"My condicion is mannes soule to kill" \-\- Everyman's Mercantile Salvation

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Comparative Drama, Volume 41, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 57-78 (Article)

Published by Western Michigan University

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2007.0008
“My condicion is mannes soule to kill”—
Everyman’s Mercantile Salvation

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That Everyman is atypical of medieval English drama is becoming a commonplace. While an occasional scholar will still attempt to show the play’s continuity with other medieval English drama, critics point regularly to the representation of evil in Everyman as lacking the spirit of the “vice” characters more familiar from Macro manuscript plays like Mankind or Castle of Perseverance.¹ A recent practice on the part of English-speaking scholars has been to blame the Flemish² origins of Everyman for this lack of what Robert Potter labels typically English “tempter” figures,³ and for other perceived shortcomings of the English version. On the other hand, W. M. H. Hummelen points out that “sinnekens,” comparable to the English “tempter” vices and perhaps more consistent, are a “key feature of the dramatic structure of Rederijker drama.”⁴ So if such characters actually represent a shared element between the English and Rederijker traditions, where then are “Myscheff,” “Nowadays,” “Nought,” or “New Gyse”?⁵ For that matter, given the eschatological nature of Everyman’s subject matter, where are the popular devil figures, like Castle of Perseverance’s famous Belial with “gunnepowdyr brennynge In pypys in hys handys and in hys erys and in hys ars whanne he gothe to batayl,”⁶ or outside the Macro manuscript,⁷ the memorable Tutiullius from the Towneley Judgment?⁸ Perhaps the lack of gunpowder, fire, and brimstone are an indicator of the play’s indoor performance,⁹ but more importantly one must ask — since Everyman is all about salvation, why is it not more directly about either resisting temptation or a more iconic Judgment Day, and why is the best joke the tepid tempter Cosyn’s “crampe in my to”?¹⁰
The answer to the first of these questions may be that Everyman does not actually represent Every Man, as a reader might so naturally assume, but rather Every Merchant. The play’s focus on the tension between “Goodes” and “Good Dedes,” in particular its choice to use the inanimate “Goodes” rather than a more energetic tempter figure as its primary signifier of material sin, draws sharp connections between Everyman and other English texts exploring spiritual problems of how to balance material success with spiritual success in the form of salvation. In its use of the common English pun on “good,” and in the play’s advocacy of confession and charitable donation as a method for escaping from the trap of profit, Everyman echoes Piers Plowman. In the play’s suggestion that good deeds and particularly alms can be a primary route to salvation and an antidote to evil, it echoes the more clearly mercantile emphasis on eleemosynary charity of the York Mercers’ Last Judgement, and the charitable restitution and inheritance-laundering of “The Childe of Bristowe.” Paradoxically, the origin of Everyman in a Flemish rhetoricians’ play shows the way to Everyman’s place in the English tradition, but not in the way that a critic might assume, through the dramatic tradition. While Jacqueline Vanhoutte argues that as a translation “Everyman does not belong in the original English canon,” the origin of Everyman should actually guide our search for its role in an English literary context other than the relatively small group of “morality plays” or “moral comedies.”

Spurred on by the fact that trade connections with the Low Countries were central to England’s economy, critics must examine instead English literary traditions with mercantile connections, and before that, the representations of avarice in late estates satire and related texts. Looking at Everyman in this larger context, one can see that in the terms of the primary representation of evil here, Goods, the Everyman-translator builds on Elckerlijc’s use of imagery already close to the late medieval English tradition of representing Avarice. This imagery then ties Everyman more closely to the Flemish play’s distinctly if not extremely mercantile representation of Avarice’s cure.

