FOREWORD

Sir Philip Sidney, in his elegantly concise summary, proposes the following definition of poesy and its goal:

> Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* – that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight.[1]

While in the traditional context it is difficult to find fault with the aims of teaching and offering delight, the latter one has always been more suspicious than the former. By checking the OED for the early occurrences of *delight* we find that it has been used for engagement in both virtuous and unvirtuous activities – one can find pleasure in, or be highly pleased by "merry conceites" (1576); the statutes of the Lord (1611), but also in "playing dice and cardes" (1535), in "Battails, blood, and murder" (1591), or in "foule plesaunce of the synne of lechery" (1450). No matter how straightforward Sidney's definition is, it cannot fend off negative interpretations of delight. Those for whom together with the tinkling sounds of pleasure the warning bells of endangered piousness go off automatically, will not be softened by the defence Sidney offers.

The dubious role of delight, pleasure and mirth applies not only to poetry as a mimetic art in general, nor to dramatic art in particular, but even more specifically to a character, or more precisely a dramatic function significant in sixteenth century interludes, the Vice, who himself was frequently identified as the engine of playmaking. There has not been much debate about the mirth he offers, since he undoubtedly does offer pleasure; the outcome of the mirth he generates, however, is much more problematic. The contradictory roles generating the ambiguity surrounding his figure are frequently detectable in the same play, and are sometimes explicitly connected to the role of playmaking and the role of plays in general. Such an example can be found in a play called *Jacke Jugeler,* from the middle of the 16th century, originally played by boy actors. Although clearly termed as "Vice" on the title-page, the eponymous Vice of the drama has been left rather neglected by critics, perhaps for the lack of the moral corruption that is generally expected from the character. A strong argument supporting the understanding of the Vice as the epitome of play and mirth emerges from this play once we compare the prologue with the opening lines of the lead character. The Prologue, advertising the play and precluding criticism of joyful pastime stresses the importance of

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[1] Sidney, Philip. *A Defence of Poetry.* Ed. J.A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 25.

"quiet mirthe and recreation" (l. 19) and claims that "[h]onest mirthe and pastime is requisite and necessarie" (l. 26) to the mind the same way as eating and drinking is to the body. The audience's strength "may be refreshed and to labours suffise" through honest mirth (ll.20–1):

> *For the mynd, saith he, in serius matters occupied*
> *If it have not sum quiet mirthe and recreation*
> *Interchanungeablie admixed, must niddes be sone weried*
> *[...]*
> *Therfor intermix honest mirthe in suche wise*
> *That your strenght may be refreshid and to labours suffise.*
> *ll. 15–21*

There are other necessary fruits of a good pastime, since it is natural to men

> *To have at tymes convenient pastaunce, mirthe, and pleasurs,*
> *So they be joynid with honestie, and keape within due mesars.*
> *ll. 38–9.*

After the Prologue's exit the actor playing the title role enters, greets and addresses members of the audience directly in the general fashion of Vice-presenters, and expresses his joy about meeting them:

> *Now by all thes crosses of fleshe, bone and blod,*
> *I rekine my chaunce right marvylus good*
> *Here now to find all this cumpanie*
> *Which in my mynd I wyshed for hartylie,*
> *(ll. 90–94)*

As he continues, he echoes the Prologue's lines on the need of good pastime, picking up the contrast made by the Prologue between labor and being merry, as he says, in times "when [he] may and take no thought" (l. 99).

The parallels between the prologue's announced and the Vice's own intentions with the play thus validate all the mischief the Vice is to carry out, since the source of the announced necessary merriment in this context is clearly the play that the Vice organizes. He is the one who not only provides but also embodies and generates the "mirthe and recreation" mentioned in the opening lines. The plot is based on the scheme of the Vice by mirroring another character, Jenkin Caraway (who himself bears Vice-characteristics), and shaking Jenkin's belief in his own identity. Role playing thus becomes not only the method of presenting the play, but the theme of the play as well, and by rejoicing in role-playing within the play, Jack Jugeler, the Vice celebrates the trade of acting, and more generally theatre, and the type of mirth that both the audience and the actors derive from the occasion of the play. Paradoxically, if the audience is ready to enjoy the play, they are invited to believe in the role-playing of the actors the same way the fooled victim of the Vice believes in theatrical illusion, whose fault is precisely in not being able to recognize the difference between player and role. The only difference between the victim and the audience is, however, that the former is not offered an explanation on the importance of real and actual mirth that potentially resides in the curious illusion of playing.

Perhaps in a surprising fashion, by the epilogue of the same drama the necessity of this honest merriment seems to have been forgotten – a voice of a markedly different

tone compared to the prologue appears to be disappointed with what has been presented: the trick played by the Vice is not mirthful any more, but is a delusion of "the simple innosaintes", and instead of being delighted by play, all involved are potential victims of what has been seen. The prologue hopes that everybody will escape the "trouble, miserie, and wofull grevaunce" (l. 1059) of the trickery of role-play that was inflicted by Jacke Jugeler, "the counterfeit page" (1050) on Caraway, but by extension on the audience as well.

