

EVERYMAN AND THE ENERGIES OF STASIS

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The well-known "lacks" -- of conflict, characterization, comedy, colourful language, and so on -- that set *Everyman* apart from the other English morality plays are now widely recognized as sources of, not obstacles to, its acknowledged dramatic impact and didactic efficacy. But merely to translate absences into corresponding presences and to speak of such values as simplicity, starkness, unity, naturalness is to leap over, without even taking for granted, the play's most significant achievement. In the following pages, I wish to suggest that the central strategies of representation are active ones, best described in terms of resistance, subversion, and disruption practised upon the text's own potentialities and tendencies, and so upon its audience's expectations.

By substituting pilgrimage for psychomachia, while flattening itself out in presentational technique, *Everyman* makes our own journey, the aesthetic journey, deceptively easy-going, if not bland.¹ Unquestionably, there is more "drama" than meets the eye,² and an audience will be alert to the spiritual vicissitudes inherent, too, in the concept of pilgrimage. But holy dying simply does not offer the salient dramatic possibilities of the struggle during life between good and evil -- the focus of all the other extant moralities.³ And as the action unfolds, in measured fashion, from God's determining speech, the residual potential for the usual kinds of dramatic engagement is consistently negated and suppressed. In fact, the

terrain through which we seem to pass so smoothly has been wrested, as if by domestic rebellion, from higher dramatic authority; it is very much up for grabs, and so we are continually reminded in ways that press home the knowledge that, even for an audience, "security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy."⁴ Such knowledge, of course, implies acknowledgment of mortality itself. Through our dramatic experience, then, the play subjects us to something like the experience of its central character, keeping its audience close enough throughout to the initial naive position of *Everyman*, unconscious of his "endynge," to involve it disturbingly in the unfolding and deepening of consciousness.⁵

These effects and the techniques that produce them are shared, by and large, with the Dutch *Elckerlijc*, and so in all probability derive from that work.⁶ They are extended, however, and made to permeate the play even more thoroughly by the most distinctive feature of the English version -- its quite unsystematic versification. This basic and tangible element offers a convenient starting point for assessing the play's uniqueness. Given the presumed translator's verbal skill and the influence both of the putative original and of English morality convention, we are clearly dealing with a calculated refusal to conform, not with mere ineptitude. In this light, A.C. Cawley's defence of the functionality of the play's irregular rhyme and metre⁷ -- an argument persuasive in its own terms -- seems unduly apologetic. Behind it lie unquestioned assumptions about the value of regularity and, more largely, about decorum, the relation between style and content. That the versification of *Everyman* "closely resembles"⁸ that of *Hickscorner* in exhibiting a similar diversity of patterns is true enough. But more significant, surely, is the fact that the latter play is quite conventional -- much closer to other English moralities than to *Everyman* -- in what it seeks to do with verse. However inconsistent the practice, the aim in *Hickscorner* is consistently to suit the form to the speaker and the nature of the speech in order to reinforce the contrast between good and evil principles. This is so basic and natural a technique as to qualify, I should argue, as an inherent tendency of morality plays, sanctioned by both dramatic and didactic considerations. It is a function of the texts' own impulse to make themselves, according to the expectations of their audiences, livelier and more forceful. Hence it actually belongs to the text -- to any text in the genre, that is, including *Everyman*. Yet *Everyman* offers so little in the way of adaptation of verse-form to character, doctrine, or even dramatic occasion that Cawley can only tentatively identify "signs that the author-translator . . . is feeling his way towards a dramatic use of different verse-forms."⁹ This

"lack" amounts to a rupture of the connection between sign and signified, a withholding of consent to the code binding spectacle and spectator. The result is an undercurrent disturbing the smoothly flowing surface -- the sign of the hidden rock.

The play's versification is merely a quantifiable aspect of its broader linguistic practices. It has become commonplace to think highly of *Everyman's* clear, plain, "neutral" style, which radically sets it apart from the other moralities.¹⁰ Commentators are happy to forgo the usual extreme contrasts between aureate piety and bombastic wickedness, especially since the play's substitution of the journey motif for the mode of conflict seems to call for a correspondingly sustained and subdued tone. Certainly, too, the style is sufficiently flexible to convey the relatively narrow range of dramatic nuance required of it. This is most apparent where the action makes its closest approach to the conventionally dramatic, as when *Everyman* is deserted by those on whom he has relied -- *Kynrede*, for example. Yet even as the contrary emotional states of the characters at such a moment mirror their physical parting of the ways, the stark uniformity of the diction, together with the parallel syntax, strongly links them:

Everyman. Alas, that ever I was bore!

For now shall I neuer be mery,

If that you forsake me.

Kynrede. A, syr, what ye be a mery man!

Take good herte to you, and make no mone.

