

## Drama before 1550

One of the finest religious plays of the Middle Ages, the Anglo-French *Mystère d'Adam*, was almost certainly written in England in the later 12th century. At this time, too, in many parts of Western Europe, it became the custom to dramatize the events surrounding the Resurrection by acting out the encounter of the women with the angels at the empty tomb, during the Easter services in churches.

At the same time, there were ancient traditions of popular drama, such as those preserved in the Mummers' plays, alive in the villages of England. It is inconceivable that moments of neighborhood celebration such as fairs, festivals, and carnivals, did not have forms of play-acting attached to them.

### Mystery Play Cycles

The main surviving form of medieval drama, though, is that contained in the Mystery Play cycles, which in their time were often simply called "the Corpus Christi Play". These developed during the 13-14th centuries in various parts of Europe, including England. The word "mystery" seems to come originally from the Middle French word *mestier* meaning "craft" although it also refers to the events by which God effects his salvation. The sponsors and actors of these plays were the members of the various craft guilds of the city, a guild being an organization uniting all the members of a given trade in the town, for fellowship and mutual support.

In France there were also Miracle Plays in which events in the lives of saints were acted, but these are not found in English. It is the Bible which provided the main material for the English Corpus Christi Play cycles. Manuscripts of these great cycles survive from York and Chester, as well as one not attached to a particular place (the N-Town plays), and the Towneley Cycle that may have been performed in Wakefield. These texts in their present form date from the 15th and 16th centuries, but it is clear that the plays were often revised and rewritten over the years since at least the 14th century.

The feast of *Corpus Christi* (the sacrament of the Body of Christ) falls on the second Thursday after Pentecost Sunday (Whitsunday), seven weeks after Easter, the date of which is determined by the moon and changes each year. Thus Corpus Christi falls in late May or in June, and forms a kind of summer festival.

The way the Corpus Christi plays were acted in York is known in some detail. Early on the morning of Corpus Christi Day, an elaborate wagon, with several levels of staging, was pulled by a group of citizens to a spot in front of Holy Trinity Priory; here citizens were already waiting, sitting on tiered seating that had been specially set up, or standing in the road. On this first cart, the story of the Revolt and Fall of Satan, an ancient legend that is not found in the Bible, was acted by members of the Tanners' Guild. As soon as they had finished, their cart was pulled to a second "station" about 100 meters down the street, and they repeated the play while in their place at Holy Trinity a second cart was pulled in, where the Plasterers acted the Creation of the World. Then they moved on and the Cardmakers acted the Creation of Adam and Eve. Each guild had a very elaborate pageant-wagon specially designed for their play, for the same play was acted by the same guild every year.

In all, there were almost fifty pageants (short plays) in the York cycle, covering the Creation and Fall, Noah's Flood, stories of Abraham, Moses, the Christmas stories, a very

few scenes from the life of Jesus, the various moments of his trial, Passion and Death, the Resurrection, the Death and Assumption of Mary, with the Last Judgement as the final play. Each play was acted twelve times at different stations around the town, mostly 100 or 200 meters apart. If all the pageants were acted on one day, as seems likely, it must have been very late at night before the last performance at the last station was over. Other towns had less plays, and less stations, probably; Chester had only 25 pageants. In some places it seems that there was a central fixed stage where the plays were acted once only.

The plays were copied for each guild from an official text in the keeping of the town council. It looks as though a guild might sometimes pay someone to write a better one. The authors are anonymous, almost certainly clerics, churchmen of some kind. In the York cycle several of the plays about the Passion have clearly been re-written by an author now called “the York Realist” for example. The civic authorities held the complete register (copy) of all the texts, and this register has survived at York.

Some of the plays were acted by very suitable groups: the Shipwrights performed Noah’s building of the Ark, the Fishermen and Mariners performed the actual Flood, the Bakers acted the Last Supper! Each guild tried to find good actors among its members, but the most important thing will have been a clear, loud voice strong enough to repeat the same play twelve times without failing! Many of the costumes included masks, and the gestures were probably very simple. Music from the Church’s liturgy is used in some plays, the shepherds sing, but the only instruments named are the trumpets at the Last Judgement.

