Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.
A superb adaptation for one-act play contests, classroom study and mini-productions.

Comedy. *Adapted by Aurand Harris. Based on the medieval play Secunda Pastorum.* Cast: 4m., 3w. The plot of this early religious drama is from the book of Luke in the Bible with an added comic side plot. Mak’s wife pretends the stolen sheep is a newborn baby. An angel announces the birth of the Christ Child. The shepherds bring gifts to Mary and the Child and join in singing the glad tidings. This simple folk version of the nativity story blends a secular comedy plot with a moving religious scene. *Simple set. Medieval costumes. Code: ST8.*
**The Second Shepherd’s Play**

A superb adaptation for one-act play contests, classroom study and mini-productions.

*Comedy. Adapted by Aurand Harris. Based on the medieval play Secunda Pastorum.* Cast: 4m., 3w. The plot of this early religious drama is from the book of Luke in the Bible with an added comic side plot. Mak’s wife pretends the stolen sheep is a newborn baby. An angel announces the birth of the Christ Child. The shepherds bring gifts to Mary and the Child and join in singing the glad tidings. This simple folk version of the nativity story blends a secular comedy plot with a moving religious scene. *Simple set. Medieval costumes. Code: ST8.*
THE SECOND SHEPHERD’S
PLAY

Comedy
Adapted by
AURAND HARRIS

Based on the medieval play Secunda Pastorum

Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

© The Dramatic Publishing Company
*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR’S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved. In all programs this notice must appear:

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

© MCMXCI by
ANCHORAGE PRESS, INC.

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved

(THE SECOND SHEPHERD’S PLAY)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-780-4

© The Dramatic Publishing Company
Introduction

The Second Shepherd's Play, original title: the Secunda Pastorum, is generally considered to be the best example of comedy in early religious drama. The plot is from the Bible, the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verses 6–16, with a side-plot of Mak stealing a sheep, a humorous scene which introduces an element of realistic low comedy (perhaps a daring innovation at the time) but one which the fifteenth century English audiences were beginning to demand.

To understand medieval drama, a look at the preceding years is necessary. European theatre was weakened by the invasion of the barbarians and then exterminated by the churchmen. By the middle of the sixth century, theatre as such was extinct. Then, ironically enough, dramatic activities were reborn in the church itself. By the ninth century, the Mass was embellished with antiphonal singing. Later, words (dialogue) were added, with priests impersonating biblical characters. As episodes increased in number, the drama moved from the choir down through the nave of the church with temporary “multiple settings.” The performers moved from one setting to the next.

By the thirteenth century the drama included passages of the vernacular and was being performed outside the church. As more and more elaborate scenes were added, more performers were needed and expenses accelerated. This resulted in the local workmen’s guilds producing the cycles of playlets, from the Creation to the Judgment, as the annual “miracle play.” The system of “multiple settings” was used in some towns. In others, the plays were performed on a procession of wagons (stages). Each one stopped at a designated place, that playlet was performed, and then moved on to the next stop. The Second Shepherd’s Play was probably performed on a wagon with three areas—the fields, Mak’s house, and the manger.

Little is known about the author of any of the thirty-two plays believed to have been performed by the guilds in the town of Wakefield about 1450. These scripts are known as “The Towneley plays” because the Towneley family preserved the manuscripts. There are two plays dramatizing the visit of the shepherds to the manger. The second one,
far superior, and included here, gets its title because it was the second of the shepherd’s plays. The original play is written in a peculiar form of a nine-line stanza with internal rhymes as well as rhymes at the end of lines. For modern audiences, the verse form has been modified for this short version.

The miracle play helped to give drama a re-birth in England. It accustomed audiences to plays spoken in verse. It freed drama of theunities of time, place and action. All of these helped to prepare the way and to influence the next century, the Golden Age of Shakespeare.
CAST

FIRST SHEPHERD, Coll
SECOND SHEPHERD, Gib
THIRD SHEPHERD, Daw
MAK, a sheep-stealer
GILL, his wife
ANGEL
MARY
The Second Shepherd’s Play

(A field. FIRST SHEPHERD enters.)

FIRST SHEPHERD: Lord, but these weathers are cold; And I am ill wrapped.
I am near numb, so long have I napped;
My legs they fold, my fingers are chapped.
The rich land-owners on us they thrive.
It were a great wonder that we stay alive.

It does me good, as I walk thus by mine own,
Of this world for to talk in manner of moan.
To my sheep will I stalk, and sit on a stone
For I trust, full soon,
We get more company ere it be noon.

