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Everyman, a Modern Adaptation (Or, Number's Down)

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**EVERYMAN, A MODERN ADAPTATION,
(OR, NUMBER'S DOWN)**

By

Merrick Robison

Honors Capstone Project

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

for partial fulfillment of the requirements for

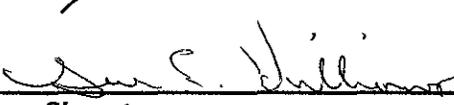
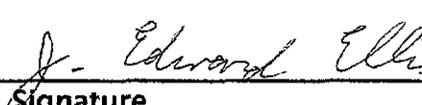
GRADUATION WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS

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Merrick Robison

Pre-Production Deliverables for
Honors Capstone Project,

Everyman, a Modern Adaptation
(or, *Number's Down*)

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Everyman, a Modern Adaptation (or, Number's Down) Honors Proposal

Purpose

Everyman is the most well known morality play that came out of the turn of the 16th century. Innumerable amounts of people have seen it in performance, both in the 1500s and modern day, since its revivals at the turn of the 20th century. It is a common choice of performance both on the professional and college level, and offers many opportunities for adaptation and modernization. The purpose for the project is to research the production and literary history of *Everyman* in order to write, produce, direct and perform in a modern adaptation of the morality play so it may speak to today's audience. Some questions that may be answered during this process include: What issues and moral or religious questions that are prominent in *Everyman* should be highlighted in the modern production? Should certain portions of the play be cut, added to, or switched around, or should the play be left in the sequence that it is? Should the modern production be completely serious, or should slight humorous articles a contemporary audience would relate to be included for comic relief? What message should the play leave in the audience's mind? These are the main points that may be answered through the preliminary research, the concept statement and adaptation in script form. Merrick Robison

Review of Related Literature

A Summary of the Analysis of the Morality Play *Everyman*

Everyman, almost by definition, is a sermon placed into dramatic form. The argument from the time on why it was created is whether it is truly a didactic tool or purely a form of dramatic literature. To understand *Everyman* and to truly comprehend its form, both views must be taken into account. T. S. Eliot said,

The religious and the dramatic are not merely combined, but wholly fused.

Everyman is on the one hand the human soul in extremity, and on the other any man in any dangerous position from which we wonder how he is going to escape—with as keen interest as that with which we wait for the escape of the film hero, bound and helpless in a hut to which his enemies are about to set fire. (Laan 465)

In his study of the comparison of *Everyman* to the Flemish *Elckerlyc*, expert in English literature Henry Vocht found the teaching side of *Everyman* to be extremely important: “Like the mysteries, the original play was not composed for anything else but for the didactic, proselytic purpose of making every man of the audience think of salvation: for causing him to live a better and more religious life so as to prepare him for a good death” (2). Bertolt Brecht once said, “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” This theatre piece was being used as a hammer. It is more than a sermon, and it is more than a piece of art. It is essentially a didactic work of art. Unlike a lot of mystery plays, *Everyman* does not use great fear as its main teaching tool. “Despite its several severe warnings, *Everyman* is essentially reassuring in its estimation of man's chances for salvation. Its purpose is not to terrify but to edify” (Kaula 10). In looking at the form of the climactic work, one can see that the play is a very well thought out, intelligent representation of the process by which one may be saved. It also teaches the medieval concept of friendship, and uses a sermon-like form to make its point known. This form of spiritual truth has survived the test of time, teaching God’s eternal plan through an earthly piece of art.

Everyman was written as a didactic piece in a dramatic form. As Lawrence Ryan states, “Thus in any judgment of its effectiveness, one must bear this conception in mind” (722). Ryan believes that this concept has been lost on modern audiences, and the work has been seen as purely dramatic. William Poel, who revived the play in the early 20th century, and was a catalyst

to making the play known again in modern times, said about the play, "I did not myself produce *Everyman* as a religious play" (722). He even goes so far as to say the theology of the play could be torn to pieces, and views the play just as a beautiful piece of art. Ryan however, sees this point of view as entirely false. He responds to Poel's and opinions from other controversialists on the subject, saying, "they fail to get at the essential point about *Everyman*-that is, the relationship between the doctrine that the author wishes to present and the dramatic means he employs to convey that doctrine to his audience" (722). Ryan believes that to ignore the doctrinal content of *Everyman* is to ignore the reason for the existence of *Everyman*, and that the artistic value of the piece cannot be known and appreciated fully without the theology it contains. He argues that it is not the action that is important, but instead what is vital is a knowledge and "comprehension of what the action signifies" (723).

The purpose of the writing of *Everyman* was to put Catholic doctrine into dramatic form. Ryan asserts that the playwright succeeded, bringing theology through the actions of the representational characters. This is trickier than at first glance. First, according to Christian and specifically Catholic theology, one cannot save oneself. Only through Jesus' death on a cross and one's accepting of that gift may one be saved. However, after the repentance and acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice, one must continue to "cooperate with grace," living well and doing good deeds in order to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. To not follow this command is seen as a "grave sin of omission," and can jeopardize one's salvation. James 2:17 states, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" and later, in verse 24: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." The playwright had to present both sides of this plan of grace in a way that did not downplay either element. There is another part of Catholic theology that states that one must have a membership in the church in order to be saved, which the play follows, but with a warning toward corrupt priests. Therefore, the morality is far more

complicated than the simple lesson, “Do good deeds and you will be saved.” The play outlines the entire process of man’s part in grace, and succeeds in the teaching of the theology necessary to participate in God’s redemptive power (Ryan 724).

Another lesson that is found in *Everyman* is the medieval view of the doctrine of friendship. According to John Conley, “The doctrine of friendship in this morality is accordingly worth examining even though our conclusion can be anticipated, namely, that this doctrine consists of the essential commonplaces of the mediaeval doctrine of friendship” (374). Conley outlines what is known by some as the first law of friendship: that a friend cannot be called true until that friendship has been tested. Death admonishes Everyman to find a true friend, one of the inconsistencies with the Flemish version of the play, *Elckerlyc*. In fact, many references of friendship are found in *Everyman*, but not in *Elckerlyc*. As articulated in the ancient study of friendship, Cicero’s *De amicitia* (c. 44 B.C.E.), adversity is needed to find a true friend. Clearly Everyman had surrounded himself with pseudo-friends, who all abandon him to his fate when they are really needed. Only Good Deeds remains, fulfilling Cicero’s criteria of a true friend: that it is lasting, for “In *De amicitia* (ix 32) we are told: ‘For on the assumption that advantage is the cement of friendship, if advantage were removed friendships would fall apart; but since nature is unchangeable, therefore true friendships are eternal’” (377). Conley states that true friendship should last till after the grave, as indeed does Good Deeds’ friendship.

