

Sarah Lawrence College

DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence

Theatre Thesis - Written Thesis

Theatre Theses

5-2023

Ride The Cyclone, The Musical: A Modern Morality Play

Bryelle Burgus

Sarah Lawrence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/theatre_written



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Burgus, Bryelle, "Ride The Cyclone, The Musical: A Modern Morality Play" (2023). *Theatre Thesis - Written Thesis*. 8.

https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/theatre_written/8

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theatre Theses at DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theatre Thesis - Written Thesis by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SarahLawrence. For more information, please contact afreitas@sarahlawrence.edu.

RIDE THE CYCLONE, THE MUSICAL:

A MODERN MORALITY PLAY

Bryelle Burgus

April 2023

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre
Sarah Lawrence College

ABSTRACT

Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries morality plays were used by Christianity to teach their moral values to the community. Focused on the life of an individual human being, an “everyman” that represented all of mankind, morality plays followed the everyman’s innocence, fall, and penitential redemption. Using spectacle, dramatization, comedy, and satire, morality plays preached of the mortal inevitability of sin and the spiritual importance of repentance. Utilizing the most well known morality play, *Everyman*, as a lens, I will be examining and analyzing the 2008 *Ride The Cyclone* as a modern day morality play that is reflective of our modern world. Through my analysis and comparison of plot and structure, moral values, and character analysis, I will prove that the character of choir member Ocean O’Connell Rosenberg is a modern day everyman plagued by the selfishness and pride that is rampant in our society, who can only be saved by witnessing the vices and the virtues of those around her, and identify the musical’s message and moral as a call for humanity in a time when we seem to have lost it entirely.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Plot Synopses.....	3
Chapter II: Moral Values & Religion.....	10
Chapter III: Structure Analysis.....	14
Chapter IV: Ocean Rosenberg as Everyman.....	21
Chapter V: Subsidiary Characters.....	27
Chapter VI: The Moral of Good Deeds.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
Bibliography.....	41

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries morality plays were used by Christianity to teach their moral values to the community. Focused on the life of an individual human being, an “everyman” that represented all of mankind, morality plays “follow[ed] a penitential progression in which an everyman figure [fell] into sin and [was] eventually redeemed through penitential ritual” (Paulson 2). Using spectacle, dramatization, comedy, and satire, morality plays preached of the mortal inevitability of sin and the spiritual importance of repentance. As the dramatic arts shifted during the Renaissance and the Reformation Period of the 16th century, morality plays decreased in popularity and production. However, the qualities and characteristics of morality plays have continued on in dramatic productions even to present day. From modern stage productions to film and television, the themes of God, mortality, moral values, sins, and redemption continue to be present in the work, though they’ve evolved to reflect our modern society, outlooks, values, morals, and religious standards. With this evolution has come works such as the movie *Bruce Almighty*, the television series *Breaking Bad*, and the subject of my analysis: the 2008 musical, *Ride The Cyclone*, by Brooke Maxwell and Jacob Richmond. A one-act musical comedy revolving around the tragic deaths of six members of the St. Cassian High School chamber choir of the fictional Uranium City, Saskatchewan.

According to Robert Potter, author of *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition*, morality plays are plays in which “a concept - what it means to be human - is represented on the stage by a central dramatic figure or series of figures” (Potter 6). Each of these plays follows the pattern of the everyman’s innocence, fall, and redemption and preaches the moral that “sin is inevitable” however “repentance is always possible” (16). Featuring a presentational style, a setting that functions as a microcosmic analogy, communal

calls for repentance, the seven deadly sins, and the personification of vices and virtues on stage, morality plays demonstrated what mortal life was about and allowed audiences to witness and recognize humanity's, as well as their own individual, weaknesses and the social abuses at hand. Plagued and tempted by vices, morality plays showed that the everyman's only path to redemption resided in the hands of the virtues who would guide him to repentance and hopefully the salvation of his soul.

Utilizing the most well known morality play - *Everyman* as a lens, I will be examining and analyzing the musical *Ride The Cyclone* as a modern day morality play that is reflective of our modern world. Through my analysis and comparison of plot and structure, moral values, and character analysis, I will prove that the character of Ocean O'Connell Rosenberg is a modern day everyman plagued by the selfishness and pride that is rampant in our society, who can only be saved by witnessing the vices and the virtues of those around her, and identify the musical's message and moral as a call for humanity in a time when we seem to have lost it entirely.

CHAPTER I: PLOT SYNOPSES

Written almost five hundred years apart, the play *Everyman* and the musical *Ride The Cyclone* share more similarities than meets the eye. Though they differ in style, language, and presentation, their plots, structures, and morals are analogous - the inspiration for my analysis. However, before beginning the analysis and cross comparison, it is important to thoroughly understand each productions' plot in detail as well as its characters and intended moral messaging.

We are greeted in *Everyman* by a Messenger who gives a brief overview of the story the audience is about to witness - the journey of the life and death of Everyman and the importance of a moral life in God's eyes. Unimpressed and upset by humanity's obsession with worldly riches, God calls Death to summon Everyman for a reckoning where God will attempt to stop him from becoming a beast and/or consuming others with envy. Plagued by deadly sins such as lust, greed, and pride and consumed by his life of luxury, Everyman is approached by Death and told that he will have to go before God for a reckoning and account for his behavior before Him. Unable to convince Death to leave him alone and afraid of traveling to the afterlife without a companion, Everyman seeks support from those he treasures the most: Fellowship (friends), Kindred and Cousin (family), and Goods (worldly possessions). Asking them to be his companion on his journey to the afterlife, Everyman is met with nothing but rejections from Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods. All of which give excuses as to why they cannot accompany him on his journey. Fellowship, only interested in worldly fun and pleasure, will not go with Everyman but offers to help him with a murder if the case ever arises. Kindred, uninterested in Everyman's predicament, offers to send a maid in their place. Cousin, selfishly preparing to attend their own reckoning, feigns a cramp in their toe. And Goods, having deceived

and entranced many humans, reveals that they are the reason most are called for their reckonings and admits to being the thief of many souls.

“GOODS

I follow no man in such voyages;
For and I went with thee
Thou shouldst fare much the worse for me;
For because on me thou did set thy mind,
Thy reckoning I have made blotted and blind,
Than thing account thou cannot make truly;
And that hast thou for the love of me

...

Therefore to thy soul Good is a thief;
For when thou art dead, this is my guise
Another to deceive in the same wise
As I have done thee, and all to his soul's reprieve.”
(*Everyman* 47-48)

It is through the failure, betrayal, and departure of these “friends” he valued most that Everyman realizes and accepts the mistakes, faults, and sins he has made on Earth. He identifies himself as a materialistic and vain person and now understands that the key to his salvation and self-worth does not lie in friends, family, or worldly possessions but rather in himself.

Following this self reflection he is met with Good Deeds, who is frail and weak from Everyman's selfish lifestyle. Not strong enough to accompany Everyman to redeem his soul, Good Deeds offers their assistance in Everyman's journey. Sending Knowledge (knowledge of God, scripture, and the Catholic religion) in their place, Good Deeds guides Everyman to Confession who instructs that the religious sacraments are integral to the salvation of one's soul. Everyman takes his confession so far as to enact mortification and self-flagellation; a common form of repentance in the Middle Ages. Once Everyman's acts of confession are completed Good Deeds is revived; saved by Everyman's selflessness. Given a garment of sorrow from Knowledge as a representation of his morality and his newfound denial of all earthly pleasures and possessions they approach the next step of Everyman's journey. Joined by Discretion (human

judgment), Beauty, Strength, (body and soul) and Five Wits (common sense), Everyman visits a priest to receive the holy sacraments as the group contemplates the power and superiority of priests and angels. Having done all he can to save his soul, Everyman now approaches his time of death. It is then, in his old age, that his earthly companions abandon him one again; Discretion, Beauty, Strength, Five Wits, and finally, Knowledge. It is only Good Deeds that will follow Everyman into the afterlife, sacrificing themselves in the process.

