

The Second Shepherds' Play

from the cycle of the
Wakefield Mystery plays
edited by Adrian Guthrie

*© Adrian Guthrie 1987 and 1999
This play may not be performed
or given a public reading, broadcast or recording
without the written permission of the author.*

playwright@australiainmail.com

The Second Shepherds' Play

1ST SHEPHERD (Col)
2ND SHEPHERD (Gib)
3RD SHEPHERD (Dave)
MAK
MAK'S WIFE (Gill)
ANGEL
MARY
CHRIST-CHILD

1ST SHEPHERD

Lord, but this weather is cold! And I am ill wrapped.
A am nearly a dolt, so long have I napped.
My legs they fold, my fingers are chapped.

But we are simple shepherds that walk on the moor,
In truth we have been kicked out the door!
No wonder as it stands, if we be poor,
For the land we used to have use of lies as fallow as the floor,
As you know.
We are so lamed,
Overtaxed and rammed,
And like a pet tamed
By those gentlemen.

Thus they rob us of our rest, our Lady them harry!
These rich men are our pest, they make the plough tarry.
What they say is for the best, we found it contrary.
Thus are countrymen oppressed, to the point of misery.

(SECOND SHEPHERD enters)

2ND SHEPHERD

Benedicite dominus! What may this mean?
The world faring thus, how oft have we seen?
Lord, this weather's to spite us, the wind is so keen
And frost so hideous, it makes my eyes stream,
No lie.

Now in dry, now in wet,
Now in snow, now in sleet,
When my shoes freeze to my feet
It's not at all easy.

But as far as I know, or yet as I go,
We poor wedded men suffer such woe.

Old comb our hen, both to and fro
She cackles.
But begin she to croak
To prod or to poke,
For our cock it's no joke
For he is in shackles.

These men that are wed have not their own will,

They are full hard put to, but they sigh full still.
God knows they are led full hard and full ill;
In bower and in bed, but speak not then till
Now, in an aside.

Take my own better half, and let me describe 'er
She's as sharp as a thistle, as rough as a briar,
She is browed like a bristle, with a sour looking cheer;
If she once wets her whistle she can sing full clear Her paternoster.
She is as great as a whale withal,
She has a gallon of gall,
By him that died for us all
I would I had lost her.

1ST SHEPHERD

Are you deaf that you make such a sound?

2ND SHEPHERD

The devil take your guts for hanging around.
Where did Dave go?

1ST SHEPHERD

He's just coming now.
Stand still.

2ND SHEPHERD

Why?

1ST SHEPHERD

For he comes, say I.

2ND SHEPHERD

He will tell us both a lie
unless we be wary.

(Enter **THIRD SHEPHERD**, afraid)

3RD SHEPHERD

Christ bless me quickly, and Saint Nicholas!
Who knows should take heed, and let the world pass;

It is ever in dread and brittle as glass
And slithers.
This world fared never so:
With marvels more and more,
Now good, now in woe,
And all things writhe.

Was never since Noah's flood such floodings seen;
Winds and rains so rude and storms so keen;
Some stumbled, some stood in doubt, as I ween.
Now God turn all to good! I say as I mean,
And ponder:
These floods they so drown,
Both in fields and in town,
And bear all things down,
And that is a wonder.
We that walk in the nights our cattle to keep,
We see fearful sights when other men sleep,
Now I think my heart lights! I see some shrews peep.
It's two spooks in white, I must see to my sheep.

**(Tries to escape. The other SHEPHERDS
cut him off. Recognises his boss.)**

Ah, sir, God save you, and master mine!
A deep drink would I have and somewhat to dine.

1ST SHEPHERD

Christ's curse, you are a lazy swine!

2ND SHEPHERD

What! Let the boy rave; sit down and dine.
We have had our fill
Ill luck be thy fate
Though the lad came late,
Yet he is still in a state
To sup if he will.

