Everyman

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANONYMOUS

Though *Everyman*'s author has not been identified, some scholars have argued that the play is an English translation of a fifteenth century Dutch morality play. The Dutch play, *Elckerlijc* (which translates to "Every Man"), has been attributed to Peter van Diest, a medieval writer from the Low Countries about whom little is known.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As an allegorical morality play, *Everyman* relies mainly on generalized personifications of abstract ideas rather than on specific events in history, but its emphasis on Catholic sacraments (such as confession) as a path to redemption reminds readers that the play was written before the Protestant Reformation, at a time when Europe was largely Catholic. In this sense, the play can be understood as a reflection of a more widely held but soon-to-be-challenged sentiment that the only path to salvation was through the Church and its clergy. Although the Reformation was not to begin until 1517, tensions had long existed—and sometimes flared up—among Christians over allegations of corruption in the Church, prompting a set of feuds known as the Great Schism of Western Christianity, which lasted from 1378–1416. Although plays like *Everyman* take a sympathetic view of the Church, they were not—as some might expect—commissioned or produced by the Church. Rather, they were often staged by craft guilds. As one of the earliest forms of English drama, morality plays can be said to have paved the way for all later drama, including that produced by such later literary luminaries as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Everyman is an example of a morality play, an allegorical drama in which morals and vices are personified into characters that lead the protagonist toward a Christian life. Morality plays were one of the earliest and most popular forms of European and English drama, and were most popular in the 15th and 16th centuries. Other examples of morality plays are *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Hickscorner*, *Mankind*, and *Magnyfycence*. The play *Everyman* is also the source of the term "everyman," which denotes an ordinary person to whom an audience can easily relate. Since the earliest performances of *Everyman* in the 1500s, many plays, novels, television series, movies, have used everyman characters. Examples range from Christian in John Bunyan's seventeenth-century allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* to Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, to Ted Mosby in the popular television series *How I Met Your Mother*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Somonyng of Everyman
- **When Written:** 15th century
- **Where Written:** Unknown
- **When Published:** Early 16th century
- **Literary Period:** Middle Ages/Medieval literature
- **Genre:** Morality play
- **Setting:** Earth and heaven
- **Climax:** Everyman dies and surrenders himself to God
- **Antagonist:** Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods

EXTRA CREDIT

Roth's Everyman. *Everyman* provided the inspiration for Philip Roth's novel *Everyman*, for which Roth was awarded his third PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction in 2007.

Everyman in the Big Apple. Playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's recent adaptation of *Everyman*, titled *Everybody*, was performed at New York City's Pershing Square Signature Center in 2017.

PLOT SUMMARY

The play opens with a messenger calling for the audience's attention to this "moral play," which will demonstrate the transitory nature of human life. Next God appears, lamenting the unworthiness of humans, who no longer revere him and who sinfully indulge in greed and lust. Deciding to make people account for their sins, God orders Death to summon Everyman so that he can be judged by his "**reckoning**," a ledger of his good and ill deeds. However, when Death approaches Everyman on earth, Everyman is unwilling to die and unprepared for his reckoning. Clinging to the life he had, Everyman begs Death for more time. Death refuses, but he allows Everyman to seek a companion for his "pilgrimage," provided that he can find someone willing to accompany him to the afterlife.

A disconsolate Everyman seeks out his friend Fellowship for comfort and counsel, and Fellowship appears, promising his undying loyalty. However, when Fellowship learns that accompanying Everyman on the journey means that Fellowship, too, will die, he refuses to help his friend. Fellowship leaves, and

Everyman seeks the help of his relatives Kindred and Cousin instead, thinking that blood will be thicker than water. However, while Kindred and Cousin promise to stand by him in "wealth and woe," they also forsake him, as they too are afraid of death. Alone, Everyman bemoans this abandonment by his friends and family and wonders whom he can turn to next for help. He decides to ask for the assistance of his friend Goods, whom he has long loved. Though Goods (like Fellowship, Kindred, and Cousin) promises to help Everyman, he immediately reneges on his promise after learning of Everyman's predicament. In addition to refusing to join Everyman, Goods also informs Everyman that he has been damaging Everyman's reckoning all along: because Everyman loved Goods so much instead of loving God, Everyman will be condemned to hell.

Shocked by Goods' treachery, Everyman is in despair, as he is completely alone, with no one willing to help him. He decides to seek out Good-Deeds, though she is so weak from Everyman's sin and neglect that she cannot stand. Unlike his other friends, Good-Deeds is willing to help him, but she is too weak to do so. Though she cannot accompany him in person, she says that her sister Knowledge can help him to clear his reckoning. Knowledge guides Everyman to Confession, who teaches Everyman to repent. To atone for his sins, Everyman prays to God, begging for mercy, and he uses a scourge (a whip) for self-mortification.

As a result, Good-Deeds is healed and she finds Everyman in order to accompany him on his journey. Knowledge then bestows upon Everyman a "**garment of sorrow**," which allows Everyman to show contrition. She and Good-Deeds request the presence of Everyman's friends Discretion, Strength, Beauty, Five-wits, who all agree to help Everyman during his pilgrimage. At Knowledge's instruction, Everyman sees a priest for the holy sacrament and unction. While the rest of the group is waiting for Everyman's return, Five-wits makes a speech about the superiority of priests, claiming that they are "above angels in degree." Knowledge reminds him that not all priests are good, but Five-wits argues that one should nevertheless honor priesthood. At that point, Everyman returns, having undergone the remaining sacraments of last rites, and the group continues on their journey.

Approaching death, Everyman weakens and decides that it is time for him to make his reckoning. When he tries to climb into a grave and asks his companions to join him, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five-wits all desert him, making him realize that "all earthly things is but vanity." In contrast, Knowledge agrees to stay with him until the moment of his death, and Good-Deeds promises to make his case as he faces God's judgment. Good-Deeds and Everyman's soul pass over to the afterlife, and Knowledge, who is left on stage, remarks that she hears angels singing and that Good-Deeds will make sure that Everyman goes to heaven. An angel then appears, welcoming Everyman into heaven because of his "crystal-clear" reckoning. The play ends with an epilogue from a doctor, who tells the audience that they must make "amends" for their sins before they die and that they can only rely on good deeds to save them from hell.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Everyman – Representing all humankind, Everyman begins the play entrenched in worldly vices, such as lust and greed. However, when God asks Death to visit Everyman and ask him to prepare a reckoning (an account of his good and bad deeds), Everyman panics and begins asking for help where he has typically found it—from his friends, his family, and his wealth. The turning point of Everyman's character—and of the play overall—is Everyman's realization that nobody can help him besides Good Deeds and Knowledge. Through them, he learns to purge his sins and reject the material world in favor of the divine.

Death – Death is God's messenger. He informs Everyman that he must take a pilgrimage to his grave and be called to account for his actions on earth. Though Death obviously represents death, it's important to note that, in the Christian worldview of the play, death doesn't represent the end for Everyman, but rather the transition of his soul from earth to the afterlife.

Good-Deeds – Good-Deeds is the personification of Everyman's good deeds. She is weak when she is introduced, as Everyman's sinful behavior has depleted her, but she becomes stronger and stronger as Everyman purges his sins. Good-Deeds accompanies Everyman on his pilgrimage and she is the only one of his friends who is able to stay with him when he meets God, though her sister, Knowledge, comes close. Because of this, Good-Deeds is shown to be the most essential of Everyman's companions—metaphorically, this instructs the audience that doing good deeds is the only behavior that can get a person into heaven.

