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Morality Plays

Introduction

The 'morality play' is one of the most recognizable medieval European dramatic genres, yet much about this term, the form's status and influence remains contested. While the label 'morality play' is a useful one for modern scholars, its origins lie in eighteenth-century antiquarianism rather than in medieval categorizations. The idea of a distinct morality play genre or tradition is further challenged by the vast array of staging and dramaturgical conventions and techniques displayed by extant playtexts; in the range of different audiences, occasions, and spaces for which they were designed; and in the extent to which they overlap with other dramatic and performance modes (saints' plays, biblical plays, *sotties*, debate and mummings, for example). Nevertheless, there is a distinct collection of plays from pre-modern Europe which share characteristics and conceptual and dramaturgic frameworks, justifying their analysis as a group. What links these plays, whether they are written in Latin or in the vernacular, is their sustained use of personification allegory and the clear exposition of a moral *sentence*. At the core of any morality play sits a central figure, a personification of, say, a universalized concept of 'mankind' (*Humanum Genus*, Everyman, Mankind); an aspect of human nature (Man's Desire in *sMenschen Sin en Verganckelijcke Schoonheit*), or a specific stage in life (like Youth or the Child). Such figures also act as a mirror or an avatar for the audience. French *moralités* often had two central figures who represented opposing moral paths. The plays' central figures are accompanied by an array of abstract personifications representing virtues, sins, vices, temptations, moral distractions, bad and good advice and facts of life. These could be faculties or qualities of humankind, such as Flesh, *Raison*, Wit, or Ignorance; temptations and forces in the external world, like New Guise, Custom, or Goods; facts of human existence, Life, Death, and Kinship; human behaviors like Flattery or Deceit; social groups such as Nobility and Clergy; personifications of God's qualities, like Mercy; as well as immortal beings like God and the Devil, or Good and Bad Angels. Every part of the performance is enlisted into the allegory, from staging, props and costumes, to the actions of and between performers. Whether or not the protagonist is saved at the end of the play varies, but there is often an explicit alignment between the life journey of the mankind figure and that of Adam, connecting the life of the individual with great scheme of cosmic history.

Documents and Records

Of vital importance to the study of any premodern dramatic form or performance mode are the records and documentary sources that supplement, enrich and contextualize the written, textual sources. Thanks to a number of ground-breaking projects, these sources are now more widely available and made accessible through modern collating, editing and, where necessary, translation. The Records of Early English Drama 1979-2020 is by far the most ambitious and extensive, but its focus is limited to English sources, though there are volumes dedicated to Wales and Scotland as

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well. The Malone Society Collections and Lancashire 1984 are more concise and are arranged differently from REED, but also have their place and are often a more manageable place to begin such research. Meredith and Tailby 1983 and Tydeman 2001 both extend the geographic range of the records edited and translated to include material from across medieval Europe.

Lancashire, Ian. *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

While obviously not as comprehensive as the REED volumes, this reference work is a valuable addition, drawing together a selection of performance texts and records from across the British Isles from the Romans through to the Elizabethans. The entries are gathered by region and then by location going alphabetically, each given a summary of contents and bibliographic information. The volume also includes illustrations and maps.

**Malone Society Collections* [<http://malonesociety.com/publications/>]*

Founded in 1906, the Malone Society aims to publish reliable, scholarly editions of early modern playtexts. The Society has also produced a number of collections of medieval and early dramatic records and sources, which students of morality plays and interludes may find helpful.

Meredith, Peter and John E. Tailby, eds. *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 4. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1983.

Translates texts and documents of specifically religious drama from across medieval Europe into modern English, making available crucial sources which would otherwise be inaccessible to students and non-specialists. The entries are arranged thematically according to staging and production, performers, audiences, and special effects. They do not relate specifically to morality plays, but do give an insight into the performance traditions that produced them and so how they might have been staged.

**Records of Early English Drama*, 28 vols (1979-2020) [<https://reed.utoronto.ca/print-collections-2/print-collections/>].*

This vast project, running since 1979 aims to locate, transcribe, edit and publish documentary evidence for performance in the British Isles from the late-medieval period to 1642. The volumes provide invaluable information on the variety, ideas about and practicalities of premodern performance generally. Volumes are available in print (from different publishers) but there is a growing number of volumes available online. See **REED Online* [<https://ereed.library.utoronto.ca/>]* and **REED Pre-Publication Collections* [<https://reedprepub.org/>].* The project is ongoing.

Tydeman, William et al., eds. *The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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One of the few books to draw together documentary sources for medieval European drama and performance, and as such is an invaluable resource for students seeking to explore the subject in more detail. The book is divided into ten sections, six focused on primary sources from specific regions (Britain, France, Italy, etc.) and four on specific themes ('The Inheritance') and forms ('Latin liturgical drama' and 'customs and folk drama').

Facsimiles and Digitized Manuscripts

Medieval playtexts as they were originally copied down look very different on the page as compared with modern play editions, and it is always worth exploring them in their manuscript contexts where possible, even if, like the Macro Plays, they have been bound together at a much later date. Not only is it possible to encounter the plays without the interventions of modern editorial procedures and punctuation, but to see the marginalia, doodles, and comments of premodern readers, the diagrams and other textual materials alongside which plays often sit can illuminate much more about the play and their audiences than is possible through a modern edition. The Folger Shakespeare Library has digitized the famous Macro Play manuscript and the interface is intuitive and accessible, enabling the user to get a sense of the play book as a whole, to sort through the different plays, and zoom in on exciting paratextual features, like the sixteenth-century doodles of the page facing the opening of *Wisdom* (ff. 98r-99v). The older print facsimiles edited by Bevington 1972 and Davis 1979 are equally helpful, especially for readers new to medieval studies, providing an introduction and facing-page transcriptions.