The structural form of *Everyman* has been written on by many a pen. Ryan finds two points of climax in the morality, both being when his two sets of friends leave Everyman. This accents the idea that Everyman is alone in the world. This is displayed even at the beginning, when Death finds Everyman walking alone. This makes Everyman more of a pathetic figure that the audience can sympathize with, highlighting the dramatic side of the play. He is abandoned by all the things he felt were important in his mortal life, all things that were passing and transitory,

things that could not survive the passage to eternity. Everyman is presented with all of these mortal friends in the order in which the increasing danger is shown with his attachment to them. This careful distinction differs from other works of the same nature, which aren't always as careful of the order of physical distractions (Ryan 726). This order climactically leads to the discovery of Good Deeds, and the turn of Everyman's fortunes and the play. Good Deeds introduces Everyman to Knowledge (of his sin), who in turn introduced him to Confession, and therefore the means by which Good Deeds is freed and Everyman is saved. Everyman is then given natural endowments that will help him on his journey: Beauty, Discretion, Strength, and Five Wits –internal, mortal friends as opposed to the external that had deserted him before. However, these aids also leave him in the end, as they too cannot be relied upon too heavily for spiritual salvation, and Good Deeds is the only one that may accompany Everyman into his grave (729). Unlike Everyman's first disappointments, these four attributes that leave him this time are inherently good, and do not lie to Everyman when they pledge themselves to him. They say no such boasts as going as far as hell with him, but he is so elated with their appearances that he doesn't listen carefully and clearly believes they will be with him until the end. The audience is as surprised as Everyman when his physical attributes leave him in the natural order: first Beauty, then Strength, then Discretion, then Five Wits. This, Ryan states, gives the play the second climax, when Everyman is once again (almost) all alone. Surprisingly, even Knowledge does not accompany him to the grave, teaching that "even the redeemed Christian in the state of grace is capable of forgetting that his natural properties and accidents are in themselves not the instruments of salvation" (731). The second abandonment is important, and gives *Everyman* the truly dramatic form that makes it so important, according to Ryan. To be abandoned by one's friends is one thing, and is almost expected. But the lesson of the morality is only truly learned when one understands that one cannot even rely on any part of oneself. Thomas Van Laan, noted

scholar, agrees with this two-part structure. First a rising action follows Everyman's falling fortunes, culminating in Good's abandonment. Then the rising action pushes Everyman's rising fortunes, ending with his acceptance into heaven. Laan states that this form is also mirrored in the Prologue and Epilogue:

The prologue and epilogue clearly distinguish a two-part structure. One movement, a falling action, occupies approximately the first half of the play; it traces Everyman's decline in fortune from Death's entrance, which shatters the apparent serenity of his life, to the depth of his despair, where he can foresee only eternal damnation. The second movement, a rising action, carries him from this nadir to his final salvation, symbolized by the words of the welcoming Angel (Laan 466).

The only instance when Everyman leaves the stage is when he receives the final sacraments from a priest. This gives way to the opportunity for a small sermon from Knowledge and Five Wits about the importance of the sacraments and holy and honest clergy. This marks the significance and importance of the idea of the sacraments and the role of the Catholic Church, and cannot be ignored, although it may seem a little odd to interrupt the action (734).

There is much evidence to suggest that "*Everyman* was based on the form of the medieval textual sermon" (Peek 159). When compared to different sermons of the time, namely *Redde Rationem Villacationis Tue* by Wimbleton, there is a distinct structural parallel. These comparisons help to explain certain "digressive" beginnings and endings to morality plays, *Everyman* in particular, and might explain why morality drama was so popular in its time. Medieval sermons generally followed the following outline: Theme, Protheme, Introduction of Theme, Division and Subdivision, and probably a Conclusion. The Theme was the scripture reading of the day, the purpose of the sermon. In *Everyman*, this could be the story of the

Messenger, who explains the purpose of the actions taking place. The Protheme began as a prayer, but evolved into facts of authorities on the Theme, like theologians or other scripture references. The Introduction of the Theme expanded upon the theme, catching the listener's attention and giving reasons why the theme was important, usually as a narrative. God's monologue could very well be considered the Introduction to the Theme in *Everyman*, as he outlines why he is sending Death to call man to a reckoning. The Division was the core of the sermon, giving different Principles expounding on the Theme. The Subdivision gave specific references and dissected the Theme even further. This would be most of the body of *Everyman*, as the audience is lead through the plot, and given reasons why certain characters may not accompany Everyman to his grave. The Conclusion of a sermon was about the same as one would be today, wrapping up what was said and restating the Theme (159). The Angel and Doctor both play a part in *Everyman's* Conclusion. Why *Everyman* is compared to Wimbledon's sermon is the similarities in the Theme, the death of man and how he may be saved. Wimbledon, however, expounds on the disaster of an unsaved soul after death (160). Using Wimbledon's sermon, as well as others, one can draw the conclusion that *Everyman* was very much related to the sermon literature of its time, and sold well because it was dramatized, which would be far more exciting than a sermon from behind the pulpit.

Expert and professor of English literature Henry De Vocht did an extensive study on the comparison of *Everyman* to its Flemish counterpart, *Elckerlyc*, using dramatic and written structure to help form a conclusion on which play was the original. On the whole, Vocht found that the structure used in *Everyman* when compared to *Elckerlyc* made the English play the obvious original. Vocht commented, "The English text appears far superior in sense and conception, and its 'dark' passages are only so because the matter treated is not well understood for want of acquaintance with the subject; whereas the Flemish morality is unintelligible and

even inaccurate in many places” (1). Vocht saw that while the theology and doctrine in the English play was carefully planned to the line and placement, the Flemish playwright seemed to have concentrated more on purely the translating of the play, while even leaving out important themes. Certain literary ideas in the English play have been criticized, such as the differences in repeating ideas in the text:

it has been pointed out that when an idea or an image occurs in the play for a second or a third time, the Flemish morality uses identical words, and has consequently been praised for being ‘far more exact in its quotations of, or references to, previous passages’; whereas *Everyman* is found fault with for using other words and forms. Instead of a shortcoming, that continual changing of terms and expressions is rather a quality based on the author’s wealth of thought and imagination. Indeed, instead of just repeating what has been said before, new ideas are added, or the object is looked at from a different angle (99).

The metric pattern of *Everyman* has also come under heavy fire by critics, who claim that the irregularities in the meter give evidence that it is the copy. Vocht disagrees however, stating that the Flemish play had a similar irregularity in its writing, giving no more evidence that *Elckerlyc* was the original.

Through many years, *Everyman* has been known as a teaching piece of dramatic literature. Using sermon structure, spiritual themes, and dramatic elements, the anonymous playwright created a work that has spanned many generations, and continues to speak to audiences far removed from those who first saw it in performance. A lesson must be learned by the end of the play, for that is its purpose. Through art, a way has been found to teach salvation; therefore, the message of Christ may reach those that would never think to enter a church.

Everyman: a Concise History of the Medieval Morality Play

"*Everyman* is generally considered to be the greatest of all morality plays. Certainly it has been produced over the longest span of centuries and is still given by theatre, church, and school widely and frequently" (Bates 3). The morality play as a genre of theatre enjoyed a flourishing period of popularity beginning in the late 15th century and lasting through the mid-16th century. However, most of these plays have survived time and are still studied and performed today. *Everyman* is known as the most popular and famous morality play and, though it was written by an anonymous author, is still the most studied and performed of its genre. To know the details of this well-known morality play the history of the play itself must be studied. The roots of morality theatre are found in medieval sermons, and the didactic nature of the play makes this very apparent. *Everyman* has a distinctive style and form very similar to other plays of the genre, and its purpose is the same as well. By studying the play, one may see what was important to the people of the era, and may certainly see the role of the Catholic Church in the time, or at least what it was thought to have been. This morality play has had a long performance career, and stood the test of time, to be known as the "greatest of all morality plays."

