Vicious Games: *Ludus* As Evil In The Medieval Morality Play *Mankind*

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The English moralities make use of different foci and techniques to create the spirit of repentance which Potter claims to be their central and unifying theme and aim. While *Castle of Perseverance* investigates the whole spiritual course of God's creation—innocence, followed by iterated temptation, fall and redemption—over the whole human lifespan, and *Everyman* encapsulates only its last, urgent hours, *Mankind* reveals the interconnectedness of the divine and the demonic with the quotidian.[1] In the course of the normal, apparently chance encounters of the day, Mankind represents the human soul adrift between Redemption and Damnation. On the one hand, he is in the loving care of God via the counsel of the priest (whose allegorical name, Mercy, allows him to denote both the saving virtue of forgiveness and a clerical character representing God and Christ). On the other, Mankind is equally the prey of the devil via temptation to sin by the other characters he meets: the Vice, Mischief; the Devil, Titivillus, and the three 'worldlings', New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought.[2]

Although Mercy will eventually triumph and Mankind return to a life of virtue, the play focuses on the temptation, which it effects and portrays with a degree of sophisticatedly self-reflexive awareness of language and performance which exceeds what critics such as Bevington and Dessen have come to recognise in late-medieval drama. Thus Rosemary Chaplan, referring primarily to the work of Kathleen Ashley and Paula Neuss, writes:

> *Mankind* is, to a large extent, *a play about language*. The speech of the 'good' characters is readily distinguishable from that of the 'evil' ones, while Mankind changes his linguistic style with his

> moral state.… (T)he actual battle between good and evil is fought
> on the level of language (140).

While fully accepting the validity of this analysis of *Mankind* as a play about language, I maintain that it is just as much *a play about play* (drama = *ludus* = game = play), and hence even more sophisticatedly self-conscious than has yet been recognised. In this context, it works within a dichotomous paradigm, defining at the outset a 'good' life as one which casts *duty* as the natural 'pleasure' of God's creatures, reflecting His authorship in creating *order*, while worldly pleasure, desire or simple fun *per se* are the *raisons d'être* of the evil worldling-tempters who rule the stage during the central part of the play. This hedonism results in disorder and is often realised in the dramatic action and discourse as a tripartite or ternary disruption or inversion of the given simple dichotomy or binary of Good and Evil, as established at the outset by Mercy. In this reading, the various actions and discourses of the 'games' indulged in by the evil characters are specifically stigmatised as 'vicious' within the context of the greater Plan (or Play) as created and stage-managed by God.

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The morality play *Mankind* can appear at first reading to be highly immoral, merely an excuse for obscenity and licence. It was not initially recognised that the play's Shrovetide setting authorised its dramatisation of evil in the context of a Lenten consciousness of human sinfulness leading to repentance and thus to the possibility of divine mercy, forgiveness and salvation. In consequence, it had a rather chequered career, with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics being hesitant to view the text as anything but debased or corrupt. Sr Mary Philippa Coogan's study was the first to demonstrate that, in its Lenten context, the comedy of obscenity, scatology and parody is in fact all very functional and moral indeed, as the comic scenes 'carry almost the entire burden of teaching Mankind [and, indeed, the audience] *through experience* what Mercy has presented to him in theory' (94). Or, as Lester puts it, '*Mankind*, more than any other Morality, instructs by example. Mercy preaches, and the wild debauchery of the comic scenes provides the living text'. (xxv) In this context, *Mankind* offers numerous examples of self-reflexivity relating to the activity of 'play', of drama-as-performance. For example, when Mercy attempts to prevent the three worldlings

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from dancing rowdily in the first scene,[3] Nowadays retorts by echoing his words and saying:

> Do wey, goode Adam? Do wey?
> Thys ys no parte of thi *pley*
> (lines 83–84)

—by which he means both simply 'This is none of your business' and that Mercy's 'play' (i.e. his earlier sermon) is over as the drama has now developed to a further episode, which is the worldlings' 'game'. He later tells Mercy, in a comment which may well be an accurate reflection of the audience's feeling at that point:

> Men haue lytyll deynte of yowr *pley*
> Because ye make no sporte
> (lines 267–68).

Even a common idiom like 'Gyff them non *audyence*' (line 299, i.e. 'Don't listen to them')—Mercy's advice to Mankind about the worldlings—begins in this context to suggest dramatic self-awareness.