But one thyng I warne you, by Saynt Anne --

As for me ye shall go alone. (lines 348-54)¹¹

What has not received due attention is the way in which such linkage, reinforced by the formulaic repetition and the use of proverbs praised by Cawley and others as dramatically effective,¹² works on a deeper level to create an anti-dramatic stasis -- again, the rock in the stream. This dimension of the play actively resists the twin dynamics of action -- forward motion, with its implication of linear time, and what may be thought of as differentiation, the continual bringing to birth of new meaning through the making of distinctions. The play's handling of time is an important index of its method, as I hope to show later. For the moment, I wish to concentrate on the latter concept. We are used to thinking of conflict as the language of drama, but perhaps this language too, as Saussurean linguistics posits of those languages we speak, is generated by difference -- by

successively giving figures on stage, of whom we might imagine anything and everything, things to wear, do, and say that restrict our possible interpretations and lend them distinct identities. In a way reminiscent of those myths of creation in which conflict arises after the birth of the "other," drama creates itself by the creation of difference. In a sense, then, the action of *Everyman*, in constituting itself as a sequence of "partings," the splitting off of parts from a whole, harnesses itself to the essential processes of drama even more directly than do the moralities that deal in conflict. By simultaneously denying difference through its language, the text is exposing the reality of connectedness that underlies both its method and the divine purpose: Kynrede does indeed belong to *Everyman*, and *Everyman* is us. But this truth does not simply loom through the limpidity of the linguistic medium -- it is hard won. Nor is "neutrality" -- because it implies passivity -- an adequate description of the medium itself. In differentiating characters and moral stances by forming patterns -- of aureation, alliteration, and elaborate stanzaic forms -- language in the other moralities is following its natural bent as a means to a dramatic end. In order for language to make itself disappear, as it seems to do in *Everyman*, the inherent tendency toward such patterning must be constantly disrupted.

Paradoxically, repetition itself is made disruptive. The insistent recurrence in different contexts and the speech of different characters of key words ("rekenynge"), phrases ("moost nede"), and formulas ("begynnyng . . . endynge") serve to break down barriers or, perhaps more precisely, to prevent them from forming despite an audience's natural preference for distinctions and compartments. When a character uses such a familiar tag, we see through the stage identity, which we are eager to accept on its own terms, and willy-nilly find ourselves confronted by the universal non-dramatic meaning beyond. A similar effect is produced by the proverbs, whose prevalence clearly reflects a policy of the translation. It makes obvious didactic sense for *Everyman* to express himself, at moments of both folly and wisdom, in the collective common language of the audience he represents. His own fumbling attempts at understanding are a way of making us equally dependent upon Knowledge for spiritual guidance. But his use of proverbs (and the proverbial mode generally) also becomes a way of maintaining a dual role, as he moves back and forth between concrete character and abstract symbol.

Thus in addressing the departing Strength, he begins by speaking out of a discrete identity, next dissolves into abstraction through his third-person moralizing, then re-materializes as an individual fictional entity:

I had wende surer I sholde you haue founde.
 He that trusteth in his Strength,
 She hym deceyueth at the length.
 Bothe Strength and Beaute forsaketh me;
 Yet they promysed me fayre and louyngly. (lines 826-30)

It is as if he hangs up his costume for a moment on an aphoristic hook, not interrupting the dramatic illusion in a Brechtian way, but rather withdrawing more deeply within it, for without his costume he is invisible.¹³ Indeed, all the allegorical characters show a similar capacity to fade in and out of dramatic existence within the action much as they come and go from the action itself. And their formulaic, proverbial, and generalizing speech patterns ensure that the hooks on which the costumes are hung form the only constant pattern, as they are used by one character after another. What emerges is a picture of the fixed and eternal order lying beyond the illusion of this world, in which we act our parts in costumes of corruptible flesh.

The elusiveness of *Everyman's* characters as dramatic presences, their unwillingness to commit themselves wholly to the stage, is, I believe, specifically a response to the challenge of allegorical drama. And it is an unusual response because it involves resisting the audience's desire, embodied in the biases of the genre, for self-contained illusion. Such desire clearly governs the presentation of characters in the other moralities. To patronize the characterization of the typical morality play as rudimentary and monochromatic is to undervalue its completeness in its own terms. That is, the on-stage figures embrace and sustain those differences that bring "character" into being and define their distance from allegorical significance. This is most obvious, and comes most naturally to the dramatist, in the case of vices and virtues, diabolic and angelic powers. But even in the "Everyman" figures in the other plays, the dynamics are centrifugal, tending powerfully toward the individual and particular.

Where such characters are not more or less particularized to start with, as are the King in *Pride of Life*, the farmer Mankind, and the various protagonists of the later moral interludes, there is usually a progression through the stages of life that offers the central figure a series of chances to play various parts. The pattern is essentially the same in *The Castle of Perseverance*, whose hero is Humanum Genus, and in the considerably later (by about a hundred years) *Mundus et Infans*, where the successive identities are actually formalized by the assumption of new names -- Wanton, Lust and

Lykyng, Manhode, Shame, and Age. In both cases, entry into each role is decisive, as if the dramatic process is in flight from the suspended animation and indeterminacy of abstraction:¹⁴

Coueytse, thou seyst a good skyl.
 So grete God me avaunce,
 Al thi byddyng don I wyl.
 I forsake the Castel of Perseueraunce;
 In Coueytse I wyl me hyle
 For to gete sum sustynaunce.¹⁵
 Ah ha! Wanton is my name!
 I can many a quaynte game¹⁶

