

Constructing *The Castle*, an Online Forum—Developed by Dr. Gloria J. Betcher, Iowa State University, and Dr. Alan Baragona, Virginia Military Institute (© 2006)

1. Model Prompt & Model Answers: Greed as Scaffold Owner

With an allegorical drama, there is always the question whether the playwright made some choice for the sake of the drama or the sake of the doctrine. A case in point is the treatment of "Greediness" in *The Castle of Perseverance*. The Seven Deadly Sins (Pride, Envy, Wrath, Greed, Sloth, Gluttony, and Lust) were not only categories of sins individually, but medieval thinkers liked to organize them into groups of categories, as well. One common scheme was to divide them between Spiritual Sins and Physical, with Pride, Envy, Wrath, and Greed as Spiritual Sins, Gluttony and Lust as Physical Sins, and Sloth as a kind of bridge between the two, since one can be physically lazy but also spiritually slothful (neglecting to take the sacraments, for instance). Another common scheme was to categorize the Seven Deadly Sins as sins of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Gluttony, Lechery, and Sloth are sins of the Flesh; Pride and Envy are sins of the Devil; and Greed and Wrath are sins of the World, although Wrath could apply equally to Lucifer.

The Castle of Perseverance obviously echoes this second scheme, with its scaffolds of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, but it also clearly does not follow either of the two most common interpretations precisely. Gluttony, Lechery, and Sloth appear on Flesh's scaffold. Pride, Envy, and Wrath appear on Belial's scaffold. But Greediness is not grouped with World. Instead, the character World appears on his scaffold with two vices that are not among the Seven Deadly Sins, Folly (*Stultitia*) and Lust-Liking (*Voluptas*, which is not sexual lust per se but general pleasure seeking). Greediness is given a scaffold all to himself. Moreover, the description of the grouping in the Banns does not match either the two most common schemes or the actual organization in the play itself, a) reinforcing David Parry's assertion that the Banns in the manuscript actually belong to another version of the play (see Johnston introduction), and b) showing that writers were not limited to one or two conceptions. Given that there is a range of possibilities, write a short response (one or two paragraphs) to the question, why does Greediness get his own scaffold?

Answers might involve either some doctrine or theme. Perhaps Church teaching gives Greed some special place that is appropriate here. Or perhaps the playwright has some reason to highlight Greed that has to do with current or local social conditions. Or perhaps it somehow adds to the drama of the presentation. You decide and make the best argument you can from what you know about Christianity and about the play.

Model response 1 to Model Prompt: Greed as Scaffold Owner (Dr. Alan Baragona)

One reason Greed gets a scaffold to himself might have to do with doctrine. Just as medieval theologians had different schemes to categorize the sins, as this question makes clear, they could also differ on how they viewed the seriousness of any given sin. Usually, Pride would be considered the worst of the Deadly Sins, because that is the sin of the Devil, literally the first sin in time. As one of our editors, David Bevington, writes,

"the sins are all interrelated. Pride is the original sin upon which the others depend" (p. 797). So it should be the foundation.

But not always. Significantly, St. Paul makes Greed the most basic sin. In I Timothy 6:8-10, he writes "But having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content. For they that will become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows" (Douay-Rheims version). It is possible, therefore, that the playwright gave Greed such a central role in the play under the influence of the doctrine of St. Paul.

On the other hand, the playwright may have had a more social reason for highlighting Greed. Our other editor, Alexandra Johnston, says, "It has been suggested that, since the sins of the central figure, Mankind, are those of the bourgeois middle class[,] . . . this play was probably aimed at the wealthy middle class wool merchants who made the fifteenth century a period of great material prosperity in the south eastern counties of England." The problem of poverty is certainly highlighted early in the Banns, especially as laying the groundwork for the sin of Covetousness:

