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SYMBOLS

-ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS

Everyman is a famously allegorical work. With the exception of God, the Angel, the Messenger, and the Doctor, every character in the play should be read as standing in for a group of people or an abstract concept. Each of these characters is named for what they represent. Everyman himself, as his name states, represents every man or every member of humanity, with appetites, fears, and flaws common to all people. Some allegorical characters, such as Death, Good-Deeds, and Fellowship, are readily comprehensible to a modern audience, but others, such as Five-Wits, require slightly more explanation.

-Everyman represents all people.

-Death represents the end of life, which often comes suddenly and cannot be avoided or reasoned with.

-Fellowship represents Everyman's friends in life, who are quick to turn their back on him in hard times.

-Kindred and Cousin represent Everyman's family.

-Goods, who claims he can solve any worldly problem, represents Everyman's wealth and possessions. Though Everyman has loved Goods best, love of Goods is a moral trap that has led him toward damnation.

-Good-Deeds represents the good Everyman has done in life. At first she cannot move to help him plead his case before God because Everyman's sin weighs her down. She alone can go with him to the afterlife and help him when facing God's judgment.

-Knowledge represents moral understanding of the difference between good and evil. She directs Everyman to a virtuous life and to the sacraments.

-Confession is described as a holy man to whom Everyman should bow. He represents the sacrament of confession, which allows for the absolution of sins.

- Beauty represents earthly beauty. While she is a good companion to Everyman, she will abandon him as he heads for the grave. Her choice represents the decline of aging.
- Strength represents physical strength. Like Beauty, she will not go with Everyman to death, and her absence represents frailty as death approaches.
- Discretion represents Everyman's ability to make wise decisions. Discretion departs after Strength, saying it is always so. His absence represents a lack of agency in one's twilight years.
- Five-Wits represents Everyman's ability to perceive and understand. The five wits are traditionally defined as common sense (or "wit"), imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory. The term is related to the phrase "to have one's wits about them." Though Everyman loves it best of his new companions, Five-Wits also leaves, representing the difference between spiritual knowledge and worldly intelligence as well as the onset of dementia.

