


## Allured by Satan, the World and the Flesh: Representations of Temptation in Medieval English Drama

Assist. Prof. Dr. Pinar Taşdelen   
Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters  
Department of English Language and Literature  
[pinart@hacettepe.edu.tr](mailto:pinart@hacettepe.edu.tr)

### Abstract

According to medieval Christian understanding, human beings have three obstacles or adversaries that mankind must overcome to achieve salvation: Satan, the world and the flesh. The Holy Trinity embodied in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost is in contrast to Satan, the world and the flesh. The ideas of heaven and hell are developed with regard to the avoidance of temptation, putting emphasis on the possibility of being abstained from temptation. Medieval dramatists represent the temptations in several mystery and morality plays so as to warn their audience against temptation, present temptation as something to be abstained from through biblical accounts, beginning with Satan's temptation, followed with an individual's falling into temptation oneself. Accordingly, this article aims to analyse the dramatic representations of the temptations by medieval playwrights with references to specific mystery and morality plays in order to reveal how spiritual and earthly temptation is handled in the plays. Thereby, an individual's own temptation with/without the possibility of salvation is questioned.

**Keywords:** Medieval drama, temptation, the Bible, mystery plays, morality plays.

### Şeytan, Dünya ve İnsan Doğası Tarafından Cezbedilmek: Ortaçağ İngiliz Tiyatrosunda Baştan Çıkarılma Tasvirleri

#### Öz

Ortaçağ Hristiyanlık inancına göre insanların ilahi kurtuluşa ulaşabilmesi için üç engeli veya düşmanı vardır: Şeytan, dünya ve insan doğası. Baba, Oğul ve Kutsal Ruh kapsamında şekillenen Kutsal Üçlü; şeytan, dünya ve insan doğasına tezat oluşturmaktadır. Baştan çıkarılmadan sakınmayla bağlantılı olarak, baştan çıkarılmanın uzak durulabilir olduğu vurgusuyla cennet ve cehennem kavramları ortaya çıkmıştır. Ortaçağ oyun yazarları, baştan çıkarılmayı izleyicileri uyarmak, kutsal metinlerde şeytanın kışkırtmalarıyla başlayıp bireyin kendisinin şeytana uymasıyla baştan çıkarılmadan uzak durulması gerekliliğini çeşitli ibret oyunları ve ahlak oyunlarında sunarak sahneye koymuşlardır.<sup>1</sup> Bu bağlamda, bu makale Ortaçağ oyun yazarlarınca, belirli ibret oyunları ve ahlak oyunlarından hareketle, dini ve dünyevi bağlamda baştan çıkarılma tasvirlerinin ele alınış yöntemlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, oyunlarda bireyin kurtuluşa erme/erememe ihtimaliyle birlikte kendi doğası gereği baştan çıkması ihtimali sorgulanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ortaçağ tiyatrosu, baştan çıkarılma/çıkarılma, İncil, ibret oyunları, ahlak oyunları.

<sup>1</sup> In Turkish drama terminology, medieval mystery plays are translated as 'ahlak oyunları', while morality plays are translated as 'ibret oyunları' and miracle plays are translated as 'tansik oyunları'.

## INTRODUCTION

Medieval people believed that they were sinful by nature due to the Original Sin, and they were “besieged by the lures of the world, the suggestion of his appetites, the snares of Satan – by the world, the flesh, and the devil” (Howard, 1966, p. 43). Medieval poets and dramatists presented temptation through a battle between vices and virtues in the human soul. This conflict defined as the “war of the soul” by the fourth century Roman poet Prudentius in his *Psychomachia*, had great influence on the representations of the conflict between good and evil in medieval allegorical works like *Romance of the Rose* and *Piers Plowman*.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this conflict, the doctrine of salvation received its full theological formulation in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries (Cooper, 2004, p. 29), then a heartfelt penance and suffering submissively became the means of achieving salvation for a tempted soul and flesh. The process of achieving salvation after being entrapped by temptations was not only a painful experience but also a means to mend the broken relationship between human beings and God, and to achieve restoration of that which was lost through the Original Sin (Gilkey, 1985, p. 57). Religious desires for repentance and salvation in the works produced in the Middle Ages provide evidence for the distinctive authority of religious teachings in medieval society. The primary focus on patience and suffering which comes either as a just punishment for a past sin or due to human malice, functions to show that the hero or heroine may eventually achieve salvation or sanctity. Such representation is presented as a role model for the Christian audience listening to, reading and even watching these works. Inevitably, these religious assumptions are reflected in the literature of the period, and a variety of devotional works were produced which placed particular emphasis on the significance of resisting temptation in this world for the sake of achieving eternal salvation. Therefore, a special kind of literature on temptation was produced with an emphasis on how to be a good Christian, based on the teachings of the Bible. Apart from the literary works such as hagiographies intended for reading and listening to, there were dramatic representations. Hence, they appealed to wider audiences regardless of social class, age or level of literacy. Within this context, the aim of this article is to study the dramatic representations of temptation with references to the medieval mystery and morality plays, the former performing the narratives in the Bible, and the latter staging the moral truths of the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