To understand *Everyman*, one must understand the morality play as a genre. Beginning in the late 15th century, these plays were known as a visual representation of medieval sermons. As Robert Potter states, "The mixture of doctrine and realism in the morality play has its origins in this preaching tradition, and the immediate sources of allegory in the morality play are almost invariably found in medieval sermon literature" (20). Many similarities between the morality play and medieval sermon literature are found. In both there is an emphasis on the coming wrath and judgment, and ways were shown to avoid these punishments, like keeping away from the seven deadly sins (20). Morality plays became popular in churches because of their visual

qualities, "For if a picture is worth a thousand words, the visual impact of the homiletic play must have been worth many sermons" (Pineas 157). For instance, the physical bonds of sin and immorality upon *Everyman's Good Deeds* could be physically seen by the audience, adding a feeling of reality that words alone could not produce (158). The morality plays could both teach and prove Christian doctrine, using ritual. In *Everyman*, the emphasis on both repentance and penance teaches the audience how to come under Christ with instructions from Knowledge and Confession, and shows the lesson with very specific actions from *Everyman* himself. One sermon title related to *Everyman* could be, *The Necessary Sacrament of Repentance and How It Must Be Done*. Because of God's intercession into the timeline of humanity with the Incarnation and Crucifixion, these actions of repentance were seen as a necessary response (Davidson 122). Another connection between medieval sermons and morality plays is the view of the Catholic Church. Since the plays were performed in the Church, they had a specific stance on the purpose of the Church and its leaders. *Everyman* itself has specific passages that speak of the Church and its roles in the society it was written in. The Catholic Church was very much shown as a necessary way to God, and was given authority in early morality plays. The Church was shown as the interpreter of the Word of God, and the laws of the Church were seen as a necessary part of being a Christian. Rainer Pineas states, "The old morality homilized in an atmosphere in which everyone acknowledged the authority of the Church to determine what was evil and what was good and in which there was general agreement on the meaning of these terms" (165). This contrasted, however, with the morality plays that were written after the Reformation. These morality plays had two objectives: to first condemn the way of the Catholic Church, then to show the way to live a holy life without the laws of the old Church (166). These plays were still

preachy however, fitting with the genre of “the repentance drama we call the morality play” (Potter 29).

Morality plays were known to have certain theatrical aspects that defined them. Stemming from medieval sermons, these plays had a distinct form that most adhered to. In *Everyman* specifically, there are several characteristics that help make it a morality play. One especially important concept, “what it means to be human,” is represented in morality, and is dramatized through actions of the characters (6). Action was not a large part of these dramas; more important was the story of the human condition, the ideas of “innocence/fall/redemption” (8). Morality plays are a representation of the human life cycle. Some critics have suggested that *Everyman* does not have a definite time span, that in fact the play could represent Everyman’s entire life. This idea agrees with Potter, who states, “The human drama of a morality play is a[...]presentation of the lifecycle. Beginning in innocence man falls by exercise of free will and appetite into a dilemma of his own making. From these depths, however, he is inexorably delivered by divine grace to achieve salvation and eternal life” (10). The plot is aided by the characters through use of allegory. Usually the plot is conveyed by action, though many times the plot is advanced by the miniature sermon of one of the Virtues in the play. These Virtues, as well as some Vices found in medieval literature, point the way to heaven and the process to get there (Pineas 159). These plays can get ‘preachy’ due to their content, but their goal is to always find Truth. “At the end of a traditional Morality Play, vital lessons have been learned; good and evil have been defined” (Godshalk 70).

This leads to the purpose of the morality play. As defined by Pineas, “The Primary object of most pre-Reformation morality plays was to teach their audience the means of salvation” (157). Morality is steeped heavily in the medieval drama tradition, which found its roots in the

passion plays of the era. Histories were the main subject of most other types of medieval plays, contrasting with the goal of morality plays as showing the life and troubles of the individual man (Potter 6).

There are several theories that have to do with origins of *Everyman*, as well as all morality plays. Although the immediate history of morality plays is based upon medieval preaching, traces of the type of allegory found in the plays have been found in the *Psychomachia*, an epic poem from the Romans in the 300s. This story as well as morality plays uses personified vices and virtues to show the dilemma over man's soul (7). *Everyman*'s story is also found in "Barlaam and Jehosophat," a religious romance that John of Damascus was credited with authoring before 770. The form that is found in the play is sometimes credited to Petrus Doralindus of Diest, a Dutch priest. From there, the play found popularity in England around 1500 (Bates 3). There has been quite an argument as to whether *Everyman* or its Flemish sister play *Elckerlyc* is the original. Though there are many different arguments given on both sides of the discussion, scholar H. Vocht has concluded that *Everyman* contains the origin of the plot, stating, "mistakes against logic, inconsistencies, inexactitudes and want of appropriate terms, apparently the result of a preponderant care for the outward form, betray that the Flemish text is the work of a translator, who was not at all on his own ground when treating the subject, in so far that he introduced into his version unidiomatic expressions and words with an unusual meaning, which evidently betray the English original" (5).

Through *Everyman* several aspects of society and life in the early 16th century are viewed. Even though the Catholic Church is held in high regard in the play, the priesthood itself is also called into account. Pineas articulates, "while the forces of good are at pains to uphold the authority of the Church and its priesthood as a means of salvation, they do not neglect to point

out that some priests fail to live up to the prescribed ideal[...]the author of *Everyman*, after eulogizing good priests, has Knowledge make a similar complaint about clerical immorality” (159). The plot also shows what the Church, and therefore the general public believed was necessary to be saved under Christ. The full order of confession, penance, chastisement, and sorrow are all included in Everyman’s journey to his grave, if one is to believe he is to end in heaven or paradise.

Everyman was performed in the traditional medieval style, with guilds supplying actors and the Church providing costumes (Jacobus 206). The verse is somber and contains a high poetic quality, and a company of around ten actors usually took the stage for each performance (Potter 31). The staging could be very elaborate; however, *Everyman* does not descend into hell as some other characters from other medieval plays did, so ‘Hell’s mouth’ was not entirely necessary for a production of this play, as it was in many other medieval plays. Extremely didactic in nature, actors take time to explain the nature and purpose of the play to the audience. This happens many times throughout the production, first in the prologue, where the introduction includes an explanation of the show, then many times throughout the performance when various characters, including Everyman himself, take the time to summarize what had happened in a certain situation and why. The play then concludes with several statements from the Angel and then from the Doctor, once again reiterating the purpose of the play.

Everyman enjoyed popularity for quite a while from the early to mid-1500s. Afterwards *Everyman* was lost to the world, rarely seen until it was revived by William Poel for the Elizabethan Stage Society of England around 1900, and it since has enjoyed a fairly steady production history, both professionally in London and on Broadway, and on many college and

amateur stages (Bates 3). *Everyman* is still a popular choice for productions in these venues to this day.

