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Music and Liturgy in *Everyman*: Some Aspects of Production

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Introduction

In the repertory of early English religious drama, *Everyman* holds a special place. Part of its attraction is that it treats a subject close to all of us, the need to prepare for our own inevitable death: but it also stands out in the history of the revival of early drama as a play manageable by amateurs, neither too long nor too short (at 921 lines) for an evening's entertainment, and without those features of pre-Reformation religion that are most unsettling to a modern audience.¹ Moreover, although it has its detractors² it is generally reckoned a well-written and eminently performable play that has proved its worth on the stage many times. Much of this reputation is due to the fine edition and commentary published by Arthur Cawley in 1961, still the best introduction to the play after thirty-seven years.³

Everyman is not typical of the morality genre in England, however, as Cawley pointed out (pp. xiv-xv). Among the many ways in which it does not 'conform', the most important for my present purpose is that, in dramatizing man's ending as a primary theme, *Everyman* minimizes the conflict of good and evil that provides the mainspring for the action of other English moralities. One result of this is that music plays only a minor role in characterizing the protagonists in the cosmic battle between Good and Evil. There are no cues or text references for music relating to God's messengers or agents on earth, and the absence of any positively evil character is responsible for a complete lack of music used in perverted form.⁴ A single text reference shows that angelic music is heard at *Everyman*'s death.

Music seems to have only a very small role in the play, therefore: and although the angelic music must imply a vision of Heaven, as well, and is certainly more important than the reference alone might suggest, it does not appear that the playwright was much interested in music. Apart from this reference, in fact, there is

very little evidence of any such interest, although there is a potential liturgical content in the play – and, therefore, a potential musical content – that must be examined.⁵ A further element to be explored is that of audience participation.⁶

These three features – music, liturgy and audience participation – can have a profound effect on the way that early drama should be presented, and the evidence for them in any play text should therefore be examined very carefully. In this essay I shall look briefly at this evidence in the text of *Everyman* and then, drawing on the repertory of early English religious drama as a whole, compile an annotated cue-list of musical and related events in the play.

The Evidence

There is no notated music in *Everyman*, and no texts for musical setting. Two dramatic directions in the copy used by Cawley as the base text of his edition are effectively speech headings only; they do not refer to music (lines 21 and 205). For information on musical and related matters, therefore, we are reliant on text references, Latin quotations from biblical and liturgical sources, and phrases in English that may be translations of these.

Text References

Text references to music are disappointingly few in *Everyman*. Evidently the author did not automatically think in terms even of metaphorical musical usage.

360-62 KYNREDE [. . .]
Ye shall haue my mayde with all my herte;
She loueth to go to feestes, there to be nyse,
And to daunce, and a-brode to sterte.

The reference to dancing demands no performance, of course: but it is important as an indication that the girl is unsuitable to accompany *Everyman* on his journey because she is wanton ('nyse').

414 GOODES Nay, Eueryman, I synge an other songe.

894-901 THE AUNGELL Come, excellent electe spouse, to Iesu!
Here about thou shalte go
Bycause of thy synguler vertue.
Now thy soule is taken thy body fro,
Thy rekenynge is crystall-clere.
Now shalte thou in to the heuenly spere,
Vnto the whiche all ye shall come
That lyueth well before the daye of dome.

This seems to be a paraphrase of a Latin text beginning 'Veni sponsa mea' or 'Veni electa mea': such an item could sensibly be the text of the angelic music sung during Knowledge's speech, 888-93. The possibilities are as follows:

- 1 *Veni de Libano sponsa mea*: text from *Canticum Canticorum* 4.8, used liturgically as a verse to the responsory *Electa mea*, as an introit, and as an antiphon.¹¹
- 2 *Veni dilecte mi*: text from *Canticum Canticorum* 7.11, used liturgically as an antiphon.
- 3 *Veni dilectus*: text used liturgically as an antiphon.
- 4 *Veni electa mea*: text partly from Psalm 44.12a, used liturgically as an antiphon, a verse to the responsory *Veni sponsa*, an alleluia verse and a responsory.
- 5 *Veni sponsa Christi*: text used liturgically as antiphons, a tract, alleluia verses and a respond.

Of these, 4 and 5 seem the most likely. Two settings of 4 are among the music written into the surviving copy of Play 45 of the York Cycle, *The Assumption of the Virgin*.¹² All the York music is for boys' voices in two parts. For *Everyman*, one of the chant settings of 4 or 5 would be a perfectly viable – and indeed, normal – option, although a polyphonic setting is possible.

