

Here begins Lazarus

JESUS: Come now, brethren, and go with me:
 Unto Judea now shall we --
 To Bethany shall we wend,
 To Lazarus, that is our friend,
 And words of comfort to him speak; 5
 I tell you, sickness makes him weak.

PETER: My counsel is ye should not go:
 Men there consider you their foe;
 I beg you, come not in that place,
 Or ye will die within short space. 10

JOHN Master, trust not those men:
 For many days thou hast known them,
 And the last time our way there led
 We truly thought to have been dead!

THOMAS: When we were last in that country 15
 This other day, both thou and we,
 We thought that thou should there have been slain!
 Wilt thou now go thither again?

JESUS: Hearken, brother: your counsel keep;
 Lazarus our friend is fallen asleep. 20
 The way to him now will we take,
 To stir that knight, and him awake.

PETER: Sir, I think that it were best
 To let him sleep and take his rest;
 To him we should not go or send,
 For, if he sleep, then will he mend.

JESUS: I say to you that, without fail,
 No quietness shall him avail;

No sleep shall stand him in good stead;
I tell you truly, he is dead. 30
Therefore, I pray you, now at last
Leave thou this talk, and go we fast.

THOMAS: Sir, whatsoever ye bid us do,
We assent freely thereto.
I hope to God ye shall not find 35
That one of us will stay behind.
Whatever peril may befall,
Go we with our master, all.

MARTHA: Help me, Lord who has me led!
Lazarus my brother now is dead, 40
That was to me beloved and dear:
He had not died, had thou been here.

JESUS: Martha, gladness to thee I give:
Thy brother shall rise again, and live!

MARTHA: Lord, I believe that he shall rise, 45
And come before thy good assize;
For, at the dreadful day of doom,
There must you meet him when he come,
To see what judgement ye shall give.
Then must he rise; then must he live. 50

JESUS: I tell you all, both man and wife,
I am the rising, and I am life;
And whoso truly trusts in me,
That I was ever, and ever shall be,
One thing I shall him give: 55
Though he be dead, yet shall he live.
Say now, woman: believe thou this?

MARTHA: Oh yes, in truth, my Lord of bliss,
Or greatly should ye now blame me;
For all is truth that comes from thee. 60

JESUS: To thy sister. Magdalene, now depart:
Tell her I come to glad her heart.

MARTHA: Sister, leave this sorry cheer,
For, at hand, our Lord comes here,
And his apostles with him also. 65

MAGDALENE: Ah, for God's love, let me go!
Blessed be he that sends me grace
That I may see thee in this place!
Lord, much great sorrow may men see
In my sister here, and me. 70
We are as heavy as any lead
For our brother, that is dead.
Had thou been here -- had thou him seen --
Then dead, indeed, he had not been

JESUS: We are now come unto you here 75
To bring you comfort of your care.
But see no sloth, nor no faintness,
Shall bring your faith from steadfastness.
I shall hold my promise made.
Lo: where have ye his body laid? 80

MAGDALENE: Lord, if thou wilt pardon me,
By now he must smell most vilely! --
For it is now the fourth day gone
Since he was laid under yon stone.

JESUS: I told thee just now, where thou stood, 85
That thy faith must ever be good.

If thou may that faith fulfil,
All shall be done, just at thy will.

And Jesus wept, saying:

Father , I pray thee that thou raise
Lazarus, thy servant fine; 90
Bring him now forth from misery's ways,
And hell, where he must pine.
When I thee pray, thou sayest always
My will is just as thine.
Then let us now increase his days: 95
To me thy will incline.

Come forth, Lazarus: stand us by!
In earth shall thou no longer lie.

Take, and loose him foot and hand,
And from his throat now take the band, 100
And the gravecloth take also:
Unbind him now, and let him go.

LAZARUS: Lord, that all things made of nought,
Loving be to thee
That such a wonder here has wrought -- 105
Greater may none be!
In death, then hell was my resort,
But thou, most mightily
Then raised me up and thence me brought:
Behold, and ye may see! 110

There is none so brave of breed,
Nor none so proud to impress,
Nor none so doughty in his deed,
Nor none in so lofty a place; 115
No king, no knight -- no-one, indeed --

Has made Death's might the less.
The flesh which he liked to feed,
The worms shall eat, and bless.
Your death is the worms' cook:
In your mirror here now look, 120
And let me be your book.
Example take by me:
Death hangs all on his hook --
Such shall ye all be!

To each one in fine array, Death shall his clothing bring, 125
And close them in cold clay, whether they be knight or king.
For all their garments gay, that were so good-looking,
Their flesh shall then fall prey to many a fearsome thing.
These fearsome creatures then
Shall gnaw these noble men, 130
Their belly and their brain;
Their hearts shall rip asunder.
These men of might and main,
Thus shall they be brought under.