Knowledge – The sister of Good-Deeds, Knowledge guides Everyman on his pilgrimage when Good-Deeds is still too weak to do so. She represents knowledge—not knowledge in general, but the specific the knowledge and teachings of the Catholic Church—and she instructs Everyman to repent for his sins and take Catholic sacraments. Knowledge and Good-Deeds are the only companions to stay with Everyman until his death, which shows that knowledge is essential for navigating life on earth, but she ultimately leaves him when he dies. This shows, allegorically, that knowledge is unhelpful on Judgment Day.

Five-Wits – Five-Wits is the personification of the five wits, which is another way of saying the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Five-Wits is a companion to Everyman, who regards Five-Wits as his best friend until Five-Wits abandons him. This shows that, though the senses are enticing

and helpful on earth, they have no place in heaven and cannot lead to salvation.

Strength – Strength, who represents physical strength, accompanies Everyman and promises to stand by him. However, she abandons him once she learns that his pilgrimage is to end in death. Once again, this illustrates that what is important on earth is not necessarily important in heaven, and that even the most steady-seeming things can be fickle.

MINOR CHARACTERS

God – God appears in the play only once. Near the beginning, he criticizes Everyman's sinfulness and his ungrateful disregard of Christ's sacrifice for humanity, and then orders Death to summon Everyman to God's judgment. God's summoning of Everyman drives the plot of the play.

Confession – The personification of confession, he is described as both a "cleansing river" and a "holy man" who lives in a "house of salvation." He helps purge Everyman of his sins and gives him the gift of penance.

Beauty – The personification of beauty (and thus a facet of the material world), Beauty joins Everyman on his pilgrimage but forsakes him when he asks her to die for him. This shows that beauty is fickle and irrelevant in heaven.

Discretion – One of Everyman's companions, Discretion represents the ability to make judgments and choices. He (or she) abandons Everyman to follow Strength.

Fellowship – Personifying friendship, Fellowship is one of Everyman's friends. Though Everyman asks for his help on the pilgrimage, Fellowship abandons Everyman after learning that he will soon die. Willing to help Everyman only for his own amusement or for the sake of violence, Fellowship enables Everyman's sins.

Goods – Though long loved by Everyman, Goods—the personification of wealth in the play— abandons Everyman when Everyman asks him to join his pilgrimage. A thief of souls, Goods is often destructive and deceitful, leading a thousand people to hell for every one that he saves.

Cousin – Everyman's cousin, who abandons Everyman in his time of need to save himself and to prepare his own **reckoning**.

Kindred – Everyman's kindred, who refuses to accompany Everyman on his journey after promising to remain loyal to him.

Doctor – Delivering the play's epilogue, the doctor summarizes the moral of the story: we can only rely on our good deeds for comfort and salvation, and we must clear our "reckonings" while we are still alive, lest we suffer eternally in hell.

Messenger – Like God, the messenger appears only once at the very beginning of the play, where he calls for the audience's attention and presents *Everyman* as a "moral play."

Angel – Appearing only at the end of the play, the angel announces Everyman's entrance into heaven.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PERSONIFICATION AND MORALITY

Everyman, which belongs to the genre of the morality play, is meant to instruct readers in matters of morality and religion. A common form of medieval drama, morality plays often feature a protagonist who represents humankind as well as other characters who personify abstract ideas such as different virtues and vices. The interaction of such characters demonstrates the possibility of human triumph over sin, thus instructing the play's audience to lead more moral, godly lives. The moral lessons of *Everyman* are facilitated primarily by the author's use of allegory and personification, which allow the author to encapsulate complex ideas like death and friendship into simplistic characters, in turn allowing him to make sweeping and blunt moral arguments about the concepts the characters represent.

The most obvious example of this is the character of Everyman himself. The author uses the character as a symbolic representation of *every man*, thereby diminishing the diverse nature of humanity in favor of viewing all humanity as tainted by sin (since, according to Christian theology, all humans are innately sinful as a result of Adam's and Eve's fall from grace). The author presents Everyman as sinful by pointing out his greed, lust, and lack of Christian piety, effectively reducing all of humanity to one specific kind of person and ignoring the possibility of generosity, virtuousness, and piousness in his depiction of mankind. However, casting one character as the personification of all humanity enables the author to make much broader moral arguments than he would otherwise be able. The presentation of Everyman as a sinner doomed for damnation allows the author to make a convincing argument that all people should, like Everyman, behave in a certain way in order to avoid damnation. It's notable that Everyman must not only behave virtuously and generously towards others, but he must turn to the Catholic Church to earn redemption. The reward, according to the author, is not only escape from fiery pits of Hell but also the promise of eternal bliss in Heaven.

Other examples of the author's didactic use of personification include the portrayal of Fellowship (or friendship) as an enabler of Everyman's sins, Goods (or material wealth) as a stain on his soul that sabotages his relationship with God, and Knowledge (or the knowledge of the Catholic Church) as the key to

salvation. By defining complex ideas like friendship, wealth, and knowledge in so narrow a manner, the author paints a picture that suits his moral worldview, in which Catholic teachings and behavior are cast as mankind's only deliverance from sin and damnation. In this way, *Everyman* not only takes a view of morality as something which can only be attained through the Catholic Church, but of people in general as innately sinful and dependent on the Church for their salvation.

DEATH

Although the character Death disappears after delivering his message to Everyman, death itself remains one of the play's primary themes. The Christian Bible teaches that one of the consequences of the fall from grace (that is, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden) is that God made humans mortal. Therefore, death is simply part of what it means to be human. As the character Death proclaims at the beginning of the play, death is a weapon, one that punishes "every man … that liveth beastly / Out of God's laws." Indeed, Everyman's fear of death stems not only from his preference for the material world over Christian devotion but also from his certainty that he has lived "out of God's laws" and will therefore face eternal damnation after he dies. In other words, for those who lead ungodly lives, loss of life is a minor punishment—since death is just the gateway to eternal punishment.

This notion of death as a gateway is especially significant in light of the fact that Hell, in the author's Christian worldview, is not the only possible existence in the afterlife. Highlighting the "transitory" and temporary nature of life, Death acts as a messenger, delivering souls to both heaven and hell. In the world of the play, death is not the end of existence, but merely a divider between the temporary material world and the eternal afterlife. Whether people end up in heaven or hell is, according to the play, entirely up to each person. For the righteous, death isn't frightening at all, since it is the gateway to eternal happiness in heaven. Death is only to be feared by those who live in sin.

A person's relationship to death can therefore be seen as a litmus test for their relationship to God. Whereas in the beginning of the play, Everyman feared and despaired of death, at the end of the play, he readily climbs into his own grave. This remarkable transformation in his attitude toward death correlates with his relationships to sin and Christianity. Whereas in the beginning of the play Everyman sinfully privileged material goods and pleasures over good deeds and Christian devotion, by the end of the play, Everyman has, with the help of Confession, Good Deeds, and Knowledge, purged himself of sin, given his wealth away, and undergone the sacraments of last rites. Now a righteous man, Everyman not only does not fear death but embraces it, as it will bring him closer to God.