Bevington, David, ed. *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind: A Facsimile Edition with Facing Transcriptions*. The Folger Facsimiles Manuscript Series Vol. 1. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972.

A photographic facsimile of an important, if problematic, manuscript. The images cannot match the digital ones produced by the Folger, but the the facing-page transcriptions provide a helpful accompaniment. Includes a detailed description of the manuscript and a thorough discussion of the plays, including provenance, dialect, the composition of the manuscript and theories as to staging, much of which has now been revised or contested.

Davis, Norman, ed. *Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 33*. 3. With Introductions and a Transcript of the Dialogues by Norman Davis. Leeds: University of Leeds, 1979.

A photographic facsimile of several non-cycle plays, including the moral play *Occupation and Idleness*, rarely included in standard anthologies but transcribed and edited in this volume.

*Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.a.354 (The Macro Plays). LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection (file 31567).

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[https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/view/search?os=0&q=Call_Number%3D%22V.a.354%22&pgs=250&res=2&cic=FOLGERCM1%7E6%7E6&sort=Call_Number%2CMPSORTORDER1%2CCD_Title%2CImprint].*

High-resolution digital facsimile of the famous Macro Plays. Allows the user to browse the entire codex and select specific folios to view. Once selected, the viewer is able to zoom in and out of the image to explore the paleographic details and marginalia.

Comparative Studies and Edited Collections

Since the 1970s, scholars have paid increasing attention to the continuities, differences and connections between the many European dramatic traditions, encouraging in particular Anglophone scholars to pay heed to the equally rich and diverse continental performance culture. Fifield 1975-6 and Potter 1989 illustrate the sources, analogues, and contexts shared by morality plays across Europe; Muir 1989 and Steenbrugge 2014 take a more balanced approach to highlight where traditions diverge as well as where they overlap, with Steenbrugge's work especially pertinent to the study of morality plays. Happé 1996 focuses expressly on the staging practices of two roughly contemporary plays, the Old French *L'Omme Pecheur* and the Middle English *Castle of Perseverance*. Drawing on evidence from other dramatic forms, like the *mystères*, Happé suggests that the design of the English play may have been influenced by techniques and methods of French drama. The two edited collections cited here bring together scholars researching various national traditions to explore European drama broadly (Simon 1991) and European morality plays specifically (Gilman 1989).

Fifield, Merle. "The Community of the Morality Plays." *Comparative Drama* 9.4 (1975-6): 332-349.

Argues for a 'community of source materials' (332) for all morality plays, regardless of their country of origin, and that their composition constituted 'an international movement'. These arguments have been contested and the approaches to the idea of performance are outdated, but this remains an important article for identifying sources for and analogues of morality plays, and considering different national traditions in conjunction.

Gilman, David, ed. *Everyman and Company: Essays on the Theme and Structure of the European Moral Play*. New York: AMS Press, 1989.

A collection of essays emerging from a panel session at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in May 1979. The essays cover prominent European traditions (France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Low Countries, England), medieval and sixteenth-century, and two broader contributions that consider the idea and nature of the morality play as a dramatic genre.

Happé, Peter. "Staging *L'Omme Pecheur* and *The Castle of Perseverance*". *Comparative Drama* 30.3 (1996): 377-394.

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Compares the staging techniques and practices of the French *moralité*, *L'Homme Pêcheur*, with that of the roughly contemporary English *Castle of Perseverance*, drawing on evidence from other dramatic forms, like the *mystères*, and what can be deduced from the surviving playtexts.

Muir, Lynette. "Medieval English Drama: The French Connection". In *Contexts for Early English Drama*. Eds. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. Pp. 56-76.

An essay which is not expressly focused on either morality tradition, but usefully illustrates the connections and differences between medieval French and English drama, providing important context for the study of morality plays.

Potter, Robert. "The Unity of Drama: European Contexts for Early English Dramatic Traditions." In *Contexts for Early English Drama*. Edited by Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. Pp. 41-55.

Although this essay is not expressly about morality plays, it makes an important argument against thinking about and studying medieval drama according to national and linguistic silos. It draws on a range of (international) scholarship on drama from England, France, Germany, Italy, the Low Countries and the Iberian Peninsula.

Simon, Eckehard, ed. *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991.

An edited collection of essays brought together with the express aim of thinking across linguistic and national boundaries. Each essay is a research report, summarizing the research undertaken in various areas of medieval drama research from across Europe up to 1991. While there is only one chapter dedicated to morality plays, the other essays, and perhaps in particular those focusing on continental drama, are helpful in contextualizing the moralities in terms of both the wider performance traditions of which they were a part and scholarly attitudes and approaches to them.

Steenbrugge, Charlotte. *Staging Vice: A Study of Dramatic Traditions in Medieval and Sixteenth-Century England and the Low Countries*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014.

A study of and comparison between two character types typical of morality plays in England and the Low Countries: the Vice and Sinneken. The volume also provides very helpful historical overviews of both regions, providing crucial contexts for understanding morality play traditions and their key figures of sin and temptation.

