

Everyman, and Medieval Miracle Plays Study Guide

Everyman, and Medieval Miracle Plays by A. C. Cawley

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Contents

Everyman, and Medieval Miracle Plays Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1 (Preface and Introduction).....	5
Part 2.....	7
Part 3.....	10
Part 4.....	12
Part 5.....	13
Part 6.....	15
Part 7.....	17
Part 8.....	19
Part 9.....	21
Part 10.....	23
Part 11.....	25
Part 12.....	27
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	37
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	42
Topics for Discussion.....	45



Plot Summary

This collection of Christianity-themed mini-plays, referred to as pageants, dates from the middle of the 1500s. Each of the pageants was part of a larger sequence, referred to by scholars and analysts as a Corpus Christi (Body of Christ) cycle. Each cycle was staged in a different city in England by guilds of different tradespeople, and each cycle dramatized Biblical events from the Creation to the Last Judgment. The creators of the various pageants endeavored, in various ways, to tell the well-known Bible stories in humorous and accessible ways, and explored additional themes related to faith versus doubt, as well as the theological concept of Original Sin versus Redemption.

The collection opens with a contemporary preface from the editor explaining how, in the decades since the collection was first published (in 1956), scholars looking at the pageants from both the historical and theatrical perspectives have come to recognize their unique value and place in both areas. The preface is followed by the original Introduction to the 1956 edition of the collection, in which the editor describes the circumstances within which, and the intentions with which, the pageants were written and performed.

The collection itself begins in the same way as all the Corpus Christi cycles do—with the Old Testament stories of the Creation and the Fall from Grace (of Adam and Eve). These first two stories, recounted in fairly straightforward fashion (that is, as faithful and unadorned dramatizations of the stories in the Bible), are followed by the stories of Cain and Abel and Noah and the Flood. In these two pageants, the style of the narratives moves more clearly into the blend of secular and humorous characterizations, with spiritual truth and integrity as one of the collection's key themes. Also, with both pageants the creators follow the apparent pattern of including material that is less Biblical and more the stuff of fable and legend (such as, for example, the shrewish stubbornness of Noah's wife). The final Old Testament pageant in the collection dramatizes the famous Bible story in which Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice the life of his son Isaac as proof of his (Abraham's) faithfulness and devotion.

The pageants based on stories from the Bible's New Testament begin with a dramatization of The Annunciation, the visit from the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary with news that she is to give birth to the Son of God. The tradition of interpolating fable with Biblical "fact" continues here, with the pageant's glimpse into the troubled mind and heart of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. The play that follows takes this practice even further, essentially inventing a story about a thieving colleague that gives the Biblical tale of the Three Shepherds that visited Jesus on the night of His birth more weight and depth. This also is the result of the next pageant, a dramatization of the circumstances surrounding the so-called "Slaughter of the Innocents", the killing of all infant males by the paranoid King Herod. A story of the adult Jesus follows, one in which his advocacy of mercy and preaching of God's love takes immediate, very personal form. This particular pageant is among the most theatrical, in the contemporary sense of the word, of the collection.



The last grouping of pageants follows the events of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The first is a dramatization of the traditional Biblical narrative, but told from a different point of view—that of the soldiers actually nailing Jesus to the Cross. The second is another interpolation of fable—the so-called "Harrowing of Hell", in which the dead Jesus (between the time of his crucifixion and his resurrection three days later) releases several tortured souls from hell. Finally, there is the Resurrection, a straightforward dramatization of the Biblical story. The final pageant is a dramatization of the Biblical Day of Judgment, when all souls are judged by God according to their deeds. All the Corpus Christi cycles end with such a pageant.

The collection proper concludes with the morality tale of Everyman who, when told he is about to die and face judgment, tries desperately to carry as much of he can of his earthly life, allegorically represented by actors, with him. After Everyman come two appendices, one dramatizing the story of what happened to Pilate after Jesus' resurrection, the other offering a complete list of the various cycles that still exist today, almost five centuries after they were first written and performed.



Part 1 (Preface and Introduction)

Part 1 (Preface and Introduction) Summary

Preface - In his preface to this collection, first published in 1956, the editor describes how the process of scholarship and investigation of the Medieval Miracle plays has expanded beyond the initial, somewhat patronizing, premise that the plays were naïve and unsophisticated. He describes how, over the years, both perception and analysis of the plays have deepened, to the point where they are recognized and examined as valuable historical relics, as insight into the society of the time and as important stages in the development of theatre as a form of communicative art.

Introduction - In his introduction, the editor traces the development of the pageant (see "Objects/Places") as a form of entertainment and education, and describes how early creators of the pageants blend religious and non-religious elements to create a form of theatre with broad based appeal. He points out that most of the plays focused on stories of Jesus from the New Testament, and from stories in the Old Testament that clearly foreshadow Jesus. He then briefly describes the physical, transportation, and technical requirements of the plays, many of which (he points out) foreshadowed the common usage of similar elements (balconies, minimal setting, metaphorical costumes) in plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, plays that, the editor contends, are created upon the foundations of the medieval plays.

The editor also points out the similarities (see "Quotes, p. xxi) and differences between the Pageants and the Morality Plays (of which the final play in the collection, Everyman, is one). Both, he writes, "are less interested in man's earthly life than in his spiritual welfare in the life to come; both are vitally concerned with man in relation to his Creator ... both kinds of play are religious in meaning and have been humanized by popular influences."

Part 1 (Preface and Introduction) Analysis

The main point to note in relation to the preface and introduction is how the editor carefully places the pageants within the context of academic study of religion and theatre, but neglects to consider them in the context of theological evolution. In other words, he makes no comment on the essential crudeness or conservatism of the theology at the core of either the dramatic narrative or the religious teachings the pageants espouse. He seems to be simply allowing the theology of the pageants to speak for itself, and for the time in which they were written. For further consideration of this question see "Topics for Discussion - How similar is contemporary Christian theology ..."

It is interesting to note, however, that these plays follow a similar pattern and develop a similar core thematic premise to the very earliest theatre of record—the theatre of the



Ancient Greeks. Both sorts of theatre were focused on, and defined by, examination of the relationship between humanity and God. Granted, the Greek theatre came into being in a pantheistic society. The principle, however, is still the same. These Christian plays do the same thing as the original Greek plays do; they explore the relationship between being human and the spiritual life at the core of physical existence.



Part 2

Part 2 Summary

""The York Pageant of the Barkers - The Creation and the Fall of Lucifer" An introduction to this play describes how the York Cycle (named after the city of York) "surveys the spiritual history of mankind 'from the creation to the general doom.'" He comments that the story of Lucifer is included in the opening plays of every cycle performed across England and has a long history. Finally, he discusses the care and skill of the rhythmic structure of the poetry.

The Pageant - As angels sing musical prayers from traditional church services, God speaks of his glory and power, while Lucifer speaks of his own (Lucifer's) power and beauty. While cherubim and seraphim sing praises of God, Lucifer continues to sing his own praises, until he falls from heaven and lands in hell. There he, and the angel who praised him and therefore fell with him, bemoan the horrors of the place into which they have fallen. Back in Heaven, God proclaims his intention that those who refuse to worship him will fear his wrath forever, and his simultaneous intention to create a being ("mankind") that will never cease to worship him. Finally, he vows to separate the darkness of hell and brightness of heaven forever.

"The York Pageant of the Cardmakers - The Creation of Adam and Eve" The editor introduces this play by describing how, like the story of Lucifer, the story of Adam and Eve was dramatized in every Corpus Christi pageant.

The Pageant - God, pleased with the world he has created, is nevertheless not fully content with what he has done (see "Quotes, p. 11"). In fulfillment of his longing for praise, he creates Man and Woman, naming them Adam and Eve. They praise him, thank him for their creation, and agree to do his bidding. God then proclaims his work is at an end, adds that the seventh day shall be his day of rest, and blesses Adam and Eve.

"The York Pageant of the Coopers - The Fall of Man" The brief introduction to this pageant describes how a summary of it appears in the historical records of the time, and also discusses its specific, intricate rhyme scheme.

The Pageant - Resentful because he is no longer in heaven, Lucifer (referred to here as Satan) resolves to "betray" God and spoil his pleasure in his new creations (Adam and Eve). He disguises himself as a Serpent and convinces Eve to eat a piece of fruit that God has forbidden her and Adam to eat. Eve initially refuses, but then gives in and eats, later convincing Adam to do the same. They quickly realize the truth of their situation (that they are naked) and cover themselves with fig leaves out of shame and embarrassment. God comes looking for them, realizes what they have done, and condemns both them and the Serpent to a life of crawling on their bellies and relying on



working the earth to provide their food. As an Angel drives him and Eve out of heaven, Adam bewails what has happened.

"The N. Town Cycle - Cain and Abel" The introduction suggests that the Biblical story of Cain and Abel is frequently included in the cycles of various communities, but in all its pageant forms consistently differs from the Biblical story in two ways. The first is the suggestion that Cain offered God his worst produce, while the second is that Cain used a bone to kill Abel.

The Pageant - Adam and Eve's son Abel convinces his reluctant brother Cain to ask Adam how best to serve and praise God. After Adam tells them to offer God "such goods as God hath you sent" as a sacrifice, Abel vows to sacrifice the best lamb he has (see "Quotes", p. 27). Cain calls him foolish for sacrificing the best, saying it is much smarter to sacrifice the worst. When Abel's sacrifice is apparently received with more joy by God, Cain becomes angry and kills Abel. When God comes looking for Abel, Cain says he does not know where he is, adding that he is not his "brother's keeper". God, however, knows what Cain has done, and curses him. Cain realizes the depths of lowness to which he has sunk, and within which he now has to live.

Part 2 Analysis

These three pageants dramatize events in the earliest Bible stories, all based on events described in the Old Testament. Each, both in terms of the pageant and the story upon which it is based, is a metaphorical exploration of ways in which human beings alienate themselves from God. They are essentially warnings, or sermons, that the wrong sort of behavior can lead the unfaithful and the un-careful down the path of unrighteousness—all three, it must be noted, are the stories of individuals who pay the (Hellish) consequences of an ungodly life. To be specific: the story of the Creation is a warning against hubris, or thinking of oneself as God; the story of Adam and Eve is a warning against ignoring God's laws and rules; the story of Cain and Abel is a warning against jealousy and anger. All three pageants are also, like the rest of the pageants in the collection, manifestations of the core Christian doctrine of Original Sin. For further consideration of this aspect of these plays, and of the collection as a whole, see "Themes - Original Sin and Redemption."