One of the clearest instances of self-reflexivity occurs in naming (always a significant feature of morality plays), in Nought's self-introduction:

> For I was neuer worth a pottfull a wortys sythyn I was born.
> My name is Nought
> (lines 272–73).

He also describes himself as '*pley*(ing) … the foll' (line 275).

In terms of costumes and properties, too, the play gives a strong impression of theatrical self-awareness. Mankind, prompting the audience to recall St Paul's description of the Christian as putting on the 'armour of Christ', initially 'labels' himself with a hand-written 'bagge of [his] armys' ((line 322)—'Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris' (line 321; 'Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return'—words taken from the Ash Wednesday penitential service). He later defends himself against the worldlings'

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temptations with a spade, the emblem of his estate as well as the tool of Adam, and remarks pointedly on its inappropriateness to the task of battle (line 396).

Later still, in scene two, his costume is 'changed' (a performative act often symbolising a change of heart)—progressively cut down by the worldlings, signifying that he has deserted virtue and become one of their evil troupe. Finally, the alacrity with which properties such as the rope and even the 'tre' appear when required for Mankind's attempted suicide, 'stage-managed' by Mischief and the vices (lines 801–02), has also always struck me as scripted by a dramatist gleefully aware of his work as playing with the conventions of the theatre, its dual 'realities', and the uniquely limbic situation of its audience between them— especially in the case of morality plays, whose performance represented not merely the experience of some Other, but what was believed to be the ultimate reality of every single Self among its observers.

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Unlike *Everyman*, which opens with a God righteously angry at the sinfulness and ingratitude of humanity, the opening of *Mankind* (though by no means denying humanity's sinfulness) is positive, reminding its audience of the love of God as both Creator and Redeemer, and establishing God's Mercy (both the virtue and the clerical character) as ever-available to 'synfull creature[s]' who 'repent [their] neglygence' (line 23). Furthermore, for the first of the play's three scenes the central character will conduct himself in accordance with Mercy's injunction to the audience: 'In *goode werkys*, I auyse yow … to be perseuerante' (line 25).

In his introductory messages to the audience and (slightly later) to the character Mankind, Mercy sets up a simple dichotomy between Good and Evil in which human 'good' is defined as casting *duty* as pleasure with a view to ultimate salvation. So, Mercy advocates a life of humility and reverence towards God (line 14), as opposed to the worldlings'

> … joy and delyte ... in derysyon
> Of her owyn Cryste to hys dyshonur
> (lines168–69)

by means of their 'wanton' (line 181) wickedness and 'ydyll worde[s]' (line 173). He tells us: 'Pryke not yowr felycytes in thyngys transytorye' (line 30), implying

that we should focus on the 'blysse perpetuall' (line 284). He recommends good works 'to puryfye yowr sowlys that they be not corupte' (line 26), and enjoins us: 'Beholde not the erth but lyfte yowr ey uppe' (line 31). He also quotes Biblical statements on the consequences of one's way of life, like: 'Such as thei haue sowyn, such xall thei repe' (line180). When leaving Mankind to face the worldlings alone, he places specific emphasis on the virtue of labour, as opposed to the idle language and hedonistic behaviour of the worldlings, telling him twice: 'Do truly yowr labure and kepe yowr halyday [sabbath]' (line 300) and 'Do truly yowr labure and be neuer ydyll' (line 308). (The need for labour is, of course, a consequence of Adam's original sin—'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou earn thy bread'.) All Mercy's injunctions are aimed towards the prospective moment when we must 'Cum forth onto [owr] Juge and yelde [owr] acownte' (line 177; the theme which, in *Everyman*, provides the motoric moment).

Mercy presents this dichotomy as God-ordained, part of the goodness, truth, and order of God's creation, as opposed to the evil, lies and disorder created by the worldlings, Mischief, and Titivillus. The dichotomy is elaborated as the play progresses, with Mankind echoing Mercy's discourse, as well as providing additional examples for our understanding, such as the antagonistic relation between the 'stynkyng dungehyll' (line 204) of the body and the 'sotill' (line 202) soul, metaphorically represented by the power dynamic between horse and rider (lines 241–44), or (in terms acceptable in an earlier, more chauvinistic era) between wife and husband (line 200)—a dynamic of power in which the ideal order is susceptible to revolt and disorder. Further instances, many of them manifestations of Mercy's warnings, are provided by the words and deeds of the vice characters, notably Mischief and the three 'worldlings'.