British Isles and Ireland: General Studies

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Of all the morality play traditions of Europe, the plays of the British Isles and Ireland, and in particular those in English, have been the most thoroughly studied. Approaches to the morality play, a form previously denigrated as simplistic, naive and often crude, have changed dramatically in the last sixty years with scholars identifying the dramatic and intellectual sophistication of the plays, in addition to locating important sources and analogues, and the dramatic and performance modes with which they overlap. Potter 1975 was a significant influence over this shift in scholarly appraisal of the morality play, while Stevens 1972 helped to illuminate the composite nature of medieval drama in general and so the complex performance culture of which morality plays were a part. Beadle and Fletcher 2008 edit a collection of essays introducing the variety and dynamism of English dramatic culture, including the chapter by King 2008 dedicated to morality plays. Jones 1983 provides an excellent summary of key sources and analogues for the plays and Crohn Schmitt 1982 helps to address the distorting affects of anachronism in previous analyses of morality play 'characters'. Bawcutt 2006 offers an instance of the use of the term 'morality' in a record from sixteenth-century Scotland that perhaps indicates the contemporary use of the word.

Bawcutt, Priscilla. "A Note on the Term 'Morality'". *Medieval English Theatre* 28 (2006): 171-74.

Challenges the claim that 'morality' was not used in premodern England and Scotland as a generic label by discussing an early sixteenth-century Scottish account of an entertainment for the wedding of James IV and Margaret Tudor, in which the word appears to designate a specific type of play.

Beadle, Richard and Alan J. Fletcher, eds.. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

An anthology of essays exploring different aspects of medieval English drama. The chapter by King 2008 focuses exclusively on morality plays, but other chapters (including Twycross 2008 under *Staging and Performance*), are worth reading for their contextualization of the form.

Bevington, David. "Castles in the Air: The Morality Plays". In *The Theatre of Medieval Europe New Research in Early Drama*. Edited by Simon Ekehard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. 97-116.

A useful summary and assessment of research into, and the shifting scholarly attitudes to, Anglophone morality plays up to 1991.

Crohn Schmitt, Natalie. "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays." In *The Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*. Edited by Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris and John H. Stroupe. New York: AMS Press, 1982. Pp. 304-315.

Argues that we have applied anachronistic psychological and allegorical terms and ideas to morality plays, which has confused our understanding of them. Instead, Crohn Schmitt

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argues, we should seek to view these plays from a medieval understanding of the nature of Man and his relationship with eternal reality.

Jones, Marion. "Early Moral Plays and the Earliest Secular Drama". In *The Revels History of Drama in English*, 8 vols (vol 1). London and New York: Methuen, 1983. Pp. 211-291.

A good introduction to and overview of all of the known English morality plays, including a description and discussion of the Latin *Liber Apologeticus* (c. 1460) (see also Chaundler 1974 under *Editions and Anthologies*). A wide-ranging study that provides both a helpful grounding in the morality play's analogues and sources, and how they shape the plays themselves.

King, Pamela M.. "Morality Plays". In *Beadle and Fletcher 2008*. Pp. 235-62.

An introduction to the extant Middle English morality plays. The author points out that the label is retrospective and the plays' cohesion as a group questionable. The essay goes on to discuss some key sources and analogues for the plays, as well as their characteristic personification allegory and dramaturgy before examining each of the five complete or nearly complete English plays.

Potter, Robert. *The English Morality Play: Origins, History, and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition*. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

One of earliest studies to examine morality plays on their own terms and the first extended history of the form from the medieval period into the twentieth century. The book also considers some of the key ideas behind the morality plays, questioning earlier assumptions about the formative influence of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. Potter's book remains a classic and a key source for researchers of morality plays.

Stevens, Martin. "The Theatre of the World: A Study in Medieval Dramatic Form". *Chaucer Review* 7 (1972-3): 234-49.

An insightful, lively and elegant study that seeks to demonstrate the true nature of the English 'native tradition' of drama. Arguing that medieval English drama was a composite of many different dramatic types and of non-dramatic literature, Stevens illustrates the formal and dramaturgical overlaps and connections between Corpus Christi plays, moralities, and saints' lives. An important study that shows the sophistication and variety of medieval performance culture.

The Macro Plays

There has been considerable debate about what constitutes a morality play in the Middle Ages, and the many attempts to define it as a genre and pin down its characteristics have fallen fowl of

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its range and variety. Most scholars would now agree that such an endeavor is not only futile but obfuscates the synergies seen between the so-called morality plays and other dramatic genres and performance modes. Nevertheless, the three fifteenth-century morality plays gathered together in Folger MS V.a.354 and known collectively as the Macro Plays have often been seen as both typical of the form and quintessentially medieval in their conventions and outlook. Aside from *Everyman* (see the separate *Oxford Bibliographies* article **Everyman** [obo-9780199846719-0021]) *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind* and *Wisdom* have received the most critical attention of all morality plays in the Anglophone tradition. Each, however, is markedly different from the others in tone, style, staging and likely auspices and, as King 2008 (under **General Studies**) asserts, their absolute cohesion as a group is questionable. They do though indicate the once vibrant dramatic tradition of medieval East Anglia, which also included, for example, saints' lives, miracle plays, biblical drama, and folk plays. As such they invite an array of critical, methodological and theoretical approaches. Forest-Hill 2003, for example, explores the use of language in *Mankind*, specifically as it pertains to preaching. Marshall 1997 and Pettit 1996 both consider the likely auspices for the same play, the former being guided by internal references to attendant audiences and the latter following the evidence for performance in households. Schell 1972 and Davidson 1989, in contrast, foreground the iconographic and literary traditions on which the plays draw. Young 2015 and Paulson 2019 similarly look to wider cultural contexts, specifically medieval theories of vision and penitential and sacramental rituals and culture, while Clark, Kraus and Sheingorn 1998 and Epp 2000 look through the lens of gender and sexuality, and show how these constructs are deployed as part of the plays' political and moral agendas.

Clark, Marlene, Sharon Kraus, and Pamela Sheingorn. "'Se in what stat thou doyst indwell': the shifting constructions of gender and power relations in *Wisdom*". In *The Performance of Middle English Culture*. Edited by James J. Paxton, Lawrence M. Clopper and Sylvia Tomasch. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998. Pp. 43–57.

