

Introduction

The first English comedy is the anonymous late medieval morality play *Mankind*. Likely written and performed by monks in East Anglia as part of the Shrovetide festivities of 1471 (possibly on Saturday, February 23, 1471), it survives in only one damaged manuscript. It was written about five years before the arrival of the printing press in England, at the tail end of a world in which ideas circulated primarily by word of mouth or handwritten manuscript.

Morality plays were popular or folk entertainment, but their themes were religious. Their characters are allegorical, and the plots tend to dramatize the battles between good and evil, body and soul, worldly vices and eternal bliss. The best-known surviving morality play, by far, is *Everyman*, which is roughly contemporaneous with *Mankind* and similar to it in length and theme. In *Everyman* (which we are not reading), a character representing humanity is warned that God is keeping a ledger of his activities and repentance and that he will be judged when he dies. The main plot concerns Everyman's attempt to get spiritual help from others, only to learn that he must find his own salvation. At the end of the play, he dies.

That death fits nicely with works we will read later this semester, especially *Doctor Faustus* and *Don Giovanni*. But *Everyman* lacks the vice figures and the slapstick comedy they stir up in other morality plays. *Mankind* has those characters, and you will recognize their descendants in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, written about a century later. Like the medieval morality plays, *Faustus* centers on the cosmic battle for a man's soul.

Mankind, however, is both fast-paced and raunchy. Its audience turns out for what sounds like a wholesome, spiritually safe event: a play put on by the local clergy. It is a deeply serious play, but it is also one of the most hilarious pieces of literature I know. The play was probably performed during Shrovetide, the season of licensed misrule before Lent—something like Saturnalia, Mardi Gras, Spring Break, and Halloween rolled into one. I believe it was a local production staged by clergy themselves rather than a performance by a traveling troupe of professional players (as many scholars have argued). Mercy, traditionally one of God's daughters, is masculine here, suggesting an all-male cast. Mercy and Titivillus—the angel and the devil, as it were—never appear onstage together, and they may well have been played by the same actor. Some scholars have suggested it may have been staged in a pub; when *Mankind* asks for another ale, the actual barmaid may have handed it to him. Or perhaps it was performed at the local church. There's a lot we don't know, but if the vice figures were played by local clergy, as I believe they were, the original audience may have had the particular pleasure of watching the same priests who heard their confessions enthusiastically take on the roles of their tempters.

The costumes must have been highly entertaining, from *Mankind*'s shrinking jacket to Titivillus's spectacular costume and mask. And the original audience must have had high expectations for what Titivillus would look like, since the actors effectively held them for ransom and collected a donation before bringing out their devil. How I'd love to know what it looked like when it was first staged more than five hundred years ago!

I first prepared this translation in 2010 for the inaugural semester of *Legacy of Success*. I had already committed to teaching *Mankind* when I discovered that no modern translation existed that would do what I needed: make this difficult East Anglian Middle English play accessible to intelligent college students without cleaning up precisely the material that makes it so interesting.

This is therefore a classroom and performance translation rather than a critical edition. My aim has been to capture the meaning, humor, pace, vulgarity, and dramatic energy of the dialogue for modern readers. I have made no attempt to preserve the original meter or rhyme scheme. Some translated lines are nearly half their original length, while others are nearly twice as long. Because leaves are missing from the sole surviving manuscript, I have also supplied dialogue where necessary to make the dramatic action intelligible.

For those reasons, I have not provided line numbers. Lineation in this translation does not correspond consistently to the Middle English text or to scholarly editions, so we will make do with page numbers.

The obscenity of *Mankind* has helped keep it out of undergraduate classrooms. Material that could apparently be performed by clergy in the fifteenth century became “unprintable” to scholarly editors centuries later. Joseph Quincy Adams, among others, simply censored obscene passages from his edition. Such editorial decisions made the Middle Ages seem more remote from our own time rather than simply different from our own. After all, why should jokes about oral sex and obscene Christmas carols that could be performed in the fifteenth century become unprintable in the twentieth?

For many modern readers, *Mankind* is their first exposure to the gritty, vulgar, crass, and at times blasphemous side of medieval literature. It is also a play about conformity and submission above all else. As with all our readings this semester, our task is not to decide whether its theology is right or wrong, nor to reconcile its worldview with our own beliefs. We will instead approach the play as historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and literary scholars, asking what its theology, comedy, assumptions, and theatrical strategies can tell us about the culture that produced it and the people who first performed and watched it.

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Mankind

Dramatis Personae

Mercy	Mankind
Mischief	New-Guise
Nowadays	Nought
Titivillus	

Enter Mercy, who addresses the audience:

MERCY We sinful wretches were put on earth to venerate
The founder and beginner of all creation.
He sent his own Son to be crucified because of our disobedience;
Our dutiful service should be devoted to God at every moment,
For he is lord of all, and made all things from nothing—
All for the wretched sinner—even sending his own Son to death.

The truth is that mankind was ransomed at a high price:
Through the crucifixion of Jesus, Mankind had his salvation;
His debt was paid off, his sins washed away.
To all with free will, I urge you to clean up your act,
And with humility and reverence commit your lives
To God and clean living, so that you may have everlasting life.

Mercy is my name, and I am the means for your rebirth.
I mourn for your old, sinful ways. Here's my advice:
Don't give in to earthly temptations now,
So that you may be acceptable to God when you leave this world.
The great mercy of God is always available, through Our Lady's intercession,
To the sinful man who repents for his recklessness.
I pray to God, that when you need mercy most, I will defend you.

I advise you to persevere in good works,
To purify your soul from corruption:
Your spiritual enemy will make his advance,
Attempting to ruin all your hard work and right living.
Sirs and madams in the theater-boxes,
And brothers and sisters in the cheap seats,
Don't look for happiness in short-lived things!
Behold not the earth, but lift your eyes up to the heavens!

For example, see how the body's limbs defer to the head.
Who is the head in this metaphor?

It is our Savior, of course, described like a lamb;
And his saints are the limbs he directs with the blood from his side.

There is no such manna, neither on land nor in water,
So precious or glorious, so ideal for our purpose,
For it has dissolved mankind from the bitter bond Of
the mortal enemy, that venomous serpent Satan, From
whom God liberates you all at the last Judgment! For
surely there will be a strict examination then:
The wheat shall be saved, the chaff shall be burned.
I beseech you heartily, pray on this.

Enter Mischief.

MISCHIEF I beseech you heartily, leave your praying!
Leave your chaff! Leave your wheat! Leave your whole sermon!
Your wit is little, your head too big! You're a windbag preacher!
But, sir, perhaps you can help me with this one nagging question:

Driff-draff, mish-mash,
Some was wheat, and some was chaff;
My lady said my name was Raff;
Reach in your pocket, and give me a buck and a half!

MERCY Why are you here, brother? Nobody called for you.

MISCHIEF I was hired as a winter wheat-thresher, sir,
And you said the wheat should be saved,
And it is proven in this verse:

“Corn servit bredibus, chaff horsibus,
Straw firibusque,”¹

Any scholar can see your ignorance; it translates as follows:
“As the wheat serves for bread at the next baking...” Continuing:
“Chaff horsibus” means, “The chaff is good produce for a horse,”
And “Straw firibusque” means that when a man is very cold,
This straw may be burned.
And so forth, *et cetera*.

¹ Dog Latin: “Corn [wheat in the US] serves for bread, chaff for horses, and straw for fires.”

MERCY You're heckling my sensible sermon.
 I think it's time for you to high-tail it out of here.