3RD SHEPHERD

Such servants as I who work till we sweat
Eat our bread quite dry and that makes me fret;
We are often weak and weary when our masters sleep yet;
Late home and dreary, in food and drink we get
Less than our due.

Both our dame and our sire,
When we run in the mire
They dock us of our hire
and pay us late too.

2ND SHEPHERD

Peace, I say, lad, no more of jangling,
Hold your tongue!
Where are the sheep we've shorn?

3RD SHEPHERD

Sir, this same day at morn
I left them in the corn,
When matins were rung.
They have pasture good, they cannot go wrong.

1ST SHEPHERD

That is right. By the rood, these nights are long!
Yet before went, I would, someone gave us a song.

2ND SHEPHERD

So I thought as I stood, to cheer us among.

3RD SHEPHERD

I grant.

1ST SHEPHERD

Let me sing the tenor free.

2ND SHEPHERD

And I shall sing the treble key.

3RD SHEPHERD

Then the alto falls to me.
Let's see how we chant.

(SHEPHERDS sing then MAK enters.)

MAK

Now Lord, in thy names seven that made both moon and stars,
More than I can count in heaven, thy will from bliss me bars;
My life is uneven with jangles and jars;
Now would God I were in heaven where no bairn's tear mars
The still.

1ST SHEPHERD

Who is it that sings so poorly?

MAK

Would God ye knew of me for sure!
A man that walks across the moor,
And has not his own will.

2ND SHEPHERD

Mak, where hast thou been? Tell us thy tidings.

3RD SHEPHERD

If Mak's coming, watch out for your things!

MAK

That! I be a yeoman, I tell you, one of the king's;
A messenger who from great lords takes and brings
And such
Fie on you! Go hence Out of my presence!
I must have reverence;
Why? Who am I?

1ST SHEPHERD

Why do you act so quaint? Mak, you do wrong.

2ND SHEPHERD

But you want to be a saint, Mak? I think for that you long.

3RD SHEPHERD

Look how the shrew can fake it, to the devil he belongs.

MAK

I shall make complaint; and you'll be flogged if you go on.

I'll just say one word.

2ND SHEPHERD

Listen. Shrew peeps
Thus late as thou goes,
What will men suppose?
That thou hast an ill nose
For stealing of sheep.

MAK

That I am true as steel all men know,
But a sickness I feel has brought me so low,
My belly lacks a meal, it's in a sad state.

3RD SHEPHERD

Seldom lies the devil dead by the gate.

MAK

Therefore
Full sore am I and ill,
If I stand stone-still.
I've ate not a needle
This month and more.

1ST SHEPHERD

How fares thy wife? By thy hood, how fares she?

MAK

Wallowing, she'll be, by the fire there,
And a house full of brood, and she drinks without care.
But she, I tell you
Eats as fast as she can, And each year that comes to a man
She brings forth another bairn;
And, some years, two.

2ND SHEPHERD (ASIDE)

I have kept awake, watching, as none in this shire;
I must sleep, even if, I take less for my hire.

3RD SHEPHERD

I'm cold and I'm naked, and long for a fire.

1ST SHEPHERD

I am weary, I'm forrakyd, and run in the mire.
You stay awake!

2ND SHEPHERD

Nay, I will lie down by you.
For I must sleep, too.

3RD SHEPHERD

As good as a man's son I
As any of you.
But, Mak, come here. Between us, lie down.

MAK

But I might come between your whispers and snores.
No fear, I'm here!
From my top to my toe,
Manus tuas commendo,
Pontio Pilato,
Christ's cross me speed!

(When the SHEPHERDS are asleep MAK rises.)

MAK

Now's the time a man who lacks what he wants might get hold
By secretly stalking into the fold.

Lord, but they sleep hard! As you may all hear!
If the flock aren't scared, then I shall nip near.
How! One comes forward. Now turn our cheer
From sorrow!

(MAK seizes a sheep.)