Similarly to the ambiguity of the mid-16th century understanding of the Vice and the pleasure he offers through his play, our own interpretations of the figure are contradictory to the present day. Greg Walker in his book published in 2005[2] analyses the play of John Heywood, the humanist playwright who, in the 1520s, was the first to use the term "vice" in order to specify a character and its dramatic function. Apart from writing the play, Heywood himself is thought to have played the role of the Vice as well – as it seems proper regarding the Vice as the chief game-maker.[3] Walker gives an intriguing analysis of the effect of the play with the Vice performed in the king's court by Heywood, counsellor of Henry VIII. It is not difficult to see that Jupiter, the chief god in the play can be identified as the allegorical representation of the king, and through his ambiguous treatment of the God figure, Heywood demonstrates "a clear sense of licence on the part of the playwright to touch upon highly sensitive political and personal issues central to the King's current preoccupations in a comic vein".[4] Heywood seems to have been not only a playful but a courageous servant as well: we cannot but agree with Walker that he was "risking Jove's thunderbolts in order to offer him the good counsel that all princes needed". At the same time, surprisingly, the positive side of the Vice-character's mocking play is applied by Walker only when regarding the relationship between Heywood and Henry/Jove. The missing part of this double pair, namely the Vice, the servant in the play, in Walker's opinion does not seem to be a good counsellor at all. His name (Merry Report) implies merriment, specifically because no matter what the weather is like, this character will not be biased, and will report on it merrily. In Walker's interpretation the indifference of the character is "misleadingly represented as impartiality of the good counsellor and the honesty of the loyal servant", and he sees a *rogue* appointed "to a position of influence at court". Does Heywood play a good counsellor through an ultimately positive comedy only outside the play, and not within? The negative interpretation of this particular Vice is unique in Walker: the same character has been dismissed as the proper representative of the type precisely because he seems not evil enough. I see it more plausible to regard the Vice within the play no worse a good counsellor *and* a comedian than Heywood himself.

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[2] *Writing Under Tyranny. English Literature and Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 100–119.

[3] "Heywood has conflated the role of playwright with that of stage manipulator. It is hard not to imagine that, as servant of the King and, possibly, groom of the chamber, he wrote the part for himself to act..." Richard Axton and Peter Happé eds. *The Plays of John Heywood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 26.

[4] Walker, 118.

These two examples – in both of which the Vice is a central concern – demonstrating 16th and 21st century ambiguous understandings of the Vice within one drama and one scholarly account respectively, are in line with the contradictory interpretations of pleasure and mirth, as well as assumptions of the theoretically informed mainstream of poststructuralist criticism, readily focusing on the plurality of meaning, the inevitable, indeterminate, and open-ended play of signification, and the consequences of such signification, such as radical ambiguity and the lack of fixed sense. These are scholarly insights that can be applied to an infinite number of phenomena, and can easily be ridiculed (as they are, for example in the recent works of Stanley Fish), if they do not go beyond the statement of the instability of signification. There are people, however, who remain fascinated by the power of this instability, and the play of emerging and distancing meaning; and there seem to be ages (such as the early modern and our own) when this instability becomes a central concern, when every act of representation automatically becomes on the one hand, a potential explicit comment on the code it uses, and on the other a self-reflexive exploration of its own function. The motto of Shakespeare's Globe, *Totus mundus agit histrionem* – all the world's a stage, the whole world is acting – is such a comment, implicitly undermining the "real" stability of meaning, which cannot be safely kept outside the playful realm of the theatre, while the above mentioned self-reflexive exploration is crucial to several of Shakespeare's dramas. Similarly to the double meaning of play and mirth derived from theatrical representation, in some cases the same plays illustrate both the positive and the negative aspect of the pervasiveness of theatricality in life: Rosalind's powerfully creative attitude through role-playing in *As You Like It* is the opposite pole of Jacques's lament on all the world as stage. The self-confidence of the Globe's motto is the happy interpretation of the representational crisis I explore in the argument of the present book that is focusing primarily on two tragedies. The stake in my interpretation, tracing the representational logic of the Vice in two Shakespearean figures, Iago and Lear's Fool, as well as exploring the changing values of mirth and play through these figures, is at seeing how pleasure in mimesis disappears or becomes accessible for us, audiences of the world described in the motto of the Globe.

Let us return now for a second look at Sidney's definition of poetry. The smoothness of the definition is misleading: the concise phrase can be read as an innocently elegant parade of all the possible and contradicting interpretations of mimesis: representing, counterfeiting, *and* figuring forth. Representing – not in the new-historicist sense, but in the sense of presenting through imitation of ancient masters, or in the sense of describing the world based on the cultural conventions and stereotypes we can learn by imitating existing models of understanding within our cultural tradition. Counterfeiting – in the sense of coming up with something that is not the real thing, but a lie or a life distanced from a reality beyond the counterfeit or the confines of a theatre play; as in the critique of the theatre by anti-theatricalist writers, or the lament of Jacques. Figuring forth – in the sense of presenting something that will be created by the same act of presentation, in the sense of Austin's performative utterances, or exemplified by improvisations on stage; not following previous models, but coming up with something unique, embedded in the given situation.

