

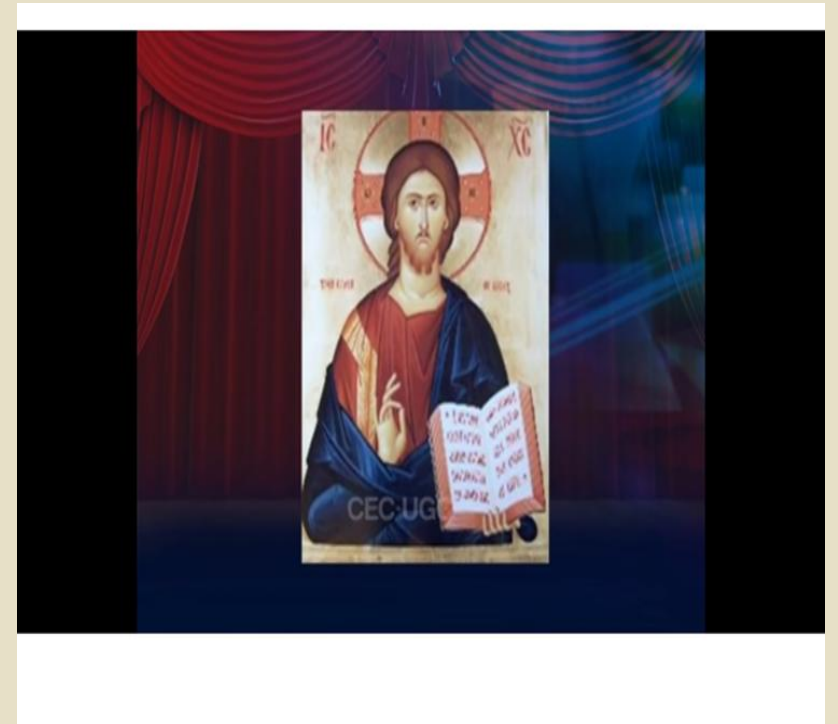


MEDIEVAL THEATRE

MIRACLE, MYSTERY AND MORALITIES
AND INTERLUDES

Origin of Drama

- ▶ **The origin of the drama is deep-rooted in the religious predispositions of mankind. Same is the case not only with English drama, but with dramas of other nations as well. The ancient Greek and Roman dramas were mostly concerned with religious ceremonials of people. It was the religious elements that resulted in the development of drama.**



DEVELOPMENT OF DRAMA IN THE MIDDLE AGE:

- * In the Middle Ages Church had a significant role in the life of community.
- * In order to preach the ignorant mass the clergy seemed eager to show them scriptural story in a visible form during special festivals as in **Christmas or Easter**. The services of the Church were in Latin and few could understand them.
- * During the 10th century the Gospel stories being illustrated by the series of living pictures in which the performers acted the story in the dumb shows and in the next age spoke as well as acted the parts. The actors were monks, priests, choir-boys in the service of the church. The plays were performed inside the church.



Development of Drama

- * After the Norman Conquest in place of Latin, the liturgical play followed the French pattern and finally in place of French, vernacular English was used as the language.
- * The crowds became more interested and they started to throng inside the church. As a result the church yard was opened and finally drama came to the open market place. The organization had begun to pass from ecclesiastical to lay hands.
- * The growing secularization of the drama is reflected in an edict of 1210 forbidding clergy to take part in the plays.