MISCHIEF But I have neither horse nor saddle, so I can't ride away.

MERCY Then go forth on foot, brother, in God's name!
 Now, take a hike, I say!

MISCHIEF Obviously you haven't figured out that I've come here to have some fun with you!
 And since you didn't invoke my master, the Devil,
 When you asked me to leave, I think I'll stick around a little bit longer.

Mercy addresses the audience:

MERCY Sinners, beware! I am Mercy, and Mischief won't leave even me alone.
 Don't be so brazen as to think you can overcome temptation without me!
 Mischief seldom travels alone; his gang also includes
 A fashion expert called New-Guise,
 Instant gratification called Nowadays,
 And a trendy urban type called Nought.
 There are others, to be sure, in such corrupt times as ours,
 But these enticements pose the greatest risk to Mankind these days.

MISCHIEF On second thought, I'm already tiring of your droning homily.
 There are other men to tempt, and besides, I'm sure my friends are on their way.
 If I can't corrupt you today, I'll bet the three you just mentioned can!

Enter New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought, with musicians.

NOUGHT Come on, you guys. Why won't you leave me alone?
 When will I be an official member of the gang?

NOW-A-
DAYS Your initiation is almost complete;
 We want to make sure you're not an imposter.

NEW-
GUISE You've almost proven yourself, but you have one ordeal left.
 You must show us all the latest dance moves you've learned in the city
 Musicians, play a fast and catchy ditty.
 Play your guitars so fast you break their necks—and Nought's, as well!

NOUGHT But seriously, what if I break my neck?
Then what? Am I still in the club?

NEW- I don't care, by Saint Anne, Mother of Mary!
GUISE Just dance!

NOW-A- Leap about lively! You're a limber guy!
DAYS Let's have some fun now, while we're still alive!

NOUGHT So now I have to break my neck to show you a good time?

NOW-A- What are you, chicken?
DAYS

NOUGHT Screw you all! You guys are bad news.
I'll show you my moves if you show me yours.

They dance. Eventually, Mercy says:

MERCY Stop! Stop this horsing around, you guys! I'm serious!

NOW-A- Stop, old man? You're older than Adam!
DAYS (*mocking him*) Cut it out? Do you mean it?
Butt out, okay?

NOUGHT (*aside*) I'm getting tired and could use a break.
Plus, here's my big chance to prove myself—it's his turn now!)

Come closer, Gramps, so we can talk.
There, that's more like it. Now, why don't you try a little dance?
You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out...
Like this, see? You don't know what fun you've been missing!

MERCY No, brother, I will not dance.

NEW- If you loosen up a little, we'll teach you all the latest moves.
GUISE

NOW-A- You don't seem to understand:
DAYS This is an offer you can't refuse.
 Now, do as I say—it's time to dance.

NOUGHT ([*Aside*] This guy doesn't stand a chance against us.
 My friends wore me out, and besides,
 This room is too small to really get moving!)

More to the point, sir, you did summon us three, didn't you?

NEW- Yeah, you interrupted my nap when you called us here.
GUISE

NOW-A- And I was just about to sit down to a feast.
DAYS Since you've called us from our earthly pleasures,
 We came quickly when you called, and we hope to keep it snappy!

MERCY Keep it snappy! (*rolling his eyes*)

NEW- Sir, it's the latest style and the height of fashion.
GUISE Short and sweet, that's my motto.

MERCY Our Lady, help! How wretches delight in their sinful ways!

NOW-A- Say nothing against us trendy villains;
DAYS You'll find us rogues in every way.
 Careful—or you'll taste a knuckle sandwich!

MERCY Whoever brought you thugs together wasn't wasting *his* time!

NOUGHT Quit changing the subject.
 I heard you call "New-guise, Nowadays, Nought."
 You summoned all three of us at once.
 Are you calling me a liar? I won't fall for that!
 Pack your bags, you've just won a trip!

Nought trips him.

Oh, and one other thing. I have a wife—her name is Rachel—

² “Denomination” and “communication” are derived from the Latin; perhaps New-Guise is suggesting that even Mercy is a victim of some fashions.

She and I have had a great battle;
You must tell who won the struggle.

NOUGHT I'll bet twenty lice Rachel won.

NOW-A- Who spoke to you, fool? Shut up.
DAYS I've got another test before you can be ordained in our order:
Osculare fundamentum!—Kiss my ass!

NOUGHT Well, excuuuuse meee.
I got an indulgence from Pope Deep-Pocket—
If you put your nose in his wife's socket,
You'll get forty days of pardon.³

MERCY You shall repent for this revolting language!
Now, please leave this place.

NEW- Let's get out of here.
GUISE Grandpa here can't appreciate our eloquence.
I have just one prayer for him:
May God and the Blessed Mary bring you
Into the fold of the brotherhood of devils!

NOW-A- Come wind, come rain, I'll never come here again.
DAYS I hope the devil puts out both of your eyes!
Fellows, let's hit the road!

NOUGHT In the devil's name, let's go!
Here's the door, don't let it hit you on your way out. (*To Mercy*)
Sayonara, slow-poke!
I pray to God you'll have a good night!

*They exit together, singing. They end up hiding in such a way that
the audience can see them but they are out of sight of Mercy.*

³ This is a satiric attack on Papal indulgences (or pardons) granted in exchange for gifts like cash and real estate. The fictional pope in this play is so corrupt that he grants indulgences to men who perform oral sex on his wife.

MERCY Thanks be to God, we are no longer endangered by
Those three irresponsible hooligans!
They have no respect for their place in the world.
By all that is rational, I swear they're worse than beasts,
For beasts act according to their place in the hierarchy.
You can deduce from these fellows' carousing and misconduct
That their only pleasure is in deriding Christ—who died for their sins!

Their way of life is dangerous to the soul,
So beware of it! It is worse than any felony or treason.
How may God, the Judge of all, excuse such behavior,
When we must give a justification for every thoughtless word?
These careless, lazy fellows are like animals—
They live without thinking of the consequences of their actions.

But when the angel of heaven blows the trumpet,
And says to the transgressors who have sinned:
“Come forth towards your judge, and submit your account!”
Then shall I, Mercy, begin in sorrow to weep:
Neither comfort nor council shall be had then;
As they have sown, so shall they reap.
They may be carefree now, but then they'll be sad.

And yet I only disapprove of wicked habits.
Pardon me for rambling on about common sense:
Use those things which God intended for you to enjoy in moderation,
And just say “no” to those which should be refused.

Enter Mankind, carrying a spade.

MANKIND From dust are we made, and from dust shall we return:
This is our destiny, by the providence of God.
I recommend His mercy to this entire audience,
For it is the only way to receive his eternal bliss.
By reining in our carnal condition, taming our perverse desires,
And submitting ourselves to God's provision,
Every man, according to his station, can join in his heavenly reward.

My name is Mankind. I am made of a body and a soul—of contrary conditions;
Between the body and the soul is a great division:
Although the soul should control the body, the body is usually victorious.
I am saddened to see my flesh governing my soul:
Where the wife is master, the husband is sorry.
This is a wretched revelation!

O, thou, my soul, such refined substance! Alas!

Why were you so unlucky as to be associated with my flesh—
My flesh, that stinking dunghill?

Mother Mary, help! It does my soul much ill to see the flesh prosperous,
While the soul is trodden under foot.
Perhaps that man over there can help me;
I trust he will help me in spiritual solace.

He goes to Mercy and kneels.