“GOOD DEEDS

All earthly things is but vanity:
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion, do man forsake,
Foolish friends and kinsmen, that fair spake,
All fleeth save Good-Deeds,
And that I am.”
(*Everyman* 58)

With the self-sacrificial accompaniment of Good Deeds, Everyman is accepted into Heaven by this singular virtue. A closing speech by a Doctor confirms the play’s final moral message: that only Good Deeds are the key to one’s salvation, not the worldly goods and possessions that we mistakenly value in our lifetimes.

The subject of this analysis, *Ride The Cyclone*, begins with a greeting from The Amazing Karnak, a 1920’s fortune-telling machine and our narrator throughout the piece. Described as “an imposing figure with a majestic beard and glowing eyes” (Maxwell and Richmond 1), Karnak explains that he possesses the power to predict peoples’ deaths, even his own which will happen in an hour as the teeth of a rat he named Virgil finally chew through his power cord. During this introduction he recounts the story of five teenagers whose fortunes he read years ago on September 14th, whose deaths on the rollercoaster he predicted would occur at 6:19pm, and who, “knowing they would board the doomed roller coaster” (4), uttered his programmed phrase “Be sure to ride the Cyclone.” (86) and “could tell them nothing” (4). Having died tragically in this

roller coaster accident, choir members Noel Gruber, Mischa Bachinski, Ocean O’Connell Rosenberg, Ricky Potts, and Constance Blackwell have now been summoned by Karnak to an unspecified limbo. With only a few hours left to live, he presents the choir members with a competition for a large prize: that “one worthy contestant will be brought back to life, to live beyond the Cyclone accident...to live again” (8). Following his explanation of the competition, Karnak tragically introduces Jane Doe: the “one unidentified body of the Cyclone roller coaster disaster” (61), found wearing a Saint Cassian uniform and missing a head. With black eyes and doll-like physicality and expression, she holds no memories of herself, nor does the choir, and nor does Karnak, who never read her fortune on that fateful day. Once everyone is settled, Karnak announces that Ocean will be the first choir member to present her case: why she should be the lucky one to return to Earth. In an attempt to ingratiate herself, Ocean O’Connell Rosenberg, “high school president, straight A student...the most successful girl in town” (15), rebels against the competition, bragging of her superiority in the group but grandstanding with talk of how she wants no part of a competition because all of those involved are a family and community. Unfortunately, this selfish rebuttal to gain a positive rapport backfires and leads to Karnak announcing that she has “tak[en] the moral high ground” (16), selflessly conceding from the competition and relinquishing her chance to live again. In response to Karnak’s announcement, Ocean sings a rousing gospel-inspired self-anthem in an attempt to make herself look better than the others and prove she is a good person. Contrarily, her anthem puts down her competition with derogatory remarks and boasts of her supremacy. After her number, Karnak ironically reveals that the group will be voting unanimously on who to send back. Ocean’s peers will be the judges. The same peers she just humiliated through song.

Interrupting Ocean's desperation for attention and validation is Noel Gruber: an "Aspiring Iconoclast, enfant terrible...the most romantic boy in town" (28) and the only gay boy in his high school. He reveals that to escape his small town of Uranium City, where the major cultural event of the year is "July 11th when Seven Eleven gives out free Slurpees" (28), and his career, which consists of shifts at the Mega Mall food court Taco Bell, he would imagine himself to be Monique Gibeau, "a hooker with a heart...of black charcoal" (Maxwell and Richmond 30), in Post-War France. He goes on to perform a song enacting this fantasy. Dissatisfied by Noel's performance as well as the profanity in it, Ocean questions the purpose and moral of the song, claiming that "every story's got a lesson" (37). To prove her point, Constance and Ocean perform an improv lesson akin to a D.A.R.E. education initiative, which quickly backfires when Constance goes off-script from the script that Ocean wrote. Intervening in their disagreement is Mischa Bachinskia: a loud and proud Ukrainian, "the best rapper in all of North Eastern Saskatchewan" (Maxwell and Richmond 40), and "the angriest boy in town" (40). It is revealed that he was born in a small town outside of Odessa, Ukraine and lost his mother to prolonged Uranium exposure from working on the Chernobyl clean up crew. Sent away to Canada with falsified adoption papers, he lived in a basement with absent parents and so began his rage-driven dive into commercialized hip hop. He raps about the high life of money, possessions, and bling before shifting to a vulnerable love song about his young love and online girlfriend - Natalia Muruska Bolinska, "Talia". Once finished he volunteers Ricky Potts to go next. A boy "born with a rare degenerative disease" (52), "the most imaginative boy in town" (52), he was the member of the choir who "couldn't talk and [was] like super sick and made everyone feel sorry for [them]" (25). Having lost his ability to speak and suffering from physical ailments on Earth, Ricky was at a loss for friends as well as family and "developed an elaborate playground

in his synapses” (52) to fill his time and occupy his mind. He explains that he created the fantasy of himself as the savior of the sexy-cat Zolarian race in the kitty cat star land and became their sexual god. It is after Ricky’s performance that Karnak turns the attention to the mysterious guest, Jane Doe, who sings a haunting lament about her loneliness in this limbo and the sham of her existence. With no memories of her life and no one to remember her, she questions why she was alive at all. Upon the conclusion of the song she is thrown a surprise birthday party, initiated by Ocean. The choir members enjoy the party and take time to chat honestly with one another, opening up emotionally. This honesty leads to the formal introduction of Constance Blackwell: the “nicest girl in homeroom...three years in a row” (72) who’s “pages in [her] yearbook” signed disingenuously by her classmates “were carefully removed with an exacto knife. And burnt” (73). She reveals to the group that she lost her virginity to a carnie a few hours before she died in an attempt to confirm her assumption that her life was a deadend and she was a loser. It is only when recounting her final moments alive, flying through the air in the unhinged roller coaster car, that she unashamedly reveals her love for her small town, her hardworking, low wage parents, and herself; inspiring her own celebratory anthem.

After Constance’s number, Karnak freezes all but Ocean and asks her and her alone to vote for who should return to Earth. Through the presentations of the choir members’ lives, Ocean began to see those around her for who they truly were, viewing them nonjudgmentally for the first time. Having learned from her mistakes and with a new moral compass, she decides that it should be a group decision. Karnak tempts Ocean with a portal to Earth but she refuses to choose herself. Instead, she decides, with the input of the choir, that Jane Doe deserves to live again, to remember who she was, and exclaims that “Democracy rocks” (84). The choir members guide Jane Doe to the portal and she steps through. She is identified by Karnaks as a girl named

Penny Lamb as her life is projected for the choir members to see - from birth to old age. A life well lived and well remembered. Shortly after this presentation, Virgil the rat chews through the last of Karnak's power cord causing him to malfunction and share his final preprogrammed fortunes before shutting down forever - leaving the remaining choir members in darkness. With her selfless good deed accomplished, Ocean moves on with the souls of the other choir members to whatever is next - Heaven or their next life.

CHAPTER II: MORAL VALUES & RELIGION

In examining morality plays it is imperative to gain an understanding of their origin in the Middle Ages as well as the substantial role the church filled in a person's everyday life during that time. Often the tallest building in the center of town, the church provided town residents with a variety of resources including community, healthcare, spiritual guidance, and education and in turn held much of the power and wealth of their communities. It is the Church's gain of power and wealth that branded the Middle Ages as the "Age of Faith" and it is no coincidence that morality plays surfaced during this time.