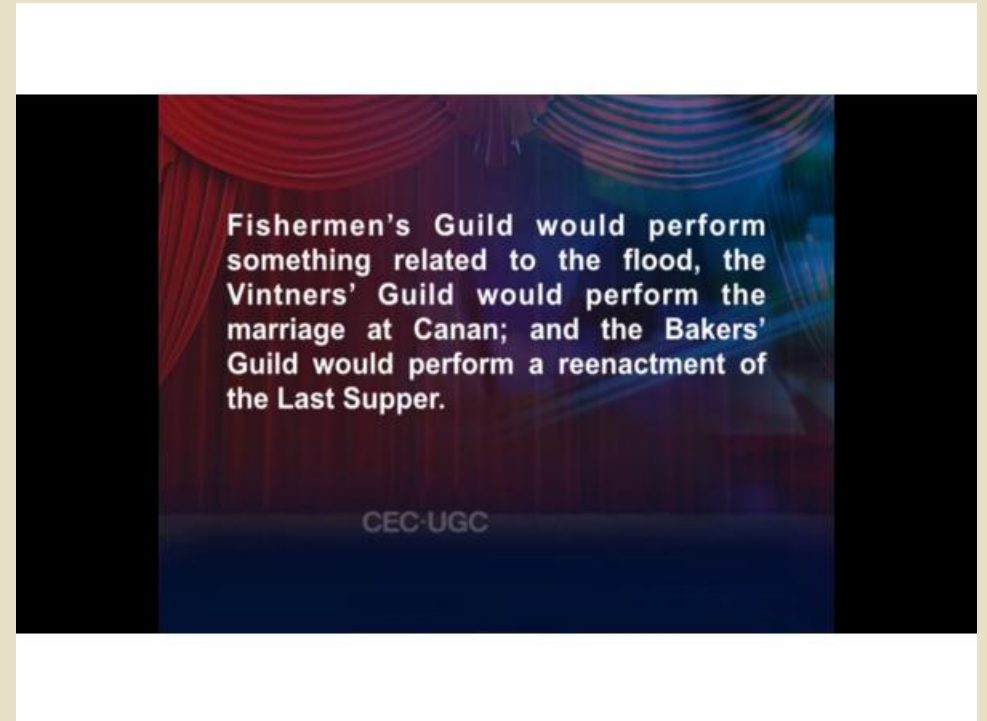


Development of Drama

* From the clergy, control first passed to the religious and social guilds and then to the trade guilds under the general control of the council of the town.

*The guilds were wealthy and out of rivalry became responsible for the productions.

*The four guilds were generally known as **Chester cycle**, **York cycle**, **Wakefield cycle** and **Coventry cycle** (These cycles took their names after the names of the Towns).



Development of Drama

Gradually the extension of the cycles led to the evolution of the ambulatory cycle, in which the play was performed on the two decked cart or pageant. This pageant consisted of one enclosed room, which served both as Hell and as a tiring room and a second storey open to the sky on which the action was performed.

* For such outdoor performance only summer festivals were really suitable. Most of the plays of the different cycle began to attach themselves to the feast of **Corpus Christi** which fell in May on June when the weather was likely to be good and the hours of daylight were long.



Oldest Church Drama



- ▶ **The oldest existing church drama was “Quem Quarritis” trope (*whom are you seeking*), when the three Marrys visited the empty tomb of Christ and met angel. Their conversation with angel consists of four sentences in Latin then adapted and performed by the clergy in very simple performance. This simple beginning gradually grew more elaborate. This drama called liturgical drama, in which the story simply taken from the scripture. The earlier play were given inside the church, the story were written by the clergy and performed by the clergy using Latin language. However, drama were not performed in all churches, only in certain cathedrals and monasteries where there were enough clergy to perform the plays.**