As may be seen by careful examination of the examples quoted above, most of Mercy's utterances relating to the conduct of life (as opposed to exegesis) are the binary or bipartite type. Thus the very structure of Mercy's initial discourse assists in establishing from the outset the clear dichotomy between two sets of opposites: Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell, Salvation and Damnation. As the discourse develops into dramatic action, these abstract binary oppositions are concretised in more everyday terms: game/sermon, stasis/movement (e.g. dance), humour/gravity, tomfoolery/seriousness (as in work and prayer), and degeneracy/righteousness. In scene three, thus, when Mankind has fallen prey to the lying wiles of Titivillus and become the companion of the worldlings, Mercy, still operating within this context of ongoing binary opposition, will in fact

describe him as 'Man onkynde' (line 742), thus emphasising his transformation into his own directly dichotomous opposite.

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With the entrance of the evil characters, Mercy's binary oppositions are not simply incarnated, however. Though the basic dichotomy of Good and Evil, God and the Devil, persists, the subsidiary or illustrative oppositions are, in fact, complicated and problematised, often by a transformation of the dichotomies into more complex oppositions—triads, triplets, or ternary forms. The trio of vices, New Guise, Nowadays and Nought, is the most obvious example. The numerological relevance of the number three is, I think, the reason why the anonymous dramatist has, as Coogan puts it, 'violate[d] the principle of economy in number of characters which generally operates in professional or semi-professional performances' (78), as only the diametrically opposed roles of Mercy and Titivillus may be 'doubled' by one actor.

In another study ('A *Trio con Brio*') I have suggested that, viewed onomastically, the names and natures of the trio of worldlings in *Mankind*—Nowadays, New Guise and Nought—may have been derived, via the popular medieval principle of inversion, from the natures and functions of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, who are to be seen in orthodox theology as both Three-in-One and One-in-Three. A brief investigation of medieval number symbolism, derived from Pythagoras (cf. Hopper 39–40), appears to confirm this, with the number one (the first principle, or Father, from which the other numbers flow, and which is not susceptible of inversion) functioning to represent God and the Good. By contrast, the number two represents diversity, a breaking-away from the unity of the number one. The dyad was conceived of as in eternal opposition, like the constant dichotomy of Good and Evil. The triad, too, contrasts with the unitary principle of God and the Good, in having a beginning, a middle, and an end, whereas God is eternal and unchanging. (Its representation as a unity in the Trinity is, of course, an exception. Interestingly, though the playwright does mention the Trinity, he does not itemise the three Persons, except where it is unavoidable in the Latin blessing of Mankind with the Sign of the Cross at the very end of the play, when the dangerous trio of tempters has been overcome by Mercy. This may well be in order to avoid appearing to suggest that the triune forces of Good may in any way be equated with

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the tripartism of Evil as conceived and dramatised in the temptation sections of the play.) The present study in part applies the earlier focus on the number three to the discourse of the play.

In many instances the complications of the binary into the ternary are linguistic in nature. The palpably faster pacing of the dialogue of evil may even be experienced as similar to a musical change from the more pedantic two-breve time of Church music (in Mercy's solemn discourse) to the lighter, lilting triple-time of popular song (in the banter of the hedonistic 'worldlings'). At times the representatives of the opposing forces of Good and Evil speak at such cross purposes that they could be participating in totally distinct and mutually incomprehensible 'language-games' in the Wittgensteinian sense. Wittgenstein (cf. Sluga & Stern) presents a series of such 'language-games' using different words, rules and assumptions, but ultimately (at least in his later work) making no pretence to represent reality, merely to communicate (Sluga 331). In *Mankind*, the 'realities' subscribed to by the representatives of Good and Evil are so totally different that their failure to effect any real communication—while by turns seriously significant and entertainingly humorous—is scarcely surprising.

Not wishing to repeat here other critics' analyses of the dramatist's use of parody (e.g. in Mischief's 'court' in scene two, or in his 'pity' for the injured worldlings as a parody of Mercy's genuine compassion for Mankind), inversion (particularly in having Mankind ask 'mercy' of the worldlings and swear in 'court' to commit the 'six' Deadly Sins), and audience manipulation (particularly in the scatological 'Crystemas songe' of scene one, which also parodies the sacrament of confession), I shall focus in this study on investigating certain other instances, many of them discourse-related, in detail.