Everyman's willingness to die at the end of the play is portrayed as an act of piety, and throughout the play, the willingness to die for others is depicted as a rare virtue. Everyman's friends—Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Strength, Five Wits, Discretion, and Beauty—all refuse to join him on his pilgrimage. No one, except for Good Deeds and Everyman, is willing to die. However, one complication of the play's portrayal of Everyman's self-sacrifice as virtuous is the fact that his sacrifice is motivated by selfishness, by his desire to gain admission to Heaven. An important distinction between Good Deeds and Everyman is that while Good Deeds is willing to die for Everyman's sake, Everyman embraces death for his *own* sake. Since he has already been summoned by Death, Everyman has no choice in whether he lives or dies. Although he despairs of his own impending death, he displays no compunction when asking his friends to die and possibly go to Hell with him, bemoaning their abandonment when they refuse without seeming to realize that he is asking for the ultimate sacrifice. By contrast, Good Deeds is ready and willing to die for Everyman. Portrayed as the ultimate good deed, Good Deeds's willingness to die for Everyman recalls Christ's sacrifice. Just as Christ's self-sacrifice gave mankind a path to salvation, Good Deeds's self-sacrifice gives Everyman a path to salvation. One might argue, then, that Everyman's ostensibly contradictory selfish self-sacrifice fits into an allegory of Christian salvation: in spite of our sins, humankind has been granted salvation (whether deserved or not) through a savior's virtuous death.

SIN, HUMAN NATURE, AND THE MATERIAL WORLD

The purpose of any morality play is to warn its audience against sin, and *Everyman* is no different. At the beginning of the play, Everyman's life is filled with sin, which, at first glance, appears to be represented entirely by his friends, who serve to enable Everyman's sins. For example, the character Fellowship reveals that, while he won't die for his friend, he is more than willing to help him "eat, and drink, and make good cheer, / Or haunt to women, the lusty company," or even to "murder, or any man kill." When Everyman turns to his friend Goods for comfort, Goods reveals that he was actually been tarnishing Everyman's soul and distancing him from God. In these two cases, it is clear that part of what the play is characterizing as sinful (aside from the most obvious sin of murder) is Everyman's indulgence in the material world. Sin is associated with worldly pleasures and goods—eating, drinking, sex, and money. Such materialism results, as Goods tells Everyman, in the gradual loss of a person's soul and, eventually, damnation. Even Knowledge, Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and Five-Wits—though not sinful or malicious like Goods or Fellowship—ultimately prove to be inadequate in saving Everyman from death because they, too, represent worldly values. As Everyman approaches death and his body begins to

weaken, all of his companions—save for Good-Deeds—are unable to accompany Everyman on his "pilgrimage," which ultimately leads him to heaven. Whether sinful or righteous, these friends cannot support him during his **reckoning**, demonstrating the author's belief that material things have no power to save people from Hell, and that everyone will face judgment with nothing to defend them but their good deeds.

The play portrays humanity (with Everyman being the personification of humanity) as inherently sinful. Although the author uses personification to represent the various things that tempt Everyman into sinfulness (e.g., Goods, Beauty, Fellowship), Everyman's sinfulness is nevertheless characterized as being part of his nature. Fellowship and Goods may represent Everyman's sins and indulgence in materiality, but only insofar as they are enablers or tempters. Everyman's choices to succumb to such temptation are the reasons for the sins in his reckoning. The inherent nature of Everyman's sinfulness is emphasized by Death, who explains that "in the world each living creature / For Adam's sin must die of nature." Death is referring to the idea of "original sin," which, in Christian theology, is the sin inherent in every human being as a consequence of Adam's and Eve's fall from grace. Adam's sin—disobeying God's commandment—is the root of the widespread sinfulness that God laments in the beginning of the play. Everyman, like Adam, has neglected God and ignored his commandments. Humanity, according to God, is so "drowned in sin" and fixated on material wealth that they seem to have entirely forgotten the sacrifice that Christ made when he died for their salvation.

In other words, Everyman is selfish. He has forgotten God, he has not shared his wealth with others, and throughout much of the play he asks his friends to die for him, even though he himself is afraid of death. His selfishness is made especially clear in his attempt to rid himself of sin. Everyman eventually learns that in order to escape damnation he must not only deny his worldly desires but also punish himself for having had those desires. After Knowledge brings Everyman to church, Confession tells him that he must "receive that scourge of me" and "chastise" (or punish) his body—that is, he must engage in self-mortification or self-flagellation. Everyman literally whips himself, "suffer[ing] now strokes and punishing" and declaring that his body is "the sin of the flesh." Through his act of flagellating himself in order to purify himself, he demonstrates both that he is becoming selfless and that his selfishness—his pursuit of worldly pleasures and material goods—would have been his damnation.

SALVATION, HUMILITY, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

From the beginning of the play—when Everyman learns that the time of his death has come—*Everyman* is deeply concerned with the subject of salvation. Although Everyman initially searches for salvation in the form of someone to accompany him on his pilgrimage (to death), he eventually begins to question how he can save his soul from damnation. The answer, he finds, is through the Catholic Church and Good Deeds—the only friend that agrees to accompany him on his journey to the afterlife. The main moral message of *Everyman* is not simply that the path to salvation is through the doing of good deeds, but that humanity does not have the power to save itself. Rather, much like Everyman, humanity finds salvation through the grace of God. In fact, this is one of the central tenets of Christianity: that man cannot save himself—he needs a savior. Therefore, the importance of the humility Everyman demonstrates in relying on Good Deeds to save him from damnation can be taken as one of the play's main moral messages. It is not simply the doing of good deeds which saves Everyman, but his willingness to acknowledge his need for help and his own inadequacy in saving himself.

Everyman's salvation by the self-sacrificing character of Good Deeds parallels mankind's salvation by the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the Christian Gospel. Like Jesus, Good Deeds is the epitome of selflessness who—unlike Fellowship, Kindred, and Goods—is willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of Everyman's salvation. Importantly, Good Deeds does not save Everyman because he is deserving of salvation. Rather, his selfishness and sinfulness make him markedly *undeserving*—and Good Deeds reminds readers of this when she complains that if Everyman had "cheered" her, rather than pursuing his own selfish desires, she wouldn't be too weak to help him in his pilgrimage. Good Deeds only regains strength when Everyman repents for his sins and punishes himself through self-flagellation, suggesting once again that Everyman's humility—and his ability to acknowledge his sinful nature and accept help from others—are the keys to his salvation.

Notably, Everyman does not perform good deeds in the general sense that readers might think of today. Although he does donate half his wealth to charity after the character Good Deeds has been healed, what actually revitalizes Good Deeds is the series of Catholic sacraments that Everyman participates in. When Good Deeds is too weak to help Everyman, her sister Knowledge guides Everyman on his spiritual journey to purification. Along the way, Everyman participates in specifically Catholic sacraments and practices such as penance, confession, self-flagellation, extreme unction, and last rites. Knowledge is therefore not the personification of knowledge in general but rather of the knowledge of the holy sacraments and rituals of the Catholic Church. In this way, the play suggests that salvation is attained not just through humility and doing good deeds, but through the Catholic Church and its sacraments. Indeed, Five-Wits even claims that priests are more powerful than angels, and that because priests are crucial to the seven sacraments, "[they] beareth the keys and thereof

hath the cure / For man's redemption." Therefore, underlying the explicit moral of this play—that only good deeds and reliance on God can save mankind at his reckoning—is a subtler and decidedly less universal message: that humanity must rely on the Catholic Church for salvation or face eternal damnation.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RECKONING

Also referred to as a "book of count" or "counting book," the reckoning is the ledger book of all of Everyman's good and evil deeds. The premise of the play is that Everyman must embark on a pilgrimage to the afterlife and present his reckoning to God, who will decide whether Everyman goes to heaven or hell. The reckoning therefore symbolizes both God's judgement of Everyman's soul and Everyman's actions, which are what God will judge. In the beginning of the play, Everyman, who is consumed with wealth and desire, has a reckoning without many good deeds in it. Everyman's greed and lust has stained his soul, and thus his reckoning, prompting his frenzied search for a companion to accompany him to what he believes will be hell. However, by the end of the play, Everyman, with the help of Good-Deeds, manages to clear his reckoning, thus securing him a favorable judgement and allowing him to enter heaven.