Finally, the doctor who ends the play quotes Christ's words in Matthew 25. 41:

915 DOCTOUR [. . .]
God wyll saye, 'Ite, maledicti, in ignem eternum'.

This is not a liturgical text. In the present situation, in any case, singing it is clearly out of the question.

Cue-list

In the process of compiling a cue-list of musical and related events, a considerable element of interpretation of the evidence is needed. It is helpful to the potential producer of a performance to give some indication of the dynamic functions of a music cue, the possible identity of a liturgical item (because often several items share an *incipit*), a full discussion of any issues that might present the producer with alternatives, and information on the degree of certainty with which one can recommend that the cue be implemented. This cue-list addresses these needs in much the same way as, although not in the format of, volume 2 of *The Heaven Singing*, from which *Everyman* is excluded.¹³

Cue Line(s)

- 1 80** Music at *Everyman*'s first entrance would have the dramatic function of focussing the audience's attention on the new character.¹⁴ It would also be appropriate as an indication of *Everyman*'s current predilection for worldly pleasures:¹⁵ he might sing some frivolous love song, therefore, as he enters. There are other characters for whom this treatment would be appropriate, but it should perhaps not be over-used.

There is however no evidence for a song here: it is simply a possible alternative to having *Everyman* eating fruit or flirting with a woman as a means of underlining Death's description of him: 'Full little he thinketh on my coming / His mind is on fleshly lusts and his treasure' (lines 81-82).

- 2 887** Music at *Everyman*'s death has the dramatic function of drawing the attention of the audience to the Heaven from which the Angel will speak. This is the angelic singing mentioned by Knowledge at line 891. It is the only certain cue for music in *Everyman*.

As noted above, the text sung should be one of those beginning 'Veni electa mea' or 'Veni sponsa mea', since the Angel gives the translation of such a line in the speech that immediately follows. It is worth noting that in the plays the translation commonly follows the Latin text rather than coming first:¹⁶ on this issue, see cue 3, below.

The singers should presumably be costumed angels located in a Heaven elevated above the main playing area. The music should begin at *Everyman*'s death after line 887 and must continue beyond line 893.

Assuming that two pieces are involved in this final scene, the Angel should wait until this one is finished before speaking: but see the next cue.

- 3 **901** The Angel's speech shows that although Everyman's soul has departed from his body (line 897) it has not yet ascended to Heaven (899: 'Now shalt thou into the heavenly sphere'). The soul's ascent into Heaven should therefore be enacted after line 901, which is the end of the play proper. No doubt a doll should be made to rise to the Heaven by means of a pulley.

This action should surely be covered by another item of angelic song. The text might again be one of the 'Veni' items listed earlier, or one beginning 'Surge' ('Rise'). Again, one should remember that the music for the York Assumption play includes settings of 'Surge propera mea', 'Veni de Libano' and 'Veni electa mea', just such texts as seem most appropriate here. Indeed, much is lost from this scene unless one understands it as a close parallel to those of the Assumption of the Virgin.

The problem remains over cues 2 and 3: should they really be two separate cues, or could they be a single cue? Could a single piece of music be sung by the angels in Heaven, covering both the speech of Knowledge and the Angel's speech as well? One might say that a single item seems unlikely because the Angel's speech seems too important to be spoken over music, with the consequent danger of the words being lost. On the other hand, there seems little doubt that Knowledge speaks over the singing, because in the middle of his speech he refers to the singing in the present tense.

This problem cannot be resolved for certain. On balance, I prefer a 'Veni' item immediately after Everyman's death, followed by the Angel's speech and a set-piece 'Surge' item at the end of the play proper, while Everyman's soul rises slowly to Heaven. Then, after the music has brought the play itself to an end, the Doctor can step forward and round the proceedings off with his epilogue (lines 902-21).

- 4 **921** As already noted, the audience should say 'Amen' after the last line of the play, led by the cast. There is no evidence in any play that this Amen should be sung.