As pieces of theatre, these three pageants fall somewhat short in terms of creating a sense of dramatic narrative, of suspense, or of character development. In other words, the stories come across as having the same sort of dramatic energy and drive as they would if someone were standing in front of a congregation simply reading from the Bible. Granted, this is on some level a manifestation of their core intent. Nevertheless, they do not succeed as well as others of the pageants do in either developing genuine drama (as is done in "Abraham and Isaac"), comedy ("Noah's Flood"), or a combination of both ("The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Play"). Neither do they seem to be all that successful at, or for that matter interested in, incorporating contemporary attitudes and circumstances in the way so many of the other pageants do ("The Harrowing of Hell"). In short, they are less than fully engaged in developing what is otherwise one of the



principal themes of the collection—combining the secular with the liturgical (scriptural) in order to make the latter more accessible.

Abel's sacrifice of a sheep can, on some level, be seen as foreshadowing of Jesus' crucifixion and death, His self-sacrifice. For an explanation of this, see "Objects/Places - Sheep."



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

"The Chester Pageant of the Water-Leaders and Drawers in Dee - Noah's Flood" The editor makes three key points in his introduction to this pageant. The first is that the portrayal of Noah's Wife as opinionated and sharp goes against the theological tradition of her being "a meek and virtuous prototype of Mary." He reinforces this point by saying that the portrayal is widespread throughout European portrayals of Noah's wife of the time. The editor's second point is that the pageant's rhyming scheme is more consistently and strictly maintained than rhyming schemes in other pageants. His third point is that the manuscript for this pageant contains more, and more detailed, stage directions than most of the others.

The Pageant - God speaks at length of his unhappiness with humanity and of his determination to destroy all human beings. He gives Noah detailed instructions on how to build a giant boat, or ark, in which he can save his family and some of the animals. Noah instructs his family to help him build, and they all set to work with a good will—all except his Wife, who prefers to spend her time complaining, sometimes with friends. As his sons and daughters-in-law load animals onto the ark, Noah tries to convince his wife to come on board with them. She refuses, drinking instead with her friend Gossip. Noah sends out his sons to bring his Wife back. At first she resists, but eventually she is brought on, where she smacks Noah angrily for interrupting her. The rains begin, time passes, and Noah eventually sends out first a raven then a dove to find a sign of dry land. The raven does not return, but the dove does, carrying a branch from an olive tree. Noah takes this as a sign that God's flood is ending, and offers praise to Heaven. God responds by first issuing decrees as to how humanity is to live from then on, and then promising to never again destroy the human race by flood. He symbolizes his promise through the creation of a rainbow in the sky (see "Quotes", p. 46).

"Brome - Abraham and Isaac" The introduction to this pageant suggests that the version of the story published here is the more strongly written source for another, similarly written version of the story.

The Pageant - Abraham speaks at length of the joy he feels at the presence of his son Isaac in his life. In heaven, however, God tells an Angel to implement his (God's) plan to test whom Abraham loves more, God or Isaac. Abraham, God tells the Angel, is to take Isaac to a remote mountain and sacrifice his life to God. The Angel conveys the message to Abraham, who laments but ultimately agrees and takes Isaac out into the wild without giving him a chance to bid goodbye to his mother. Isaac senses something is wrong, and begs to know why Abraham is upset. When Abraham tells him, Isaac begs for his life, frequently referring to his desire to be with his mother. It does no good—Abraham is determined to prove his devotion to God. Seeing that his father is resolute, Isaac begs him to do what he must do quickly. Just as Abraham is about to kill his son, however, the Angel returns and tells Abraham he can sacrifice a nearby sheep to God



instead. Isaac runs to get the sheep, Abraham sacrifices it (praising God the whole time), and God promises to reward his faithfulness (see "Quotes", p. 62). As Abraham and Isaac return home, a "doctor" comes out and speaks a prologue, asking members of the audience which of them would be as faithful and strong as Abraham and telling them that if they show as much devotion as he (Abraham) did, they too will be rewarded.

Part 3 Analysis

These two pageants are among the clearest examples in the collection of what the editor suggests throughout the book is the main motivation of those who created the pageants. In "Noah's Flood", the character of Noah's Wife is a clear example of how contemporary and comic elements are grafted onto traditional Biblical stories in order to engage audiences more fully and thoroughly in the narrative action. That said, the overall dramatic effect of the narrative is similar to that of the narratives in Part 2—the presentation is ultimately pretty dry, although it is amusing to consider how producers and actors might have portrayed the various animals going into the ark (the stage directions roughly describe the use of a selection of drawings). Finally, a minor point: Noah's wife refers to "Christ" who in strict Biblical chronology has not been born at the time of the flood, but in terms of the theological context of the pageants, is very much a constant, implied presence.

Meanwhile, the editor's point about the pageants being good theatre is born out by "Abraham and Isaac", in which contemporary dramaturgical terms like "motivation" and "conflict" could easily be used to describe the story, much more easily than they could in most of the other pageants. In most cases, as previously discussed, the latter are simply living retellings, enactments. Abraham and Isaac, however, goes further, dramatizing the retelling by adding both motivation (God's suspicions of Abraham's loyalty, arising from Abraham's extravagant celebration of his son) and conflict (intense, increasing conflict between Abraham and Isaac as the latter pleads for his life). Students of theatre history might even find, in the sudden intervention of the Angel at the point of highest tension (the climax), echoes of a centuries-old dramatic technique known as "deus ex machina." This is a device popularized in Classical Greek theatre in which an intervention from a god or a god's representative changes the course of the pageant, exactly what the Angel does here.

Water Leaders and Drawers were responsible for bringing water from the River Dee into town. Note the irony of having this particular guild presenting the story of Noah and the Flood. For further consideration of the relationship between the guilds and the pageants they presented, see "Topics for Discussion - "Noah's Flood", according to the editor ..."



Part 4

Part 4 Summary

"The Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors - The Annunciation" In his introduction to this play, the editor comments that this pageant is one of only two representing the community of Coventry (see "Objects/Places"). He adds that one of the scenes in this pageant (subtitled "The Doubt of Joseph") has no clear Biblical precedent, but is nevertheless included in "all the English cycles." He suggests that its inclusion is a manifestation of the "medieval dramatist's" desire to incorporate "pathos and broad humor" into the more staid religious teachings of the rest of the pageant.

The Pageant - This pageant opens with a prologue spoken by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah who here, as he does in the Bible, foretells the Virgin Birth of the Son of God. The first part of the first scene follows the Biblical story of Mary being visited by the Angel Gabriel and told that she is to bear God's son. After an initial expression of doubt, she offers herself as a vessel of God's will. The second part of the scene is, as discussed above, an interpolation; Joseph comes to Mary, realizes somehow that she's pregnant (there is no indication in either the dialogue or the stage directions of how he knows this), and accuses her of being unfaithful. Apparently a much older man, Joseph laments the folly of putting faith in a much younger woman, but later in a dream is assured by an Angel that Mary is still physically pure. When he wakes, he apologizes to her, and she accepts his apology. They plan to journey to Bethlehem. The second scene finds them on the road to Bethlehem, and a weary Mary asking Joseph to find her a place to rest for the night (see "Quotes", p. 73).

Part 4 Analysis

For the most part, this pageant is a straightforward presentation of the Biblical story of the Annunciation, although it does not include what has become one of Christianity's most often-recited prayers, "The Magnificat," which is based on a text taken from the Gospel of St. Matthew and is a prayer of humble Thanksgiving to God offered by Mary.

As the editor points out, however, this pageant does contain another example of interpolation—the injection of what some might call a humanizing element into the somewhat austere and remote spiritual context of the narrative. In this case, that humanization involves Joseph, whose doubt and concern about the situation he is entering into are explored here in much more depth than they are anywhere else in the Bible.

"Shearmen" were laborers who sheared sheep for their wool (for further consideration of this aspect of the pageant see "Objects/Places - Sheep"). The meaning of tailors, on the other hand, is self-explanatory.



Part 5

Part 5 Summary

"The Towneley Cycle - The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Pageant" In his introduction, the editor comments on the history of this particular pageant and its specific relationship to a French pageant of three centuries before. He also comments on how it interpolates details from the Bible, local references, detailed characterizations of the shepherds, and what might be described as a sub-plot involving a stolen sheep.

The Pageant - On a cold clear night, three Shepherds watch their flocks and complain—the First about the weather, the Second about the miseries of his married life, the Third about both. They are joined by Mak, another shepherd, who echoes their complaints and then casts a "night spell" that sends them to sleep and enables him to steal a sheep. He takes the sheep home to his shrewish wife Gill, who is at first resentful of this thievery but then realizes the benefit that a sheep could bring to their life. She conceals the sheep in a cradle, and Mak runs back to the other shepherds, where he pretends to be asleep. The other shepherds wake up, and the Third Shepherd reveals that he dreamed Mak, wearing a wolf-skin, stole one of the sheep. The Shepherds wake Mak, who says he dreamed that his wife gave birth. He complains about the difficulties of having a large number of children, and hurries home to Gill. The other shepherds agree to meet him later.

Back at home, Mak tells Gill the other shepherds do not suspect anything. Gill makes a plan just in case they do come—she will pretend to be in labor. Meanwhile, at the place where the Shepherds and Mak were to meet, the Shepherds realize that a sheep is missing, and that Mak is probably behind its disappearance. They go to Mak's hovel and confront him, but he defends himself vigorously. Gill, claiming she has given birth, backs him up (see "Quotes", p. 97). The Shepherds are eventually convinced and leave, but the First Shepherd realizes he left no gift for the "new baby" and goes back, only to discover the sheep. Mak and Gill come up with increasingly desperate, and increasingly outlandish, explanations for their "child's" appearance, but the Shepherds refuse to believe him. They take the sheep, wrap Mak in a blanket so he cannot follow, and go.

