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EVERYMAN IN PERFORMANCE

Although *Everyman* is not at all representative of the English morality plays, it nevertheless occurs frequently as a part of tertiary courses of mediaeval studies, and even in generalized studies of English literature. Often, in fact, it constitutes a student's only sample of mediaeval and Renaissance drama. The people who set the courses are justified in this choice of text on philosophical grounds, since *Everyman* raises the two fundamental human problems—of death and aloneness. (It is probably less important that some will now judge the playwright's solution to these problems to be simplistic, inadequate or unbelievable.) The many modern productions prove that *Everyman* is rightly selected for special study on dramatic grounds as well. It is pre-eminently a work which shines in performance.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the dramatic excellence of *Everyman* from the differing viewpoints of the director and actors and of the audience. As far as possible, discussion will be limited to the earliest performances, beginning with an attempt to determine the auspices and set. The intention is to comment on the text which the playwright left to be performed by his contemporaries and immediate successors.

The available evidence suggests that *Everyman* was translated from the Dutch play, *Elckerlijc,* in 1519, or a few years earlier.[1] Whether this view is accepted, or whether the argument for the precedence of *Everyman* and for the traditional dating of between 1480 and 1500 is preferred, does not affect the conclusion that, when *Everyman* was first written, the conditions for staging plays in England were extremely diversified, just as they are today. It is, however, possible to isolate two major staging conventions, which have already been described by writers such as Glynne Wickham[2] and David Bevington[3]: there were small professional travelling companies who performed on single playing areas, usually indoors, and there were larger companies, apparently made up mainly of amateurs, who performed on detached or multiple stages, usually out of doors.

Between 1460 and 1520, as Bevington has pointed out[4], the professional companies entertained both elite and popular audiences. They included in their repertoires purely popular plays, such as *Mankind, The World and the Child, Youth* and *Hyckescorner;* humanist or scholarly plays suitable also for popular performance, such as Henry Medwall's *Nature,* John Rastell's *The Nature of the Four Elements,* and John Heywood's trilogy—*The Four P's, Johan Johan the Husband. . .,* and *Witty and Witless;* and courtly plays with popular features, such as Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres* and John Skelton's *Magnificence.* The plays of the professional companies are characterized above all by small casts, never more than six, and in one instance, *The World and the Child,* as few as two. Sometimes,

as in *Nature* and *Magnificence*, this economizing in actors was achieved by extensive doubling. Although Wickham argues the opposite[5], length of performance does not seem to have been a primary feature distinguishing single set productions ("interludes") from those on multiple stages. Some interludes, for example those by Medwall, are quite long, while some multiple-stage plays are quite short. Most of the plays intended for the small troupes include robust or bawdy comic scenes, which were probably inspired in part by the professional players' need to maintain audience numbers.

Of the plays suitable for performance on separate stages, *The Castle of Perseverance* (1400-1425) is the best known. It was preceded by *The Pride of Life* (c. 1350) and followed, at the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth, by the multiple-stage plays of the Digby manuscript, *The Killing of the Children, Mary Magdalene* and *The Conversion of Saint Paul.*

Productions using separate stages were much more elaborate than those on single sets. There seem to have been no firm limits on the size of the casts, and opportunities for doubling were not cultivated. Complicated staging and effects were usual. *Mary Magdalene*, for instance, required thirteen scaffolds, two of which went up in flames, and a ship, which circumnavigated the playing area three times. *The Conversion of Saint Paul* has stage directions which read:

> Here cometh a fervent with great tempest, and Saul falleth down off his horse; that done, Godhead speaketh in heaven.
> (at 1.182)

and

> Here the Holy Spirit [in the form of a dove] appears above him.
> (at 1.291)

Comedy is a less pervasive feature of detached-stage plays than it is of single-set productions. *The Pride of Life*, with no comic scenes or characters, established this pattern early. Of the two longest extant multiple-stage plays, there are few comic scenes in *The Castle of Perseverance* and only one in *Mary Magdalene.* The two shorter plays of the Digby manuscript—*The Conversion of Saint Paul* and *The Killing of the Children*—each contains only one comic scene.