It would however be possible to have a parallel angelic response to the Doctor's words, and this would certainly be a sung Amen. While there is no direct evidence for this, either, a model for a parallel angelic response does exist. In the *Assumption of the Virgin* play from the N-Town cycle the angels in Heaven echo the Alleluias of the apostles, who are singing the psalm *Exiit Israel* during the burial procession of the Virgin.¹⁷ While this is far from being a precise parallel, it does at least show that earth and Heaven could join in an act of worship together in the plays, so that heavenly confirmation of an Amen said or sung by mortals at the end of *Everyman* is a credible piece of production in medieval terms.¹⁸

Conclusion

Everyman is normally staged relatively simply. The text apparently does not demand a lavish production, and it is therefore suitable for performance by relatively few players in almost any space that may be available. Partly as a result of this, the play has been viewed in a decidedly Protestant, if not Puritanical, manner. But *Everyman* is too early to be a Protestant play, and as it is hardly typical of the later moral interlude, either, we should perhaps consider whether such staging really does the play justice.

Cawley realised that a raised structure was needed for the Heaven,¹⁹ but he seems not to have thought through to the logical conclusion in respect of the implications of such a structure for the type of production envisaged. The work and materials demanded, after all, imply a considerable financial commitment to the production. So, too, does the music required, even if the angelic singing is thought to be a single piece: it needs several singers to perform it, and they must be of professional standard. It would be perverse not to follow this reasoning into the realms of costume, staging and properties: and in this case we come to a type of presentation that is thought of principally in connection with the biblical and saint plays.

Everyman, then, may have been presented as a relatively lavish spectacle, using professional singers, machinery and the rest of the production paraphernalia of religious drama in sixteenth-century England. If this is correct, then *Everyman*, surprisingly, is still waiting for its proper revival – a revival in which music must account for a large proportion of a rather heavier budget than we have so far imagined.

NOTES

¹ It seems most likely that *Everyman* was translated from the Dutch play *Elckerlijck*, first published c. 1495 but published in the version that seems to have been the exemplar for the English translation c. 1518-25. See *Everyman*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. x-xii.

² See, for instance, W. A. Davenport, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama: The Early Moral Plays and their Literary Relations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), pp. 32-35, for a rather dismissive view of *Everyman*.

³ Cawley, *Everyman*: see n. 1, above. Cawley had already published a slightly modernized edition in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London: Dent, 1956; 2nd edn 1974; reprinted with revisions 1977). I follow the 1961 edition here.

⁴ For music used as part of the representation of God's servants and the Devil's agents, see my *The Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama*, I (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), especially sections 5.2 and 5.4. (Volume II is due for publication in 1999.)

⁵ On the relation of liturgy to drama, see *The Heaven Singing*, I, ch. 7. Liturgy is potentially important for music because it was normally sung.

⁶ Discussed in Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, section 8.6.

⁷ On the matter of audience participation in Amens and elsewhere, see *The Heaven Singing*, I, 371-73.

⁸ John Cunningham, 'Comedic and Liturgical Restoration in *Everyman*', *Comparative Drama*, 22 (1988), 162-73.

⁹ M. P. Coogan, *An Interpretation of the Moral Play Mankind* (Washington DC, 1947), especially p. 16.

¹⁰ *Manuale ad usum per celebris ecclesiae Sarisburiensis*, ed. by A. Jefferies Collins (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960): see p. 112.

¹¹ The various liturgical items mentioned here can be identified further through the alphabetical list of incipits in John R. Bryden and David G. Hughes, *An Index of Gregorian Chant*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), I.

¹² See *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: Arnold, 1982), pp. 392-99 and, for John Stevens's edition of the music, pp. 469-74. For another edition of the music, see *Six Songs from the York Mystery Play 'The Assumption of the Virgin'*, ed. by Richard Rastall (Newton Abbot: Antico Edition, 1985).

¹³ On the rationale behind the exclusion, see Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, 2-5.

¹⁴ For the dynamic functions of music in the plays, see Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, 225.

¹⁵ The representational functions of music are discussed in Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, ch. 5: see especially pp. 193-215.

¹⁶ On the Latin+English pattern in early English drama, see Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, 81-84.

¹⁷ See *The N-Town Play*, ed. by Stephen Spector, 2 vols, EETS, ss 11, ss 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I, 402; Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, 290.

¹⁸ In fact, the burial story comes from the *Legenda Aurea*, and that book has another example in which the angels join in a piece of earthly liturgy: see Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, I, 290; and the legend of 'Saint Thomas of Canterbury', in *Jacobus de Voragine, 'The Golden Legend': Readings on the Saints*, tr. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), I, 59-62 (p. 61 for the burial story).

¹⁹ Cawley, *Everyman*, pp. xxix-xxx.