When such characters use the language of popular wisdom, as they often do, it merely flows from and so reinforces their current moral position, against which the audience is being urged to measure itself. Thus the speech of *Humanum Genus* above continues:

Afor mele men mete schul tyle;
 It is good for al chaunce
 Sum good owhere to hyde. (lines 2537-40)

There is no breaking of the dramatic illusion here, no self-erasure, no opening up of a metadramatic dimension. Only when the self-conscious mode of repentance finally becomes their mode of identity are *Humanum Genus* and *Infans* (now "Age") capable of the sort of self-commentary that distinguishes *Everyman* throughout:

Now, good men, takythe example at me.
 Do for youreself whyl ye han spase.
 For many men thus seruyd be
 Thorwe the world in dyerse place.
 (*Castle of Perseverance*, lines 2995-98)

Now, syrs, take all ensample by me,
 How I was borne in symple degre;
 The Worlde ryall receyued me. . . .
 (*Mundus et Infans*, lines 961-63)

By contrast, to such an extent are we conditioned to the double functioning of *Everyman* that his own formal address to the audience, when

it eventually comes, seems much more closely woven into the dramatic fabric and furnishes less sense of closure. Just a few lines before, he yet again withdraws from, then reenters, the action:

Gramercy, Good Dedes! Now may I true frendes se.
 They haue forsaken me, euerychone;
 I loued them better than my Good Dedes alone.
 Knowledge, wyll ye forsake me also? (lines 855-58)

The dramatic momentum is briefly interrupted, the balance tipped towards abstraction. This familiar pattern nearly swallows up the standard hortatory injunction, which in other plays rings out so clearly:

Me thynke, alas, that I must be gone
 To make my rekenynge and my dettes paye,
 For I se my tyme is nye spent awaye.
 Take example, all ye that this do here or se,
 How they that I loued best do forsake me,
 Excepte my Good Dedes that bydeth truely. (lines 864-69)¹⁷

Moreover, Good Dedes herself immediately recapitulates the pattern, beginning with a moral aphorism -- "All erthly thynges is but vanyte" (line 871) -- then returning through her own abstract meaning to recapture her dramatic identity: "All fleeth saue Good Dedes, and that am I" (line 873). It is as if the text is anxious not to allow the tension of its allegorical balance to dissipate in the topos of exhortation. At this point, paradoxically, its method requires stronger allegiance to the dramatic flux than we find in its more consistently dramatic counterparts. Again, *Everyman* demonstrates that its ultimate loyalty is to the principle of opposing the complacency of its audience, even when that complacency is centred on a decorous exit from illusion.

The complicity of Good Dedes points up the extent to which the maintenance of subversive tension is a collective enterprise, not the project of *Everyman* alone. The typical morality character assumes his dramatic identity by disclosing himself at some length and establishing his distinctive speech pattern:

Now I sytte, Satanas, in my sad synne,
 As deuyll dowty, in draf as a drake.

I champe and I chafe, I chocke on my chynne,
 I am boystows and bold, as Belyal the blake.

(*Castle of Perseverance*, lines 196-99)

I haue be the very mene for yowr restytucyon.
 Mercy ys my name, that mornyth for yowr offence.
 Dyverte not yowrsylffe in tyme of temtacyon,
 That ye may be acceptable to Gode at yowr goyng hence.¹⁸

The boundary-crossing language of *Everyman*, on the other hand, supports a compositional policy of indirect introduction, reluctant self-revelation, and resistance to *amplificatio*. In the place of a rising action constructed with building blocks of character-definition, the play opens by receding along a chain of enigmatic presences. Even God, who, of course, sets events in motion, is introduced by a Messenger, while he in turn introduces his own messenger, Death. In the speeches of both God and Death, the orientation is outward, the tone pragmatic, the emphasis on the task in hand. Death does not even identify himself to Everyman until challenged, while Everyman himself does not utter a word before Death accosts him. Even before his appearance, moreover, the text has wavered between references to Everyman as collective and particular,¹⁹ so that his very incarnation seems almost frankly a concession to dramatic necessity:

Every man wyll I beset that lyueth beestly
 Out of Goddes lawes, and dredeth not foly.

 Loo, yonder I se Eueryman walkyng. (lines 74-80)

Subsequently, the play moves ahead by way of brief exchanges and frequent shifting of character groups. Precisely because the action is smoothly continuous with a momentum of its own, it furnishes characters with continual occasion to step back from self-disclosure, even as most of them retreat from commitment to Everyman himself. Their appearances, like Everyman's, are made to seem contingent on plot. They come, as it were, out of nowhere at the text's "moost nede" -- most strikingly, no doubt, when Good Dedes speaks from the ground when called upon. As for Knowledge, whose arrival turns the tide of despair for Everyman, she enters as if sprung from the words of her sister and immediately hangs up her costume on the verbal hook previously provided: "Everyman, I wyll go with the and be thy gyde, / In thy moost nede to go by thy side" (lines 522-23). It is a statement of

self-effacement, not of self-definition, and its mode is sustained so thoroughly that the precise significance of Knowledge has preoccupied critics more than any other aspect of the play.

