

Morality play

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Popular from the early 1400s to the 1580s.

Morality plays were about the fate of a single individual's soul. The main character represented all men and often had a name such as Mankind or Everyman to demonstrate their allegorical function. They include vice and temptation characters attempt to corrupt the Everyman figure. Allegorical characters also represent virtues. The 'Everyman' character listens to them and takes note of warnings, often returning briefly to his 'good' lifestyle. A reform/relapse pattern is repeated several times.

Through a series of blunders and moral lessons the hero is gradually educated into an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and the nature of god. At the end, the main character settles his accounts with God and either lives or dies forgiven and Christian. He is wiser and better at the end of the play. A chorus, such as the Messenger and Doctor characters in Everyman, is used to comment on and explain the action for the audience.

Elements of Renaissance plays

Contain soliloquies in which a highly distinct self reflects upon his own desires and actions. Celebrate the scope of human powers while acknowledging their boundaries; there is a duality at work which praises man's creative powers (by implication also those of the poet, or author) but concedes that man is not God and that ultimately all his powers derive from God. They begin to refer to the new countries and things being discovered by explorers, mentioning exotic settings and transporting their audiences around the world.

Renaissance ideas

The body and soul are separate and linked with different elements and humours. Catholicism was banned in England and the Pope was considered the antichrist by some. Renaissance scholars studied classical literature, including Roman and Greek philosophy. Discussion of what it meant to be human centred on reason, balance and dignity - much more individualistic than medieval scholastic thinking. The humanist attitude to the world was anthropocentric: instead of regarding humanity as fallen and corrupt, their idea of truth and excellence was based on human values and experience; people openly questioned religious theology and teaching. *The world was dynamic, changing and exciting. Plays explored the many contrasts between how people should behave and how they actually do, and the questions and contradictions thrown up by a changing world.