYMAN* A MORALITY PLAY? into four parts (leaving out the indefinite article) and offer an exegesis upon each of the four words. But the plan proved too restricting, as I wanted to dodge about as I went along. However, I put

it to you that each of these words—*IS-EVERYMAN-MORALITY-PLAY*—needs careful attention.

*Everyman* is the most famous of all English medieval plays, and it has had a most extraordinary life and influence since the beginning of the twentieth century both as text and performance, as well as having some intriguing earlier manifestations in several countries since its original conception. There is no doubt that it is still alive today, though the reasons for its continuing interest are a matter for separate consideration. It is significant that it has become so famous that it is often taken as typical of morality plays, and that is a concept which I should like to question. Such an enquiry involves looking at several aspects of genre and provenance as well as some bibliographical features in what is a complex history and one we shall find is also frustratingly incomplete in some respects. The approach to genre also involves performance indicators in the text.

The play's typicality comes much into question when we look at the very small number of English plays which are its approximate contemporaries and which we are obliged to compare with it. It lacks many of the characteristics which have perhaps been over-generalized in that very small surviving sample. It contains no clear conflict between the forces of good and evil, and no battle between matched Vices and Virtues. Though temptation is occasionally mentioned as having taken place, it is not the main business of the action. Instead of a battle over the soul of one representative human being who is essentially a site of conflict, we find that the hero is a sentient being who is changed by what he learns, and who passes through a number of different states of concept and feeling. This view means that there is still a sense of right and wrong which is material to the main business of the play: a road to salvation. At least one of the changes is self-motivated by the protagonist, so that although to an extent *Everyman* is subject to inexorable external forces, including the summons of death, he is also at least partially a controller of his own fate. Along with the universality of this person who is *every man*, this centralizing of the self-awareness in a common humanity of the protagonist is a persistent and dominating feature.

The play has very little comic content, and that which it does have avoids the low, notably crude escapades found in *Mankind*, showing instead a restrained use of dramatic irony which directly stimulates our perception of the protagonist. I am thinking here of the audience's state of mind as Friendship, Kindred and Cousin assert their durable loyalty to *Everyman*, unaware that what is threatened is the coming of Death, a prospect the audience has been emphatically made aware of.

Friendship is notably ebullient in his overstatements, even promising to go to hell with Everyman (232), and, in similar vein, Cousin promises to live and die together with him (324).<sup>1</sup> Nor does the action of the play comprise the whole-life narrative found in *Castle of Perseverance* and some outstanding contemporary French examples.

This leads us to consider exactly what we are dealing with in our encounters with this text. I want to suggest that in doing so we have to be aware not of one play but of several and in this process to distinguish four somewhat different contexts. There is now no doubt that the English play is a translation from the Dutch *Elckerlijc*. I don't intend to investigate that argument further here: it has dominated the scholarship about the play for rather too long. Yet I do make the point that it is very difficult to discuss the English version without some consideration of its predecessor, not least because the process of change reveals much about what is now in front of us and thus enriches our response.

So, running the two plays in tandem for the moment, we may identify four phases:

1. The original date of *Elckerlijc* has to be somewhere about the middle of the fifteenth century, probably before printing began in 1460. It is difficult to identify a performance context for such an edition. Suggestions have been made that it was written for a school environment.<sup>2</sup>
2. In its next phase the Dutch play is more clearly identifiable with the culture and practices of the Rhetoricians, and it is reported to have won a prize at one of their competitions in Antwerp in 1496. What is not clear, however, is whether the play was originally intended for such an environment, and I would like to bear in mind that there is much about it which does not closely match many of the surviving Rhetoricians plays. In saying this we should admit that an adaptation from an earlier version to a Rhetoricians performance is a possibility, though we cannot be certain which form of the play actually won the prize.
3. At about the same time as this competition the play was printed, apparently first by Snellaert at Delft in 1495, and there were other printings at Antwerp in about 1496, and about 1501. This development enables us to recognize what

1. References are to *Everyman and Its Dutch Original Elckerlijc*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, Martin W. Walsh and Ton J. Broos (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007). This edition provides a reprint of *The Somonyng of Everyman* (London: John Skot, 1525–30; STC 10605), *Den Spyghel de Salicheyt van Elckerlyc* (Antwerp: William Vorsterman, c.1496), and a translation of the latter into modern English.

2. G. Cooper and C. Wortham, eds., *Everyman* (Nedlands: Western Australia Press, 1980), p. xlii.



we might describe as a literary existence to the play, since it now existed as something to be read.<sup>3</sup> We should remember too that the idea of printing a play for reading as distinct from being a performance text implies a different intention and a new kind of reception. Nor should we underestimate the importance of the innovation of actually printing a play.

4. The fourth phase is the translation into English from a Dutch text which is thought to have been the edition printed by William Vorsterman at Antwerp (c.1518-25).<sup>4</sup> The English version is found in four surviving editions, which can be dated after 1510, but it is likely, as we shall see, that these were later than 1521. We may suppose that these editions are undoubtedly the result of one translation, but the interconnections between the surviving texts, as W. W. Greg has shown, require the hypothesizing of at least three other versions to explain the relationships between them and the presumed original English version.<sup>5</sup> But we must also pause upon this word *translation* because much was changed and a good deal added, suggesting that the translator/adaptor/author had a different agenda from that discernible in the early Dutch versions. In addition, we may well be talking about a date in the 1520s, perhaps two generations after the original Dutch version in the mid-fifteenth century. Instead of the earlier pre-Reformation Catholic context, we would now be in post-Lutheran England, where the religious environment was in a process of profound, even cataclysmic change. The English text thus stands within a long line of evolution, and as such it contains within it marks, scars even, which give us clues about what might have happened to it. It seems that the Dutch original cannot now be entirely disregarded. Nor is it clear that the English version was ever acted during this period when the printed editions were so frequent, even though, as we shall see, there are distinctive performance characteristics which can be identified

3. The texts of at least two other Dutch plays surviving from the period have been investigated as to the priority of their status for reading or performance, especially with regard to the woodcuts in the printed texts: see the introductions to *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, ed. Dirk Coigneau ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1982), and Matthijs de Castelein (attributed), *Pyramus ende Thisbe*, ed. G. A. van Es in *Pyramus en Thisbe: Twee rederijkersspelen uit de zestiende eeuw* (Zwolle: Willink, 1965).