While it is not surprising that God -- the only non-allegorical participant in the action proper -- fails to disclose and define himself in typical morality-play fashion, his single speech (at forty-two lines by far the longest in the play) contains anomalies that dislocate convention in a parallel way. There is no better emblem for the play's method on many levels than the joining here of simplicity and directness of expression to intransigent mystery and enigma -- that is, the withholding of revelation. Depicting divinity did not pose difficulties for mediaeval dramatists, and their insouciance about anthropomorphizing the persons of the Trinity (even the Holy Ghost, who appears for instance in the Norwich pageant of the Fall) is reflected in the normal practice of keeping them distinct for dramatic purposes. Even where "Alpha and Omega" is used as a tag or the paradox of three-in-one is insisted upon (most notably in the Creation pageants), the portrayal tends to adhere to the particular aspect of the divine nature most obviously implied by the context. In this respect *Everyman* is highly unconventional, exploiting to the full the possibilities of its indeterminate context. God makes no overt reference to his mysterious essence; he begins by speaking almost matter-of-factly and getting right down to business:

I perceyue, here in my maieste,
 How that all creatures be to me vnkynde,
 Lyuyng without drede in worldly prosperyte. (lines 22-24)

Yet as his complaint develops, the mystery of the godhead powerfully obtrudes itself into the very texture of the speech, as the divine voice is felt to shift from Father to Son and back again.

Although this effect is without exact parallel, to my knowledge, in English mediaeval drama, it is supported by specific conventions of depiction found in the cycle pageants. At first, we distinctly hear the vengeful Old Testament God, bent on punishing the proliferating sin that manifests man's ingratitude for the Creation:

Of ghostly syght the people be so blynde,
 Drowned in synne, they know me not for theyr God.
 In worldely ryches is all theyr mynde;
 They fere not my ryghtwysnes, the sharpe rod. (lines 25-28)

The figurative use of "drowned" helps to evoke in particular the wrathful deity of the Noah pageants:

Me thoght I shewed man luf when I made hym to be
 All angels abuf like to the trynyte; . . .
 Veniance will I take,
 In erth for syn sake . . .
 I repente ful sore that euer maide I man,
 Bi me he settis no store and I am his soferan.²⁰

We are not allowed to rest, however, either in a single concept of God's identity or at a comfortable historical distance. This is a play not about the ancient punishment of particular sinners, but about Everyman's punishment -- that is, ours -- in the indefinite present. Next, the sublime instance of God's love typologically prefigured by the saving of Noah is brought to bear through an abrupt yet seamless transition to the unmistakable voice of the Second Person:

My lawe that I shewed, whan I for them dyed,
 They forgete clene / and shedyng of my blode rede.
 I hanged bytwene two theues, it can not be denyed;
 To gete them lyfe I suffred to be deed. (lines 29-32)²¹

These reproaches of the sorrowful Christ, injured by man's continuing sinfulness, redirect the audience's attention to the anagogical level -- the opposite verge of human history -- by echoing his role as Doomsday judge:

Behalde, mankynde, this ilke is I,
 Thus was I dight for thy folye--
 Man, loke, thy liffe was to me full leffe.²²

When Christ so appears in the York and Towneley cycles, the incarnation of the godhead is stressed and his identity is pointedly differentiated from that of the Father: "Mi fadir of heuene, he has me sente . . ." (York *Last Judgement*, line 233); "Mi fader of heuen has me downe sente. . . ."²³ In the York version, the play is opened by the distinctive voice of the wrathful Father, who speaks of having sent his Son to redeem mankind (lines 27 ff.) and promises the Son's later appearance: "Ther schall thei see the woundes fyve / That my sone suffered for them all" (lines 71-72).²⁴ Given the manuscript identification of both speakers as *Deus* and the fact that a

single actor evidently played both parts, perhaps with a change of costume,²⁵ the strong tendency towards separation suggests a tendency to produce character by means of dramatic function. Only in the concluding stanza of the play might the divine voice be said to cross the boundary dividing the divine persons into distinct characters. After clearly speaking as Christ, the voice at least diffuses itself as it incorporates the action we have witnessed into the grand providential design:

Nowe is fulfillid all my forthoght,
 For endid is all erthely thyng.
 All worldly wightis that I haue wroght,
 Aftir ther werkis haue nowe wonnyng. (lines 373-76)

Even in the *Chester Judgement*, which is opened by a *Deus* who asserts the indivisibility of the Trinity, there is an immediate centrifugal particularizing of identity. The text virtually seizes upon the possibilities for differentiation. After two lines that may refer to the Father, the voice decisively becomes that of the Son. This may be accompanied, it seems, by an on-stage donning of costume ("what weede for them I weare, / upon my body nowe I beare" [lines 21-22]), as *Deus* moves into character for his later descent as "*Filius Dei*" (line 356 SD).²⁶ In all subsequent appearances the manuscripts agree in designating the character as "*Jesus*"; at one point he refers to "my Father almightie" (line 390); and, except perhaps where he takes credit for the creation of man (lines 369 ff.), the character of the Son is consistently and richly developed as such.