I bow down to you, Father! You are welcome in my house!
You share in and partake of the true wisdom of God!
My body and my soul are always fighting.
I pray for your help! I am fickle in my ways;
My name is Mankind. My spiritual enemy, the devil,
Takes joy in my sinful behavior and delights in seeing my demise.

MERCY Christ sends you good comfort!
You are welcome, my friend!
Stand up on your feet! I say, arise!
My name is Mercy; you are too gracious to me.
My advice is to steer clear of all vice.

MANKIND O Mercy! You are the embodiment of grace and virtue!
Devout priests have told me that you are God's head-servant;
That he places you above all his other works.
O! Your lovely words are sweeter than honey to my soul!

MERCY You must resist the temptation of the flesh like a man,
For there is a constant battle between the soul and the body:
The life of a man on earth is a battle.⁴
Overcome your spiritual enemy, and be one of Christ's knights!
Never be a coward in the face of your adversary!
In order to be crowned you will have to fight.
Aim high, and God will guide you well.

My friend, remember the shortness of life!
So help me God, life is but one cherry-time—short but sweet.
Spend it well! Serve God with loyalty of heart.
Don't rot your brain with good ale or with wine.

But "measure is treasure"—I don't completely forbid the use:

⁴ Job 7:1.

Pace yourself, and beware of excess!
It's immoderation that I urge you to refuse;
When nature is satisfied, then you should stop.

For example, if a man has a horse that he's always starving,
It will be easy for him to control that hungry horse.
A well-fed horse, in contrast, will be prone to disobey,
And in such satisfaction buck his master into the mud.

New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought are still visible only to the audience.

NEW- What you say is true, sir; you're no liar.
GUISE (*Mocking him.*) I have fed my wife so well that she was my master!
See this wound on my head?
And see this cast where I piss—on my pecker?
If my wife were your horse, she would disobey you!
You're a wise man for *starving* your horse *in moderation*!
I swear, if you were the king's horse-keeper,
Very few horses would survive your diet.

MANKIND Where is this heckler? Won't he show himself?

MERCY In good time, my brother, I fear, for your sake.
He was just here (I swear, by Christ, who paid for our sins!)
With some of his posse. Those guys are in for a rough ride at Judgment Day.

They will be here again—just as soon as I leave.
Mankind, meditate on my doctrine! It shall be your defense.
Learn while I am here; set my words in your heart.
I must go soon.

Nowadays is still hiding.

NOW-A- The sooner the better—if not right away!
DAYS I believe your name is "Do-little"; you are so far from home.
As soon as you leave, we'll all come over, the whole group.
You have few friends because you're such a kill-joy.
Off you go!

Nought is still hiding.

NOUGHT Your dinner's getting cold, sir.
Why, I've seen a man gamble away twenty gold coins
In the time you're taking to leave!
(Yet he didn't lose to me, I swear by Saint Quentin,
For I've never had even a potful of cabbages to my name!)
My name is Nought, I love to make merriment;
Before I came here I was hanging out with my favorite bartender.
Fool though I may be, I played so long that I became very weary—
Yet I will be there again tomorrow!

MERCY (*To Mankind*) I care for you very deeply, my dear friend.
Your enemies will be here soon; they have made their boast.
Take to heart that your name is "Mankind";
Be not defiant to God, I pray! Be his servant!
Be steadfast in your resolve! Stay on the wagon!
Don't let folly buy your soul so cheaply!
God will test you soon; and if you are loyal,
You shall share in his everlasting bliss.

You may not succeed on your first try.
Remember the great patience and tribulation of Job:
Like the smith refines iron in the fire,
So was he tested by God's affliction.

Job was of your nature and of your frailty:
Follow in his footsteps, my dear boy,
And say, as he said, in your trouble and adversity:
"The Lord Gave, and the Lord hath taken away;
As it was pleasing to him, so it was done;
Blessed be the name of the Lord!"⁵

Moreover, in particular I command you:
Beware of New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought!
Extravagantly dressed and big talkers,
They go to great lengths to lead you astray.

Good son, avoid their company at all costs!
Why, they haven't been to church once this whole year!
Don't give them your time, for they will tell you many lies.
You must work hard and keep the Sabbath.

Beware of a devil named Titivillus;
He knows every trick in the book.
He goes invisibly and will not be seen:

⁵ Job 1:21. Notice the sermonic structure of Mercy's speeches.

He will whisper in your ear from beneath his cloak of invisibility.
He's the worst of them all! God will see to it that he never enters heaven.

If you displease God, ask for mercy right away,
Or else Mischief will swoop in and fasten you in his bridle.
Kiss me now, my dear darling! God will shield you from your foes!
Focus on your task at hand, and never be idle!
The blessings of God be with you—
And with all these devout men! (*He gestures to the audience.*)

MANKIND Amen! Blessed be Jesus!
My soul is nourished with the nectar of this holy man's lessons!
The rebellion of my flesh is conquered.
Praise God for sending Mercy and his teachings!

I'll sit here and record in this ledger
The immeasurable wealth of my promised inheritance.

To the audience:

Pious men and women, I have written here
The glorious remembrance of my noble condition,
To have remorse and memory of myself.
To defend me from all superstitious charms,
I have written these words:
"Remember, O man, that thou art ashes, and to ashes thou shalt return."⁶
The cross on my necklace symbolizes my Heavenly Father's coat of arms;
It shields me from dangerous curses.

Enter New-Guise.

NEW- This weather is cold! God should send us some fires!
GUISE "With the holy you will show yourself holy;
And with the wicked you will show yourself wicked,"⁷
Said the devil to the friars,
"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."⁸

⁶ Compare with Job 34:15: "All flesh perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." Like the purpose of this entire play, perhaps *Mankind* is using this as a *memento mori*—a reminder of the inevitability of death.

⁷ Psalms 18:25-26.

⁸ Psalms 133:1. These two Biblical quotations are part of a rich tradition of satire against friars in the Middle Ages. In this case, the friars are being accused of belonging to the brotherhood of devils. Throughout the Middle English manuscript Latin is untranslated; I have generally substituted an English translation instead.

MANKIND I hear somebody speaking. I'll stay clear of him.
I'll dig this earth with my spade;
To make sure I'm never idle, I'm a do-it-yourself guy;
I trust God will bring my field good crops.

*He begins to dig. Nowadays and Nought enter
through the audience, shouting at the spectators.*

NOW-A- Long time, no see! Stand aside, gentlemen!
DAYS It's time to lead the audience in a Christmas carol!

NOUGHT Folks, join us in our merry cheer!

*He sings a line at a time, which New-Guise
and Nowadays, leading the audience, sing after him.*

It is written with a coal, it is written with a coal,⁹

N-G & It is written with a coal, it is written with a coal,
N-A-D

NOUGHT He who shitteth with his hole, he who shitteth with his hole,

N-G & He who shitteth with his hole, he who shitteth with his hole,
N-A-D

NOUGHT Unless he wipes his ass clean, unless he wipes his ass clean,

N-G & Unless he wipes his ass clean, unless he wipes his ass clean,
N-A-D

NOUGHT On his britches it will be seen, on his britches it will be seen,

N-G & On his britches it will be seen, on his britches it will be seen.
N-A-D

⁹ Thanks to Dr. Edward Wheatley at Loyola University Chicago for pointing out that this can be sung to the tune of "Deck the Halls."

All sing:

Holy, holy, holy! Holy, holy, holy!

NEW- Hey, Mankind, Godspeed to you and your spade!
GUISE I shall tell you of a perfect matrimony:
 I wish your mouth were married to the
 Ass of the guy who wrote this song!