Through the many years of its existence, *Everyman* has proven to be the most popular play of its kind, as well as one of the ancestors of modern theatre. This morality play has seen revival upon revival, and theatre has been greatly affected by its influences. The tenure of *Everyman* shows its worth, and the study of this play brings to light many nuances of theatre as one knows it today. Through the study of its form, one may see its influence upon its descendants in theatre, and though it may seem slow and tedious by today's standards, the timeless truths found in its plot still apply today, giving the play its worth. Through *Everyman* one can see what the times it was written in were like, and can see the values of the age. Many adaptations of the play have placed it into the view of the modern audience, giving it an even more timeless appeal to people across the ages. There seems to be no end to what is possible with productions of this play, as generations adapt and modernize its timeless message of reckoning and judgment to reach successive contemporary audiences.

Researcher Reflections on *Everyman* and Modern Adaptation

I have fallen asleep in church. Not a lot, but I'll admit it. Usually it's during the sermon. The truths being taught have to do with my eternal soul, and I can still fall asleep. Sometimes I think if church were a little more interesting I would stay awake more often. This is perhaps one goal that the anonymous author of the medieval morality play *Everyman* had in mind when the play was written: to present the path of salvation in an interesting way to the general public. Unfortunately, I have also fallen asleep while viewing a recorded production of *Everyman* put on by a university. In writing a modern adaptation of the play, this goal of creating interest needs to

still be kept on the forefront of the mind. There is no point in creating a contemporary adaptation if it is still seen as boring. If the play doesn't speak to the audience, then the meaning is lost.

Therefore, a systematic look at the intent of the play and how it was carried out is necessary to reinterpret the script. A thorough examination of the characters, writing style, and important moments of the play help to cultivate an understanding of the piece that will in turn give tools to the writing of an adaptation that will speak to the modern audience. Then, perhaps, the interest an audience has will spark a curiosity towards eternal truths, and lead viewers down a path of self-realization, and perhaps salvation itself.

Everyman was written as an extremely didactic piece of literature. This is shown in the prologue and epilogue, both portions a point by point explanation of the events of the play. The morality also uses monologues to teach, narratives that follow each scene, a summation of what had happened, to make sure that each point of the play is fully understood by the audience. After *Everyman* is abandoned by each friend, he delivers a monologue in which he states who had left him, what they had said, and who he may go to next. The didactic qualities of this piece are what tie it together, and give it much of its form. They also seem to stop the action at times, slow the plot and 'pause the game,' so to speak. To the audience to which the play was written, these moments of reiteration would serve to drive the point home, and remind the audience just what exactly had happened, and what it could possibly mean. These are the sermon portions of the play. Therefore, because the play is rooted in medieval sermon literature, these points were necessary to convey the meaning of the scenes. To a modern audience these individual lessons may seem boring and unnecessary, one reason why the play could use adaptation. Keeping some of these points is something to be considered however, as the playwright may want to honor at least in some way the structure and intent of the original script. These moments could be

shortened, or done away with entirely, to keep the action moving. Some times for reflection may be necessary however, to give moments of rest for the audience in between scenes of progressive action. In this adaptation, these moments will be done away with, in the hopes that modern audiences can keep up with the action taking place.

So what is *Everyman* trying to teach exactly? There are several answers to this question, some more obvious than others. The most obvious lesson is that *Everyman* is showing the path to salvation, which is offered to every person through the death of Christ Jesus. This lesson would have been aimed at the 'lost' audience members, those who had not accepted Christ as a personal savior, or those that lived a pseudo-Christian life, giving witness to their salvation in word but not in deed. This lesson of salvation has to be a focal point in any adaptation of *Everyman* as well, for this is the reason the playwright put pen to paper. In no way can this message be made shallow, or be passed over.

The path to salvation in this morality play is through the Catholic Church, and doesn't seem possible without the Church. While this idea may be put to discussion in the modern church, this is still a main point in the original morality play. *Everyman* was written before the Reformation, before any denominations came into being, and the Catholic Church was the only body representing Christ. The playwright was most likely a Catholic priest, and preached salvation from a Catholic perspective. This presents an interesting dilemma. Should the adaptation stick to the Catholic perspective, even when written by a Protestant, more specifically a Nazarene? The Nazarene denomination does not place a large emphasis on penance, for example. This is a rather climactic point in the original script, as it is when *Everyman* scourges himself that Good Deeds is freed and is able to witness for *Everyman* in the afterlife (29). So the centrality of Christ's message will be heard, a very basic stance will be taken by the adaptation.

Saint Paul said, “Through [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:39 New International Version). This message is the basis of the Christian faith. How one may come about this salvation is thus, “That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10). This is how one may be saved. Penance, the scourging of the body, and the receiving of the sacraments by a priest, while perhaps beneficial to one's own walk with God, are not necessary to be saved according to the Bible. One may ask, “Why are Good Deeds necessary as well then?” Saint James clearly answers this question with, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone,” and “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:24,26). This dual order of faith and works is incredibly biblical, as man is first saved by Christ's death, then shows that he has given himself to Christ by the good works he does. One may not have good works without faith, and one cannot have true faith without outwardly showing it through good works. Therefore, what is true when it comes to basic Christian belief will be kept in the adaptation. Everything else may be altered or left out entirely.

This brings to light the importance of Good Deeds as a character. Good Deeds is the pivotal role in the play, bringing in other characters that help Everyman to receive eternal life. Good Deeds is so important that he is the only one who is able to follow Everyman into the grave. Without Good Deeds, according to the play, Everyman would be forever lost. The allegory relating to this character must be obvious. This character is knowledgeable about what must be done to assure Everyman's salvation. Good Deeds is placed directly in the middle of the play, with eight characters introduced before him, and eight after. He will take the physical form of

someone Everyman had wronged when in high school. Everyman and this boy had been in the same grade, had almost been friends. But when it came time to decide whether to do the right thing, or the popular thing, Everyman chose poorly, abandoning this boy to be the social outcast. This boy eventually committed suicide, something Everyman could have possibly prevented, had he invested in his classmates life, instead of going with the grain and against his own conscience. Good Deeds wants nothing more than to help Everyman achieve eternal life, and everything Good Deeds does is for Everyman alone. That is the purpose of the allegory of the character of Good Deeds, to show that he would be with Everyman during his reckoning with God and to be a witness for him during the final judgment. Whatever Good Deeds can do to help Everyman, he does, and he holds no grudges from what Everyman had done to him, placing him in chains and forgetting him alone in the corner. Good Deeds shows grace to Everyman and then salvation, introducing Knowledge.

Knowledge is also an incredibly important character in the lesson of *Everyman*.

Knowledge also wants nothing but to help Everyman reach eternal salvation, and introduces him to Confession, through which Everyman is saved (27). Knowledge is very understanding of the situation that Everyman is in, and can also be seen as a foil to the character of Goods.

Knowledge almost goes to the grave with Everyman, and outlasts all other characters except Good Deeds. What would this mean about the physical appearance of Knowledge? Since Goods could be viewed as a seductive woman, perhaps Knowledge could be the opposite, a 'Proverbs 31' type of woman, a wholesome feminine figure who guides instead of destructs. Knowledge could even be a young, innocent girl. The youngest are often seen as the wisest in literature.