As God continues in *Everyman*, however, his voice passes through and beyond the humanity of the Second Person. By next assuming the unmistakable perspective of Judgement Day Father, divinity resists the dramatic pressure to resolve the suspended mystery of its unitary multiplicity:

I se the more that I them forbere
 The worse they be fro yere to yere. . . .
 I profered the people grete multytude of mercy,
 And few there be that asketh it hertly. . . .
 . . . nedes on them I must do iustyce,
 On euery man lyuyng without fere.
 Where arte thou, Dethe, thou myghty messengere? (lines 42-63)

Sethen haue thei founde me full of mercye,
 Full of grace and forgyffenesse,

And thei als wrecchis, wittirly,
 Has ledde ther liffe in lithirnesse. . . .
 Men seis the worlde but vanité,
 Yitt will no manne beware therby;
 Ilke a day ther mirroure may thei se,
 Yitt thynke thei noght that thei schall dye.

(York *Last Judgement*, lines 41-52)

The immediate effect of these shifts and resonances is to communicate an unsettling sense of God's mysterious essence beneath the superficial straightforwardness of the presentation. The ostensible foundation of the ensuing drama, both in theological and representational terms (God is at only one remove from "reality" -- an object of representation, not an allegorical representative) is made elusive and uncertain. The imperative repository of trust becomes impossible to grasp, and our need for humility, mediation, and above all knowledge, is thereby established. To suppose that God will stay still for us and play, as we might expect from both cycle and morality analogues, a *part* (rather than the whole), is to forget his nature and our obligation. Certainly, God speaks clearly; as we are reminded, his word both created and, as Christ, re-created, us. But because we have heard these messages imperfectly, not taken them to heart, we are in need of another sort of message and messenger. The text says to us, in our would-be complacency as audience, what Death says to our stand-in:

Eueryman, stande styll! Whyder arte thou goynge
 Thus gayly?/Hast thou thy Maker forgete? (lines 85-86)

More deeply, by uniting in concentrated form the various divine manifestations of the cycle plays, *Everyman* establishes the concept of divine time, the eternal will of God providentially fulfilled, behind the linear time so intensely experienced by man as a consequence of the consciousness of death. Everyman's awareness of time is radically altered, of course, by the divine message. He has not been thinking of his ending; suddenly, even one more day would be inexpressibly precious. His former nonchalance is unwittingly mocked by Felawship's cheery greeting, "Eueryman, good morowe, by this daye!" (line 206) -- a bitter counterpoint to the Faustus-like desperation that dominates Everyman ("The day passeth and is almost agoon" [line 194]) until the influence of Knowledge reverses his attitude ("For ioy I wepe; I wolde we were there!" [line 537]).²⁷ As has often been noted, this unremitting emphasis on the passing of time is an important source

of dramatic power²⁸ and is peculiar to *Everyman*, contrasting with the looser handling of time in the other morality plays.

Yet in this respect *Everyman*, far from cutting across the dramatic grain, is actually pushing a natural dramatic tendency beyond its usual limit. Obviously, the concept of time is particularly important in portraying the career of any morality-play protagonist, whatever stylization may be employed in the stage-chronology. More broadly, linearity and sequentiality are fundamental to all dramatic patterning. The stress on *Everyman's* dilemma in terms of human time, therefore, exploits a basic audience response; it is part of the process of encouraging "identification" with the character and his situation. And despite the minatory message here, that response is in essence a complacent one. It is only possible, after all, to "identify" with a character who possesses a discrete identity and functions in circumstances that have an apparent reality of their own and that are dramatically "complete." The premise of such an imaginative coming-together is separate-ness; a way out of the experience is left open, reassuringly.

The impact of *Everyman's* temporal predicament does not end but rather begins with such identification. Once again the text draws the audience into the dramatic fiction only in order to draw it through and beyond, where it finds, not an image of itself, but itself indeed. All morality plays take place in the temporal gap defined by the cycles, the indefinite here-and-now stretching between the terminus of Biblical history and the Judgement to come. By making this framework so explicit and insistent, *Everyman* does more than accent the universality of the experience of death -- it sets the linearity of that experience, the very mechanism of our engagement, adrift in a sea of cosmic time, detaching it forcibly from the pole of the particular, the determinate, to which it seeks to cling. The fate of *Everyman* is "bounced off" against that of the sinners punished by the Flood, then against that of the *maledicti* on Judgement Day, so as to make it clear that his death is those deaths and the deaths of all men in between.²⁹ In short, it is our death, not that of a character who represents us. Death has, of course, existed since Adam, yet God is also deciding before our eyes to introduce it into the world as punishment: that decision will be reenacted continually until the final death. The character *Everyman* may have a stage day whose passing he and we are made to feel acutely.³⁰ But against that sense of familiar measurable time is set the meaninglessness of the concept from the divine perspective. We realize that "day" is a metaphorical convenience, a span in which a metaphorical journey might take place. Any unit of human time is interchangeable with this day and amounts to the

"all daye" during which, according to the Messenger, we are "transytory" (line 6). Any period may serve to reach the "endynge" implied in our "begynnyng"; it is these two mutually dependent verities that begin and end what we can be sure of. And so we are led to see through the text as through a window by the raising of the shade.