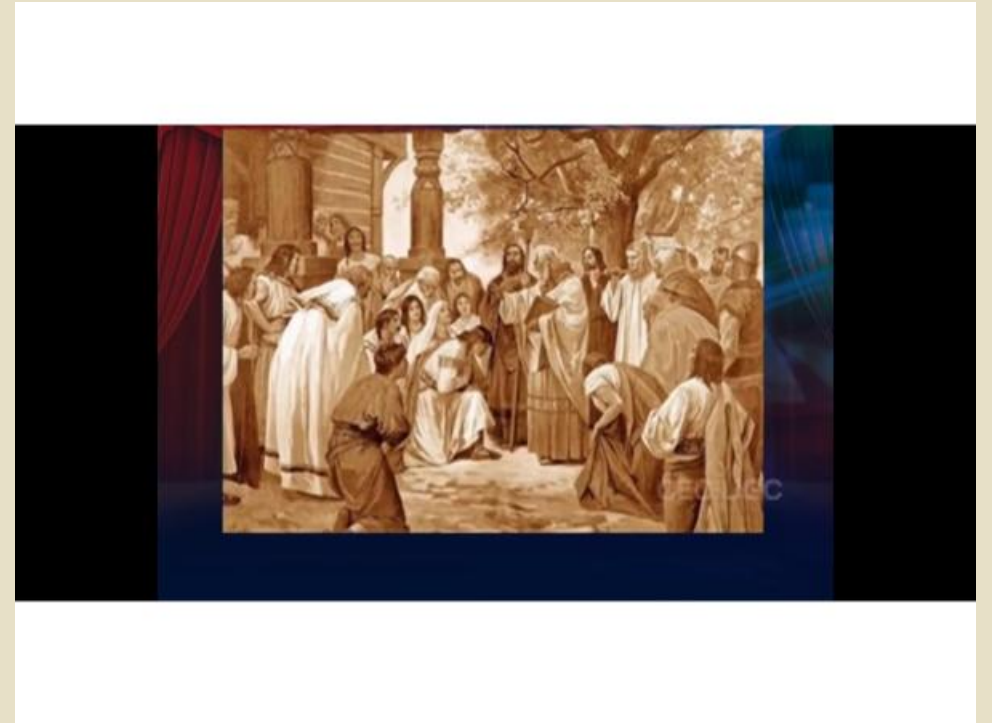
Mystery and Miracle Plays

- The earliest species of the dramas are known as '**Mystery**' and '**Miracle**' plays.
- It has long been the fashion to call the **Biblical plays 'mystery' and those dealing with saints' lives 'Miracles.** This division has come from France.
- Though these kinds of plays were performed at first inside the church, gradually through the hands of four notable cycles they come to the open market. All the cycles more or less took the materials from **the episodes of the Old and New Testaments.**
- Their aim was to reveal to the common crowd the entire story of the human world from the **Creation to the Resurrection.**
- The productions of these plays were rather crude. There was very little stage property .There was a very few scenery and the dramatic effect was mainly brought out by means of some symbols. The actors were almost amateurs. But the audience was very responsive to the appeal of the play.



The Mystery Plays

- **The mystery plays are sequences of performances, sometimes referred to as 'cycle plays' because they make up a cycle of 48 surviving short playlets.**
- **Throughout the 15th and into the 16th century, around 300 years before the building of the London playhouses, these cycles were the most popular and enduring form of theatre in Britain, performed annually in the biggest towns and cities of the country.**



They are most commonly known as the 'mystery plays' for two reasons:

- Firstly, they took the mysteries of God as their primary theme. They aimed to show, in the course of a day, the whole history of the universe from the creation of Heaven and Earth to the Last Judgement – the end of the world, when everyone on earth will be judged by God and divided between Heaven and Hell, salvation and damnation.
- Secondly, these plays were organised, funded and produced by guilds, which were also called 'mysteries' in the Middle Ages. Guilds were associations of craftsmen or merchants, who were in charge of regulating and teaching their trade; they were often wealthy and wielded considerable power.



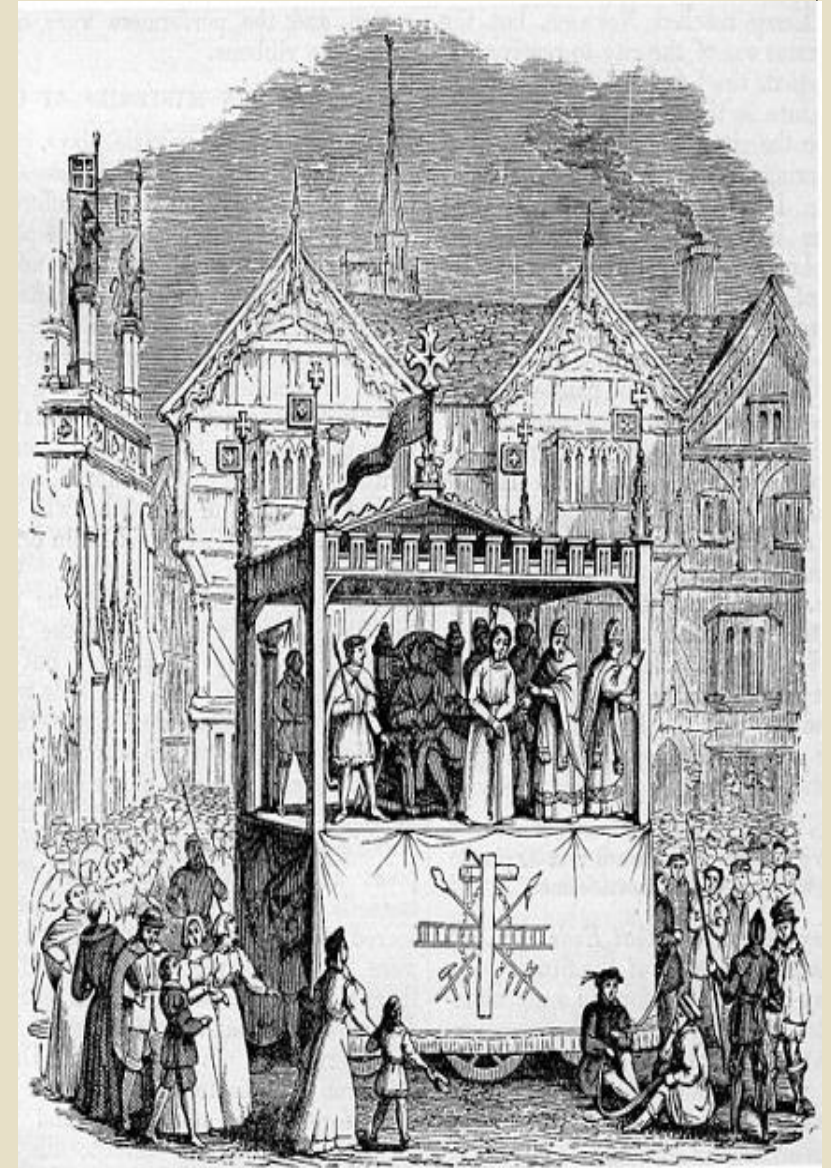
Mystery plays

- The mystery plays gave guilds the opportunity to advertise and show off their wares. A play about **Noah's Ark and the Flood** would be sponsored by the Shipbuilders, who provided the ark itself, and the Goldsmiths would be in charge of the play of the Magi, donating lavish gifts as props.
- According to a surviving public proclamation from York, the guilds were also in charge of sourcing 'good players, well arranged, and openly speaking'. Significantly, these players weren't usually professionals. They were ordinary people with a taste for drama – so you might well see your friend, neighbour or local butcher in the cast, as Herod, Noah or even Jesus.