For example, Mercy, in warning the audience of the Last Judgment, uses the familiar Biblical metaphor of 'corn' and 'chaff' for the saved and the damned at the Last Judgment—a typical medieval binary opposition. He is joined—interrupted, actually—by Mischief, the Vice character, who first transposes the opposition from the context of theology to that of agriculture (or from the world of the sacred to that of the secular) by announcing his availability as a 'winter corn-thresher', before extending the bipartite metaphor into a tripartite one and proceeding to make nonsense of Mercy's message, as may be seen:

> Mercy:
> For sekyrly ther xall be a streyt examynacyon,

The *corn* xall be sauyde, the *chaffe* xall be brente.
   (2-part)
I besech yow hertyly, haue this premedytacyon.

Myscheffe:
I beseche yow hertyly, leue yowr calcacyon,
Leue yowr chaffe, leue yowr corn, leue yowr dalyacyon. (triple time)
Yowr wytt ys lytyll, yowr hede ys mekyll, ye are full of predycacyon. (2-part)
But, ser, I prey this questyon to claryfye:
Mysse-masche, dryff-draff,
Sume was corn and sume was chaffe,
My dame seyde my name was Raffe;
Onschett yowr lokke and take an halpenye.

Mercy: Why com ye hethyr, brother? Ye were not dysyryde.

Myscheff: For a wynter corn-threscher, ser, I haue hyryde,
Ande ye sayde the corn xulde be sauyde & the chaff xulde be feryde,
Ande he prouyth nay, as yt schewth be this werse:
'*Corn* seruit bredibus, *chaffe* horsibus, *straw* fyrybusque.'
   (3-part)
Thys ys as moch to say, to yowr leude wndyrstondynge,
As the corn xall serue to brede at the nexte bakynge.
'Chaff horsybus et reliqua,'
The chaff to horse xall be good provente,
When a man ys forcolde the straw may be brent,
And so forth, et cetera.
(lines 42–63)

Apart from providing humour, this transformation of the Biblical metaphor into dog-Latin is also an early attempt to contest and appropriate power by conferring some of the authority of that text and its (medieval) language on the tripartite structure associated with evil, as well as on its author, Mischief, and his fellows. There are further instances of the forces of evil's superimposition of a three-part

structure on Mercy's original dichotomy, some of these on a grander scale than the example quoted above. Whereas Mercy enjoins Mankind in scene one to practise labour and prayer—another well-known Latin binary—in scene two (after the failure of the worldlings' attempt) Titivillus (the Devil) seduces Mankind not only from these two virtuous duties, but thirdly from his attachment to Mercy. Playing on the natural indolence and suggestibility of the body (the Flesh), he makes the 'erth' too hard to dig by inserting a 'borde' (line 533) into it (an extremely theatrically self-aware moment) as well as stealing Mankind's grain and his spade—thus ending the work. He also curtails Mankind's prayers by whispering (invisibly—an equally theatrical convention) in his ear that (a) short prayers are best and he is in any case the holiest man alive (lines 558–59), and (b) nature is calling and he needs to go and relieve himself (line 560)—thus ending the prayer. Thirdly and finally, when Mankind returns and decides to sleep (indicating that, having ceased to work and pray, he has been seduced into Sloth, which will make him one with Nought, New Guise and Nowadays in their hedonistic pursuit of the World), Titivillus ensures that his perversion will be more than momentary by whispering lies about Mercy's death. The result is Mankind's equally tripartite statement of his own imminent corruption by drunkenness, bad company and fornication:

> Adew, fayre masters! I wyll hast me to the ale-house
> Ande speke wyth New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought
> And gett me a lemman [mistress] wyth a smattrynge face.
> (lines 609–11)

Mankind's temptation thus fulfils Mercy's direst warning—the only segment of his discourse other than the blessing (as far as I can see) which is tripartite in content or structure, though still part of the dichotomy of Good and Evil which he originally set up. In the first scene, in the course of a long speech recommending labour, prayer, steadfastness and patience (the example of Job being cited at particular length), he warns Mankind in separate stanzas (lines 293–309) against the worldlings, Titivillus and Mischief. At the end of the play he speaks warningly again, in shorter compass and more analytically, of Mankind's 'thre aduersaryis'. (One of the three, the World, as we have seen, is further subdivided into the aspects of the three 'worldlings', so that we may actually speak of two tripartite threats, or a six-fold onslaught on Mankind. (In Pythagorean

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terms the number six represented a secular perfection, but in this inverted usage—as in the 'number of the Beast' in Revelations—the significance would obviously be the opposite—a perfection of evil.)