Back in their fields, the Shepherds are visited by an Angel, who sings to them of the birth of a savior in Bethlehem. The Shepherds recollect the Biblical prophecy that foretells the birth, and journey to Bethlehem. There they offer their simple gifts (cherries, a bird, a tennis ball) and are greeted by Mary, who promises to intercede with God on their behalf. The Shepherds leave, singing God's praises.

Part 5 Analysis

This pageant has several parallels with the story of the Nativity (the birth of Jesus), many of which are ironic. Most are related to the Biblical likening of Jesus to a lamb



(see "Objects/Places - Sheep"). In both narratives, the Three Shepherds seek a lamb (either literal or metaphorical), in both narratives the Three Shepherds seek the truth (of what happened to the lost sheep, of their vision means), and in both narratives the principle and practice of giving gifts leads to an awareness of that truth. It is interesting to note that while there is no reference in the Bible to the Shepherds bringing gifts other than adoration (material gifts are traditionally brought by the Three Wise Men), the gifts brought by the Shepherds are specifically detailed, perhaps another example of how the writers of the pageants strove to incorporate humanizing details into their stories.

On a deeper level, the pageant can be seen as a dramatization of a greater truth, a development of the idea of lambs being a metaphor for Christ. In the Bible and in Christian tradition, Jesus is referred to as "The Good Shepherd," one who will leave his flock in order to save one straying lamb. The actions of the Three Shepherds here can be seen as a dramatization of the same principle—searching for the lost is ultimately of more value than preserving what already is safe (although the ultra-logical reader or audience member will wonder who is keeping those safe sheep safe while the Shepherds are searching for that lamb).

Finally, in the pageant's last few moments, there is a dramatized reference to the role Mary has assumed in Christian, specifically Catholic, religious practices—as an intercessor between human beings and God.



Part 6

Part 6 Summary

"The Towneley Cycle - The Wakefield Pageant of Herod the Great" In describing the intricate relationship of this pageant to other Herod-focused pageants, the editor describes the second Wakefield pageant in this collection as being among the most effectively characterized of the existing pageants.

The Pageant - A Messenger proclaims the arrival of Herod, speaking extravagantly of his power, his range of influence, and the need for the people to pay him appropriate respect. Herod arrives, and the Messenger tells him that the people (the crowds there to greet him) are all chattering about another king. Herod threatens them with punishment if they do not stop, and then withdraws, complaining to the Messenger about how he was greeted (see "Quotes", p. 110). He then reveals that he is also angry that the "kings" to whom he had given safe passage on a journey through his lands have left without seeing him again as he had ordered, losing his temper and blaming the Soldiers he had sent to supervise their visit. The Soldiers defend themselves by saying the "kings" traveled too quickly to be followed, and Herod dismisses them.

When he consults with his Counselors, Herod tells them that one of the "kings" told him of an ancient prophecy of the Virgin Birth of a great king. The Counselors confirm that there is indeed such a prophecy, and Herod again loses his temper at the thought of a potential threat to his power. The Counselors calm him by suggesting he put to death all the male children under the age of two—that way, the unknown new born king will die and no longer be a threat. Herod agrees to this idea, promises rewards to the counselors (see "Quotes", p. 115), summons his soldiers, and sends them on their mission.

Scene Two - The Soldiers follow through on their orders in spite of the furious, violent resistance of the mothers of some of the boys they have been sent to kill. When their mission is complete, the Soldiers argue over which of them will have the honor of telling Herod.

Scene Three - The Soldiers tell Herod about the success of their mission, and Herod rewards them (in the name of Mohammed) with gold and wives. After the Soldiers leave, Herod speaks to the audience of his relief, almost bragging that "such a murder ... shall never be again." He threatens to slaughter more children if anyone ever again attempts to take, or is reputed to want, his power.

Part 6 Analysis

The first thing to note about this pageant is the clear, perhaps deliberate, echoes in the Messenger's speech to Lucifer's speech in "The Creation ..." There seems to be an attempt here to connect Herod with the Devil. The second thing to note is that the

"kings" Herod refers to are undoubtedly the Three Kings or Wise Men of Christian tradition, who followed the Star that marked Jesus' birthplace, and who were warned in a dream not to see Herod on their return journey home.

Another noteworthy point is how the confrontations between the Soldiers and the Women are dramatized. Aside from this being another non-Biblical interpolation into the Biblical narrative, there is also the sense here that the creators of the pageant are including what they believe would be a contemporary woman's reaction, or for that matter any woman's reaction, to having her infant child slaughtered.

Finally, there is the reference here to Mohammed, the prophet of Islam (or as his name is spelled throughout the collection, Mahmout). While there is undoubtedly anti-Islamic bias in the reference, it must be remembered that these pageants are a product of the time and the place in which they were written. Islam, at the time, was a reviled religion, the race and community that kept Christians out of Jerusalem, the holiest of Christian shrines. They were, in the language of the day, "the infidel." While this does not justify the inclusion of the term, it does explain it.



Part 7

Part 7 Summary

"The N. Town Cycle - The Woman Taken in Adultery" The editor comments on how well this particular Bible story (based, he says, on the Gospel of John, chapter 8, verses 3 to 11) is dramatized. "It would be difficult," he writes, "to find a more successful example of a biblical story grafted on to the stem of medieval life." He goes on to suggest that "while the human interest of the episode is exploited to the full, its Christian meaning—the quality of divine mercy—is also made plain."

The Pageant - In a speech that is part prologue (spoken for the audience's benefit) and part drama (spoken to listeners at a temple), Jesus preaches the doctrine of mercy, describing himself as having been sent from God to lead the people to grace and faith (see "Quotes", p. 128).

Scene 1 - A Pharisee (lawgiver) and Scribe (secretary and writer) discuss the danger posed to their authority by Jesus and his teachings, referring to Him as a "stinking beggar" and plotting to expose him as a hypocrite. An Accuser rushes in, telling them that a woman of high repute is committing adultery, and if they hurry they can catch her. The Scribe and Pharisee realize this is their opportunity, and plot to take the Woman in front of Jesus so they can expose him, commenting that the penalty for adultery is death by stoning.

Scene 2 - The Scribe, Pharisee and Accuser arrive at the house of the Woman, where they interrupt the affair and startle the Man she is with into running off. Speaking crudely and harshly, they call the Woman out of her house, dismissing her pleas for mercy and attempts at bribing them as they take her to face justice.

Scene 3 - The Scribe, Pharisee and Accuser bring the Woman before Jesus, repeatedly demanding that he pass judgment on her—specifically, the death-by-stoning judgment laid down by Moses. He merely sits on the ground and writes in the sand with his finger, eventually looking up only to tell them that whoever has passed a sin-free life can go ahead and judge the Woman. The Scribe, Pharisee and Accuser "as if put to shame ... go apart into three separate places" and speak in soliloquy of their own sins, guilt, and humiliation. Meanwhile, the Woman asks Jesus for mercy. He tells her she shall not be judged, and that she should "live in honesty / and will no more to sin." She thanks him, and goes. Jesus then speaks to the audience, again urging them to mercy (see "Quotes", p. 136).

Part 7 Analysis

It could reasonably argued that the biblical story upon which this pageant is based would never have been included in the Old Testament—the harsh, judgmental God of that book of the Bible would, it could easily be argued, have sided with the Scribes and



Pharisees. It is that God, after all, who apparently makes all the decrees in Leviticus about not having sexual relations with menstruating women and, in fact, the very laws quoted by the Pharisees here. Jesus, on the other hand, and as evidenced in this and many other stories from the New Testament, is much more interested in mercy, compassion and forgiveness. Even while He is held up to be the Son of God, it is almost as though He is in fact the other side of God, the flip side of the moral coin.

Meanwhile, in his final speech to the audience (see "Quotes", p. 136), Jesus' comments about God dying "for all mankind" foreshadow his Crucifixion and death (see "Objects/Places"). A significant question, in this pageant and indeed in any consideration of Jesus' story, is how much he knew about what lay ahead—in other words, is he aware that he is foreshadowing his death, or is it the playwright working with an intention of creating irony?

Finally, this play contains another example of what the editor considers to be the effective theatricality of the pageants. Specifically, the device of having the Scribe, Pharisee and Accuser "go apart into three separate places" has become commonly used in contemporary theatre to indicate, among other things, ways in which characters have different reactions to similar circumstances. It could even be argued that this convention is one of the core conventions of musical theatre, and even more so of opera—specifically, the principle of characters having different reactions to experiences of the same event at the same time.



Part 8

Part 8 Summary

"The York Pageant of the Pinners and Painters - The Crucifixion" The editor introduces this pageant by commenting on how non-liturgical dramatists of the period generally avoid portraying the Crucifixion (see "Objects/Places") and how the creator of this particular pageant (whom he says is known to scholars as the "York Realist") emphasize the intensity of the experience in order to "make a direct assault on the feelings of the audience".

The Pageant - Four Soldiers, ordered to punish the arrested Jesus for heresy, agree that he should be crucified. They bicker among themselves and order each other about as they nail him to the cross, stretch his limbs so the "nails large and long" can be properly hammered through flesh and bone into the holes prepared for them, struggle to lift the cross upright, and set it into its base. The whole time, Jesus speaks only twice—first, just before he is nailed to the cross (to accept God's will and to acknowledge that he is accepting responsibility, on behalf of all humanity, for the sins of Adam) and second, to seek forgiveness and mercy for the Soldiers. After the Cross is set up, the Soldiers argue over who is to take Jesus' coat. One proposes that they draw lots for it, but the First Soldier (who all along has set himself up to be the leader) says it belongs to him. The Soldiers go out arguing.

"The Chester Pageant of the Cooks and Innkeepers - The Harrowing of Hell" In his introduction the editor describes how this particular story (see "Analysis" below for the meaning of "The Harrowing of Hell") is found in the Apocrypha (again, see "Analysis" below).