SECOND SHEPHERD: (Enters. He does not see FIRST SHEPHERD.)
Blessings upon us, such days I seldom have seen.
Lord, these weathers are spiteous, and the winds full keen.
And the frost so hideous they water mine eyes.
It is not all easy. I speak no lies.

But as far as I’ve been, or yet as I go,
We men who are wed suffer a great woe.
Some men will have two wives,
And some men three.
Some are grieved that have any.
Woe to him that has many.

But, know what you wrought young men of wooing,
Be well ware of wedding, and think what you’re doing.
“Had I known” is a thing that serves nought.
Much grief and mourning has wedding home brought.
Alas, for I have one for my wife,
Rough as a burr; tongue sharp as a knife.
She’s great as a whale, full of gall that does foster.
I would I had run till I had lost her.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Look about. Full deafly ye stand there. Saw thou young Daw?

SECOND SHEPHERD: He comes.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Where?

SECOND SHEPHERD: He will tell us a lie. Best we beware.

THIRD SHEPHERD: (Enters. He is a boy. He does not see the other shepherds.)

Was never since Noah's flood such floods seen,
Winds and rains so rude and storms so keen—
We that walk in the nights, our cattle to keep,
We see sudden sights when other men sleep.

(FIRST and SECOND SHEPHERD move. He is frightened.)

Yet—methinks—two giants!—my heart skips a beat!
Two rogues—two giants!—I meet.
Back to my sheep I will slip and go,
(Tip-toes away.)
And pray I do not trip my toe.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Daw! Why and whence trot ye?

THIRD SHEPHERD: Tis my master! I knew not ye.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Where are our sheep? Blow ye the horn.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Safe they are left in the corn.
They have pasture good, they can not go wrong.

FIRST SHEPHERD: That is right. By the rood, these nights are long!
Ere we went, how I would that one gave me a song.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Let me pitch the tenory.

FIRST SHEPHERD: And the treble I bring.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Then the mean falls to me.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Together we sing.

(They sing. MAK enters, wearing a cape.)
MAK: Oh, Lord, maker of the stars and all,
And of more than I can recall,
Were I in heaven where no children stirred,
Nor ranting of a wife was heard!

FIRST SHEPHERD: Who is that who pipes off tone?

MAK: A man who has no life of his own.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Mak, where hast thou gone? What tidings bring?

THIRD SHEPHERD: Mak? Then each one take heed to his thing!

FIRST SHEPHERD: What means this so late thou goes,
A rogue in the night, taking a peep,
Men will suppose thou has a good nose.
For stealing a sheep.

MAK: I am true as steel, all men wot;
But a sickness I feel, that holds me full hot;
My belly fares not well; it is out of estate.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Seldom lies the devil dead by the gate.

MAK: I am ill, fullsore;
May I stand stone-still,
If I have eat meat
This month or more.

FIRST SHEPHERD: How fares thy wife? By the hood, how fares she?

MAK: Lies lolling a-bed, calling for brew
Each year a baby she brings anew,
And some years bringeth two.

SECOND SHEPHERD: I am weary of watching sheep in the night.

THIRD SHEPHERD: I am cold. I would be near a fire burning bright.

FIRST SHEPHERD: I am tired and would sleep. Stay awake thou?
SECOND SHEPHERD: Nay, I be with you and sleep now.

(They lie down.)

THIRD SHEPHERD: As good a man's son am I as any of you.
But, Mak, come hither. Rest between us two.

(Lies down.)

MAK: I'll hear secrets ye whisper, but I'll do.
(Sits between them.)
A prayer I say, on bended knee.
From my top to my toe,
Manus tuas commendo, ("Into thy hands I commend,
Poncio Pilato;
May Christ's cross cover me.
(He lies down. THREE SHEPHERDS more. MAK rises.)
Now's the time for a man that lacks what he would
To privily take from the fold what he could.
(Makes a magic spell around Shepherds.)
Here about you a circle I make, as round as a moon,
Till I have done what I will; sleep ye till noon.
May ye lie stone-still till I be done.
(Waves hand over their heads.)
Over your heads, my hand I run.
Out go your light. Fordo your sight!
(SHEPHERDS snore louder.)
Lord, how they sleep hard, and buzz like a fly.
Was I never a shepherd, but now will I try.
Though the flock be scattered, I'll catch one.
(Cautiously catches a stuffed sheep.)
Nab—grab—a prize I've won!
A fat sheep, I dare say,
A good fleece, dare I lay,
Repay when I may,
So ends my sorrow,
For this will I borrow.
(He takes sheep, hidden under his cape; to his house.)
How, Gill, art thou in? Get us some light.