In Christian belief, Satan prompts Christ to act in disobedience to his father, God, testing him as the Son of God; however, human beings are exposed to temptations more indirectly through the world and the flesh.<sup>4</sup> Satan attempts to manipulate a person to sin;

<sup>2</sup> For the detailed description of the “war of the soul”, see Vest, E. B. (Trans.). (1956). *The Psychomachia of Prudentius*. Chicago: University of Illinois.

<sup>3</sup> Medieval mystery plays were performed in different towns in England and produced in cycles named as York, Chester, Towneley (also known as the Wakefield) and N-Town. Each cycle may differ from each other in how they contribute to the dramatic approach of the cycle (Stevens, 1987, p. 11).

<sup>4</sup> For all biblical references given in the article, see *The holy bible containing the old and new testaments*. (1996). London: Tophi Books. In the New Testament, the temptations of Christ are mentioned mainly in Luke 4:2 “Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.” (Holy Bible, 1994, p. 29); Luke 4:13 “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him from a season” (Holy Bible, 1994, p. 30); Matthew 16:23 “But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Holy Bible, 1994, p. 10); Matthew 4:5-10 “(5) Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, (6) And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a

yet, this is, from God's point of view, a test for one's righteousness in faith. Human nature's inclination to temptation is exemplified prominently in the Bible through the image of Christ tempted by Satan. Satan attempts to tempt Christ after he fasts for forty days and nights so that he doubts he was the Son of God. He wants to convince Christ that God's promise is unreliable so as to break his thrust in God.<sup>5</sup> The conflict between the flesh and the spirit, and impossibility of a weak soul's endurance to resist the fleshly temptations is stressed by Christ's stance against temptation. Satan's attempts to make Christ commit a sin and his resistance to these temptations are exemplary for the Christian audience. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer words:

*[b] y the temptation of Jesus Christ the temptation of Adam is brought to an end. As in Adam's temptation all flesh fell so in the temptation of Jesus Christ all flesh has been snatched away from the power of Satan. For Jesus Christ wore our flesh, he suffered our temptation, and he won the victory from it. [...] Because Christ was tempted and overcame, we can pray: Lead us not into temptation. For the temptation has already come and been conquered. (1997, p. 122)*

Although Bonhoeffer's statement implies that human beings would no longer be led into Satan's temptation because it has been endured and overcome by Christ beforehand, there are continual reminders of the threat of Satan through the medieval dramatic representations. Particularly, Adam and Eve's Fall from heaven, Abel and Cain's failure in overcoming brotherly jealousy, Pilate's hubris, human being's thrust in temporality and inability to avoid temptations are used to warn people and urge them to act in accordance with God's will and order. While Christ's endurance against temptations is unique in religious context by exemplifying the ideal Christian, the characters' yielding to the temptations of both Satan and the other tempters in the plays is didactically presented in the medieval dramatic performances in order to expose human nature's inclination to temptation.

### REPRESENTATIONS OF TEMPTATION IN MEDIEVAL MYSTERY PLAYS

The recurring idea of temptation in mystery and morality plays involves not only human fallacy leading a trial but also resistance against renunciation of the Christian dogma. It is even self-sacrifice, leading not only to sin but also to an awareness of sinfulness and the necessity of repentance for the salvation of the sinful soul. In these works, the regenerative and ennobling power of willing repentance for the sake of faith is praised, while earthly temptations are presented as a means of avoiding eternal salvation after death. These performances describing Christian idea of temptation and sin are treasured and offer the Christian audience a particular self-understanding, apart from providing both a narrative and visual training for Christian audience.