Beyond this, it is difficult to generalise about the staging of plays intended for multiple sets. Their elaborateness and large casts suggest that they had at their disposal the resources of the trade guilds in the provincial cities, and that their staging was a development from that of the mystery cycles.[6] On the other hand, at least two of the extant plays of this type—*Perseverance* and *The Conversion of Saint Paul*—were definitely intended for travelling companies. The identity of the actors who were prepared to tour such complex productions is an intriguing question.

Although *Everyman* is as anomalous among contemporary English plays in staging as it is in other areas, most of the comparative evidence suggests that its earliest productions were on detached stages. Dating the

play as late as 1519 does not exclude this, since the three multiple-stage plays of the Digby manuscript could also well be early sixteenth-century productions. Furthermore, a scene[7] which was added to *The Conversion of Saint Paul* in a hand perhaps belonging to the reign of Mary proves that interest in multiple-stage productions persisted until quite late.[8]

When Everyman summons Discretion, Strength, Beauty and Five Wits at 1.668, there are, with Good Deeds and Knowledge, seven characters on stage. In addition, at least one of the characters with a fixed position—God, Goods or Confession—would probably be unavailable for another role at this point. This gives a minimum cast of eight, two more than the usual maximum in the professional troupes at this time.

On the other hand, the fact that *Everyman* is so obviously adapted for the doubling of roles would, if there were no contrary evidence, tend to link it with the professional troupes. Although the doubling can begin very early, if the actor playing the Messenger, for instance, also takes the part of Death, and then reappears as Kindred or Cousin, or even as Fellowship, the division of work among the cast is more equal if the doubling begins nearer to the centre.

With a cast of only eight, either Cousin or Kindred must be played by an actor who has already appeared in a different role, since Goods and Good Deeds are fixed on stage from the beginning. Thereafter all new parts, with the exceptions of Goods and Good Deeds, must be doubled, thus:

Roles	*Players*	*Roles*	*Players*
Messenger	1	Knowledge	3^2
God	2	Confession	2^2
Death	3	Discretion	5^2
Everyman	4	Beauty	6^2
Fellowship	5	Strength	7^2
Cousin	6	Five Wits	1^3
Kindred	1^2	Angel	6^3
Goods	7	Doctor	7^3
Good Deeds	8		

By this arrangement, Goods must exit after he has played his part, but the actor playing Confession is not obliged to re-appear. Three players, 1, 6 and 7, have three roles each.

By adding two to the cast, an almost exactly symmetrical division of work can be achieved. Careful productions of the early sixteenth-century probably followed this plan:

Roles	*Players*	*Roles*	*Players*
Messenger	1	Knowledge	10
God	2	Confession	2^2
Death	3	Discretion	1^2
Everyman	4	Beauty	6^2
Fellowship	5	Strength	3^2
Cousin	6	Five Wits	5^2
Kindred	7	Angel	7^2
Goods	8	Doctor	8^2
Good Deeds	9		

Here, the actors of Everyman, Good Deeds and Knowledge, who are longest on stage, have only one part, while the minor actors of the first half—for example, God, Fellowship, Kindred—are given ample time to prepare for a second minor role—perhaps as Confession, Five Wits or the Angel. An actor would have no difficulty in remembering his entrance and re-entrance, and from his point of view the scheme for doubling in *Everyman* would have been much preferable to the almost random reappearances in different roles which must have occurred in some productions of the professional troupes.

Performances of *Everyman* by the small professional troupes seem unlikely also because the playwright did not exploit some obvious means of economizing on actors. The peripheral parts of the Messenger, Angel and Doctor could presumably have been reduced in some way, but this has not been done.[9]

There is no evidence to link *Everyman* with any of the types of plays listed by Bevington as performed by the professional companies. *Everyman* is not obviously humanist or courtly, and it is separated from the popular canon by its prevailing seriousness. This is, however, another characteristic which it shares with the plays of the multiple sets.

Internal evidence also supports the view that the poet had performances on detached stages in mind. The script calls for three distinct localities—"the hye sete celestyall" (1.153) from which God speaks in the beginning; the position "here above" (1.895) to which the Angel leads Everyman's soul; and the House of Salvation, the abode of Confession. That the House of Salvation and the place "here above" really are thought of as places distinct from the main playing area is proved by the two processions, each lasting for ten lines, the first by Everyman and Knowledge to the House of Salvation (11.535-44), and the second by Everyman and the gifts of nature to the grave (11.780-89). The most likely position for the grave is underneath the place "here above".