GARMENT OF SORROW

The garment of sorrow, given to Everyman by Knowledge, represents contrition. According to Knowledge, wearing the garment (or showing contrition) "getteth forgiveness" and "pleaseth God passing well." As the garment signifies Everyman's repentance for his sins, it is an integral part of the sacrament of penance, which is one of the last rites in Catholic theology. The sorrow represented by the garment is distinctly different from the sorrow Everyman experiences in the first half of the play. Whereas previously, Everyman's sorrow was one of despair for his impending departure from the material world and the abandonment of his materialistic friends, now his sorrow is one of remorse for his sins and for forsaking God in favor of the material world. In this way, the garment of sorrow represents not only contrition, but also Everyman's transformation from a sinner to a faithful follower of God, from a person who is focused on the world to one who is focused on heaven.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Everyman & Other Miracle & Morality Plays* published in 1995.

Everyman Quotes

Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God;
In worldly riches is all their mind,
They fear not my rightwiseness, the sharp rod;
My law that I shewed, when I for them died,
They forget clean, and shedding of my blood red;
I hanged between two, it cannot be denied;
To get them life I suffered to be dead

Related Characters: God (speaker), Everyman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

At the start of the play, God describes the world as being full of sinners who have forsaken him. Specifically, he laments that they have forgotten the sacrifice he made for them when he came to Earth and died for their sins so that they might have eternal life in Heaven (this in reference to the Christian belief that Jesus died on the cross to save the souls of mankind). When God says "I hanged between two," it's a direct reference to the story of the crucifixion of Christ, who hung on the cross between two criminals who were also crucified.

The passage establishes the centrality of the theme of humility and self-sacrifice in the text. God calls for a "general reckoning"—in which all sinners will account for their sins—because they are selfishly concerned with worldly goods and have forgotten God's sacrifice. God's selfless love is echoed later in the text, both in Good-Deeds's act of self-sacrifice to save the soul of Everyman, as well as in Everyman's acts of repentance and self-flagellation, which require him to behave with humility and deference. In this way, the play portrays humility and self-sacrifice as the pathway to salvation.

I set not by gold, silver, nor riches,
Ne by pope, emperor, king, duke, ne princess.
For and I would receive gifts great,
All the world I might get;
But my custom is clean contrary.
I give thee no respite: come hence, and not tarry.

Related Characters: Death (speaker), Everyman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Despite Everyman's begging for mercy, Death here asserts that no worldly goods can save Everyman now as he is summoned to the afterlife. The sentiment Death expresses in this passage—that material goods carry no currency in death—will be echoed throughout the text, as various personifications of worldly goods (e.g., Beauty and even Fellowship) abandon Everyman in his time of greatest need. In this way, Death foreshadows the general reversal of values that Everyman undergoes in the play—a reversal in which everything he most treasured and held dear in life will be shown to be worthless, and the spiritual virtues he neglected will be revealed to carry the utmost importance. Thus, the play demonstrates that even in the moment of death, the sinner can find salvation if they are willing to examine their life thoroughly and repent.

Now in good faith, I will not that way.
But and thou wilt murder, or any man kill,
In that I will help thee with a good will!
...
Whether ye have loved me or no,
By Saint John, I will not with thee go.

Related Characters: Fellowship (speaker), Everyman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Fellowship is the first character Everyman seeks out after he receives news of his impending death. Although at first Fellowship promises to stand by Everyman no matter what his predicament, he quickly reverses this position when he learns that Everyman is undertaking a pilgrimage into the afterlife—and that Everyman wants Fellowship to come with. In this passage, Fellowship firmly asserts that he will not accompany Everyman. His denial, while understandable, underscores the selfishness of humans, as does Everyman's request that Fellowship accompany him in death, since that would entail Fellowship sacrificing his own life. The repeated refusal of characters like Fellowship to sacrifice their lives to save Everyman's life becomes a type of foil for Jesus's ultimate act of self-sacrifice to save the souls of "every man. Furthermore, Fellowship's assertion that he would kill another but not sacrifice himself shows the vice, selfishness, and sinfulness of mankind.

That is to thy damnation without lesing,
For my love is contrary to the love everlasting.
But if thou had me loved moderately during,
As, to the poor give part of me,
Then shouldst thou not in this dolour be,
Nor in this great sorrow and care.

Related Characters: Goods (speaker), Everyman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Goods is the personification of worldly or material goods. He speaks these lines after revealing to Everyman that Everyman's lifelong love of Goods has only brought him further away from God and has unbalanced his reckoning dramatically in favor of damnation. When Goods tells Everyman that loving Goods is "contrary to the love everlasting," he subtly gestures toward the true nature of Everyman's pilgrimage, which is to find a source of lasting value in a world of unreliable friends and vanishing wealth. The betrayal of Everyman by Goods is in some ways reminiscent of the Bible story of the man who builds his house on sinking sand (a metaphor for a man who prizes worldly riches above spiritual wealth). Goods even goes so far as to say directly that if Everyman had been less selfish and donated some of his money, he might not be facing damnation, reinforcing the play's central message of the importance of selflessness and good deeds.

> Yea, sir, I may thank you of all;
> If ye had perfectly cheered me,
> Your book of account now full ready had be.
> Look, the books of your works and deeds eke;
> Oh, see how they lie under the feet,
> To your soul's heaviness.

Related Characters: Good-Deeds (speaker), Everyman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Good-Deeds is too weak to help Everyman or accompany him on his pilgrimage because Everyman has neglected Good-Deeds for such a long time. Here, Good-Deeds informs Everyman that is he had "perfectly cheered" her (presumably by doing good deeds himself), his reckoning would be "ready," meaning that he would not be facing the threat of eternal damnation as punishment for his sins. Here, as elsewhere, the reckoning is portrayed as a literal book containing a list of all Everyman's deeds. The implication is clear: the path to Heaven is paved with good deeds. Therefore, as the play will go on to show, to clear his reckoning, Everyman will need the help of Good-Deeds.

> I come with Knowledge for my redemption,
> Repent with hearty and full contrition;
> For I am commanded a pilgrimage to take,
> And great accounts before God to take,
> Now, I pray you, Shift, mother of salvation,
> Help my good deeds for my piteous exclamation.

Related Characters: Everyman (speaker), Knowledge, Confession

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Knowledge—the sister of Good-Deeds—has brought Everyman to Confession as part of his pilgrimage and his effort to save his soul. By this point in the play, Everyman has come to realize the gravity of his situation, and seems to have internalized the fact that nothing can save him but repenting of his sinful life and asking forgiveness. That Knowledge brings Everyman to Confession—and later instructs him to partake in other sacraments—suggests that her character is the personification not of knowledge generally, but of knowledge of the Church and its sacraments.

It is worth noting that while the play uplifts the virtues of humility and selflessness, Everyman's confession and his generally repentant attitude do not necessarily demonstrate selflessness, considering he is clearly acting out of some form of self-interest, in a last-minute bid to save his soul from damnation. Nevertheless, the play suggests that it's never too late to repent and redeem oneself in the eyes of God.