---

stone. (7) Jesus said unto him, It is written again Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. (8) Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: (9) And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. (10) Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt thou serve." (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 4)

<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament, this temptation is narrated in Matthew 4:3 as, "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Yet, in Matthew 4:4, Christ resists and replies: "... Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 4)

The earliest example of temptation in Christian belief is known as the Original Sin. In Christian belief, Adam and Eve are depicted as the primal couple tempted by Satan and disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree that had been forbidden to them. Temptation struck at the very heart of the temptation of Adam and Eve.<sup>6</sup> Satan caused Adam and Eve to disbelieve God's word concerning judgment for eating of the forbidden fruit, the ultimate cause of disobedience. Their disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden has led to Adam and Eve's expulsion from heaven, which is dramatized at the mystery play *The Creation, and Adam and Eve* in Chester cycle. In fact, Adam and Eve bear resemblance to Satan since the fallen angel has also been expelled from heaven because of his disobedience to God. Before his fall, Satan was an angel in heaven; however, he was tempted by his hubris and desire for power, leading his downfall. In *The Creation, and Adam and Eve* play, Satan disguises itself as a serpent, as in the Scriptural account. In shape of a snake, Satan stands as an agent of fate due to the fact that he seals the fate of human beings by being the reason for their fallacy and fall. Hence, he not only tempts mankind in heaven but also avenges his being expelled from heaven by God.

As Cushman points out, Satan, seeing Adam and Eve in bliss in heaven, is filled with envy as he himself has lost his place there (1900, p. 5). Therefore, "gluttony, the lust of the flesh, had been the initial suggestion of the tempting serpent" (Howard, 1966, p. 43) when he offers the forbidden fruit to Eve. Hence, Eve becomes the central figure in the act of temptation in addition to disobedience, and she becomes the primary figure responsible for the Fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Actually, Adam and Eve are not only tempted because they are deceived by the promises of the serpent but also due to the fact that they have fleshly desire. Eve, at first, is a bit hesitant to yield to Satan's temptation in shape of the serpent; yet, the serpent assures her that she and Adam will achieve God's knowledge on condition that they eat the forbidden fruit:

EVA: *This tree, that here in the middes is,  
Eate we of it we do amisse.  
God said we shold dye, i-wis,  
And we touched that tree.*

SERPENS: *Woman, I say, levee not this!  
For yt shall not lose yow blisse,  
Ne no ioy that is his,  
But be wise as he. (Happé, 1985, p. 70-71, lines 217-224)*

The desire for obtaining heavenly knowledge prevails over being subservient to God's order, and makes Adam and Eve blind to the fact that they are about to commit a sin that cannot not be made up for or forgiven. In addition to this, Adam and Eve have no awareness of Satan's temptation and the self-destructiveness of the sin they are on the verge of

<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve were put to the test in the idyllic setting of the Garden of Eden as narrated in Genesis 3: 1-5 "(1) Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (2) And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden: (3) But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die: (4) And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: (5) For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 5).

committing. However, on the other hand, Satan has a well-constructed plan to tempt his victims, besides his having supreme control over them which can be inferred through his monologue. The implementation phases of Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve are revealed through his monologue, which also functions as a foreshadowing of Adam and Eve's taking Satan's bait. In his monologue, Satan reveals how he is going to entrap Eve at first, and how it is going to help him out with putting temptation in Adam's way:

*Shold suche a caytife made of claye  
Have suche blisse? Nay be my laye!  
For I shall teache his wife a playe;  
And I maye have a while  
For her deceave, I hope I maye  
And through her bringe both them awaye;* (Happé, 1985, p. 69, lines 177-182)

Even if they have been ignorant to the result of committing the sin of disobedience to God by yielding to Satan's temptation and eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve realize its result only after they become aware of their sinfulness. In this regard, Satan's temptation is employed as a means for the realization of the ideas of sin and sinfulness, apart from revealing the avarice of mankind for fleshly desires, such as knowing the good and evil and being equal to God in knowledge. Within this context, the phases of implementation of temptations are as followed: "nature required that the devil tempt first by concupiscence of the flesh, then by concupiscence of exterior things, and last by the pride of life" (Howard, 1966, p. 51). According to this idea, temptation has three phases beginning with Satan's putting temptation into Adam and Eve's way, followed by Eve's, and then, Adam's consent to carnal desires, and the realization of submission to temptation as a sin. Therefore, apart from the role of Satan in tempting Adam and Eve, the weakness of human willpower, the attraction of fleshly desires and human being's aspiration for power expose mankind's latent inclination to temptation and sin.