1 HERALD

When Mankind will not come out of good Perseverance
The Bad Angel with Greediness begins him to assail --
Finding him in poverty and penance now so numb --
And makes him believe in poverty he will fail.
Then he offers him goods and gold, so great a sum,
If he will wend to the World, wealth to enjoy.
The Bad Angel to the World lures him to come,
From the Castle of Perseverance to flee, from the joy
And Bliss.
Then the World begins his goods to restore
Had he never so much, yet he would have more --
Thus, the Bad Angel teaches him his lore:
The more a man ages, the harder he is. (Johnston, ll. 78-91)

Finally, rather than being social commentary, the emphasis on Greed might illustrate the medieval understanding of human psychology and the human condition. Bevington writes, "Covetousness is the sin of old age, when all others fail" (797), and the Second Herald says this explicitly.

Hard is a man in old age and covetous is his kind.
When all other sins Man hath forsaken
The more gold he has, the more is in his mind
To gather and get goods though in evil it's taken. (Johnston, ll. 92-94)

In a play that traces the life of a typical "everyman" from birth to death, perhaps it makes sense to highlight the sin that we are all heading towards.

Model Response 2 to Model Prompt: Dramatic Reasons That Greed Needs a Scaffold (Dr. Gloria Betcher)

While it is true that over the centuries Greed has sometimes been identified as the greatest of the Seven Deadly Sins (see St. Paul's comments in I Tim 6: 8-10), one does not have to look to a hierarchy of sinfulness to find a reason that Greed should have a scaffold. The play itself offers ample motivation for this sin to be assigned to a scaffold other than those "owned" by World, Flesh, or Belial. Reading the play, one might note that, like many medieval nobles, the Seven Deadly Sins have multiple layers of familial and feudal allegiance. The text makes clear that they are tied to each other (*e.g.*, Johnston, ll. 747-9, 863-88), as well as to the kings World, Flesh, and Belial (Johnston, ll. 25-6, 53-61, 92-100, 737-41, 789, 799-801, 841-5, 850-3). Thus the sins are part of the same family (Johnston, ll. 863-4, 880-1) and might be expected to show that connection in some way. The text also indicates that the sins need a place to gather as they assault Mankind with their temptations (Johnston, ll. 1158-60). While these facts do not necessarily indicate that the sins need a scaffold to themselves, or that Greed should be the owner of that scaffold, logic dictates that this would be the case.

The only other places that the sins might gather as a group are the scaffolds of the kings or in the place (*platea*). The scaffolds of the kings do not seem to be a viable option for this sort of gathering. Since the sins have their own obligations to specific kings, having sins from one regal domain visit another for any length of time makes no sense dramatically. It will only confuse the audience about who is allied to whom. Likewise, the *platea* does not seem to be a viable location for the grouping of the sins for two reasons. First, the nature of the *platea* as an unlocalized playing space means that, in this play, most of the action that takes place there is transient. Action in the *platea* represents transitional periods in the life of Mankind as he makes his life decisions and moves on to another phase in his pilgrimage. Mankind's stay with the sins is not a period of transition; it is a 40-year stop on his road of life (Johnston, ll. 1419). Therefore, the stay with the sins requires a scaffold location to indicate some permanence. Second, using the *platea* as the home for the sins would make it more difficult for Greediness to reveal to Mankind his cupboard of worldly wealth. Where would Greed's cupboard be kept in an unlocalized space like the *platea*? Would Greed be forced to drag the box with him as he played? That seems unlikely.

It is this same dramatic consideration, the need to accommodate Greed's cupboard, that argues in favor of Greed as a scaffold owner. The other sins are not encumbered in this way with the trappings of worldly wealth. They have no need of a home base in which to leave a major property such as the cupboard. Thus, it makes dramatic sense to assign the scaffold associated with the Seven Deadly Sins to Greed, the only sin who needs a place to keep his props.