Rather than clarifying and straightening the meaning of the term, Sidney opens up something that may be the treasure house – or Pandora's box – of the functions of poetic creation. The definition of mimesis (or representation – the term that replaced mimesis in most of the scholarly literature on early modern literature from the early eighties) is itself as elusive, as various in meaning and equally rich in potential as are our possibilities in using mimesis or representation to interact with what we experience as the reality of the world. Namely, to describe it, to interpret it, to structure it, to try to understand our position facing it, and to explore our powers in making it. As I hope to show, the Vice character and its successors, including Iago and Lear's Fool, can be relentlessly severe and magically liberating companions in such an undertaking.

INTRODUCTION

The argument of the present book is based on a comparison of two Shakespearean figures: the Fool of *Lear* and Iago from *Othello*. Regarding the number of the obvious differences between the Fool and Iago, a question may be raised as to the validity of such an undertaking. The characters clearly embody opposite poles of behaviour and even their function may be contrasted. It is enough just to think of the Fool who always utters the truth, while Iago is the great liar and deceiver. The Fool says things that are true but difficult to accept, while Iago tells credible lies. If we leave out the character of the Fool from the play (as he was indeed left out after Shakespeare had been ironed to fit the neoclassical taste) the play may still be called *The Tragedy of King Lear*, while *Othello* without Iago is just unimaginable. The Fool is not an intriguer, he does not have a direct effect on the events, he is rather a mere commentator, while Iago is the engine of the plot in his play. Still, in spite of all these differences, there are a number of generic, dramatic and functional similarities between them that I would like to expand.

Apart from throwing light upon our ways of interpreting these two figures, my aim with such a comparison is to explore their common dramatic origin, the morality Vice figure, as well as other characters within the same generic group. In a wider context the comparison will also make it possible for us to gain new insights about the plays of the period and examine ideas that did not invite our attention because we did not have the necessary interpretative matrix for them. This matrix emerges by contextualising, on the one hand, the epistemological and representational crisis as it appeared in the culture of early modern England and, on the other hand, ideas of intellectual history and theatre history within poststructuralist theories of the sign, drama-semiotics and in general the new trends of re-reading the Shakespeare-corpus. The matrix that I use is a combination of several considerations: a historical, "archeological" approach in regarding the Vice as an inherently and uniquely complex root of the characters I examine; an understanding of Iago and the Fool as Vice-successors and thus as agents of involvement and interaction within the logic of the renaissance stage, focusing on their *effect* on the audience; an examination of the metadramatic consequences of such an involvement; as well as of theories on the epistemology and semiotics of renaissance plays and play-texts, with special emphasis on the problematisation of mimetic representation and meaning.

Within this background the comparability of Iago and the Fool will gain its validity. A contextual outlook will also come into view, in which relevant statements can be made on other – in some sense similar – contemporary characters and their ancestors. During the analysis it will emerge, on the one hand, how a specific sense of humour

typical of the Vice disappears from drama during its history, and on the other, why critics are reluctant to acknowledge this sense of humour retrospectively.

An overarching idea of the examination is the Vice figure as a way to understand and analyze a crisis that I will term a representational crisis. Thus, I base my comparison of Iago and the Fool first of all specifically on their common dramatic origin in the Vice of the morality plays. I see them function similarly in their respective dramas: they are both outsiders to the networks of the other characters, both reflecting and criticising the social and the signifying systems they are set into, but first of all – and this is what I would like to illustrate in my analysis – I see them both as *agents* of representational crisis, a crisis which concerns a disconnection between signs and their meaning, which is characterised by an experience that language seems inappropriate for dealing with reality, as well as the questionability of reality itself – not only the impossibility of making meaning, but also the absence or emptiness of reality. I will position my argument within the critical discourse and explicate my main theoretical terms in my first chapter. This is where I will give a more detailed explanation of my understanding of the term "representational crisis," and of what I ultimately intend to discuss: the way it manifests itself uniquely in tragedy. Here I would like to reflect on the main assumptions and themes of my undertaking.

Taking the Vice of the morality as a starting point for the comparison of Iago and Lear's Fool I see as fruitful and justified because in that character several traditions are merged, such as the fool figure of popular festivities, the devil character of the mystery plays, and even the seven deadly sins. The comic and evil Vice became a rather conventional type in the late moralities, and it went more or less out of fashion[5] in Elizabethan drama, leaving its traits on a number of psychologically much more complex villain characters. In my view the two Shakespearean figures feature the original "components" of the morality Vice – the already heterogeneous prototypical figure – so that these seem to be separated again in such a way that the separation allows new forms and new characters to be born, characters who employ modified dramatic functions as well. In other words, the "components" of the Vice, the fool and the devil appear in later, Shakespearean characters that originate in the Vice: the Fool of Lear and Iago from *Othello* "split" their common root, the Vice into its original "components," i.e., the fool and the devil. Obviously, these original "components" this time appear in a much more complex form, and put the original complexity or heterogeneous quality of the Vice in a new light. It is the journey into this complexity and its mapping that I embark upon with this present project.