The desire for power which has tempted Adam and Eve in heaven tempts Cain on earth, and because of his desire for superiority over his brother Abel, Cain acts violently and kills Abel.<sup>7</sup> In the Towneley cycle, the mystery play *The Killing of Abel* dramatizes the tempted Cain who is enslaved by his fleshly desire. Cain's rebellion on earth reminds Lucifer's rebellion in heaven. Both of them are conceited and dissatisfied with God's order and His creations. Cain makes sacrifice to God unwillingly, scorns Abel, behaves arrogantly and complains about the necessity of the sacrifice for pleasing God. Furthermore, Cain slays his brother Abel after God rejects his reluctant sacrifice. Before becoming a victim of fratricide, Abel is subjected to the temptation of Cain who tries to persuade him to avoid sacrifice to God, claiming its futility. However, despite Cain's temptations, Abel maintains his reason and he strives for avoiding his brother's attempt to tempt him:

---

<sup>7</sup> In The New Testament, it is narrated in Genesis 4: 4-8 as follows "(4) And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and his offering: (5) But unto Cain and unto his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. (6) And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? (7) If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not do well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall* be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. (8) And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 6).

CAYN: *Yei, yei, thou iangyls waste!*  
*The dwill me spede if I have hast,*  
*As long as I may lif,*  
*To dele my good or gif,*  
*Ather to God or yit to man,*  
*Of any good that ever I wan.*  
*For had I giffen away my goode,*  
*Then myght I go with a ryffen hood,*  
*And it is better hold that I have,*  
*Then go from doore to doore and crave*  
 ABELL: *Brother, com furth in Godys name,*  
*I am full ferd that we we get blame (Happé, 1985, p. 84-85, lines 134-145)*

Abel is worried about the fact that both he and his brother are going to be exposed to God's wrath because of Cain's hubris and disobedience. Even if Abel has foresight for possible punishment of hubris and disobedience, Cain is blinded by his excessive ambition and defiance. Eventually, God appears to Cain after he slays Abel, and curses him since his deed is too dreadful to be forgiven. In this sense, Cain is tempted not by Satan but his own hubris, victimizing not only himself but also his brother. Even God, as follows, questions the motivation behind Cain's temptation:

DEUS: *Cam, whi art thou so rebel*  
*Agans thi brother Abell?*  
*Thar thou nowther flyte ne chide (Happé, 1985, p. 89, lines 291-293)*

God's questioning the reason for Cain's submission to temptation and committing sin brings to mind the role of human beings in yielding to temptation, apart from Satan's function in it. Adam, Eve and Cain's tendency to fall into temptation suggests that the only tempter is not Satan; on the contrary, mankind also has inclination to temptation. Satan is assumed to be the actual tempter because of his role in the Fall of Adam and Eve that brought sin onto the earth. However, as Kolve points out, "his [man's] prior guilt does not lessen man's moral responsibility. Only a man could eat the apple, and only men can kill Christ" (1966, p. 230-231). In other words, yielding into temptation depends on human being's own choice more than the incitement of Satan.

The tendency of human nature to fall into the trap of temptation, as suggested in *The Killing of Abel*, is similarly highlighted in *The Crucifixion* play of the York cycle. In the play, Satan's stimulating role is not explicitly displayed in order to stress man's inclination to temptation because of his own fleshly desires. The weak nature of the folk, how easily they are carried away with the spreading rumour about Christ's being a traitor cannot be ignored for their participating to the victimization of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, in the play *The Crucifixion*,

<sup>8</sup> In The New Testament, how Christ is stripped of his clothes, a crown of thorns is platted on his head, how he is mocked, and crucified is narrated in Matthew and in Mathew 27: 35-36 as follows "(35) And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots. (36) And Sitting down they kept watch over him there;" (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 17).

as pointed out by Kolve, “natural man- not Pilate and not Satan is ultimately guilty of Christ’s death” (1966, p. 234). In other words, the reason for the Crucifixion is not merely the incitement of Satan or Pilate but also the weak nature of the folk that gets carried away easily. Moreover, the people have blind confidence in the essentiality of crucifying Christ; therefore, they do not even question the reason for it; rather, they hurry up to go through with it, without realizing what they are actually carrying out:

*III MIL: Now certis, I hope it schall nocht nede  
To calle to us more companye.  
Me thynke we foure schulde do this dede,  
And bere hym to yone hille on high  
I MIL: It muste be done, with-outen drede.  
Nomore, but loke ye be redy; (Happé, 1985, p. 531, lines 169-174)*