We must be kept aware of the relation between shade and window if we are not to mistake either the barrier to our sight or the disclosed image for exclusive reality. This is surely the key to *Everyman's* method. The cycle plays, in that they dramatize Biblical figures and actions, purport to present truth directly, enriched though the presentation is by typological indirections. The other English moralities, despite their allegorical premises, slip continually into fascination with dramatic surfaces, while these surfaces serve as primary substance in the saints' plays. Not that these alternative approaches to conveying Christian knowledge on stage necessarily suffer, either didactically or aesthetically, by comparison with *Everyman*. But it may be argued that, like a boat that sails close-hauled against the wind, by keeping its "tenor" and "vehicle" in a constant state of tension the play keeps its audience uniquely in touch with the journey's difficulty, rate of progress, and even danger. To exploit wholeheartedly opportunities for conflict and colour is to run before the wind of dramatic imperatives: we tend to lose our sense of motion and take our arrival for granted.

The ultimate embodiment of *Everyman's* reflexiveness is the character Knowledge, whose multivalent role is unparalleled elsewhere in the extant morality drama. As *Everyman's* guide to salvation, she is central to the theology of the work, and the audience is made commensurately dependent upon her for guidance through the text's meaning. At the same time, she maintains the strategy of withholding certainty and resolution, of disappearing, as it were, before our eyes. Many commentators have taken up the challenge of her ambiguity as mediatrix between *Everyman* and truth, generally attempting to fix her doctrinal significance on a scale between human understanding and specifically Christian kinds of acknowledgement -- that is, roughly, between reason and revelation. The most satisfactory arguments, I believe, are those that stress the link between self-knowledge and knowledge of God.³¹ Such an approach suits the general technique of the play: the elusiveness of Knowledge's meaning leads to the realization of its inclusiveness. She is indeed meant to carry truths that originate both with man and with God, for looming behind, shining through, and containing the divisions of the text is truth indivisible.

Problematic in a similarly stimulating way is the dramatic dimension of Knowledge's mediation between text and audience. Whatever her doctrinal significance, in terms of the dramatic fiction she at least begins as unequivocally Everyman's -- as much a part of him as are his Good Dedes and his Strength. Her position of special authority merely expresses her allegorical importance. It is logical, therefore, that, despite her assurances and proofs of steadfastness, she will finally follow the example of the other perishable parts of him:

Knowledge, wyll ye forsake me also?

Knowledge. Ye, Eueryman, whan ye to Deth shall go. (lines 860-61)

For Everyman, earthly knowledge, seeing "through a glass darkly," is to be superseded by seeing "face to face." Yet inevitably, over the course of the play, Knowledge's authority -- hence her new identity -- has also come to apply beyond the central character to those he represents. Hence, Knowledge's detaching of herself from Everyman only superficially resembles the preceding desertions of Beaute, Strength, Dyscrecion, and V. Wyttes -- those self-negations that mechanically enact the stages of dying. Instead, her role is transfigured and enlarged, even as her authority is diffused.

Knowledge promises Everyman to "se where ye shall be-come" (line 862), then remains on stage to transmit the information, thereby redefining her function by reorienting herself towards the audience. The transformation does not stop there, however, for this would be to leave the fiction intact behind her: merely to become our guide instead of his is to remain separate from us. Rather, thanks to the stage-effects and the informative Aungell, we are given equal direct knowledge of our own. And so Knowledge herself joins the audience, experiencing what we do and speaking for us rather than to us: "Now hath he suffred that we all shall endure" (line 888). She thus anticipates the Epilogue convention of later drama, where an actor steps partly out of character, creating a bridge between the stage world and that of the spectators. Everyman's Knowledge thoroughly becomes ours by melting into our consciousness -- the culmination of her evolving role as liminal figure in our own rite-de-passage.³² Her disappearance as participant in the fiction, coinciding with the end of Everyman's journey, induces our participation in the truth she has portrayed. As happens over and over in this play, we are compelled to acknowledge, not only that she has been its enduring subject, but that so have we. Her refusal to exit on cue, to join the final closure

by concluding her role within the dramatic illusion, bars our own escape from the responsibility which is that illusion's legacy.

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NOTES

¹ The metaphor of flattening has appealed to critics commenting on diverse aspects of the play. John Conley, "The Identity of Discretion in *Everyman*," *Notes and Queries*, N.S. 30 (1983), points out that the Dutch "voersienich has been flattened out to 'good aduysement'" (p. 395). More to the point, John Webster, "The Allegory of Contradiction in *Everyman* and *The Faerie Queene*," in *Spenser and the Middle Ages 1976*, Proc. of a Special Session at the Eleventh Conference in Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2-5 May 1976, ed. David A. Richardson, microfiche (Cleveland, Ohio 1976), speaks of the dramatic aspects of character and situation as "flattened out" (p. 367), though only from time to time.

² Thomas Van Laan, "*Everyman*: A Structural Analysis," *PMLA* 78 (1963) 465-75, has effectively drawn attention to the latent dynamics of the play, including the implicit presence of the sins portrayed in other moralities.