4. A. C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. xii, citing J. van Mierlo, 'De Proiriteit van Elcklerlijc tegenover Everyman gehandhaafd' (Antwerpen: Standaard Boekhandel, 1948), p. 22.

5. *Materialien zur Kunde des älteren englischen dramas* (Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1910), pp. xxviii, 62-65.

in the text. It can hardly be supposed indeed that the frequency of the printed English editions was determined by a market consisting of potential performers or directors. Rather, it seems much more likely that these texts were printed for sale to readers who might bring different requirements to the book. Amongst these we can identify a need for devotional literature, particularly that associated with the *Ars Moriendi*, the craft of dying.

I should like here to interject that the term “morality” needs some careful handling in connection with *Everyman*. The word was not used commonly about the plays it has come to designate at this early period. The title page does have its own formula, “a treatyse . . . in the maner of a morall playe”, but, as we shall see, that has some interesting implications about the status of the text. On the other hand, the term “moralité” did have some currency in France at this time. But even there a difficulty arises because some of the French plays so designated turn out to be more like mystery or biblical plays. The one instance of the word in Scotland in 1503, recently noted by Priscilla Bawcutt, may have been influenced by French examples.<sup>6</sup>

I have pointed out that the English version is a translation, and this is substantiated by many details once the priority is accepted. This reveals a closeness of incident and also many stretches of text where the detailed structure of the speeches is clearly the same in the Dutch. Both versions share a common cultural background which, as Cawley noted, includes the *Danse Macabre*, the *Ars Moriendi*, manuals of confession and the *Legenda Aurea* (containing the story of Barlaam and Josaphat).<sup>7</sup> As to changes, I want to concentrate here on four which are substantial in themselves and which have the cumulative effect of re-orienting the play. These are the introduction of the Messenger as a Prologue; the re-naming of Good Deeds, *Everyman*’s principal supporting character; the significance of penance; and the change of gender for Confession.

*Everyman* begins with the speech by the Messenger, which has no counterpart in *Elckerlijc*. On the one hand, it has a purpose in drawing the attention of Man to the need to take heed of his ending, however gaily he may begin. Noticeably, it calls upon Man to do this rather than simply referring to the protagonist *Everyman*. It takes brief notice of the plot by telling how all will fade when he is summoned to the reckoning by God. The list given includes names from both halves of the play,

6. Priscilla Bawcutt, “A Note on the term ‘Morality’”, *Medieval English Theatre* 28 (2006): 171–74.

7. Cawley, ed., pp. xv–xix.

before and after the critical completion of the act of penance. But this speech has another purpose which seems closely aligned to performance. It matches the phrase on the title-page in referring to the “fygure of a morall playe”.<sup>8</sup> But the attention to performance is even closer because the Messenger, addressing the audience, tells how they will *see* how the other characters will fade and also how they will *hear* how Everyman is called to the reckoning and what God says to him. This opening speech is thus distanced from the dramatic action, but in a Brechtian way it draws attention to what is about to be enacted, thus separating stage time from real time. The word “audyence” appears twice in the speech, but it is used as a way of referring to the act of listening rather than as the more modern generic term for all the listeners: “I pray you all gyve your audyence / And here this matter with reverence” (1-2).

The play ends with a speech by the Doctor, in which he directs the listeners’ attention to the need to make a good reckoning, and once again he is talking to “ye herers” (903), a phrase not in the original.

Perhaps the next feature of the English version is even more pervasive. In contrast to all the other characters, whether well or ill-intentioned, who leave Everyman, the one to support him best in going with him into the grave is called Virtue (Duecht) in Dutch, but she is renamed Good Deeds in the English version. This is a systematic change throughout the English text and presumably it is meant to give a different function to this character. This strategic re-naming is backed up tactically through interpolations in the text. The Dutch version may indeed mention good deeds but only briefly, as when Virtue says he will testify that Elckerlijc has done a good deed (“*weldaet*”, D583), but it is likely that this refers to his having gone to confession on Virtue’s prompt, and there is also one reference to giving to the poor (D653-55). It may well be that the translator has noticed these details and been prompted to make more of the concept for his own purposes than the original author did. At the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the play he certainly uses items about good deeds which were not present in the Dutch text. Thus Death, as he takes up his divinely appointed mission at the beginning of the play, notices, as Doot does, that Everyman shall suffer for loving riches, but he adds that he will separate him from heaven, “Excepte that almes dedes be his good frende” (78), and force him to dwell in hell for ever. Later, at the critical moment when Friendship,

8. It seems to me possible that the phrase in the text at l. 3 might have come first and that the printer imitated it for the title-page.

Cousin and Kinship have all deserted him, Everyman turns to Good Deeds of his own volition:

I thynke that I shall never spede  
Tyll that I go to my Good Dedes. (481-82)

Near the end of the play, as Good Deeds accompanies Everyman to the grave, the translator has moved the idea from one line in the Dutch from Everyman himself to Good Deeds, who says, "All fleeth save Good Dedes, and that am I" (873).

This change of emphasis allows us a further insight into the context in which *Everyman* was created, and it seems that it helps to place the play in a post-Lutheran context. For Luther, emphasizing the doctrine of *sola fides*, rejected the concept of good works as a way to salvation. That being so, it would appear that the deliberate emphasis upon good works means that the translator was interested in re-asserting the traditional and orthodox Catholic position.