I hope to show that no matter how distinct the Fool of Lear and Iago may seem to be, some of the essential characteristics of both are clearly detectable and inherently intermingled in this earlier figure. It seems to me that these descendants of the Vice,

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[5] As Happé has it: "...The taste for the Vice was created and used on the popular stage. Later, by the time of *Twelfth Night* or *Old Fortunatus* or *The Staple of News,* he had gone out of fashion, and this, too, is the fate of the popular theatre in general" Peter Happé, "'The Vice' and the Popular Theatre, 1547–80.," in Anthony Coleman ed. *Poetry and Drama 1570–1700* (London and New York: Methuen 1981), 13–31, 28.

who are set into a different epistemological context than the Vice of the moralities, are capable of reflecting on the problems of representational practices in society in a much more sensitive way than other characters, precisely because of the complexity of their distinct dramatic origin. It is worthwhile to examine them both from a great distance – taking them both as representatives of one type – from where their differences are diluted by their common origin, as well as from a closer perspective, and try to give explanations for their obvious differences as well.

The procedure of my investigation will be the following. In order to establish the background for comparison, in the second chapter of my study I will examine the aspects of the morality Vice that are relevant for my investigation. I will try to map out the most important issues of the critical debate concerning this figure in order to reveal some inherent contradictions within this debate. One crucial aim in introducing major assumptions concerning the connection between the Vice and the Fool will be to point out that characteristics which make the Vice resemble the popular fool or clown are treated as not representative of the Vice by most major critics of this character, surprisingly even by those who do acknowledge that there are cases when it is impossible to make a distinction between the Vice and the fool or clown. I will take issue with scholars whose understanding of the Vice disallows such complexity where the vice, fool and clown can be used as synonyms – as they certainly were in a number of cases. A number of scholars, first of all Bernard Spivack[6] have already dealt with Iago as the heir of the morality Vice. Although the Vice's traits are clearly more detectable in Iago than in Lear's Fool, I would like to stress the important element of the popular fool in the amalgam of the Vice. In order to provide a broad spectrum of examples of the type, I will include in my argument plays from a wide span of time, beginning with plays written several decades before Shakespeare's two discussed figures were created.

The two subsequent chapters focus on two different topics: Chapter Three on metadrama and Chapter Four on laughter. Each of the two chapters concentrates on features that are likely to be taken as characteristic of either Iago or the Fool respectively; however, as it will turn out, they are each fruitfully applicable to the other as well. The structure of the two chapters is similar: they both start with the characteristic to be discussed as it appears in the common root of the Fool and Iago, the Vice. Iago is the character that is more explicitly a Vice-successor; thus, in my third chapter I concentrate on his metadramatic activities that are intrinsic to a Vice, and the consequent ways he plays with the emptiness of words and shows. I will show how, surprisingly, the Fool is playing a similar game, and that, from the perspective of the structural similarity of the two figures, the relevance of the difference in the motives of their deeds – for example Iago's iniquity versus the Fool's benevolence – vanishes. While Iago is more easily recognised as metadramatic than the Fool, it is easier to see the comic or humorous side of the Fool than that of Iago. This is why I discuss the Fool first and Iago second in my fourth chapter on their comedy. The Fool's method is to take the edge off woeful

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[6] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958).

events with his grotesque humour by showing the questionability of their meaning, but the same can be said of Iago as well, despite the fact that, as I will argue, in his play tragedy is rooted precisely in the fact that meaning is proven to be questionable. I will look at the similarities and differences of the Fool and Iago and I will present an understanding of the two Shakespearean figures in which they are both pointing backward as well as forward in an epistemological context, but embodying two different possibilities for dealing with a crisis. I hope to arrive at a complex understanding of the function of these figures as two agents of representational crisis, a crisis that springs from the awareness the characters have of the ultimate defectiveness of the production of meaning. In the final chapter I will argue that the acts of the Fool and Iago are organically embedded in the world of the plays, and finally I will concentrate on the dramatic consequences of the denial of folly, as well as with the wider, philosophical and epistemological consequences of such a denial.