Explores the construction of gender in *Wisdom*, specifically as it materializes in the three Might: Mind, Will and Understanding. The authors argue that, while these allegorical figures are ostensibly gendered male, none of them maintain a uniformly masculine subjectivity. Their gender fluidity is examined in relation to the female-gendered Soul (Anima) and as a critique of political power. Includes an outline of the Augustinian model that informs the play's allegory.

Davidson, Clifford. *Visualizing the Moral Life: Medieval Iconography and the Macro Morality Plays*. New York: AMS Press, 1989.

This volume explores the iconographic traditions on which the three Macro plays draw, making accessible a visual culture vital to understanding the plays and yet unfamiliar to most modern readers. The introduction covers important contexts for the Macro plays; early critical attitudes to morality drama; and an explanation of the differences between medieval and post-Enlightenment definitions of allegory.

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Epp, Garrett. "The Vicious Guise: Effeminacy, Sodomy, and *Mankind*." In *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland, 2000. Pp. 303–20.

An important work of queer criticism on the most controversial of English morality plays. The article explores gender and costuming in the play in the context of commonplace associations between effeminacy, vice and fashionable excess.

Forest-Hill, Lynn. "*Mankind* and the Fifteenth-Century Preaching Controversy." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 15 (2003): 17–42.

Explores the language of preaching in *Mankind*, and specifically in the context of anti-Lollard texts. The article situates the play in the unique cultural and religious milieu of fifteenth-century East Anglia, and the contemporary regional debates about the implications of the use and misuse of language.

Marshall, John. "'O Ye Soverens that Sytt and Ye Brothern that Stonde Ryght Wppe': Addressing the Audiences of *Mankind*." *European Medieval Drama* 1 (1997), 189–202.

Challenges the generalized assessments of *Mankind*'s potential audiences and, therefore, likely auspices by focusing on two prominent references in the play's text: 'soverens' and 'brothern'. The article suggests that the play may have been produced for a religious guild in the Bury St Edmund's area.

Paulson, Julie. *Theater of the Word: Selfhood in the English Morality Plays*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.

The most recent book to explore the Macro plays, this study emphasizes the embodied nature of performance. Drawing on Wittgenstein's ideas about the relationships between words and the body, Paulson argues that each of the Macro plays demonstrates how penitential rituals and sacramental culture construct Christian identities and selfhoods.

Pettit, Tom. "*Mankind*: An English *Fastnachtspiel*?". In *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13-19 July, 1989*. Edited by Meg Twycross. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996. Pp. 190–202.

An influential and important study that identifies *Mankind* as a play designed as a Shrovetide performance for a noble or institutional household.

Schell, Edgar T. "On the Imitation of Life's Pilgrimage in *The Castle of Perseverance*." In *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*. Edited by Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972. Pp. 279–291.

Criticizes scholarly assumptions that all morality plays are rooted in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. Focusing on *The Castle of Perseverance*, the article argues that it is the

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metaphor of pilgrimage as it pertains to an individual human life that shapes this iconic English morality play.

Young, Andrea. *Vision and Audience in Medieval Drama: A Study of The Castle of Perseverance*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Young argues that the early fifteenth-century *Castle of Perseverance* is preoccupied with sight, sight lines and theological concepts of vision, and that the play's structure and staging are therefore also informed by these principles. In examining medieval ideas about vision and their significance, Young produces distinctive, helpful readings of its famous staging diagram and how the experience of spectatorship enabled by the performance space reinforced *The Castle's* moral message.

The British Isles and Ireland: Editions and Anthologies

Because of the number of plays that could be classified as moralities and their resistance to stable generic definition, the production of a single morality play anthology is nearly impossible, not to mention deeply problematic. The plays are therefore scattered across a number of editions and anthologies, collected and edited according to the very different parameters set by the editors. In each case, the plays and texts with which they are edited foreground and highlight different features of the form. The list provided here is not definitive and there are considerable gaps – for example, Gwenan Jones' edition and translation of Welsh morality plays would be a welcome addition to the list, but this volume is extremely rare, difficult to locate and access for the majority of scholars and students and has therefore been excluded. The editions and anthologies that are listed are, on the whole, the most accessible and most widely available, but it is hoped that readers will follow them to the more obscure and less-read morality plays as well. Of these, Ashley and NeCastro 2010, Davidson, Walsh and Broos 2007, Klausner 2008 and Klausner 2010 are both the most readily available and the most accessible, being available in digital and print formats and edited with students in mind. The others (Chaundler 1974; Davis 1970; Eccles 1969; Schell 1969; Wickham 1976 Walker 2000) are generally available via institutional libraries and, where still in print, from many booksellers.

*Ashley, Kathleen M. and Gerard NeCastro, eds. *Mankind*. TEAMS Middle English Tests Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010.

[<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/ashley-and-necastro-mankind>].*

An accessible, yet scholarly edition of the dramaturgically sophisticated *Mankind*. The introduction foregrounds staging and performance, as well as emphasizing the radical potential of the play. Print copies are also available.

Chaundler, Thomas. *Liber Apologeticus de Omni Statu Humanae Naturae*. Trans. and ed. Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1974.

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This mid-fifteenth-century, Latin play exemplifies the porosity of medieval dramatic forms. Employing personified abstractions, it shares many features with its Middle English counterparts, but also echoes the narrative arc of the Corpus Christi plays and utilizes the conventions of academic debate to present its 'defense of human nature'. The edition offers the Latin text with a modern English facing-page translation, and a detailed introduction.