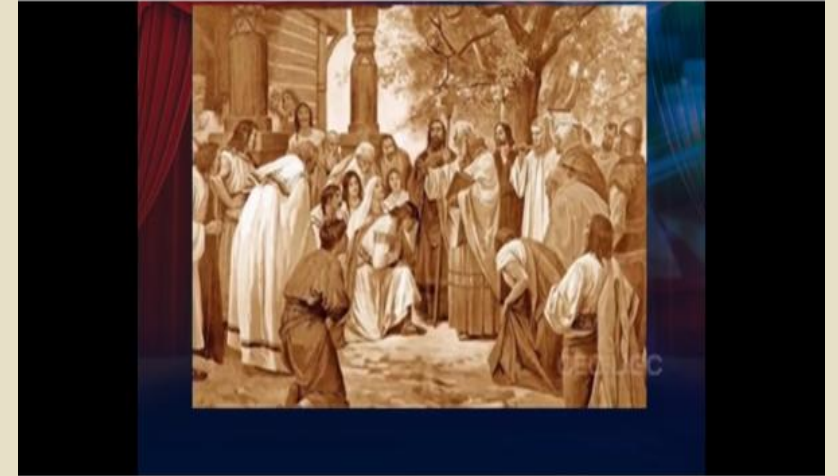
Main Themes

- Another detail which sets these plays apart from modern drama is their mobility. The plays were usually performed on separate pageant wagons, with wheels, so that they could be moved. The wagons would proceed, one after another, and the players would perform on them at various fixed stations around the town or city. The audience could pay a bit more to have a seat at these various stations, or they could stand – and this gave them more autonomy over their experience. They could either stay at one station and watch every play, or dip in and out, wandering between the different stations – something more akin to the immersive theatre which has found such popularity in recent years, than a West End show or a play at the National. The players performed their historical stories in up-to-date settings, making references to local landmarks, disputes and characters in order to root the action not only in the contemporary moment, but in their particular location. In this way, the players drew their audience into the playworld, making the mysteries of God and the history of Christianity feel more present and accessible.



Earliest Miracle Play

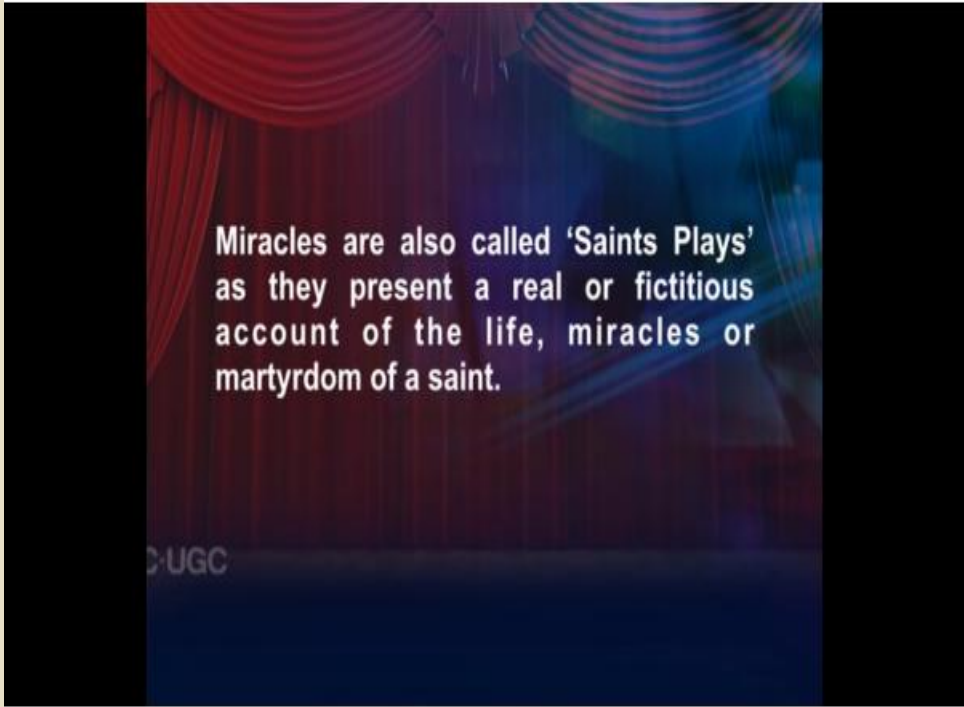
- ▶ **The earliest recorded Miracle play in England was “*Ludus Santa de Katherina*”, which performed in Dunstable around 1110. It was not known who wrote the original play, but the first version was prepared by the French school teacher, Geoffrey from St. Albans. The plays were given in Latin or French. The Miracle play attracted so many people and increased its popularity. The plays were before given inside the church began to move to the porch then to the churchyards. But when the plays began interfere the church services and had become too elaborate, the scandalized priest forbade the play in the church. By the thirteenth century, the Miracle play began move outside the church.**