Goods is another character necessary to explore. As mentioned, Goods could be viewed as a seductive woman, convincing Everyman to follow her away from God's plan to not attach

oneself to worldly possessions. However, Goods does mention that she/he is weighted down by what Goods is, the packs and bags that contain only worldly things (22). This would prevent Everyman from taking Goods anywhere else, keeping Goods forever on earth, where Goods can forever be passed from one person to the next, never leaving the confines of earth, always seducing the next person who comes along. This also opens the possibility of Goods as an on-screen character in a modern adaptation, recorded ahead of the production. Of course, relying on technology is always risky, and it would not allow for any changes to fit audiences, but the possibility is there. Goods is the last worldly friend to abandon Everyman, and this must be a poignant and biting point of rejection in Everyman's quest to find a companion to take to his reckoning. Goods alludes to Good Deeds (23), perhaps giving Everyman the idea to turn to Good Deeds after all else have failed. Leading up to Goods is the abandonment of Everyman by three other of his friends.

Fellowship, Cousin and Kindred are all cowards, not facing up to the friendship Everyman calls them to. Each promises to be with Everyman to his death, and each renege after they hear that this is what Everyman is requesting of them. These would probably be the same actors along with Goods that would portray the physical attributes towards the end of the play.

What may be visualized of these physical attributes, Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits are as follows. They are symbolic representations of traits of Everyman, therefore they are a part of him, theoretically. What may be done then is to take the same costume as Everyman and "dress it up" when it comes to each character. Strength may have a muscle suit under his costume, and perhaps carry dumbbells with him. Ideally he might have a military haircut, signifying the strength of will this character embodies. Discretion, while not appearing quite a 'nerd', may have some qualities that reflect that type of person, such as glasses, a parted haircut,

and an overall 'square' look to him. Beauty would be seen as the exact opposite. Preferably a female or very preppy male, this character would have tight fitting clothes, great hair, and a perfect smile. Five Wits is a challenge to dress up. This character may have to rely more on personality traits than costume to convey the five wits: common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory. As the writer, this playwright will try to make this character seem more 'aware' of his surroundings and be able to connect the dots more, at least on the script.

The character of God is used as the opener of the play, and most of the exposition. With the adaptation God might have more of a conversation about Everyman with Death, kind of like at the beginning of *It's a Wonderful Life*. God will appear in human form, just as a regular person, not especially the stand out type, perhaps just an all white outfit to designate who he is. God may also be the one to free Good Deeds after Everyman's prayer. Death will also be relatively normal, but perhaps dressed in all black.

This leaves one character left to discuss: Everyman, the title role. This modern Everyman is an average U.S. Citizen, born and raised in the Midwest. His name is Christian Alice Stevens, Chris for short. Only his mom calls him Christian, and sometimes Christian Alice. He's not fond of his middle name, from a forgotten great aunt. Chris is a college grad, age 25-35. He's a pro golfer, not PGA material, but a head golfer at an average city golf course. Occasionally he might make golfing references. Chris is married to Amber Elizabeth Stevens. They met at college, she's a Midwesterner as well, and teaches a fourth grade elementary class. They don't have kids yet. Faith was important in the home Chris grew up in, but unfortunately he never took a faith of his own, even while married to a Christian woman. They both attend church regularly, and even participate in Sunday School and other church activities. However, Chris has never made a personal commitment to Jesus, confessing his sins and asking for forgiveness and redemption. As

far as Chris sees it, he has plenty of time to work it out and isn't worried that he doesn't actually believe in anything. Chris is a good person, he doesn't see how he needs to be 'saved,' and even if he has doubts, he pushes them aside and distracts himself with his activities and social life. He doesn't really not believe in God, but God isn't a part of his life. Chris is in the condition of many mainstream Christians of our culture.

Another issue to be addressed in a modern adaptation is the question of what sort of time span the play takes place in. While reading the play, one may think that it takes place in the span of one day, or even real time. Many critics disagree however, stating that the play could take place in the whole of Everyman's life, culminating with his death. In a sermon it may be stressed that one should not hesitate when deciding whether to follow Christ or not, and so perhaps the play was originally written to show action in real time. It may not matter when it comes to the writing adaptation, but having a time span in mind would add to the consistency of the play, leaving out any hints of discrepancies relating to time. For this adaptation I don't think it is necessary to have a specific time span in mind, but let the actions play on their own. There are other issues to be addressed pertaining to the writing style of the play.

Originally, *Everyman* was written in a poetic format, line by line. This most likely will not be kept in the adapted script, as it would be time consuming and would not relate to a modern audience as well. This style would be interesting to a medieval audience, and therefore has merit originally. It would be interesting to explore the possibilities of a poetic scheme of some sort for the adaptation, but since the playwright does not have much experience in writing poetry, this form of writing would most likely not come out as well as would be hoped. Therefore, for the adaptation what is considered modern speech will be used.

Humor is something that is for the most part missing from the original script. Salvation was a very serious topic, and medieval audiences would appreciate the sobriety of the play as it pertained to their eternal lives. A contemporary reading of the script reveals small points of what could be viewed as sarcasm, biting remarks toward Everyman that could be viewed as rather humorous. These sometimes ironic points can be brought out in the modern adaptation, giving some comic relief to the audience, and relaxing some points of the play so other points may be even more powerful.

The idea that the show may have two separate points of climax is intriguing. Some critics state that the two climaxes are both points when Everyman's earthly friends leave him. This creates sort of a problem, as a well-made play has one great climactic moment towards the end of the show. Interestingly, the script tends to disagree with this opinion. The first part of the play is all of Everyman's earthly friends abandoning him one at a time, in the same order of what elements of life would be more foolish to cling to on earth. First Everyman is deserted by Fellowship, then Kindred and Cousin, then Goods, the most dangerous worldly item to become attached to, as Jesus says that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. These points of abandonment happen one at a time, and while Goods' words and Everyman's reiteration afterward may be somewhat of a climax, this cannot be the moment of most emotion and angst in the play. This is too gradual, and doesn't end in a pointed enough climax to be the climactic moment of the show. This should however be a subsidiary climactic moment. This should be the point when Everyman is in his lowest spirits, and can't see a way to escape judgment. If this is the point of Everyman's greatest stress, then a turning point can be more apparent and pointed. From this point on Everyman's fortunes are on the rise, with the introduction of Good Deeds. The second so called climax is the point when Everyman's physical

attributes leave him, which also might only be seen as rising action. In quick succession Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wits leave Everyman as he prepares to enter his grave. This leads to the climax of the show when Everyman leaves Knowledge at the foot of his grave and enters it with Good Deeds, shouting for God to receive his spirit (38). This is the point that all of the play has led up to, the point that proves that it is possible for man to be saved, and only through Christ. This must be the climax of the play. This is the moment when Everyman relies on his faith and Good Deeds, and gives himself to the inevitable-death. However, after careful thought on the adaptation, one other point of the play may be seen as the climax. The point at which Everyman prays the sinner's prayer, and Good Deeds is released from bondage is the moment that may be seen as the climactic point in the adaptation. After this, even though the physical attributes are introduced, all the action may be seen as falling, pointing towards the end of the show when Everyman goes into his grave. While the point of Everyman's death is exciting, in the adaptation it will not be the climax of the production.

