

[PDF] Morality Play

Michael Maloney, Barry Unsworth - pdf download free book

Books Details:

Title: Morality Play

Author: Michael Maloney, Barry Unsw

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly A portentous opening sentence—"It was a death that began it all and another death that led us on"—sets the tone for Booker Prize winner Unsworth's (Sacred Hunger) gripping story. Indeed, a larger spectre than those two deaths hangs over this tale set in 14th-century England. The Black Plague is abroad in the land, and here it also symbolizes the corruption of the Church and of the nobility. One bleak December day, young Nicholas Barber, a fugitive priest who has impulsively decamped from Lincoln Cathedral, comes upon a small band of traveling players who are burying one of their crew. He pleads to join them, despite the fact that playing on a public stage is expressly forbidden to clergy. His guilt and brooding fear of retribution pervade this taut, poetic narrative. Footsore, hungry, cold and destitute, the members of the troupe are vividly delineated: each has strengths and weaknesses that determine his behavior when their leader, Martin, suggests a daring plan. In the next town they reach, a young woman has been convicted of murdering a 12-year-old boy, on evidence supplied by a Benedictine monk. Desperate to assemble an audience, Martin suggests that they enact the story of the crime. This is a revolutionary idea in a

time when custom dictates that players animate only stories from the Bible. As the troupe presents their drama, many questions about the murder become obvious, and they improvise frantically, gradually uncovering the true situation. This, in turn, leads to their imprisonment in the castle of the reigning lord and their involvement in a melodrama equal to the one they have acted. Among the strengths of this suspenseful narrative are Unsworth's marvelously atmospheric depiction of the poverty, misery and pervasive stench of village life and his demonstrations of the strict rules and traditions governing the acting craft; underlying everything is the mixture of piety and superstition that governs all strata of society. Though sometimes he strays into didactic explanations, Unsworth searchingly examines the chasm between appearance and reality and the tenuous influence of morality on human conduct. Author tour.

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From Library Journal The author of the Booker Prize-winning *Sacred Hunger* (LJ 7/92) brings 14th-century England to life in this imaginative medieval mystery, which will inevitably invite comparisons with Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (LJ 4/1/83). Its narrator is Nicholas Barber, a young monk who has forsaken his calling and joined an itinerant troupe of players that gets caught up in the real-life drama of a small-town murder. The crime presents Barber and his fellows with an opportunity to attract a larger-than-usual audience, and they turn sleuths, weaving the bits of information yielded by their investigation into an improvised play that eventually reveals the surprising, sordid truth. Rich in historical detail, Unsworth's well-told tale explores some timeless moral dilemmas and reads like a modern page-turner. Recommended for fiction collections.

David Sowd, formerly with Stark Cty. District Lib., Canton, Ohio

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