Under the earth ye then shall lie most woefully; 135
The roof beams of your hall, your nose shall touch freely;
Neither great nor small will kneel or crouch to thee;
A sheet shall be your pall; these toads your jewelry.
Toads shall you bite,
Fiends you affright; 140
Your flesh that was so fair
Thus ruinously shall rot.
Instead of collar there,
These bands shall bind your throat.

Your ruddy cheeks so red, your hands so pale and fair, 145
Then shall be gray as lead, and stink like a rotting hare.
Worms from you shall be bred: their stench shall fill the air;
The eyes out of your head, like mine, the toads shall fear.

When you are deceased,
 Many a loathsome beast 150
 Thus shall make them a feast
 Of your flesh, and blood, and bone.
 They will sorrow for you least
 Who take most of what you own.

All ye own ye shall forsake, be ye never so loth, 155
 And nothing with you take but such a winding cloth.
 Your wife's sorrow will slake; your children's also; both
 Will lose their heartfelt ache, be ye then never so wroth.
 They remember with nothing
 That might be to your helping: 160
 Neither with mass-singing,
 Nor yet with alms-deed;
 Therefore, in your living
 Be wise, and take good heed.

Take heed! Yourself avail while yet ye have life:
 Trust never friends so frail, nor trust ye child nor wife;
 Executors will fail -- to help you will not strive;
 Your soul to help and heal may no man penance give.
 Repent for you none may
 After your ending day, 170
 Your soul to make glad.
 Executors will swear, "Nay!"
 And say ye owed more than ye had.

Amend thee, man, while thou may;
 Let pleasure not pervert thy mind. 175
 Think thou on the dreadful day
 When God shall judge all human kind.
 Think that you fare as doth the wind:
 The world is fickle, it flits away;
 Man, have this in thy mind, 180
 And amend thee now, while thou may!

Amend thee, man, while thou art here,
Lest that ye go another way.
When thou art dead, lain on thy bier,
Know thou this well: it is too late! 185
If all the goods laid at thy gate
Were there to ransom thee that day,
In heaven it would not mend thy state --
Therefore, amend thee while thou may!

If of thy great wealth thou art proud, 190
As a royal steed stood in his stall,
Let this in thy heart be allowed:
That they are God's goods, one and all.
He might have made thee poor and small,
As one that begs from day to day. 195
Know ye this: make a reckoning ye shall --
Therefore, amend thee while thou may!

Oh, if I might with you dwell
To tell all that has been,
Much then I would you tell 200
That I have heard and seen:
Of many a great marvel
That would astound you clean,
Concerning the pains of hell,
There where I have been! 205

For I have been in woe!
To hell do not ye go!
While ye live here below,
If ye would dwell with him,
Pursue that path ye know 210
May heal you, life and limb.

He is a Lord of grace :
Think well, while you have space;
And pray him, full of might,
He guard you in this place,
And have you in his sight.
Amen!

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Here ends Lazarus

TOWNELEY CYCLE, Toronto 1985

Play 16: LAZARUS

Modernized text by David Parry

CAST

Jesus	Martha
Peter	Mary Magdalene
John	Lazarus
Thomas	(Possibly other non-speaking disciples)

This play in the Toronto production comprises Towneley XXXI from the EETS edition: headed Incipit Lazarus (pp. 387-393). In the manuscript, the play appears after the text of the Last Judgement and before the fragment of the Hanging of Judas.

The verse forms in the play are quite varied, and include a set of four stanzas delivered by Lazarus which are in the verse form attributed to the Wakefield Master. One of the latter stanzas is imperfect. Indeed, there is a fair amount of inconsistency in technical aspects of the verse in the play as a whole. I have not tried to smooth out any of the resulting unevenness.

Movements from one stanza form to another, and from light to heavy alliteration and back again, seem at least partially intended to reflect movements from relatively informal to very formal delivery of the lines. The four "Wakefield Master" stanzas, for example, appear quite intentionally the most formal part of the play in terms of the actor's delivery; and there is a careful poetic transition both into and out of this fine central "set piece" of Lazarus' great speech on death. The range of tonal and formal effects indicated here should be used to the full!

The speech on death is textually fascinating for yet another reason. Like the N-Town Death of Herod it seems to deny the kind of categories we have imposed on medieval drama. The formal links to the morality tradition and allegorical plays are clear. Don't try and avoid the issue in thinking through the production approach to this play: use it to the full.

From a staging point of view, the manuscript text provides little assistance. Apart from the notes that begin and end the play, there is only one original staging annotation, after l.88: "Et lacrimatus est ihesu, dicens" ("And Jesus wept, saying"). No other stage directions guide the interpretation of action or stage movement at any point. There are, however, obvious points of transition in the action implied in the text after ll. 38, 62, 66, 88 (where the above note appears), and of course at 98, as Lazarus rises. I have not added any editorial stage directions at these points, but clearly a good deal of movement from one onstage location to another was envisaged by the playwright.

Finally, a point which is probably obvious at first glance, but occasionally gets overlooked: "Magdalene" is here pronounced "Mawdlyn".