> In the name of the Holy Trinity,
> My body sore punished shall be:
> Take this body for the sin of the flesh;
> Also thou delightest to go gay and fresh,
> And in the way of damnation thou did me bring;
> Therefore suffer now strokes and punishing.
> Now of penance I will wade the water clear,
> To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.

Related Characters: Everyman (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Here Everyman engages in self-flagellation (i.e., whipping himself) as part of a ritual of demonstrating his repentance for his sins. Because he spent his life indulging in pleasures of the body, he now punishes his body, inflicting pain. Although this practice was common among the pious in the Middle Ages, it represents a stark vision of what it takes to gain salvation and to lead a pious life. However, such self-flagellation is reminiscent of the painful death that Christ endured in sacrificing himself to save the souls of humanity—and so, yet again, the play seems to be reminding readers of the virtues of selflessness and self-sacrifice. Although it may seem that such self-harm is a senseless act of masochism, the play unambiguously presents it as a good deed that helps Everyman gain admittance to Heaven.

God will you to salvation bring,
For priesthood exceedeth all other thing;
To us Holy Scripture they do teach,
And converteth man from sin heaven to reach;
God hath to them more power given,
Than to any angel that is in heaven

Related Characters: Five-Wits (speaker), God , Everyman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the character of Five-wits extols the virtues of the clergy and lavishes praises on priests, claiming that they are more powerful even than angels in Heaven (an arguably sacrilegious claim since priests are human and angels are divine). If Five-wits is meant to personify the five senses—and, by extension, the "common sense" of mankind collectively—perhaps his speech is meant to be taken with a grain of salt rather than at face value. In other words, this passage *may* be the author's way of subtly indicating that people place too much faith in the Church—but it may also be a sincere expression of belief that priests are deserving of such praise. In any case, Five-wits speech is in keeping with the overall tenor of the play, which portrays the institution of the Catholic Church as being integral to Everyman's—and every man's—salvation.

But when Jesus hanged on the cross with great smart
There he gave, out of his blessed heart,
The same sacrament in great torment:
He sold them not to us, that Lord Omnipotent.
Therefore Saint Peter the apostle doth say
That Jesu's curse hath all they
Which God their Savior do buy or sell,
Or they for any money do take or tell.

Related Characters: Knowledge (speaker), God , Five-Wits

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Knowledge articulates a counter-argument to Five-wits's argument about the praiseworthiness of the Catholic clergy. By referring repeatedly to money, Knowledge seems to be pushing back against the widespread practice of selling papal indulgences as a way of absolving sinners of their sins—a practice which effectively allowed the wealthy to buy admission to Heaven and generated an important stream of revenue for the already very powerful Catholic Church. The sale of indulgences was so controversial, however, that it was eventually one of the primary reasons for the Protestant Reformation. This passage suggests that the author of *Everyman* may in fact have been opposed to the sale of indulgences, and it is therefore a rare moment in which the play turns a critical eye toward the Church and its conventions. Knowledge points out that Jesus died to redeem mankind's sins, but that mankind had not been made to buy his salvation then—suggesting that it is wrong for the Church to try to sell people their salvation in the form of indulgences.

Everyman: Take example, all ye that this do hear or see,
How they that I loved best do forsake me,
Except my Good-Deeds that bideth truly.
Good-Deeds: 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, and that am I.

Related Characters: Good-Deeds , Everyman (speaker), Discretion, Strength, Beauty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Everyman states the moral of the play most clearly in this passage: all earthly things are "but vanity," meaning that they don't matter when death comes and people must account for how they lived their lives. Rather, the only thing that accompanies Everyman into the afterlife are his good deeds (in the form of the character Good-Deeds). Even the most seemingly praiseworthy attributes in life—Strength, Beauty, and Discretion—vanish in the moment of death. The play's message is a deeply moral one, concerned ultimately with the goodness of people's actions as the ultimate measure of their worthiness for salvation. By the end of the play, Everyman has undergone a transformation from a sinner to a man who repents of his sins, having realized that everything he loved most in life was devoid of real and lasting worth. The process of gaining salvation, therefore, depended on Everyman having the humility to confess and repent for his sins, and to recognize that he lacked the power to save himself.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

EVERYMAN

The messenger opens the play, by calling for the audience's attention to "The Summoning of Everyman." He says that the play will demonstrate the "transitory" nature of mortal lives and the ostensibly pleasurable but ultimately pernicious effects of sin. The messenger notes that Fellowship, Jollity, Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty will disappear after death, and that God will summon Everyman for "a general **reckoning**." Then the messenger introduces the present action, asking for the audience's attention once again to hear God speak.

The messenger establishes sin and death as the play's primary subjects and themes. By creating an early association between sin and death, the messenger reminds readers of the Christian viewpoint that Adam and Eve's original sin is the reason for mankind's mortality, and that, by contrast, leading a Christian life opens a pathway to eternal life in Heaven. Put in less overtly religious terms, the messenger establishes that the play will center around death as an occasion for reflecting on one's life.

God's speech begins the action of the play. He laments the fact that people are "unkind" to him and that they "liv[e] without dread in worldly prosperity." By indulging in sin and material wealth, they forget God and the sacrifice he made for humanity through Christ's martyrdom. As people are engaging in all seven of the deadly sins and are becoming worse every year, God decides to "have a **reckoning** of every man's person," calling them to account for the sins so that they don't degenerate further into uncharitable, cannibalistic beasts. To do this, he summons Death.

God establishes an opposition between virtuousness and "worldly prosperity" that will appear repeatedly throughout the play, as characters that represent various worldly goods and pleasures make appearances to lead Everyman astray from the path of righteousness. God's sweeping statements about mankind's sinfulness hint at one of the play's main viewpoints: that mankind is inherently sinful. The "reckoning" to which God refers is both a process of judging people's souls and a physical ledger of all the sins and good deeds people have committed.

Death enters, and God orders him to tell Everyman that he must immediately go on a pilgrimage "in [God's] name" and bring with him a "**reckoning**"—a ledger that lists all the good and bad deeds Everyman has done, which God will use to decide whether Everyman goes to Heaven or Hell. Death eagerly sets out to fulfill God's orders, searching the globe for "every man… that liveth beastly / Out of God's laws." Everyman, who is preoccupied with lust and greed, does not expect Death's arrival.

Although it initially seems that Death sets out in search of all people who fail to live according to God's law, he instead finds the character Everyman, making clear that Everyman is meant to symbolize "every one." He symbolizes all people, which also drives home that all people in the view of the play are sinful.

Death approaches Everyman, asking if he has forgotten his maker and informing him that God wants a **reckoning** from him. Troubled and unprepared for such a task, Everyman asks the identity of his interlocutor, who reveals that he is Death, who spares nobody.

The fact that Everyman is surprised by Death's arrival shows that sinful behavior is in part the product of an arrogant mentality that death will never come, and that one will never have to account for one's behavior, least of all by compiling a list of every good and bad deed ever committed.

Everyman exclaims that Death came when he had least expected him, and then he tries to bribe Death with money in exchange for his life. However, Death refuses, as material goods mean nothing to him. Everyman then begs Death "for God's mercy" to give him more time to make his "**counting book**" (another name for a reckoning) ready, but Death tells Everyman that crying and praying won't help him now. Death then reminds Everyman that all humans must eventually die because of Adam's sin. Everyman asks if he will be able to return to life, but Death says it is impossible and that his life was not "given" but merely "lent." Upset that he must die, Everyman begs again for God's mercy and asks Death if he can bring company on his journey. Death allows it, as long as he can find willing companions. After again rejecting Everyman's pleas to be spared, Death sends him on his way.