To make a question of just how broadly to understand the “every” of Everyman does require some further explanation, however. For the most part, scholars have taken every’s lack of ambiguity at face value, though this broad vision of the eponymous character has been evolving a little
over the past few decades of *Everyman* scholarship. Clifford Davidson effectively captures the traditional view of Everyman as a universal type, when he describes him as “representative of all of the members of all the orders of society.”\(^{12}\) Despite this seemingly obvious understanding of the play’s protagonist, readers of the play have also long noticed the extent to which mercantile issues permeate *Everyman*. Robert Potter, in his encyclopedic *The English Morality Play*, sees Everyman more traditionally as the embodiment of a dualistic view of all of humanity as both the “image of God” and “imprisoned in a futile bodily existence leading only to the grave.” In his discussion of the modern performance history of *Everyman*, though, he points out how Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s early twentieth-century adaptation of the play, *Jedermann*, “converted [Everyman] into an epic parable of the materialism of modern man, subtitled ‘The Play of the Rich Man’s Death,’” and explicitly interpreted Everyman as “a greedy materialist.”\(^{13}\) Potter acknowledges how von Hoffmannsthal adds considerable material to underline his point for a modern audience, including Dr. Faustus–like figures of “Mammon and Mephistopheles.”\(^{14}\) Still, one should see such an adaptation as a reading of *Everyman*—something in William Poel’s 1901 revival of the play made the German playwright see the potential for *Jedermann* in that material.\(^{15}\) Considerably more recently than *Jedermann*, Dorothy Wertz simply assumes a mercantile audience for *Everyman*, suggesting that “burghers … probably comprised a large section of the audience … [and] if *Everyman* was never staged … we can assume that all its readers stemmed from the upper classes.”\(^{16}\) In a critical reading with fewer assumptions, Richard Marienstras argues that the entire action of the play revolves around the idea of a “contrat passé entre l’homme et Dieu” (contract established between man and God); though his overall focus is more theological than economic, he still sees the relationship between God and Everyman in the play in legal/economic terms.\(^{17}\) This growing sense of a mercantile audience is then demonstrated further when Alexandra Johnston, in an argument that scholars seeking records of performance for “the moral play” should start by extrapolating target audiences from the plays’ texts, categorizes *Everyman* as “a bourgeois play whose climax of despair comes with the desertion of Goods.”\(^{18}\) Johnston does not even make a case for this audience attribution, but takes it as a given.
More detailed work on the “mercantility” of the play is generally more recent than Wertz or Marienstras, and tends to focus on the play’s connections to its Flemish source. Several scholars have argued that *Everyman* is actually less mercantile than *Elckerlijc*. Vanhoutte, following Jan Pritchard, clearly establishes *Elckerlijc*’s focus on and appeal to merchants, and she also argues that the *Everyman*-translator goes to some lengths to erase “the suggestion that the character represents the wealthier portion of humanity.” Pritchard, not entirely unlike Marienstras, similarly points to differences in “the imagery of accountability” that he argues make *Elckerlijc* more “legalistic” and thus in his mind more mercantile than *Everyman*. Vanhoutte builds on Pritchard’s work to make a convincing case that the terms of *Elckerlijc*’s identity with “members of the medieval Dutch merchant guilds” are considerably toned down in the representation of *Everyman*. She also makes the interesting point that the names of the main characters have somewhat different valences in the Flemish and English plays—while “Everyman may very well refer to ‘every creature,’” she argues that “‘Elckerlijc’ seems to refer only to a certain portion of humanity, which is defined in opposition to ‘donnosel’ (‘the innocent’).” Pritchard adds that “donnosel” has strong associations with “the poor and oppressed,” so that this opposition establishes *Elckerlijc* as the wealthy oppressor. Thus in Pritchard and Vanhoutte’s view the Flemish play is less clearly meant to represent all of society with its protagonist than is the English *Everyman*.

Vanhoutte further points out elements of *Elckerlijc* that make its main character appear to be a critical representation of the merchant estate, observing for example that *Elckerlijc* directly addresses his audience as “broeders” (brothers), so that the play “identifies here the group of people at which the play aims its moral lesson,” gild members or brothers. She also argues that “*Elckerlijc* assumes a series of local ties with its audience: its figurative language and its secular interests cater to wealthy, progressive, worldly spectators,” and she makes it clear that these mercantile elements of the Flemish audience are meant to see themselves in the character of *Elckerlijc*. Her reading is that the play attempts to further social reform by showing that portion of the audience their own sins. Vanhoutte describes that audience in some detail, in terms recalling Wertz’s imagined *Everyman* audience. She notes that the play “would be
judged primarily by the rich and powerful burghers that controlled the Flemish cities ... [and the play's] audience would be made up of fellow rederijkers, burghers, and merchants."²⁴ One can see a similar assessment of the Everyman's possible audience from Bob Godfrey, who argues that "the emphasis throughout upon Everyman bringing his account to Heaven might also be said to shape the play significantly for a mercantile consciousness."²⁵ David Mills, not unlike Pritchard and Vanhoutte, argues that Elckerlijc is more aimed at "an entrepreneurial mercantile society" than Everyman,²⁶ but he sees less sharp division between the two plays' mercantility, because his starting notion is to ask whether the literature of England "would look to the example of the Netherlands for some of its models," given the close economic ties between those nations.²⁷ While he sees Elckerlijc as the more mercantile play, he argues for strong continuity between Flemish original and English translation. He elsewhere argues that compared to the cycle drama, "in Everyman specific allusions ... characterize a more restricted society, one that is wealthy and materialistic."²⁸

Interestingly, while Vanhoutte deliberately extends the work of Pritchard, neither Vanhoutte, Mills, nor Godfrey cite each other, though Vanhoutte's and Mills's articles are close enough in date to excuse such an omission; my point, at any rate, is that Vanhoutte, Mills, and Godfrey, to varying degrees, seem independently to see something "mercantile" about this material. While Mills makes a good case in "Anglo-Dutch Theatres" that Elckerlijc does appeal to a Dutch mercantile audience, and Pritchard and Vanhoutte look in detail at the fine distinctions between the texts of the two plays, the "Dutchness" of the mercantile elements in Everyman can be overstated, particularly if one expects Everyman to be considerably less directed at a mercantile audience than Elckerlijc. Pritchard and Vanhoutte, in particular, argue that the critique of merchandise is removed to a considerable extent by the Everyman-translator, Vanhoutte claiming that the English play is more "conservative."²⁹ She does not recognize the extent to which such conservatism in an English context relies upon those elements of antimercantilism that survive in Everyman. While in the merchant-dominated Low Countries the notion that merchants should redirect their attention from their wealth to the less-fortunate might have been socially progressive, attacking
materialism and implying that those with too many possessions—too many trussed-up moneybags—are going to Hell is how conservative English writers like estates satirists had been pairing merchants and avarice for generations. Following up that attack with a detailed description of charity is also how English merchants had been responding, though *Everyman* does not go as far as some English examples, especially “The Childe of Bristowe.”