*Davidson, Clifford, Martin W. Walsh and Ton J. Broos, eds. *Everyman and Its Dutch Original, Elckerlijc*. TEAMS Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007. [<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-everyman>].*

Taking the widely-accepted view that *Everyman* is a translation of the Dutch *Elckerlijc*, this edition gives equal weight to both texts, placing them side-by-side with a modern English translation of the Middle Dutch play in the footnotes. Includes a general introduction and an extensive bibliography. The real value of this edition lies in being able to read the texts together, noting the small but telling changes the English translator made to his source. Also available in print

Davis, Norman, ed. *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*. Ed. Norman Davis. Early English Text Society S.S.1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

An essential read for anyone studying Middle English morality plays. Alongside some major non-cycle plays, Davis edited a selection of incomplete yet illuminating play fragments, which add richness to the canon and show the diversity of medieval morality plays, as well as providing indications of, for example, audiences, playing spaces, and wider production contexts.

Eccles, Mark, ed. *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, Early English Text Society 262. London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969.

The three plays have been edited more recently in various anthologies and individual editions, but this volume offers details for readers interested in dialectal characteristics, verse forms, sources and analogues. The texts have not been modernized and explanatory notes are minimal, though there is a glossary. As was fashionable at the time of its writing, this edition divides the plays into scenes to make them conform to twentieth-century theatrical expectations.

*Klausner, David, ed. *The Castle of Perseverance*. TEAMS Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010.* [<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/klausner-the-castle-of-perseverance>].

Following a thorough introduction, which includes a discussion of the Middle English morality play 'corpus', this edition provides both detailed explanatory notes and glosses that will appeal to students who have some experience of reading Middle English, since the text has only been gently modernized. Also available in print.

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*Klausner, David *Two Moral Interludes: The Pride of Life and Wisdom*. TEAMS Middle English Texts Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008.

[<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/klausner-two-moral-interludes>].*

An edition of two of the lesser read English morality plays. As with the other TEAMS editions cited, there are ample footnotes and glosses for both texts, as well as appendices providing extracts from key non-dramatic sources and an explanation of the music included in both plays. Also available in print.

Nelson, Alan H. *The Plays of Henry Medwall*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980.

The only volume to edit both surviving plays by the remarkable fifteenth-century playwright, Henry Medwall. Of those two, it is *Nature* that is usually considered alongside other morality plays, though the characters in the more famous *Fulgens and Lucre*s show the traits of their morality play fellows. Medwall's 'life records' included as an appendix provide important information that help to contextualize these superb, strikingly modern, plays.

Schell, Edgar T. and J.D. Shuchter, eds., *English Morality Plays and Interludes*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

The majority of plays in this volume date from c. 1500 to 1558 (*The Castle* and *Everyman* are given much earlier dates than is widely accepted now), and many are now rarely edited or studied, which makes the volume even more precious. The general introduction explains some morality play quirks, provides a helpful account of dramatic trends in the sixteenth-century, and some dramaturgical similarities with twentieth-century drama. A volume ahead of its time in many respects.

Walker, Greg, ed. *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Designed for use by teachers and students, this is a comprehensive anthology of Anglophone drama in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, including biblical plays, miracle plays, interludes and an extract from a unique antitheatrical tract. Some features of Middle English have been modernized, and there are substantial explanatory footnotes and headnotes. Plays in the morality tradition include *Wisdom*, *Mankind*, *Everyman*, *Magnyfycence*, and *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*.

Wickham, Glynne. *English Moral Interludes*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1976.

A classic by one of the most influential medieval drama scholars of the twentieth century. Foregrounding the interlude tradition, Wickham juxtaposes the allegorical moralities with plays like *The Conversion of Saint Paul* and John Bale's *The Temptation of Our Lord*, the early *Interlude of the Student and the Girl* and two of John Lydgate's mummings. The extent to which some of these can be considered either 'moral' or 'interludes' can be debated.

Staging and Performance

One of the major shifts in critical focus in the mid-twentieth century was the move towards an awareness and appreciation of the dramaturgical sophistication of medieval plays and their inventive, often elaborate, staging practices. This shift is also reflected in the scholarship on morality plays of the Anglophone tradition, though modern critics are still trying to undo the damage of their predecessors' assumptions. This recovery work has taken many forms. Denny 1974, for example, considers how the use of elements from the Mummers' play traditions shaped the practices in and performance of *Mankind*. Nichols 1986 finds evidence for morality play costumes in the sculptures on baptismal fonts. Twycross and Carpenter 2002 focus exclusively on the use of masks in medieval and early modern England. Twycross 1994 introduces three different methods of staging common in medieval England, while Southern 1975 and Crohn Schmitt 1972 debate what *The Castle of Perseverance* diagram actually depicts with regards staging practices. Garner 1987 and Wright 2019 take a different approach, foregrounding and reinstating the physical and embodied nature of performance, privileging liveness and the experiential over the textual or the verbal as the main vectors of meaning making.

Crohn Schmitt, Natalie. "Was There a Medieval Theatre in the Round?". In *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*. Edited by J. Taylor and Alan Nelson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972. Pp. 295–315.

A response to Southern's speculative and influential proposal that the diagram accompanying *The Castle of Perseverance* depicts a theatre-in-the-round (see *Southern 1975*). Schmitt persuasively argues that the sketch should be understood as a set design, and in particular that the ditch should surround the central Castle scaffold only, drawing on the imagery, theology and allegories of confession in support of her argument, as well as other literary uses of the allegorical castle.

Denny, Neville. "Aspects of the Staging of *Mankind*." *Medium Aevum* 43 (1974): 252–63.

