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*Dramatic Publishing*



# Everyman/ Everywoman

A One-Act Modern Version of the  
15th Century Allegorical Sermon

By  
VIRGINIA EGERMEIER



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(EVERYMAN/EVERYWOMAN)

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EVERYMAN/EVERYWOMAN  
*A Play In One Act*  
For Five Women, Four Men, plus  
Six to Ten of either sex

C H A R A C T E R S

THE MESSENGER	WORLDLY GOODS
GOD	GOOD DEEDS
THE ANGEL	KNOWLEDGE
DEATH	STRENGTH
EVERYMAN/EVERYWOMAN	DISCRETION
THE FRIEND (CHARLIE)	BEAUTY
THE BROTHER (RICK)	THE SISTER (CLAUDIA)

FIVE WITS (one actor or five actors)

SIGHT  
HEARING  
SMELL  
TOUCH  
TASTE

## PREFACE

*Everyman* was the best of the morality plays. It was an allegorical dramatized sermon in contemporary language and setting. This modern version is in keeping with the spirit of the original play. The medieval framework is intended to convey a sense of the timeless relationship which Everyman has with God and with Death.

Performances of *Everyman* date back to the end of the 15th Century. There were two versions, Dutch and English (and heated scholarly arguments about which came first and which was better).

We do not know who wrote *Everyman*, nor do we know how it was originally staged. The play contains reference to a House of Salvation. In other plays of the time, a vertical structure was used, of which the top could represent Heaven or the battlements of a castle, and the bottom could represent Hell, a dungeon, or in this case, a grave. Perhaps a real grave was dug at the foot of the House of Salvation in outdoor performances.

The Middle Ages were times of plague in Europe, and there was an obsession with death, for death was always peeking around the corner. But *Everyman* is not a tragedy. It is a triumphant drama of salvation in the nick of time.

The original play is irregular in verse-length, verse-forms, and rhymes. A great deal of what is called "slant" rhyme is used. For example:

"I pray you all give audience,  
And hear this matter with reverence . . ."

With regard to differences between the old play and this version, the main addition has been an expansion of the part of Five-Wits from one actor to five, but the option is retained of playing Five-Wits as one part only. In this version, God and Death return at the end. The clock has been added to provide suspense. The basic plot remains unchanged.

With regard to theology: This version is about as universal as a play of this nature can be written. All sectarian references have been deleted. True, there are echoes of the theological base here and there, but it is believed that this play could find acceptance with any sect or creed. We have God, Death, Everyman, kin, friend, and the possessions and attributes of Everyman. This is the story of everyone who has ever walked the earth.

The Confession of Everyman contains several elements. It begins with words from the old play. The reference to detestation of sins comes from the Roman Catholic confession. Then comes sentences from the Book of Common Prayer (Anglican/Episcopal). And finally there are spontaneous outpourings from Everyman, concluding with an anguished cry for grace. The Robe of Repentance represents the custom in all religions of wearing clothing which proclaims a certain state of mind or which enhances a particular ceremony.

When Everyman says his ledger "still must satisfy the Angel of the Lord," there is an echo of the Catholic doctrine that satisfaction must be made, regardless of repentance. Satisfaction is made during his journey toward the gate of heaven, as described by Knowledge. This journey can be interpreted as purgatory, or as a pilgrim's progress, or whatever the reader desires.

Many people who face imminent death choose to spend their remaining time in communion with Nature. There is a suggestion of primitive religions in the celebration of the beauties of the earth ("Song of the Earth"). Subdued references are made to the four directions, the sky, the seasons. These, of course, are not in the original play; they are intended to suggest a return to elemental pleasures. As death approaches, people sometimes seem mere shadows to the dying person, physical attributes fade away, and daily activities often cease to be important or even interesting. Some people pursue an obsession to the end, if they have one, but Everyman does not have one. His endearments to Wordly Goods are now absent-minded, used merely from old habit.

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Knowledge represents the medieval concept of knowledge of God, but she is more than that. She is as dogmatic as any pedant, also curious and helpful. She will be a “guide” to Everyman, she says. In other words, she is a teacher.

One wonders if the anonymous old playwright, thought to have been a monk, was also a teacher.

Virginia Egermeier

## EVERYMAN/EVERYWOMAN

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: GOD sits or stands on high at UC, looking out over the earth. ANGEL stands nearby. MESSENGER enters and crosses to C stage.

MESSENGER.

I pray you all give audience  
And hear this matter with reverence  
By figure a moral play:  
The summoning of Everyman and Everywoman,  
That of our lives and ending shows  
How transitory we be all day.  
The story saith: All of ye, from the beginning,  
Look well, and take good heed to the ending,  
Be ye never so gaye;  
Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet,  
Which in the end causeth the soul to weep,  
When the body lieth in clay.  
Here shall you see how Fellowship and Jollity,  
Strength, Five-Wits, Discretion and Beauty,  
Will fade from thee as flower in May.  
For ye shall hear, how our heaven king  
Calleth all who live to a general reckoning:  
Give audience, and hear what he doth say.

(MESSENGER exits.)

GOD.

I perceive here in my majesty,  
How that all creatures be to me unkind [i.e. ungrateful],



Living without dread in worldly prosperity.

ANGEL.

Yes, Lord. In spirit the people be so blind,  
Drowned in sin, they know thee not for their God.

GOD.

In worldly riches is all their mind.  
And I see that the more I them forbear  
The worse they be from year to year.  
Therefore I will in all haste  
Have a reckoning of every man's person.  
For if I leave the people thus alone  
In their life and wicked tempests,  
Verily they will become much worse than beasts.