To understand the extent to which *Everyman* does participate in the English estates satire tradition, and the mercantile response to that discourse, my discussion must digress somewhat, to show the cultural associations of the iconography of the play’s depiction of Goods’s physical appearance. This iconography is the clearest example of how *Everyman* participates in this tradition, rather than the English dramatic tradition of mischievous tempters or demons onstage. Goods’s appearance is well known enough, but the details need to be seen in a larger iconic and satiric context:

I lye here in corners, trussed and pyled so hye,
And in chestes I am locked so fast,
Also sacked in bagges—thou mayst se with thyn eye—
I can not styre, in packes lowe I lye.

(394–97)

Note that Goods here does not include such aristocratic material wealth as real estate or livestock, but rather involves unspecified moveables that can be kept in bags, chests, and packs. This is also significantly different from the depiction of Goods in *Elckerlijc*, who reports that “I lie here in a cage, / Neglected, rusty, . . . heaped up, filthy” (Ick legghe hier in muten, / Versockelt, vermost, als ghi mi siet. / Vertast, vervuylt). Both plays feature Goods in confinement and in a negative light, but the English play is much more specific in that the Goods are stored in the same manner that cash and plate would be. While moveable wealth was by no means associated solely with the estate of merchants in an era of cash rents, both the association of cash with the sin of avarice, and of both cash and avarice with the estate of merchants have a long history within the discourse of estates and sins.

Indeed, while one critic has associated Everyman himself with the personification of Avarice, Goods’s appearance most clearly recalls a long international tradition of antimercantile artistic representation of Avarice,
outlined by Lester K. Little. Little describes depictions of avarice as “a small, crouching figure … [with] matter accumulated in moneybags,” and also as a figure “with his mouth tightly closed, his fists clenched desperately about two sacks.” Avarice also appears sitting “by a money chest sorting and counting coins,” “with a moneybag pulling at his neck,” or, in my personal favorite from “a sculpted relief on a church near Parma,” “his neck is bent by the weight of a huge moneybag, another bag hangs from each shoulder, by his side stands a devil who yanks out his teeth with pincers, and above him another devil presses down the weight of a treasure chest that he carries on his back.”

Even more appropriately for *Everyman*, Little elsewhere shows a twelfth-century sculpture featuring “the rich man on his deathbed,” with a “serpent slither[ing] about the moneybags underneath,” and another showing Avarice “weighted down with three moneybags and a strongbox.”

This imagery is all from the Continent, and much earlier than either Elckerlijc or *Everyman*, but as church decorations these images retained their influence long after the Church had begun to get over the initial resistance to the money economy that Little analyzes.

This iconography was adopted by English estates satirists in the late fourteenth century, most clearly by William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer. Langland is more directly antimercantile with his images of money containers, particularly with *Piers Plowman*’s Coveitise, who has a moneybag built into his face, so that “as a letheren purs lolled hise chekes.” While Little’s statuary images established a traditional connection between money storage and avarice, Langland with Coveitise particularizes that iconography to the estate of merchants, as Coveitise “went to the feyre / With many manere marchaundise” (5. 201–2), and was educated by “drapiers” (5. 205). His subsequent sins are generally mercantile in nature. This is not to say, however, that Langland does not make extensive use of this set of images elsewhere. Moneybags or coffers are metonymic with wealth and avarice throughout *Piers Plowman*, such as in Thought’s description of Dobet in Passus 8, where “the bagges and the bigirdles, he hath tobroke hem alle / That the Erl Avarous heeld, and hise heires; / And with Mammonaes moneie he hath maad hym frendes” (8.88–90). Later on, Patience contrasts the complicated money-storage methods of the wealthy to the simple bags of the poor:
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For Poverté hath but pokes to putten in hisse goodes,
Ther Avarice hath almaryes and yren-bounden cofres.
And whethere be lighter to breke? Lasse boost it maketh—
A beggeris bagge than an yren-bounde cofre

(14.246–49).

Coveitise’s final appearance in the poem continues this imagery, as Con-
science laments that Coveitise “is so kene to fighte, / And boold and
bidynge the while his bagge lasteth!” (20.140–42). One could overstate
this point, as money imagery is used somewhat more positively else-
where, as when Trajan observes that

Almighty god myghte have maad riche alle men, if he wolde,
Ac for the beste ben som riche and some beggeres and povere.
For alle are we Cristes creatures, and of his cofres riche,
And bretheren as of oo blood, as wel beggeres as erles.