MANKIND Get out of here, you good-for-nothings!
 Take your derision and your mocking and leave!
 I need to get to work—it's my living!

NOW-A- Are you kidding me? But we just got here!
DAYS And we don't get what you're trying to do.
 Are you trying to grow all this wheat in this tiny little field?
 Either wheat must be terribly expensive, or you must be terribly poor.

NOUGHT Alas, old man, this labor is wearing you to the bone!
 I sure feel sorry for your crop:
 You'll never finish it alone—I'll try to get you a wife.

 How many acres would you guess this is?

NEW- Who taught you how to turn the earth up and down?
GUISE I've traveled far and wide,
 But I've never seen anybody till like that!

MANKIND Why are you just standing there idly?
 It's a pity that you were even born!

NOW-A- You can relax, we're not going to mock or scorn you.
DAYS Here's our proposition:
 At harvest, load all your wheat into a cart.
 What do you think we'll pay for all the leftovers?

NOUGHT He is a good, strong laborer! He could come out ahead!
 But he has met with the good man Mercy at a bad time,
 And for that mistake he's going to starve.

Wouldn't you say he's shrewd?
There will be good wheat in this field, he can't go wrong:
If he needs rain, he can piss in it,
And if he needs compost, he can bless it with his arse, like this. (*bends forward*)

MANKIND Go do something productive! May God never let you thrive!
Or, I swear by the Holy Trinity, I'll beat you with my spade!
Don't you have some other man to taunt, or must it always be me?
Quit trying to get me to join your ranks.
I want you to go now, before I have to make you leave.

He beats them with his spade.

NEW- Ouch! My family jewels!
GUISE My wife is going to kill me when I can't get it up!

NOW-A- Oww, and I am also permanently disabled.
DAYS

MANKIND Thus I say, New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought!
Mercy warned me that you'd use every trick
To ruin my virtue and bring me down.

You thieves tell nothing but lies.

NOUGHT I was out in the cold, but now I am warm!
You'd better be on guard, mister, now that you've hurt us. By
Cock's consecrated body¹⁰, I have such a pain in my arm
I can't go about my business—you've put me of commission.

New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought start to leave. Mankind kneels.

MANKIND Now I thank God, kneeling on my knee—
Blessed be his name! He is of high degree—

¹⁰ One major theme in morality plays like *Mankind* is the value of the body—"a stinking dunghill," according to Mankind in his first speech—versus the value of the soul. The original line, "By cockys body sakryde," is a commonly perverted form of "God's sacred (or consecrated) body." To a medieval Christian, swearing by Christ's body was like torturing him again. For medieval Christians, not even Jesus was free from the problems of having a body.

I have made three of my enemies flee
With the aid of his grace, which he has sent me.

He holds up his spade and addresses the audience:

Yet this instrument, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls,
Is not made to defend.
David said, "The Lord saves neither with the spear nor with the sword."¹¹

NOUGHT *(over his shoulder)* To the contrary, damn you, he saves with the spade!
Therefore, Christ's curse will send you less strength.

All exit, except for Mankind, who addresses the audience:

MANKIND I assure you these fellows won't be back—
Some of them came a little too close for their own good!
Mercy, my spiritual father, advised me to keep my chin up,
And to fight my enemies like a man.

I shall conquer them—I hope—each and every one, I will!
Wait—I misspoke—I'm not doing it alone:
I resist my foes and their wicked assaults
Through the help of God's grace.
Dear audience, I'm taking my spade and leaving.
To work to correct my arrogance,
I'll go fetch some seeds for my land.
Thanks for your patience—I'll be back soon.

Mankind leaves to get the seeds.

Enter Mischief, his acting completely over the top.

MISCHIEF Woe! Woe that I was ever born!
Woe that I am worse than nothing!
I am utterly undone by Christ (who ransomed me)!
I, Mischief, was here at the beginning of the game,
And I argued with Mercy—God should be ashamed of him!
While I was laying low,
He says he taught Mankind to fight his foes like a man.

His *spade* was his weapon for
Beating New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought.

¹¹ A slight misquotation from 1 Kings 17:47.

I have great pity to see them weep.
Listen—I can hear them crying.

They cry, and Mischief calls to them:

Alas! Alas! Come here! I'll be your guardian.
Alack! Alack! *Vene! Vene!* Come here, with sorrow!

Enter New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought, crying.

Hush, poor babes! I'll give you an apple tomorrow.
Why are you whimpering? Why?

NEW- Alas, master! Alas, my privates!
GUISE

MISCHIEF Oh, where? Hush, poor babe, kiss me.
Wait! Then again, I'll see it soon enough!

NOW-A- Over here, master! Check out my head!
DAYS

MISCHIEF Our Lady, help! Poor darling, hurry, hurry!
I'll put you out of your misery:
I'll knock your head off and screw it on right!

NOUGHT By Our Lady, that would take a huge brace!
Since when is "Off with his head" an outpatient procedure?
So, are you going to punch him or not?

As for me, I escaped unscathed;
There's no need to cut off my arm.
Here's how to do your surgery: *In nomine patris*¹², chop!

NEW- You won't chop off my family jewels,
GUISE If I can help it!

¹² "In the name of the Father." Nought is telling Mischief to amputate Nowadays's head by saying a quick prayer and then quickly chopping it off.

NOW-A- Good Lord! Are you really going to take my head off?
DAYS How? When? Where? Forget it!
 I'd look like a fool without my head!

MISCHIEF I can chop it off and make it better than new.

NEW- I know he punched my lights out,
GUISE But he really didn't do any damage.

NOW-A- Now that you mention it, my head is all better.
DAYS Now, turning to the temptation of Mankind,
 We have a quorum, so let's call a meeting
 And come to a resolution on the matter.

MISCHIEF Hey, I have an idea. Do you know any minstrels, any at all?

NOUGHT I got this penny-whistle at the gift shop at Norfolk,
 At the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.¹³
 I can play! Pick me! Nought! Nought! Me! Me! Pick me!

MISCHIEF Play it now, and you'll bring him^o with your flute. (Titivillus)

*There is an explosion of powder,
and Titivillus shouts from offstage:*

TITIVILLUS I'm coming as fast as my little legs can carry me!

MISCHIEF Hang on, New-Guise, Nowadays! One more thing before I go:
 When we talked earlier, I spoke of *quid pro quo*.¹⁴

¹³ This play is filled with references to specific people and places that would have been familiar to medieval English audiences, who apparently traveled more than you might think. In the Middle Ages, shrines containing relics of saints and martyrs were popular destinations for pilgrims. Pilgrimages showed devotion to God, while the relics were believed to have healing properties. As a result, pilgrimages were big business, and medieval pilgrims (like tourists today) bought souvenirs of their travels.

¹⁴ In the Middle English the line reads, "When owur hedis wer to-gethere I spake of *si dedero*." *Si dedero* literally means "If I give," implying that if I give you something, I expect payment in return. Here, the villains expect payment from the audience before they'll bring out the devil. The collection of money from an audience during a performance is the first such instance in English drama.

NEW- Go your way and we'll gather money for the purpose—
GUISE Or else nobody will see our devilish friend!
 Let's split up and collect an offering for our righteous purpose.

To the audience:

Open up your purses, pious worshippers, and show your negligence
For a man whose brains are omnipotent—¹⁵

NOW-A- (*interrupting New-Guise*) Keep the books, my good brother,
DAYS Titivillus is a venerable man, sirs. If you don't mind,
 He doesn't make change, and he doesn't like small contributions.
 You'll have to give us tens and twenties if you want to see his formidable presence.