Queries earlier assumptions that *Mankind* was performed by a travelling company and the attendant claims for the size of the acting troupe and for doubling. Instead, Denny returns to features of the Mummers' play apparent in the surviving text, which suggest a level of improvisation and has implications for staging practices and performance.

Enders, Jody. "Allegory Plays". *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55.2 (2015): 447-464.

Drawing on two rhetorical treatises popular in the Middle Ages, this article seeks to redress modern assumptions that allegory doesn't make good theatre. Resituating morality plays (and its sister modes) in the context of rhetorical theory and practice, Enders realigns the comic and the serious to illustrate how allegory 'plays' as enjoyable, funny, and effective drama.

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Garner, Stanton B. "Theatricality in *Mankind* and *Everyman*." *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987): 272–85.

Dismissing the implicit Aristotelian bias which had previously rejected morality plays as effective drama, this article privileges the embodied, physical, and experiential immediacy of performance over the verbal and the textual to show how the plays capitalize on their own 'theatricality' to create meaning.

Nichols, Ann Eljenholm. "Costume in the Moralities: The Evidence of East Anglian Art". *Comparative Drama* 20 (1986–87): 305–14.

Identifies the Penance panels on late-fifteenth-century seven-sacrament baptismal fonts, sculpted in and unique to East Anglia, as potential evidence for the costumes, props and action of the English morality plays.

Southern, Richard. *The Medieval Theatre in the Round: A Study of the Staging of The Castle of Perseverance*. 2nd edn. Faber & Faber, 1975.

A radical, highly-speculative and influential study first published in 1957. Southern argues that the famous sketch accompanying *The Castle of Perseverance* is a depiction of a theatre-in-the-round and indicative of a wide-spread theatrical tradition. Though its arguments have largely been overturned in the intervening years, it is still worth reading as an important moment in the critical history of English morality plays and the impetus behind many later scholarly studies.

Twycross, Meg, and Sarah Carpenter. *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

Characteristic of both Carpenter's and Twycross' work, this careful, detailed, rich study explores the practices, effects and purposes of English masking in the medieval and early modern period. Readers will find it generally useful and illuminating with regards performance practice, but there is also a chapter expressly devoted to masks and masking in the morality plays.

Twycross, Meg. "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. 37–84.

An introduction to and exploration of the variety of staging conventions in medieval English drama. Focusing on the practicalities of putting on a play, the essay discusses pageant wagons, place-and-scaffold, and indoor performances in a great hall. While not focused expressly on morality plays, the discussion draws on evidence from all three of the Macro Plays, and a selection of later Tudor moral interludes.

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Wright, Clare. 'Empathy with the Devil: Body, Movement and Kinesthetic Empathy in *The Castle of Perseverance*,' *Theatre Survey* 60.2 (2019): 179-206.

Centering attention on an audience's embodied experiences of and interaction with performance, this article explores the dramaturgical potential of a kinesthetic response to the highly-active, physically exuberant bodies of sins and vices in *The Castle of Perseverance*.

The Morality Play in Early Modern England

Although often thought to be a medieval dramatic genre, the majority of surviving playtexts in the Anglophone morality play tradition were composed in the sixteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century scholars like Spivak 1958 and Bevington 1969 began to look back to the earlier medieval and early Tudor dramatic traditions in order to understand more fully the later works of commercial playwrights like Shakespeare and Marlowe. Bevington 1968 and Walker 1991 and 1998 focus more expressly on Tudor drama and its relationship to politics, while Happé 2000 and Craik 1958 explore the plays in and of themselves, offering insights into the conventions and practices specific to Tudor moral plays and interludes.

Bevington, David. *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Argues that most plays written between the reigns of Henry VII and Elizabeth I are informed by and responding to specific political circumstances. Though not expressly about the morality tradition, the book remains relevant for its detailed observation of the trends, circumstances and contexts to which the morality play format was adapted in the early modern period. Precursor to the work of Walker 1991 and Walker 1998.

Bevington, David. *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962.

An influential and formative study. Explores what was then understood as a 'popular' and 'native' English dramatic tradition that profoundly influenced later early modern playwrights like Marlowe. Ground-breaking in its day, the book's arguments have been problematized by many later critics who are troubled, in particular, by its teleological approach which continues to privilege the commercial theatre and reinstates an evolutionary narrative of dramatic progression.

Craik, T.W.. *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume and Acting*. Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1958.

Foregrounds the performance of interlude drama, including a great number of 'moral interludes'. In focusing on the staging and performance of the plays, Craik advocates for

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their dramaturgical value and sophistication which can be obscured by exploring them solely as literary artefacts.

Happé, Peter, ed.. *Tudor Theatre: Allegory in the Theatre*. Theta 5. Bern: Peter Lang, 2000.

An edited collection of essays by leading scholars emerging from the seventh round table on Tudor drama, held in Tours in 1997. Focusing broadly on the use of allegory in performance, the collection offers an insight into the wider dramatic, aesthetic and intellectual allegorical traditions to which morality plays contributed and of which they were a part.

Spivack, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Most Major Villains*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Seeks to explain the mysteries of Shakespeare's villains in terms of the medieval dramatic traditions that informed them, specifically those relating to the morality plays' personifications of sin and the charismatic figure of the Vice. The study pitches an evolutionary model of dramatic progression which has now been widely dismissed, but represents an important moment in scholarship, emphasizing the dramatic traditions Shakespeare inherited and so the irrelevance of analyses based on the assumptions of naturalism.

Wasson, John. "The Morality Play: Ancestor of Elizabethan Drama?" *Comparative Drama* 13.3 (1979): 201-21.

Argues against the widely-held view that morality plays were models for Elizabethan drama.