With the town masses in its grasp, the Church, as well as other authoritative entities, spread the word of the "common good". As with all moral principles, the common good was used by the "individuals living together in social communities...to make them refrain from selfish behavior and to prevent them from lying, cheating, or stealing from others" (Ellemers, et al. 2). Aligned with many of the Church's standards and holy commandments, these moral principles aimed to "induce individuals to display behavior that [had] no obvious instrumental use or direct value for them, for instance, when they show[ed] empathy, fairness or altruism towards others" (2). These moral principles now give a deep insight into the societal weight of religion and selfless good deeds throughout the early Middle Ages and can be seen in philosophies such as the Knight Code of Chivalry (the lifestyle of knights which praised the values of honor, honesty, valor, and loyalty) and "The Song Of Roland" (the French epic poem of Charlemagne's loyalty to God and His punishment or reward based on said loyalty). People valued the Church, its religious practices and rituals, and held high the standards it put forth in regards to a worthy and rewarding afterlife.

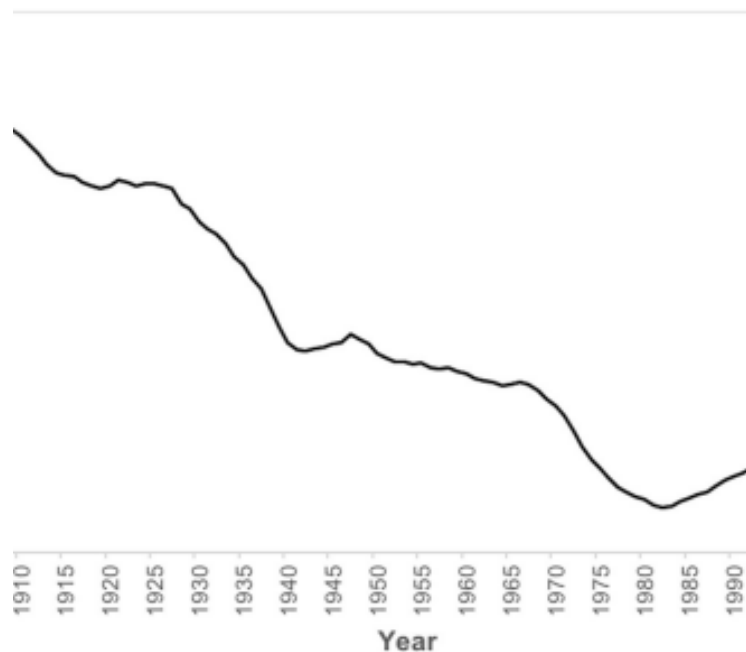
Used as a device to spread the moral messages of Christianity: vices and virtues, goodness and evil, and man's soul, morality plays emerged during a period of orthodox reform when the rituals of the Catholic Church were being scrutinized. Julie Paulson, author of *Theater of the World: Selfhood in the English Morality Play*, defines morality plays as "didactic or instructional dramas that dispatch easily discerned moral truths" (Paulson 2) and "draw on the tropes, directives, and categories of...pastoral literature" (9). With origins in traditional sermons, morality plays advocated repentance and the absolution of sins and were calls to religious acts. They warned of humanity's inability to save itself and preached that man's salvation was only found through the grace of God. As seen in *Everyman*, this salvation is said to only be possible through good deeds (either Everyman's personal deeds or Catholic sacraments) and the acknowledgement and eagerness of the everyman to ask for help due to his inadequacy. Used primarily for religious education, morality plays physically demonstrated the Christian doctrine, proving its truth on stage, and brought to light the understanding of higher principles: God, morals, eternal life, Heaven, Hell, etc. They aimed "to show the universality of sins and the universal cure of repentance" (Potter 29).

It is no surprise that our moral principles and religious views have shifted over the past five hundred years that separate these two works. A 2007 study titled "Twentieth Century Morality: The Rise And Fall Of Moral Concepts From 1900 To 2007" attempted to track some of that shift over the last hundred years. Using the Google Books database, the study investigated if the changes of morality in our modern society have been reflected in our use of moral language in printed text.

"Words conveying general morality (e.g., good, bad, moral, evil), and those representing Purity-based morality, implicating sanctity and contagion, declined steeply in frequency from 1900 to around 1980".
(Wheeler et al. 2)

In recent decades they found an increase in individualist values, “me”, and a decrease in collective values, “us”, suggesting that moral virtue has become less important in our society. However, a surprisingly re-moralisation began around the year of 1980, as seen by the chart below.

Figure 1
Time series of the general morality dictionary from 1900 to 2007.



Source: Wheeler, Melissa A et al. “Twentieth century morality: The rise and fall of moral concepts from 1900 to 2007.” PloS one vol. 14,2 e0212267. 27 Feb. 2019, fig 1.

The study theorizes that this rebound in moral language may point to the reinvigoration of social conservatism - the political ideology focused on the preservation of traditional values. However, it is unclear as to the true cause of this moral comeback.

This increase in general morality post 1980 provides a launching point and necessity for modern morality play adaptations of all mediums. In a time driven by the desire for power, dominance, hedonism, and individual merit, it is only natural that we find ourselves, in the present day, striving for human connection and contribution and attempting to find and give

human kindness. A difficult feat when surrounded by a society that is “less prudish and judgemental...more accepting of others, rational, irreligious, and scientific in how we approach matters of right and wrong” yet “increasingly censorious”, where “more things offend and outrage us, and the growing polari[z]ation of political debate reveals excesses of righteousness and self-righteousness” (Haslam). It is during this uptick of moralisation that I believe the inciting incident of *Ride The Cyclone*, the death of the choir members, to take place. With characters references Playstation, texting, cell phone girlfriends, and Wi-Fi and references to the prolonged aftermath of the Chernobyl clean up, the choir members seemed to have died in the early to mid 2000s. A time when humans were searching for human connection and struggling with the barriers of technology. When our moral compasses began to shift back to those around us. When people wanted to focus on the “common good” as opposed to every man for himself, but were grappling with how to do so.

CHAPTER III: STRUCTURE ANALYSIS & COMPARISON

According to Potter, morality plays utilized three common theatrical characteristics: presentational style, a setting of a microcosmic analogy, and communal calls to repentance. Following these criteria morality plays became quite distinctive in plot and structure. Each morality play followed the pattern of everyman's innocence, fall, and redemption, presenting everyman's repentance as the climatic theatrical event and positioning the moral message at the centerpoint of conflict and drama.

Customarily, morality plays began with a prologue that set the scene. These opening prologues functioned much like religious sermons, with the priest identifying the moral before breaking it into easily digestible points told in a specific order, usually in the form of a fictional story. *Everyman* opens with a direct address to the audience from the Messenger who explains the moral of the story: that mankind should take heed that death comes for all and that earthly pleasures and possessions will not stay with you when that time comes.

“MESSENGER
I pray you all give your audience
And here this matter with reverence,
By figure a moral play -
The *Summoning of Everyman* called it is,
That our lives and ending shows
How transitory we be all day.
This matter is most wondrous precious,
But the intent of it is more gracious,
And sweet to bear away.
The story saith, - Man, in the beginning,
Look well, and take good heed to the ending,
Be you never so gay!
Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet,
Which in the end causeth they soul to weep,
When the body lieth in clay,
Here shall you see how Fellowship and Jollity,
Both Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty,
Will fade from thee as flower in May
For ye shall hear, how our heaven king

Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning:
Give audience, and hear what he doth say.”
(*Everyman* 36-37)

The Messenger effectively sets the scene before further characters are introduced, allowing the audience to have more information than the main protagonist and a full understanding of the overall arc of the story.

Following this prologue we are introduced to God as they send Death on a mission to retrieve Everyman for a reckoning; verbalizing the inciting incident that will propel Everyman onto his journey seeking salvation. Upon leaving the characters of God and Death in Heaven, we are transported back to Earth to follow Everyman on his journey. Due to the non-specification of location on Earth and Everyman representing all of humanity, it is implied that the character of Everyman could be any human in society. “The High Father of Heaven sendeth Death to summon every creature to come and give account of their lives in this world...” (36) therefore Everyman could be any man or woman from any culture, background, social status, etc. Though it may seem general, the setting of Earth functions as a microcosmic analogy, capturing the universal human and mortal experience of people all over the globe.