NEW- Not true! If you don't have a ten or twenty, just fork over a fifty.
GUISE

They descend, and begin to take up a collection.

First we'll ask the innkeeper for his donation.
God bless you, sir, for your contribution!
Although you badmouth traveling actors, you don't refuse to pay.
Now we'll collect from the rest of the audience—
Everyone pays, one way or another. Good luck to you!

Having collected the money, they return to the stage.

NOUGHT I say, New-Guise, Nowadays, are we in the money?
 To hell with you, I'm done panhandling.

Nowadays turns to call in Titivillus.

NOW-A- Yes indeed, master.
DAYS Come on out!
 He is an excellent man, ladies and gentlemen:
 Make way, and beware!

¹⁵ This speech parodies the conventional formulas for asking for offerings, for example by accusing the audience of negligence rather than flattering them for their reverence. It also underscores the popularity of the comic and grotesque character Titivillus, since audiences evidently would pay to see him (and his presumably spectacular costume). The blasphemy apparent in this speech—and indeed throughout the play—is never glamorized and is characteristically spoken by a villain. This scene highlights the audience's susceptibility to the vices of worldly pleasures, even as they witness Mankind's struggle against similar temptations.

Enter Titivillus, dressed as a frightening devil, with a net in his hand.

TITIVILLUS I am the lord of lords,¹⁶
And my name is Titivillus.
Those of you who have good horses, look out!
Mischief and his gang are easily capable of snatching them right from your gates!

I will demonstrate their dishonesty:
Sir New-Guise, lend me some cash.

NEW- I have a big wallet, sir, but I have no money;
GUISE I'm four quarters short of a buck.
Yet I had a hundred last night.

TITIVILLUS (*Addressing Nowadays*) You're an arrogant bastard. What's in your wallet?

NOW-A- You can all go to hell!
DAYS I'm broke! I pray to God I'll never be worse off than I am now!
If not, I hope this night passes quickly.

TITIVILLUS (*Addressing Nought*) Your turn—I hear you're loaded?

NOUGHT By Saint Denis, not to us, O Lord, not to us!¹⁷
The devil may dance in my purse for any penny;
It is as clean as a bird's arse.

TITIVILLUS (*Addressing the audience*) Now I say yet again, beware!
This gang is especially talented at stealing horses from your corrals.
Now I say, New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought,
Go and search the country! Search high and low,
To see what you can burgle.

And if you fail with the horses, take whatever else you can get your hands on!

NEW- Then have a word with Mankind about the time he sacked me in the nuts.
GUISE

¹⁶ See Deuteronomy 10:17 and Apocalypse 19:16. It is a common trope in medieval dramas—which are virtually all religious in nature—for the villains to make such blasphemous claims as being the Lord of Lords.

¹⁷ Psalms 115:1, profanely quoted out of context.

NOW-A- And don't forget my broken head, by Christ's five wounds.
DAYS

NOUGHT Yeah, and the sciatica in my arm!¹⁸

TITIVILLUS I know full well what Mankind did to you;
Mischief gave me a full briefing on the matter.
I shall avenge your quarrel, by God.
Go forth, and look for places to do harm!
Take William Fide, if you need any help.¹⁹
I say, New-Guise, are you ready to go?

NEW- First, I'll start with Master Huntington of Sawston.
GUISE Then I'll go to William Thurlay of Hauxton,
And so forth, to Pichard of Trumpington—
I'll work these three.

NOW-A- I'll go to William Baker of Walton,
DAYS Then I'll hit up Richard Boolman of Gayton.
But I'll spare Master Wood of Fulbourn—he is a *noli me tangere*—a touch me not!²⁰

NOUGHT I'll go to William Patrick of Massingham,
I shall spare Master Allington of Bottisham
And Hammond of Swaffham.
I fear those words: “into thy hands I commit my spirit!”²¹ (*he gags and chokes*)
Fellows, let's go!

¹⁸ Although this is the first known use of the term “sciatica” in the English language, “sciatica of the arm” is probably a joke, as the sciatic nerve runs from the lower back, through the buttock, and down the leg—and nowhere near the arm.

¹⁹ The topical references both to names and places in the manuscript suggest a performance near Cambridge; since the traveling troupe of performers doubtless changed the names and places for each performance, a modern production in Albuquerque might go something like this: TITIVILLUS: I know full well what Mankind did to you; Mischief had given me a full briefing on the matter. I shall avenge your quarrel, by God. Go forth, and look for places to do harm! Take Richard Obenauf, if you need any help. I say, New-Guise, are you ready to go? NEW-GUISE: First I'll start with Garnett Stokes, over on Las Lomas, Then I'll go to Larry and Dorothy Rainosek, at the Frontier, And so forth, to Michelle Lujan Grisham, up in Santa Fe. I'll work these three. NOW-A-DAYS: I'll go to Steve Stucker, on Channel 4, then I'll hit up Neil Patrick Harris. But I'll spare Ron Bell—he is a *noli me tangere*!

²⁰ *Noli me tangere*, or “touch me not,” are Christ's words to Mary Magdalene in the garden after the Resurrection when he is mistaken as a farmer in John 20:17. Here, it seems to mean somebody who's so much of a rascal you'd better keep your hands off, or perhaps somebody with enough legal power you'll regret messing with them. In any case, note yet again the blasphemous out-of-context quotations from scripture.

²¹ *In manus tuas*, or “into thy hands [I commend my spirit],” are Christ's last words, and traditionally the final words of a man about to be hanged.

NEW- It's time to go our ways, men. Remember, be careful:
GUISE If we get caught, we'll never be back here!
 Let's go practice the neck-verse²² from memory,
 So we can avert disaster.

TITIVILLUS Go your way, the devil's way! Go your way, everyone!
 I bless you with my left hand! Bad luck to you!
 Come again, I'm warning you, as soon as I call you,
 And bring your loot back to this place.

All but Titivillus leave. He addresses the audience:

In the meantime, I'll speak with Mankind,
And try to get him to abandon his good intentions.
The good man Mercy shall no longer be his guide;
I'm going to make him dance to a different tune now!

I travel invisibly—it is my fashion;
I hope to ensnare him in my net before his very eyes,
Blinding him, as it were. I think I've sized him up.
To disrupt his diligent hard work, I'm going to make a wooden frame:
I'll secretly hide this board in his field.

He places the board in the field.

His spade will have a hard time plowing the earth.
After working it for a while, for fear of being disgraced,
I hope he'll just get angrier and angrier and eventually lose his patience.

I'll mix his seeds with thorns and thistles and other weeds.
It won't be suitable either to sow or to sell.
I see him coming. Let's keep this our little secret.
My plan will make him lose his faith.

Enter Mankind, with a sack of wheat.
Titivillus is invisible to him.

MANKIND Merciful God, send us a bountiful crop!
 I have brought some seed for sowing my land;
 While I till the field, I'll leave the sack here.

²² Clergy were not generally hanged, so a man could escape hanging by demonstrating literacy in Latin; the so-called "neck verse" was usually a portion of the fifty-first Psalm, which deals with God's mercy.

*Mankind sets the sack of seed down, which Titivillus steals and leaves.
Mankind then picks up his spade.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
Now I will begin.

He tries to dig; his spade strikes the board. Time elapses.

This land is so hard, it's making me tired and cranky.
I shall sow my wheat in winter and let God work.

He turns to get his sack of wheat.

Oh no! My wheat is gone! What a sinister thing to have happen!
I can clearly see I'm not going to get ahead by tilling.