The Pageant - As they await Jesus' arrival in hell (following his crucifixion), several figures from the Bible proclaim their eagerness for his arrival. Adam awaits the redemption promised by Jesus' sacrifice. Meanwhile, the prophet Isaiah comes close to bragging about the accuracy of his prophecy of Jesus' arrival, while the elderly Simeon also comes close to bragging as he speaks about recognizing Jesus' nature and welcomed him into the Temple when he was a child. John (the Baptist) speaks of his heralding of Jesus' arrival, Adam's later son Seth speaks of his intercession with God to have mercy on his father, and the ancient Hebrew king David cries out in hope that with Jesus, the time has come for he (David) and the rest of mankind to be delivered from Hell.

Satan appears, urging his demons to be ready for the arrival of Jesus and to spare him no suffering or punishment. The Demons urge him to send Jesus away, out of fear that he (Jesus) will end their power. Before Satan can respond, Jesus appears, demanding that the gates of hell be opened to him. Satan resents this show of power (see "Quotes", p. 155), and his Demons throw him off his throne to combat Jesus directly. Before that combat can begin, however, Jesus calls down the Angel Michael and



instructs him to lead Adam and the rest of the saints to heaven. As they go, Satan mourns the loss of so many souls.

Up in heaven, Adam is greeted by two prophets and by the Second Thief (see "Characters"). All go out celebrating their freedom and singing the praises of God.

Back down in hell, a Barmaid complains to Satan about the innumerable miseries she suffers and mournfully recalls the regular and frequent little cheats that she employed as she ran her business. As she speaks, she comes to accept that she has been given the death she deserves. Satan and his demons welcome her, celebrating her pain with her.

Part 8 Analysis

Definitions: "The Harrowing of Hell", in Christian tradition, is the story of what happens to Jesus when he descends to hell in the three days between his crucifixion and resurrection. "The Apocrypha" is a collection of writings about Jesus and his teachings that were edited out of what has become the accepted Bible.

These two plays are each notable, in their individual ways, for how they manifest the collection's three main themes. "The Crucifixion", in its graphic depiction of the act of crucifying Jesus, and "The Harrowing ...", in the tragic-comic appearance of the barmaid, both intensify their theological points by adding layers of immediacy and contemporary reality. Meanwhile, "The Harrowing" is a concentrated exploration of the collection's overarching thematic concerns with the tensions between faith and doubt and between Original Sin and Redemption.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the nature of hell, as defined in "The Harrowing..." is somewhat ambiguous. Yes, it is a place of punishment for sins—those of Adam, for example. On the other hand, the rest of the souls who greet Jesus upon his arrival seem, for the most part, to be free from sin—or at least, biblical tradition (as well as their own words) would seem to suggest that Simeon, Isaiah, John the Baptist and David are all good souls who have no real reason to be punished in Hell. It almost seems that Hell in this play is similar in purpose and atmosphere to what is called Hades in Classical Greek literature - the place where all the dead go and in which some of them are punished for their earthly sins, but not all.

Pinners are pin-makers, and in his introduction, the editor points out the grim irony of their presenting a pageant in which "nails large and long" are employed as props.



Part 9

Part 9 Summary

"The York Pageant of the Carpenters - The Resurrection" The editor's introduction outlines the complex history of the pageant's development, linking it with both biblical and apocryphal texts as well as with earlier liturgical plays. He also comments on the author's skill at characterization, specifically referring to the way biblical characters are given contemporary traits.

The Pageant - In Scene 1, Pilate and his allies (high priests Caiphas and Annas - see "Characters") congratulate themselves on having forestalled the potential social and political activism that seems to have been developing at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Their self-congratulation is interrupted by the arrival of a Centurion, who warns them that they have made a mistake, executing such a "Holy Man." Pilate and the others tell him to leave and to keep quiet. After he goes, Pilate and his allies discuss the prophecy that Jesus will rise again after the third day, and order a squad of soldiers to keep watch over Jesus' tomb to prevent either his rising or his followers taking the body to make it look as though the rising had taken place.

Scene 2 takes place outside Jesus' tomb. The soldiers arrive and stand guard, but an angel appears and sings them into sleep. Three women (see "Characters - The Women at the Tomb") arrive, speak of their grief and of their plans to anoint Jesus' body, and wonder who will roll the stone away from the tomb. The Angel tells them that Jesus has risen, and has gone to Galilee. Two go off to Galilee to see if it is true, but one remains, continuing to grieve. As she stands to one side, the soldiers wake up, see that Jesus is gone, and agree to reveal the truth to Pilate in spite of their fear of how he will punish them.

In Scene 3, the Soldiers tell Pilate, Caiphas and Annas what they have seen. Caiphas and Annas calm down the furious Pilate, telling him to spread the word that Jesus was removed from his tomb by "ten thousand men in good array." Pilate agrees, and offers the soldiers a bribe to sustain their telling of the lie. The soldiers pledge to do as they are told, and Pilate tells them to travel widely as they can (see "Quotes", p. 179).

"The York Pageant of the Mercers - The Judgment" The editor comments here that in all the existing cycles, an enactment of God's Judgment is "the concluding pageant" (see "Quotes", p.181), adding that judgment pageants nearly always include references of some kind to the pageants that have gone before.

The Pageant - In a long speech, God summarizes the history of his relationship with the world - its creation, the betrayal of Adam, and his frustration with the evil ways of man. He announces his resolve to bring judgment to all earthly souls. A pair of angels calls the dead to rise and be judged by God. "Good" and "Bad" souls appear, with the former celebrating their chance to be united with God and the latter bemoaning the ill-spent



lives that have left them in Hell. The angels separate the souls, putting the "good" ones on God's right hand and showing them the way to heaven. As the souls do as they are told, Jesus appears and announces his intention to return to earth and make his judgment there. Scene 2 portrays his arrival, and his inviting of two Apostles to be on either side of him as he passes his judgments. In Scene 3, a pair of Devils in hell speak of Jesus' sense of justice, expressing their belief that they will be judged fairly. In Scene 4, Jesus reminds both the Good and Bad souls of the suffering He endured on their behalf (see "Quotes", p. 190), thanks the Good souls for treating Him well, and blesses them. As He berates the Bad Souls for all the mistreatment He endured from them, they protest that they never encountered him. He tells them that all the bad things they did to others He counts as having been done to Him, likewise the good things. He then invites the Good souls to join him in paradise, and condemns the Bad souls to hell.

Part 9 Analysis

Even a cursory consideration of "The Resurrection" will show the reader or audience that the creators of the pageant are successful at incorporating contemporary sensibilities not only of their time, but of this. Specifically, Pilate is clearly and vividly identifiable as a self-serving politician and manipulator of the first order, a familiar figure as distastefully corrupt then as now. At the same time, the pageant is remarkably faithful to the biblical version of the story, with its touching, simply presented narrative of the arrival of the women at the tomb. It is interesting to note, however, that the pageant stops short of one of the most discussed moments in the Bible—the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Mary Magdalene prior to His appearance to any of the other (male) disciples. Is this an example of sexism embedded in Christian theology? In any case, Part 1 of the Appendix contains a pageant that suggests that after death, Pilate experiences parallel physical and spiritual humiliations to those he imposed on Jesus, humiliations that audiences of the time in which these pageants were created would view as "justice", of the sort meted out in the following pageant.

In terms of "The Judgment", the previously discussed judgmental God of the Old Testament and the merciful Jesus/God of the new conflate into one, with both sides passing judgment on the human souls before them. Interesting elements here include the suggestion that Jesus' sense of justice is so pure that even demons in hell have faith that their sins will be perceived and acted upon impartially, and Jesus' comments at the end of the pageant that He was present in every person on earth who was either treated poorly or well. This is a clear echo of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew that, paraphrased, suggests that whatever a person has done to "the least of these my brethren" he has also done to Jesus. In other words, here again the creator of the pageant is putting a contemporary, more accessible spin on a traditional biblical teaching.

"Mercers" are merchants, specifically merchants of textiles and fabrics. "Carpenters" are woodworkers, the particular irony here being that Jesus' father Joseph and Jesus himself were carpenters.



Part 10

Part 10 Summary

"The Moral Play of Everyman" In his introduction, the editor discusses the ongoing debate over which of two plays came first—Everyman, or a Flemish play with a similar title and similar story. His debate is essentially inconclusive. He speaks admiringly of Everyman's theological intent, its basic dramatic skill, and its success at arousing emotions in the audience.

The Play (Part 1) A Messenger speaks a prologue calling for everyone in the audience to pay attention to what is about to be presented to them, essentially a warning against sin which, he suggests, will lead to God's judgment. God then appears, commenting on his perception of humanity (see "Quotes", p. 199-200), speaking of himself as having suffered what Jesus suffered on the cross, and vows to have a "reckoning of every man's person." He calls Death to him and tells him to bring Everyman to heaven to account for his actions. Death descends to earth, meets Everyman, tells him who he (Death) is, and says he (Everyman) is to journey to meet God and account for himself. Everyman is fearful, and then tries to both bribe and beg Death to let him live. Death refuses, but gives Everyman the remainder of the day to prepare himself

After Death has left him alone, Everyman mourns what is happening to him, and looks for someone to talk to. He encounters Fellowship, who at first promises eternal devotion, but when Everyman explains the situation and asks that Fellowship accompany him, Fellowship refuses, saying that he (Fellowship) would accompany Everyman anywhere but into Death. Everyman then encounters Kindred and Cousin, who also refuse to go with him (Cousin refuses because he has a cramp in his toe). After they leave, Everyman recalls his material prosperity, and wonders whether it can keep him company on his journey. Goods appears, explains that "he" cannot follow Everyman into the next world, and points out that if Everyman had loved "him" less and given some of "him" to the poor, he would not be in this situation. This leads Everyman to wonder about Good Deed, a female figure who he believes will help him but who "is so weak / That she can neither go nor speak". The prostrate Good Deed then speaks from the ground, saying that Everyman's sins have weighed her down so much that she cannot move, otherwise she would go with him. She suggests he call upon her sister Knowledge, who appears and agrees to accompany him on his journey.

Part 10 Analysis

In some ways, the basic narrative foundations of this play are the same as those of "Noah and The Flood." God is fed up with humanity's ways and decides to bring the corrupt existence of human-kind to an end. Some might argue that because Everyman (the character) is clearly an individual, the play is talking about a single life and not the lives of every human being on the planet. To a degree, that argument is fair, but two



things must be taken into consideration. The first is perhaps the most obvious—Everyman's name suggests that the play is not, in fact, talking about an individual. The second fact to remember is related; "Everyman" (the play) is an allegory.