In another play of the Towneley cycle titled *The Scourging*, Pilate, differently, is presented as a ruler who does not hesitate to do anything because of his desire to obtain more power. He is a villain representing all of the fallen men; in other words, he stands for any man on earth who is so weak-willed in the face of temptation.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the characterization of Pilate, and his role in the crucifixion differs, as in the York cycle he has generally been depicted as the least consistent figure due to the fact that he attempts to be fair to Christ, yet, in the end, failing as a human being with his proud and selfish nature, resigning to the authority to the Jews, and thereby, taking part in the crucifixion (Jobling, 1989, p. 49). However, in the Towneley cycle, Pilate is presented as the motivating force behind the crucifixion.<sup>10</sup> In Jobling’s words, “the Pilate of the Towneley play does not appear to be a hypocrite, nor does he refer to his intention to betray Jesus by a pretence of friendship.” (1989, p. 52). His hypocrisy and antagonism to Christ is given within the lines below:

*PILATUS: (3) Bot this prophete, that has prechyd and puplyshed so playn  
Cristen law, Crist thay call hym in oure cuntre;  
Bot oure prynces full prowldy thisnyght have hym tain:  
Full tytt to be dampned he shallbe hurlyd byfore me;  
I shall fownde to be his freynd utward, in certain,  
And shew hym fare cowntenance and wordys of vanyte;  
Bot or this day at nyght on crosse shall he be slayn,  
Thus agayns hym in my hart I bere grete enmyte  
Full sore. (Happé, 1985, p. 508, lines 27-35)*

In this context, it can be observed that the play includes several stages of temptation highlighted successively. First of all, Satan is implicitly the tempter of Pilate through

<sup>9</sup> In The New Testament, Pilate hesitates to crucify Christ and treats him fairly; however, in the end he delivers Christ to the crowd of the Jews who are hurrying up to crucify him. It is narrated in John 19: 16-17 as follows “(16) Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led *him* away. (17) And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: (*Holy Bible*, 1994, p. 54).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the characterization of the Pilate figure in the mystery cycles, see Arnold Williams. (1950). *The characterization of Pilate in the towneley plays*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State College Press.  

---

*SEFAD*, 2019; (42): 149-162

arousing pride and desire for more power in him. Secondly, it is Pilate who tempts the folk to crucify Christ. Thirdly, it is the folk convinced with Pilate's provocation. Hence, in this tripartite-phase, the people are being tempted not only by Satan but also by Pilate and also because of their self-weakness. Human nature and its inclination to fall into temptation, as highlighted in *The Killing of Abel* and *The Crucifixion*, are once again unfold through Mak figure in *The Second Shepherds' Play* in the Towneley cycle. Mak reminds of Satan because of his fiendish mind, role as a magician and his claim of being 'the master', although they are all presented humorously (Helterman, 1981, p. 107-108). Different from the serious tone and discourses of *The Creation, and Adam and Eve* and *The Killing of Abel* plays within the context of temptation and the representation of Satan, in *The Second Shepherds' Play*, Mak is presented humorously as Satan's representative. Mak deceives the shepherds with his trick without difficulty, and he steals their sheep. Furthermore, he is proud of himself because he gets everything easily, whilst other people work hard and make great or desperate efforts. He enjoys the fact that he does not need to strive for getting whatever he desires:

MAK: *Do way:*  
*I am worthy my mete,*  
*For in a strate can I get*  
*More then thay that swynke and swette*  
*All the long day. (Happé, 1985, p. 227, lines 309-313)*

Mak's over self-confidence and his being a trickster bring his representation closer to that of Satan. He is identified by the third shepherd as a 'wolf' which is a beast associated with the devil in the bestiaries (Helterman, 1981, p. 103). For Helterman, in the play, Mak is the tempter because he "symbolizes the characteristics in the shepherds which prevent their seeing Christ. Mak has the second shepherd's misogyny and the third's slyness, and his claim to mastery over the first two." (1981, p. 103) Although Mak tempts people like Satan, he is tempted by the desire of keeping hold of earthly goods. He also longs for being hold in high esteem, and he is eaten up with his pride, reminding Lucifer before his fall from heaven. He says:

MAK: *What! Ich be a yoman, I tell you, of the king;*  
*The self and the some, sond from a great lordyng,*  
*And sich.*  
*Fy on you! Goyth hence*  
*Out of my presence!*  
*I must have reverence;*  
*Why, who be ich? (Happé, 1985, p. 273, lines 201-207)*

Mak is not sentenced severely as Lucifer who has been expelled from heaven; rather, his desire for being treated with reverence is punished humorously, since the shepherds wrap him up in a blanket. This humorous punishment, indeed, is not unusual in the Middle Ages. As Jonathan Wilcox points out, "humor is a recurring preoccupation for scholars of later medieval English literature, where the canonical and most-studied text is a recognized comic masterpiece. Indeed, humor abounds throughout Middle English literature and has been much discussed. All such fun, though, apparently starts with the Norman Conquest" (2000, p. 5). The instances of laughter in *The Second Shepherds' Play*, especially during Mak's



comeuppance, establish a sardonic quality rather than laughter. In this context, not only the human failing but also the failing of the tempter is stressed; thus, the human nature of Mak is focused on rather than he is equated to Satan. Through such representation of Mak underlining the human nature instead of presenting Mak as the incarnation of Satan, the unavoidability of temptation on earth is stressed. Hence, it is suggested that Satan's role is undertaken by human beings on earth; therefore, human beings are not that much innocent.