He throws his spade down in anger.

I'm giving up my spade, for now and forever!
I'm not going to put myself in hardship just to keep my body occupied.

Titivillus takes the spade and leaves.

But before I depart, I'll say my evening prayers.
I proclaim this place as my church;
Here, in my place of worship, I kneel on my knees.

He kneels, and with his beads begins to say the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

Enter Titivillus, again addressing the audience:

TITIVILLUS I can act quickly, believe me!
I'm here again to vex this fellow.
Shhhh—I'm going to sneak up on him and whisper in his ear.

Still invisible to Mankind, he approaches Mankind and whispers in his ear:

A short prayer is heard in heaven. Cease your prayer.
You are holier than any of your kin ever were.
Arise and relieve yourself! Nature's calling!

Mankind rises, and addresses the audience:

MANKIND I'm going to step out into the yard, but I'll be right back.
I dread colic and kidney stones, so I'll do what I have to do.
My beads will be here for whoever else wants them.

Mankind exits, leaving his prayer beads behind.

TITIVILLUS Mankind was busy in his prayer, yet I got him to arise;
He was transported (by Christ!) away from his holy service.
Where is he now, do you suppose? I astonish even myself with my power!
I've sent him away to shit lies.

If you have some brass coins,
You can rub a little Paris powder over them,
And in the owl-dark of night you can pass them off as silver coins.
Titivillus can teach you many crafty things!

I think Mankind will be back again soon,
Otherwise, I fear, he'll be too late for evening prayers.
He'll toss his beads aside soon.
This will be entertaining, if you just wait.
Here he comes now—good luck to him!
I'll answer all his questions;
I'll stir up a crisis of faith.
I know I can get him to give up his righteous ways.

Re-enter Mankind.

MANKIND Evening prayers have been going on a long time, I swear!
I'm already tired of it: it's way too far, by a mile.
To hell with it! I'm not going to hike all the way back to my church.
I need to rethink my priorities:
I'm getting fed up with both labor and prayer.
Mercy will be angry, but I will have no more of either!
To tell the truth, my head is very heavy;
I'm going to sleep to my heart's content, Mercy be damned!

*Mankind goes to sleep and snores.
Titivillus gloats to the audience.*

TITIVILLUS If you ever do anything for me, be quiet now!
Not one peep, I'm warning you, or you'll pay for it.
I'll give you a good show before you go home.
Do you hear him snoring? He's sound asleep!

Quiet! Shhhh! The devil is dead, the job's almost done!
I'm going to whisper in his ear.

He approaches Mankind, and whispers in his ear:

Alas, Mankind! Alas! Mercy has stolen a mare!
He's on the run, and nobody knows where.
What's more, he stole both a horse and an ox-cart.

And I heard him say he broke his neck as he was riding to France,
But I think he's really riding on the gallows and learning how to swing dance,
Because he's a thief. That's his M.O.
You can't trust him anymore; he's a ruined man.
You've caused my friends much grief with your spade—
Arise, and beg New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought for their mercy!
They're on their way. Seek their goodwill; they'll give you sound advice.
And here's my advice—leave your wife, and take a mistress.

To the audience:

Farewell, everyone! My work here is done,
For I have brought Mankind to mischief and to shame.

Exit Titivillus. Mankind wakes up.

MANKIND Wahoo! Mercy has frayed his necktie, it is said,
Or else he's hanging by his neck from high atop the gallows!
Adieu, fair master! I'm already on my way to the alehouse,
Where I'll catch up with New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought,
And pick up some kinky slut.

Enter New-Guise running, with a broken rope around his neck.

NEW-
GUISE Make way! By Cock's consecrated body, get out of my way!
I'm running from the cops—God damn the hangman!
We were nearly to Saint Patrick's Way,
I swear by Christ (who died for my sins).

My neck was in the noose, the game was on.
By God's grace, my leash broke in two.

He holds up the broken rope.

As you can see, half is still around my neck. It was a close call!
As the wife said when she was about to whack off her husband's head,

“Look out!”

Mischief escaped death row, since he remembered his neck-verse.

My body gave a swing when I was on the scaffold.

It's a pity they'll hang such handsome and fierce fellows just for stealing horses!

I pray to God the hangman has some bad luck of his own!

Get me out of this collar! What the devil is Mankind doing here, curse him!

Jesus, have I got a crick in my neck!

MANKIND Hey there, New-Guise! How's it going?

NEW-
GUISE *(Distrusting Mankind)* Fine.

MANKIND What's that there around your neck? Are you all right?

NEW-
GUISE Uh, it's a holy neckerchief from Saint Audrey's shrine.
She died of a tumor of the neck, and as it pleases God,
I wear it to cure my little disease, my “ring-worm.” Yeah, that's the ticket.

Enter Nowadays, carrying a bunch of stolen church furnishings.

NOW-A-
DAYS Make room, my brothers!
I've been working all through the night; how much longer till we eat?
A local church is sponsoring our banquet—
Here's the stuff that will pay for our ale, bread, and wine.

NEW-
GUISE Now, by the holy Mother Mary,
You're a much shrewder businessman than I!

Enter Nought.

NOUGHT Out of the way, knaves! Let me through!
I can't seem to steal anything, and I'm gonna starve!

Enter Mischief, handcuffed.

MISCHIEF Here comes a cop! Why are you just standing there? Do something!
I've had my fill of murder and manslaughter.

NOW-A- What, Mischief, have you been in prison?
DAYS If you don't mind my saying so, you've worn your manacles clean.

MISCHIEF I was chained by the arms—as you can see—
I broke out of the chains and killed the jailer,
Yeah, and I got his hot wife in a corner—
Oh, how gently I kissed that sweet mouth of hers!
When I had to, I was my own butler:
I walked away with their dishes and platters.
Well, enough about me, cheers!
Here's to our way of doing business!

MANKIND New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought, can you forgive me?
I remember I once fought you with my spade;
I will make amends if I hurt you at all.

NEW- What the devil made you change your mind about us?
GUISE

MANKIND I dreamt that Mercy was hanging—this was my vision—
And that I should apologize to you three.
I'm asking for your goodwill;
I beg your mercy for any trouble I caused you.

NOW-A- (*Aside*) I say, New-Guise, Nought! Titivillus must be behind all this:
DAYS This is his handiwork, as sure as God is in heaven!

NOUGHT (*To Mankind*) Stand up on your feet!
Why are you so still? (*Sarcastically—Mankind is visibly trembling.*)

NEW- Master Mischief, we are proud to present the newest member of our ranks.
GUISE At last you can record Mankind's name in your book.

MISCHIEF I won't do it yet; I still need to cross-examine him.
We've got to follow the letter of the law on this one, you moron!

Nowadays makes a proclamation:

NOW-A- Hear ye, hear ye! All rise!
DAYS The court of the honorable Judge Mischief is now in session.
Will Mankind please take the stand; he is one of our men.

MISCHIEF Nought, come forth. You are charged with the duty of court reporter.

NEW- Your Honor, I wish to enter into evidence Mankind's needlessly large coat,
GUISE Which is made of enough fabric for not one but two.

MANKIND I'll do what you think is best,
As long your new fashion doesn't make me cold.

He takes off his coat.

Take this with you, and return it to me later.

Nought is busy writing.

NEW- I promise you a new jacket in the latest fashion.
GUISE

MANKIND Go and do your job, but save what you can!

New-Guise goes out with Mankind's coat.
Nought hands what he has written to Mischief.

NOUGHT Hang on, Master Mischief, and read this!