I should like to add two further interrelated points of corroboration. In his concluding speech the Doctor refers to Judgement Day and says that to those whose reckoning is not clear God will say, "*Ite maledicti in ignem eternum*" (915). This phrase derives from Matthew 25:41, where those who have not carried out the works of mercy are separated from those who have, and are condemned to the fire. This seems to reinforce the idea that it is only Good Deeds which will count at the last. Moreover, in the English dramatic tradition exemplified by the York cycle, this sequence from Matthew is dramatised as the central item in the episode of the Last Judgement.<sup>9</sup> The York text is thought to have been transcribed between 1463 and 1475. It thus appears that the pro-Catholic translator had both scriptural and dramatic precedents upon which he could draw. His play might thus be part of a resistance to Reformation thinking. Although we are not certain about the dates at which it was printed, it is quite possible that it followed the clamp-down on Lutheran books initiated by Cardinal Wolsey in 1521. That Richard Pynson, who was responsible for two of the known editions, was actually the King's printer reinforces the possibility of orthodoxy. We also find that it was about this time that King Henry, probably assisted by Sir Thomas More, was granted the title of *Fidei Defensor* by the Pope in recognition of his treatise *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, a refutation of some of Luther's work.

9. It has also been pointed out that there was a commonplace relationship between the notion of Friendship, Good Works and the Last Judgement; see John Conley, "The Doctrine of Friendship in *Everyman*", *Speculum* 44 (1969): 374. Conley also notes (375) that l.78, added in the translation and quoted *supra*, specifically refers to friendship.

The treatment of the sacraments in the two plays is indeed remarkable and it merits further consideration. For some reason *Elckerlijc*, in listing them as seven, leaves out Penance and in fact gives only six (D675-79). It is hard to tell whether this omission was deliberate or accidental, but the translator apparently noticed it and added Penance to his list of sacraments at the end of his line 725. Once again there is a possible context for this change, in as much as Luther had questioned the value of confession to a priest and it would appear that the translator was interested in underlining or restoring its value. In addition he draws attention to the character of Confession by making him male—"Where dewelleth that holy man Confessyon? (539)—presumably because only a male who was a priest could hear confession, whereas the Dutch author saw Biechte as "mother of health".<sup>10</sup> But, as it happens, the translator is not consistent, in that he left Confession as female when translating this line (cf. 552 with D505).

The treatment of the priesthood invites comment from a slightly different standpoint. It seems to me that in this respect the author of *Everyman* followed his predecessor closely. He noticed and stuck to the aspects of the priesthood previously outlined, placing priests above the angels, in particular in the ability to make Christ's body in flesh and blood by means of five words at the altar ("*Hic est enim corpus meum*"), an affirmation of transubstantiation (738, following D692) in the face of its denial by Protestant interpreters. He also keeps to the original condemnation of the buying and selling of spiritual matters (simony), and cohabitation by priests, as evidenced by their offspring (755-63, from D711-18). Possibly these sentiments were part of an Erasmian wish to reform the church from within when *Elckerlijc* was originally composed, but for the author of *Everyman* they might have had a new urgency.<sup>11</sup> The useful implication would be that even if priests themselves were corrupt their office remained of primary significance in the way to salvation.

In what I have said so far I have made some references to performance aspects of *Everyman*: I should now like to turn to this question more directly. We have seen that there is some external evidence, however slender, that *Elckerlijc* was performed. Alternatively it may be that the text as printed reflects some details of actual performance, but for *Everyman* there is nothing external to support the possibility of

10. C. J. Wortham, "Everyman and the Reformation", *Parergon* 29 (1981): 24-25.

11. There is a possibility that the origin of *Elckerlijc* lies in the critical or discerning attitude to the Roman Catholic Church under the aegis of *Devotio Moderna*; see the article by Luc Bergmans in the present collection.

an actual performance. We shall have to rely instead upon what can be gleaned from the text. We have already noted that the chances are that the frequency of printing was more likely due to the perception of a reading market rather than a performing one. The title-page, as noted, seems to offer the former in its use of “treatyse” and yet there is also some sort of modification in the phrase, “in the maner of a morall play”, which sounds as though the printer needed to make some excuse or apology for the dramatic form.<sup>12</sup> Yet even if this is so, the designation still reveals that there was a consciousness here of dramatic form and one which might be aligned with other aspects of other plays. Such similarities in respect of performance are not very convincing if we consider the extant corpus of moralities, which vary in scope and size and can hardly be described as of a similar dramatic mode to *Everyman*. *Castle of Perseverance*, for example, demands a panoramic stage with many locations and much movement between them; *Wisdom* requires an elaborate musical and dancing presentation; *Mankind* requires a cast of resourceful players competent in comedy which is verbal and visual. Thus the phrase is not very illuminating as to the “maner” in question, though it might have been, had more plays survived from the period.

We can derive some ideas about performance from the text in two ways: its overwhelming sense of presenting its material through dialogue, which, taken with its structure, implies a dramatic experience; and the details which are embedded in the text implying that what has happened is a theatrical action perceived by an audience.

For the former I am impressed by the structure of the play, which seems conceived to show an unfolding experience. This is enhanced by the use of the Messenger and the Doctor as commentators upon what is about to be seen and what has been seen. The structure of the play turns upon the central episode of penance, preceded by the desertion of those who have nothing to offer the protagonist—Friendship, Kindred and Cousin—and followed by the contact with those who do—Beauty, Strength and Five Wits—but who in the end may not go with him into the grave in spite of their supportive disposition and ability to help him. Very possibly, as André Lascombes has suggested in this paper included in the collection, the change depends upon the ambiguous function of Goods, who may be used evilly but can provide a good warning.<sup>13</sup> As to dramatic experience, it seems to me that

12. This is not in the Dutch text.

13. I have discussed the generic ambiguity of wealth in an article entitled, “Wealth in Interludes” (forthcoming).

there is no doubt that these two groups are meant to reflect upon one another, even though they are presented in linear narrative. The framing commentary serves to set this off. Further support for a theatrical experience also comes in the dramatic irony, as the audience see the first group condemn themselves in the light of what the audience already knows about what is to happen. In addition, we have already noted that the writer is interested in the concept of seeing and hearing.