A fat sheep, I dare say,
A good fleece, I dare lay,
Pay back when I may,
But this will I "borrow".

(MAK goes home.)

How Gill, are you in? Get us some light!

MAK'S WIFE

Who makes such a din, this time of the night?
I've sat down to spin; I hope now I might
Not rise for a pin. I'll curse them for spite!

So fairs

A housewife that has been
Got up to go between,
And has nothing to be seen
For such small cares.

MAK

Good wife, open this hatch! See you not what I bring?

MAK'S WIFE

I will let you draw the latch. Come in my "sweeting"!

MAK

You care not a patch for my long standing.

MAK'S WIFE

By your neck you may catch a rope at a hanging.

MAK

Get away!
I am worth my meat
For in a trick can I get
More then they that toil and sweat
All the long day.

(MAK shows her the sheep.)

Thus it fell to my lot, Gill; I had such a grace.

MAK'S WIFE

It were a foul blot to be hanged for such a case.

MAK

But come and help fast.

I would he were slain, I want so to eat.
For twelve months past I've longed for this meat.

MAK'S WIFE

They'll come ere he's slain, and hear the sheep bleat,

MAK

Then might I be ta'en; that gives me cold feet!
Go bar
The outer door.

MAK'S WIFE

Yes, Mak,
But what if they come to the back.

MAK

Then might I be - for all the pack -
The devil of the war!

MAK'S WIFE

A good trick have I spied, since you think of none:
Here shall we hide him until they are gone,
In my cradle, to abide. But let me alone,
And I shall lie beside in childbed, and groan.

(MAK leaves his house.)

MAK

Then quick!
And I shall to them tell,
that you had a boy child, as well.

MAK'S WIFE

Now bless I that day
That ever I was born!
This is a cunning play and well cast;
But it takes a woman to get it right at the last.

MAK

If they wake before I get back, they'll blow a cold blast.
I will go sleep.

**(MAK returns to the SHEPHERDS and
resumes his place.)**

Yet sleeps them together.
So I must creep light as a feather,
As though I had never
Taken their sheep.

1ST SHEPHERD

Resurrex a mortuis! Let go my hand!
Judas carnas dominus! I can hardly stand!
My foot sleeps, by Jesus, and my water's been dammed!

2ND SHEPHERD

Say ye!
Lord, but I sleep well;
As fresh as an eel.
As light I feel
As a leaf on a tree.

(Waking from nightmare.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Blessed be all here! My heart so quakes
It leaps out of my skin such noise it makes.
Who makes all this din? My head sorely aches.
I must stir from within for my fellows' sakes.
We were four
See you Mak now?

1ST SHEPHERD

We were up ere thou.

2ND SHEPHERD

Man, I give God a vow,
He went nowhere.

3RD SHEPHERD

I dreamt he was wrapped in a wolf's skin.

1ST SHEPHERD

So are many got up nowadays, namely within.

2ND SHEPHERD

When we had long napped, I dreamt with cunning ploys
A fat sheep he had trapped, but he made no noise.

3RD SHEPHERD

Be still!
This is a phantom, by the rood.

1ST SHEPHERD

God can turn all to good,
If it be his will.

2ND SHEPHERD

Rise, Mak, for shame! Thou liest right long.

MAK

Now Christ's holy name be us among!
What is this! By Saint James, I can't get along!
I trust I be the same. Ah! My neck has lain all wrong.

(They help him.)

Many thanks! Since yester-even,
Now by Saint Stephen,
Such a dream I was given
My heart nearly stopped.
I dreamt Gil, began to cry and labour
And by the first cock, a young lad had born
To add to our flock; when I never want more!
Of cares I've a stock more than ever before.
Ah, my head!
A house full of young bellies with hunger pains,
The devil knock out their brains!
Woe is him who has many bairns
And too little bread.