As Everyman continues on his journey, accompanied by his various companions, he is introduced to Confession who encourages him to repent for through penance he may find forgiveness from God. Everyman agrees and enacts his penance through self-flagellation.

“EVERYMAN
In the name of the Holy Trinity,
My body sore punished shall be:
Take this body for the sin of the flesh;
Also thou delightest to go gay and fresh,
And in the way of damnation thou did bring;
Therefore suffer now strokes and punishing,
Now of penance I will wade the water clear,
To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.”
(52)

Everyman's act of penance revives Good Deeds allowing them to accompany him on his journey. By being the only one of Everyman's companions to stay with him until the afterlife, Good Deeds substantiates repentance as a necessary step to Christian salvation. Good Deeds' revitalization through the act of penance exemplifies that repentance is possible and achievable for everyman; hopefully inspiring the audience members to participate in confession in their own life in order to save their own souls. Utilizing these three theatrical attributes, *Everyman* embodied the Christian values of the 16th century; sermonizing the fear of damnation and celebrating the joyous opportunity of salvation via remorse and penitence.

Utilizing the three main morality play criteria, *Ride The Cyclone* follows Ocean's innocence, fall, and redemption, with her repentance as the climatic theatrical event and its moral of humanity at the centerpoint of the dramatic structure while rooting itself firmly in Christianity: featuring a purgatory-like setting, members of a Christian educational institution, and the elder figures of priests. In exploring the various religious themes of the musical, I find it no coincidence that Maxwell and Richmond specified the children as members of the Saint Cassian Chamber Choir of Uranium City, Saskatchewan; not only via dialogue but in the detailed costume notes written by the creators:

“All the kids wear Saint Cassian uniforms, the colors being grey and blue. Boys wear gray dress pants, white dress shirts, ties, and blue vests. Girls wear gray tunics, white shirts and ties. The way they wear their uniforms is character dependent.” (Maxwell and Richmond)

As is the case with many Catholic school children, the young adults hiding behind the matching fabrics, textures, and accessories are struggling with their individuality and sexuality, independently rebelling against the morals and values being force fed to them by the institution; innocent prey for the deadly sins to take hold. The creative choice to name the school after Saint Cassian seems quite fitting for a morality play as both Saint Cassian of Imola and Saint Cassian

of Tangier died as faithful Christian martyrs. Saint Cassian of Imola, convicted of the crime of being Christian after refusing to sacrifice for the Roman Gods during the 4th century, was sentenced to a torturous death at the hands of his students. After his death, he was declared a martyr and the patron saint of teachers (a strong choice for a musical striving to teach a moral lesson). Similarly, Saint Cassian of Tangier, a court recorder in the 3rd century, spoke out against a death penalty by announcing his Christian beliefs. He was arrested immediately and was sentenced to death by beheading (perhaps the inspiration for the circumstances of Jane Doe's unsavory death by the same means). Although it is not explicitly stated if either of these saints were the inspiration for Maxwell and Richmond's creative choice, their histories as religious martyrs and parallels to the material cannot be overlooked.

Much like the Messenger in *Everyman*, *Ride The Cyclone* begins with a prologue; a direct address to the audience by Karnak. After a brief introduction of himself, he quickly reviews common theater etiquette with the audience and reveals his ability to predict the cause, time, and place of people's deaths. He goes on to explain that he has predicted his own demise. For the last two years, a rat named Virgil has been chewing on his power cord and in approximately one hour it will chew its way through, effectively killing both itself and Karnak. It is then that Karnak introduces the choir and begins their resurrection process; awakening them from their frozen state.

"KARNAK

Tonight I shall speak of these teenagers, whose tales ended abruptly on a roller coaster in a small Canadian town in the middle of nowhere. The former Saint Cassian Chamber Choir. And my part in the story...I read all of the children's fortunes...I felt their hopes, thoughts, dreams, knowing they would board the doomed roller coaster and could tell them nothing. I even suggested that they ride the Cyclone. On Monday, September 14th, they would board the Cyclone roller coaster at 6:17pm. At 6:19pm this same roller coaster's front axle would break causing it to derail at the apex of the loop-de-loop, hurtling the children to their deaths." (4)

Echoing the moral of *Everyman*, that death comes for all, Karnak's prologue establishes the circumstances surrounding the choir members' young demise as well as his own role in their untimely deaths. It effectively sets the scene for the unfreezing of the choir members, the announcement of the game, and the beginning of Ocean's moral quest.

At the conclusion of this prologue and the opening number, the children are confused and concerned about their whereabouts. Described as "a dilapidated [traveling fairground] warehouse, storing in it the debris of a once thriving amusement park; there is the detritus of many rides, midway booths, marquees of rides, their once brilliant colors now muted with age and neglect" (Richmond & Maxwell), this setting, that Maxwell and Richmond refer to as "limbo", lends itself to a much larger message - a microcosmic analogy of the musical's take on Catholicism's purgatory and a portrayal of the morality play life process. Though the physical set is specified as a "dilapidated warehouse" (Maxwell and Richmond), its spiritual, atmospheric and, at times, magical properties suggest it may be something more. Appearing in early Catholic theology, "limbo" referred to a "border place between heaven and hell where those souls who died without being baptised, though not condemned to punishment, were deprived of eternal happiness with God in heaven" (Queen's University Belfast), most often referring to the souls of babies. In regards to the preparation for Heaven, Catholic teaching defined purgatory as an intermediary state where stained souls may be left in waiting for an unknown amount of time in order to repent and be cleansed before entering Heaven. According to the "Time" notes in the script, the action of the musical takes place a couple of decades after the accident on the Cyclone, inferring that their souls have indeed been waiting for quite some time, frozen after their deaths and waiting to repent. Upon the choir members' arrival in this "limbo", these miraculous properties of purgatory begin to manifest; specifically through the healing of choir

member Ricky Potts. Also described in the Christian religion as a place where one is relieved of their Earthly physical ailments, this purgatory or “limbo” allows Ricky, who was born with a rare degenerative disease on Earth and unable to speak or move, to be vocal and impressively physical, surprising his fellow choir mates. In addition, Potter explains that “the human drama of a morality play is an analogous, but crucially different, presentation of a life cycle...the end of human life is not ‘mere oblivion’ but regeneration: never death, always a rebirth” (Potter 10). A concept manifested in the lyrics of the musical finale “It’s Just A Ride”: “And the world will keep on spinning with no ending or beginning...so just take a look around” (Maxwell and Richmond 88). However, it is through Maxwell and Richmond’s metaphorical description of the set that this analogy of regeneration and rebirth first comes to life. “The warehouse itself looks as if...nature has begun to reclaim it...mold, vines, even breaks of dirt through the concrete of the warehouse floor have begun to grow patches of fungus and little triumphant patches of grass” (Maxwell and Richmond). The metaphor of nature’s reclamation of the setting and the bringing of new life functions as both a representation of the life cycle of morality plays and a precursor to the choir members’ journeys. For Jane Doe: a chance to live her life again on Earth. For the others: a chance to move onto heaven and perhaps be reborn again.

Through Ocean’s journey, we see the “play elaborate on the all-too-human refusal to be accountable” (Paulson 115). Paulson describes *Everyman* as “a drama of responsibility that seeks to correct the facility with which we make ourselves absent to our words and thus to one another” (116); *Ride The Cyclone* and Ocean’s moral roller coaster is no different. While *Everyman*’s sins relied on physical actions and possessions, Ocean’s relies on her verbal communications towards her peers. It is only through her impromptu birthday party for Jane Doe, featuring Ocean’s creation and performance of a new birthday song, and her verbal apology

to Constance that she revitalizes her own internal good deeds and becomes worthy of redemption. Immediately following her sincere apology to her best friend, Karnak freezes all of the other choir members and offers Ocean the final and sole vote on who wins the competition. However, Ocean has admitted that death has changed her and “to recognize death fully is to recognize that one is a part of one’s community and responsible to it but...alone accountable for one’s actions” (117). As a result of her self revelation Ocean decides to revoke the opportunity for an individual vote and asks to vote as a group, leading to the group’s unanimous decision of Jane Doe and their own journey to the afterlife. It is through this final selfless act that the moral of the show is manifested. As Paulson describes “penance...itself...binds the individual to his community” (117) and it is through this community that Ocean’s humanity, love, and care for her fellow man can be found.