MISCHIEF He's written, "Blot, Blot, Blottity Blot, Scribble."
Curse your bad hearing and your bad handwriting!

NOW-A- Indeed! Such a flowing handwriting style is indispensable!
DAYS

NOUGHT I would have done a better job,
If I had known you were going to examine it.

MISCHIEF Focus in, guys, this concerns you:

He reads the document, a parody of actual court records:

“The general court having been held
In a place where there's good ale,
In the thousandth year of the reign of King Edward the Nothingth
On yesterday in February, on New Year's Eve.”

As Nought, our expert in rhetoric, has written,
“In the regnal year of King Nobody.”
He's making it up as he goes—we've got a regular Cicero in our midst.

*New-Guise appears in the back of the audience, holding
Mankind's coat, cut down to about half its original length.*

NOW-A- It looks like New-Guise has finally decided to join us again.
DAYS What was taking you so long?
That jacket is worthless.

New-Guise elbows his way through the audience.

NEW- Get out of my way, or I'll have to beat you up.
GUISE Look! This coat has nice tails, perfect for dancing.

NOUGHT Nah, its deformed shape isn't even worth a crumb of bread.
There's still too much cloth; it's as heavy as lead. I'll go and
mend it, or else I'll go out of my head. (*Addressing the
audience.*) Stand aside! Let me out of here!

Nought exits, taking the jacket with him.

MISCHIEF Mankind, come here!
May God send you the gout!
You are instructed to get it on with all the women of the country
While their husbands are out.
Say, “I will”!

MANKIND I will, sir.

NEW- As all of us here will tell you,
GUISE There are only six deadly sins—lechery isn't one of them.
 So you are instructed to rob, steal, and kill, just as fast as you can.
 Say, "I will"!

MANKIND I will, sir.

NOW-A- On Sunday, tomorrow, early in the morning
DAYS You are instructed to come with us to the alehouse for brunch,
 And skip mass and matins, and all the other church services.
 Say, "I will"!

MANKIND I will, sir.

MISCHIEF You are instructed to have at your side a long sword—your "peacemaker"—
 Which you will use to carve up honest men as they ride by,
 Then, take their money, and cut their throats!
 Thus you shall overcome them and their upright ways.
 Say, "I will"!

MANKIND I will, sir.

*Re-enter Nought, with Mankind's coat, which is
now tailored into a hilariously short jacket.*

NOUGHT Now here's a cool jacket. What do you think of it?

NEW- That should be a fine screen against the elements for a man's body.
GUISE

They put it on Mankind and chase him around like a dog.

(Whistles) Here, doggy, doggy!
You are well suited for running.

Mercy enters at a distance.

MISCHIEF Listen up! We've got an intruder in our midst.
Grab your stuff! We've got to leave, and fast.
The last one out is a rotten egg.

ALL Amen!

MERCY Oh, no, Mankind!
Find some new friends, I'm begging you!

MANKIND I'll catch ya later,
Maybe in the morning, or perhaps some other day.
Oh, I know, we'll meet up and put flowers on my father's grave.
But now, let's have another drink! Bar-wench, hurry!

MISCHIEF Hey, Mercy, I'm glad to see you're getting a taste of real mischief.
If you keep harassing our pal, I'm going to shit all over you.

NEW- Innkeeper, lend us a football—this looks like an even match.
GUISE I guess we're taking this outside.

All but Mercy leave.

MERCY My mind is distracted! My body is trem-trembling like an aspen leaf!
Tears would be trickling down my cheeks,
If it weren't for the reverence of this good audience. Only
the cruel release of death can bring me solace now. I
cannot express this misfortune without being rude.
I thrive on weeping, sighing, and sobbing;
Any other diet is as revolting to me as carrion.
My inward affliction renders me wearisome even in your presence;
For I cannot stay calm having witnessed Mankind's fickle nature.

The human condition is contrary to the rules of nature, quite universally:
The entire world could not see how to discharge original sin
And the bondage and captivity of living in the flesh,
Until God's own beloved Son followed his orders and was willing to suffer.
He shed every drop of his blood to purge your wickedness.
I abhor and denounce this widespread fickleness in human nature,
In every creature who is so contemptible and odious.
Why art thou so insolent, Mankind, so inconsiderate? Alas, woe is me!
As the weather-vane turns with the wind, so too can you change.

In trust is treason; I don't believe your promises;
Your perverse ingratitude is unspeakable.
You are despicable to God and all the holy courts of heaven,
As a noble poet mentions in this verse:
"Law and nature, Christ and all justice condemn the ingrate;
They lament that he was born."²³

O good Lady and Mother of Mercy, have pity and compassion
On the wretchedness of Mankind, who is so wanton and so frail!
Let Mercy exceed Justice, dear Mother!
Grant our prayers—set justice aside and let mercy prevail!
The moral of our story is that sensual living
Is to blame for what happens these days:
With their alluring ways, New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought
Have perverted Mankind, my sweet son, as I have seen all too clearly.

O! I do declare, he won't last long in the company of these cursed wretches.
As his spiritual father, I, Mercy, have a special task ahead.
Lady, help! This abominable lifestyle is centered on base pleasures;
Vanitas vanitatum, all is vanity.²⁴

Mercy shall never be conquered by man's base nature;
With weeping tears, I will never give up, night or day, press on I must.
Will I find him? I hope so. Now, may God protect me!

He calls aloud.

My greatly beloved son, where are you?
Mankind, *ubi es?*²⁵

Exit Mercy, crying "Ubi es?" Enter Mischief.

MISCHIEF My most excellent father, eat, drink, and be merry—
Stuff your face with both hands—you're so puffed up—
And you tell nothing but lies.

(*To the audience.*) Do you hear him? He's still yelling, "Mankind, *ubi es?*"

²³ The poet is unknown.

²⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:2: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Vanity, as we recall, means emptiness.

²⁵ Here the playwright asks *ubi es* ("where art thou"); the *ubi sunt* ("where are they") motif is common in the *memento mori* ("remember to die") tradition, of which this play is an example. The *ubi sunt* motif reminds readers of the transient nature of life by asking "But where are they now?" This could also be an allusion to Luke 15:3-7, where the good shepherd searches for the lost sheep until it is found.

Enter New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought.

NEW-
GUISE *(Imitating Mankind's voice)* Here! Here! I'm over here! Here! Here! Here!
I'm nearly dead in this creek!
Hey, Mercy, if you want to save him, go and seek, seek, seek!
But don't search too long, or you'll lose your mind!

NOW-A-
DAYS If you want to apprehend Mankind—O Lord, Lord, Lord!—
You must arrange with the sheriff for an arrest warrant—"take my body"—
Or else you'll end up with his certification that the prisoner could not be found,
Like the three Marys said when Jesus wasn't in his cave.
What do you say to that, sir? I gave it my best shot—am I on target?

NOUGHT Beware where you take aim when I can't hold it in any longer!
Dammit! I shot myself in the foot, if you know what I mean!
Be careful where you point your weapons, for God's sake—
My foot is covered in shit.

MISCHIEF A parliament! A parliament! Come over here, Nought.
A quick word, please. I'm afraid Mercy will find him.
What do you think? And what should we do about it?
What are we going to do about Mankind?

NEW-
GUISE Calm down! It's not a big deal.
Remember, Mankind thinks Mercy was hanged for stealing a mare.
Mischief, go tell him that Mercy's searching everywhere;
I bet he'll hang himself out of fear of seeing his ghost!

MISCHIEF What a clever plan! Of course I'll do it.

