



Morality Going Concrete: A Medieval Mystery With Dancing Elephants

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"Write about 500 words about the play. It's not a review in the way that you review a journal submission; if you don't like the play, don't write anything." This is a bit unusual as guidance from a journal editor – but then the journal is unusual, the way that organization and aesthetics interact is not normal (in the sense that it's different from the b-school norm, how organization and (social) sciences speak to each other), and this isn't the kind of thing you normally read in a scholarly journal.

It's also unusual to write about a play that you haven't seen. I did my best to imagine the people named acting out the play; I was able to do this thanks to the very public way that academics are present in the world via university webpages with photos and personalised descriptions of research interests. All the same, I haven't met any of the actors and don't know if they would catch an audience's attention, so this commentary is really only about the text and my imaginings – I hope to see the play performed at some point, though, because I think it's significant, for these reasons.

First, because it puts a set of scholars out into the world, mostly as talking animals, to embody and inhabit a set of ideas. The elephants' names in particular [Faith, Doubt, Tenacity] point towards the allegorical nature of the events.

Second, because I'd love to see the sets. The play moves the characters from Alberta to Brussels via Paris and a couple of airports. I'd like to see elephants moving through a contemporary airport, especially security and passport control.

Third, I want to hear the songs: Dixeland rag, blues, and a variety called "roaring 20s". I'm guessing, because there are few stage directions, that there would also be some dancing – elephants/academics dancing – who wouldn't want to see that?

But most of all I'd like to see the play because it's a proper medieval morality play. I've liked this form since my first contact with it, reading Scottish poet's David Lyndsay *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* at an impressionable age. *Cow Going Abstract* is less satirical than most Renaissance moralities, and I would have liked (even) more (c/rude) farce, but it still enables the author to dramatise what is essentially a sermon, enabling those disinclined to read dense philosophy to play with ideas. And of course there is lots of fun to be had in personifying vices and virtues, and subjecting characters to temptations of the world, the flesh, and demons. Happily, though, as in all moralities, there is also repentance and salvation in the narrative.

In terms of ideas, what you read or see into the play will be in part up to you. I found lots of interesting ideas about work, organization, and management – but that's what I do with most things. Above all this is fun, and would be even more fun if it was being performed in front of you. And there's a recommendation for the best chocolatier in Canada, for the next time you visit Alberta. Perfect.