(11.196–99)

Given that Langland was quite adept at punning on good and goods (see
below),38 the image of Christ’s coffers here may represent an extension
of that juxtaposition of the troubling material world with the more ideal
economy of a Christian cosmology.

Rather than attempting a detailed reading of Everyman in terms of
the theology and imagery of Piers Plowman here, the point of this di-
gression is that the Everyman-translator’s choice to depict Goods in terms
of moneybags and coffers, rather than dirty and in a cage, ties that play
to the anti-avarece tradition, which had been used both directed prima-
arily at merchants and more generally by Langland himself. While one
could overstate Langland’s influence on his immediate posterity,
Everyman does not just share this moneybag imagery with Piers Plow-
man. While I have argued elsewhere that Chaucer’s Shipman’s Tale is far
more ambivalent about its satire on merchandise than most critics have
claimed,39 it also shares the eminently practical, if symbolically compli-
cated association of merchants with moneybags: the merchant in that
tale “His bookes and his bagges many oon / He leith biforn hym on his
countyng-bord. / Ful riche was his tresor and his hord, / For which ful
faste his countour-dore he shette.”40 Later in that tale the merchant’s
wife admonishes him, “Com doun to-day, and lat youre bagges stonde”
(7. 220). When we add in the image of Everyman’s “boke of counte” (104),
“boke of rekenynge” (134), and “the bokes of your workes and dedes”
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(502–3), which Eric Jager describes as characteristic of late fifteenth-century "bourgeois piety" or "middle-class piety, literacy, and economic values [that] had converged in the vivid metaphor of the moral account book," it is hard not to see another resemblance between Everyman and the Shipman's Tale merchant, both with their accounting books and difficulty balancing those accounts. My point here is not that Everyman's description of Goods or the account book are borrowed directly from Langland or Chaucer, but rather to show how the tradition of using this imagery as a metonym for both avarice and mercantile wealth remained strong in England long after the period from which Little's sculptures emerge. For Langland and Chaucer to approach a consensus strongly implies a high level of cultural currency for that issue. To the Everyman-translator, the "mercantile" material cut from Elckerlijc might well have seemed more effectively replaced with iconography strongly associated with merchants in the English tradition—when the native tradition has such a strong iconographical convention for mercantile avarice, those references to gild brothers may have been seen as superfluous.

Another regularly discussed element in Everyman that helps to signal a subtle estates satire context is the pun on Goods and Good Deeds. Certainly these two entities are tied together in the play—in addition to their overlapping names, they both appear onstage bound, announcing "I lye here" (394) or "here I lye" (486), and discussing Everyman's "rekenynge" (419, 508). This parallel is also accentuated in Everyman relative to Elckerlijc. The original terms are Tgoet (Goods) and Duecht (Virtue), and Conley et al. translate the latter as Virtue, not Good Deeds (see below). Also, in Elckerlijc, Virtue lies "Te bedde, vercrepelt ende al ontset" (in bed, paralyzed and completely exhausted; 453), rather than "colde in the grounde" (486) and "sore bounde" (487). Just as the mode of confinement for Goods as opposed to Tgoet made that character more clearly participate in the iconography of mercantile avarice, the clear confinement of Good Deeds accentuates the parallel with Goods. The paralysis and exhaustion of Duecht also imply more agency for that figure, and so the fine details of the contrast between Tgoet and Duecht work out somewhat differently than between Goods and Good Deeds. This punning parallel between Goods and Good Deeds reinforces the shift of this material to an English satiric context, because that pun on
good and goods in English is highly characteristic of the antimercantile satire tradition, as characteristic as that familiar trio of exchange, usury, and chevisance. The cluster of puns at the end of the Shipman’s Tale has been thoroughly studied, as the merchant admonishes his wife at the end to “keep bet thy good” (7.432). Langland takes this pun much further in Coveitise’s confession, and the temporary resolution of the problem of restitution. After Coveitise confesses his assorted very mercantile sins, such as stretching wool and selling watered beer, Repentaunce explains that no forgiveness is possible unless Coveitise makes restitution. While Repentaunce clarifies that simple charity is not an answer, as no “frere of that hous ther good feith and charite is” (5.264) would accept stolen goods, he explains that a bishop does have the authority to accept Coveitise’s restitution. He advises Coveitise,

And if thow wite nevere to whom ne where to restitue,
Ber it to the Bisshop, and bid hym of his grace
Bisette it hymself as best is for thi soule.
For he shal answere for thee at the heighe dome,
For thee and for many mo that man shal yeve a rekenyg:
What he lerned yow in Lente, leve thow noon oother,
And what he lente yow of Oure Lordes good, to lette yow fro synne.