The individual pageants vary, some are short and very simple, some are miniature plays in their own right. Most striking, and very popular, is the introduction of comedy, and melodrama, into these Biblical stories. When Noah has built his Ark, he tells his family to get in before the rain comes, but his wife begins to make all kinds of trouble, refusing to believe him, wanting to go home to fetch things, wanting her friends with her...

At the Crucifixion of Jesus, the soldiers nailing him to the cross are all that can be seen for most of the play, as the Cross to which they are fixing Jesus is lying flat on the stage, while they describe in gruesome dialogue all the trouble they have. They stretch Jesus’ arms and legs with ropes to make him fit on the badly-prepared cross. At last, they raise up the cross and drop it into its slot with a great jerk. It is only at this moment that the crucified Jesus becomes visible, and the mood suddenly changes to high pathos as he speaks:

All men that walk by way or street,  
Take tent you shall no travail tine.           *(be careful not to miss*  
Behold mine head, mine hands, and my feet,   *any of my pain)*  
And fully feel now, er ye fine,                   *(pass)*  
If any mourning may be meet                   *(equal)*  
Or mischief measured unto mine.               *(misfortune)*

Other familiar popular elements in other cycles included a ranting, roaring Herod in the Christmas pageants, that Hamlet recalls as a form of over-acting (“out-herod Herod”).

### The Wakefield Master’s *Second Shepherd’s Play*

The Wakefield group of pageants in the Towneley Cycle is a group of six pageants written mostly in nine-line stanzas, and showing special links with the city of Wakefield. The author of these plays has great skill in constructing plots and writing lively dialogues in vivid colloquial language, he is usually called the Wakefield Master. The most often studied of

these Wakefield Pageants is the “Second Shepherds’ Play,” so called because the cycle has two plays about the Shepherds who come to worship the new-born Jesus in the manger.

The Second Shepherds’ Play begins by introducing three shepherds, Coll, Gib, and Daw, each of whom speaks to the audience about the hardships they endure from the authorities and the weather:

*Coll.*

Lord, what these weathers are cold, and I am ill happed;  
I am nearhand dold, so long have I napped;  
My legs they fold, my fingers are chapped.  
It is not as I would, for I am all lapped

In sorrow:

In storms and tempest,  
Now in the east, now in the west,  
Woe is him has never rest  
Midday nor morrow.

But we silly husbands that walks on the moor,  
In faith we are nearhands out of the door.  
No wonder, as it stands, if we be poor,  
For the tilth of our lands lies fallow as the floor,  
As ye ken.

*(farmers)*

We are so hammed,  
Fortaxed and rammed,  
We are made hand-tamed  
With these gentlery-men....

Gib has also problems in his marriage:

*Gib.*

These men that are wed have not all their will:  
When they are full hard stead they sigh full still;  
God wot they are led full hard and full ill;  
In bower nor in bed they say nought theretill.

This tide

My part have I found;  
I know my lesson:  
Woe is him that is bound,  
For he must abide.

But now late in our lives, a marvel to me,  
That I think my heart rives such wonders to see;  
What that destiny drives it should so be,  
Some men will have two wives, and some men three

In store!

Some are woe that has any,  
But so far can I:  
Woe is him that has many  
For he feels sore.

Meeting together, they sing, then Mak enters. It seems that this must have been a traditional name for a comic villain in this area, and Mak has been hailed as one of the great comic characters of English drama. He pretends to be a southern gentleman, with an elegant city accent that shows up the dialect of the shepherds, but the shepherds know him too well: “Thou has an ill nose (*bad reputation*) of stealing sheep.” But they are all tired, cold and hungry, and they lie down to go to sleep; Mak has a special Latin bed-time prayer: *Manua tuas commendo Pontio Pilato* (“I commend your hands to Pontius Pilate” instead of “I commend my spirit into your hands, Lord”) and as soon as the others are snoring he gets up and runs off with a sheep.