Walker, Greg. *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Examines the interaction between politics and drama in the tumultuous reign of Henry VIII, developing a line of argument followed up in *Walker 1998* that drama in this period should be understood as a political act in itself and not only reflective of a political moment. Includes discussions of plays that adapt the morality play format, like *Hick Scorner*, *Magnyfycence* and *King Johan*.

Walker, Greg. *Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Builds on the arguments made in *Walker 1991*, focusing expressly on great hall plays or interludes composed between the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, many of which adapt the morality play format. Walker argues that these plays, understood specifically in the context of courtly and noble households in which they were performed, represent a politicized form and can contribute to a fuller understanding of English Renaissance culture and politics.

French *Moralités*

Scholarship on the French *moralité* tradition is not as extensive as that concerning *le mystères*, even though around seventy playtexts survive. See the separate *Oxford Bibliographies* article “French Drama” [OBO/9780195396584-0061] for online translations of medieval French plays and a more extensive range of scholarship of medieval French drama in general.

Editions

Editions of these plays are hard to come by for most Anglophone students and English translations are extremely rare. The editions by Aubrilly and Roy 1990 and Cohen 1975 emphasize the highly political nature of French morality plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Aubrilly, Jena-Claude and Bruno Roy, eds.. *Deux Moralités de la Fin du Moyen-Âge et du Temps des Guerres de Religion: Excellence, Science, Paris et Peuple, Mars et Justice*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990.

A critical edition of two French morality plays dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both of which are highly topical and political in their subjects. The earlier *Excellence, Science, Paris et Peuple* (c. 1465-1468) relates to the League of the Public Weal, the editors suggest, while *Mars et Justice* speaks specifically to the tension and violence between Catholics and the Huguenots during the Wars of Religion.

Cohen, Gustave, ed. *Mysteres et moralités du manuscrit 617 de Chantilly, publiés la première fois et précédés d'une étude linguistique et littéraire*. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975.

Originally published in 1920, this edition, while very much of its critical moment, remains valuable for its detailed philological and historical study of the plays. The three moralities edited here are *La Moralité Sept Peches Mortels et des Sept Vertus*, *La Moralité de l'Alliance de Foy et Loyauté* and *La Jeux de Pelerinage Humaine*.

Critical Studies

The critical studies selected offer both general introductions to French drama in the Middle Ages (Clark 2017, Frank 1960, Knight 1991) and more specific topics and problems relating to its study (Knight 1989, 1983a, 1983b).

Clark, Robert. “The Early “Anglo-Norman” and French Tradition”. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance*. Edited by Pamela M. King. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. 42-59.

Focusing on the Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam*, this essay provides a useful introduction to current research in medieval French dramatic traditions.

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Frank, Grace. *The Medieval French Drama*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

First published in 1954, this monumental study introduces all of the major genres of French medieval drama. While there is no single chapter dedicated to the *moralités*, there are short discussions of individual plays and Chantilly *Musée Conde* MS 617, which contains three morality plays. Despite its age, the book remains a scholarly touchstone, and Frank made a number of important observations that have shaped critical approaches.

Knight, Alan E. "From Model to Problem: The Development of the Hero in the French Morality Play" In *Everyman and Company: Essays on the Theme and Structure of the European Moral Play*. Edited by David Gilman. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp. 75-89.

This essay offers an essential introduction to the *moralités* and their connection with later French drama through an exploration of the plays' protagonists.

Knight, Alan E. *Aspects of Genre in Late Medieval French Drama*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983.

Highlighting the issues of imposing anachronistic concepts of genre onto medieval drama, this book seeks instead to understand late-medieval French drama on its own terms, and to argue for genres based on the opposition between historical and fictional content, with subdivisions within each category.

Knight, Alan E. "France". In Eckehard 1991 (under *Comparative Studies and Edited Collections*) Pp. 151-68.

An important historiographical account of scholarship on medieval French theatre in general up to 1991. This essay will help orientate students new to the subject, providing some discussion and description of a selection of plays (including morality plays) alongside scholarship.

Knight, Alan E. "The Condemnation of Pleasure in Late Medieval French Morality Plays". *The French Review* 57.1 (1983): 1-9.

Explores a selection of plays dealing with the condemnation of the pleasures of the flesh, specifically in relation to late-medieval bourgeois culture and values.

The Low Countries: *Spelen van Sinne*

The morality play tradition in the Low Countries was dominated by the Chambers of Rhetoric, fraternal organizations dedicated to the writing and recital of poetry and drama that were common in the region throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many of the Chambers held drama competitions, encouraging the creation of some of the most innovative and creative plays of the period anywhere in Europe. Characteristic of the Rhetoricians' drama were the *sinneken*, figures both similar to and markedly different from the English Vice. For a more general selection of

scholarship on premodern drama in the Low Countries, see the separate Oxford Bibliographies article **Dutch Theatre and Drama** [OBO/9780195396584-0089].

Editions and Translations

The work by scholars like Strietman and Potter 1994, King 1986 and Davidson, Walsh and Broos 2007 (under **British Isles: Editions and Anthologies**) have made some of these astonishing plays accessible to an English-speaking readership who are starting to attend more to the detailed, rich and important scholarship in this corner of the field.

Davidson, Clifford, Martin W. Walsh and Ton J. Broos, eds. *Everyman and Its Dutch Original, Elckerlijc*. TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007.

Gives equal weight to both the English and the Dutch text, placing them side-by-side with a modern English translation of the Middle Dutch play in the footnotes. See Davidson, Walsh and Broos 2007 under **British Isles and Ireland: Editions and Anthologies**.

King, Peter. "The Voluptuous Man: Introduced and Translated by Peter King". *Dutch Crossing* 10.28 (1986): 523-107.