(5.290–96)

This pair of puns, Lent/lente and Good/goods, allows Langland to experiment with the similarity in structure between the spiritual and material economies, a point that is recalled as well by the emphasis on “rekenynge” that this passage shares with Everyman. James Simpson shows how Langland expands upon this overlap of language from models in the New Testament, so that it is certainly available throughout the Christian tradition. Still, it seems particularly common to invoke the good/goods pun in English treatments of mercantile sin. Even Margery Kempe, from her subject position as a merchant-estate person who has internalized a satiric antimercantile view of merchants and trade, uses this play on words when God tells her

Dowtyr, þu seyst oftyn to me in þi mende þat riche men han gret cause to louyn me wel, & þu seyst ryth soth, for þu seyst I haue ȝovyn hem meche good wher-wyth þei may servyn me & louyn me. But, good dowtyr, I prey þe, lœue þu me wyth al thyn hert, & I xal ȝeyvn þe good a-now to louyn me wyth.
For a particular pun to be shared by such disparate texts as *Piers Plowman*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, it seems reasonable to argue that this play on words was quite accessible to late medieval English culture in the context of mercantile sin. In terms of *Everyman*, this familiar overlap of Goods and Good Deeds, reinforced by the figures' similarity in appearance, accomplishes much of the connection of the main character to the merchant estate that Pritchard and Vanhoutte see the *Everyman*-translator as cutting. Even without references to "broeders" or the innocent "donnosel" victims of capitalism, an English reader seeing Everyman carrying his book of account, owning possessions best stored in bags and chests, and hearing that old pun on good and good deeds, would be well equipped to recognize Everyman as a member of the merchant estate.47

When one considers the play’s response to this materialism, *Everyman’s* solution is also solidly in the middle of the English tradition on the salvation of the estate of merchants, specifically in its emphasis on material charity, Good Deeds. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the figure of Good Deeds represents one of the most major changes made by the *Everyman*-translator. As C. J. Wortham points out, Elckerlijc’s "Duecht does not mean Good Deeds—but virtue."48 One can perhaps imagine a chain of connotations that could lead us from the general virtue to the specific good deeds, through the mediation of a word like *charity/caritas* which can essentially mean both, but that would be more of a theological train of thought than a linguistic one.49 That is, the concepts of virtue and good deeds are clearly related theologically, so this change between the two plays is not particularly wrenching—it is not as though the *Everyman*-translator had replaced duecht with “duck,” for example. Still, virtue and good deeds are not quite the same thing, so the translator shifts the specifics of the theology here. This particular association of charitable acts and mercantile sins is hardly new in the English tradition, however. The more satiric Langland and Chaucer had both paired charity with avarice and wealth, with Langland’s Will, arguing that the rich should have “beggeres bfore hem” (13. 440), and Chaucer’s Parson discussing “general almesses or werkes of charitee of hem that han temporeel riches” (10.1032). While Langland ultimately has reservations about whether material charity can make up for the sins of the material economy, though,
the fifteenth-century tradition drew a much closer connection between the merchant estate and material charity. The strongest example is probably the poem “The Childe of Bristowe,” which like Everyman features the threat of damnation as a response to great wealth. There is also a strong connection to mercantile charity and the Corporal Works of Mercy in the York Mercers’ Last Judgement.

Before extending these comparisons to fit the translation into the English tradition, it seems worthwhile briefly to recap the details of Everyman’s salvation. He is presented with his Good Deeds bound by his sins, or “paralyzed” as Zacharias P. Thundy puts it, following Elckerliëc. Good Deeds points out that if Everyman had “parfytely chered” her (501), which Denise Ryan glosses to mean performing several particularly hospitable Corporal Works of Mercy (see below), he would not be in such straits. Good Deeds refers Everyman to her sister, Knowledge, who in turn refers Everyman to Confession. After Everyman’s rather vague confession to being a “sinner moost abhomynable” (595), Good Deeds is revivified and returned to freedom, and when she has introduced Discretion, Strength, Five-Wits, and Beauty, Everyman calls them to witness his will:

I wyll make my testament,  
Here before you all present.  
In almes halfe my good I wyll gyue with my handes twayne  
In the way of charyte with good entent,  
And the other halfe shall remayne  
In queth to be retourned there it ought to be.  
This I do in despyte of the fende of hell,  
To go quyte out of his perell  
Euer after and this daye.

(697–704)

This is not quite the standard mercantile pattern of bequest, which generally called for a third of the estate to be left to heirs, a third to a widow, a third “for the testator to dispose of for the good of his soul.” Still, it was customary to divide the bequest in half, to split between charity and either a widow or heirs, if one of the latter were lacking. It is also clear that some testators used their wills to make restitution, pay debts, and otherwise settle both physical and spiritual debts. Given Everyman’s apparent lack of close family at this point, it would be reasonable to
expand the charitable half or third to the whole, and there is historical
evidence that this was done by late medieval merchants with no imme-
diate heirs. The continuation to the present day of the charitable endow-
ment left by London Mercer Richard Whittington in 1423 reflects the
availability of a high-profile model for doing so.55