ANGEL.

One would by envy eat another up,  
And charity they do all clean forget.

GOD.

I hoped well that every man  
In my glory should make his mansion —  
But now I see the people thank me not.  
They be so cumbered with worldly riches  
That needs on them I must do justice.

Where art thou, Death, thou mighty messenger?

(DEATH enters.)

DEATH.

Almighty God, I am here at your will,  
Your commandment to fulfill.

GOD.

Go now to Everyman,  
And tell him in my name  
A pilgrimage he must undertake,  
Which he in no way may escape;

And that he bring with him his reckoning  
Without delay or any tarrying.

DEATH.

Lord, I will seek him out.

(GOD exits.)

ANGEL.

One moment, Death, I pray.  
Is there a chance that Everyman can bring  
a fair accounting of his days on earth?

DEATH.

I cannot say. The man is neither very good nor very bad.

ANGEL.

I hope that he repents in time to avoid the pains of hell.  
When shall I see his ledger?

DEATH.

By God's command, this very day.

ANGEL.

Give him at least one hour to think about his fate.  
I know it lies within your power.

DEATH.

One hour it is, since you request it.  
But do not hope too much. His evil deeds may send  
him down to everlasting fire.

ANGEL.

Death, tell me this: from all your traveling  
about the earth, much evil you have seen –  
does it increase from age to age?

DEATH.

To me, one age is very like another.  
To me, all time is like a gentle wind  
that comes and goes, and is but faintly heard  
or felt and never seen. Yet as I dart  
about the world, I observe that people everywhere  
believe their own age is the best. They think  
that all the ages past were quaint in speech and

dress, but full of miseries, which they themselves,  
by superior intelligence, have remedied.

ANGEL.

That's true. This present century now,  
the bloodiest since time began, they think  
is wonderful!

See how their buildings sprout like weeds,  
and airplanes fly about like gnats.

And cars – so many cars there are, in which  
the people run from here to there like ants!

DEATH.

Ah, wonderful indeed! How I wish they'd give me time to  
catch my breath between their wars! I say the present age  
contains both good and evil like the rest. And human  
nature changes not a whit.

ANGEL.

It seems to be their nature to bring most of their troubles  
on themselves – then cry for justice.

DEATH.

Yet their justice depends on chance and circumstance.  
The justice of the Lord is swift and sure. His final  
judgment offers no reprieve and no appeal – as Everyman  
will soon learn.

ANGEL.

But Everyman has done very little harm.

DEATH.

The point is, he has done very little good. He has joyfully  
wasted most of his life in selfish pursuit of goods and  
pleasure.

(Enter EVERYMAN, whistling.)

ANGEL.

There he comes!

DEATH (mildly amused).

See how he struts, as if he owned the world  
he is about to leave.

ANGEL.

I still have hopes for him. Farewell.

(DEATH makes answering gesture of farewell. Exit ANGEL.)

DEATH (glowering at EVERYMAN).

Full little he thinks on my coming.

His mind is on women and pleasure and his gold.

(EVERYMAN still whistles his tune, then talks to himself.)

EVERYMAN. Let me see — first I'll go to the bank and make a deposit. Then I'm supposed to meet Rick and Claudia to see our tax accountant about some new tax shelter . . . then I'll go to the office and do some telephoning, set up a date for the weekend . . .

(Loud sudden burst of organ, a low note, or cymbals or drum, as DEATH stretches his arm and points forefinger at EVERYMAN. EVERYMAN doubles over with pain. DEATH slowly lowers his arm. EVERYMAN shakes his head, recovers, and continues on his way with a jaunty air. With hood covering the upper part of his face, DEATH blocks the way as EVERYMAN tries several times in vain to pass. There is a suggestion of the macabre Dance of Death which so fascinated the people of the Middle Ages.)

EVERYMAN. Shall we dance? (This is merely a quick joke — he doesn't intend to become involved with the stranger.)

DEATH.

Hold, Everyman! It is time to remember your Maker.

(EVERYMAN thinks this is a religious fanatic, and regrets his friendly gesture.)

EVERYMAN. Excuse me, please — I'm in a hurry.

DEATH.

This is a matter yet more urgent.

In great haste I am sent to you from God.

EVERYMAN. You think you're sent from God? Look, if you're giving away pamphlets, I'm really not interested.

DEATH.

Though you have forgot God here,  
He remembers you in the heavenly sphere.

EVERYMAN. Heavenly sphere? I'm sorry – some other time.

DEATH.

A reckoning He will have without any longer respite.

EVERYMAN. You sound like someone out of the Middle Ages.

I don't know what you're talking about. Never mind – I don't want to know.

DEATH.

All creatures fail to comprehend at first,  
and yet I speak a universal tongue.  
Listen again – I'll speak in words of your own time.  
You must undertake a journey and bring your book of  
reckoning.

EVERYMAN. Do you know that you have to have a city license to solicit funds?

DEATH.

I solicit nothing. I have come for you.

EVERYMAN. For me? Who are you?

DEATH (removing hood).

I am Death.

(Loud sudden burst of sound.)

Do I still need a license?

EVERYMAN (recoiling in horror). Death? Oh . . . no . . . no . . . (Long pause as realization sets in.) Wait a minute – let me think – a journey? Where to? (DEATH sits down, deciding this is going to take a while.)

DEATH.

Your final destination depends upon what is written in your ledger.

EVERYMAN. My ledger?