An allegory is a form of writing in which the action appears to play out on a superficial level of meaning, but is in fact representative of a deeper truth, usually spiritual. In other words, the story of Everyman and the various people he encounters is, in fact, the story of every life, and the various experiences each life encounters. Thus God's calling of Everyman is, in the Christian religious and spiritual context of both the play and the historical period in which it was created, the story of every soul, of every life.

This same principle applies to all the characters in the play. With the exception of God, the characters are embodiments of concepts rather than portrayals of human beings. Their function within the allegory is to portray circumstances not so much of Everyman's day to day life, but of every soul's overall existence. With that in mind, it is important to understand not just the actions taken by each embodiment, but the allegorical (metaphorical, spiritual) meaning of those actions.

Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin's relationship with Everyman embodies the Christian principle that Death, and the final reckoning with God, is something that each soul must encounter and experience on his own, without the company (fellowship) of friends or family. Goods reveals that wealth and other forms of material success will not follow those who accumulate them into the next life, but good will and generosity will. Good Deeds reveals that the spirit of generosity and compassion that motivates good deeds must be nurtured, kept alive, and acted upon regularly, because if it is not, the few good deeds that are performed will be too weak to do any good in heaven.



Part 11

Part 11 Summary

Everyman, cont'd. Knowledge takes Everyman to Confession, who tells him that if he confesses his sins, asks for mercy and does penance, Good Deeds will be able to accompany him on his journey to meet God. Everyman does what he says, confesses (in general terms) the sins he has committed, punishes himself by beating himself with a whip, and then puts on a garment of contrition (repentance) given to him by Confession, who tells him that God loves all who wear the garment. As he does so, Good Deeds rises from the ground, renewed, and prepares to accompany him.

Good Deeds tells Everyman to call more allies, and very powerful ones: Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and the Five Wits. Everyman does as he is told, and the next group of allies appears, all agreeing to accompany him. In gratitude, Everyman vows to give half his goods to charity. Knowledge then tells him to visit Priesthood and receive the Holy Sacraments (baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage, holy unction [last rites] and penance) as manifestations of God's grace. As Everyman visits a priest and receives the sacraments, Knowledge speaks of corrupt priests, but Five Wits tells her to have faith in the principles at work in the priesthood. Everyman returns, and prepares to make his journey.

Everyman and his allies arrive at his grave. When they realize the truth of what they and Everyman are facing, Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits all hurry off. Everyman despairs, and even Knowledge admits that she can only travel so far with him. He takes heart, however, from learning that Good Deeds will accompany him all the way into death. Everyman makes one last cry to God for mercy, and Good Deeds promises that she will speak for him. Everyman commits his soul to God, and "sinks into his grave."

Knowledge then addresses the audience, saying Everyman has "suffered that we all shall endure" and adding that "Good Deeds shall make all sure." She describes hearing angels sing as Everyman's soul is accepted into heaven. A character called a Doctor appears, reminding the audience of what will pass from each of them at death, and that it is not possible to make amends for an ill-lived life after death. A lack of repentance for such a life, while life is still lived, will result in the soul being sent to hell.

Part 11 Analysis

Definitions of the allegorical meanings of the various embodiments: Knowledge - a footnote from the editor comments that Knowledge represents a particular kind of knowledge, specifically religious knowledge (of "religious doctrine necessary for salvation"). This means that Knowledge's taking Everyman to confession can be seen as an example of the sort of doctrine and/or practice referred to.



Confession - an embodiment of religious (Roman Catholic) doctrine, which states that genuine repentance and contrition will open the doors to heaven, and therefore to God's mercy.

Beauty, Strength, Discretion, Five Wits - all have a degree of power or good qualities about them that will help Everyman live a good life, but when it comes to the point of actual death, all (as Good Deeds says - see "Quotes", p. 224) will of necessity disappear.

All in all, Everyman is a clear embodiment of two of the collection's central themes, and indeed of the main themes of Christian teaching, then and now. Essentially, the play is saying that nothing done on earth has any value for getting a soul into heaven (which is, of course, the ideal destination of any soul) except for generous "good deeds" done selflessly in the name of God. Everything else must be repented of and forgiveness must be sought. Only then will faith truly and fully conquer doubt and redemption transcend the power of original sin.

Finally, the structure of "Everyman" is perhaps the best illustration of the editor's contention that the works in this collection ought to be considered in terms of their theatrical effectiveness and not just either their antiquity or their religious perspective. To be specific, the play's plot can clearly be seen to be following the contemporary template (based, of course, on classical principles) of a central character with a central objective. The character pursues that objective in the face of increasing obstacles until, at a point of climax, that objective is either achieved or utterly blocked. What is particularly noteworthy about "Everyman" is that the central character fails in his initial objective (to live), but that failure results in his achieving the larger, more universal, transcendent objective of being accepted into heaven. In other words, it is the happy ending rising from the ashes of the unhappy ending, the double-sided coin—the character gaining, or winning, while losing.



Part 12

Part 12 Summary

Appendix 1 - "The Cornish Trilogy - The Death of Pilate" The editor comments that the story of this particular pageant does not appear in any of the other existing collections of pageant manuscripts, adding that the manuscript of the Trilogy contains detailed plans and descriptions of set designs and staging procedures.

The Pageant - The Roman Emperor, suffering from leprosy, is advised to seek out Jesus, who (it is rumored) has the power to cure the disease. A messenger sent to Jesus is told by a woman (Veronica) that Jesus is dead, but that she is a follower and if brought to the Emperor may be given grace to cure him. When she meets the Emperor, she tells him that if he professes faith in Jesus (as demonstrated by his adoration of her handkerchief - see "Objects/Places"), he will be cured. He does as she says, is immediately cured, and takes Veronica on as his advisor. When he asks what he can do to repay her, she asks that he arrest and execute Pilate for his part in ending the life of Jesus. The Emperor does as she asks, and Pilate is arrested.

When Pilate is brought before him, the Emperor finds himself unable to punish him. After Pilate goes, Veronica tells him that Pilate is wearing the garment taken from Jesus at the time of his (Jesus') crucifixion, and cannot be harmed as long as he is wearing it. The Emperor calls Pilate back, and as Veronica watches, orders him to remove the robe. Pilate protests, but eventually finds he has no choice and removes the robe. The Emperor takes the robe for himself and throws Pilate in prison. As the Emperor, Veronica and the Emperor's Jailers discuss what is the worst punishment he can face, Pilate kills himself.

After celebrating Pilate's death (see "Quotes", p 244), the Emperor orders that Pilate be buried. When attempts to do so are made, however, the body is thrown out of the grave. The Emperor then decrees that the body is to be sealed in an iron coffin and sunk into the Tiber River, but after that has taken place the river becomes poisonous to all life, human and animal alike. In desperation, the Emperor asks Veronica for advice. She tells him to put the coffin in a boat and send it out to sea, letting the waves and wind take it where it will. As the boat is sent away, Devils appear with Pilate's body and rejoice at the thought of the tortures Pilate will endure for all eternity.

Appendix 2 - "Contents of the Cycles" This appendix lists, in detail, "the pageants comprising the Chester, York and Townley cycles." The editor comments that his intent is to show "the full range and content of the three cycles from which most of the pageants in this volume have been taken."



Part 12 Analysis

There are several important points worthy of note about Appendix 1, "The Death of Pilate". First, the basic elements of the main plot (the leprosy of the Emperor, his search for healing, his relationship with Veronica, the death of Pilate, the difficulty in getting rid of his body) are all absent from the Bible, in which there is no reference whatever to what happens to Pilate after Jesus' Crucifixion. In other words, the plot of this pageant is, like the characterization of Noah's Wife in "Noah's Flood" and several of the other pageants, are interpolations based on legend and entertainment value. It is very possible, in fact, that audiences of the time would have found what happens to Pilate and his body to be a highly satisfying display of poetic justice; there is none of Jesus' mercy here. That said, another noteworthy element of this pageant is the fact that the characters of Pilate and Veronica, as well as the story of her handkerchief (but not necessarily of its healing powers) are based on biblical text. In other words, in this pageant its creators are doing what the creators of other pageants have also done—combining the liturgical with the invented and the legendary.

The main point to consider about this play, however, is its bloodthirstiness, its portrayal of relentless, angry vengeance pursued in God's name. The saintly Veronica and Emperor are so vicious in their pursuit of "justice" and in their execution of that justice, that a reader or audience member might well be justified in wondering if the play is, in fact, a satire, a send-up, or a comically-exaggerated commentary on Christian hypocrisy. In other words, the actions and attitudes of the characters are so extreme that it seems possible that the creators of the pageant are, in fact, warning against justice that is not tempered by mercy. They may, in fact, be saying to the audience "this is what happens to you, this is how cruel you will become, if you do not follow Jesus' lead and practice merciful compassion." However, the play may have been entirely serious in suggesting that justice, in the name of God, should and must be pursued to its ultimate conclusion: the sending of deserving souls into the torture of Hell.



Characters

God

While God appears as a character in only eight of the sixteen pageants in the collection, he is a powerful presence in all of them. The reason for this is the pageants' essentially religious purpose—to bring religious instruction to the masses through the medium of entertainment. The primary purpose of that instruction is similar to that of the instruction offered by the churches—to indoctrinate said masses in the proper way to live a God-inspired life and join him, at the time of death, in heaven.

(For further consideration of the non-church aspects of the pageants, and in particular of their instructive aspect, see "Themes - The Blending of Secular and Liturgical").

That primary purpose (to instruct) is at the core of how God is portrayed throughout the pageants, both those in which He appears and those in which He is only referred to; in general, the portrayals are consistent with traditional Christian theology. Specifically, throughout the pageants God is portrayed as the all powerful, all knowing Creator (although a line in "The Creation ...", interestingly, has a strong and clear echo of more contemporary, "new age" perspectives on the nature of God, as God refers to himself as the "maker unmade"). He is simultaneously loving and judgmental, disappointed in how humanity has turned away from him, and hopeful that of their own free will, given to humanity by him, they will turn back. He is merciful to those who repent of their sins and accept His dominance over their lives, harsh and pitiless to those who do not. In short, the God of the pageants is the God of the Bible, of both the Old Testament (a harsh, judgmental God) and the New (a merciful, loving God), although this latter aspect manifests most often when God is referred to in relation to Jesus.