Here, Death alludes to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which the first man and woman defy God's commandment and are exiled from the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve's sin represents the sinfulness that is a part of human nature, and which is (according to the story) the cause of man's mortality. Therefore, death and sin are inextricably linked—but eternal life is available to those who are righteous and follow God. Death's reminder that Everyman's life was never given to him, but merely on loan, reinforces the play's theme of humility, encouraging readers not to arrogantly take their own lives for granted, but to remember that God is all powerful.

At a loss for what to do, Everyman seeks his friend Fellowship for comfort, expecting that Fellowship will accompany him on his journey. When Everyman tells Fellowship that he is in danger, Fellowship asks Everyman to confide in him, promising that as Everyman's friend, he will try to help. Fellowship insists that he will not forsake Everyman even if Everyman is going to Hell and he declares that he is willing to die for his friend.

Fellowship is the personification of friends and friendship in general. When faced with death, it is only natural that Everyman would first turn to his friends for support—and indeed, when Fellowship first appears, he seems like a trustworthy and supportive character.

However, when Everyman reveals that he must soon face God's judgment and would like company on his journey, Fellowship hesitates, as he knows that the journey will mean his death. He asks Everyman when he would be able to come back, and Everyman responds, "Never again till the day of doom." Fellowship now adamantly refuses to join Everyman. He says that, while he wouldn't take the journey of death even "for the father that begat [him]," he is more than willing to help Everyman "eat, and drink, and make good cheer, / Or haunt to women." When Everyman points out that Fellowship is willing to accompany him only for his own amusement, Fellowship denies this, arguing that he is also ready to help Everyman "murder, or any man kill." Everyman pleads with Fellowship, reminding them of their friendship, but Fellowship dismisses this, swearing by Saint John that he won't change his mind.

Although Fellowship seems at first like a trustworthy and compassionate character, he is—quite understandably—unable to die along with Everyman. This passage underscores Everyman's dread of death as well as his selfishness (since he asks his friend to accompany him on a journey he himself does not want to take). It also shows that, however dear one's friends may be in life, people must ultimately face death and account for their sins alone. Everyman seems to hope that Fellowship will be able to rescue him from his fate, but Fellowship's refusal to make the pilgrimage illustrates that, as beautiful as friendships may be, they are not the key to salvation. Moreover, the author suggests that Fellowship actually stands in the way *of Everyman's righteousness by helping him pursue worldly goods when in fact Everyman would be better served by pursuing spiritual virtues.*

Fellowship leaves, and Everyman wonders aloud about who could help him. He realizes that friendship cannot help him, quoting the proverb "in prosperity men friends may find, / Which in adversity be full unkind." He decides to seek instead the help of his kinsmen, Kindred and Cousin, who declare that they will remain loyal to Everyman in "wealth and woe." Everyman tells them about his situation—that he was commanded by a messenger of God to give an **account** of his good and evil deeds, and that he is seeking companions for his journey.

This proverb underscores the selfishness and unreliability of people in general, presenting a sobering reminder of the difficulty inherent in Everyman's search to find something of lasting and reliable value in life before making the journey to death. Forsaken by his friend, Everyman instead turns to seek the help and companionship of his family.

After learning of Everyman's fate, Cousin and Kindred are unwilling to help him. Cousin makes the excuse that his toe is cramped and that he is not to be trusted, as Cousin "will deceive you in your most need." Because his family has forsaken him, Everyman believes that he will never be happy again. Kindred tells Everyman to "make no moan," and he offers his "maid" to accompany Everyman. Cousin then gives Everyman another reason for his refusal: he too has a "**reckoning**" to prepare. Soon after, Kindred and Cousin flee the scene.

Like Fellowship, Cousin and Kindred also refuse to help Everyman or accompany him on his journey. The unwillingness of various characters throughout the play to perform the ultimate self-sacrifice stands, implicitly, in contrast to the figure of Jesus Christ, who did *die to save the soul of mankind. Cousin's excuse for refusing Everyman's request is particularly pathetic, underscoring the unreliability of even the people who are (supposedly) one's closest and most devoted relations. Friends and family, the play makes clear, offer no salvation.*

Alone again, Everyman laments the loss of Fellowship, Kindred, and Cousin, who have all forsaken him. Wondering to whom he should turn next, Everyman decides that, as he has loved wealth his whole life, he should summon his friend Goods for advice. Goods appears and swears that "[if] ye in the world have trouble or adversity, / That can I help you to remedy shortly." Everyman tells Goods his troubles, asking him to accompany Everyman and to help "purify" his **reckoning**, as he believes that "money maketh all right that is wrong."

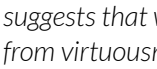
Goods promises to be able to solve whatever problem Everyman might be facing—but much like Kindred, Cousin, and Fellowship, Goods seems not to have considered the possibility of death, which no amount of money can keep at bay. Everyman's request that Goods help him purify his reckoning is likely an allusion to the real-world practice, widespread at the time, of buying slips of paper called papal indulgences that supposedly absolved the buyer of their sins. The sale of indulgences, while sanctioned by the church, was controversial because it meant that the wealthiest people could simply buy their salvation. Hence, Everyman believes that Goods can help him right his wrongs.

Goods, however, "sing[s] another song." He says that if he accompanied Everyman, Everyman's situation would be even worse than it already is, and he explains that Everyman's love for Goods "made [his **reckoning**] blotted and blind." Though troubled by Goods' warning, Everyman still asks Goods to come with him. Goods tells him that he is "too brittle" to go on the journey. When Everyman points out that he has loved Goods his whole life, Goods replies that Everyman's love for Goods has been leading him toward damnation, "for my love is contrary to the love everlasting."

Goods's confession has broad thematic resonance in the text, supporting the idea that sin is associated with the material world and its pleasures, which ultimately lead people away from the path of godliness. Everyman's love of material goods has blinded him to the fact that worldly pursuits such as money are diametrically opposed to the pursuit of spiritual goods such as selflessness. Everyman's belief that Goods can help him thus demonstrates how hopelessly lost he is in his search for a source of everlasting value.

Goods further explains that if Everyman had loved Goods only moderately and had "to the poor give[n] part of me," Everyman would have been better off. Everyman realizes that he has been deceived, as Goods explains that, contrary to Everyman's belief that he owned Goods, Goods was actually only "lent" to him. Goods reveals that he deceives people to steal their souls. Everyman berates Goods for deceiving him, calling him a "traitor to God," but Goods says that Everyman was responsible for his own fate. His anger relenting, Everyman recognizes that he should have loved God instead of Goods, but nevertheless he asks Goods once again to join him. Laughing at Everyman, Goods again refuses and leaves.

Goods's betrayal of Everyman represents something of a turning point in Everyman's pilgrimage, since it prompts his realization that he should have loved God if he hoped to have life everlasting—but that instead he loved something that was all along leading his soul down the path to damnation. The passage portrays Everyman as a deeply materialistic person, which means by extension that the play portrays people in general as deeply materialistic and vain (since Everyman symbolizes all of humanity). The cruelty of Goods suggests that worldly goods are mankind's most sinister distraction from virtuousness and other worthy aims.