CHAPTER IV: OCEAN ROSENBERG AS EVERYMAN

In morality plays, there is the central figure(s) that represents all of humanity - a person plagued by sin who is doomed to repeat the pattern of innocence, fall, redemption. Everyman and Ocean both function accordingly. Each illuminates the social issues of their time, the worldly temptations at large, and the path to repentance and salvation.

After being “jerked to life” (Maxwell and Richmond 2), Ocean is the first of the St. Cassian Choir members to be introduced to the audience following Karnak’s opening prologue. Once the competition is presented, Ocean attempts to take control of the situation and her fate. Vying for the spot as the winner of the prize, she quickly turns on her diplomatic demeanor in an attempt to win favor with Karnak. She boasts about herself, her “good deeds”, religious values, and lifetime accomplishments while putting on the guise of democracy and showmanship.

“OCEAN

Look, I’ve seen enough reality TV shows to get what you want us to do...Who’s the best? I mean sure, grades, humanitarian efforts, extracurricular activities, prestigious university, spiritual mastery of both Judaism and Catholicism- Nailed my Confirmation and Bat Mitzvah, in the same week. And I’m not even bragging about that because it’s against my Buddhist beliefs...I am the best here, by any metric of society I get that...but if that’s how worth is measured, I want no part of it! Look...some of us are left wing, some of us are right wing...but the last time I checked it takes two wings to fly!! We are community! We are Family! We are the World!” (16)

Unfortunately her conciliatory and disingenuous speech backfires and causes Karnak to announce that she has conceded from the competition. In her attempt to be the best, or what she mistakenly thought would make her seem the best, her actions were driven by sin. Driven by greed and pride, she is blinded to the impact and consequences of her actions, more specifically her words, on those around her.

It is through Ocean’s use of words that Paulson’s definition of a morality play finds truth. Paulson argues that “rather than seeking to impart static moral lessons, morality plays instead

demonstrate the pedagogical and performative power of penance where the meanings of words develop through participation in penitential ritual” (Paulson 2). Ocean’s path to redemption proves this to be true. Upon being removed from the competition, Ocean exclaims that she is trying to prove she is a good person and urges Karnak to “make the responsible choice...for the betterment of humanity” (Maxwell and Richmond 17). Shifting from her previous motto of inclusion, she takes on a demeaning and derogatory approach with her song “What the World Needs Is People Like Me”; a song that is described as a “general smarmy rap, seemingly to no one in particular, but obviously referring to the individual kids” (17). Pitting the winners (Ocean) against the losers (everyone else), she fantasizes about the trajectory of the other choir members' lives if they had lived on after the accident. Beginning with some generalizations such as sandwich artists, security guards, and Walmart greeters with credit card debt, her predictions become more personal. She predicts that Mischa will become a thief covered in homemade tattoos, Constance will be a soccer mom with four children, no partner, and nothing to offer the world but her organs as a donor, and Ricky, being fed through a tube and having little attention span, will contribute nothing of value except comic books expertise and the ability to solve a Rubik’s cube. Revealing her true “me vs. them” mentality, she tries to distinguish herself from her “less than” competition. Having effectively put her competition down, she presents herself as “the headline maker” (19) and announces that no one can keep her down. With her own value system of what makes a person “good”, she reveals that, from her perspective, she has done enough on Earth to prove herself a good person. She assumes that she should be at the top of the moral leaderboard.

“OCEAN
And as we move through life
To find our place in the crowd
Oh yes, oh yes, Oh isn’t someone keeping sore?!

I've got to say it out so loud?!
I mean do we really need another zero?
Or zero? Or zero?
Or zero? Or zero?
Add 'em all up, and you'll still get zero
What you really need is a futher muckin' hero!"
("What The World Needs Is People Like Me", Maxwell and Richmond 19-20)

Once again, her skewed moral compass and worldly views mislead her and her words lead to her moral demise (the Everyman's fall).

Innocently and naively following her Earthly beliefs she effectively alienates herself from the rest of the group and falls out of favor with her so-called "friends". Following her song, Karnak reveals that the vote must be unanimous by the group. Her competition has become her literal lifeline but the damage has already been done. Realizing the impact of her erroneous tactic of belittlement, she quickly tries to repair her relationships with her fellow choir members. Following a selfish and disingenuous "sorry" to Constance she tries to justify her actions and claims she was merely showing everyone "what you shouldn't do in this competition" (Maxwell and Richmond 24) and that her "song was a cautionary tale of hubris" (25); not unlike the cautionary tales of morality plays. Sensing her fall out of favor, she boasts of her love and admiration for each choir member but never without a backhanded compliment. Her brown nosing is cut short by Noel's introduction as the competition moves on to the next "contestant".

As the competition continues and each choir member is introduced, Ocean's parallels to the everyman continue. Chiming in after Noel's song, "The Fucked Up Girl", she questions the moral: "What is even the moral in his song anyway? What does it teach you? What's the lesson?" (36). She claims that "every story has a lesson" (37); a motto that is described in the stage directions as her entire worldview.

"OCEAN
Every story's got a lesson

A simple moral to be told
Although a tale may
Twist and Turn

KIDS
There's always something you can learn

OCEAN
A nugget of wisdom, solid gold!"
("Every Story's Got a Lesson", Maxwell and Richmond 37)

Her fascination and questioning of the moral and meaning continues effectively centering her as the lost soul seeking answers and guidance. As each of her fellow choir members present their lives, Ocean begins to see the humanity in each of them cause her desire for power, self pride, envy of others, and wrath over forcefully conceding to fade away. For example, having previously referred to Jane Doe as a "freaky monster" (Maxwell and Richmond 20) and "thing" (25), it is only Karnak's explanation of Jane's circumstances and Jane's song, "The Ballad of Jane Doe", that forces Ocean to perceive her as a person with a soul.

"KARNAK
Everyone knew everyone in Uranium, but no one could recall this member of the choir. There were rumors of a girl who joined at the last minute but as the choir conductor Father Markus died of a heart attack seven hours after the accident, there was no one left to verify. Some believed that perhaps she was never in the choir at all. I never read her fortune, I sadly cannot tell you. All one knows for certain is that a body was found in a Saint Cassian uniform, without a head. So a mystery." (62)

Angry that her existence was a sham, Jane Doe sings of her loneliness and loss of self. She questions the Lord and is confused as to why she is left with no memories, no friends, and no family. Upon the conclusion of the song she is met with a surprise birthday party, initiated by Ocean; a surprising juxtaposition to her previously selfish actions. With no one knowing Jane Doe's real name they are unable to sing the traditional "Happy Birthday" song. It is then that Ocean takes it upon herself to create a new birthday song; one that is "bouncy and merry and not quite as scary" ("The New Birthday Song", Maxwell and Richmond 68). Overcoming her

judgment, jealousy, and wrath towards Jane, Ocean surprises all with her actions; especially Constance. In a private conversation, following the party, Ocean has a moment of confession and admits that she is envious of Constance.

OCEAN
(grabs CONSTANCE's hand)
You know I envy you?

CONSTANCE
No you don't, Ocean.

OCEAN
No I do...I mean I got straight A's since I was in grade one. I was working toward something. I was building a life. You, you were satisfied doing nothing, making cupcakes...eating them. You are what the Taoists call an 'uncarved block.'

CONSTANCE
I'm a block?

OCEAN
Just learn to take a compliment.

CONSTANCE
Thanks.