When we come to the details embedded in the text, we should first take notice of the dramatic style of this play. It is not written with a great deal of detailed attention to external characteristics. Much of the content, including the monologues as well as the dialogue exchange, is concentrated upon spiritual matters. It is hardly, one might say, a realistic drama, but, in spite of this, it is a drama in which things are represented in a physical dimension, even though this is done with restraint and discrimination. These features are reflected in what can be found in the play regarding practical details of performance. They include information about locations and movement between them, a change of costume, some physical properties, some music, and some opportunities for enactment and action. There are indeed striking opportunities for acting. These may be associated with the elaboration of allegorical significance, but some of them are distinctly performable, as in showing how Everyman grows old before reaching the grave, as well as the ebullient, even boastful behaviour of Fellowship.

Even for a reader, as distinct from a performer, there are three indispensable places in the text, as well as a more general area. The first is the initial location for God, who sets up the intervention of Death by sending him to Everyman. It is not certain that he was placed in an elevated position from which he might overlook the main events of Everyman's pilgrimage, though Knowledge's words, "God seeth thy lyvyng in his trone above" (637), suggest that he might have been. He speaks of himself as "in my majesty", which rather suggests that he is enthroned. He does not take a specific part at the end of the play when Everyman's soul is received into heaven, but it does seem likely that this later episode might be associated with God's original initiative.

Separate from this location is the more general space where Death perceives Everyman and approaches him. This would seem to be an undesignated area, but at times it appears that Everyman moves around this space. In particular he goes to the two other fixed locations: the House of Salvation, where Everyman carries out his penance and receives the sacrament, and the grave where his body must lie as his soul ascends to heaven. The House of Salvation is named by Knowledge in the text as the place where he will meet Confession, and when they reach it she tells Everyman

to kneel and ask for mercy (540-44). While he submits to Confession, he receives the scourge of Penance (571). The scourge is apparently an indispensable prop, as he then scourges himself: "Take this, body, for the synne of the flesshe! . . . Therefore suffer nowe strokes" (613-16). This has a specific effect upon Good Deeds, and once again there is a sense of stage space in which action takes place. Initially, for both Goods and Good Deeds, location has some significance. The former explains that he is trussed and piled in corners, locked in chests and sacked in bags "thou mayste se with thyne eye" (396), so that he cannot stir. For the reader this produces a complex image in the mind's eye, but it raises interesting implications for staging, since it implies that the audience can see him in his plight, even though it does not tell us precisely how it might have been presented. Nor is it clear how Goods is withdrawn from the action, since Everyman does nothing to release him and he does not act as a companion on the pilgrimage. On the other hand, the treatment of Good Deeds is complete and coherent. She also begins immobile:

Here I ly, colde on the grounde  
Thy synnes have me so sore bounde  
That I cannot stere. (489-91)<sup>14</sup>

But events lead to her recovery, as she turns instantly more healthy when Everyman scourges himself (619-21), and she becomes his close companion physically, entering the grave with him at the last (879).

This grave forms the third fixed location, and once again it seems as though it must have had a presence on the stage, not least because Everyman and Good Deeds must enter it and remain there while the soul moves up into heaven. Moreover, it is noticed beforehand, when Everyman says, "into this cave must I crepe" (792), and Beauty recoils from it and leaves Everyman. Perhaps more strikingly, after he has made his confession and received the sacrament, Everyman takes the initiative and leads his companions to the grave in what was probably a procession. Before he does so he asks them to put their hand on "this Rodde" (778). Though doubts have been expressed about exactly what this is, it seems likely that he is carrying a cross which he presents physically to his companions. In this way it looks as though there is a visual and enacted dimension to the point of view which advises the pilgrim on the way to the grave to keep the cross in sight.

In considering these physical features of staging which the text seems to require, we should notice that the author has visualized or imagined them. It is

14. Duecht is in a bed, D441.



quite possible that no one ever performed them in the way I have suggested, but the imaginative process I have described still takes place within the mind in a way which cannot but be described as “dramatic”, even if the purpose of printing the work was primarily aimed at reading. We should also notice that certain other physical aspects of performance appear in costume and properties and in the music. Everyman’s clothing is not described in detail, but Death’s query about going gaily (86) suggests a bright costume of some sort. Later Knowledge gives him another garment, which is called Sorrow and Everyman accepts that in wearing it he shows true contrition (650). The properties are few, but they have powerful symbolic resonances. Besides the cross noticed above, there is the book of Everyman’s reckoning. At first, Good Deeds points to them (books in the plural at 503) lying underfoot, but later, when the reckoning has been improved (“clere” [652]), he carries it on the pilgrimage. Other properties seem to be required in the scourge, and possibly bags and chests for Goods to be imprisoned in at his first appearance.

As to the music, we find that Knowledge says that she hears angels singing after Everyman has entered into the grave, and if the play were performed this would have to be provided to justify the line. However, the ending of the play raises an interesting doubt about how it might have been performed. Notably, Everyman has no words after his death, and although the Angel bids his soul welcome to the heavenly sphere, there is nothing in the text to suggest that it was necessarily visible at this point: the Angel’s speech, the music and then the comments of the Doctor could have ended a performance in an appropriate manner.

The topics I have discussed in this paper suggest to me that to come to terms with *Everyman* one has to take account of a number of different contexts, literary and dramatic, and that its originality lies largely in its economy of language and theatricality. The English author appears to have used the work of his predecessor in *Elckerlijc* with great resource and sensitivity, but he was working to his own agenda in terms of doctrine and performance.