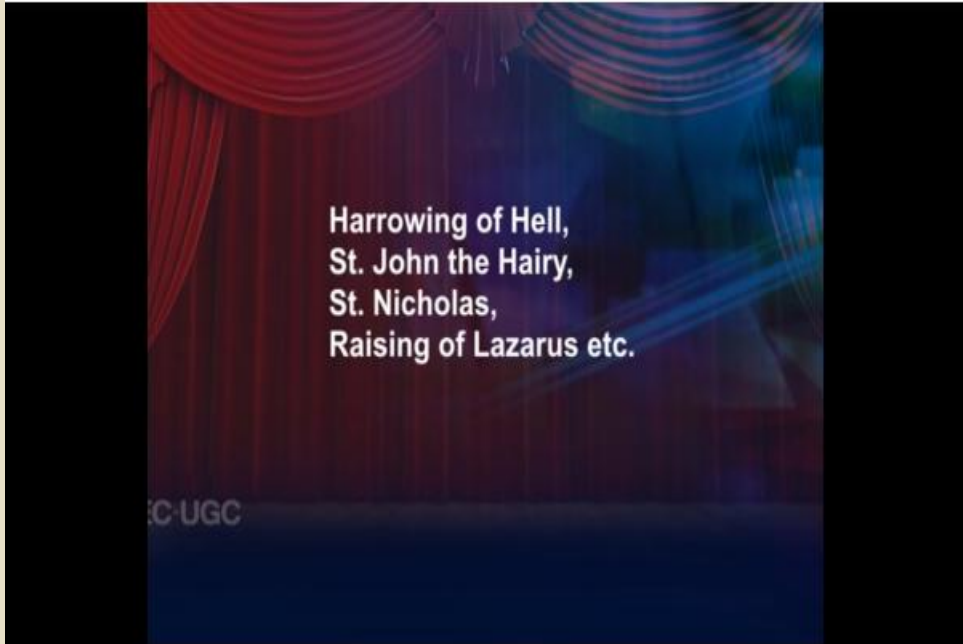
Miracle Plays

- ▶ **From the liturgical, drama evolved to *Miracle* and *Mystery* play. In France, *Miracle* used to represent the life of the saints and *Mystery* used to represent any scene taken from the scripture. The very word *Mystery* shows its ecclesiastical origin, since the word comes from the French *Mystere* derived from *ministere*, because the clergy, the ministerium or *ministry ecclesiae*, themselves took part in these plays. In England the term *Miracle* is used indiscriminately for any kind of religion play, but the strictly speaking the term *Mystery* is applied to the stories taken from the Scriptures narrative, while *Miracles* are plays dealing with incidents in the lives of Saints and Martyrs.**

Miracle plays



Miracles are also called 'Saints Plays' as they present a real or fictitious account of the life, miracles or martyrdom of a saint.



Harrowing of Hell,
St. John the Hairy,
St. Nicholas,
Raising of Lazarus etc.

Examples of miracle plays

Rise of Morality Plays

The Mystery and Miracle Play gave rise to the Morality and Interlude. In the Miracle and Mystery plays, serious and comic elements were interwoven. Now they part; the Morality presenting the serious and the Interlude the higher side of things. The Morality was frankly didactic. The characters typified certain qualities e.g., Sin, Grace, Repentance. The Interlude aimed merely at amusement. *Everyman* and *Four P's* of Heywood are best examples in this regard.

Moralities began to be acted in the reign of Henry VI and like the miracle plays continued to flourish until the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. The morality, as we have said, is a drama in which the characters are allegorical, symbolical, or abstract. The main purpose of the play is didactic. The allegorical characters to be found in some of the earlier Miracle plays owe their importance to religious sources. They are not essential to the story. One of the earliest morality plays was *The Castle of Perseverance*, a drama of the old faith. The spiritual progress of mankind from the day of his birth to the Day of Judgment is set forth in this drama.