Jesus

Jesus plays a substantial role in only four of the pageants in the collection, and only in those based on New Testament narratives (the biblical Jesus appears, and is referred to specifically, only in the New Testament).

Jesus, like God, manifests a powerful presence in those New Testament-based pageants, specifically as an embodiment of aspects of God, both the merciful ("The Woman Taken in Adultery") and the merciless ("The Judgment"). In other words, even if He does not appear in the pageant Himself, or even if His appearances are relatively brief (as in "The Crucifixion", or "The Harrowing of Hell") the pageant is still about him as a manifestation of God.



Lucifer / Satan

Lucifer, the soul-greedy ruler of hell, appears in several of the pageants, some of which refer to him as Satan. He is portrayed (in "The Creation") as a fallen angel, condemned to an eternally evil existence by his pride, his arrogance, and his resentment of God. Interestingly, the various portrayals do not show him as having an active presence in human life, suggesting instead that he is waiting in Hell to punish those whose free will has taken them away from a God-fearing life of good deeds, compassion, and responsibility. Ultimately, he is portrayed as powerless in the face of the purity of God and of Jesus. He is portrayed as a necessary component of God's overall will for humanity, a manifestation of the punishment that awaits if the judgment of God and Jesus finds a human soul lacking.

Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth

Adam and Eve, the first humans (according to the Bible), appear together only in "The Creation of Adam and Eve", in which their portrayal is essentially biblical in nature. That said, Eve, in the pageant, comes across as a little more resistive to temptation and a little less devious than the Bible, and conservative interpretations of the Bible, generally make her out to be. Adam, meanwhile, also appears in "Cain and Abel" in which he gives wise counsel to his two sons on how to become closer to God. This might be viewed as paradoxical, given that Adam is generally credited with being the originator of all sin. On the other hand, it is possible to perceive Adam in "Cain and Abel" as having learned his lesson; as a result of being banished from paradise, he has acquired wisdom and humility. Adam's final appearance is in "The Harrowing of Hell", in which he is portrayed as being punished in Hell for his above mentioned participation in the origination of sin, but also as feeling humbled and blessed at receiving God's mercy and being freed from Hell. It is interesting to note that it is Adam, and not Eve, who receives this blessing. Feminist theologians may argue that this is a manifestation of long-standing sexism within the Christian church.

Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel, appear only in the play that bears their name, and that tells the Biblical story of Abel's murder at his brother's hands. For further commentary on their relationship, see the editor's introduction to their pageant in Part 3 - "Cain and Abel." Finally, Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, appears only briefly in "The Harrowing of Hell", speaking of how all his efforts to get mercy from God for his father's misdeeds have failed. His appearance is representative of the theological contention that only individual, personal contrition ultimately has any weight in receiving God's mercy.

Noah and his Family

The stalwart, paternal Noah, his obedient children, and obstinate wife appear in "Noah's Flood", their story and characterizations illustrating the gamut of general human reaction to God.



There is pure, unquestioning obedience (Noah), obedience to those who manifest God's will (Noah's sons and daughters in law), and eventual obedience after a period of resistance that only comes to an end following absolute acceptance of His will (Noah's wife).

Abraham and Isaac

The story of Hebrew patriarch Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac is one of the most well known of the Bible, and provides an indelibly powerful example of the intensity of self-sacrifice the Old Testament God demands from those who worship him. The New Testament God, as manifest in the teachings of Jesus, is generally less demanding (and less apparently bloodthirsty), but nonetheless insistent that if souls are to be saved, his path is the only way.

Mary, Joseph, Herod

Other than Jesus (see above), other important New Testament figures portrayed in the pageants include Jesus' parents (the trusting Virgin Mary and doubting Joseph - The Annunciation). Mary also appears in "The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Pageant," but in an essentially cameo role as the loving, patient, generous Madonna of literature and art).

Meanwhile, Herod (the governor at the time of Jesus' birth, not the one who was involved in his crucifixion) appears in "The Wakefield Pageant of Herod the Great" (Part 5), and is portrayed as a tyrant, simultaneously almost hysterical in his fear of threats to his power and gloatingly vicious in his celebration of that power. This characterization can be seen as a portrayal of any who value earthly power over that of God and Heaven.

The Woman Taken in Adultery - The Woman, The Woman's Accuser

The Woman is a figure from one of the most well known of New Testament Bible stories, one of the most vivid (and dramatic) examples of Jesus' teaching of unconditional mercy and forgiveness. The Woman in the pageant is given a degree or two of depth not found in the Bible story, but in both cases she is essentially functional (that is, to provide a means for Jesus to exemplify the value of mercy).

In that same story, the portrayal of those accusing the Woman (the Scribe, Pharisee and Accuser) is consistent with how they are portrayed in the Bible, and in fact with how the tradition-bound, conservative Scribes and Pharisees are portrayed throughout the Four Gospels. In other words, the story of the Woman Taken in Adultery is among the most faithful to its source material (the Bible) in the collection.



The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Pageant - The Shepherds

As they are portrayed in the Bible, the Three Shepherds who visit Jesus on the night of his birth are barely characterized, if at all. In *The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Pageant*, the Shepherds are portrayed as hard-working, barely tolerant of the uncomfortable conditions (bad weather) in which they work, and unhappily married. They are comic characters, and at first glance seem unlikely to be blessed by the opportunity to see the Christ Child. There is the sense, however, in the pageant as in the Bible, that they (in contrast to the intellectually and financially aristocratic Three Wise Men) represent the ordinary people whom Jesus has come to teach, lead, and save. In other words, the story of the Shepherds is the story of all human kind—no matter what earthly troubles human beings face, the arrival of Jesus into the human experience brings joy, peace, humility and transcendence.

Mak and Gill

Mak is a conniving, thieving shepherd and Gill is his shrewish, equally conniving wife. When Mak plots to steal a sheep, Gill abets his crime by concealing the stolen animal. Their efforts at concealing their crime may be essentially comic, but the moral embodied by their actions and their comeuppance (revelation of the truth) is essentially serious—that crime will always be revealed, and that morality and truth will transcend earthly, greed-defined concealment.

The Harrowing of Hell - The Second Thief

In the Bible, two thieves are crucified alongside Jesus. One accuses Jesus of being as common a criminal as they are, the second repents of his sins and professes his belief that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus tells the Second Thief that they will see each other in paradise, an example (according to Biblical theology) of how anyone, no matter what they have done in their past) can and will be welcomed into Heaven if they accept Jesus and repent.

The Resurrection - Pilate, Caiphas, Annas

These three characters, in the pageant as in the Bible, are the three main plotters behind the arrest, trial, conviction, and crucifixion of Jesus. In both versions of the narrative, they are portrayed as self-interested, corrupt, and fearful of a loss of their power. In short they are, as is Herod in "*The Wakefield Pageant ...*", portrayals of the failings, weaknesses, and essential evil of earthly power. The character of Pilate also appears in "*The Death of Pilate*", where he is portrayed as suffering punishment for his contribution to Christ's death.



Everyman - Everyman

Everyman is, as his name suggests and as the names of all the characters in the pageant suggests, intended to be a representational figure rather than a portrayal of an individual human being. Specifically, Everyman is intended to be exactly that, every man, with his confrontation with death (not to mention the experiences / awareness arising from that confrontation) intended to be seen as something that every living human soul must face when his/her time on earth comes to an end.

The characters encountered by Everyman

As discussed in relation to Everyman above, the various "characters" he encounters as he prepares for death are not intended to be perceived as actual human beings but as manifestations of various aspects of human life. For a detailed breakdown of what each figure represents, see the Analyses of Parts 9 and 10.

Tiberius, Pilate

The character of Tiberius in "The Death of Pilate" is clearly intended to be a portrayal of earthly human power, similar to that of Herod (in "The Wakefield Pageant ...") and of Pilate and his minions (in "The Crucifixion"). The leprosy from which he suffers can be seen as an externalization of the corrosive, destructive potential of that power, while the healing of that leprosy can be seen as a similar externalization of the transformation of that potential into grace through acceptance of Jesus and his teaching. It is interesting, and more than a little ironic, that after his conversion to Christianity, Tiberius is portrayed as being incredibly vengeful, almost bloodthirsty, albeit in the name of punishing Pilate for his role in killing Jesus. In this sense Tiberius is, to coin a phrase, much more of an Old Testament Christian than a New Testament one.

Meanwhile, the character of Pilate can also be seen as a portrayal of the consequences of too much adherence to earthly power. The message in this pageant, however, is much stronger and much more vividly manifested than it is in other pageants, what with Pilate's body both refusing to stay buried and causing widespread death.

Veronica

Veronica, or Saint Veronica as she is known in Christian tradition, is the woman portrayed in the Bible as wiping Jesus' face with her handkerchief as He climbs the steep road to his crucifixion, carrying his cross. In Christian theology, she is both portrayed and perceived as an embodiment of Christ's teachings about mercy. There is considerable irony, therefore (as there is in the character of Tiberius) that she pursues violent retribution on Pilate with such ferocious, relentless intensity.



Objects/Places

The Medieval Pageants

The plays in this collection are what have come to be known as either Corpus Christi (in Latin: "Body of Christ") pageants, church-staged dramatizations of biblical stories, or guild pageants, "short plays acted by various trade guilds as episodes of the whole Corpus Christi cycle." Such plays were written and performed throughout the church year to mark celebrations and remembrances of the various events of Christ's life and teachings in particular, and of Bible stories in general. The pageants in this collection were written in England in the 1500's. The term "pageant" also referred to the vehicle in which the dramas were performed, a kind of horse-drawn wagon with two levels—a dressing-room area below, and a playing area above. The pageant, both wagon and play, moved from place to place within medieval towns, and were seen by large audiences gathered in the open air.

The Bible

The Christian Bible is the source for the core content (specifically, the main plots and thematic messages) of each of the pageants, making them clearly intended to reflect prevailing moral teachings and values of the time.