I must go home, by your leave, to Gill, as I thought.
Now look up my sleeve that I have stolen nought:
I loath you to grieve, or from you take ought.

(MAK goes home.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Go forth, ill-luck achieve! Now would I we sought
This morn
That we all had our store.

1ST SHEPHERD

But I will go before.
Then let us meet.

2ND SHEPHERD

Where?

3RD SHEPHERD

At the crooked thorn.

(The SHEPHERDS part.)

MAK

Undo this door! Who is here? How long shall I stand?

MAK'S WIFE

Who makes such a blare? Like a lunatic band?

MAK

Ah! Gill, what cheer? It is I, Mak, your husband.

MAK'S WIFE

Ah, then never fear, it's the devil at hand.

MAK

Oh, the fuss that she makes, and the way that she goes,
She does just what she likes, just tickles her toes.

MAK'S WIFE

Why, who fetches, and who wakes, who comes and who goes?
Who brews and who bakes? Who mends all your hose?
And then
It's sad to behold,
How woeful the household
That wants a woman.

But what happened with the hired-men, Mak?

MAK

The last word they said when I turned my back,
They would look they had all the sheep in their pack.
I hope they're not paid when this sheep they lack,
By God!
But howe'er the game goes,
They'll come here, I suppose.

Now do as you promised.

MAK'S WIFE

To that I agree,
I'll swaddle him like this, in my bed he will be;
I'll lie down beside him. Come, cover us.

MAK

Let me.

MAK'S WIFE

Make ready all and sing on thine own;
Sing lullay you shall, for load I must groan,
Sing lullay loud and fast
When you hear them at last;
And if this play is wrongly cast,
Trust me no more.

(At Crooked Thorn.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Ah, Coll, good morn, why sleepest thou not?

1ST SHEPHERD

Alas that ever I was born! We have a foul blot.
A fat wether has gone.

3RD SHEPHERD

God forbid, I hope not.

2ND SHEPHERD

Who should do us this scorn? That were a foul blot.

1ST SHEPHERD

Some shrew!

3RD SHEPHERD

Now trust me, if ye will, by St. Thomas of Kent,
Either Mak or Gill, had a hand in this event,

1ST SHEPHERD

Peace, man, be still! I saw when he went.
You slander him ill, you ought to repent
With good speed.

2ND SHEPHERD

Now as ever I might be alive,
even if I dropped down and died,
I would say it was he'd
Done this same deed.

(Crossing to MAK's house.)

3RD SHEPHERD

We should go there, I say, and fast
I shall never eat today till the truth he may speak.

1ST SHEPHERD

Nor have drink in my head till with him I meet.

2ND SHEPHERD

I will rest in no stead till him I may greet,
My brother.
I promise I might,
Till I have him in sight,
Never sleep one night. May I do no other.

(At MAK's house. Singing within.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Will you hear how they croak? His lordship likes to croon.

1ST SHEPHERD

Never heard I sing folk so clean out of tune.
Call him.

2ND SHEPHERD

Mak, may you choke! Undo your door soon!

MAK

Who is it that spoke, as if it were noon
With the sun aloft?

3RD SHEPHERD

Good fellows, were it day!

(MAK opens the door.)

MAK

As far as ye may,
Speak soft,
Over a sick woman's head who is not at ease,
I would rather be dead than she had a disease.

(THE SHEPHERDS enter MAK's house.)

MAK'S WIFE

Be off from the bed, let me breathe, if you please!
Each step that you tread from my nose to my knees
Goes through me.

1ST SHEPHERD

Tell us, Mak, if ye may,
How fare ye, say?

MAK

But are ye in town today?
Now how fare ye?

Ye have run in the mire, and now are all wet.
I shall make you a fire now we are all met.
A nurse I should hire? What think ye yet? I've been paid now, entire. My dream has been sent
I have bairns, if ye knew,

Far more than a few,
But we must drink as we brew,
And that is but reason.
I would ye dined 'fore ye went? Ye sweat, as I think.