### REPRESENTATIONS OF TEMPTATION IN MEDIEVAL MORALITY PLAYS

In addition to the explicit and didactic representations of temptation through the Scriptural accounts in *The Creation, and Adam and Eve, The Killing of Abel, The Crucifixion*, and non-Scriptural *The Second Shepherds' Play*, the conflict of the vices and the virtues in the soul of mankind, his lack of resistance to temptation and his vulnerability in case of temptation are introduced allegorically in the morality plays. Moreover, morality plays somehow present temptations within a secular context, whilst mystery plays employ religious references in order to emphasize the role of Satan in temptation, basing mostly on the role of Satan in the Original Sin. The main idea of the morality plays, in other words, human being's inclination to be tempted, is stressed in the morality plays *Everyman* and *Mankind*. Furthermore, the human tendency is accompanied by the allegorized Seven Deadly Sins serving to Satan's intention. In these plays, human nature provides a focal point to contemplate on the function of Satan and the role of human beings in case of temptation, in order to define the instigator and the victim.

Despite the representations of the temptations by Satan and the Seven Deadly Sins, Robert Potter points out that a morality play does not necessarily display a battle between virtues and vices, but it may be "a didactic ritual drama about the forgiveness of sins" (1975, p. 57). Thus, these plays particularly stress what happens following the temptations, rather than how human beings are tempted either by Satan or the Seven Deadly Sins, as in *Everyman*. In the play, there is neither Satan nor any evil character; however, Everyman is tempted by his personal attributes (Potter, 1975, p. 38), in other words, because of his relying on the pleasures of the earth, and not realizing the fact that they are all transient. The ignorance of human beings to the temptations of anything transitory is followed by their consequent realization of committing sin only when they face death. This final awareness is mostly penitential; yet, its consequence cannot be made up for. The irresistibility of temptation, the pleasure of surrendering to it and the ultimate repentance are all stated by the Messenger who at the beginning summarises the moral of the play:

*The story sayth: Man, in the begynnynge*  
*Loke well, and take good heed to the endynge,*  
*Be you never so gay!*  
*Ye thynke syme in the begynnynge full swete,*  
*Whiche in the ende causeth the soule to wepe*  
*Whan the body lyeth in claye. (Gray, 1985, p. 334, lines 10-15)*

Accordingly, death is presented as the moment of recognition in addition to being the beginning of eternal life. Everyman has put extreme thrust into the worldly pleasures and goods; however, he realizes their ephemerality only at the moment of his death. How Everyman has been tempted is not performed in the play; nevertheless, all action focuses on

his striving for achieving God's forgiveness and salvation. When he is about to die, he realizes that he has misspent his life on earth; yet, he also realizes that he can redeem it.

In fact, the reason for Everyman's falling into temptation is his acting with his free will. In other words, he is tempted owing to his ignoring the divine warning and distancing from God by consenting to the desires of human body and mind willingly, without realizing the fact that they are deceptive. In Potter's words, "Everyman's free will is an asset in this reckoning; though it has led him to the blink of disaster" (1975, p. 47). Hence, even though his free will is the reason for his disastrous situation, it is also functional to make him recognize his weakness. Therefore, he struggles to compensate for the wrong decisions he has taken with his free will. He realizes deceptiveness and temporariness of anything that have tempted him:

*Everyman: Alas, I may well wepe with syghes depe!  
Now have I no maner of company  
To helpe me in my journey and me to kepe,  
And also my wrytyng is full unredy.  
How shall I do now for to excuse me?  
I wolde to God I had never be gete!  
To my soule a full grete profyte it had be;  
For now I fere paynes huge and grete. (Gray, 1985, p. 338, lines 184-191)*

In fact, following his repentance, he compromises with the divine power, consenting to the sentence he has rightly deserved; hence, he becomes not only the victim but also the victimizer of himself. At the end of the play, Everyman obtains mercy and salvation of God because of his sincere repentance. Herein, *Everyman* differs from the mystery plays ending with the punishments of those tempted, since he is rewarded with the mercy and forgiveness of God.