York, Chester, Brome, Coventry, Wakefield, Towneley

The various pageants were written and performed in these communities in the United Kingdom. It is important to note that these were not the only communities in which this took place, but they were the sites where most of the original, surviving manuscripts were first performed, and the sites from which the most complete cycles originated.

N. Town

The use of "N" in place of a town is a common substitution, often used to either preserve anonymity or to suggest universality. There is no sense in the book of what town "N" town actually is, although there is the possibility that the pageants originating in "N" Town were actually put together by artists from a number of communities, who then toured the pageants throughout those communities.

Sheep

Sheep, and specifically lambs, are used as sacrifices in a number of the pageants (for examples, see Cain and Abel, N. Town Cycle, Abraham and Isaac). While several of the other pageants also highlight sacrifices to God, the sacrifices of sheep are particularly



notable in that Christ is often referred to as "the lamb of God" and his death upon the Cross as a "sacrifice." In other words, the references to lambs throughout the plays can be seen as references to Christ, with the sacrifices of the lambs referring to Christ's sacrifice of his life. This sacrifice was made so that others might live in God (in the same way as the sheep was sacrificed so that Isaac might live) or as an act in praise of God's glory (as with Abel's sacrifice of his best lamb).

A sheep also plays an important role in both the action and themes of "The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Pageant" (Part 5). In this pageant, in which a sheep is stolen and concealed, the sheep can be seen as a metaphor for Christ. The sheep is concealed in the way Jesus' glory is concealed from those who would destroy Him (Herod in his infancy, Pilate and the Romans in his adulthood). However, the truth of the sheep's identity is ultimately revealed to the shepherds (who represent the common human being - see "Characters - The Shepherds") in the same way as Jesus' glory is revealed to the world. In other words, the revelation of the sheep's true identity is a metaphor for the revelation of Jesus' true identity as "the lamb of God."

Heaven and Hell

Hell the setting for several scenes in the various pageants, with the action of one pageant ("The Harrowing of Hell") playing out there almost in its entirety. The narration of the various souls there describes it not in terms of fire, heat, or smells (as other poets or dramatists have done) but rather as a place of pure suffering and torture.

Like Hell, Heaven is the setting for several scenes throughout the pageants, the home of God, the angels, and, in later pageants, of Jesus. Heaven is described even less than Hell, essentially being consistently portrayed as the ultimate peaceful, godly, righteous place to be, as opposed to either Earth or Hell.

Adam and Eve's Apple

In both the Bible and the pageant, God strictly and specifically forbids Adam and Eve to eat fruit from what is called "The Tree of Knowledge." They do anyway, and as a result develop what would today be described as self-awareness. Their disobedience leads God to banish them from paradise. For an examination of the metaphorical meaning of the apple, and of the consequences of eating it, see "Themes - Original Sin and Redemption."

Noah's Ark

In "Noah's Flood", the faithful, humble and reverent Noah is instructed by God to build an ark, or large boat, in which pairs of all the animals and birds on earth can survive the flood that God is sending to punish humanity for its denial of him. In both the Bible and the pageant, the ark can be seen as an externalization and manifestation of the power and safety of faith.



Bethlehem

This small community in what is now Israel has been made famous by its being designated in the Bible as the birthplace of Jesus. It is to Bethlehem that Jesus' earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, journey at the time when Mary is drawing close to giving birth. It is the setting for the scenes of encounter between Mary and the Shepherds in "The Wakefield Second Shepherds Play."

The Cross

In Ancient Rome, it was common practice to execute prisoners by nailing them to a tall wooden cross and leaving them, exposed to the elements without food, water or clothing, to die a lingering, painful death. It was, in short, an instrument of torture that has, over the centuries—and because a man believed to be the Son of God was crucified on one—become both an object of veneration and a symbol of hope, that the power of God and the Spirit can transcend the tortures and suffering of earthly existence.

Veronica's Handkerchief

In the Bible, the merciful Veronica uses a handkerchief to wipe the blood and sweat from Jesus' face as he carries his cross to his execution. In "The Death of Pilate", this same handkerchief is offered to the Roman Emperor, and utilized by him, as a conduit for God's / Jesus' healing mercy and power.



Themes

The Blending of Secular and Liturgical

The primary purpose and intention of the various pageants was, as the editor points out, to instruct and remind audiences of their spiritual responsibilities (to follow the teachings of the Bible and the church), of the incentive to fulfill those responsibilities (spending eternity with God in heaven), and of the fate (eternity in hell) that awaited if they did not. As the author also points out, however, the writers (and presumably the producers) of the various pageants seemed to want to communicate these things as accessibly as possible. This was partly done, it seems, by employing ordinary working people (the various trade guilds) to present and perform in the pageants, and partly by telling the story using as many contemporary characters, perspectives, words and attitudes as possible. There was also, he adds, an evident intent to interject humor into the scripts.

While the editor makes no suggestions as to why this contemporizing took place, it would be reasonable for the reader to conclude that this approach was taken as either a counterpoint or a complement to the same sorts of teachings communicated in church, which were presented in what would possibly be called much dryer, more judgmental ways. Thus the audience member encounters (for example) a very down-the-street sounding Barmaid sharing space in Hell with Adam (The Harrowing of Hell), an interpolation that is clearly intended to bring the teaching vividly and undeniably close to the lives of those in the probably quite rowdy crowd watching. These sorts of interpolations appear throughout the plays, some just as obvious and some less so, with many (such as the corrupt Pilate who creates a new "truth" with the liberal spreading around of bribes) awakening echoes of the politics of today.

Original Sin and Redemption

The essential spiritual teaching of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, is that when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, they created sin—specifically, Original Sin (as it is known in Christian theological tradition). That sin was, in essence, disobeying God, which is itself ultimately the basis of all sin (again, according to Christian teaching). There is, however, another core component of the Bible's essential spiritual lesson, much more evident in the Jesus-oriented New Testament than in the Old. This is the idea that sin, even Original Sin, can be redeemed—that God is ultimately and willingly merciful, if only the sinner can and will honestly repent and ask for forgiveness.

This dual core of biblical teaching, the inescapability of Sin and the opportunity for Redemption, is also at the core of the pageants in this collection (and indeed of the pageants in general). Each pageant portrays a step along the journey from living in an earthly, corrupt state of sin to heavenly, transcendent state of redemption and union with God. In other words, even though some plays ("The Creation of Adam and Eve", "The



Crucifixion") dwell entirely on experiences of sin and its consequences, because of their basis in biblical teaching the possibility of redemption is implicit. The reverse, however, is not consistently true. While some of the pageants that focus primarily on redemption (such as "The Harrowing of Hell") do contain both implicit and explicit references to sin, there are also those (such as "The Resurrection") in which redemption and transcendence are presented almost without the contrasting value of sin. There is, in this, the sense that the writers and producers are implying the biblical contention that redemption through Jesus' relationship with God is the only true way to salvation and eternal life.

Faith vs. Doubt

In many of the pageants, dramatic conflict is based in (and defined by) a basic, common tension between faith in God and in doubt and denial of His supremacy. This is as evident in the first pageant ("The Rise and Fall of Lucifer") as it is in the last ("The Judgment"), as well as in "Everyman" and "The Death of Pilate." Granted, this conflict manifests in varying degrees of intensity and in some very surprising ways. The depth of Abraham's faith in God (in "Abraham and Isaac"), for example, almost comes across as more certain and more powerful than God's faith in himself, although there is an undeniable parallel here. Both Abraham and God intend to sacrifice their sons to God's glory, the difference being that God actually follows through with the sacrifice of Jesus. Nevertheless, the essential conflict is still grounded in the faith/doubt tension, God's doubt that Abraham is as faithful as he (Abraham) professes himself to be.

In terms of a less intense, perhaps less overt playing out of the conflict, there is "The Second Shepherds Pageant." Perhaps as a result of its almost sitcom-like style and characters, this particular pageant comes across as much lighter in tone but is nevertheless ultimately driven by conflict between the Shepherds' faith in the inevitability of truth (God's Way) and Mak and Gill's very conscious denial of that Way.

For further consideration of this theme, see "Topics for Discussion - In what way does the tension between faith and doubt/denial ..."

Style

Point of View

As discussed throughout both the summaries and analyses, the essential point of view of the pageants in this collection is conservative and Christian. As the editor points out, the pageants were written to both remind audiences about, and instruct audiences in, the proper way to behave and believe. With that in mind, they are all, albeit to varying degrees, firmly anchored in biblical story and perspective, having been constructed from the core belief that the Bible is a manifestation of the infallible will and word of God. In this context, it is particularly important to note that the Christianity in the pageants is fundamentally Roman Catholic in perspective and tone; most of them were written before Protestantism in England took full hold in the larger population.

At the same time, however, and again as the editor notes repeatedly, the creators of the pageants wrote and staged the stories with the clear intent of incorporating contemporary characters and situations, bringing the Bible stories out of what might be described as the more austere and theoretical realm of church and into a more day-to-day, lived sensibility. It is interesting to note, at this point, that for the most part central biblical characters are portrayed much as they are in the Bible. The characters from the Bible that are less theologically significant (Noah's Wife, the Three Shepherds) are portrayed with much more leeway and freedom. The completely created characters (Mak, Gill, the Barmaid in "The Harrowing of Hell") are perhaps the most freely, and often most humorously, portrayed. Thus, in these three degrees of portrayal, the reader is given clear examples of the various levels of reverence inherent in the seeming paradox of the core point of view, and the collection's principal theme (see "Themes - The Blending of Secular and Liturgical").

Setting

Consideration of setting is important to understanding these pageants on a couple of different levels. First, as the editor points out, they were all written and performed in England, a fact which, in very general terms, contributes to the somewhat conservative, narrow theological perspective at work in the plays. Continental Europe, at the time, had a somewhat broader view of Christianity and how its principles might best be lived. On another level, and again as previously discussed, the setting in time of these pageants is also important—specifically, the Medieval Period (1500s), pre-Protestant Reformation, pre-industrialization, and perhaps most importantly, before widespread use of the printing press. In other words, the general public did not have access to a written, printed version of the Bible, meaning that church and these pageants were the most significant way they had of learning about Christianity and faith.