OCEAN
I thought my life had meaning, turns out it didn't. Oh well, joke's on me...(sobbing) My death has really affected me." (Maxwell and Richmond 71-72)

It is through this interaction and the references to Constance as an "uncarved block" that Ocean's self reflection and remorse is revealed. D.C. Lau, a Chinese sinologist and author of *Tao Te Ching*, explains that "the uncarved block is in a state as yet untouched by the artificial interference of human ingenuity and so is a symbol for the original state of man before desire is produced in him by artificial means" (Lau 36). Through this analogy Ocean divulges her newfound understanding of her disingenuous self and her selfish/pride driven actions, and reveals her newfound admiration for those around her: her friends that she is seeing for the first time. Now in "limbo", the choir members' "interactions are tested by the appearance of Death,

whose presence radically changes how [everyman] and the other characters interact and how they understand their relationships to one another” (Paulson, 116). As Ocean said “[her] death has really affected [her]” (Maxwell and Richmond 72), yes. However it has affected her relationships with those around her more than she knows.

Like Everyman, Ocean’s self-reflection and acceptance of her previous sinful actions leads to the appearance of good deeds (in *Everyman*: through the physical manifestation of the character of Good Deeds, in *Ride The Cyclone*: an impromptu birthday party). Following this initial good deed, Ocean’s progress towards salvation continues - with a heartfelt apology to Constance, and her final moral decision of selflessly voting as a group and sending Jane Doe back to Earth.

CHAPTER V: SUBSIDIARY CHARACTERS

In addition to the character of Everyman, morality plays often featured characters personifying concepts such as death, good deeds, and the seven deadly sins. In *Everyman*, for example, we meet the personified virtues, vices, and values of Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Good Deeds, Knowledge, Confession, Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and Five Wits. These “subsidiary characters, defined by their function, [stood] at the service of the plot (Potter 7) and their personification of those functions allowed for blunt moral argument around the concepts they represented. Although *Ride The Cyclone*’s characters are named and multifaceted, their functions are that of the subsidiary characters of morality plays in reference to Ocean’s moral crossroads and her journey to penance and redemption; with Karnak functioning as Good Deeds, Virgil the rat as Death, and the choir members as personification of the seven deadly sins.

The primary theme of morality plays, Death is often the character to deliver the message of the reckoning to the everyman character. A part of mortal/human life, death functions as a gateway to either salvation or punishment, Heaven or Hell, and causes people to question their moral standing. Those who feel they’ve lived a righteous life do not fear death, however those who feel they haven’t led a life inside God’s laws may try to escape death or dissuade death from coming for them.

“EVERYMAN
O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind;
In thy power it lieth me to save,
Yet of my good will i give thee, if ye will be kind,
Yea, a thousand pound shalt thou have,
And defer this matter till another day.”
(*Everyman* 39)

In Everyman's case, he feels he is not ready for his reckoning and tries to bribe Death to come back at another time, allowing him time to prepare for his reckoning and increase his moral standing.

Just as Death begins the journey of *Everyman*, Virgil (whose name is perhaps inspired by the Roman poet, Virgil, who guides Dante through Hell and Purgatory in *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri) begins the journey of *Ride The Cyclone*. Having painstakingly chewed on the power cord of The Amazing Karnak for the past two years, he will finally "chew his way through the rubber, biting down on two hundred volts of electricity" (Maxwell and Richmond 1); effectively ending Karnak's life. If Karnak was not faced with his own death by Virgil, he would not have questioned his own morality and use of his power, he would not have brought the St. Cassian choir members to this "limbo" for this competition, and Ocean would never undergo her moralization, repentance, and redemption. Virgil sets the musical in motion.

According to Potter, the seven deadly sins function in morality plays as incarnations of human fragility. As physical manifestations on stage they "show the universality of sin and the universal cure of repentance" (Potter 29). In *Everyman*, God exclaims of his anger towards those who have abandoned His ways for lives of sin.

"GOD
And now I see the people do clean forsake me.
They use the seven deadly sins damnable;
As pride, covetise, wrath, and lechery,
Now in the world be made commendable;
And thus they leave of angels the heavenly company;
Everyman liveth so after his own pleasure"
(*Everyman* 37)

Driven by the seven deadly sins, Everyman's materialistic and selfish lifestyle has slowly damned his soul. It is only through the virtues such as Good Deeds, Confession, and Knowledge that his soul can be cleansed of these sins. Though the seven deadly sins themselves are not

personified in *Everyman*, their consequences are seen through characters such as Goods (worldly possessions) and Fellowship (friends) and their selfish and hypocritical responses towards Everyman's plight.

Though morality plays often had abstract names for their characters, branding them with their function/concept and that alone, I argue that *Ride The Cyclone*'s characters, while named, are also personifications of the seven deadly sins. Written in present times, it is easier for modern audiences to find connection in characters that are humanized, with names and personalities, instead of simple concepts. In our search for morality it is important to be able to find the humanity, the person, behind the name or facade; exemplified by the craze of celebrities on social media. Karnak, Ocean, Noel, Mischa, Ricky, Jane Doe, and Constance. Seven characters each exemplifying one of the seven deadly sins: pride, gluttony, envy, lust, wrath, sloth, and greed.

Ocean O'Connell Rosenberg, the "everyman" of this production, is most prominently plagued by greed or an insatiable desire for more. She is driven solely by her ravenous longing for power and status. A drive made apparent by her constant attempts to prove herself as a good person and to make herself likable, even if that means putting others down; most notably in the lyrics of her pop number "What The World Needs Is People Like Me".

"OCEAN
(to Mischa in particular)
Seriously? This one here? He's rar in' to fail!?
He'll rob a Seven Eleven, and go straight to jail
Maybe steal hubcaps, maybe steal booze?
Expressing himself with his homemade tattoos!

(to Constance)
Soccer mom, minivan
Four little brats, no steady man
Do we really need another organ donor?

(spoken)
Maybe that was a little harsh? Love you!
(to Ricky in particular)
Ah noo, comic book? Spiderman?
This kid doesn't have an attention span.
And what's he gonna do, solve a rubik's cube?

(whispered aside)
How long's he got if they feed him through a tube?
("What The World Needs Is People Like Me", Maxwell and Richmond 18)

A brown noser blinded by her own ambitions and goals, she is often unphased by the effect of her derogatory comments on her classmates until it is too late, a fact pointed out by Karnak when revealing the judges of the competition. A fact she would have known if she had waited for the rest of the rules.

"OCEAN
But if I would have known that-

KARNAK
You wouldn't have called every one of your potential judges a loser, crowing about your superiority in song, culminating in you standing on top of them in a human pyramid? That did strike me as an unorthodox strategy."
(Maxwell and Richmond 23)

Perhaps if she could see past her competitive nature and her greedy appetite for success, if she realized that "Sin ... is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods" (Catholic Church 453), she would in fact be the preferred candidate to return to Earth. Unfortunately her awakening may have occurred too late and her selfish apologies may not be enough.

Noel Gruber is plagued by gluttony, or overconsumption. He is obsessed with the overindulgent fantasy of racking up men, experiences, alcohols, and drugs like a grocery store receipt, a list of his triumphs with no regard to the guidance of the Catholic Church that "The

virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco or medicine” (552).

“NOEL
For I sing songs until the break of dawn
I embrace a new man every night
My life’s one never-ending carnival
A whirl of boozy, floozy flashing light!
I want to be that fucked up girl
...
Broken heart, a flask of gin
Tattoo’d with a safety pin
Teeth all stained with nicotine
Running nylons, shattered dreams
Super crust, holy terror
Wild eyes and bad mascara”
 (“That Fucked Up Girl”, Maxwell and Richmond 30 & 34)

He leaves nothing for those around him ending only in the destruction and disrepair of himself. While being unhappy and unfulfilled with “being the only gay man in a small rural high school” (Maxwell and Richmond 10) and feeling that he was “born in the wrong town, the wrong country, [and] the wrong era” (28) may have led him to this fantasy, his gluttonous nature and desire is what kept it alive during his life. Sadly, this fantasy may have made him too far removed from the rest of the group to help him achieve resurrection in this afterlife.