I have stated above that the starting point of my comparison of the two characters is that they are both successors of the Vice. As it will appear later in the paper, a number of problems arise in defining this character. There is another problematic point regarding their common root: how far should one go back in time in presenting the common origin? It seems to me that the furthest one can get is the archetypical trickster. Although with such an insight in my case I am left with little specific explanation about Iago and the Fool as agents of representational crisis in their given context, seeing them both as tricksters does give an explanation on some of their functional parallels. In his book about subversive Shakespearean characters, Richard Hillman discusses subversive practices in Shakespearean drama, and among other examples (which are not exclusively characters in plays) includes both Iago and Lear's Fool in his analysis.[7] Although his subject goes beyond trickster-characters, he uses the figure of the archetypal trickster as a conceptual anchor. His way of thinking allows me to discuss the two figures and their comedy in the dramas based on the Vice in such a way that I place them outside a moral framework. This motif is fruitful for my understanding because I find it insufficient to take Iago's wicked nature and the Fool's less wicked, perhaps benign, nature as an explanation for the difference in their trickery. With the trickster as common denominator we do not have to make artificial distinctions between playful villains who play in the service of harmony and those who play in order to divide and destroy.[8] I will show that even if it is not the trickster but the Vice that is regarded as the common denominator of Iago and Lear's Fool, as in my approach, this does not have to imply a necessarily moral explanation of their behaviour.

As I have mentioned about the method of the investigation, in my approach I combine a historically oriented view (the development of the morality Vice) with a semiotic perspective (the function of these characters in generating and reflecting on the very idea of meaning within the play) - and I employ this method in establishing both the similarities and the differences between the two figures. My exploration aims at acquiring,

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7 Richard Hillman, *Shakespearean Subversions.* (London and New York: Routledge: 1992), 8.

8 Hillman quotes McAlindon who makes this distinction, Hillman, 11-2.

in Timothy Reiss' phrase, a "historically oriented view not of the meaning of individual tragedies but of what tragedy does."[9] I take a similar approach in examining the two characters: I am looking at the fact of their being embedded in an earlier tradition, and in this light at their potentials – what they do to the audience if these potentials are exploited – even if a contemporary audience did not consciously perceive them in a way that our perspective allows us to do. I try to understand the characters historically, by discussing their dramatic context, but I explain their function from a semiotically informed perspective. To put it differently, if Reiss concentrates on what tragedy does, these characters seem not only to be aware of what signs do, but to stage that knowledge consciously. I see them as embedded in a specific epistemological context and thus having a unique possibility to reflect on drama and play, and more precisely to reflect on the defects and problems of representation. Certainly, the original "productions" of these plays cannot be reconstructed, but, based on the texts and their interrelatedness, I will make performance-oriented semiotic explanations[10] through trying to excavate the way these dramas may have worked, explaining them with the vocabulary provided by semiotics. My aim is to illustrate that the texts do allow solutions which support my idea of Iago and the Fool as agents of this representational crisis. I claim by no means that they were so *understood* by a contemporary audience, but that such is the logic according to which they *worked.* The re-examination of the morality Vice serves two purposes in this context: on the one hand, the grounding of a thorough and new interpretation of these two figures, including their comparison and contrast, and on the other hand, by relying on the comparison of Iago and the Fool as Vice-successors, the understanding of the morality Vice's transformations in a wider epistemological context, and seeing his transformations as symptomatic of an epistemological shift. Although such an examination is not within the scope of the present project, once the Vice is re-interpreted, one could revise systematically other Shakespearean characters that are traditionally understood as Vice-successors.

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[9] Timothy Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 25.

[10] Such an approach is characteristic of the works of Alan Dessen, Robert Weimann or Attila Kiss. My indebtedness to the works and ideas of Attila Kiss cannot be adequately reflected in the individual references to his work.

CHAPTER 1

SHAKESPEARE'S DIALECTICAL TRAGEDY AND THE CRUMBLING CODE OF REPRESENTATION

I would like to outline three contexts that are essential for my argument, and in this outline my basic theoretical assumptions will also unfold. The first two contexts I intend to delineate are the epistemological background and the place of theatre and representation against this background. As for the ultimate concern regarding the time period dealt with in the present study, it is both easy and difficult to define it. Easy, because the two central figures featuring in two Shakespearean tragedies were born as particular characters within a timeframe that is possible to define with little problems: the two dramas were written at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, within a few years. And it is difficult, since my examination of these figures is done in the light of the changes the Vice character has gone through, and these transformations are folded into a larger issue of epistemological change. I admit that the idea of an epistemological change is a highly problematic one because of its elusiveness and debatable nature. Still, since I am convinced that it can help me to give an account of how and why certain dramatic types or figures entered the stage at one point of the sixteenth century and left it at another in the seventeenth, it is the more compelling to deal with it.

I will introduce the term representational crisis in more detail to characterise what I see contemporary drama was capable of expressing and reflecting on. Outlining the third context will allow me to present my focus, and to position my own argument within the discourse on representation and its problems in Shakespearean drama.

1.1 The question of epistemological crisis

The first context of my analysis is the epistemological background, more specifically the period of dynamic epistemological change and crisis at the turn of the 16th–17th centuries. Providing such a broad context reflecting on whole epochs and epistemes, and an analysis itself that deals with dramas and dramatic characters from such a wide span of time, may harbour pitfalls of imprecision and generalisation. Still, as it will appear from my analysis, such an approach can throw new light on the development of the Vice and its later Shakespearean successors precisely because it allows us to see how similar devices and techniques applied by these characters have significantly different effects in a changed epistemological context.

