1 Everyman

Medieval morality play – possibly originally Dutch and late 15th century. It’s structure is very different from more modern theatre such as Shakespeare and Marlowe, however both of these playwrights have borrowed themes from Everyman. It is pure allegory based on the Christian ethics of morally correct behaviour, akin to morality play cycles such as the German Oberamagau which is still performed today.

Obviously, at this time, everyone believed in God – religion was the major ideological means of control so a play on how people should reflect on their behaviour would be a major point of learning.

Plot – the basic overall message is to tell people that they need to remember their maker (God) and be fearful of what will happen if they lead an ungodly life. There are various monologues involving the Messenger, God and Death before Death introduces the character Everyman who has led a sinful and wild life so far.

Obviously the ‘Everyman’ name is meant to resonate with the audience as it could be any one of them. This is one of the archetypal characters in literature.

Death challenges Everyman to take a long journey with him and take the book of reckoning which will balance Everyman’s good and bad deeds. Everyman is not prepared for this and reluctantly starts his journey.

Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin joins Everyman (who is looking sad) but none are prepared to join him on his journey. Similarly, Goods (wealth), Knowledge, Discretion, Strength, Beauty and Five Wits all fall away. The only companion that accompanies Everyman on his final journey is Good deeds.

A very simple message in that good deeds are the only thing that matter morally.

Points of intertextuality

The symbolism of the journey. – see note at the end of The Pilgrim’s Progress

The archetype of ‘Everyman’

**1 “Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet** **Which in the end causeth the soul to weep**.”

**2 A pilgrimage he must on him take** **Which he in no wise may escape.”**

2 The Pilgrim’s Progress John Bunyan 1678

Christian allegory.

Plot: Two parts – we are only looking at Part 1 (Sparknotes for this bit)

The story is framed as a dream. The narrator dreams of a man named Christian, who is tormented by spiritual anguish. A spiritual guide named Evangelist visits Christian and urges him to leave the City of Destruction. Evangelist claims that salvation can only be found in the Celestial City, known as Mount Zion.

Christian begs his family to accompany him, unsuccessfully. On his way, Christian falls into a bog called the Slough of Despond, but he is saved. He meets Worldly Wiseman, who urges him to lead a practical, happy existence without religion. Refusing, Christian is sheltered in Goodwill’s house. Goodwill tells Christian to stop by the Interpreter’s home, where Christian learns many lessons about faith.

Walking along the wall of Salvation, Christian sees Christ’s tomb and cross. At this vision, his burden falls to the ground. One of the three Shining Ones, celestial creatures, hands him a rolled certificate for entry to the Celestial City. Christian falls asleep and loses his certificate. Since the certificate is his ticket into the Celestial City, Christian reproaches himself for losing it. After retracing his tracks, he eventually finds the certificate. Walking on, Christian meets the four mistresses of the Palace Beautiful, who provide him shelter. They also feed him and arm him. After descending the Valley of Humiliation, Christian meets the monster Apollyon, who tries to kill him. Christian is armed, and he strikes Apollyon with a sword and then proceeds through the desert-like Valley of the Shadow of Death toward the Celestial City.

Christian meets Faithful, a traveler from his hometown. Faithful and Christian are joined by a third pilgrim, Talkative, whom Christian spurns. Evangelist arrives and warns Faithful and Christian about the wicked town of Vanity, which they will soon enter. Evangelist foretells that either Christian or Faithful will die in Vanity.

The two enter Vanity and visit its famous fair. They resist temptation and are mocked by the townspeople. Eventually the citizens of Vanity imprison Christian and Faithful for mocking their local religion. Faithful defends himself at his trial and is executed, rising to heaven after death. Christian is remanded to prison but later escapes and continues his journey.

Another fellow pilgrim named Hopeful befriends Christian on his way. On their journey, a pilgrim who uses religion as a means to get ahead in the world, named By-ends, crosses their path. Christian rejects his company. The two enter the plain of Ease, where a smooth talker named Demas tempts them with silver. Christian and Hopeful pass him by.

Taking shelter for the night on the grounds of Doubting Castle, they awake to the threats of the castle’s owner, the Giant Despair, who, with the encouragement of his wife, imprisons and tortures them. Christian and Hopeful escape when they remember they possess the key of Promise, which unlocks any door in Despair’s domain.

Proceeding onward, Christian and Hopeful approach the Delectable Mountains near the Celestial City. They encounter wise shepherds who warn them of the treacherous mountains Error and Caution, where previous pilgrims have died. The shepherds point out travelers who wander among tombs nearby, having been blinded by the Giant Despair. They warn the travelers to beware of shortcuts, which may be paths to hell.

The two pilgrims meet Ignorance, a sprightly teenager who believes that living a good life is sufficient to prove one’s religious faith. Christian refutes him, and Ignorance decides to avoid their company. The travelers also meet Flatterer, who snares them in a net, and Atheist, who denies that the Celestial City exists. Crossing the sleep-inducing Enchanted Ground, they try to stay awake by discussing Hopeful’s sinful past and religious doctrine.

Christian and Hopeful gleefully approach the land of Beulah, where the Celestial City is located. The landscape teems with flowers and fruit, and the travelers are refreshed. To reach the gate into the city, they must first cross a river without a bridge. Christian nearly drowns, but Hopeful reminds him of Christ’s love, and Christian emerges safely from the water. The residents of the Celestial City joyously welcome the two pilgrims. In his conclusion to Part I, the narrator expresses hope that his dream be interpreted properly.

Points for intertextuality:

The journey – the pilgrimage itself is important – is an act of realisation and rebirth. Yes the destination – heaven is important as the reward for spiritual growth, but it is the journey that enables spiritual growth, reassessment of sins committed and commitment. The pilgrim can only progress morally through making the journey.

*“Here is a poor burdened sinner. I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to Mount Zion, that I may be delivered from the Wrath to come.”*

Sleep – when the characters sleep, they are in danger through loss of direction and spiritual bankruptcy. This is when they are most threatened by moral dangers which they cannot prevent.

The wilderness – biblical overtones – the Israelites wandered through it for forty years before finding the promised land (Old Testament) and Christ’s forty days and forty nights in the wilderness (New Testament). It’s a place of despair and hardship and so journeying through it successfully develops spiritual growth.