He arrives home, where his wife Gill is horrified to see what he has done, the stealing of a sheep might be punished by death. They decide to tie up the sheep and hide it in the cradle, then pretend that Gill has just had another baby. Mak runs back to the shepherds (a few feet over the stage) and lies down just before they wake up. Mak wakes up and says that he has dreamed that Gill was having another baby, and rushes off. At home, he warns Gill to prepare the sheep in the cradle. Meanwhile, since the drama switches skillfully from place to place, we see that the shepherds have counted their sheep and found one missing. They are sure Mak has taken it.

The shepherds visit Mak’s house, search it in vain, and are just leaving when they recall the custom of giving a coin to a new-born child, and Daw returns:

*Daw.* Mak, with your leave, let me give your barn  
But sixpence.

*Mak.* Nay, do way, he sleeps.

*Daw.* Methinks he peeps.

*Mak.* When he wakens he weeps.  
I pray you go hence.

*Daw.* Give me leave him to kiss, and lift up the clout.  
What the devil is this? He has a long snout!

*Mak.* He is marked amiss. We wot ill about.  
(*The others return*)

*Gib.* Ill-spun weft, ywis, ay comes foul out.  
Aye so!

He is like to our sheep!  
*Daw.* How, Gib, may I peep?

(...)  
Will you see how they swaddle  
His four feet in the middle?  
Saw I never in cradle  
A horned lad ere now!

Mak and Gill realize that the game is up, yet still desperately try to play the trick they had planned:

*Gill.* A pretty child is he  
As sits on a woman’s knee,  
A dillydown, pardie,  
To gar a man laugh! (make)

*Daw.* I know him by the earmark, that is a good token.

*Mak.* I tell you sirs, hark, his nose was broken.  
 Sithen told me a clerk that he was forspoken.  
*Coll.* This is a false work, I would fain be wroken. (*avenged*)  
 Get weapon.  
*Gill.* He was taken with an elf,  
 I saw it myself,  
 When the clock truck twelve  
 He was forshapen. (*transformed*)

*Gib.* Ye two are well feft sam in a stead.  
 (*You're both the same*)

*Daw.* Since they maintain their theft, let do them to dead.  
*Mak.* If I trespass eft, gird off my head. (*again; cut*)  
 With you will I be left...

So with this promise and surrender the comic farce ends, they toss Mak in a blanket instead of hanging him, then lie down to sleep again.

Suddenly an angel appears, sings *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory to God, words sung by the angels in the Gospel story about Christmas) and the play is converted into a religious pageant. As in the Bible, the angel tells the shepherds out in the fields to go to Bethlehem where they will see "God is made your friend." The shepherds joke about their vision, then each makes a formal, theological speech about the news.

One part of the wagon, perhaps, had remained closed until now; as the shepherds approach it opens to reveal a *tableau vivant* of Mary standing beside the manger. Each makes a delightful speech, and offers a gift: a bob of cherries, a bird, and a ball. Mary makes the final statement of the play's message:

The Father of heaven, God omnipotent,  
 That set all on seven, his Son has he sent.  
 My name could he neven, and light ere he went.  
 I conceived him full even, through might as he meant.  
 And now is he born.  
 He keep you from woe!  
 I shall pray him so;  
 Tell forth as ye go,  
 And mind on this morn.

These Corpus Christi plays were a part of the civic life in a number of English towns until the Reform movement became powerful around 1550. Then some plays were first revised, to remove Catholic elements and finally the performances were stopped. We know that many of those influenced by the Geneva and Zurich Reformation movements of Calvin and Zwingli would have been opposed to dramatic and visual representations of any kind. In addition it may be that urban culture was evolving away from such spectacles. It is possible that simplified forms of the Cycles were played for a time in some places; in Coventry they may have gone on until towards 1580. There is no way of knowing if Shakespeare ever saw such plays in his childhood.