GILL: Who makes such a din this time of night?

MAK: Good wife, open. I bring meat to eat.
GILL: (Opens door.) Ah, come, my husband, my sweet.

MAK: See. In a pinch—and in my way—I get more than they that sweat all day. (Shows sheep.) I would it were slain; I would well eat. This twelvemonth I taste not one sheep-meat.

GILL: Come they before it be slain, and hear the sheep fret—

MAK: Then might I be taken. That were a cold sweat!

GILL: A good trick have I spied, since thou can none; Here shall we him hide till they be done—In the cradle abide. Let me alone. And I shall beside the sheep lie, and groan.

MAK: And I shall say thou was light Of a male-child this night.

GILL: This is a good guise and a fair cast; A woman’s advice helps at the last. But I fear they awake; return, go thou fast.

MAK: I’ll go ere they rise, or they’ll blow a cold blast. (MAK returns to Shepherds.)
Yet still sleep, these three. In I shall creep, and be As though I had not been he Who stole their sheep.

(MAK lies down in place. FIRST SHEPHERD and SECOND SHEPHERD awake.)

FIRST SHEPHERD: Resurrex a mortunus. ("Resurrection from the dead"
Have hold my hand. Judas carnas dominus! ("Judas, lord of the flesh.")
I can not well stand.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Lord, what I have slept well! And thus I feel As fresh as an eel; As light, ah, ye,
As a leaf on a tree.

THIRD SHEPHERD: (Awakes.)
Blessing be herein! My body does quake;
My heart out of skin, thus does shake.
See you ought of Mak now?

FIRST SHEPHERD: We were up ere thou.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Man, I give God a vow
That he did not stir.
He sleeps as a kitten doth purr.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Methought, when we napped, he, in a wolf-skin
trapped a fat sheep, but made no din.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Be still! Thy dream makes thee mad.
It is but a phantom, my lad.
(They awaken Mak.)
Rise, Mak, for shame! Thou liest right long.

MAK: What is this? Ah, my neck has lain wrong.
I trust I be the same.
Alack! My leg is lame.
(Others help him.)
Many thanks. since yester-even,
Now by Saint Steven,
A bad dream did my head fill
That did stop my heart still!
I thought my wife, Gill, croaked full sad,
And gave birth to another child-lad!
Too many ere before she has had,
Now another she doth add!
Oh, my head!
Woe for him what numbers grow,
And there be little bread!

I must home, by your leave, to Gill, as I thought.
I pray look in my sleeve, that I steal nought.
I am loath you to grieve, or from you take ought.

(He leaves.)
THIRD SHEPHERD: Go forth. Best we sought
If a sheep be naught.

FIRST SHEPHERD: We’ll meet before the morn.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Where?

THIRD SHEPHERD: At the crooked thorn.

(They depart.)

MAK: (At his door.)
Undo the door! How long shall I stand?

GILL: Who is there?

MAK: I, Mak, your husband.

GILL: Ah, Sir Guile! Let him cool his toes.
Let him attend, so he knows
Who brews, who bakes, who makes us our hose?

MAK: (Aside.) Day and dark thus her mouth goes.

GILL: Full woeful is a man’s life
What lacks a helpful wife.
(Opens door.)
What end has thou made with the shepherds, Mak?

MAK: The last word they said when I turned my back
They would look that they had their sheep, all the pack.
I think there will be trouble when they their sheep lack.
Here they will hie and peep.
“Thief!” they’ll cry. “Where be the sheep?”
Quick! Thou must do as thou said.

GILL: I shall swaddle the sheep in the cradle bed.
(Gill puts sheep in cradle.)
Twere better, if I helped still.
I will lie down. Come wrap me.

MAK: I will. (Covers her.)
GILL: Behind! Watch. Give a sign full straight.
When Coll comes and his mate.
Harken well. Thou sing alone.
Thou sing “lullay” for I must groan.

(Practices crying loudly.)

(Three Shepherds meet.)