An important difference in *Everyman*, separating it from other works of its day, is its ending. This is no fire and brimstone conclusion. Everyman does not descend into hell's mouth. He is merely entering his grave. Everyman has been given the promise that he has received salvation through faith and works. This is a triumphant descent to his death, not one full of fear. An opposing example of this moment would be the ending of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, where the title role is dragged to hell by a vengeful spirit. On the contrary, Everyman is ready to meet his maker. He has placed everything in his life in order. One question to answer in a modern adaptation is: should Everyman enter his death going down into his grave, or should he move upwards into heaven? If he is to head upwards, would this be as climactic a moment? To stay true to the original manner of Everyman's death would be to send him downward somehow. How

could this be shown as a triumph and not a descent into hell? How dramatic should this ending be? In the original script, this point in the play was very somber, however triumphant. This could be changed to a more casual exit, which might accent any previous climaxes of the show, making an interesting dénouement. However, this would seem to trivialize what Everyman has been accepted into, that is everlasting life. What is envisioned is Everyman makes his final statement towards the audience, declaring that God receive his spirit, then lays down in the coffin, which is covered, and lowered into the movable pit that Kresge Auditorium has, in the Larsen Fine Arts Center at Olivet Nazarene University, where the first production will be staged.

While it may be useful to have a Messenger, Doctor, and Angel to explain some actions in the play, to a modern audience these roles would seem rather redundant, and will be left out of the adaptation. This leaves the question that if there is no Angel and Doctor, and the climax is the point when Everyman enters his grave, who will be left to fulfill any type of dénouement at the end of the show? Logic points to Knowledge as the one who will help end the show, although it may be interesting to have the rest of the characters come in to discuss Everyman's exit in some way. However, this would be a less climactic ending than cutting the action with Everyman's exit, so despite the theological discussion after Everyman's exit in the original play, no action will take place after Everyman's exit to his grave.

Everyman was written in the way of a sermon; the visual element of action and dialogue was added to what would be a very long speech. Each character adds to the plot in a specific way. This element of theater added to a story that speaks to every person on earth is why *Everyman* has lasted so far beyond its conception. This is not just a love story, it is *the* love story, the story of God's plan for salvation; how every person on earth may be saved through Him. This tale can be incredibly uplifting, if told right. It is the greatest promise given to man. It is an

earthly piece of art depicting a heavenly idea that many men cannot even fathom. The mere fact that this play is sometimes put on in such a boring way is an atrocity. The point of putting this story into a theatrical art form was to make it *more* interesting, and in some cases make its message clearer. That this seems to be lost by some modern productions is quite a shame. This story was meant to be shouted from the rooftops, so everyone would have a chance to make a choice on how they would respond to the redeeming grace that is given to all of mankind. The opportunity to modernize this play to fit an audience of peers creates many possibilities, giving new life to a play of eternal truth. The worthiness of this script has been shown through the years that it has been produced, both through the church and secular venues. While it is being modernized, it is necessary to remember that the message behind the play should not be tampered with, as it is a message that speaks to all generations and races, transcending language and cultures.

Concept Statement

Everyman is simply the story of the path of salvation. It shows us why one must be saved, and how. It is a theatrical sermon, outlining what forces in this world one cannot rely on for salvation, and what may be done when those things have abandoned one. The play is steeped in allegory, every character representing something or things that every person comes into contact with every day. In this way the play speaks to every generation, every language, and every race. It is the history of all, as all have had to come to a point of decision on the question of salvation. This is the power the play contains, that all are called to account.

A modern adaptation brings many possibilities of allowing the timeless truths in the play to speak more obviously to a contemporary audience. It will be performed in an intimate setting, but in a large room, so the lights and set need to contain the action so the audience is not

distracted by the open space behind the action. The beginning of the play will have foreboding in it, with a giant coffin in the middle representing all of our fates. Chris' fate gets darker and darker as the play progresses, and his darkest moment is when Stuff leaves him. Chris has nowhere else to go. His fortune finally picks up when he meets Good Deeds, who points him toward his salvation. The moment Chris accepts Christ as his savior is the climactic moment of the show, and should be celebrated as such. Having lights under the pit of the stage may help make certain moments such as this more exciting.

Costumes will be modern for the human characters, but any kind of creativity can be used with the allegorical characters such as Wisdom, Good Deeds, the 4 Attributes, and especially Stuff. These characters must be represented in their costumes in a way that the audience can associate the actor with the idea of the character. The chorus can be in suits or something similar, adding costume accents to represent the different characters they become.

The play may be light-hearted, but at the same time not forget that its message is the most serious of all, and that if ignored may lead to one's damnation. This brings the importance of *Everyman* to light. The allegory of the play must speak to a modern audience, relating eternal truths that have the power to show the danger of characters like Fellowship and Goods, and the necessity of characters such as Knowledge and Good Deeds.

This play should be uplifting, not frightful, triumphant, not defeatist. It is a call for all to search themselves for truth, to reckon with themselves and prepare for the final judgment. It is an intelligent, systematic proof of man's own weakness and need of God, and how one may find Him. This play is helping to carry out the Great Commission, Christ's commandment to all to bring the lost back to Him, so every man may find eternal life.

Number's Down

Number's Down

A Morality Play

Adapted from *Everyman* by Merrick Robison

“Oh, let's be ready my friend. Let's make sure the old account is settled.”

-Dr. Forrest Whitlatch

Note: The original text of the play *Number's Down* is not included to protect the intellectual property of the student writer.

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Merrick Robison
Olivet Honors Program
4-28-11

Reflections on *Number's Down*

There are many times in life when we come to the end of something. When you begin a project that is supposed to last two years, it is hard to visualize the end product at the beginning. Yet eventually that deadline comes, whether you are ready for it or not. Thankfully this time, I believe I was ready. Ready for the stresses of becoming a director, after I had already worked a year and a half on the relatively small theatrical project that became *Number's Down*, an original adaptation of *Everyman*. Through much trial and error, and error and maybe some more error, the new performance was born.

I began this project without any prior experience in scriptwriting. I had never even written a sketch for a church service. I had always been purely an actor when dealing with theatre. This project became an interesting one then, because it was an entirely new experience. As can be seen in the early drafts, I was concocting mere monologues, trying to express in speech what should have been dramatized and shown to the audience. It was tough for me to see ahead, to visualize what the new production could actually look like on a stage, with actions being the true media, instead of just words. I don't believe I ever truly was able to step away from this fault, as I believe the final product still contained more monologues than necessary, and less action than what was needed. However, I certainly did improve from the first draft to the final. After over a year and a half of researching and drafting, it was time to take the script to the stage.

Stepping out of the shoes of a playwright and into those of a director had interesting challenges. When I have approached a script before, usually as an actor, I'm sure I have seen and interpreted the words on the page somewhat differently than the playwright, or even the director. This allows me to bring new life to a script, by adding my experiences to those of the playwright, I can craft anew what had been envisioned before. However, as I was both the playwright and the director of this production, it was hard to get new visions of what it could be. Once I had set my mind that an aspect of the show was going to be a certain way, it was hard to find ways to make it different, even to improve it. From this experience I have learned that I work better, at least in the conception of a production, as a part of a team, being able to bounce ideas off of others in order to improve upon the script and see things from other perspectives. When I am alone it is harder to see things from other points of view. And, after working on a project for this long, I noticed that I became rather disenchanted with the process. Things that were once funny or striking became dull. It was a depressing scene at times. But working with the actors gave me hope. They had a positive attitude throughout all of the rehearsals. I could see that they were still excited for the show, and could see the value of it. This gave me courage and stamina to bear through the draught and reach the oasis of the performance itself.