Richard HILLMAN, « Doing Allegory Otherwise in *Everyman* »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-10,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *Doing Allegory Otherwise in Everyman*

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The basic definition of allegory, as mandated by the word's Greek origin, is saying things otherwise, one thing in terms of another. That is conspicuously to leave undefined, however, the relation between the two “things” in question—arguably for good reason, since it is allegory's business to define and redefine that relation. As Carolyn Van Dyke puts it in her stimulating 1985 book on the history and development of the trope, “Allegory, the narrative of universals, envisions human life as a continual interchange between temporal event and eternal pattern”.<sup>1</sup> Still, the common modern understanding, which sometimes employs the demeaning name of “naïve allegory”, or the falsely complimentary one of “pure allegory”, is to presume a constant and stable link based on the subordination of vehicle to tenor, medium to message, sign to signified. To invoke this last dichotomy is effectively to renounce all pretence of stability, from the point of view of post-Sussurean linguistics, but the illusion persists, no doubt because the attraction of what James I. Wimsatt, speaking of *Everyman*, terms “beau-

1. Carolyn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 63.

tifully simple allegory”,<sup>2</sup> is strong: in this light, an allegorical character appears “transparent”,<sup>3</sup> in Wimsatt’s phrase, with his or her identity determined onomastically. Hence a character designated as Truth derives existence, form and meaning wholly from the way the quality thereby indicated is defined, explicitly or inferentially—by its actions or interactions. This would be so, moreover, regardless of the fact that Truth in the occidental tradition is overwhelmingly likely to be female—as in the grammatical gender of Veritas, as in the proverb holding Truth to be the daughter of Time, as in the tradition of the four daughters of God.<sup>4</sup> There is, of course, no Truth in *Everyman*. (There, by the way, am I speaking allegorically or not?—the question is not wholly frivolous.) But as it happens, there are three allegorical figures gendered feminine—Good Deeds, Knowledge and Beauty—and we obviously cast away some part of what is signified by them, however indefinite, if we suppose that such an individualising element has nothing to with it.

Any notion of allegory as transparent signification is vastly oversimplified in itself, and, especially since the important work in the 1960s of D. W. Robertson and Rosamund Tuve, a substantial body of criticism has developed to prove the point.<sup>5</sup> Some of this criticism, moreover, is particularly to the point here, because it returns to that much-cited but little-read fountainhead of medieval allegorising practices, the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius. Van Dyke’s book opens with a chapter devoted to “The *Psychomachia* and the Nature of ‘Pure’ Allegory”, whose conclusions functionally inform her subsequent reading of *Everyman*,<sup>6</sup> a full-length study of Prudentius’ “Poetics of the Soul” by Marc Mastrangelo, published in 2008, takes a typological approach to the *Psychomachia* under the rubric, “Christian Theology and the Making of Allegory”.<sup>7</sup> The latter work, in particular, decisively dispels another widespread

2. James I. Wimsatt, *Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), p. 47.

3. Wimsatt, p. 47.

4. A notable exception occurs in *Mankind*, where Mercy (himself a masculine character, contrary to tradition, assures the despondent protagonist that “Trowthe may not so cruelly procede in his stryt argument / But that Mercy schall rewle the mater” (*Mankind, Medieval Drama*, ed. David Bevington [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975], ll. 841–42. The figure of Truth is not actually brought on stage, however.

5. See esp. D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), and Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

6. See Van Dyke, pp. 25–63, 127–39.

7. Marc Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 82–120.

misconception—namely, that “transparent” allegory, if it did or could exist, with the concrete simply folding itself into the abstract, would be compatible with medieval thought.

The reason for the incompatibility should be recognised as a substantial semiotic one, if one hopes to define the specificity of *Everyman*. A reductively theatrical reading, such as that expressed by A. C. Cawley, cannot fully accommodate the issue either (and, indeed, Cawley surprisingly skirts it by applying a “realism” every bit as anachronistic in its own way):

Although several of the characters in *Everyman* are vividly personified and have a very real existence on the literal plane, they also have a theological meaning underlying their surface liveliness.<sup>8</sup>

Although virtually every term in this statement is problematic, it is nevertheless useful in returning us to the semiotic starting point, that is, that the symbol in medieval iconography retains its “very real existence on the literal plane”. This is the basis of allegorical interpretation of the Bible, whose literal truth is never in question; as Robertson puts it, with reference to St. Paul’s use of the term (in Gal. 4:22 ff.), “The word *allegory* here means, as it does among the grammarians, ‘saying one thing to mean another’, but the thing said in the first place is also true”.<sup>9</sup> The point has been more largely formalised by Julia Kristeva in terms of an episteme, precisely as a way of distinguishing premodern from modern perception, the universe of the symbol from that of the sign, in her important essay, “Le texte clos”.<sup>10</sup>

But in this case there is also—and here, too, Cawley points the way, however unwittingly—a theatrical factor. Whatever the precise circumstances (if any) in which performance of *Everyman* was envisaged, it is other than a narrative to be read or listened to. It obeys and exploits the universal theatrical principle by which character successively defines itself action by action, speech by speech—in effect, writing itself on a blank slate—before an audience’s eyes and ears. The vernacular medieval theatre in general abounds with evidence that characterisation tends, as if by centrifugal force, to individualise and particularise, hence to slip around on (if never to topple off) its inevitable base of spiritual significance. This adds an instability and a tension to the signifying process, given that in allegory generally, as Tuve has pointed out,

8. A. C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. xx. References to *Everyman* are taken from this edition.

9. Robertson, p. 291.

10. Julia Kristeva, “Le texte clos”, *Semeiotikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Collection “Tel Quel” (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 113–42.

it is often knowledge of the meaning that animates the particular representation."<sup>11</sup> In the theatre, symbolism becomes, in a sense, a moving target: now one clearly glimpses the referent; now it is blurred again; always, however, one *knows* it is there. This form of *knowledge*, proper to the medieval didactic theatre, is arguably included in the multiple meanings of the character so named in *Everyman*, whose mediating function for Everyman—chiefly, no doubt, as a doctrinal informant (“What must I do to be saved?”)—is explicitly transferred at the conclusion to an audience yet to come to grips with its mortality:<sup>12</sup> “Now hath he suffered that we all shall endure” (888).

More than incidentally, this essentially metatheatrical dimension of the role of Knowledge points to what I see as the distinctive self-consciousness of the allegorical procedures in *Everyman*. The basic principle of a variable relation between concrete existence and abstract signifying—between, in effect, the letter and the spirit—extends, however, to the Miracle (or Saints) Plays and even to the biblical figures of the Corpus Christi cycle pageants. This is clear from comparison, notably, with the liturgically derived enactments staged within the churches, where anything that might be called characterisation is minimal. The tendency towards theatrical particularity in the cycles extends, indeed, to substantially embroidering biblical personages (such as the wife of Noah) or supplementing them (by developing Christ’s executioners, for instance), to say nothing of sheer inventions, such as the subplot of the Wakefield Second Shepherds’ Play.