In *Mankind*, different from *Everyman*, the process of Mankind's temptation by Satan and the earthly pleasures is dramatized through allegorical representations. While the vices New Guise, Nowadays and Nought stand for the earthly ephemerality trying to tempt Mankind, Titivillus can easily be identified as the incarnation of Satan. Similar to the temptation of Adam and Eve in *The Creation, and Adam and Eve* play, Satan in disguise of Titivillus deceives Mankind by persuading him to give up saying prayers and his labour, dragging him into laziness, idleness and disobedience to God:

*Titivillus: To blench hys sight; I hope to have hys fote-mett.  
To yrke hym of hys labur I xall make a frame.  
Thys borde xall be hyde wnder the erth prevely;  
Hys spade xall enter, I hope, onredyly;  
Be then he hath assayed, he xall be very angry  
And lose hys pacyens, peyn of schame. (Gray, 1985, p. 252, lines 531-536)*

According to William Anthony Davenport's assertion "Mankind is, of course, Adam, who was furnished with a spade as a sign of his life of toil, after he was banished from heaven" (1984, p. 43). In that sense, his spade stands for "a weapon against the vices"

(Davenport, 1984, p. 44). In other words, the spade is his means to resist to the earthly temptations. His avoiding the temptations of the vices urging him to lechery, murder and robbery is possible provided that he diligently goes ahead with his labour. However, there are obstacles and tempters such as New Guise, Nowadays and Nought accompanying Titivillus, preventing Mankind's engagement with his labour. These vices representing "the current vices of the day" (Mackenzie, 1914, p. 67) are full of tricks. Because of his human weakness in front of the temptations of the flesh, Mankind ignores Mercy who strives for protecting him from these temptations:

*Mercy: I have be the very mene for yowr restytucyon.  
 Mercy ys my name that mornyth for yowr offence.  
 Dyverte not yowrslyffe in tyme of temtacyon,  
 That ye may be acceptable to Gode at yowr goyng hence. (Gray, 1985, p. 238, lines 17-20)*

As W. R. Mackenzie points out, New Guise, Nowadays and Nought stand in a general way for the temptations of the world and the flesh, which assail the hearth of man and lure him away from virtue; while Titivillus, on the other hand, acts as Satan giving directions to the vices, in contrast to the Mercy who is the only representative of goodness (1914, p. 68). Mercy cannot believe that Mankind is so weak in nature against the temptations:

*Mercy: I kan not bere yt ewynly that Mankynde ys so flexybull.  
 Man onkynde wherever thou be, for all this world was not aprehensyble  
 To discharge thin orygnall offence, thraldom and captvyotyé,  
 Tyll Godys own welbelovyde son was obedient and passyble. (Gray, 1985, p. 258, lines 741-744)*

Although he is protected against the temptations by the help of Mercy, the vices and the virtues have a fight for Mankind's soul. In that battle, Satan and the worldly temptations exploit Mankind, manipulate his weakness; however, he is saved by Mercy who teaches him the Satan's temptation and his demonic companions. After his falling into temptation, Mankind's character also changes. As Potter points out, "Mankind is by no means depicted as a crude peasant; rather, he appears as an honest, well-spoken yeoman tilling and planting his land. His fall from grace is to some extent manifested by his adoption of the crude and vulgar manner of the tempters." (1975, p. 43) Despite Mercy's efforts to warn him against the temptations, he is tempted by Titivillus who convinces Mankind that Mercy is unreliable. Yet, after his realization of his sinfulness like Everyman in *Everyman*, Mankind begs for the forgiveness of God. He confesses that he has acted unwisely and been deceived by the vice whispers of the tempters and obeyed them:

*A, yt swemyth my hert to think how onwysely I have wrought.  
 Tytivillus, that goth invisibele, hynge hys nett before my eye  
 And by hys fantastical visionys sediciously sowght,  
 To New Gyse, Nowadays, Nowght causyd me to obey. (Gray, 1985, p. 262, lines 875-878)*

Towards the end of the play, Mercy once more warns Mankind against the temptations of Satan, the world and the flesh. He expresses that they are all spiritual enemies:

*Mercy: Ye haue .iii. aduersaryis and he ys mayster of hem all:  
That ys to sey, the dewell, the world, the flesch and the fell.  
The New Gyse, Nowadayis, Nowght, the world we may hem call;  
And propyrly Titivillus syngnyfyth the fend of helle;  
The flesch, that ys the unclene concupissens of your body.  
These be your .iii. gostly enmyis, in whom ye haue put your confidens.  
Thei browt yow to Myscheffe to conclude your temporall glory,  
As yt hath be schewyd before this worcheppyll audiens. (Gray, 1985, p. 263, lines 883-890)*