What is most interesting here, though, is the issue of restitution. In
Piers Plowman, the impossibility of making proper restitution to his
victims reduces Covetise to tears, and requires the intervention of a
bishop to resolve. The problem, theologically, is that mercantile malprac-
tice represented theft, so that, as Repentaunce puts it, “I kan thee noght
assoille / Til thow make restitucion” (5.269–70). Thomas Aquinas in his
Summa gives a fairly clear expression of this doctrine, and he consis-
tently requires restitution for mercantile malpractice: “he who profits is,
therefore, bound to make restitution to the party who loses out, pro-
vided the loss is an important one. And I use this latter term advisedly,
because we cannot always fix the just price precisely.”56 Given this con-
text, the half of Everyman’s goods that are “in queth to be retourned
there it ought to be” seem to represent restitution, which indicates some
anxiety about the source of his Goods. This notion of restitution being
necessary to salvation is also associated with English merchants else-
where, notably in “The Childe of Bristowe,” which defers this expectation
on another estate grouping by having a virtuous young merchant give
away and sell his ill-gotten patrimony to save the soul of his deceased
squire father, who had grown rich in shady land deals.57 The poem’s
focus on death is strongly evocative of the later Everyman, down to the
importance of a will; when the avaricious father dies,

\begin{verbatim}
Ther was no man in that countré
That his excutour wold be,
nor for no good ne ille;
they seid his good was geten so,
they wold not have therwith to do,
for drede of God in heven.
\end{verbatim}

(109–114)

These ill-gotten goods require the restitution that Everyman undertakes
in his own will, and the imagery of this poem clearly sets up hellfire as
the alternative to restitution, when young merchant’s divestiture of his
patrimony is started by his late father’s appearance to him in a cloud of
brimstone, as “the devel bi the nekke gan hym lede in a brennyng cheyne” (245–46). Like Everyman, the Childe on his father’s behalf has to get rid of these ill-gotten goods, down to the shirt on his back—when he runs out of cash to make restitution, “Off his clothes he gan take, / and putt hem on the pore manis bake, chargyng [him] for hys fader to pray” (448–50). “The Childe of Bristowe” is much more overtly mercantile in its details than Everyman, and the positive figure of the Childe’s merchant master (to whom he sells his patrimony, and from whom he inherits it yet again) works to divorce the avarice of the squire father from the estate of merchants, but the poem opens a window into a mercantile ethic of restitution, inheritance, and fear of damnation, all elements which recur in Everyman.

Everyman in its treatment of mercantile testamentary restitution thus seems to represent a middle ground between the highly antimercantile Piers Plowman, which complicates restitution well beyond actual practice, and the unusually pro-mercantile “Childe of Bristowe,” which shifts the need for restitution away from merchants to the gentry. Indeed, Everyman seems closest in its theology to the York Mercers’ Last Judgement play.58 The latter lacks Everyman’s mention of restitution, and the detailed sacramental content shared only with Piers Plowman, but it does share Everyman’s emphasis on the good deeds of charity. Indeed, Deus in the Last Judgement lists the Corporal Works of Mercy from Matthew 25 in some detail twice,59 when telling the Good Souls why they will be going to heaven, and when he explains to the bad souls why they are not:

Whenne I was hungery se me fedde,
To slake my thirste your harte was free;
Whanne I was clothles se me cledde,
Se wolde no sorowe vppon me see.
In harde presse whan I was stedde,
Of my payns se hadde pitee;
Full seke whan I was brought in bedde,
Kyndely se come to coumforte me.
Whanne I was wille and werieste
Se herbered me full hartefull.60

The specificity of this listing has been thoroughly studied, and Clifford Davidson demonstrates effectively how the York Mercers here and in a window in All Saints Church, North Street publicly proclaim their
commitment to charity; Eamon Duffy also includes several plates of English church decorations featuring the Corporal Works of Mercy, adding to the windows cited by Davidson images from Blythburgh, Suffolk, and Combs, Suffolk. Duffy particularly associates decorations featuring the Works of Mercy with "prosperous merchants," though that estate certainly did not have a monopoly on biblically inspired eleemosynary charity. The Good Deeds of Everyman are less specific and biblical than the ones on Duffy's churches, but they remain comparably central to the salvation offered in the Last Judgement. To some extent the role of the Corporal Works of Mercy in Everyman develops primarily through implication; while they are not listed, Denise Ryan does point out that Good Deeds"'portrayal as weak, cold and sick … establishes Good Deeds as a dramatic character capable of eliciting empathy from her audience", this representation of Good Deeds thus evokes the Corporal Works of Mercy by presenting an ideal recipient for that charity. If Duffy is correct about their ubiquity, a listing of the Corporal Works might have seemed redundant in a play structured around personification allegory. The choice of terms in Good Deeds's description furthers the connection between almsgiver and beggar: "If ye had parfytely chered me, / Your boke of counte full redy had be" (501–2). Ryan points out that the semantic range of "parfytely chered" includes a variety of charitable activities. She argues that

if Everyman had "parfytely chered" Good Deeds he would have treated her hospitably: entertained her with food and drink, welcomed her to his house, and warmed her by his fire. He would have performed three of the works of corporal mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and shelter those who have been left out in the cold.