2. God's Scaffold (adapted from Dr. Alan Dessen)—Prompt for group response

In his 1957 book, *The Medieval Theatre in the Round*, Richard Southern poses some important questions about *Castle*. He notes that the appeal to God's scaffold does not come until line 3118 (say, three hours after the start of the performance). Southern then asks whether: "1. God sat motionless in his scaffold all this time? 2. Or whether his scaffold was empty until just before the cue, and then God walked from some place of concealment and took his seat on the throne in time to be ready for the Four Daughters? 3. Or whether his scaffold was closed by a curtain until the moment of the appeal? In this case God would take his throne in concealment at his leisure, and be ready for a dignified (and very dramatic) discovery on the drawing of the curtain." Southern notes "how dramatic it must have been for a spectator to watch these three hours of wrangling for the soul of Man, with four open scaffolds belching forth the vaunts and ill wishes of the Evils throughout and yet, in the East, one silent and apparently unmoved scaffold, that all this time seemed to take no part in the Destiny, but by its silent existence held attention and raised expectation!" Southern sees no evidence for choosing among his three alternatives (he obviously prefers #3) but does note "one strange fact" in favor of the apparently impossible #1, that the legend on the drawing of the plan states that the soul of Man shall lie under the bed till he is to rise and play, a wait of over 3000 lines, so there is evidence "that players waited for three hours and more to take part in an action, and waited moreover in a specific place to which there seems to have been no access (on the evidence we have) save before the performance began." Southern notes that the same argument could pertain to the appearance of Covetyse on his scaffold (Bevington, l. 783; Johnston, l. 627) or the appearance of the 7 Virtues in the castle-tower (Bevington, l. 1601; Johnston, l. 1445).

Write a short response (one paragraph to one page) to Southern's questions, choosing one of his alternatives or coming up with your own and saying why.

3. Depicting the Allegiances of the Sins—Prompt for group response

The Seven Deadly Sins in *The Castle of Perseverance* have layers of allegiance. As brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters, their allegiance is expressed in familial terms showing that they are allied to each other (Johnston, ll.863-4) and to their wicked "parents," Belial (Johnston, ll. 37-8, 789) and Flesh (Johnston, l. 843). Likewise, the sins are allied to these parent figures and World as subjects are to kings (Johnston, l. 111) or "great lords" (Johnston, ll. 850-1); the sins hold positions of feudal and military obligation: "lords" (Johnston, l. 60), "prince" (Johnston, l. 53), "treasurer" (Johnston, l. 25), etc. When they go into battle against the virtues holding the Castle of Perseverance, the sins attack under banners designating their regiments, each led by a "lord." Sometimes the sins are in the company of their leaders, sometimes in each other's company. This layering of allegiance could cause some interesting costume questions to arise.

In the late medieval period, lords gave livery to their retainers for faithful service. "Livery" was "a token by which they (retainers) may be recognized; in wider sense, a distinctive badge or suit worn by a servant or official, a member of a company" (*OED*). For example, livery might take the form of distinctive clothing, such as a cloak of a particular color; jewelry, such as the famous Lancastrian collar of Ss; or badges, featuring the heraldic device of a retainer's lord. Given that the sins go to battle for their lords, we might expect them to wear such livery, identifying their

battlefield regiments, but we might equally expect that they will wear clothing showing their familial ties or even showing their "true" nature as depicted in medieval iconographic sources.

Does a designer need to convey both familial allegiance and feudal obligation? If not, which is the more important message to convey for the sake of the dramatic action? Using your knowledge of the text, iconography, and/or military tradition, argue whether it is necessary to convey both types of allegiance or only one and which allegiance would be primary if you think both are important. Then show how the sins' allegiance might be conveyed effectively, that is, design a costume scheme that would indicate either familial or feudal bonds or both familial and feudal bonds.