In the case of the allegorical figures, who, of course, dominate the Morality Plays, there is little initial anchoring in a concrete entity—apart from certain standard iconographic attributes (the Dart of Death), generic attributes (angel wings, devilish fireworks) or coded traits of speech (dignified preaching for the virtues, rough colloquialism or brash obscenity for the vices). There is also a fundamental *décalage* involving the status of many of them. To stage the psychomachia around an Everyman figure, as most Moralities do, is to put outside what must simultaneously be understood to be inside, and this effect is further complicated where generic inward misleaders shade into particularised outward ones, as in *Mankind*. Such theatrical doubleness is not foreign to *Everyman*—far from it, given the inward-outward shifting of such figures as Good Deeds, Knowledge, Strength, Beauty and Discretion—even, arguably, Death, who is sent from outside but obviously oper-

11. Tuve, p. 26.

12. The most systematic treatment of the figure of Knowledge is by Michael J. Warren, “*Everyman*: Knowledge Once More”, *Dalhousie Review* 54 (1974): 136–46. Cf. Van Dyke, pp. 133–34.

ates from the inside out. The cumulative effect in such plays is to turn Everyman's theatrical space into a virtual No-man's land, neither here nor there, and conspicuously suspended between life and death.

The scope for "jeu" in the Derridean sense, then, between the particular and the universal is greater in the Moralities than in the other medieval dramatic forms. One can push quite far towards creating the sense of a character without impairing his or her capacity to signify spiritually. In fact, in most of the English medieval drama, such double signifying is understood to come with the territory, taken for granted, even if the balance varies case by case and widely varying degrees are possible. The effect is possible to trace—and especially to the point, of course—even in the Everyman figures of the other surviving moralities. On the one hand, in the case of Humanum Genus in *The Castle of Perseverance*, whose entire lifespan is traced from infancy to death, the individualizing takes the form of spinning off into the successive phases of life, with their characteristic temptations. On the other hand, Mankind in the play so called, who spends his entire career as a young man tempted by a young man's vices, is identified with considerably precision in terms of local geography and social milieu.

*Everyman*, nevertheless, stands out not just for installing these signifying procedures at the centre of the play but for actually making them the object of play in selfreflexive metadramatic fashion. The structural principle is hardly in doubt—witness Michael J. Warren on Fellowship and Kindred, who, he says, "have a dual quality; at times they appear as Everyman's friends in their particularity, and at others in their abstract roles as representative figures and aspects of Everyman's thought".<sup>13</sup> More elusive is the effect aimed at or achieved. Here, to Warren's aesthetic reservation ("The first attendant problem, however, is that the separation is never exact")—and it is tempting to see this as evidence that the play exerts its destabilising power across the centuries—Van Dyke responds with a claim for didactic functionality: "That 'problem' is not the playwright's lapse, but his point. Everyman must learn to see beyond the promises and evasions of his own friends and kin to the laws of the categories whose names they bear".<sup>14</sup>

The claim is generally persuasive, and it may be bolstered by recognising that the functional tension between particular and categorical is enhanced by the confusion between inward and outward—in short, over ownership. We can see this in the

13. Warren, p. 137; cited by Van Dyke, p. 130.

14. Van Dyke, p. 130.



universal properties—Beauty, Strength, Discretion, Five Wits—that Everyman supposed were properly his. Fittingly, the pivotal instance is that of Goods, property itself, whose relocation to the exterior is accompanied by his disclosure of himself as the play’s closest approximation of a diabolical vice, the only character in this decidedly bleak landscape who is actually enjoying himself:

*Goods.*           What, wenest thou that I am thyne?  
*Everyman.*       I had went so.  
*Goods.*           Naye, Eueryman, I saye no.  
                     As for a whyle I was lente the;  
                     A season thou hast had me in prosperyte.  
                     My condycyon is mannes soule to kyll;  
                     .....  
                     Marry, thou brought thy selfe in care,  
                     Whereof I am gladde;  
                     I must nedes laugh, I can not be sadde. (437-56)

This movement is ironically complemented by the inverse transfer of Good Deeds from outside, repudiated and enfeebled—“Here I lye, colde in the ground; / Thy synnes hath me sore bounde, / That I can not sterve” (486-88)—to become Everyman’s indeed: his only companion through to the end, who “shall make all sure” (889). The recurrent “my” that was originally fraught with desperate disaffection—“My Good Dedes, where be you?” (485)—becomes a token of the glorious possession of enduring assets: “Welcome, my Good Dedes! Now I here thy voice / I wepe for very sweteness of loue” (634-35).

Yet when Van Dyke enfolds the primordial encounter of Everyman, the one with Death, into the heuristic pattern of learning how to read allegorically—“Everyman responds to the visible agent and the particular encounter, not to the concept they embody”<sup>15</sup>—her reading reveals its limitation and short-changes the play’s theatrical daring and power. For on this point Everyman is conspicuously not wrong. Death is pointedly established for the audience, on God’s own authority in the extraordinary opening monologue, as at once particular and universal, and, moreover, as a punishment at once synchronic and diachronic, infinitely repeated through human history from the Fall to the Day of Doom. From the typological perspective of the original audience, the expression “Drowned in synne” (26) would be bound to evoke the retributive Flood, while the promise of mercy conveyed by the rescue of Noah resounds with God’s representation as at once Father of his “creatures” (23) and suffering Christ (“To gete them lyfe I suffered to be deed; / I heled theyr