It may appear to some that since Shakespeare's active period is not much more than two decades, in this approach all his dramas belong to a single episteme, and thus it is impossible to account for the differences between his early and mature works. The dramas in my narrow focus are, indeed, the ones that are traditionally regarded as the "masterpieces of Shakespeare's maturity," but from my perspective many differences

between the early and the mature works are irrelevant exactly because they belong to the same episteme or rather, to the same crisis of it. I have chosen this broad, epistemic perspective because I find a revolutionary possibility in drama, specifically tragedy in the age to reflect on the peculiar epistemological situation, and this possibility can be very well grasped in the comparison of the two characters discussed, with special consideration of their Vice-heritage.

My basic assumption is that there has been a major epistemological shift at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century that brought about the gradual appearance and solidification of a new way of thinking, characterised by the achievements of the scientific revolution, the reformation, the rationalism of the rising bourgeois class and the early signs of the Cartesian understanding of the self. These changes can be regarded as contributing to the emergence of a radically new episteme, radically new compared to the Middle Ages, and actually underlining the similarities of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in spite of their diversities. A consequence of the epistemological change, what might be called an epistemological crisis, is in my view an essential context of English Renaissance drama – a period in which plays themselves address topical issues of truth and illusion, as well as ways of representation, or the possibilities of knowledge and meaning. In this sense the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century is an "in between" territory. Obviously, any issue of an epistemic nature, be it even a major crisis, would be experienced and recognised unevenly. Most probably we rightly suspect that for many people there was no "crisis" at all. I will, however, give examples in the present chapter of contemporary writings where I see this crisis manifest itself. I wish to illustrate what I mean by epistemological crisis, uncertainty and change in order to provide a backdrop to the way I see this same crisis expressed uniquely in tragedy.

As said above, issues of epistemic change cannot be but experienced unevenly by individuals. If we see connections between selected phenomena that may be regarded as individual manifestations of a more general crisis, we will not arrive to the reconstructed experience of the late-renaissance man, but a cultural construct of our own time. Still, it is exactly our contemporary perspective that grants us the possibility to see such connections between seemingly isolated phenomena. And the connection seen between the diverse events of the late Renaissance helped intellectual historians of the 20th century to build this construct. Before I take a look at excerpts from non-dramatic texts that may be understood as reflecting on the epistemological crisis of the age, let me introduce how the idea of the changing episteme was discussed and constructed by scholars at the initial stages of this understanding.[11]

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[11] Later descriptions of the same idea that Shakespeare's tragedies are both products and accounts of an epistemological crisis include the work of Alasdair Macintyre, in whose interpretation Hamlet is struggling with an epistemological crisis: the schemas of interpretation collapse, and any such schema becomes questionable. One of the signs of such a crisis is "that its accustomed ways for relating *seems* and *is* begin to break down". Alasdair Macintyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in Joyce Appleby et al. eds., *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 357–67.

The idea that there are several common characteristics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that can be opposed to the period following the Renaissance was addressed in detail in the 1940s and 1950s, when dealing with the history of ideas was a widespread phenomenon in Western cultural history. Hyram Haydn, for example, has convincingly shown that a broad perspective on the Renaissance allows us to see the connection or even similarity between Luther and Montaigne, or Luther and Machiavelli, namely their similar fight of disreputing the scholastic-medieval-renaissance etc. ideology.[12] Such disreputing resulted in what can be considered a crisis, or in Haydn's words "distrust" of the attainability of truth by man, and a consequent insecurity that manifested itself in various cultural and social practices. As Haydn has it,

> religious fideism and philosophical scepticism, occultism of various sorts and radical empiricism, an assertive individualism and a conviction of man's utter dependence on God – these and other superficially paradoxical allies consorted in the common distrust of the efficacy of man's speculative mind to grasp truth, and of his natural reason to come by virtue.[13]

The end of Haydn's "scholastic-medieval-renaissance etc. ideology" is discussed by Theodore Spencer as a background of Shakespearean drama in his book originally published in 1942.[14] His description of "The Renaissance Conflict" is at several points parallel to Haydn's discussion of the Counter-Renaissance, including the itemization of the major events that contributed to the shattering of the earlier model. These events considered crucial are first of all the Copernican revolution, Montaigne's ideas on natural order and men, and Machiavelli's revolutionary ideas on ethics presented in *The Prince*. Spencer claims that great tragedies are written in ages when conventional patterns of belief and behaviour are violated. The convention and its violation may be, for example, social or religious. In Shakespeare's age the violation was particularly destructive, since it included all the spheres of culture and convention. Spencer gives an expressive account of this matter at the end of his chapter on the Renaissance Conflict:

> In Shakespeare's day the convention included everything – it was the whole inherited picture of man in the system of the universe, of Nature and of state; it was religious, moral and social; it was a vast inclusive pattern of order. The violation of this order [...] was being felt everywhere at the end of the sixteenth century, and it was a violation which when it occurred in any one part, was felt throughout the whole structure.[15]

The Copernican revolution is a highly expressive example among the ones in which the crisis unfolded, because it involved not merely a different understanding of the system of the universe, but entailed severe implications concerning the position of man and his world within this new system, and it also entailed more general epistemological questions on the possibility of knowledge about the universe and man. The shock the Co-

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[12] Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), Introduction.