Another distinctive feature of *Everyman* is the heavy cueing of entrances. Death, Kindred and Cousin, Strength, Beauty, Discretion and Five Wits, for instance, are actually called on stage. Fellowship's entrance is particularly well prepared for. Everyman pointedly mentions Fellowship's name at 1.197, and he is visible to the audience by 1.202, since Everyman

says, "I se hym yonder, certaynely", but he is not apparently in a position from which to talk to Everyman until four lines later still. Similarly, Everyman's return after attending mass is announced in some not very meaningful lines:

V. Wyttes: . . . Pes! For yonder I se Everyman come,
Which hath made true satysfaccyon.
Good Dedes: Me thynke it is he in dede.
(11.769-71)

Exits, also, tend to be slow. Many characters, notably Fellowship (11.295-302), Cousin (11.373-76), and the gifts of nature (11.794-850) exit with an exceptional number of lines, spoken while on the move.

Taken together, the heavy cueing and the lengthy exits suggest that "off-stage" in the playwright's conception was some distance away from the main playing area. A large, and therefore probably outdoor set, seems to have been envisaged, and this further supports the view that early performances were on detached stages.

The main symbolic opposition in *Everyman* is not between virtues and vices, as in most English morality plays, but between characters who point the way to salvation and morally neutral characters. God, Good Deeds, Knowledge, Confession, the Angel and the Doctor are opposed to such figures as Death, Goods and Five Wits, who are more or less well-disposed towards Everyman or more or less indifferent. An obvious way of expressing this opposition in the terms of early sixteenth-century staging would have been to associate the salvation figures with raised structures and the neutral figures with the main playing area. The "cold ground" from which Good Deeds first speaks (1.486) might have been used again as Everyman's grave, placed under the stage from which the Angel addresses Everyman, and Knowledge might have emerged from the House of Salvation to play her part.

Whether the early productions of *Everyman* used one, two, or even three stages, and whether Good Deeds' "cold ground" and Everyman's grave were in fact the same structure, cannot now be determined. The playwright left this decision to the performers, as one of their contributions to his work's artistic realization. The evidence on this question which can be derived from the text and from other multiple-stage plays is inconclusive.

If "the hye sete celestyall" and the place "here above" were combined in a single structure, the actor of God would be able also to play the Angel's part[10], thus solving one of the difficulties of doubling. The grave might be placed beneath this structure and the House of Salvation would be a separate unit. This plan would to some extent reproduce the staging of *Perseverance*, in which the Castle (symbolically equivalent to the House of Salvation) is detached from God's scaffold.

Alternatively, it would be possible to combine God's throne, the Angel's place, the House of Salvation, and the grave in a single tower-like structure. This would have the disadvantage of detaching Good Deeds

from the other salvation figures. She could not begin speaking from the grave, since she must not be too close to the House of Salvation, to which Knowledge must conduct Everyman. On the other hand, a single actor would be available for God, Confession and the Angel. The stage-plan of *Perseverance* differs from this arrangement in having heaven (God's scaffold) as a separate structure, but resembles it in that Mankind's death-bed, from under which Anima arises, is placed below the Castle. The arrangement also receives some support from the staging of *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, where a single scaffold, centrally placed, probably contained God, an angel, the Holy Spirit, and some complicated machinery.[11]

In staging, then, the text makes suggestions without being in any way prescriptive, and this is further proved by the multifarious stagings of *Everyman* in the present century. I shall mention two other ways in which the script supports the performers, before considering some of the techniques by which it is likely to engage the audience.

First, the text implies a great deal about the movements and positions of actors. Detailed stage directions could be added to many passages with ease. An example is the following exchange, in which Fellowship realises the full significance of Everyman's journey:

Everyman (looking at him). In dede, Deth was with me here.

Felawship (backing away). Now, by God that all hathe bought,
If Deth were the messenger,
For no man that is lyuynge to-daye
I wyll not go that lothe iournaye –
Not for the fader that bygate me!

Everyman. Ye promysed other wyse, parde.

Felawship (hesitantly). I wote well I sayd so, truely;

(approaching him suddenly). 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.

Everyman (shrugging him off and moving away).
Ye, therto ye wolde be redy!
To go to myrthe, solas, and playe
Your mynde wyll soner apply,
Than to bere me company in my longe iournaye.