15. Van Dyke, p. 129.

feet / with thornes hurt was my heed" [32-33]), now come to Judgement. Particularity here, moreover, extends to insisting on Christ's assumption of humanity—in effect, of Everyman's sin and punishment—so far that the Omnipotent appears helpless in the face of humanity's free will: "I coude do no more than I dyde, truely" (34). (In that adverb, by the way, Truth makes a cameo appearance after all.) The duality of particular and universal, then, is thoroughly bound up with, hence anchored in, a verbal and visual enactment of the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, if it is true that Everyman must learn how to read allegorically, his own double signifying is equally signalled, before the character appears, through a mingling of references to him in the singular and plural: "I perceyve, here in my maiesty, / How that all creatures be to me vnkynd" (22-23); "Euery man lyveth so after his owne pleasure, / And yet of theyr lyfe they be nothyng sure" (40-41); "I hoped well that euery man / In my glory sholde make his mansyon, / And thereto I had them all electe" (52-54). This, again, is an anchoring of semiotic duality in impeccable authority, but since the Trinitarian mystery does not apply to humanity, the frankly theatrical effect remains uppermost. That theatricality is seconded and foregrounded by Death, who, in responding to the divine command with the play's most concrete evocation of the *danse macabre*, couples his own double function with that of his victim—or victims:

Lorde, I wyll in the worlde go renne ouer-all,  
And cruelly out-search bothe grete and small.  
Euery man wyll I beset that lyveth beestly  
Out of Goddes lawes, and dredeth not foly. (72-75)

In sum, by the time Death (guiding the audience's perception) physically perceives Everyman as an individual—"Loo, yonder I se Eueryman walkyng" (80)—and asks whether he has forgotten his "Maker" (86), not only has the basic double perspective been established, but so has the principle of continually shifting from one to the other, as if in an anamorphic painting. Thereafter, all interplay between particular and universal, concrete and abstract, outward and inward, depends on and participates in that principle, so that it seems misleading to see the dynamic in moral terms, as one that must be mastered or transcended by Everyman as part of

16. The conflationary effect is akin to, but carried well beyond, what is found, for example, in the York play of the *Judgment* (printed in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, ed. A. C. Cawley, ed., pref. and bib. Anne Rooney, new ed. [London: Dent; Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1993], pp. 181-94). There, despite some linguistic boundary-crossing, which makes the synchronic point, the Father and Son appear separately in distinct roles.

his journey towards salvation. Rather, he himself is caught up and functions within it, to the point where, as the only character who might lay claim to subjectivity in something like the psychoanalytic sense, one may see him as emerging alternately as subject (in his particularity) and object (in his universality). One might even find him, from this point of view, illustrative of the evolution of Kristeva's medieval universe towards the modern one, in that he shifts back and forth between aiming to constitute meaning as a sign and being constituted as a signified.

Such linguistic terminology highlights the role played by a double discourse in the anamorphic representation of Everyman—again, an effect without an exact parallel elsewhere in the other surviving medieval English drama. As I have stressed in a previous study of self-speaking and subjectivity, his language moves insistently, often abruptly, between “personal” expression and the ventriloquising of the universal through proverbs, generalities, and spiritual tags,<sup>17</sup> as when he reacts to the blunt desertion of Strength, shifting from the first to the third person:

I had wende surer I sholde you haue founde.  
He that trusteth in his Strength,  
She hym deceyveth at the length. (826-28)

And if Everyman's last words, inevitably, echo those of Christ in the transcendental language of prayer—language in which he is spoken, effectively, as the redeemed soul parting from the body and its fallen discourse—it is nonetheless on this level, too, that Knowledge symbolically remains mortal and confronts the audience with its mortality. For she anticipates the Angel's definitive declaration in the language, not of certainty, but of perception and deduction:

Me thynketh that I here aungelles synge,  
And make grete ioy and melody  
Where Everymannes soule receyued shall be. (891-93)

This is, I take it, confirmation that the spectators are interpellated as Everyman. They at once recuperate his collective identity as “the people” (25) of whom God spoke warningly at the outset and are invited to apply as individuals the lesson that has just led, before their very eyes and ears, to the precarious saving of a single soul. The interpellation and the lesson depend on the ongoing doubleness of the signifying process, the unstable relation between particular and universal, temporal and eternal, until the end of time. That relation is shown to be inherent in the symbolic

17. Richard Hillman, *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1997), p. 46.

functioning of the divine creation itself, not a semiotic anomaly to be resolved by any man's mastery of allegorical technique. That is perhaps the most fundamental message that the play, through its "myghty messengere" (63), succeeds in conveying by doing allegory otherwise.



André LASCOMBES, « Afterword: *Everyman* as a Dual Play »,  
coll. « Théâtre Anglais : traductions introuvables », 2008, p.1-8,  
mis en ligne le 12 décembre 2008,  
URL stable <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8A>>.

### Théâtre anglais

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

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### Mentions légales

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ISSN 1760-4745

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### Date de création

décembre 2008



## *Afterword: Everyman as a Dual Play*

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On reading the programme some two weeks before the event and realizing that I was last on the list of speakers, I rejoiced that I might be able (everything useful having been said already on the environment and the nature of the play) to dispense with introductory developments and immediately concentrate on my topic. In the event, I felt on the evening before my paper was scheduled that my expectations had been more than fulfilled and that, in fact, little useful and new remained for me to offer—an impression further confirmed by three other brilliantly demonstrative arguments the next morning. Yet apart from the fact that I could hardly be so impudent as to withdraw my paper altogether at such short notice, had I done so I would have abdicated the pleasant privilege of thanking in my own name colleagues and students for what they all have brought to us, first in attending and in bringing their rich contributions, and no less importantly in getting involved in our performance of the play *Everyman* (by taking parts in the play and by creating an encouraging audience). I therefore decided at the very last minute to compromise and restrict my initial paper to a set of two remarks on questions that possibly deserved further comment.