Finally, the performance weekend came. All of this time now seemed to have passed at an extraordinary rate, and the final culmination of so much work had come. This was certainly a different type of performance than Olivet audiences were used to. With the audience on the stage it created an intimate atmosphere that makes some people uncomfortable, including my mother. However, an incredible thing happened.

There were laughs. And moments of silence. And compliments afterward! Apparently the show was a success! I received reviews that far exceeded my expectations.

I am incredibly grateful to have been able to bring together this project, and to see it literally come to life on the stage. I tried to express to my actors how grateful I was that they would be willing to take on something so personal to me, and work on it until I was satisfied. Although I may continue to work on the script, adapting and improving it further, I believe I accomplished what I originally set out to do, create a modern adaptation of *Everyman* that spoke to its modern audience.

Jury Reaction and Comments

Jerry Cohagan, Professor of Theatre, Olivet Nazarene University

Let me begin by stating how absolutely proud I am of all your hard work. From the beginning concept in the fall of 2009 through the final production, you have shown dedication, commitment, and discipline in realizing your vision of a modern adaptation of *Everyman*. There were many strong elements in your realized production.

First, and most notable, would be the scoring throughout the production. From the opening use of a contemporary song as recurring theme, we are immediately aware that what we are about to experience is going to be a fresh, relevant take on themes that are as old as mankind. Overall, the soundscape throughout the production was very good. The sounds of nature—whether it be birds chirping or thunder and lightning rumbling—worked well throughout to enhance and not overpower the tone of narrative.

This subtle underscoring worked well to support underlying tension and to create foreshadowing of the reckoning to come.

The spectacle was very impressive. Strong use of stark lighting defined by the haze to focus our attention on the coffin as we entered the theatre immediately immersed us into a world where death was palpable. The tone of the production was established before a word was spoken. The strongest use of spectacle occurred during the climax when Everyman faces his sins and, in doing so, faces a loving, forgiving God. The use of mirror and refracted light helped drive home the moment of salvation available to all of us. The intended approach to this moment technically was very formalized and felt almost liturgical in approach. A stylized choice which, in some ways, allowed the audience to remain a bit more removed, rather than an invitation to participate in one's own salvation.

The use of a contemporary chorus was an excellent choice. Keeping them onstage throughout created strong visual framing of the story. The pacing of the narrative and creative staging was very strong and was also crucial in keeping an audience interested in a didactic story. While there were still strong moments of "sermon" or "message," these moments were more palatable through the use of creative staging and choral response.

While the production worked very well on many levels, there is always room for growth and improvement. As a director, I have never experienced a production where I felt that it had totally "arrived" and worked in every aspect. There are always elements that one can see in hindsight which could be strengthened, re-examined, and re-worked. That is one of the great dichotomies of theatre—it is ephemeral in nature. And

therein lays both its power and curse. A doctoral candidate in dramaturgy, Matt McMahan, states that “good theatre finds beauty in details.” And more thought and planning on some details would’ve helped enhance the big picture.

Costuming and props seemed a bit “last-minute” rather than well thought-out and planned. Theatre, above all, is a collaborative art and a strong costume design could’ve helped highlight your overall vision and concept for this production. While a director is not a costume designer, the director is responsible for casting a unified vision to all hands involved in the production: set designer, costumer, light designer, etc. The choice to costume the chorus in black t-shirts, black tennis shoes, and blue jeans—while uniform—did not really help tell your story. A couple specific choices seemed to actually detract from the moment: the use of something which looked like a gold pipe cleaner halo hooked onto Death’s belt loop only served to take me out of the moment while wondering what that was and why it was there. While Stuff was one of the stronger characters, the costuming of a trench coat seemed ineffective and the use of a knapsack with various items (a lace hankie?) pinned to the outside of it did not visually help tell your story. With a bit more thought and planning, the use of contemporary shopping bags with brand name logos showing, various types of contemporary electronic devices—from a blackberry earpiece to an I-pod in the other ear, to an Apple I-pad in an inside pocket of the trench coat—this amalgam of “Stuff” could have visually made a much stronger point. Also, the use of a short white toga for Wisdom seemed totally anachronistic. While all the costuming seemed to be contemporary, suddenly a costume from a Greek era seemed totally out of place. With a bit more foresight this character, too, could have made a stronger impact visually. One of the strongest gifts a

director can give himself is to be surrounded with people who can help cast the director's vision in other areas, i.e. costuming/props.

One musical element that perhaps could've been stronger was the moment of "reveal" with the broken mirror. The underscoring at this moment became very pastoral and classical. This moment could have been helped by a more jarring, disjointed contemporary sound rather than a serene, restful sound.

There were two visual elements that could be explored. The first one is Everyman's actual confession and repentance. Due to the heightened, formal staging of this moment it did not "ring" true for me. It seemed more of a formulaic conversion, rather than an intimate moment of a broken man before his Savior. While the confrontation was immediately impactful through the lighting and mirror, it did not have that moment of vulnerability and true brokenness before God that would bring us to tears, creating that lump in our throats, as we realize "I, too, am this man and my only hope is in a God who can see beyond my brokenness." It felt rushed over and Everyman's acknowledgement of this moment seemed cursory at best—and then on with the denouement. This moment, for me, should be the most impactful of the show. Not the confrontation itself, but the moment of brokenness and honest, raw confession. And that is a small, humbling, intimate moment when we see ourselves in Everyman. This is the moment that theatre can be most impactful—not in the grandness, but in a quiet moment when theatre gives us a glimpse of our true selves. These are the moments of theatre that resonate with us long after the production is over.

The second visual moment was the final denouement when the orchestra pit lowers into the earth. Lighting from below and more haze coming up from below would

have helped give a much stronger visual definition to this moment—strong light shooting up through the edges of the pit—then when the pit begins to lower we see a strong swirling haze rising up as the light defines this square by shooting beams straight up above. And we are left with the image of all of us being swallowed by this fog and light as the coffin descends.

As many directors as there are—so are there opinions and varying ideas when approaching a production. This creative collaboration can be a time of great joy, great growth, and great frustration, as well. The gift of theatre is a powerful medium that God has given us to explore our relationship with Him and with each other. And this you did very well. You achieved what you set out to do: taking a medieval play and bringing it to a post-modern audience in a contemporary way which challenges us to look in the mirror and see our own relationship with God and humankind. This was an impactful evening of theatre. Your energies and gifts for theatre were challenged and put to good use in this project. I am eager to see how God will use you in your future endeavors. I imagine you might find yourself, more often than you think, being that objective eye that stands out in the house and creates a unified vision for others to see. Congratulations, Merrick, and well done.

Lynda Cohagan, Literature Teacher, Kankakee, IL

Let me start by saying how much I enjoyed the production of *Number's Down*. To be quite honest, I went into the production somewhat expecting to see some overly didactic, Sunday-school-lesson-ish production which was a repackaging of an old play with minimal revisions. What I experienced was authentic theatre. The “Sold Out” sign

made me eager to see the show. The well-lit coffin center stage heightened my anticipation as I was seated. And the student sitting next to me probably articulated my sentiments best at the end of the play when he said, “Well, that was the shortest hour I’ve ever lived.” The play was thought-provoking to be sure, but better than that, it was downright entertaining.