Jane Doe is plagued by envy, or jealousy, haunted by her “sadness at the sight of another’s goods and [her] immoderate desire to have them for [her]self” (Catholic Church 611). With no memories of her own life, no family or friends, and no relationships with her fellow choir members, she is lost. And her connection with God hangs in the balance.

“JANE DOE
Jane Doe is what the coroner said,
They found my body, not my head,
No parents came, and so they
Never learned...
My name, or who I used to be.
My life, an unsolved mystery.”

("Jane Doe's Entrance", Maxwell and Richmond, 12)

Envious of the recountings of the others' times on Earth, their dreams, and their families who grieved for the deaths, she is tormented by the question of "why?". Jealous and angry that her life had no purpose, she sings a haunting lament and prays to St. Peter (the saint who holds the keys to the gates of Heaven) to let her in.

"JANE DOE
Oh no soul, and no name
And no story, what a shame
Cruel existence was only a shame?
...And I'm asking why Lord?
If this is how I die, Lord
Why be left with no family and no friends?"
("The Ballad Of Jane Doe", Maxwell and Richmond 62 & 65)

With no way to bond or relate to the rest of the group, and no semblance of self, she feels completely alone; alienated with no means of connection. Envy "is a capital sin" (Catholic Church 611), therefore perhaps her jealousy of others could be the most dangerous of all, for herself and her peers.

Ricky Potts is plagued by lust or overwhelming and intense desire, specifically for sex. As his prognosis grew dimmer in his teen years, he was offered a wish from Father Markus to which Ricky replied that he would like to make love in outer space. But "The God of promises always warned man against seduction by what from the beginning has seemed 'good for food ... a delight to the eyes ... to be desired to make one wise'" (608). However Ricky ignored this warning and began his fantasy of a life as a space age bachelor man.

"RICKY
The naughty daughters
Of the realm
All hungry for my chi
You'd never guess the
Role I played
In Zolarian History!"

(“Space Age Bachelor Man”, Maxwell and Richmond 54-55)

In an attempt to fill the void created by his lack of familial connection, his bleak prognosis, and his poor quality of life, his lust for these fictitious cat-women inadvertently created one. A void that was unfillable as long as he stayed locked away in his own imagination. Which he did for the entirety of his Earthly life.

“MISCHA. Dude, you are so awesome in the afterlife!

RICKY. I’m the same person I always was, it’s just no one ever listened to me on earth.

MISCHA. We’ll listen to you now Space Jesus.”

(Maxwell and Richmond 61)

It seems unfair that only when relieved of his Earthly afflictions is he able to be seen as a person, express his inner thoughts, and feel needed and wanted. Certainly different than being wanted in the sexual way he imagined but perhaps in the friendly, genuine way he was always truly seeking. However, it seems that this all may have come too late to save him.

Mischa Bachinski is plagued by wrath, or resentment and rage, towards Canada and its supplying of Uranium. Avoiding the grief of the loss of his mother, Mischa angrily raps about money. He explores a deluded fantasy of the rich and glamorous life he would have led had his mother still been alive; the life that was robbed from him: “Thank you for killing my mother. And for indirectly killing me. I feel the rage, and when I rage I rap about money in auto-tune. Auto-tune will never die. Hit the beat.” (40). Using hip hop as an emotional outlet and over verbalizing his masculinity through vulgar language and a gangster persona, his rage drives him to protect himself from others, to prove himself a man, and vanquish any doubts that his life is anything but awesome.

“MISCHA
What you is, is what you got,
And I am the money

CONSTANCE
Take a look baby
He's the real ca-ching
...

MISCHA
My life is awesome
This beat is awesome

CONSTANCE
Take a look baby
He's the real ca-ching"
("This Song Is Awesome", Maxwell and Richmond 41-42)

Beneath his rage lies grief and beneath that grief lies loneliness and a deep yearning for love and acceptance. Hiding beneath his wrath is a sensitive and romantic boy, unlocked only by his young love and online girlfriend - Natalia Muruska Bolinska, "Talía". Perhaps if he had shown his true self on Earth, the same boy who would "lay [his] masculinity at the altar of [Talía's] maidenhood" (Maxwell and Richmond 45), he would be the more desirable choice of the group. But his "Anger is a desire for revenge" and "The Lord says, 'Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.'" (Catholic Church 554). The revealing of his true self to those around him may have come too late to grant him resurrection and the chance to meet his love.

The Amazing Karnak is plagued by sloth. Afflicted by laziness, carelessness, an unwillingness to act, and an apathetic disposition he "refuse[s] the joy that comes from God and [is repelled] by divine goodness" (508). Being a precognition machine, he has become numb to his "morbid function", with no regards to the lives whose ends he predicts.

"KARNAK
I was designed to predict the exact cause, time, and place of someone's death. A rather morbid function, I grant you; which is precisely why I was set on "family fun novelty mode" when sold to the World Ville traveling fairground."

(Maxwell and Richmond 1)

He reveals that he has always “possessed the power to bring one back to life”. And it seems that in his final hour of life, he would like to finally use his powers for good; contrasting his previous life of indifference and negligence. To enact one good deed before his demise. But will saving one soul in his final moments be enough to save his own after Virgil the rat finally chews through his power cord? “That, [he] couldn’t possibly tell you” (86).

Constance Blackwell is plagued by pride or the desire to be better or more important than others. She was once uninterested in social status and was proud of her family’s long history in Uranium, their family business of the Blackwood Cafe, and her small town of Uranium City.

“CONSTANCE

The Blackwoods have been in Uranium since they opened the mines...my family had pride when it came to that. ‘Til I went to high school and having pride about our town was only like the lamest thing you could ever think or believe.”

(73)

However, Constance’s optimistic outlook on her life shifted once she began high school. Under the harsh lenses of social hierarchies and peer pressure(s), she began to feel ashamed about her life, her family, her town, and herself; going so far as to think of her parents as losers. Feeling that her life was not valuable enough, she adopted an increasingly pessimistic view on her life and self-worth.

“CONSTANCE

I used to that life was just a jawbreaker

Yeah, you suck and you suck

And you suck and you suck

And you suck some more

Yeah, you suck some more.”

(“Jawbreaker”, Maxwell and Richmond 74)

Having viewed everything around her as a dead end, it is only in the final moments of her life that she relinquishes her want for what others deem a “better” life and realizes that “there’s no

shame in loving [her] small town” (Maxwell and Richmond 74) and is reminded that ““everyone should look upon his neighbor (without exception) as ‘another self’, above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity”” (Catholic Church 469). Unfortunately “it took a horrible accident for [her] to realize how goddam wonderful everything is” (Maxwell and Richmond 74). Perhaps if she had realized sooner that materialistic wealth was not the barometer for value she would have avoided her sinful acts: thinking her parents were losers, losing her virginity to a carnie, and letting others dictate her self-worth. But she stands up for herself too late to fight for her right to live again.

It is these subsidiary characters that guide the everyman in their journey towards repentance. Although *Ride The Cyclone*’s characters are represented through named, multifaceted people, they function the same as those such as Good Deeds and Confession in *Everyman*. These characters and the sins they represent that shape Ocean’s moral compass: showing her the good ways of life, the sinful ways of life, and, in Virgil’s case, initiating her journey all together. Without these characters, her redemption would never be possible.

CHAPTER VI: THE MORAL OF GOOD DEEDS

Morality plays warned of humanity's inability to save itself and preached that man's salvation, in the eyes of God, was only found through the doing of good deeds on Earth. The presence of these good deeds in morality plays is two fold: through the good deeds of the main protagonist and often through a physical embodiment of good deeds. It is Good Deeds and Karnak who are the selfless and sacrificial keyholders to the gates of Heaven for Everyman and Ocean respectively and who lead them on their journey to selflessness and ultimately redemption.