Development

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Cycles of Drama

- York Cycle:

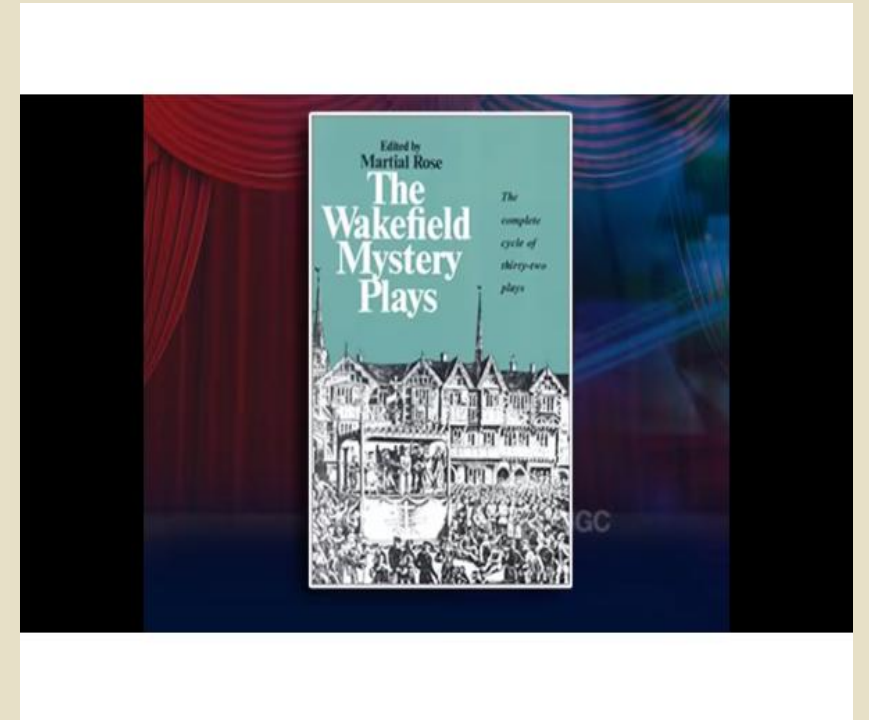
- * It consists of **forty-eight (48) plays** (though according to records 51 plays were acted).
- * They were performed from the 14th to 16th century. The plays were written in the Northumbrian dialect. They had dramatic life, and were on the whole reverent in tone. The plays deal with-

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- **Creation of the World, Fall of Lucifer, Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Life of Christ, Crucifixion** etc.

- The Wakefield Cycle (The Townley plays):

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- * The plays were acted at **WoodKirk near Wakefield**. The plays are entitled as Townley Hall in Lancashire.
- * The Cycle consists of **thirty-two (32)** plays.
- * The most important play of this cycle is **The Shepherd's Play** which is supposed to be the first farce in English.
- * The usual series of plays follow- **Noah, Abraham and Issac, Jacob and Easu, Crucifixion, The Visit of Wise Men** etc. ___

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Cycles

- **Chester Cycle:**

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- * It consists of **twenty-five (25)** plays. They are more serious and didactic in purpose.

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- * The plays were acted by the trade companies of the city on the **Monday, Tuesday** and **Wednesday** in Whitsun week from 1268 to 1577 and again in 1600.

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- * Some important plays are- ***The Sacrifice of Issac, Fall of Lucifer, The Deluge, Balaam and the Ass*** etc.

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- **The Coventry Cycle:**

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- * It consists of **forty-two (42)** plays. As all the 42 plays were not acted in one year-the custom was to perform the first 28 in one year and the remaining in the next year. The plays were acted at Coventry on the festival of **Corpus Christi**.

Morality Plays

- Dominican and Franciscan Monks developed the morality play in the 13th century by adding actors and theatrical elements to their Sermons
- A Morality is a kind of **allegorical play**. The characters are **personified abstraction like – Mankind, Mercy, Justice, Peace, Vice, Death, Beauty** etc. The play is concerned with the conflict between good and evil over the possession of human soul. It generally ends with the triumph of virtue and the good.
- The remarkable Moralities are- ***Everyman, Mankind, The Castle of Perseverance, The Three Estates*** etc.