Morality Plays

At the same time as the Corpus Christi plays were at their height, in the 15th century, another kind of didactic drama was developing: “moral plays” or “morality plays” were designed to impress people with an urgent sense of the need for change in their lives. This is usually done by reminding them of their mortality, and of the dangers of hell. These plays are dramatized sermons, written by priests, and they invariably employ allegory, in the shape of personifications of abstract qualities; many of them introduce angels and tempting devils as well, and the throne of God, to show that human destiny has an eternal dimension.

Only a few examples of early morality plays survive. A fragment of a play called *The Pride of Life* dates from about 1400, but the most impressive and earliest surviving play is *The Castle of Perseverance*, written before 1425 and including in its manuscript a fascinating but mysterious diagram of how it is to be staged “in the round,” drawn in such a way as seems to leave very little space for an audience.

*The Castle of Perseverance* has Mankind at the centre of its action, and the play is a *psychomachia* (a battle between Good and Evil for possession of the soul) which would have great dramatic power if the speeches were not so long! All the morality plays are dramatized allegories, where personifications of abstract aspects of human existence debate and fight with each other. The use of allegorical personification was common in Europe during the middle ages. It figures in secular works such as the *Romance of the Rose*, but is mainly employed in moral religious works designed to encourage penitence in sinners.

The first part of the play has Mankind making choice of all the sins in turn, as his two “guardian” angels, a good and a bad one, watch and lament or rejoice. He passes from the house of World to those of Devil and of Flesh; in the first he encounters and gives in to Lust and Folly, in the second Pride, Anger, and Envy, in the third Gluttony, Lechery, and Sloth. Then Confession comes, his conscience is moved and he asks God’s forgiveness. After being absolved from his sins he is in a “state of Grace” symbolized by Mankind’s installation in the Castle of Perseverance (or of Goodness) where he is defended by the Virtues: Humility, Patience, Charity, Abstinence, Chastity, Business, Generosity. But can he stay good?

In the next part he is tempted again, there are comic conflicts between the various vices, the Castle is besieged, but all is well until Avarice uses Mankind’s fear of poverty in old age to get him down from the Castle by offers of gold from his cupboard. Suddenly the dreadful figure of Death appears and strikes him to the heart. He sees a stranger coming to inherit his goods, as the Psalms say, and realizes his folly. He has no time to prepare:

I die certainly.  
Now my life I have lore.  
Mine heart breaketh, I sigh sore.  
A word may I speak no more.  
I put me in God’s mercy.

He dies and from behind the bed rises a figure representing his soul, who repeats his call for mercy, then the Bad Angel grabs him to carry him down to Hell. This is the prelude to another long debate, in Heaven this time, where personified Mercy urges her case against the strict demands of Truth, Peace insists on saving the soul while Justice rejects this until Peace brings them into harmony (as in Psalm 85: “Mercy and Truth embrace, Justice and Peace kiss”). They turn to God and Peace asks him to show mercy. God sends them to take the soul from the Bad Angel and bring him to heaven, where he sets him at his right hand and speaks the final lines:

All men example here-at may take  
To maintain the good and menden their miss.  
Thus endeth our games.

To save you from sinning  
Ever at the beginning  
Think on your last ending!

The unknown author of the *Castle* tried to cover too much ground in his spectacle, and as a result the play is largely ignored.

Two other morality plays were composed later in the 15th century, around 1470: *Wisdom* and *Mankind*. The first represents again the struggle between Christ and Lucifer for the human soul, quite briefly but with much visual spectacle. Wisdom is dressed as a king in purple and gold, Soul is a maiden in white and black, Lucifer is dressed as a devil. The whole cast numbers 36, the same as for the *Castle* although most of them only dance and sing but do not speak.