Once alone, Everyman laments his situation, pondering whom he can ask to accompany him on his pilgrimage. His friends Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods "gave [him] words fair," promising to stand by him, but they all deserted him when he asked for help. Goods' treachery was especially painful to Everyman, who becomes so ashamed that he says, "Thus may I well myself hate." Everyman decides to seek out Good-Deeds, though she is "so weak / That she can neither go nor speak."

The suggestion in this passage is that Everyman has spent so much of his life in sin and the pursuit of worldly goods that he no longer knows how to devote himself to the performance of good deeds. He admits to feeling some degree of self-hatred, implying that his sense of self-worth was so thoroughly entangled with his friends and possessions that, now that they have forsaken him, his sense of self-worth has also forsaken him.

Everyman calls out for Good-Deeds, who "lie[s] cold in the ground," weakened by Everyman's sins. Everyman begins to ask her for help, but Good-Deeds already knows that Everyman has been summoned before God to account for his actions. Everyman asks Good-Deeds to accompany him, and she says that she would, but that she cannot stand up. When Everyman asks what happened to her, Good-Deeds tells him that she is too weak because he neglected her and that if he had "perfectly cheered" her, his "book of account" would have been ready. When Everyman asks Good-Deeds to help him "make **reckoning**," she tells him again that she is not able to do so, but that she has a sister, Knowledge, who can help him "make that dreadful reckoning."

The weakness of Good-Deeds symbolizes the difficulty of turning one's life around at a moment's notice. Having spent his life in sin, Everyman finds that he is unable to summon the help of Good-Deeds in the moment when it would most serve his own interests. In this sense, the play shows that anybody would likely repent of their sins when faced with the prospect of eternal damnation, but that this alone is not enough to redeem a person's soul in the eyes of God. However, the fact that Good-Deeds is willing to help Everyman—even if she's unable—immediately sets her apart from the cast of other characters that have appeared thus far in the play.

Good-Deeds's sister Knowledge appears, offering herself as Everyman's guide. Happy that something good has finally happened, Everyman thanks "God my Creator." Good-Deeds tells Everyman that once he "heal[s] thee of thy smart" and returns to Good-Deeds with his **reckoning**, they will go to "the blessed Trinity" to be judged together. Everyman thanks Good-Deeds and leaves with Knowledge, who tells him that they must visit Confession, "that cleansing river."

The fact that Knowledge is the sister of Good-Deeds suggests that she, too—unlike Fellowship, Kindred, and Goods—will be willing and able to help Everyman in his pilgrimage. Because Knowledge's first act is to take Everyman to see Confession, it is likely that the name "Knowledge" refers specifically to knowledge of God, the scripture, and the holy sacraments of the Catholic religion rather than to knowledge more generally.

Everyman asks where "that holy man, Confession" lives, and Knowledge replies, "In the house of salvation." Knowledge instructs Everyman to kneel before Confession and to ask him for mercy, as Confession "is in good conceit with God almighty." Everyman does so, asking Confession to wash away his sins and explaining that he has been summoned by God to present his reckoning.

That Confession lives in the house of salvation strongly suggests that confession and the other sacraments of Catholicism are foundational to the salvation of one's soul—even more so than the doing of good deeds. This is in keeping with the play's general treatment of morality and salvation as being intimately associated with the institution of the Catholic Church.

Confession, who already knows of Everyman's predicament, agrees to help because he came with Knowledge. He gives Everyman "a precious jewel… / Called penance, wise voider of adversity." According to Confession, penance, combined with abstinence and service to God, will purify Everyman. Confession then tells Everyman that Everyman will "receive that scourge of me." Confession warns that it will be painful, but that Everyman must persevere and remember that the Savior suffered such pain for him. Confession tells Knowledge to stay with Everyman as he continues his pilgrimage and assures Everyman that he will be saved by God's mercy.

Confession lays out a plan for Everyman to win salvation. Notably, he tells Everyman that the process will be painful, which reflects a more broadly-held attitude that mortification and even flagellation (whipping) of the body were necessary because the flesh and its pleasures are inherently corrupt, and so harming one's own body was a way of denying the flesh in favor of one's soul. The idea that confessing to one's sins and repenting are necessary to salvation also fits with the overarching theme of humility in the text. Not only is Everyman not capable of saving his own soul, but indeed his only path to salvation is by acknowledging as much.

Everyman thanks God and sets out to begin his penance with Knowledge by his side. He prays to God for forgiveness, reminding the audience of Adam's sin and of God's mercy through Christ. In his prayers, he addresses God with numerous epithets such as "way of rightwiseness" and "mirror of joy." He also prays to Mary, asking her to pray to God on his behalf. He then tells Knowledge to "give [him] the scourge of penance" so that he will be released from the bondage of his own sin. Knowledge assures him that he is on the right path to making his **reckoning**, and Everyman proceeds to punish his body "in the name of the Holy Trinity." He explains that, since his pursuit of bodily pleasures led him to damnation, his suffering of "strokes and punishing" will save him.

The self-flagellation (or whipping) that occurs in this passage may seem jarring to modern readers, but was in fact quite common as a means of demonstrating repentance for one's sins in the Middle Ages. Here, the pain endured by Everyman is meant to counteract or pay for the worldly pleasures he pursued and experienced in life. By modern standards, this presents a markedly austere view of what it would take for the average person to redeem themselves in the eyes of God. The willingness to subject oneself to physical pain is another symbol of the humility that the play presents as the key to winning salvation.

Suddenly Good-Deeds appears and announces that she has been healed and is now able to accompany Everyman on his pilgrimage. When Knowledge tells Everyman to be happy, as Good-Deeds is "whole and sound" and able to join them, Everyman responds that his "heart is light, and shall be evermore." Good-Deeds tells him that he will receive "eternal glory" and that she will always stand by him. Everyman welcomes her, weeping at the love in her voice.

By stating that Everyman will receive eternal glory, Good-Deeds implies that the simple acts of repentance, prayer, and self-flagellation effectively saved his soul. Good-Deeds is now healthy and able to accompany Everyman on his journey to the afterlife, once again suggesting that the Catholic Church and its sacraments are the pathway to morality and salvation.

Knowledge again tells Everyman to be happy, as he will go to heaven. She gives him a "**garment of sorrow**" to wear before God and tells him that such contrition "pleaseth God passing well." As Everyman now has "true contrition," and as Good-Deeds has his **reckoning** in hand, Everyman is ready to continue his journey with his two companions. However, Good-Deeds says that in order to move forward, he must be joined by Discretion, Strength, and Beauty. Knowledge adds that he must also seek the advice of his Five-wits.

The garment of sorrow is a symbol not simply of Everyman's repentant attitude, but also of the austere view that the play takes of morality more generally as a matter of denying any and all earthly pleasures—and even happiness. Knowledge implies that it flatters God to see his creation acting with humility and contrition. The characters of Discretion, Strength, and Beauty represent virtues that are secondary to Good-Deeds and Knowledge but who nonetheless accompany Everyman on his journey.

Beauty appears with Discretion, Strength, and Five-wits, ready to assist Everyman. At Good-Deeds' request, they all agree to join Everyman on his pilgrimage, causing Everyman to thank God. Strength vows to fight for him in battle, while Five-wits, Beauty, and Strength assure him of their loyalty, regardless of what happens next. Everyman prays that God will send them to heaven, and tells them that after he dies, most of his money is to go to charity. Knowledge then instructs Everyman to go to a priest for the holy sacrament and unction, while the rest of the group waits for him to come back.