A lively, if colloquially-outdated, modern English translation which gives a good sense of the original verse form and linguistic variation. Includes a brief introduction to the text.

Strietman, Elsa, and Robert Potter, trans. and ed. *Een Esbattement van sMenschen Sin en Verganckelijcke Schoonheit (Man's Desire and Fleeting Beauty)*.(Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1994.

A unique and fascinating example of Rhetoricians' drama, given a fresh, lively translation by Strietman and Potter with the Dutch original on the facing page. The introduction provides some key information for understanding the play, including the play's urban contexts, the activities of the Chambers of Rhetoric, staging practices, and the use of allegory.

Critical Studies

For introductions to and general overviews of the Rhetoricians Drama, see Hummelen 1989, Strietman 2017, and Strietman and Happé 2006. Hüsken 1996, Happé and Hüsken 1995 focus specifically on the figure of the *sinnekins*. See also Steenbrugge 2014 under **Comparative Studies and Edited Collections**.

Happé, Peter, and Wim Hüsken. "'Sinnekins' and the Vice: Prolegomena." *Comparative Drama* 29.2 (Summer 1995): 248-269.

Makes the case for a comparative study of the Dutch *sinnekins* and the English Vice.

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Hummelen, W.M.H., "The Drama of the Dutch Rhetoricians". In Gilman, 1989 (under *Comparative Studies and Edited Collections*).

From a pioneer of research into medieval drama in the Low Countries, this contribution provides a very helpful summary of the extensive and unique drama created by the *Rederijkamers* (Chambers of Rhetoric), amateur literary guilds pervasive in the towns and villages of the medieval and sixteenth-century Low Countries.

Hüsken, Wim. "Between Evil and Temptation: *Sinnekens* in Rhetoricians Drama from 's-Gravenpolder." *Dutch Crossing* 20.2 (1996): 128–147.

Re-evaluates previous definitions and understandings of the sinnekens, Vice-like characters unique to Rhetoricians' drama of the Low Countries and especially prominent in the sixteenth-century.

Strietman, Elsa. "Playing in Northern Europe: Setting the Stage for the Low Countries". In *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance*. Edited by Pamela M. King. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. Pp. 81-96.

An introduction to Rhetoricians' drama, discussing some key contexts for the plays and a selection of plays that exemplify, for instance, specific genres, staging, different occasions and purposes for performance. The essay also includes some helpful references to existing editions and translations, and a brief historiographical overview of shifting popular and scholarly attitude to the plays.

Strietman, Elsa and Peter Happé, eds. *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400-1625*. Turnhout: Belgium, 2006.

An indispensable volume with essays covering the full range of plays produced and performed in the late medieval and the early modern Low Countries. The editors' introduction provides important cultural, religious political and historical contexts, and although not all of the essays deal expressly with the *spelen van sinne*, readers will benefit from reading the volume in its entirety, to gain a full understanding of the dramatic, cultural and material contexts in which the *spelen van sinne* emerged. There is, in addition, an important final chapter by Femke Kramer which examines the modern performance of medieval Dutch plays.

Italy, the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish Empire

The evidence for morality play traditions elsewhere in Europe is more patchy as compared with France, England and the Low Countries. The most extensive appears to be that of premodern Spain, which is comparatively late but unique and astonishingly bold, a product of the particular cultural, religious and political circumstances of that region (see Gitlitz 1989 and the separate Oxford

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Bibliographies entry *Iberian Theatre and Performance* [OBO/9780195396584-0008]. It is perhaps this tradition that inspired the Bolivian *Narrative of the Seven Deadly Sins*, which was still performed when observed by Harris 2000. There is little indication of a morality tradition in either premodern Germany or Italy, at least as it appears in other countries, though the Italian *Sacra Rappresentazione* does employ similar allegorical techniques and devices (see Radcliff-Umstead 1989). For more scholarship on medieval German and Italian drama, see the separate Oxford Bibliographies entries *German Drama* [OBO/9780195396584-0134] and *Italian Drama* [OBO/9780195396584-0023].

Gitlitz, David M. "Carvajal's *Cortes de la Muerte*: The Political Implications of a Sixteenth-Century Spanish Morality Play". In Gilman 1989. Pp. 111-128 (under *Comparative Studies and Edited Collections*).

This essay opens with an overview of pre-modern Spanish drama before proceeding to explore Miguel de Carvajal's extraordinary *Las cortes de la muerte* (1557), a play that uses examines the theme of religious conversion, focusing on both Spain's 'new-Christians' (Jews forced to convert to Catholicism) and the indigenous Americans subjugated by Spanish invaders. In the course of the essay, Gitlitz illustrates the uniqueness of pre-modern Spanish drama, which shaped by its particular cultural, social and religious contexts.

Harris, Max. 'A Bolivian Morality Play: Saint Michael and the Sins of the Carnival Virgin.' *European Medieval Drama* 5 (2002): 83-98.

Describes, contextualizes and analyzes the *Narrative of the Seven Deadly Sins*, a morality play performed annually during Carnival in Oruro, an Andean mining town, from perhaps as early as the sixteenth-century. The study highlights how the form adapts to and is affected by changes in place, occasion, and cultural context.

Radcliff-Umstead, Douglas. "The Miraculous in the Italian *Sacra Rappresentazione*." In Gilman 1989, pp. 91-109 (under *Comparative Studies and Edited Collections*).

Discusses the *Sacra Rappresentazione*, a dramatic tradition particular to Italy which portrays the human struggle with and triumph over temptation, and the route to human salvation. While few of these plays have abstract allegorical figures, some do include elements that may be comparable to morality plays elsewhere in Europe.