*Mankind* is by far the most comic of the morality plays, perhaps designed for performance on Shrove Tuesday, the carnival before the beginning of Lent. Five of the seven characters are comic villains who dominate the play: Mischief, New Guise, Nowadays, Nought, together with the merry devil Titivillus. They make fun of Mercy and bring Mankind to the brink of suicide before he is saved by Mercy. New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought are good at mockery but not very successful at tempting, they keep getting beaten. Mercy here is in fact the priest of confession, waiting for Mankind's repentance. The language of *Mankind* is lively, the tempters are often comic in a coarse way, but the moment when they are trying to get Mankind to hang himself before Mercy can get there to save him has real suspense.

Morality plays continued to be written into the 16th century, when we find *Everyman* and the many "Interludes" of Heywood and others, as well as Skelton's *Magnificence* and John Bale's protestant (anti-catholic) morality play *King Johan*.

### *Everyman*

The most famous morality play in English is *Everyman*. It is usually studied as part of "medieval drama" although it seems likely that it was written at about the same time as More's *Utopia*, between 1509 and 1519; it was printed in about 1530. It is a free adaptation of a Dutch play *Elckerlijc* and belongs to the same tradition of allegorical drama as *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Wisdom*. It is much admired for the unity of its dramatic action and the clarity of its verse, that influenced T.S.Eliot in his *Murder in the Cathedral*.

At the start of the play God sees that people have forgotten him:

They be so cumbered with worldly riches  
That needs on them I must do justice  
On every man living without fear.

He sends his messenger Death to tell every person (Everyman) that he must go on a pilgrimage (die) and bring a sure reckoning (a balanced account) with him. The play begins with Death's visit to Everyman; he is panic-stricken, offers Death a thousand pounds to delay, asks for another 12 years... but all he has is a brief moment (the play time) to prepare himself. Everyman laments, then on seeing his friend Fellowship decides to ask him to go with him. Before hearing his news, Fellowship swears he would even go to hell with him, but when he realizes it is death, he refuses, to Everyman's grief: "Ye promised otherwise, pardie!" This is a "fair-weather friend" only:

And yet, if thou wilt eat and drink and make good cheer,  
Or haunt to women the lusty company,  
I would not forsake you while the day is clear....  
But if thou wilt murder or any man kill,  
In that I will help thee with a good will.

He runs off. Everyman experiences the same disappointment with Kindred and Cousin, his family and friends: "I have the cramp in my toe, trust not to me!" So Everyman is left alone; he turns to his stored-up wealth (Goods) and learns that "you can't take it with you when you die"; Goods tells him bluntly: "My condition is man's soul to kill." After each refusal, Everyman has a short monologue commenting on what has happened. Finally he turns to the record of the good works he has done in life (Good Deeds) but "she is so weak That she can neither go nor speak." Good Deeds introduces her sister Knowledge:

Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide,  
In thy most need to go by thy side.

Knowledge represents the memory of what he had learned of the Church's teaching; she brings him to Confession who lives in the House of Salvation. Confession gives him a little whip (scourge) with which to beat himself as an expression of repentance, and he prays:

O blessed Godhead, elect and high Divine,  
Forgive my grievous offence!  
Here I cry thee mercy in this presence,  
O ghostly Treasure, O Ransomer and Redeemer,  
Of all the world Hope and Conductor,  
Mirror of Joy, Founder of Mercy...

Once he is forgiven, Good Deeds can stand and walk, no longer buried under all the burden of his sins. The atmosphere changes to joy and hope: "I weep for very sweetness of love." Everyman puts on a garment of sorrow for his sins (contrition) and the reckoning is now clear

The second part of the play introduces new personifications: Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and his Five-wits. These represent all the natural aspects of life in the mortal body; they swear to be with him until death and send him to Priesthood in order to receive the last Sacraments in preparation for death. While Everyman is away, Knowledge makes a little speech about the horror of sinful priests who make money with the sacraments or live with women.

Everyman returns, ready for the journey. As he collapses beside the grave, his Beauty abandons him, followed by his physical Strength, his Discretion, and his Five-wits, much in the same way as his friends and family left him before.