4. Placement of Greed's Scaffold—Prompt for individual response

The manuscript of *The Castle of Perseverance* is one of only two medieval British play manuscripts that contains a staging diagram [**Instructor: provide staging diagram for this prompt**]. This diagram provides some guidance for basic place-and-scaffold staging of the play, including a circular playing space with scaffold locations indicated around its circumference and in its center. In this diagram, the scaffolds of God and Belial are placed according to tradition, with God in the East, associated with the rising sun, and the devil in the North, traditionally associated in the British Isles with sorcery. But there is no particular tradition for placing Flesh in the South and World in the West, much less for placing Greed in the Northeast. Given that Greediness is often categorized as a sin of the World, we might expect to find his scaffold next to that of World instead of between the scaffolds of God and the devil. Consequently, one must consider if the playwright wanted to send some kind of message by putting Greediness between God and the devil or if the position of the scaffold serves some practical theatrical purpose, for example, in "blocking" (choreographing) the movements of the characters. This raises the question, why is Greed's scaffold located between the devil and God and not next to the scaffold of the World? Write a short response (one or two paragraphs) to this question.

Answers might consider issues of doctrine or theme. Or, they might focus on somewhat more theatrical issues, such as the blocking (movement) requirements of scenes involving Greed's scaffold or the stage picture (iconography) of the scene created through this placement of Greed's scaffold in relation to God and the devil's.

5. Design-a-Scaffold Prompt—Prompt for individual response

Just as directors and designers staging *The Castle of Perseverance* need to make many choices about how they will portray characters to effectively reveal their natures, they need to decide what the scaffolds will look like. Not only does the design of a scaffold need to accommodate the action that occurs there (room for characters, seating, and movement, etc.), it needs to reflect the nature and interests of the scaffold's owner. God's scaffold has a different atmosphere than World's or Belial's. Greed's scaffold needs room for all the sins. Every scaffold must be considered individually, yet all of them need to work together to create a stage picture and need to be suited to the place-and-scaffold stage plan in the play's manuscript. The text provides some clues to what the scaffold designs will require. Some of these clues are contained in the lines of

the characters, others in the manuscript diagram, and still others in the play's stage directions. Along with considering these textual clues, directors and designers may draw inspiration from medieval iconography or modern associations, among other things, to create scaffolds that will work effectively for the play's production.

Your goal is to design one scaffold in its entirety—from its size and levels to its draperies and furniture to its atmosphere and props—to create a useable space for the actors and an understandable stage picture for the audience. You may draw either on medieval conventions or on modern associations to create an effective scaffold. For example, Greed, World's treasurer (Johnston, l. 608), might have a scaffold that looks like a bank vault (of course, now that we've mentioned that idea, you can't use it!). As you describe your scaffold design in detail, tell us what action your scaffold must accommodate and what other concerns related to the stage picture influenced your design. Remember to support your assertions about action and design by citing brief evidence from the text or elsewhere.

6. Design-a-Sin Prompt—Prompt for group response

Directors and costume designers staging *The Castle of Perseverance* need to make many choices about how they will portray the Seven Deadly Sins to effectively reveal their natures and social allegiances. Since the play is allegorical, the sins need to be readily recognizable to the audience; the universality of the message cannot be obscured by idiosyncratic (or weird) costume and directing choices. The text provides many clues to what the Seven Deadly Sins look like, how they are dressed, how they act, and what they possess (props associated with them at various points in the play, for example, the items they carry when going into battle). Some of these clues are contained in the words of the sins themselves, others in the lines of those who comment on the sins, and still others in the manuscript's stage directions. Along with these textual clues, directors and designers may draw on a rich history of medieval iconographic representations of the sins to evoke their true natures for the audience or may choose to draw on modern associations.

Your goal is to design one sin in its entirety — from its costume to its speaking style and movement to its props — to project the appropriate allegorical message to the audience. Your design may draw either on medieval conventions or on modern associations to reveal the nature of that sin effectively. For example, a modern Gluttony might be portrayed as looking and speaking like Jabba the Hutt from *Star Wars* and might be costumed like that modern figure in all his flabby excess (of course, now that we've mentioned that idea, you can't use it!). Tell us what message your chosen sin must convey and then embody that message in your design. Remember to support your assertions about message and design by citing brief evidence from the text or elsewhere.