Everyman

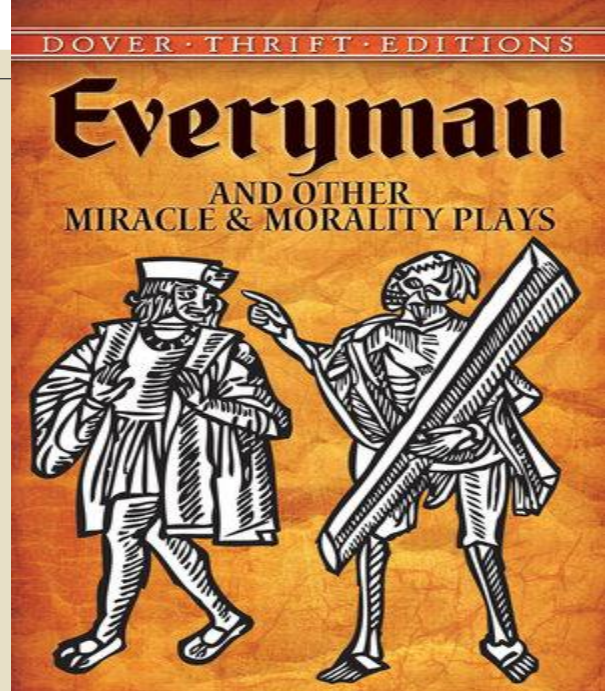
***Everyman** [c. 1470: Best known morality play, character Everyman is summoned by Death to the day of Judgment. Everyman tries to find a companion, but is deserted by Fellowship, Kindred, Goods, etc. and only Good Deeds doesn't]. It is an allegorical play of **some 900 lines**.

- * There are some controversies over the source of the play. Some name 'Elckerlijck' (a Dutch Play) as the original source of the play. To some the inspiration has come from a parable which is told in the legend of 'Balaam and Joseph'.

- * **Story:** God sends Death to Everyman. Death summons him to undertake a journey. Everyman tries to turn the summoner away by bribes. Death tells him that he is to obey God's command. Then Everyman gets the Death's consent to have company on the journey. Everyman requests his friends- Fellowship, kindred, Good to accompany him but none agree. Then he remembers Good Deeds whom he has long given up. He goes to him and finds him lying on the ground weak and miserable but he hears his prayer, agrees to accompany with him and recommends him to his sister Knowledge. Knowledge sends him to confession. Then as he begins his journey Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits depart in spite of their promise to follow him Knowledge would go with him but can not. Only Good Deeds is left. She alone is not vain and will plead for him to God. Everyman dies pure of sin and forgiven.

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- * **Everyman** is a perfect example of morality play. The characters are personified abstraction. The work is classically constructed. In '**Everyman**' no comic scene is introduced to relieve its seriousness. The action is carried through with solemnity from first to last.

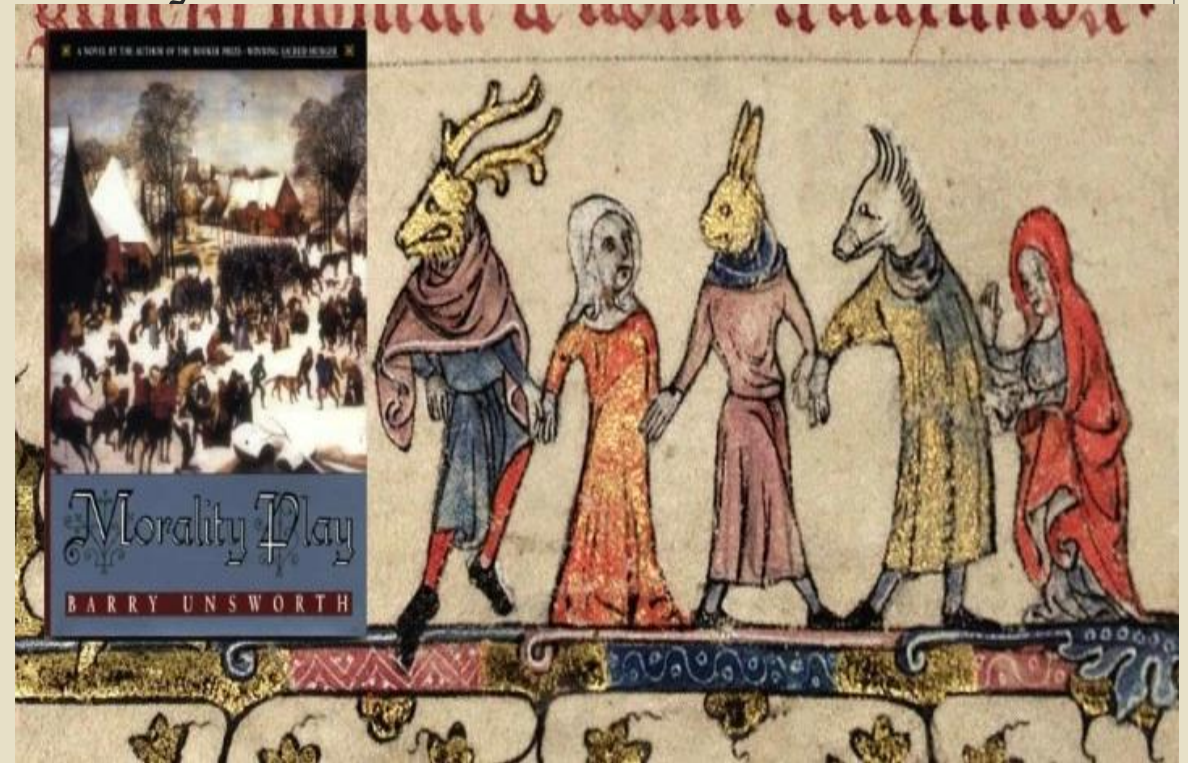


Castle of Perseverance:

- **Castle of Perseverance:** * [c. 1425: oldest complete play. Bad Angel and Good Angel for the soul of the man, and the latter puts him in the castle of Perseverance. Hell's forces cannot prevail against the Castle, but Greed lures him outside, where he dies repentant. Mercy, Truth, Peace and Righteousness compete in a debate for the man's soul. Mercy wins]
- * It describes the spiritual progress of Mankind from the day of his birth to the Day of Judgment. The Good Angels and Bad angels strive to possess the soul of Mankind. He forsakes the Good Angles and consorts with the Seven Deadly sins. From their power he is released by confession and Penance and safely lodged in the castle of Perseverance. The seven Deadly Sins attack the castle of and are repulsed by the roses discharged by the Virtues. He then is lured from the castle by Avarice and he completely surrenders to her. Finally Death tames him away. After his death he appears before the Judge for his judgment. "Let him drink as he brewed" - is the claim of Justice; but Mercy pleads the Passion of Christ and ultimately the soul of Mankind is saved.
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- * It is a complete morality play that strikes the Christian ethical note of Salvation of man.

Example of Morality Play

Mankind: [c. 1475: Comic morality play, vices compete for the soul of man, lewd antics. Titivullus, a devil who collects words mumbled or skipped in divine services, was a favorite medieval character. He seduces Mankind from Mercy at first, but Mercy triumphs at last]



Example of Morality play

Magnyfycence: [c. 1516: Earliest English drama whose authorship is certain. John Skelton. Depicts mankind being deceived by vices, but later redeemed by the virtues of Goodhope and Perseverance]

Ane Pleasant Satire of the Thrie Estaitis: [1540: Sir David Lindsay, depicts the temptation of Rex Humanitas by Sensuality, Wantonness, Solace and other undesirable companions. Good Counsel is hurried away, Verity is put in stocks and Chastity is warned to stay away. Correction arrives to save the date]

Second Shepherd's Play:

The play is actually two separate stories presented sequentially; the first is a non-biblical story about a thief, Mak, who steals a sheep from three shepherds. He and his wife, Gill, attempt to deceive the shepherds by pretending the sheep is their son. The shepherds are fooled at first. However, they later discover Mak's deception and toss him on a blanket as a punishment. At this point, the storyline switches to the familiar one of the three shepherds being told of the birth of Christ by an angel, and being told to go to Bethlehem, where they offer gifts to the Christ child.

Interludes

◦ As a development of the morality play that drew on the legacy of the minstrel, interludes (from Latin *interludium*) were performed in Europe by small companies of professional actors during the 15th and 16th centuries. The term covers a wide range of entertainment, from simple farces performed on small stages in public places to dramatic sketches performed at banquets in the halls of the nobility. In both cases the plays were purely secular and more concerned with ideas than with morals. They were called *Fastnachtsspiele* in Germany and *kluchtspelen* in the Netherlands; they were also performed in Italy and Spain, but most interludes came from France, where they were known as *soties*, and from England. These pieces usually dealt with the antics of foolish or cunning peasants, exploring the relationship between master and servant or husband and wife. In England the move toward professionalism was accelerated by a law that subjected “all players of farces, minstrels and other entertainers” to be whipped if they did not have the patronage of a member of the nobility.

Examples of Interludes

- It was a short play that introduced real characters, usually of humble rank, such as citizens and friars; there was an absence of allegorical figures; there was much broad farcical humour, often coarse; and there were set scenes, a new feature in the English drama. It will be observed that the interlude was a great advance upon the morality-play’.

- * The Interlude aimed at amusement and entertainment. The most notable Interlude is **John Heywood’s ‘The Four P’s’**.

- • **The Four P’s:**

- * It is written in **doggerel verse**.

- * It describes a lying-match between a **Pedlar, a Palmer and a Potycary**.

- Each one makes a trial of their skill in that direction. The Potycary tells the story of his visit to Purgatory and to Hell to recover a lost soul. Finally the Palmer tells that he has traveled through many towns and cities throughout Christendom. He has seen five hundred thousand women yet in all the places he has been he had never seen or heard of “any woman out of Patience!”

- Finally the Palmer is awarded the prize.

- Other Interludes are- **Johan, The Play of Weather, The Husband** etc.