Felawship (making a stand). Now in good fayth, I wyll not that waye;

(approaching him again). But and thou will murder, or ony man kyll,
In that I wyll helpe thee with a good wyll.

(11.264-82)

In the second half, the grouping of the characters, with the central figure, Everyman, being supported in the first rank by Good Deeds and Knowledge, and in the second by Strength, Discretion, Beauty and Five Wits, will probably suggest visually effective, symmetrical stage arrangements to a director. If Everyman stands centre after his confession, with Knowledge and Good Deeds on either side, the choric effect of 11.654-67 is enhanced. On their entrance immediately following, the gifts of nature can then stand behind, in a row or semi-circle. Once this position is established, subsequent movements flow very easily. Five Wits has merely to step forward in order to harangue the audience and to chat with Knowledge; the touching of the rood can be a single symmetrical action, and the escort can line up rapidly to conduct Everyman to the grave. Stage balance is maintained as Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits depart, and the dying Everyman remains behind, with Knowledge and Good Deeds once again to the right and left of him. Knowledge can step forward to comment (11.888-93) as Everyman and Good Deeds enter the grave.

Secondly, because the dialogue consists mostly of brief question-and-answer, and because only Everyman's part is somewhat long, the text supports the performers by demanding little line-learning. Furthermore, several of the dialogue patterns, which were probably evolved in the first place for the audience's benefit, have the secondary effect of assisting the actors' memories. Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits, for instance, almost always have lines in that order, which is also the order, symbolically appropriate, of their individual exits. Again, the patterning of Everyman's soliloquies in the first half is likely both to assist the initial learning of lines, and to aid an actor in difficulties. Although there are no close, and therefore confusing, verbal resemblances, each soliloquy consists of a lament, a recapitulation of events, a moral interpretation of them, and an idea of what to do next. The first three soliloquies, furthermore, have keynote apostrophes—to God the Creator—"Lorde, helpe, that all wrought!" (1.192), to the Blessed Virgin—"A, Lady, helpe!" (1.304) and to Jesus (1.378).[12]

Words such as "pattern", "order" and "symmetry" can hardly be avoided in discussions of the morality plays, including *Everyman*, and they have already been used in this paper. What is important from the dramaturgical viewpoint is the life with which the different playwrights endowed their patterns, and whether they used them subtly, and with moderation or to excess, with subsequent stiffness. The writer of *Everyman* handled his patterns with unerring liveliness and lightness.

The dangers of the first half are that the scenes between Everyman and his false friends will go on for too long, and that they will become repetitive. As it is, the scenes of rejection halt at the number of perfection and the godhead—three, which happens to be perfect also from a theatrical point of view. If there had been more, humour might have crept in. Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin and Goods comprise in their persons a concise statement of the diverse aspects of creation with which a human may assuage

his loneliness.

The rejection scenes are various on an obvious visual level and also in their dialogue. Fellowship is alone, but Kindred and Cousin meet Everyman as a pair. They are lively, comic characters, only briefly on stage, and therefore contrast with the immobility of Goods. The dialogue of the first rejection scene creates considerable tension as Fellowship asserts and re-asserts his faithfulness (11.212-40) and then strives to penetrate the obscure language of Everyman's request (11.241-63). Kindred's and Cousin's professions of friendship, on the other hand, are quite brief (11.319-26), and although Everyman explains his dilemma even less plainly to them, they understand him much more readily (11.327-44). The playwright has refrained from creating tension twice by the same means. Again unlike Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin are not even slightly conscience-stricken over their refusal, but make comic alternative offers and excuses. Goods, too, passes through the protestations quickly, and readily comprehends Everyman's plight, but his refusal, far from being comic, is couched in terms which are really moralistic, though Goods himself presumably does not see them in that light.

The rejection scenes are part of two broad contrasts established in *Everyman*, between static and active characters and scenes[13], and between scenes of few and many characters. An example of the first kind of contrast occurs early when Death, who is an extremely mobile figure, enters after God has given his long speech without moving from his stage. Death's mobility helps to create his forcefulness and fearsomeness:

> Lorde, I wyll in the worlde go renne ouer-all
> And cruelly out-serche bothe grete and small.
> (11.72-73)

but later in the play mobility, and also a well-occupied stage are associated with spiritual health and security.