[13] Haydn, 83.

[14] Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: Collier Books, 1967).

[15] Spencer, 50.

pernican turn created shattered not only the physical, but as significantly the spiritual universe as well. A reaction on Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus* by Nicolaus Raimarius Ursus suggestively shows the more general consequences of discrediting the old system and introducing a radically new way of seeing the world. As Ursus's example shows, the effect of such turn may be that the very possibility of belief becomes uncertain, which in turn results in an overall epistemological instability. According to Ursus, Copernicus "transposed and converted the places of the sun and the earth...By an act of imagination he, so to speak, transferred and relocated the earth, together with the air surrounding it and the moon that rides upon the air, to the place of the sun."[16] The reaction of Ursus is that he ridicules the whole profession by claiming that for him it is no problem to come up with ever new and better hypotheses every day. He displays a radically destructive and sceptical attitude,[17] in Ronald Levao's words a "corrosive scepticism, a Pyrrhonian game of infinite regression that, in doubting the foundation beneath foundations, subverts the stability of any intellectual construction."[18] Kepler in his response to Ursus's treatise tries to argue for some sort of epistemological stability against the subversive claims of Ursus.

> For in architecture the builder is content to lay down foundations below the ground for the future mass of the house, and he does not worry that the ground below might shift or cave in. Just so in the business of geometry the first founders were not, like the Pyrrhonians who followed later, so obtuse as to want to doubt everything and to lay hold on nothing upon which, as a foundation, sure and acknowledged by all, they would wish to build the rest. Those things that were certain and acknowledged by all they used, therefore, to call by the special name "axioms," that is to say, opinions which had authority with all.[19]

The beauty of Kepler's response is that while he needs to deal with the problem of "foundation" in order to argue against Ursus, he cannot come up with any absolute authority either. He uses a common comparison of the period between hypotheses and the foundation of a house,[20] and although he does not say explicitly that the "axioms," i.e., claims that have authority with all, at the foundation of a construct might eventually turn out to be false, in his parallel the builder decides *"not to worry* that the ground below might shift or cave in" (my italics). Both Ursus and Kepler are embedded in the

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[16] The English translation of extracts from Ursus's *Tractatus* and Kepler's *Apologia* against Ursus *(Apologia pro Tychone contra Ursum)* are available in Nicholas Jardine, *The Birth of History and Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 41–57 and 134–207.

[17] It seems that Ursus had indeed become disappointed with astronomy, since by the end of his career he lost the favour of the king in the Prague court precisely for claiming that astronomy is mere cheating. Ursus's attitude was not an isolated and singular one. As Jardine argues, "Ursus is an exponent of a sceptical position widely adopted by astronomers of the period". Jardine, 37.

[18] Ronald Levao, "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," *Representations* 40 (1992): 1–32, 11.

[19] Jardine, 137.

[20] Jardine notes (137) that this comparison was included in a passage that was used as an elementary Greek text.

context of epistemological doubts of the late-Renaissance, they need to address the issue of the possibility and certainty of knowledge, however Kepler, by admitting but stepping over the sceptical challenge, may be seen as paving the way to a new episteme and a belief in the absolute authority of objective science.

A notion such as an epistemological change, or an epistemological crisis is difficult to nail down in general, but if we compare phenomena that are further away from each other on the sequence of the change, it becomes much easier to understand the concept. If we have a look at the ways the logic of signification worked in different historical periods, and consider how radically it could change, the situation becomes much clearer. As I will present below using the example of semioticians' approaches to Shakespeare, scholars dealing with semiotics or questions of representation do think within the broad frame of epistemological contexts. The reason for this I see in the fact that opposing systems are much more clearly detectable regarding the logic of representation or the way systems of signification *worked,* compared to the myriad of social and cultural data within which it is so difficult to perceive clear tendencies, let alone epistemic shifts. Taking the most obvious theatrical example, it is beyond question that there must be a characteristic and different view of reality and its representability behind the signifying logic of a ritualistic, Medieval, allegorical theatre, compared to the other system to which it gradually gave way: a completely new, realistic and photographic-type theatre, the centre of which is illusion. Renaissance emblematic theatre is historically *in between* these two models and can be interpreted from both ends, exactly because it displays a mixture of elements from both systems, able to be interpreted from both perspectives, as I will also illustrate in the forthcoming analyses. In my view Shakespearean theatre, being at the threshold of an old and an emerging new system not only in theatrical but also in epistemic terms, does something similar to Ursus's reflections on the problem whether knowledge about the celestial spheres is possible or whether knowledge at all is available for man. I will show how the plays themselves reflect on the questionability of any foundation, including the one that is called reality.