Third, the various settings of the pageants themselves are essentially biblical, including Heaven, Hell, the Garden of Eden, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, for examples. As such,



they are manifestations of both the pageants' point of view and of their central theme, to educate hearers in the Bible and its teachings. Finally, there is the setting in which the pageants are performed—that is, the stage, which was constructed on a wagon that could be moved from place to place. There were no heavy flats of scenery, no heavy pieces of furniture, no large backdrops to denote changes in time or location. In other words, much of the "setting" was left to the audience's imagination, triggered by words, relationships and situations, in much the same way the Classical Greeks did it and which seems to be the staging language of choice in contemporary theatre.

Language and Meaning

There are three main points to consider about language in this collection. The first is that the original texts of the scripts (again, written in the mid-1500s) have been recreated here as they were originally written down—with the language, spelling, terminology and references of the time. In other words, they have not been adapted into modern language. This can make the dialogue somewhat difficult to comprehend, but a careful read (with attention paid to the many footnotes and sidebars) can make reading and understanding what is going on much easier.

The second point to consider about language and meaning is that, like every element at work in the pageants, there is relation and integration with theme, purpose, and religious intent. Language, it seems, has been chosen to illuminate questions of faith and belief, specifically the core element of Christian/Roman Catholic theology—the principles of Original Sin and Redemption. This is not to say that the language is stiff and formal; quite the contrary, as previously discussed, there seems to have been a concerted effort to make the language, even for characters like God and Jesus, as colloquial and accessible as a conservative faith might allow. In this way, then, language is clearly allied with both meaning and intent.

The third point to note about language in the pageants is that almost without exception, dialogue is spoken in rhyme, and is therefore quite stylized. There is an interesting juxtaposition, in fact, between the formality of the many (and varied) rhyme structures evident in the various pageants with the informality of the colloquial images and actual words. Here again, then, can be seen a manifestation of the pageants' collective and individual purposes and themes—the blending of the more traditional and formal (faith-based stories, strict rhyming schemes) with the more relaxed and informal (familiar, humanized characters, colorful and relaxed language).

Structure

In the larger picture, the collection is structured with a purpose—to take the audience member on a metaphoric journey of faith from innocence ("The Creation") through suffering and the accumulation of sometimes difficult wisdom into redemption and spiritual freedom ("The Judgment", "Everyman"). It is, literally, a journey of birth through life into death. Specifically, the pageants are arranged in the order in which the stories



they enact appear in the Bible. In the case of "The Harrowing of Hell", the story of which is not strictly biblical, the pageant is placed where it would occur in the Crucifixion / Resurrection chain of events—that is, between the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

In terms of many of the individual pageants, structure is a factor of lesser apparent concern than the twin intentions of accurately dramatizing the Bible story upon which the pageant is based and of bringing audiences into the world and experience of that dramatization through the incorporation of contemporary sensibility. In some of the pageants, however (most notably "Abraham and Isaac" and "...Herod the Great"), as well as in "Everyman", there is an effective sense and use of traditional dramatic structure—of set-up, complication, and resolution, of rising action building to a climax. In other words, they are narratives, as opposed to straightforward recreations. This, it could be argued, goes further towards achieving the intents of the creators than those recreations. Time and again, dramatic structure has shown itself to be unarguably effective in drawing audiences into the experiences and truths of characters, a key component of the pageants' overall purpose.



Quotes

"...the primary concern of the medieval playwright was to instruct his audience through dramatic entertainment on the stage." Preface, p. x.

"...we can no longer be superior or patronizing in our attitude to the medieval playwright. We can now honestly admire his blending of sacred and secular themes and his handling of the stage conventions by which he conveys these themes to the eyes and ears of his audience and still more to their imagination." Ibid, p.xi.

"The coalescence of religious and secular, Christian and pagan, traditions produced in the fifteenth century a vernacular religious drama with a strong infusion of humorous and popular elements." Introduction, p. xv.

"The morality [play] does not dramatize biblical persons and episodes, but personifies the good and bad qualities of Everyman and usually shows them in conflict. The pageant is a part of the whole cycle: it presents a phase in the spiritual history of mankind. The morality [play] is complete in itself, and is restricted in scope to the spiritual biography of the microcosm Man." Ibid, p. xxi.

"This work is wrought now at my will / But yet can I here no beast see / That accords by kindly skill / And for my work might worship me." Part 2, The Creation of Adam and Eve, p. 11.

"And also for to have in mind / How simple he is at his making / For as feeble I shall him find / When he is dead, at his ending." Ibid, p. 12.

"What worship should we win thereby? / To eat thereof us needeth it nought / We have lordship to make mastery / Of all thing that in earth is wrought." Eve to Satan, Part 2, The Fall Of Man, p. 19.

"And thereto thy grace grant thou me / Through thy great mercy / Which, in a lamb's likeness / Thou shalt for man's wickedness / Once be offered in painfulness / And die full dolefully." Abel - Part 3, Cain and Abel, p. 27.

"Where clouds in the welkin been / That ilk bow shall be seen / In token that my wrath and teen / Shall never thus wroken be / The string is turned toward you / And toward me is bent the bow / That such weather shall never show..." God to Noah - Ibid, Noah's Flood, p. 47.

"I have divers children mo / The which I love not half so well / This fair sweet child he cheers me so / In every place where that I go / That no disease here may I feel." Abraham - Ibid, Abraham and Isaac, p. 51.

"Show [Abraham] the way unto the hill / Where that his sacrifice shall be / I shall essay now his good will / Whether he loves better his child or me / All men shall take example by him / My commandments how they shall keep." God - Ibid, p. 52.



"I shall multiply [both of your] seed / As thick as stars be in the sky / Both more and less ... this shall I grant you for your goodness / Of you shall come fruit great [in quantity] / And ever be in bliss without end." God - Ibid, p. 62.

"Unto some place, Joseph, hendly me lead / That I might rest me with grace in this tide. / The light of the Father over us both spread / And the grace of my son with us here abide."

Mary - The Annunciation, p. 73.

"For, as ever read I epistle, I have one to my fere / As sharp as thistle, as rough as a briar / She is browed like a bristle, with a sour-loten cheer / Had she once whet her whistle, she could sing full clear / her paternoster / She is as great as a whale / She has a gallon of gall / By him that died for as all / I would I had run to I lost her!" The Second Shepherd - The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Pageant, p. 82.

"I pray to God so mild / If ever I you beguiled / That I eat this child / That lies in this cradle." Gill - Ibid, p. 97.

"My name springs far and near: the doughtiest, men me call / That ever ran with spear, a lord and king royal / What joy is me to hear a lad to seize my stall! / If I this crown may bear, that boy shall buy for all." Herod - The Wakefield Pageant of Herod the Great, p. 111.

"If I live in land good life, as I hope / This dare I thee warrant—to make thee a pope!" Ibid, p. 115.

"Mercy to Grant I come indeed / Whoso ask mercy he shall have grace / Let no man doubt for his misdeed / But ever ask mercy while hath space (time)" Jesus - The Woman Taken in Adultery, p. 128.

"Now God, that died for all mankind / Save all these people both night and day / And of our sins he us unbind / High Lord of heaven that best may." Jesus - Ibid, p. 136.

"My masterdom now fares amiss / For yonder a stubborn fellow is / Right as wholly hell were his / To reave me of my power." Satan - The Harrowing of Hell, p. 155.

"Thus shall the [truth] bebought and sold / And treason shall for truth be told / Therefore, ay in your hearts ye hold / This counsel clean." Pilate - The Resurrection, p. 179.

"Starting with the Creation and ending with the general Judgment, the medieval playwrights have dramatized the most significant scriptural events in which they believed God's purpose for mankind is revealed." Introduction - The Judgment, p. 181.

"Behold both body, back and side / How dear I bought your brotherhead / These bitter pains I would abide / To buy you bliss, thus would I bleed." Jesus - The Judgment, p. 190.



"Everyman's fear of death is a universal emotion, but his spiritual victory over death is a triumphant expression of Christian faith and Catholic doctrine." Everyman Introduction, p. 195.

"I perceive, here in my majesty / How that all creatures be to me un[grateful] / Living without dread in worldly prosperity ... Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God / In worldly riches is all their mind ..." God - Everyman, pp. 199-200.

"All earthly things is but vanity / Beauty, Strength and Discretion do man forsake / Foolish friends, and kinsmen that fair spake / All fleeth save Good Deeds ..." Good Deeds - Ibid, p. 224.

"Jesus, blessed be thou / That thou hast willed to give the villain / The cruelest death in the world / For a more cruel death, indeed / Than to kill himself / No man may find, I think." The Death of Pilate, p. 244.



Topics for Discussion

How similar is contemporary Christian theology and/or teaching to the theology at the core of the stories in these pageants? If you see the two forms as being different, in what ways might the stories and the pageants dramatizing them be different if they were being dramatized today? What points about faith, redemption, and sin might they make?

Do you agree with the idea of making Biblical teachings more accessible to the general public by adding contemporary characters, ideas and language? Why or why not? Consider the question in terms of the other great Holy Books—the Torah, the Koran. Is there value in presenting the stories and truths they contain in non-traditional ways?

The creators of the Medieval Miracle pageants used what they saw as contemporary characters, language, and situations to make the Biblical stories they were dramatizing more accessible. How might you add a contemporary sensibility to an adaptation you were doing of the stories? Write down and stage your idea of a contemporary version of a Bible story.

"Noah's Flood", according to the editor, was presented by a tradesman's guild which had associations with water—an ironic fact given that water plays a key role in the narrative of the pageant. What other connections can you find between the guilds and the pageants they presented?

Plan and write your version of Everyman, keeping in mind the play's religious context and overall intent. What embodiments would your version of Everyman (or Everywoman) encounter? In what ways would their actions embody and/or dramatize the play's central theme?

In what way does the tension between faith and doubt/denial drive the conflict in each of the various pageants?

Is there any sin that cannot be redeemed? Do you believe in the principle, espoused here and in contemporary Catholic faith, that any sin can be forgiven as long as the sinner genuinely repents?

Do you believe in heaven and/or hell? Why or why not? What is your understanding and/or perception of the afterlife?

What is your understanding of God and/or Satan?