At the end, all he has is Knowledge and his Good Deeds; Knowledge remains to the end, while the record of the good each one has done goes with him to Heaven. Everyman makes a pious end:

Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend:  
Receive it, Lord, that it be not lost.  
As thou me boughtest, so me defend,  
And save me from the fiend's boast,  
That I may appear with that blessed host  
That shall be saved at the day of doom.



*In manus tuas, of mights most,  
Forever commendo spiritum meum.*

He descends into the grave, and Knowledge remains alone to make a final comment:

Methinketh that I hear angels sing  
And make great joy and melody  
Where Everyman's soul received shall be.

The voice of an angel is heard welcoming the soul into Heaven, and a Doctor (preacher) makes a final summary of the play's message which is the need for everyone to remember death and repent while there is still time.

The action in *Everyman* is rapid, the tone is unified, the language simple and effective. The short soliloquies, in particular, introduce a direct awareness of the protagonist's feelings that make him a far more individualized and sympathetic figure than the puppet-like Mankind of other morality plays. It is striking to note that the seriousness of the play is maintained by the absence of any Devil or Vice figure. Everyman has been his own enemy and the drama of his salvation is played out within his free choice of a step-by-step preparation for a holy death. This play is not structured around a dramatized *psychomachia*.

#### Skelton's *Magnyfycence*

King Henry VIII's former tutor, the poet **John Skelton** probably wrote *Magnyfycence* in 1515-6; there is no record of any performance, but the stage directions show that there are never more than 4 actors on stage at once. Since the directions mention doors it may be that the play was designed to be acted in the hall of some royal palace. It was printed in about 1530, only one complete copy survives. While *Everyman* has only 921 lines, *Magnyfycence* has over 2500, and *The Castle of Perseverance* 3700. The central drama of Skelton's play is life at court, it was probably designed to give advice to the king and high courtiers. The fundamental structure is similar to *The Castle*; the prince Magnificence is surrounded by 10 bad counsellors, including Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyance, and Cloaked Collusion, who are controlled by Fancy and Folly. These gradually draw the prince away from the control of reason represented by Measure who claims control over Felicity and Liberty at the start of the play. As Magnificence becomes increasingly profligate, he swells with pride, challenges Fortune, and listens to invitations to indulge in lechery and anger.

At last Adversity arrives, like a Death figure, and Magnificence loses everything. He turns to his former friends, who reject him, and he is visited by Despair and Mischief. Like Mankind, he is urged to commit suicide and comes to the brink of destruction. Good Hope storms in, in the nick of time, and drives away the diabolic tempters, just as Magnificence is about to stab himself. There is a rebirth of wisdom as the prince repents and resolves to change his ways. This is a work of divine Grace, but the virtues who now surround the restored prince are Circumspection and Perseverance, qualities that the play shows are required in a wise and just ruler.

#### Bale's *King Johan*

The protestant reformer and writer, **John Bale** (1495-1563), wrote his play *King Johan* for propaganda in the early Reformation struggle against the old Catholic system. It was first acted on January 2, 1539; towards the end of his life Bale seems to have revised it for presentation before Queen Elizabeth in 1560. The early 13th century King John had been involved in a fierce struggle with the Pope, about the exercise of royal and papal powers in England; he was forced to surrender. For men like Bale, the question was whether King Henry VIII would prove stronger than John, and successfully free England from a system of church government that they considered diabolical.

*King Johan* tells the history of King John's defeat and death at the hands of the Roman powers in a morality-play framework of allegorical figures. The main villain is Sedition (treason), who leads the Pope's cause and is a good illustration of what is meant by a Vice figure. He is cunning, sure of himself, and full of glee when his plots succeed:

Is not this a sport? By the mass it is, I trow.  
What wealth and pleasure will now to our kingdom grow!  
England is our own, which is the most pleasant ground  
In all the round world! Now may we realms confound.  
Our Holy Father may now live at his pleasure  
And have abundance of wenches, wines and treasure.  
He is now able to keep down Christ and his Gospel,  
True faith to exile and all virtues to expell.  
Now shall we ruffle it in velvets, gold and silk...  
If Solon were here I reckon that he would laugh  
Which never laughed yet; yea, like a welp he would laugh.  
Ha, ha, ha! Laugh, quoth he! Yea, laugh and laugh again!