Except for the brief scene with Kindred and Cousin, there are, in the first half, before Everyman turns for counsel to Good Deeds, never more than two characters on stage. Between the scenes with Death and with his false friends Everyman is left in frightening isolation. After he has called on Good Deeds, however, the audience does not again see him alone.

The physical immobility of Goods and Good Deeds places extra stress on their uselessness to Everyman as companions on his journey. In this way Everyman's isolation and the suspense of the play's middle section are increased. As Everyman and Knowledge walk to the House of Salvation this suspense is somewhat alleviated, but it is recaptured during the long prayer to the Trinity and the scourging, when Everyman is the only active figure. Good Deeds, Confession, Knowledge—and God and Goods[14], if they are still on stage—do not move. Good Deeds' lines giving thanks for her restored mobility on the completion of the penance finally release the tension of the play's centre, and are a major turning point. Everyman's clothing in the garment of contrition follows immediately. An impression of joyful activity is created by repeated references to the proposed pilgri-

mage, even though this does not actually occur until later:

> . . . Whan ye to your iourneys ende come shall
> (1.641)
> And lette us go now without taryenge.
> (1.651)
> Yet thou must lede with thee
> Thre persones of grete myght.
> (11.657-58)

The entrances of the gifts of nature contribute to the movement on stage and to the much lightened mood.

Five Wits' address and his talk with Knowledge slow the pace before Everyman confidently leads Knowledge and the gifts of nature on their pilgrimage. The journey which Everyman so dreaded in the beginning has, then, been radically reinterpreted, in part by a feature of performance which consistently equates movement and a crowded stage with security.

The soundest base for an appreciation of the superlative stagecraft of *Everyman* is the witnessing of a production which does justice to the script. However, such an appreciation can also be arrived at more abstractly by setting *Everyman* in its historical context and contrasting it with other plays written about the same time. The playwright does not court the audience with robust comic techniques, such as were inseparable from the interludes staged indoors. Nor are there elaborate props or stage effects, though these were usual in other plays intended for multiple stages. In *Everyman* gimmickry and spectacle have been abandoned in favour of a subtler and more effective dramaturgy.[15]

NOTES:

[1] A.C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman*, Manchester University Press, 1961, pp. x-xii. Cawley supports van Mierlo's conclusion that *Everyman* was translated from Vorsterman's print of *Elckerlijc*, of c. 1518-25. He writes that this "is not seriously at variance with the date 1510-25 proposed for the earliest extant print of *Everyman*" — the Douce fragment in the Bodleian Library of an edition by Richard Pynson.
The later dating for the writing of *Everyman* was adopted by S. Schoenbaum in his Supplement to his revision of Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, London, Methuen, 1964; Supplement, Northwestern University, Illinois, 1966, p.2.

[2] *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1600*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, Vol. I, pp. 229-53.

[3] *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962, pp. 8-47, 68-87.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-48.

[5] *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[6] *op. cit.*, p. 233-34.

[7] Between two devils, Mercury and Belial, 11.412-501.

[8] D.C. Baker and J.L. Murphy, "The Late Medieval Plays of MS. Digby 133: Scribes, Dates and Early History", *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, X (1967), 154-55; 162-63.

[9] The peripheral roles, usually of one speech only, are unlikely to have been acted by supernumeraries, since this would not have reduced the total cast required. The professional companies seem in any case to have ceased employing supernumeraries early, for financial reasons. (Bevington, *op. cit.*, p. 116)

[10] This is more likely than that God remains visible throughout the action, treating Everyman's impassioned prayers (for example, at 11.192 and 581) with wooden indifference. However, God's presence is supported by Knowledge, at 1.637:

> God seeth thy lyuynge in his trone aboue.

[11] G. Wickham, ed., *English Moral Interludes*, London, Dent, 1976, p. 106.

[12] Cf. David Kaula, "Time and the Timeless in *Everyman* and *Dr. Faustus*", *College English*, XXII (1960), 10-11.

[13] Cf. Samuel Beckett's use of immobility in an almost symbolic way in *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*.

[14] In view of Goods' assertion of his immobility on first speaking, it is desirable that he should not exit when his part is completed. Everyman can gesture to him when later he divides his goods between the poor and his just creditors. (11.699-702). A symbolic point is made if Goods remains behind after Everyman has completed his pilgrimage.

[15] This article was adapted from a paper which the writer delivered at the Sixth Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, held at Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, in September, 1977.