NOW-A-
DAYS Put this rope in your coat right away.
May Saint Gabriel's mother protect the cleats on your shoes!
Even if we had ransacked all the books in the world,
We wouldn't have found a better idea!

Mischief exits. He returns leading Mankind, now in despair.

MISCHIEF Hi, Mankind! Come and speak with Mercy!
He's very near us.

MANKIND A rope, a rope! I am not worthy!

MISCHIEF Hang on! I happen to have one for this very occasion,
And a scaffold, too.

They produce a noose and gallows.

Hold the gallows, Nowadays!
Nought, pay attention, and you might learn something.

NEW- Okay, Mankind, do as I do.
GUISE Here's your new fashion—even in suicide you're trendy.
Adjust the rope just around your neck, like this.

*New-Guise demonstrates the noose around
his own neck. Mercy enters at a distance.*

MISCHIEF Forget him, Nought! Mercy is here! You've got to save yourself!
The guy is like poison to us; we don't have any time to lose.

*They run away. In all the excitement, New-Guise
forgets the rope and accidentally hangs himself.*

NEW- (gagging and choking) Alas, my throat! Damn you all!
GUISE And I hope Mercy is forever plagued by Christ's infinite curse.

They come back and release their friend.

Ack, my throat! That was a close call!

*They all leave, except for Mankind, who
falls in despair on the floor. Mercy
ascends the stage and addresses him.*

MERCY Arise, my precious redeemed son! You are very special to me.
He is so scared, it seems to me his vital spirit is expiring.

MANKIND (crying) I was hiding from you because I've been acting like an animal.
I am not worthy to see your comforting face.

MERCY Your guilty conscience wounds my heart like a lance.
 Act meekly and ask for mercy, and I will grant it.
 Give me neither gold nor treasure, but your humble obedience,
 The voluntary subjection of your heart, and I will be content.

MANKIND What! Ask for mercy yet once again? I'm so pathetic, crawling back to you.
 Always offending and always asking for mercy—I am like a small child.
 I cannot bear to repeat my worst transgression;
 I am not worthy to have mercy, it's no longer a possibility.

MERCY O, Mankind—my source of solace—what a pathetic excuse.
 The sorrowful fires of my heart are burning stronger.
 O blessed Jhesu, help me redeem this sinful wretch!
 For this is the change of the right hand of the Most High:
 He overthrows the wicked, and they are no more.²⁶

 Arise and ask for mercy, Mankind, and join my ranks.
 Your death will bear very heavily on me. Alas, it's a pity it should be thus.
 Your obstinacy will exclude you from God's glorious eternity.
 Yet, for my love, open your lips, and say, "Have mercy on me, O God."

MANKIND The evenhanded justice of God will not permit such a sinful wretch
 To be revived and restored again. It is impossible.

MERCY The justice of God desires what I desire, as he himself preaches:
 I do not wish the sinner's death, he said²⁷—
 If he is willing to be recovered.

MANKIND Then have mercy, good Mercy! What is a man without mercy?
 Few would know paradise if mercy no longer existed.
 Good Mercy, excuse my predictable weakness in the face of my spiritual enemy:
 As the proverb says, "the truth proclaims itself." Alas, I have great sorrow.

MERCY God will not give you his verdict until his last judgment.
 Justice and fairness shall be upheld, I won't deny,
 But Truth alone cannot make his cruel case

²⁶ This is a combination of Psalms 77:10 and an adaptation of Proverbs 12:7.

²⁷ See Ezekiel 33:11.

Because Mercy presides in this trial, without a doubt.²⁸

Arise, now, and go with me into this courtyard.
Try to understand; my doctrine is sound.
Don't sin now in expectation of mercy later!
That is a well-known crime, for it is unwise to put too much trust in a prince.

Beware of sinning in hope of subsequent mercy.²⁹
The holy gospel is the authority, as we read in scripture,
The good Lord said to the lecherous woman of Canaan,
"Go and sin no more."³⁰
Christ saved this sinful woman caught in adultery:
He said these words to her, "Go and sin no more!"
So I say to you: "Go and sin no more!"
Beware of overconfidence when it comes to mercy:
As I said before, you can't count on a prince's good nature to save you.

If you feel yourself trapped in Satan's snare,
Ask for mercy right away; beware of continuing in sin.
A fresh wound heals completely when treated right away,
But if you wait too long it will become infected and harm you even more.

MANKIND To ask for mercy and to receive it is a generous gift.
In your view, will such a necessary petition always be granted?

MERCY In this present life mercy is plentiful;
But you're only good till your last drop,
And when you die you'll get your just reward.

Ask for mercy, and receive it now, while your soul and body are still united:
If you put it off till your death, your luck might run out.
Be repentant here! You can't count on it at your death bed.
Consider this lesson: "Behold, now is the accepted time,
Behold, now is the day of salvation."³¹

Even if you could attain all the virtue in the world,
Your merits would be insufficient for the bliss above:
The greatest earthly merit is not enough for even the smallest joy of heaven.
I'm not lying—Mercy is necessary—as is proven in scripture.

²⁸ Justice, Truth, and Mercy are God's three daughters (the fourth is Peace). *Mankind* is unusual in its portrayal of these figures as men—this suggests, at least to me, that this play was written for a troupe of male actors.

²⁹ See Ecclesiastes 5:4-7.

³⁰ John 8:11.

³¹ 2 Corinthians 6:2.

MANKIND O Mercy, my sweet solace and sole source of comfort,
My dearly beloved! You are worthy to have my love;
For you act without thinking of your reward. You answered my petitions,
And you were compassionate despite my inexcusable behavior.

Ah! It makes my heart swim to think about how unwisely I have carried myself.
Titivillus, who goes invisibly, hung his net before my eyes,
And by his supernatural visions he seditiously caused me to obey
New-Guise, Nowadays, and Nought.

MERCY Mankind, you were oblivious to my doctrinal admonishments!
I warned you that Titivillus would attack you.
From now on, beware of his sinister delusions!
The proverb says, “anticipated darts wound less.”

You have three adversaries—the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.
He is master of them all.
We may call him the New-Guise, Nowadays, Nought, the “world”;
And Titivillus accurately signifies the fiend of Hell.

The Flesh—that is the unclean appetites of your body.
These are your three spiritual enemies, in whom you have put your trust.
They brought you to Mischief, who ended your temporal glory,
As it has been shown before this righteous audience tonight.

Remember how ready I was to help you: from such encounters I was unharmed;
Wherefore, good son, abstain from sin evermore after this!
You may both save and destroy your soul—which is so precious—
You are free to choose, and free to refuse! God cannot deny your free-will.

Beware of Titivillus with his net, and of all his jealous-will,
And of your sinful delight that overcame your spiritual substance.
Your body is your enemy; don't let it have its way.
You can leave when you're ready. May God send you good perseverance!

MANKIND Since I am leaving now, bless me, father, before I go.
May God send us all plenty of his great mercy!

He kneels, and Mercy blesses him.

MERCY May the Lord preserve you from all evil!
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mankind exits; Mercy speaks the epilogue:

Righteous audience, I have performed my special task:
Mankind is delivered through my friendly protection.
May God preserve him from all wicked subjugation,
And send him grace to renounce his sensual inclinations.

Now, search your conditions with due examination
For Christ's love, who took human form for our sake!
Think and remember that the world is but a vanity,
As it is proven daily by diverse transformations.

Mankind is wretched, as he has sufficiently proven;
Therefore, through his mercy, God grants
That you all may be companions with the angels above,
And have your share of the life everlasting. *Amen!*