³ Recent studies of the play in terms of the *ars moriendi* tradition include Phoebe S. Spinrad, "The Last Temptation of *Everyman*," *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985) 185-94, and Donald F. Duclow, "*Everyman* and the *Ars Moriendi*: Fifteenth-Century Ceremonies of Dying," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 6 (1983) 93-113.

⁴ The obligingly concise expression of *Everyman*'s informing principle by the probably non-Shakespearean Hecate of *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, *The Arden Shakespeare* (10th ed., London 1971) III.v.32-33.

⁵ This view of the process of the play is in general accord with those of Webster (at n. 1) 358-86, and Carolyn Van Dyke, "The Intangible and Its Image: Allegorical Discourse and the Cast of *Everyman*," in *Acts of Interpretation, The Text in Its Contexts 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and*

Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman, Oklahoma 1982) 311-24. As Van Dyke puts it, an important aspect of the play is "Everyman's [hence our] education in allegorical vision, which is the recognition of the particular and timebound as the universal" (p. 316). However, both of these analyses limit themselves by presenting what I see as the pervasive uneasy fusion of "literal" and "figurative" (Webster, pp. 359-60), or "concrete" and "abstract" (Van Dyke, p. 315), in terms of successive dramatic effects that dislocate the perception of the audience. I also find fundamentally anachronistic Van Dyke's assumption of the existence of "the theatrical illusion called 'the fourth wall'" (p. 323) and her argument that "Initially Everyman and his friends are as realistic as the most traditional [modern] director could wish" (p. 322). A useful perspective on issues of "realism" in mediaeval drama, with primary reference to the cycle plays, is provided by William F. Munson, "Audience and Meaning in Two Medieval Dramatic Realisms," *Comparative Drama* 9 (1975) 44-67, rpt. in *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York 1982) 183-206.

⁶ I find particularly suggestive, however, the observation of Hans H. Meier, "Middle English Styles in Translation: A Note on *Everyman* and Caxton's *Reynard*," in *From Caxton to Beckett: Essays Presented to W.H. Toppen on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Jacques B.H. Alblas and Richard Todd (Amsterdam 1979), that the English adaptor tends to violate dramatic requirements and even logic "by being anticipatory, explicit, interpretative, or expository out of his turn" (p. 18, my emphasis). For a summary of the arguments and evidence regarding the relation between the Dutch and English works, see A.C. Cawley, ed. *Everyman* (Manchester 1961) x-xiii. A more recent perspective on what now seems a dormant controversy is furnished by Elsa Strietman, "The Middle Dutch *Elckerlijc* and the English *Everyman*," rev. art. *Medium Aevum* 52 (1983) 111-14.

⁷ Cawley (at n. 6) xxvii-xxviii.

⁸ *Ibid.* xxvii.

⁹ *Ibid.* xxvii.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Van Laan (at n. 2) 474-75, citing Cawley (at n. 6), who in turn cites T.S. Eliot's well-known approbation (p. xxv).

¹¹ All references to *Everyman* are to Cawley's edition (at n. 6).

¹² Cawley (at n. 6) xxvi-xxvii. For Van Laan (at n. 2), the proverbs "lend [the hero] universality and charm" (p. 475). Attuned to "realism" as she is, Van Dyke (at n. 5) conspicuously fails to take this feature of the language into account, except perhaps when, in my view missing the point, she comments that Kynrede's "unthinking [sic] reliance on clichés reveals him as only too typical" (p. 317).

¹³ Even allowing for the different aims of Brecht and mediaeval dramatists, Claude Gauvin, "Rite et jeu dans le théâtre religieux anglais du Moyen Age," *Revue d'histoire du Théâtre* 29 (1977) insists, "Il reste que les moyens prônés par Brecht et les procédés de dramaturgie médiéval -- ils sont parfois identiques -- aboutissent au même résultat -- la non-identification et la non-illusion" (p. 134). Surely "non-identification" and "non-illusion" apply in radically different ways in the two cases. For me, the sharply contrasting didactic purposes are the key to the distinction between Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and the supremely implicated audience consciousness fostered, with unparalleled success, by *Everyman*: Brecht sought to provoke critical analysis, the *Everyman* author to evoke an uncritical faith. Such a response might well have been facilitated by the perception of acting posited for Renaissance audiences by William E. Gruber, "The Actor in the Script: Affective Strategies in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Comparative Drama* 19 (1985) 30-48, who argues that spectators were conscious of the process of impersonation in a way which did not "force a dichotomy between critical objectivity and emotional presentation" (p. 34).