The morality plays, as the mystery plays, do not deny the weakness of human nature against temptation; rather, they expose 'Adam in all men'. Besides, they reveal God's recognition of human nature in case of temptation and his granting forgiveness through repentance (Potter, 1975, p. 49). According to St. Victor:

*the World is associated with the lust for prosperity and the fear of adversity: We conquer the devil when we resist his suggestions; we conquer the world when we neither lust after prosperity nor fear adversity; we conquer the flesh when we neither extinguish its desires in necessary things nor relax them toward things allowed. (qtd. in Howard, 1966, p. 62)*

Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux associates "the World with sense, the flesh with delectation and consent, and the devil with the resulting sin" (qtd. in Howard, 1966, p. 62). In medieval drama, the temptations of Satan, the world and the flesh are displayed through the representations of the biblical narratives and allegorical characters, the former in the mystery plays and the latter in the morality plays. The characters subjected to the temptations are all delighted at first because of the temporary pleasures of sin; however, they are either punished or they become penitents afterwards. God, warning people against the temptations either directly or through his agents, is punitive in the mystery plays; yet, he is merciful to those who are tempted in the morality plays.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all creations of God are prone to the temptations of the world, and of the flesh, in addition to that of Satan. However, provided that they become penitent, there is possibility of redemption and reward of heaven for the sinners. Therefore, if those tempted repent they can return to heaven where their primal couple were expelled because of temptation. Most temptations are displayed on medieval stage to the medieval people who, in addition to the means of salvation, are exposed to the possible temptations of Satan, the world and the flesh. The display of the downfall of the tempted and his repentance cause the purgation of the audience. This cathartic experience provides them with an understanding of divine mercy. The more the victim suffers, the more the audience achieves self-realization and the knowledge of their own susceptibility to temptation. In addition to this, human beings achieve realization of their own nature apart from that of Satan, which reminds them the fact that they are not totally innocent since they are not urged to give into temptation.

Hence, not only 'the serpent', but also human being's inner voice speaks to tempt. Christ's experiences help people realize these temptations that keep them away from devoting to God properly. Accordingly, people learn the mind-set and the methods of Satan and how they are to respond to the temptations through those of Christ, enabling them to withstand Satan's attacks. There are many temptations that people can sadly fall into because of their flesh's weakness; however, through their being alert to these, and God's not letting them be tempted provide a way out of sin. They recognize and combat these temptations by being adhered to the teachings of God in the Bible, in expectation for God's mercy on them. The dramatic representations of temptation provide a sort of warning against the fact that each human being is inclined to temptation; therefore, they employ visual didacticism for the illiterate audience who are unable to read the Bible and *exempla*. Moreover, since performed in inn-yard or within an inn by travelling players (Davenport, 1984, p. 131), these plays appeal to larger audience; hence, the illiterate folk are educated in Christian virtues and morals through drama.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Bonhoeffer, D. (1997). *Creation and fall temptation: Two biblical studies*. New York: Touchstone.
- Cooper, H. (2004). *The English romance in time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cushman, L. W. (1900). *The devil and the vice in the English dramatic literature before Shakespeare*. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Davenport, W. A. (1984). *Fifteenth century English drama: The early moral plays and their literary relations*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Gilkey, L. (1985). The christian understanding of suffering. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 5, 49-65.
- Gray, D. (Ed.). (1985). *The Oxford book of late medieval verse and prose*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Happé, P. (Ed.). (1985). *English mystery plays*. London: Penguin.
- Helteman, J. (1981). *Symbolic action in the plays of the Wakefield master*. Athens: The UP of Georgia.
- Howard, D. R. (1966). *The three temptations: Medieval man in search of the world*. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Jobling, L. (1989). The Plate of the York mystery plays. In G. Barnes and et all (Ed.s), *Words and wordsmiths: A volume for H. L. Rogers*. (pp. 50-62) Sydney: University of Sydney.
- Kolve, V. A. (1966). *The play called corpus christi*. Stanford: Stanford UP.
- Mackenzie, W. R. (1914). *The English moralities from the point view of allegory*. New York: Haskell House.
- Potter, R. (1975). *The English morality play: Origin, history and influence*. London: Routledge.
- Stevens, M. (1987). *Four middle English mystery cycles: Textual, contextual, and critical interpretations*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Wilcox, J. (Ed.). (2000). Introduction. In J. Wilcox (Ed.), *Humour in Anglo-Saxon literature* (pp. 1-10). Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.