2ND SHEPHERD

No, we don't mind tonight if we don't eat or drink.

MAK

Why, sir, is everything right?

3RD SHEPHERD

What do you think?
A sheep just went! Stolen in a blink!

MAK

Drink, sirs.
Had I been there
They'd have got theirs.

1ST SHEPHERD

That's what we fear!
Some think you were there!

2ND SHEPHERD

Mak, some men now think it must be ye.

3RD SHEPHERD

Either you or your spouse, so say we.

MAK

Now, don't you suppose it was Gill or me!
Come, go through our house, and then ye may see
Who had her.
If any sheep I've got.
And Gill, my wife, rose not
Since down she laid her.

As I am true as steel, to God here I pray,

That this be the first meal that I shall eat this day.

1ST SHEPHERD

Mak, that's not what I feel, then be advised, I say:
He learns in time to steal that never could say nay.

MAK'S WIFE

I die!
Out thieves from my home,
You come to take what we own.

MAK

Hear you not how she groans?
Your hearts should melt.

MAK'S WIFE

Out thieves! Leave my babe! Don't come near here!

MAK

Knew you what she'd been through, your hearts would be sore.

MAK'S WIFE

Ah, my middle!
I pray to God so mild,
If ever I you beguiled,
That I should eat this child
That lies in this cradle.

MAK

Peace, woman, for God's pain, and cry not so!
Thou spills thy brain, and makes me full of woe.

2ND SHEPHERD

I think our sheep be slain. What say you two?

3RD SHEPHERD

All this is in vain; we may as well go.

1ST SHEPHERD

We have aimed amiss; we be but beguiled.

2ND SHEPHERD

We have done!
Sir, our Lady him save!
Be this child a boy brave?

MAK'S WIFE

Any lord might him have
This child for his son.
When he wakes he snatches, a joy is to see.

3RD SHEPHERD

May he be happy, and in good time, when he
Needs godparents to stand by him we'll be ready!

2ND SHEPHERD

Mak, friends will we be, for we are all one.

MAK

We? Count not on me, for amends get I none.
Farewell all three! And gladly be gone.

(They leave the cottage.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Fair words there may be, but love there is none
This year.

1ST SHEPHERD

Gave ye the child anything?

2ND SHEPHERD

Not I, nor one farthing.

3RD SHEPHERD

I'll go back with something.
Wait for me here.

(He returns to the cottage.)

Mak, by your leave, your son may I see?

MAK

No, you treat me poorly! This birth you mar!

3RD SHEPHERD

This child will not grieve, that little day star.

Mak, by your leave, thy bairn never bar
from sixpence.

MAK

Nay, go away! He sleeps.

3RD SHEPHERD I think he peeps.

MAK

When he wakes he weeps;
I prey you go hence.

(The other SHEPHERDS come back.)

3RD SHEPHERD

Give me leave him to kiss, and once lift him out.
What devil is this? He has a long snout!

1ST SHEPHERD

He is marked amiss. Let's not wait about!

2ND SHEPHERD

The ill-spun weft always comes foully out.
Aye, so!
He is like to our sheep.

3RD SHEPHERD

How, Gib, may I peep?

1ST SHEPHERD

I think cunning will creep
Where it may not go.

2ND SHEPHERD

This was a crafty trick, and fair cast.
It was a grand fraud.

3RD SHEPHERD

Yes, sirs, it was.

MAK

Peace, I say, what! Let be your blare!
I am he that him got, and yon woman him bare.

1ST SHEPHERD

Have you named him not, nor made him your heir?

MAK

At your mercy I am left.

1ST SHEPHERD

Sirs, do what I say;
For this trespass
We will neither curse nor chide,
No more deride,
No longer bide,
But toss him in a canvas.

**(They toss MAK in a canvas, after which Mak
and his WIFE return home.)**

Lord, but I am sore; to the point that I'll burst.
In faith I can no more, therefore will I rest.