## On the Disputed Nature of the Play *Everyman*

I would like to return briefly to a question which has several times been alluded to during these two days: that of *Everyman*'s proximity to (or distance from) the morality drama as we know it in the English corpus. I would like briefly to insist, before we leave the play, on what strikes me as being its basic *dual* and even *ambiguous* nature, further claiming that its generic affiliation deserves further critical debate. Peter Happé and Richard Hillman, in particular, have today underlined the importance of both its resemblances to and differences from the other morality plays in its dramatic structure and its allegorical mode. Clifford Davidson and the other editors of the 2007 edition of *Everyman* also recognize in their commentary that an intricate and major question is involved.<sup>1</sup> These references prompt me to suggest what, at this stage, certainly remains a peripheral and partial answer but may hopefully help put the problem in a different light. "Genre" being now recognized as an invention of the Age of Enlightenment, it does seem something of a critical delusion to pose affiliation to any of today's genres as *the* defining rule for any medieval aesthetic product. That is what the Canadian medievalist Paul Zumthor suggested years ago about medieval poetry.<sup>2</sup> It is even more enlightening to note that a similar approach is adopted to deal with non-European theatrical artefacts belonging to a still largely oral culture. Critics studying traditional aspects of African culture assert that what goes there by the name of theatre must be regarded as one *individual item* in a cultural compound likely to incorporate singing, dancing, gesturing and speech, and, more importantly still, as *one moment* of its overall effect and significance. What the Adioukrou of the Ivory Coast define as "play" precisely refers to such a product, defined as "a cultural activity embodied by a living collective actor performing to a united community that share the same body of cultural beliefs and aesthetic emotions, and (it is added) thereby rehearsing what amounts to collective instruction."<sup>3</sup>

1. Clifford Davidson, M. W. Walsh and Ton J. Broos, eds., *Everyman and Its Dutch Original: Elckerlijc* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007); see Introd., p. 3, where the editors acknowledge the impact of Enlightenment prejudices upon subsequent later to present day's assessments of the play's relation to morality drama.

2. Paul Zumthor, "Poésie et théâtralité: l'exemple du Moyen Âge", *Le théâtre et la cité dans l'Europe médiévale*, Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Colloque international de la Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval, Perpignan, Juillet 1986, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly et Edelgard E. DuBruck, *Fifteenth Century Studies*, vol. 13 (Stuttgart, Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1988), pp. 3-12.

3. *Le Théâtre négro-africain*, Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Abidjan, 15-29 avril 1970, and prepared by Bernard Mouralis (Paris, Editions Présence Africaine, 1971). My quotations

If we remember that medieval theatre in Europe (and in England at the period of the publication of *Everyman*) was functionally connected with the dissemination and defence of the dominant religious and political ideology and ethos, we may more willingly regard the play in question as structurally reflecting such a dual function: one that provides physical and emotional on-the-spot enjoyment of a performed action, but which also offers, wrapped up in it, as it were, and preserved for later intellectual assimilation and memorial consumption, an article of the socio-political faith. That *Everyman* could be such a “double-barrelled event” should, it seems to me, be a serious hypothesis. It is in fact what the Messenger’s description suggests (ll. 3–9 and 20–21 of the play as we have it),<sup>4</sup> together with some oblique addresses both to characters *and* audience (l. 694 as well as ll. 867–69), and lastly the explicit bracketing of the play-text between the initial and final exhortations of the Messenger and the Doctor. Could we not, therefore, consider that the play structurally assumes the quasi-constant superposition of two reception attitudes by a special category of consumers: the “spectators-readers” that Greg Walker, among others, analyses as that of its possible, or probable, addressees.<sup>5</sup>

## The Semantic and Theatrical Structure of the Play

My second very brief point primarily concerns the function in the play of the character Goods as the decisive agent of the hero *Everyman*’s moral change, and it has therefore to do with the semantic and theatrical structure of the play as a whole. Having to keep here to essentials, I will just call attention to the very particular nature and function of that allegorical character, whose exceptional status feeds what I feel is the central paradox of the play, one upon which the dramatic action and the whole ideological lesson crucially revolve and which inevitably determines

are from B. Kotchy, “Discours inaugural”, p. 10, and Harris Memel-Fote’s paper: “Anthropologie du théâtre négro-africain traditionnel”, pp. 26–27.

4. Both in A. C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), and in G. Cooper et Charles Wortham, eds., *The Summoning of Everyman* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1980). The importance of the Messenger’s warning has been pointed at already by Bob Godfrey in “*Everyman* (Re)Considered”, a paper given at the 4th International Conference on Aspects of European Medieval Drama, Camerino, 5–8 Aug. 1999, in *European Medieval Drama* 4, ed. S. Higgins and A. Lascombes (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 155–68.

5. Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); see chap. I.

the immediate impact of the play, as well as its long-term significance. I must also say that if I had, before seeing the play performed by my colleagues, entertained any doubt about the exceptional status of Goods, the impressive rendering of that character given by Peter Happé, as by anticipation it emerged as the antagonist of Sarah Carpenter's Good Deeds, would have won me over to the view I am trying to put forward here. Some brief remarks about that allegorical couple will probably suffice to highlight the structural and semantic significance of the dramatic paradox they embody at the core of the play.

No one is likely to question the importance of the dense net of both echoes and contrasts which the anonymous author has carefully woven between the two figures. Such oppositional repetitions enforce upon the audience's minds the parallelism, both visual and linguistic, which has been widely noticed (the verbal echo of their respective names, to begin with) but, to my knowledge, never totally accounted for. Visually, they both appear on stage (and are correspondingly evoked in the dramatic text) as fettered—by material links for the former, and by the accumulation of sins for the second. Dramatically, these two oppositional figures, standing out as the representatives of the two opposite parties (black side and white side) on the moral checker-board of the play, purposely figure the central theological issue mentioned in the parable from Matthew 25:14–30 which V. A. Kolve has so usefully applied to the play.<sup>6</sup> But even more profoundly, I would suggest that they cryptically illustrate the basic dogmatic tenet of the function of the Fall in the process of Redemption. I would add, moreover, that the tension thus created extends into the whole play, in both its dogmatic and socio-political aspects, but also (and even more importantly, I would say) in its formal dimension, which until now has been unduly underestimated.<sup>7</sup>

6. V. A. Kolve, "Everyman and the Parable of the talents", *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 316–40.

7. The role of the Demon in that process has been endlessly dealt with through centuries of patristic and theological commentary. It has also been successfully dramatized in medieval preaching and drama, especially in the Cornish *Passio Domini*, when the devil visits Pilate's wife (ll. 1907–55) and later deplores his mistake (ll. 3031–98). But the same episode also features in the *N-Town Play* (Play 31, ll. 1–77) and in the famous mock sermon called Satan's Prologue (Play 26, ll. 1–124).