THIRD SHEPHERD: Ah, Coll, why lookest thou so bobbed?
FIRST SHEPHERD: Alas, of one sheep we have been robbed!
SECOND SHEPHERD: The devil you say!
THIRD SHEPHERD: A sheep astray!
SECOND SHEPHERD: Who should do us this foul play?
FIRST SHEPHERD: I have sought with my dogs
All Horbury bogs,
Of the fifteen we keep
Found all but one sheep.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Now believe me, if you will, iwis,
Either Mak or Gill hath done this.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Peace man, be still.
I saw when he went.
Thou slanderest him ill;
Thou ought to repent.

SECOND SHEPHERD: I will stake my life if need,
It were he, what did the deed.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Go we thither. Search about.
I shall never eat bread, till the truth is out.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Brother. Let us swear in our plight,
Until we see him in sight,
Shall we never sleep one night
Where we do another.
(SHEPHERDS approach Mak’s house. GILL begins to groan. MAK sings loudly.)

THIRD SHEPHERD: Will ye hear how they hack? Our sire can croon.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Heard I never none sing so clear out of tune. Call on him.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Mak, undo your door soon!

MAK: Who is that spake, as it were noon?

THIRD SHEPHERD: Good fellows what ye know and see oft.

(SHEPHERDS enter the house.)

MAK: I beg, sirs, speak soft. A sick woman, in bed, lies distressed. I had rather be dead than give her unrest.

GILL: Come not by my bed! My breath wheezes. Each step that ye tread, my nose sneezes.

MAK: Ye have run in the mire, and are wet yet! I shall make you a fire, if ye will sit. I have sons, if ye knew, Well more than a few! Yet another is born to add to the brood. (Points to cradle.) Ere ye go ye must take drink and some food.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Nay, meat nor drink mends not our mood.

MAK: Why, sir, tell me, is ought not good?

THIRD SHEPHERD: Our sheep were stolen as they stood.

MAK: Sirs, drink! Had I been near Some should have felt it full dear!

FIRST SHEPHERD: Some men hold that ye were there. And so think I, I swear.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Mak, some men propose that it were ye.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Either ye or your spouse, so say we.
MAK: If ye suppose it of Gill or of me—
Search our house, and ye will see
If I have a sheep or half,
Or if I have a cow or a calf.
And Gill, my wife, less live than dead,
Rose not, from her child-bearing bed.
I swear tis true what I say,
Or this be the first meal I eat today.

(Points to cradle.)

(SHEPHERDS begin to search.)

GILL: Out thieves, away from me go!
Ye come to rob us, that I know.

MAK: Hear ye not how she groans?

GILL: I swelt!

MAK: Hark! Do ye hearts not melt?

GILL: Off, thieves. Away from the son I bore!

MAK: Ah, the pain she is in, be ye hearts not sore?

GILL: Oh, my middle! I pray to God so mild,
If ever I you beguiled.
That I will eat this child!

MAK: Please, woman, for God's pain, cry not so.
Thou spill your brain, and make me great woe.

SECOND SHEPHERD: What find ye two? I think our sheep be slain.

THIRD SHEPHERD: We may as well go. No sheep is here, tis plain.

FIRST SHEPHERD: As the wind blows, I know by my nose.
Of all animals, boy or beast that dwells,
(Points to cradle.)
None do as loud as he smells!

GILL: Nay, to a mother tis a sweet smelling child.

FIRST SHEPHERD: We have marked amiss; I hold us beguiled.
(To Mak.) Friends we be for we are one.
MAK: Nay. No one helps me.

SECOND SHEPHERD: We are done.

MAK: (Aside.) Go then and be about. Farewell all three.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Fair words they be, but love is left out.

(SHEPHERDS leave the house.)

FIRST SHEPHERD: Gave ye the child anything?

SECOND SHEPHERD: I swear not one farthing.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Fast again will I run. Abide here.

(Runs to house.)

I bring, Mak, a gift for your son.

MAK: Nay, to me foul hast thou done!

THIRD SHEPHERD: By your leave, let me give him but sixpence.

MAK: Nay, I pray you go hence. He sleeps.

(Other SHEPHERDS enter. Sheep “Baa’s.”)

THIRD SHEPHERD: Methinks he peeps.

MAK: When he wakens he weeps.

THIRD SHEPHERD: Give me leave him to kiss, and lift up the clout.

(Lifts cover.)

What the devil is this? He has a long snout!

(Others look.)

FIRST SHEPHERD: He is marked amiss. We wait not about.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Look! He is like to our sheep!

THIRD SHEPHERD: How, Gib, may I peep?

SECOND SHEPHERD: This is a prank, a trick, a false riddle!

THIRD SHEPHERD: See how the four feet they tied in the middle. Two horns saw I on many a cow,