While Ryan does have to stretch a bit to fit the Corporal Works into Everyman, it further supports this particular logical leap that this passage represents another place where Everyman has been subtly changed from Eckerlijc, which reads "Haddi mi volcomelijc ghevoecht, / Ic sou u rekeninghe, die nu onreyn is, / Ghesuvert hebben" (Had you completely followed my wishes, I should have cleansed your reckoning, which is now unclean; 466–68). The shift from satisfying Virtue's wishes to "cheering" Good Deeds emphasizes the shift in the English play to a much more specific understanding of good works, one tied to the action of physical charity.
Like the York Last Judgement, Everyman dedicates much more stage time and attention to the centrality of charitable works than to the value of grace, though neither denies the orthodox necessity of grace for salvation. Indeed, following Elckerlijc’s request that “God geefs mi gracie” (God give me grace to [do] it; 580), Everyman prays for grace after his confession (607); the York Last Judgement similarly acknowledges the insufficiency of good works alone when the good souls ask, “But graunte vs for thy grace bedene [forthwith] / Þat we may wonne in paradise” (103–4). While the York play shifts its dramatic focus from initial repentance to the enumeration of good deeds, and Everyman shifts its focus in the other direction from Good Deeds to confession and the offstage sacraments of Priesthood, the two plays’ overall similarity of content indicates how the Everyman-translator was able to build on Elckerlijc’s mercantile elements to place Everyman solidly in the tradition of dealing with mercantile sin, ranging from the sharp critique of Piers Plowman through the emphasis on material charity of the materially charitable York Mercers, and to the spiritual optimism of the “Childe of Bristowe.” As Everyman simply gives away his Goods in a combination of Good Deeds “in the way of Charyte with good entente” (700) and restitution for any of his gains that were ill-gotten, he navigates between the extremes of the York Mercers’ charitable salvation (and noteworthy silence on the question of restitution), and Langland’s weeping Coveitise. Note also that he is not referred to Priesthood for the sacraments until he has declared his restitution in the will. Apparently he is not fully absolved until he has addressed that particular spiritual problem.

This clearly represents an only partial reading of Everyman; my focus has been on those points of contact with other texts that take comparable approaches to the problem of materialism, with particular attention to changes made by the translator. Many other details of the play, including the heavy sacramental content at the end, and the humor of Everyman’s false friends with their ironically empty promises, their willingness to commit fornication or murder, and their cramped toes, remind us that there is more to this play than a critique of materialism and an admonition to launder any ill-gotten gains through testamentary restitution. There are also some elements of the mercantile tradition that are missing in Everyman, most notably the strong connection to a particular city
that one sees with the York Mercers’ play, “The Childe of Bristowe,” Margery Kempe’s work, or even Chaucer’s Shipman’s Tale. The removal of the particularity of the “broeders” of Elckerlijc (591), while in some ways replaced with iconographic and rhetorical elements of the English antimercantile tradition and corresponding mercantile response, is not replaced with any geographic particularity, which gives the English play so much of its abstraction. Still, it seems striking that the translator of Everyman managed to shift Elckerlijc’s mercantile orientation into conformity with this strand of the English tradition, and thus to translate not only the language of the play, but also the conceptual relation of the play’s allegory to a mercantile audience. For now, then, I suggest a partial answer for the absence of those vice figures—if Everyman is indeed Every Merchant, and the details of his salvation are a nod to the mercantile tradition arising in England out of estates satire, then readers should not expect energetic tempter figures, or many other similarities to the other moral comedies. In this context, the vice of Avarice is in part personified by the folks sitting in the audience or holding the book, and perhaps the joke is on us if we do not learn our lesson.

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NOTES


2 I here use the national term Flemish to locate the play as carefully as possible, though the language of Elckerlijc is of course Middle Dutch. The political situation of the Low Countries in the late Middle Ages is complicated enough that I leave the fine details in more capable hands.


These, of course, are the particularly raucous tempters in *Mankind*, in *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS, o.s. 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 153–84.

6 *Castle of Perseverance*, in *The Macro Plays*, frontispiece, 1.

It seems noteworthy that in Max Harris’s explanation of how the overlap between the depictions of vices and of demons in Macro plays like *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Wisdom*, or in the Digby *Mary Magdalen*, should prevent over-reliance on psychological readings of these plays, he omits *Everyman* from his discussion. Clearly this aspect of the iconography of *Everyman* makes it distinct from the cross-section of Middle English drama in Harris’s analysis. Max Harris, “Flesh and Spirits: The Battle Between Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Drama Reassessed,” *Medium Ævum* 57, no. 1 (1988): 56–64.


10 *The Summoning of Everyman*, ed. Geoffrey Cooper and Christopher Wortham (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1980), l. 356. Subsequent references to *Everyman* will be to this edition unless otherwise specified.