You managed to translate the allegorical elements of *Everyman* into our modern context in a way that was clever and engaging. Specifically, Zarah’s portrayal of Stuff was really fun—all of her possessions hanging on her and her constant handling of the video game controller created in the audience an instant connection. We saw ourselves, and isn’t that the point? I also thought Death’s personality made him seem like a product of the twenty-first century, not a revision from six hundred years ago. I would have liked to have seen even more development of the four characters toward the end: Charm, Good Deeds, Tact, and Street Smarts. I had difficulty determining how these characters were different from the other characters, Power and Stuff. They all would leave Chris in the end, and I didn’t know how these four were different and why they were grouped together.

I thought the three most powerful aspects of the production were the use of the song, “Number’s Down,” the use of the chorus, and the coffin being the only set piece. In fact, Jerry had commented that he wished the lyrics to the song had been printed in the playbill so that we could understand them all the better. I agree that I would have profited from that, as well. I found the chorus very compelling. All characters staying on stage and “framing” the story literally held it together and created a sense of unity for us. I liked how characters would step out of the chorus, assume a role and then step back.

Their mutability helped to universalize the story, saying, in effect, to the audience, that we all play many roles during our lives, but the curtain will certainly come down on us all. I loved the characters reaching into the coffin for any props needed, again affirming the belief that this life is temporal, grounded in “death” whereas real life is found through Christ. I found this metaphor of the coffin and its contents effective. And this leads me to my only criticism. Perhaps my own perspectives on salvation led me to think the climax seemed overly didactic. I wanted less of a “ta-da!” moment, and more of a broken, repentant soul—the humbling realization that we do indeed take nothing with us.

But that criticism is very minor. The overall experience was fabulous. I laughed, enjoyed the spectacle, and was awed when the coffin descended. Well done, Merrick. Well done.

Neal W. Woodruff, DMA, Professor of Music, Olivet Nazarene University

This review is written on behalf and at the request of Merrick Robison. His production of “Numbers Down” is Protestant adaptation of the 15th Century, Catholic-themed, morality play entitled “Everyman,” and this is offered as the capstone project for the Olivet Nazarene University Honors Program.

One of the most unusual attributes of this production was the empty room behind the players; the actors played to what is traditionally upstage, and the audience was seated upstage, facing out to the auditorium. While it took some time initially to adjust to the novelty of the seating, the lack of backdrop and the corresponding vacancy of the room actually lent additional hollowness and vacuity to the character and his attempts at

personal justification. In theatre reality and perspective are momentarily suspended as the audience borrows from the attitude and viewpoint initiated by those on stage. In fact, the affect of this narrative was heightened by the subtlety of the atypical aspect.

The lack of traditional wing space necessitated the creation of alternate boundaries by the players. Characters not directly involved with the scene utilized both sides of the stage, a pace from the main staging area. The demeanor of those to either side was generally appropriate, and their eventual inclusion as set pieces was an interesting touch.

Audience proximity created a curious issue for the inexperienced actors. While the general countenance of the players was positive, there were moments when the specific attempt to avoid direct eye contact with the audience caused some issues. Specifically, some of dialogue became rather presentational, which was out of context with the general feel of the direction.

Another consideration is the specific use of names in the script. It is unusual to begin every exchange within a dialogue with the name of the person being addressed. Once the conversation has begun, either names are inserted into the body of the sentence, or dropped from usage.

A final matter is the soundscape. The song worked quite well to frame the show. The underscoring could have been a bit more prominent without issue.

The overall effect of the production was positive. I am pleased to offer my thoughts and observations to what was a very successful senior project.

R. Kendall Franklin, Pastor of College Church of the Nazarene, Bourbonnais, IL

I must first express a disclaimer of sorts. I have watched many plays that have been presented at ONU since our arrival just under 3 years ago. In addition, I have been to several student, alumni, and trustee events that featured Merrick Robison as actor, vocalist, instrumentalist, (Olivetians) etc. So, I have a very strong bias. I am NOT objective. Merrick is one of my favorite people in the characters he portrays and in the other areas he performs. I realize I am not writing a critique but rather a reaction or reflection as a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene. But I must express first, that I have a huge slanted unapologetic bias. My wife and I have enjoyed every performance when Merrick was involved.

In addition, I did not read or watch the morality play Everyman, so I felt at a slight disadvantage. However, the information in the program under the Director's comments were helpful and informative. My conversations following the performance with Professor Jerry Cohagan were also enlightening. I do not feel I have the right or the experience to comment effectively on Number's Down in its adaptation of the play Everyman. But, I do feel it appropriate to comment on the themes and the theology.

Number's Down was a rather gripping and challenging presentation. As a pastor and Christ-follower, I was stuck by how clearly the message of Jesus being the only way to God and to heaven was expressed. You couldn't miss it. It was quite direct. The message was blunt. It was presented without apology and intimidation. I was moved with the power in which this theme was delivered. I loved the line when the character was standing on the casket and the question was asked, "Don't they see how much I have for them?" What a powerful presentation of the Gospel!

I liked the teaching on tithes! The dialogue at this point was very realistic. I thought

the theme of "Stuff won't save you." was very strong and fitting in our culture. The satire that "stuff is here for you.. you can be sure what you hold on to...it's your treasure... all yours!" I loved the irony. The twist is terrific when Stuff says to Chris, "The more you love me, the less you love God." How fitting for Zarah's character to zing Chris with the biting words: "You thought wrong, Stupid! Any hope you had in me is pointless!"

The theme on omission was also meaningful. When the main character is confronted with what could have been, the audience was tracking every word and listening carefully. They were leaning in when the words "When you could've done good and you did nothing..." resonated. A lot of people were examining their motives, schedules, and attitudes at that point.

I like how the play let you come up for air near the end, when it reminded the audience that there is still hope and there can be a future. Great words. That's the Gospel. There is Good News. It doesn't all have to be bad.

It was creative, intriguing, intense, thoughtful, with just enough humor thrown in to release the tension. I liked the use of comedic tension with lines like, "toughed by an angel"...or "I pity the fool." It's a heavy subject -- not something that you would talk about easily. It takes on some very intense, difficult issues and faces them "head on." The play journeyed through some very poignant themes. It was a very effective teaching tool. I think you could have great conversations after viewing this play with a group of people.

I perceived the Catholic influence of the play in many of the scenes...the conversations following the main character Chris' confrontation with death. I sensed several "Catholic" echoes regarding the point of conversion for Chris. These nuances

made me think of 1 Peter 3:18-19ff

18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago..."

Ironically, we had an interesting discussion in a membership class about people going to heaven or hell. I thought specifically about Number's Down. I believe that theologically it was in line with the Church of the Nazarene. Related to the above, the only thing that made me squirm was the question rolling through my head on when did Chris choose to follow Christ? This would be a great discussion point as well.

What I liked best about Number's Down is that it makes you reflect on your own life. It makes you think about your own future. I was very impressed, very proud, and quite moved by the play.

Merrick Robison is to be commended for a job well-done!