¹⁴ This reading of the dynamic of characterization in the moralities is at odds with that of Catherine Belsey in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London 1985), for whom such a succession of identities shows that the fifteenth-century concept of a human being did not include the capacity to function as "subject" -- that is, "to speak, to identify with the 'I' of an utterance, to be the agent of the action inscribed in the verb" (p. 15). Rather, according to Belsey, "Disunited, discontinuous, the hero of the moralities is not the origin of action; he has no single subjectivity which could constitute such an origin" (p. 18). On the contrary, I should deduce a premise of "subjectivity" in this sense from the plays' very tendency -- uniquely resisted by *Everyman* -- to particularize the identity of a figure who is theoretically universal, even if, for obvious didactic reasons, the resulting identities may be multiple and "discontinuous." See also Natalie Crohn Schmitt, "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality

Plays," *Comparative Drama* 12 (1978) 23-34, rpt. in *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays* (at n. 5) 304-15, who analyzes dramatic technique in terms of mediaeval psychology and concludes, with respect to *Mundus et Infans*, that "we must not assume that shifts in personality have to be developmental to be verisimilar. . . . They may . . . be understood as more life-like than we have assumed" (pp. 312-13).

¹⁵ *The Castle of Perseverance*, in *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS, O.S.262 (London 1969) lines 2531-36 (þ and 3 transliterated). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁶ *Mundus et Infans*, cited here and below from J.M. Manly, ed. *Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama* (1897; rpt. New York 1967) I, lines 76-77.

¹⁷ This address to the audience is the first point at which Van Dyke (at n. 5) finds the "theatrical illusion" to be violated (p. 323).

¹⁸ *Mankind*, in ed. Eccles (at n. 15) lines 17-20 (þ and 3 transliterated).

¹⁹ Observed by Cawley (at n. 6) note to line 66. V.A. Kolve, "Everyman and the Parable of the Talents," in *The Medieval Drama*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Albany 1972), comments on the way in which Everyman is thus not immediately distinguished from the audience. Cf. Webster (at n. 1) 360-61, and Van Dyke (at n. 5) 314-15, who ignores the participation of the audience and merely finds that the character's appearance enacts a "metamorphosis" of the "collective" into the "singular."

²⁰ *Noah and the Ark (Processus Noe cum filiis)*, *The Towneley Plays*, ed. George England, EETS, E.S. 71 (London 1897) lines 82-92.

²¹ See Cawley (at n. 6) note to line 29, on the proposed emendation of "lawe" to "loue," citing the possible influence of the Judgement plays.

²² *The Last Judgement* pageant in *York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London 1982) lines 265-67 (þ and 3 transliterated). Subsequent references are to this edition.

²³ *The Towneley Judgement*, in ed. England (at n. 20) line 390.

²⁴ The opening of the Towneley pageant is lost. So is the ending of the *N. Town Doomsday*, which, however, is evidently much simpler. It features a single figure identified as Ihesu in the opening stage direction, who addresses the blessed as "Patris mei ye childeryn dere" -- see *Ludus Coventriae or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi*, ed. K.S. Block, EETS, E.S. 120 (London 1922) line 41 (3 transliterated).

²⁵ The indenture made with the York Mercers in 1433 specifies a "Sirke Wounded" as part of the "Array for god" -- See Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama, York 1, Introduction, The Records* (Toronto 1979) 55.

²⁶ The text cited, as well as the source of information regarding manuscripts, is *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, I, EETS, S.S.3 (London 1974). For discussion of the shifting of divine persons in the opening lines, see the same editors' *The Chester Mystery Cycle, II Commentary and Glossary*, EETS, S.S.9 (London 1986) 352-53, where they point out the challenge of dramatically reconciling the role of Jesus in conducting the Judgement with the tradition that the hour of doom was known only to God the Father (note to lines 7-8).

²⁷ See David Kuala, "Time in *Everyman* and *Doctor Faustus*," *College English* 22 (1960) 12.

²⁸ See, e.g., Van Laan (at n. 2) 467.

²⁹ Cf. Kolve (at n. 19) 82, who discusses the play's setting in "a perpetual present, but also a specific historical time" -- i.e. Doomsday; also Kuala (at n. 27) 12.

³⁰ Against the relatively literal understanding of the play's chronology exemplified by Henry de Vocht, *Everyman: A Comparative Study of Texts and Sources, Materials for the Study of the Older English Drama*, N.S. 20 (Louvain 1947) 184, and Van Laan (at n. 2) 467, may be set the more flexible perspectives of Dennis V. Moran, "The Life of *Everyman*," *Neophilologus* 56 (1972) 325; Kuala (at n. 27) 12; Webster (at n. 1) 361; and, most valuably, Kolve (at n. 19) 81-82.

³¹ See, notably, ed. Cawley (at n. 6) xxi-xxii, and the extension of his approach by Thomas J. Jambeck, "Everyman and the Implications of Barnardine Humanism in the Character 'Knowledge'," in *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, N.S. 8, Transformation and Continuity, ed. Paul Maurice Clogan (Cambridge 1974) 103-23. Michael J. Warren, "Everyman: Knowledge Once More," *Dalhousie Review* 54 (1974) 136-46, provides another useful consideration of the problem and of some proposed solutions. More recently, however, William Munson, "Knowing and Doing in *Everyman*," *Chaucer Review* 19 (1985) 252-71, has argued that Good Dedes, not Knowledge, is the "comprehensive, controlling term" in the play (p. 252).

³² See Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York 1978) 1-39. I cannot agree with Munson (at n. 31) that the last speech of Knowledge "belongs to the observer detached from the tensions of the concrete, individual action" (p. 267), because it does not seem to me that the spectator becomes such an observer.