A Study Of The Somonynge Of Every Man

Better known as Everyman, this play is considered the greatest example of medieval morality play. Written by an unknown author in the late fifteenth century, the play was judged to be only of a historical value. However, it was successfully revived on stage at the beginning of the twentieth century and has since become the most frequently performed of the morality plays. Everyman has earned praise and admiration for its profound moral message, which is conveyed with dignity peppered with gentle humor, and for its elogant beauty and dramatic characters.

The morality play, Everyman, is an allegory which carries two different levels of meaning. These two different levels are used to help the audience understand the author and the world in which he lives. The original printed version shows on its striking title page, how the play dramatises Everyman’s encounter with Death before the final judgement. (Library) The content of this play also helps the reader to better understand the author and his culture. This portrays how each character and each moral issue of the era is personified. The original crowds going to see this play understood the role of religion in their every day lives. They also greatly believed in the reality of death, heaven or hell, and in a definite afterlife. Everyman is considered to be the greatest example of the medieval morality play there is. It was composed by an unknown author in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The play conveys a profound moral message that is conveyed with dignity tinged with gentle humor and for its elogant beauty and dramatic characters.

Everyman was considered nothing more than a period play, and appeared only in collections of pre-Elizabethan drama that sought to catalogue England's literary history for its historical context alone. Such anthologies include Thomas Hawkins's The Origin of the English Drama (1773) and W. Carew Hazlitt's edition of Robert Dodsley's A Select Collection of Old English Plays (1874). No separate editions appeared until after the play's twentieth-century revival which has since then been reprinted numerous times. In addition, the play has been adapted and translated into various languages, proving just how this play has stood the test of time and remained current and of value.

Medieval drama developed out of early religious plays. These early dramatic forms still focused on the religious and moral themes that dominated the Christian imagination during the Middle Ages. The morality play presented religious and ethical concerns from the point of view of the Christian person, whose main concern was to improve his relationship with God. This person also sought to improve himself by performing good deeds and by doing so, gaining salvation for his soul. A morality play is essentially an allegory in dramatic form. It shares the key features of allegorical prose and verse narratives and it is intended to be understood on two or more levels. The characters are abstractions with label names like all the characters in Everyman, with names that closely relate to their meanings. These plays come from medieval sermons, literature, fables and other works of moral or spiritual significance from their own times. Their purpose was originally to teach people how they should act to be a good Christian. Therefore also, to make a better society, but later became just entertainment. In the fourteenth century, morality plays were mainly based on the seven deadly sins but in the fifteenth century, the plays theme was usually concerning the conflict between good and evil in an individual person. This type of play soon became popular all over Europe. The main characters in Everyman are God, a

Messenger, Death, Everyman, Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, and Good Deeds.

Everyman, like other morality plays, seeks to present a religious lesson through allegorical figures representing abstract characteristics and how they relate to one another. The play focuses on the life of Everyman, a rich man in his prime who is suddenly harkened upon by Death to appear before God for judgment. On his journey to meet God, he seeks assistance from lifelong companions, Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods, but all abandon him. These characters represent the spectrum from friends, family, and even material wealth. He has neglected her in life so Good-Deeds is too weak to accompany Everyman on his travels. She advises him to call upon Knowledge. Knowledge escorts Everyman to Confession, who directs him to do penance for his actions in life. Knowledge can be likened to an awareness of one's sins. In the process of Everyman's penance, Good-Deeds is strengthened and is finally able to accompany Everyman to his final judgement in front of God. Everyman, Knowledge, and Good-Deeds are joined on the journey by Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wits. After donating his wealth to charity, Everyman follows the advice of Knowledge and Five Wits and receives the sacraments of Communion and Extreme Unction. Approaching his grave, Everyman is again deserted by all his companions except Knowledge and Good-Deeds. As the story closes, Knowledge remains behind as Everyman and Good-Deeds together descend into the grave.

In the early sixteenth century, when this play was written was in a time when mortality was always of an immediate threat and when there was intense concern with death and its aftermath — the power of such a play as Everyman, even if read rather than staged, would presumably have been more deeply felt than today and would have left a more powerful lasting impression. (University of Rochester) There are also a set of ideas that are laid out by the author. These ideas are the central purpose of the play. One theme or idea indicates that man will always be betrayed by worldly companions, and that each man is on his own when it comes down to the end. This idea of betrayal sheds light on a principle specific to this theme and forces the character Everyman to seek out a superior truth that he himself can attain. The superior truth being that death itself is impending for all of us, and should be considered the most fearful experience that man will ever face. This is the fear that according to this culture would make a man need more time to consider and balance one's own deeds to atone for wrongs and build up the rights of one's life. Another theme or idea focuses on the separation from loved ones when in the judgment of your life's actions. This gives the audience the notion that a man is never more alone than during death. Now, the idea that follows is also important for the author and he wants society to recall this belief. This is when Everyman is feeling most terrified and without help, he is given the chance to compensate for his actions. Still the author perceives that death is unavoidable and that it comes for all of us. The themes in Everyman are

strongly reflected in the allegorical characters which populate the work. The work teaches ethical and religious lessons about how to please God and how to treat humanity on our journeys through life. Death promises to God to go to the world; to study all humans big and small critically; and to meet Everyman who foolishly leads a beastly life, disregarding the laws set by Heaven. (Academia.edu)

The ideology of the play Everyman was intended to help reinforce the importance of God and religion in people's lives during this time period although it does so even today. In this play, God represents salvation, but it is religion that provides the means to achieve that salvation for Everyman. This particular drama focuses on how religion and a belief in God will help man

overcome any problem, including the fear of death itself. Although God appears as a character only at the beginning of the play, his presence is felt throughout. It is sin that angers God in the play. It is Everyman's sins that force his final judgment. He has sinned so much in his life, and the audience is told that his sins outweigh the good so much that Good Deeds is at a ceasing point. Only when he can be aware of and abandon his sins can Everyman be saved.

Everyman can still be seen and read today with the same ideas and values that existed during the Middle Ages. When you talk to people in everyday life you see their values and morals are all based off of how they live and interact with others. When you bring up the concept of death to anyone they normally speak as if they have a long time before death will come to them and how they will prepare in old age for it. Everyman is a drama which has a religious meaning that stood true then as it stands true now. This meaning is brought to the surface in a symbolic way. This is used to describe the author and the cultural beliefs in which he wrote about. No other play that I know of compares to Everyman in its context or meaning regarding the joint human concepts of religion and death in such an eloquent way. It achieves a beautiful, simple solemnity in treating allegorically the theme of death and the fate of the human soul, of Everyman’s soul as he tries to justify his time on earth. (Encyclopedia Britannica Online) The effect this powerful work had on humanity can even be likened to the term “Everyman”, when it began being used as common slang. The name derives from a 15th-century called. (Wikipedia)

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