> Ye hawe thre aduersaris and he [Titivillus] ys mayster of hem all:
> That ys to sey, the *Dewell*, the *World*, the *Flesch* and the Fell [skin].
> The *New Gyse, Nowadayis, Nowgth*, the *World* we may hem call;
> And propyrly *Titiuillus* sygnyfyth the *Fend* [Devil] of helle;
>
> The *Flesch*, that ys the vnclene concupissens of your body.
> These be your three gostly enmyis, in whom ye hawe put your confidens.
> Thei browt yow to *Myscheffe* [the disastrous result: attempted suicide] to conclude your temporall glory,
> As yt hath be schewyd before this worcheppyll audiens.
> (lines 883–890)

<center>* * *</center>

The passages described above, which I think of as number games in the discourse, relating to the known Pythagorean number symbolism and also (interestingly) reflecting the modern Wittgensteinian language games, are not the only linguistic games played by the worldlings and castigated by Mercy as 'ydyll language'. Others derive their humour from additional sources: translation, or—as Emmerson (322) notes in a discussion of the use of Anglo-French and Latin as dramatic signifiers of evil in medieval English comedy—the related misapplication of the spiritually privileged Latin language to carnal matters, for example. The 'dog-Latin' on 'corn' and 'chaff' in the excerpt quoted earlier is one example, and there are many instances of such usage in the discourse of the worldlings. So, for instance, at the end of the first scene, when Mankind has beaten them off with his spade (an awkward weapon, although a fit instrument for the honest labour which Mercy advocated), we have this passage:

> Mankynde:
> Yet this instrument, souerens, ys not made to defende.
> Dauide seyth, 'Nec in hasta nec in gladio saluat Dominus.'

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> Nought:
> No, mary, I beschrew yow, yt ys in spadibus.
> Therfor Crystys curse cum on yowr hedybus
> To sende yow lesse myght!
> (lines 396–400)

> Here, too, a bipartite utterance on the side of Good (two lines in a
> 'neither … nor' formulation and listing 'spear' and 'sword')
> receives a tripartite restatement (three lines, with 'spear' and
> 'sword' progressing to 'spade') from the side of Evil, whose use of
> the name of Christ in a curse is also typical.
> In a slightly different usage of Latin/English translation, the
> worldlings complain about Mercy's discourse as being 'full of
> Englysch Laten', then ask him to translate

> I have etyn a dyschfull of curdys,
> Ande I haue schetun yowr mowth full of turdys
> (lines 131–32).

However, they do not give him a chance to do so, before proceeding to bad-mouth
each other in their version of the ancient and revered tongue: 'Osculare
fundamentum!' ('Kiss my arse!' line 142). This passage, again, may be seen as
amounting to a development in ternary form, with the three motifs all being
related to translation.

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Other 'games' are less linguistic and more physical in nature, though of course (in
the nature of a dramatic text) conveyed by means of discourse as well as action
and/or gesture. These are often explicitly described as 'games', the most
pervasive being what I shall term the 'hanging-game', sometimes also represented
as a 'beheading game'. From early in the play, there is constant representation of
neck injury and/or hanging, which I suspect is an inverted reference to the
Crucifixion (to which event, and its redemptive purpose, Mercy refers in detail
in his opening speech). These are almost always presented in the context of game,
or sport, or at least trickery of some sort. I shall highlight some instances, since

the references are often hidden, sometimes by linguistic means, such as paronomasia.