2ND SHEPHERD

As a sheep of seven score pound he weighed on in my fist,
Now to sleep anywhere is all that I wish.

3RD SHEPHERD

Then, I prey,
Lie down on this green.

1ST SHEPHERD

I can't believe how these thieves been!

3RD SHEPHERD

Be not vexed by what we've seen,
I say.

(They sleep. The ANGEL sings *Gloria in excelsis*, then speaks.)

ANGEL

Rise, gentle shepherds, for now is he born
Who shall fetch from the fiend what from Adam was torn.
God is made you friend now at this morn,
He promises
To Bethlehem go see
Where he lies so free,
A child in a crib poorly,
Between two beasts.

(ANGEL goes.)

1ST SHEPHERD

This was as sweet sound as ever yet I heard.
But a marvel like this is all new, and I'm scared.

2ND SHEPHERD Of God's son of heaven, he spoke the word,
Which lit up the woods with lightning as we heard
It appeared.

3RD SHEPHERD

He came us to warn,
In Bethlehem a babe will be born.

1ST SHEPHERD

Be we drawn
By yon star there.

(They sing.)

2ND SHEPHERD

To Bethlehem he bade that we should go:
I fear that we should not tarry so.

3RD SHEPHERD

Be merry and not sad, our mirth may overflow:
To be everlastingly glad is the reward we shall know
Without fuss.

1ST SHEPHERD

Let us go there straight away,
Though we be wet and weary,
To that child and that lady;
We have no time to lose.

2ND SHEPHERD

We find by the prophecy - let be your din -
They prophesied by clergy that in a virgin
Should God come to lie, to atone for our sin.

3RD SHEPHERD

But the angel said
In a crib was he laid;
He was poorly arrayed,
Both meek and mild.

1ST SHEPHERD

To so poor as we are that he should appear
First, and to us declare by his messenger.

2ND SHEPHERD

Go we now, let us fare, the place is us near.

3RD SHEPHERD

I am ready and prepared; go we together
To that bright
Lord. If thy will be -
Though we're rough all three -

Grant us some kind of glee
to comfort this mite.

(They enter stable.)

1ST SHEPHERD

Hail, comely and clean! Hail, young child!
Hail, maker, as I mean, of a maiden so mild!
Thou has cursed, I believe, the warlock so wild;
That false guiler of vexation has himself been beguiled.

Lo, he merry is.
Lo, he laughs, my sweeting,
A welcome meeting;
take my promised greeting:
Have a bob of cherries.

2ND SHEPHERD

Hail, sovereign saviour, for thou hast us sought!
Hail, excellent child and flower, that all things hast wrought!
Hail, full of favour, that made all of nought.
Hail, I kneel and I cower. A bird have I brought,
Bairn that ye are.
Hail, little tiny mop,
Of our creed thou art top,
I would drink of thy cup.
Little day-star.

3RD SHEPHERD

Hail, darling dear, full of Godhead!
I prey thee be near when that I have need.
Hail, sweet is thy cheer! My heart would bleed
To see thee sit here in so poor a weed
With no pennies.
Hail, hold forth thy hand small;
I bring thee but a ball:
Have thou and play withal,
And go to the tennis.

MARY

The father of heaven, God omnipotent,
Set all in days seven, his son he has sent.
Conceived I him even though his might, as he meant,

And now is he born.
May he keep you from woe! I shall prey him do so.
Tell of him as you go;
And remember this morn.

1ST SHEPHERD

Farewell, lady, so fair to behold,
With thy child on thy knee!

2ND SHEPHERD

Lord, well is me.

3RD SHEPHERD

In truth already it seem to be told
Full oft.

1ST SHEPHERD

What grace we have found!

3RD SHEPHERD

Let's make a good sound,
And sing it not soft.

(THE SHEPHERDS leave singing.)