In *Everyman*, Good Deeds is the only character to stick by Everyman through all adversities. Though he is weak, he guides Everyman on his journey to the afterlife, supplying any resources that he can and making the ultimate sacrifice of giving his own life to accompany Everyman to the afterlife. It is this sacrifice that allows Everyman into Heaven. With no reciprocation for his actions, Good Deeds acts completely selflessly in his actions. He is willing to die for Everyman's salvation - a nod to Christ's sacrifice and crucifixion.

“EVERYMAN
Methinketh, alas, that I must be gone,
To make my reckoning and my debts pay,
For I see my time is nigh spent away.
Take example, all ye that this do hear or see,
How they that I love best do forsake me,
Except my Good-Deeds that bideth truly.

GOOD-DEEDS
All earthly things is but vanity:
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion, do man forsake,
Foolish friends and kinsmen, that fair spake,
All fleeth save Good-Deeds, and that am I.”
(*Everyman* 58)

However, before Good Deeds' ultimate sacrifice, he is integral in Everyman's shift from his selfish lifestyle. Having been abandoned by his friends, family, and possessions, Everyman was

lost - knowing he was the culprit of his sinful life but unsure of how to rectify it in time for his reckoning. It is Good Deeds who leads him to the necessary steps on his path of redemption. They introduce Everyman to Knowledge (knowledge of God and scripture) who brings him to Confession who in turn leads Everyman to his physical acts of repentance and his receiving of the holy sacraments. Though these actions are completed by Everyman alone, it is Good Deeds who is the guiding force that keeps him on track.

This self-sacrifice and guiding force is akin to Karnak's journey in *Ride The Cyclone*. Having been visited by death through the presence of Virgil the rat, Karnak is faced with his own moral decision of selfishness or selflessness. Having predicted so many deaths with no remorse or action to stop them, Karnak decides to use what little time he has left to help others and do a final good deed. To use his powers to bring back one soul that was lost from the Earthly realm, a power he has always possessed by never saw fit to use. Faced with the countdown of his own demise, he thinks not of saving himself but of saving someone else and creates a competition where "The one who wants to win it the most shall redeem the loser - in order to complete the whole." (Maxwell and Richmond 9). It is through this competition that he guides Ocean towards her selfless good deeds. Having blatantly given critique on Ocean's selfish actions at the beginning of the play, subsequently forfeiting her from the competition, Karnak sets her on her course to right her wrongful and sinful behavior. Through her own self-discovery and the discovery of others, Ocean selflessly reaches out to those around her: to Jane Doe with a birthday party and to Constance with an apology and perhaps the first honest conversation they've had in a while. But it is Karnak's final test of Ocean's selfishness that leads to her ultimate good deed. With all the others frozen, he presents her with a portal to Earth, which she could take without anyone ever knowing or having a say. She could be selfish and choose herself, as she probably

would have at the beginning of the play. But in her final moral choice, she chooses Jane Doe, fulfilling the prophecy that she, “the one who want[ed] to win it the most”, chose Jane Doe and “redeem[ed] the loser” (9). It is because of these few good deeds and Karnak’s ultimate sacrifice that she is able to redeem her greedy and prideful soul and travel to wherever awaits her next in her journey.

CONCLUSION

Maxwell and Richmond may not have intended to write a morality play when they embarked on the creative journey of *Ride The Cyclone*. However, with an opening prologue, a representation of death, a purgatory-like “limbo” setting, acts of repentance, a moral lesson, various references to Catholic themes and figures, the enactment of good deeds, representations of the seven deadly sins, and a figure of everyman, it is impossible to overlook the similarities between the two. Written nearly five hundred years apart, the moral message of *Ride The Cyclone* is equally as imperative to our modern society as *Everyman*’s moral was to the people of the Middle Ages. Though our society is no longer driven by religion and has evolved with time and technology, we still find ourselves surrounded by judgment, discrimination, hatred, and the harsh reality that is mortal life. We are desperately seeking honesty, vulnerability, and true human connection, and it is stories like Ocean’s that can give hope for that reality. A reminder that the kindness of a birthday party, the sincerity of an apology, and the selfless act of putting others first goes a long way. That the selfless doing of good deeds is what “makes a life well-lived” (Broadway Licensing Group).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Maxwell, Brook. Richmond, Jacob. *Ride The Cyclone*, Broadway Licensing, 2020.
- Ride The Cyclone: The Musical (World Premiere Cast Recording)*. Performances by Jacob Richmond, Emily Rohm, Lillian Castillo, Tiffany Tatreau, Kholby Wardell, Scorr Redmond, and Chaz Duffy, Sh-K-Boom Records LLC, 2021.
- Potter, Robert. *The English Morality Play. Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition.* by Robert Potter. Routledge and Paul, 1975.
- Paulson, Julie C. *Theater of the Word: Selfhood in the English Morality Play*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.
- Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. 2nd ed., United States Catholic Conference, 2000.
- Ward, Candace. *Everyman and Other Miracle and Morality Plays*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1995.
- Wardell, Kholby. "Riding the Cyclone: One Actor's Take on the Rollercoaster Journey of Atomic Vaudeville's *Ride the Cyclone*." *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 171, 2017, pp. 59–66.
- Laozi. *Tao Te Ching*. Edited by Sarah Allan. Translated by D.C. Lau, Knopf, 1994.
- Haslam Professor of Psychology, Haslam, Nick, et al. "Changing Morals: We're More Compassionate than 100 Years Ago, but More Judgmental Too." *The Conversation*, 8 Feb. 2023.
<https://theconversation.com/changing-morals-were-more-compassionate-than-100-years-ago-but-more-judgmental-too-112504>.
- Wheeler, Melissa A et al. "Twentieth century morality: The rise and fall of moral concepts from 1900 to 2007." *PloS one* vol. 14,2 e0212267. 27 Feb. 2019,
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0212267
- Latham, Andrew. "Medieval Geopolitics: The Moral Purpose of the State." *Medievalists.net*, 20 June 2019, <https://www.medievalists.net/2018/06/moral-purpose-of-the-state/>.
- Ellemers, Naomi et al. "The Psychology of Morality: A Review and Analysis of Empirical Studies Published From 1940 Through 2017." *Personality and social psychology review : an official journal of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc* vol. 23,4 (2019): 332-366. doi:10.1177/1088868318811759
- Queen's University Belfast. "Why Belief in 'Limbo' Has Disappeared in Recent Decades – Queen's Research." 2018 | *Why Belief in 'Limbo' Has Disappeared in Recent Decades – Queen's Research* | News, Queen's University Belfast, 18 Oct. 2021.

Kennedy, Liam. "Afterlives: Testimonies of Irish Catholic Mothers on Infant Death and the Fate of the Unbaptized." *Journal of Family History*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2021, pp. 236–255., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199020966751>.

New Catholic Encyclopedia 1967 V.6 (Fr-H). Catholic University of America, 1967.

Murphy, Mekado. "Bowie and a Flooded Amusement Park: What Inspired 'Ride the Cyclone'." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/21/theater/ride-the-cyclone-inspiration-david-bowie-flooded-amusement-park.html>.

Staff, The Week. "Breaking Bad: A Modern Morality Play." *The Week*, The Week, 8 Jan. 2015, <https://theweek.com/articles/459357/breaking-bad-modern-morality-play>.

Yorke, John. "John Yorke: Our Modern Morality Plays." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 Sept. 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2002/sep/04/television>.

Broadway Licensing Group. "Ride The Cyclone." *Broadway Licensing Group*, <https://broadwaylicensing.com/shows/off-broadway/ride-the-cyclone/>.

Shadyac, Tom. *Bruce Almighty*. Universal Pictures, 2003.

Breaking Bad. Created by Vince Gilligan, AMC, 2008-2013.

Edwards, Natalya. "'Maybe It's Medieval?' – Comparing Modern TV and Film against the Medieval Morality Play." *History Matters*, 10 Sept. 2019, <http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/maybe-its-medieval-comparing-modern-tv-film-medieval-morality-play/>.

Alighieri, Dante, and Robin Kirkpatrick. *The Divine Comedy*. Penguin Books, 2010.