As the worldlings start the dance which so scandalises Mercy in the first scene and which is characterised by them as 'sporte' (or a 'game'), Nought (who presumably is being forced to dance wildly by the other two, for their entertainment) is concerned for his safety:

> Nought:
> I putt case I breke my neke: how than?
>
> New Gyse:
> I gyff no force, by Sent Tanne!
>
> Nowadays:
> Leppe about lyuely! Thou art a wyght man.
> Lett ws be mery wyll we be here!
>
> Nought:
> Xall I breke my neke to schew yow sporte?
> (lines 74–78)

Similarly, at the beginning of the second scene there is a passage which has been described (cf. Denny 'Aspects' 255) as reminiscent of the 'folk play', in which Mischief offers to cure the worldlings' injuries and, in particular, to chop off Nowadays's head and 'sett yt on agayn' (line 435) or 'make yt agayn' (line 445). Nowadays is understandably reluctant: 'Yea, Cristys crose, wyll ye *smyght my hede awey*?' The choice of oath again marks the link between this 'beheading game' and the Crucifixion. Indeed, this connection may be one of the reasons why Titivillus is to wear an enormous 'head' (line 461)—as yet another (visual) means of emphasising the Good/Evil dichotomy.

Slightly later, the worldlings ask Titivillus, the devil, to avenge their injuries, and Nowadays pleads: 'Remember my *brokyn hede* in the worschyppe of the fyve vowellys' (line 497)—at once a linguistic pun (on cries of pain: A! E! I! O! U!) and a reference to the five wounds sustained by Christ on the Cross (in all probability by means of mistranscription of 'v. wellys').

When the worldlings are about to set off on their thieving spree, indicating who their victims will be, and whom they will avoid, Nought speaks of being in fear

of 'in manus tuas qweke' (line 516), linking Christ's words from the Cross to His Father ('Into Thy hands I commend my spirit') with the sound of choking to death ('qweke'), while New Guise reminds his fellows to remember their 'neke-verse' (line 520)—the verse from Psalm 50 which, quoted in Latin, was apparently sufficient to classify one as a cleric and save one from hanging ('benefit of clergy'). On their return, New Guise and Mischief appear to have had just such narrow escapes, Mischief being a 'convicte, for he coude [knew] hys neke-verse' (line 619) and New Guise actually wearing the noose which fortuitously saved him by breaking. Even death, however, appears to be a 'game' to them, and life a matter of mere chance (the words 'grace' and 'ecce signum' being used superficially by New Guise, but with an ironic significance for the audience):

> I was twychyde by the neke; the *game* was begunne.
> A grace was, the halter brast asonder: ecce signum!
> (lines 615–16)

When Titivillus succeeds in his temptation of Mankind he describes himself as showing the audience 'a praty game' (line 591) and teaching his victim to 'dawnce another trace' (line 528), concluding with 'I haue don my game' (line 605). Specifically, he dupes Mankind into deserting Mercy's teachings by means of lies which convince him that Mercy is dead, having 'danced' on the gallows as a horse-thief (ironically, one of the worldlings' own stated specialisations):

> But yet I herde sey he brake hys neke as he rode in Fraunce;
> But I thynke he rydyth on the galouse, to lern for to *daunce*.
> (lines 597–98)

The Crucifixion, to which the 'hanging-games' point, is also suggested by Mankind's change of costume, effected by the worldlings at the end of scene two. This may be read as the dramatic equivalent of a stripping, reminiscent of the stripping of Christ by his torturers before the Crucifixion—an event also scripted in the form of a 'game', with the soldiers blindfolding and buffetting Him, and then casting lots for His seamless robe. The connection with Christ is further emphasised by Mankind's words to New Guise as he gives him the jacket for alteration: 'Go and do that longyth to yowr offyce' (line 677)—a phrase which clearly echoes Christ's words to Judas as the betrayer leaves the Last Supper to sell his Master (John 13: 27). Mankind is being duped into 'selling' his own soul

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here. The fact that the costume is altered twice, of course, also means that the form in which Mankind finally wears it is its third, providing a neat visual parallel to the tripartite nature of the discourse of evil.