Interestingly, strength and beauty are two virtues which can describe the body as well as the soul. This is notable because up until this point of the play, anything associated with the body or the material world has been roundly condemned. Yet here it remains ambiguous whether strength and beauty refer to physical or spiritual characteristics, adding nuance to the play's otherwise dismissive treatment of physical virtues.

At this point, Five-wits makes a speech about priests, telling Everyman that priests have greater authority than any political ruler because they are commissioned by God. According to Five-wits, priests' knowledge of the sacraments allows them exclusive access to "the key and…the cure / For man's redemption." He then lists out the seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, marriage, unction, and penance. Five-wits declares that priesthood "exceedeth all other thing" because priests teach laymen scripture and purge them of sin, allowing them to go to heaven. He claims that priests are more powerful than angels, because they have the power to transform bread and wine into the very flesh and blood of God. He praises priests as the only "remedy" that "cureth sin deadly," declaring that they are "above angels in degree." Everyman then leaves.

Five-wits's claim that priests are more powerful than angels would be seen by many today as heretical. Indeed, this kind of thinking—which places greater authority on the Church than on actual divine beings—is part of what would eventually lead to the Protestant Reformation that began in 1517. Passages like these (which emphasize the importance of the sacraments and the priesthood) make it reasonable for even the most well-informed reader to assume that this morality play—and other plays like it—must have been commissioned by the Catholic Church, but scholars maintain that they were not. This is worth noting because it demonstrates how widespread was the belief that the institution of the Catholic Church was the only *path to salvation.*

Knowledge continues the discussion on priesthood but qualifies Five-wits' statements, saying that this is true only if the priests are good. He points out that Jesus gave humanity "the same sacrament" as given by good priests, but did so "in great torment," by sacrificing his own life. He also points to the fact that there are "sinful priests" who lead lives of lechery and are poor examples to sinners. Five-wits counters, saying that he has faith that they won't encounter any of these sinful priests and that they should choose to honor priesthood. He cuts short the discussion when he sees Everyman, who "hath made true satisfaction," approaching.

The discussion between Five-wits and Knowledge is an interesting nod to tensions that existed in Europe at the time Everyman *was written about the power and corruption of the clergy. In a text that is otherwise deeply sympathetic toward the Church, here Knowledge presents an important qualification to Five-wits's argument, suggesting that the Church is in fact fallible and that not all priests should be regarded with complete reverence.*

Everyman returns, saying that he has received the Eucharist and unction. He takes out a cross, asking his six companions to place their hand on it and to follow him. Strength, Discretion, and Knowledge promise to never leave him. As they continue on their journey, Everyman feels faint and cannot stand. He tells his companions, "Let us not turn again to this land, / Not for all the world's gold," and he says he must climb into the earth—that is, a grave—to rest.

The Euchartist and unction are two of the seven Catholic sacraments. That Everyman does all these things in the hours before his death does not seem to undermine their significance in the eyes of the author or of God, despite the fact that Everyman is clearly (though perhaps not solely*) motivated by self-interest — he does these things in a last-minute bid to save his own soul from damnation.*

Beauty, shocked that Everyman is expecting her to die, decides to leave, refusing to look back, not even for "all the gold in [Everyman's] chest." Everyman asks aloud whom he can trust, lamenting that Beauty promised with to live and die with him. Strength, too, decides to leave, regretting her decision to accompany Everyman in the first place. When Everyman points out that Strength promised to stay with him, Strength says she doesn't care and leaves. Everyman notes how he thought Strength to be "surer," but now he realizes that one should not put trust in one's strength. Discretion also leaves, despite Everyman's pleas, as she must always follow Strength. Everyman laments that his friends deserted him as soon as he was close to death and he says that "all thing faileth, save God alone." At this point, Five-wits says farewell, leaving Everyman in tears, as Five-wits was his best friend.

The departures of Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five-wits confirm the play's general attitude toward worldly goods. In death, Everyman cannot depend on these four personifications anymore than he could depend on Fellowship, Goods, or Kindred. The suggestion here is that beauty and strength are often confused for spiritual goods, but they don't accompany people into death. Even Discretion—seemingly a virtue—vanishes, implying that human judgement is too fallible to be relied on, and that even it cannot save a person's soul. The disappearance of Five-wits, who arguably represents common sense, signifies the same thing, and once again bolsters the play's emphasis on humility and the ultimate value of spiritual things over anything associated with the material world or human body.

Everyman cries out to Jesus, saying that everyone has forsaken him, but Good-Deeds corrects him, promising to stay with him. Everyman thanks her and realizes that Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five-wits were not true friends to him, as Good-Deeds is. He asks Knowledge if she too will forsake him, and she replies that she will stay with him a while longer, but only until the moment he dies. Everyman thanks her and realizes that he is approaching death and that he must soon make his **reckoning**. He speaks directly to the audience, asking them to view him as an example of "How they that I loved best do forsake me, / Except my Good-Deeds that bideth truly." Good-Deeds chimes in, saying that "All earthly things is but vanity" and pointing out how everyone—Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Everyman's "friends and kinsmen"—except for Good-Deeds abandoned Everyman. Dying, Everyman cries out to God for mercy, putting the fate of his soul in God's hands.

This is the play's most direct and overt condemnation of "earthly things" as transient and unreliable. Here, Good-deeds drives home the main moral message of the play: that morality and salvation consist in good deeds alone, while all other earthly pursuits and pleasures ultimately perish or fade in death. Of course, what complicates this message is the play's emphasis on the sacraments of the Catholic Church—which one could argue is itself composed of a human and therefore corruptible clergy—as a pathway to salvation. Indeed, the Catholic Church struggled internally with corruption in the Middle Ages much as it does today, but was still widely recognized as the highest authority on matters of the soul and morality. Although Good-Deeds will accompany Everyman into the afterlife, even Knowledge will depart in the moment of death.

As the souls of Everyman and Good-Deeds leave their bodies, Knowledge remains on earth. She remarks that Everyman "suffered that we all shall endure" and that her sister Good-Deeds will ensure his salvation. Knowledge thinks she hears the singing of angels. Soon, an angel appears on stage, welcoming Everyman's soul into heaven because of his "singular virtue" and "crystal-clear" **reckoning**. The angel declares that Everyman will live happily in heaven until judgment day.

That the angel proclaims Everyman to be of "singular virtue" would suggest that the play actually takes a much less pessimistic view of mankind's innate morality than it first seemed. If it truly is the case that a man who lived his life in sin but repented at the last moment can gain salvation for his soul, then the play seems to suggest that it is far from beyond the reach of the average person to attain "singular virtue" for him- or herself.

A doctor appears, addressing the audience directly with an epilogue. He instructs us to "forsake pride" and reminds us that Beauty, Five-wits, Strength, and Discretion all abandon Everyman, and that when we are judged by God, we are alone, save for Good-Deeds. He warns us that we must make "amends" before death, in order to gain God's mercy and to clear our **reckoning**. If not, the doctor tells us, we will suffer in hell, but if our reckoning is "whole and sound," we will be "crowned" in heaven until the resurrection, when our bodies and souls will be reunited.

If there was any possibility that the play's overt moral message has not reached readers by this point in the play, the doctor's concluding speech ensures that readers understand Everyman's story is a warning to them. In other words, the play encourages its readers to realign their priorities before *it is too late and death comes calling. In this way, the play serves not only as a moral and religious reminder to forego earthly goods in favor of redemption, but also serves as a* memento mori, *or a reminder that death will come for them, too, someday—perhaps when they least expect it.*

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