12 Clifford Davidson, “Of Woodcut and Play,” *EDAM Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (1981): 14–17. Interestingly enough, Davidson also mentions that the figure of *Everyman* in question (shown immediately to the left of a nice *memento mori* figure) is “fashionably dressed” (14) and “tastefully dressed” (15); he does not then draw the conclusion that the printer, in choosing a woodcut to represent *Everyman*, might have been acknowledging the cues to *Everyman*’s estate status that I discuss below. Davidson’s point in that particular article has nothing to do with the social status of *Everyman*, however.

13 Potter, 40, 230. For Jedermann itself, see Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Jedermann: das Spiel vom Sterben des reichen Mannes* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1957); an author’s note in this edition acknowledges the debt to *Everyman*, along with several other texts (77).
14 Potter, 231. Note also that von Hofmannsthal himself credits other sources like Hans Sachs and Albrecht Dürer (Jedermann, 77).

15 For a highly detailed discussion of the phenomenon of the Poel revival, see Potter, 1–5. Von Hofmannsthal’s colleague Max Reinhardt had seen it early on (Potter, 230).


19 Vanhoutte remarks that “his observations have inspired this more systematized analysis of the audiences of both plays” (114).

20 Vanhoutte, 103.


22 Vanhoutte, 104, 102, 103.

23 Pritchard, 43–44.

24 Vanhoutte, 104, 100, 111.

25 He further, if fancifully, identifies the play’s audience as “that well to do, prosperous and high-living group inhabiting … a cultural milieu of ‘worldly joys and riches.’ The one thing that seems sure is that the ideal audience for the play is inevitably secular. It might be an audience comprised of merchants of the City of London, law students and their teachers, school or university scholars and their teachers or just simply a church congregation.” See “Everyman (Re)Considered,” European Medieval Drama 4 (2000): 155–68.


29 Pritchard, 109; Vanhoutte, 112.


33 “Medieval spectators knew the complete list [of seven deadly sins], for they met with them infrequently in other moralities and quite regularly in the Sunday sermon. They would thus see Everyman not only as a representative of themselves but also as a personification of Avarice” (Thomas F. Van Laan, “Everyman: A Structural Analysis,” *PMLA* 78 [1963]: 468).


36 I have discussed this tradition of associating merchants with avarice in the English estates satire tradition in much more detail in my “Merchants, Mercantile Satire, and Problems of Estate in Late Medieval English Literature” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2000).


38 Scanning quickly through the poem, the following appearances of “good” can be read in terms of a pun on earthly goods and moral good, though not all such readings are equally necessary: 1.182, 2.76, 3.223, 5.273, 5.288, 5.296, 6.229, 9.87, 9.160, 9.178, 10.74, 10.86, 10.377, 14.318, 15.104, 17.269, 19.104.


42 Though he does not see it in terms of antimercantile satire, David Mills does label this pun as part of a “‘business’ image” within the play that is “an extension of the wider distinction between treasure in heaven and treasure upon earth” (“Theaters of Everyman,” 136).

43 For the classic discussion of this trio, see Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 99–103.


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46 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS, o.s. 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 157; my italics.

47 This is also an issue where it would be useful to know whether Everyman was actually performed before Poel’s 1901 “revival,” or whether it was received as the closet drama “treatise” that Scot’s title page promises (Davidson, “Of Woodcut and Play,” 14; Cooper and Wortham, 3). In his analysis of the staging, David Mills does make a good case that if it were not actually performed, it was certainly performable, and the staging can be effectively integrated with the metaphorical meaning of the play (“The Theaters of Everyman,” 129–32).

48 C. J. Wortham, “Everyman and the Reformation,” Parergon 29 (1981): 25; Pritchard, Conley, et al. both translate duecht as “virtue” (Pritchard, 46; Conley et al., passim). Oddly enough, Mills translates the term as “charity” (“Anglo-Dutch Theatres,” 91), no doubt under the influence of “Good Deeds;” so influential a scholar of English medieval drama can presumably be forgiven for being more familiar with Everyman than Elckerlijc.

49 My colleague, Dutch linguist Terry Voorhees, assures me that duecht does not particularly have connotations of charity as such.


58 The connection between Everyman and eschatological plays is a well-explored one; see David J. Leigh, “The Doomsday Mystery Play: An Eschatological Morality,” Modern Philology 67 (1970): 211–23; Thomas Rendall, “The Times of Mercy and Judgment in Mankind, Everyman,
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59 Duffy argues for a late medieval preoccupation with these charitable works (357–59), arising out of the popularity of the separation of sheep and goats also in Matthew 25.


62 Duffy, plates 21–25, 130; 64.

63 Ryan, 166.

64 Ryan, 167.


66 David Mills even posits a staging where Everyman in the initial scene sits with the audience, only to be found by Death as he stalks through the hall, where “he threatens the spectators with his dart (l. 76) as he searches through them for his prey” (“Theaters of Everyman,” 137).