John loses, he dies poisoned by a monk. After this, new virtues appear; Truth (Veritas) teaches Nobility and Civil Order (two abstractions for the two main classes of society) while Imperial Majesty corrects Clergy, according to the reformed idea that the Church should be under national control. Justice is announced, Sedition is taken out to be hanged and he says he looks forward to being declared a martyr saint like Becket. John dies a helpless victim of evil powers; in this sense *King Johan* has been considered not only the first history play in English, but even the first tragedy.

### Interludes

Both *Magnyfycence* and *King Johan* are termed "interludes" in contemporary documents: on the title-page for the first, and in a letter written by Cranmer about the second. Many theatre histories repeat the idea that the plays known as interludes were performed during intervals between courses at banquets. This seems to have been suggested by the name, rather than by any documentary evidence. It is more likely that the name (from the Latin *inter-ludium*) simply means a play involving several characters; it would not really be possible to act either Skelton's or Bale's work in several sections during a meal! The early Tudor form of drama usually called "interlude" should therefore be considered as a form of morality play, shorter than those we have seen, and often containing comic elements in addition to a largely didactic purpose.

After 1486 **Henry Medwall**, the first English dramatist whose name we know, was writing interludes for Thomas More's patron, John (later Cardinal) Morton, and his play *Fulgens and Lucrece* (1497) is the first secular (non-religious) play surviving in English. It is

not very dramatic, the main topic is the nature of true nobility, illustrated by the problem a girl has in choosing between a man who is of humble origin but good and another of noble origin but no good. There is a purely comic sub-plot in which two clownish servant-figures, who seem to come out of the audience, perform a wooing that parodies the main plot. The main historical interest of such interludes lies in the way they anticipate later renaissance comedy.

The printer **John Rastell** (1475-1536), who married Thomas More's sister Elizabeth More, wrote an interlude called *The Nature of the Four Elements*, which portrays the benefits of humanistic education in a not-very-dramatic allegory where the hero Humanity is led away from his books and into a tavern by the Vice-figure Ignorance and the cheerful Sensual Appetite. Rastell also wrote a debate-play on true nobility, *Gentleness and Nobility* (1527?) and dramatized a Spanish romance in *Calisto and Melibea*, but his most important act may have been to translate into English Terence's romantic comedy *Andria*. This prepared the way for future developments.

The court musician **John Heywood** (1497-1578) married Rastell's daughter Elizabeth, and suffered for remaining true to the Catholic faith, dying in exile in Belgium. He was John Donne's grandfather, his youngest daughter Elizabeth being Donne's mother. Heywood wrote and published several interludes that are not very dramatic, all debate-centered.

In his *Play of the Weather* various higher social persons complain to Jove about the weather, only each one wants different weather! Here the character Merry Report is as much a Fool as he is a Vice figure. In the *Four P's* there is a competition between a Palmer, a Pardoner, a 'Pothecary and a Pedlar as to who can tell the best lie. The winning lie? "In all my travels I never met a bad-tempered woman." Most of the humour in Heywood is verbal, he has no sense of plot. He may also have written some plays based on Chaucerian-style fabliaux, he is in general very harsh about women. Heywood's son Jasper Heywood was the first to translate tragedies by Seneca into English, in the 1560s.

#### Further Reading

*York Mystery Plays*, edited by Richard Beadle and Pamela King. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1984.

*The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, edited by A.C. Cawley. Manchester University Press. 1958.

*Four Morality Plays*, edited by Peter Happé. Penguin. 1979.

*The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, edited by Richard Beadle. Cambridge University Press. 1994.