The hanging/Crucifixion metaphor reaches its climax in scene three when Mercy is desperately seeking Mankind, while the worldlings, by announcing this and overwhelming Mankind with guilt, very nearly succeed in coercing him into hanging himself and thereby forfeiting his soul. Mischief provides not only the rope, but the required 'tre' (line 802) as well—and we recall that this word was synonymous with 'Cross'. New Guise almost throttles himself in a demonstration, or 'rehearsal' of the procedure (line 808) before Mercy puts them to flight.[4] Suicide was sometimes referred to as the 'unforgivable' sin, as it proceeds from despair at any prospect of reconciliation with God—an implicit denial of the infinite nature of God's mercy and power. Coogan (60) quotes in comparison Skelton's *Magnyfycence* in this regard, which explains that '[N]o one may sin more mortally than he who, influenced by Wanhope [despair], shortens, through Mischief, the term of his own life'. This aspect of the 'hanging-game' is important in the context of Mercy's seeking after Mankind to re-educate him and offer him God's forgiveness. At this point the 'vicious games' of the play are at their most dangerous, being not just fatal, but also potentially instantly damning. With the arrival of Mercy and the disappearance of the forces of Evil, malice and despair are routed by love and hope. The disruption of the God-given binary order is at an end, and we leave the dangerously shifting, uncertain world of play and game to return to the safety of 'duty as pleasure' and the clarity and stability of the known: the dichotomous paradigm of Good and Evil initially established by Mercy. His blessing of the audience as they wend their way homeward, typical of the morality genre, is intended to perpetuate that conception beyond the confines of the dramatic presentation, into their real lives, in both this world and the next.

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This study has aimed to demonstrate that the medieval morality play *Mankind*, while undeniably a play about language, is also a self-reflexively and theatrically aware play about *play*, first in the sense of drama or performance, and secondly in the sense of 'game'. Within this context, it investigates the role of discourse in facilitating the establishment of an orderly dichotomous paradigm of Good and Evil which is then, in terms of the dramatic action as well as the ongoing discourse of the temptation scenes, persistently contested, disrupted, inverted and

perverted into various three-part forms by the very forces of Evil which it sought to label and contain. The hedonism with which those forces tempt Mankind from the path of duty manifests itself in the structuring of the parts of the play in which they appear as a series of 'games' of various types which, once Good has ultimately triumphed and the representative soul has been absolved of its dangerous susceptibility to play and pleasure, are stigmatised as 'vicious'—but nevertheless as redressable by Mercy—within the context of the greater Plan (or Play) of life itself, as conceived by the ultimate dramatist and stage-manager, God.

NOTES

1. Found in the Macro Manuscript—Washington D.C., Folger Library MS. V.a. 354, at fols. 122–34r. The standard edition is the EETS one, by Eccles, which is quoted here with 'yogh' silently amended.
2. Harris (163) refers to the threesome as 'vices' but, as Potter (38) has shown, they are in reality more tempters than actual embodiments of vice. Ashley, followed by Chaplan, uses the term 'worldlings' to include Mischief as well as the three Ns, while Meredith (17ff.) subsumes these four under the title 'vice'. I prefer to apply Ashley's term simply to the threesome, following Mercy's enumeration in his concluding discussion with Mankind: 'The New Gyse, Nowadayis, Nowgth, the *World* we may hem call' (line 885), and to consider Mischief, whose name, in medieval times, connoted everything from wickedness through misfortune to catastrophe; could be synonymous with suicide (cf. lines 306, 889), and is associated in literature (e.g. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* lines 1970–2050) with serious suffering or calamitous loss, as a more advanced, all-encompassing and potentially mortal evil, as Mercy seems to do: 'your thre gostly enmyis … browt yow to Myscheffe to conclude your temporall glory' (lines 888–89).
3. The manuscript is without scene divisions (as well as incomplete). Meredith presents his text without scene divisions, but arranges his introductory discussion under seven subheadings (20–38): the confrontation of good and evil; Mankind; the testing; the gathering of evil; the Fall; the realities of sin, and Mercy. Eccles's EETS edition creates three scenes for ease of reading, well-supported by dramatic action and spiritual significance. This study utilises the latter scene division.

4. One of the anonymous reviewers of this article has kindly pointed out that Mercy may be seen to dismiss the forces of evil in three ways: by argument (147), by arriving to interrupt their roguery (722), and finally physically with a 'bales' or scourge (807), this last of course echoing Christ's ejection of the moneychangers from the temple. As s/he points out, words, action and a theatrical property are all involved here too. Ultimately, Good recovers control, and both bi- and tripartite actions and utterances (such as the final blessing) are valid; it is specifically during the temptation scenes that the forces of evil manipulate the dichotomy into a false tripartite system, while deceptively offering what appears to be an acceptable path of pleasure (e.g. the innocent-sounding 'football') but is in fact only a disguised version of the negative pole of the dichotomy Duty/Pleasure, which is the human expression-in-action of the abstract Good/Evil binary.

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