Michel Foucault deals directly with the different logic of signification within the different epistemes.[21] The terms he uses are the Renaissance versus the Classical episteme. While I rely on his systematization and the respective characteristics he singles out as features of the representational logic of the Renaissance as opposed to the Classical episteme, I use the terms Medieval/Renaissance versus Early-Modern to make clear, on the one hand, that the earlier is the one which enfolds the similarities between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the common features of these two are opposed to the succeeding epoch and, on the other hand, to emphasise that the succeeding epoch provided the essential ground for Modernism. Foucault imagines the two systems with no transitory period between them. However, for me the crisis that is rooted partly in the gradual disintegration of the old system and partly in the gradual emergence of the new is of crucial importance, because it allows the *self-reflection on* and *questioning of* the

[21] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), esp. 3–71.

epistemic assumptions of a given moment in history – such as the above example, the controversy fuelled by the Copernican turn.

Foucault's model is particularly useful for my investigation because, as I have mentioned, he too discusses the characteristic issues of representation of the respective models. Until the end of the 16th century, the end of what he calls the Renaissance model, knowledge was constituted based on the logic of resemblance, and representation was posited as a form of repetition, based on that resemblance:

> Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts, it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them.[22]

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, similitude ceases to be the form of knowledge. It will be *order,* based on *identity* and *difference,* that will constitute knowledge:

> This relation of *Order* is as essential to the Classical age as the relation to *Interpretation* was to the Renaissance. And just as interpretation in the sixteenth century, with its superimposition of a semiology upon a hermeneutics, was essentially a knowledge based upon similitude, so the ordering of things by means of signs constitutes all empirical forms of knowledge as knowledge based upon identity and difference.[23]

From Foucault's argument it appears that in the previous model a sign is intrinsically bound to what it "refers to." In other words, there is a *motivated* relationship between the two, in Foucault's words the sign is "bound to what it marks by the solid and discreet bonds of resemblance or affinity."[24] In the latter model, on the other hand, a new logic occurs, and here the signifying element will have no content, no function, and no determination other than what it represents. It is because of this transparency of the signifying element to the signified that Foucault suggests that "[f]rom an extreme point of view, one might say that language in the classical era does not exist."[25] Indeed, the idea may be applied to my earlier example: language is as transparent to what it expresses as the illusory reality in photographic theatre is regarded as a perfect replica of the empirical one.

The recognition of the instability of the relationship between signifier and signified is reflected on by Montaigne. In his *Essays* he gave voice many times to his deep scepticism towards the world view he inherited. He begins his essay *Of Glory* with the crisis that reveals itself in the practice of representation, with the very problem of the unmotivated relationship between word and thing: "There is both name, and the thing: the name, is a voice which noteth, and signifieth the thing: the name, is neither part of thing

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22 Foucault, 17.
23 Foucault, 57.
24 Foucault, 58.
25 Foucault, 79.

or of substance: it is a stranger-piece joined to the thing, and from it."[26] The essay discusses virtue, and says that a heroic action is sometimes performed in the hope of fame, in which case the act that is supposed to reflect virtue does not correspond to what is seemingly represents. In other words the relationship between the signified (virtue) and signifier (the heroic act) is a deceptive one. And as it appears from the first sentence of the essay, Montaigne displays a general distrust towards language, since he suggests that words characteristically do not belong to the things they signify, there is no organic relationship between them (contrary to a preceding system that is based on resemblance); a word here is a *stranger-piece joined to the thing.* The significance of Montaigne's position within a historical sequence appears nicely when his ideas are compared to Bacon's, since Bacon too addressed the problem of representation and the unreliability of language, the customary code. When talking about literary language in *The Advancement of Learning,*[27] although he frequently seems to agree with Sidney's *Apology,* Bacon demonstates a certain distrust towards poesy. It seems that he is of the opinion that mere mental representations can be contrasted with the true nature of things. He discusses within the same train of thought Poesy Representative, i.e., drama, and at the end just drops in passing: "But it is not good to stay too long in the theatre."[28] Still in the *Advancement,* when addressing the issue of "false appearances that are imposed upon us by words," Bacon is to some extent comparable to Montaigne, based on their similar distrust of words. Words are deceitful, they seem to be impossible to govern or use properly, because they may betray us: "...although we think we govern our words [...], yet certain it is that words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgement...."[29] Bacon thus explores the same issue, but it is not the problem of deceitful words that is in his focus, rather the solution to the problem, a reliable system of codes, the one of the Mathematician. This turns out from the continuation of the above quotation: "so as it is almost necessary in all controversies and disputations to imitate the wisdom of the Mathematicians, in setting down in the very beginning the definitions of our words and terms, that others may know how to accept and understand them..." This is why Bacon, contrary to Montaigne, does not exemplify the crisis of representation, because although he too is aware of the problems of language, he reveals the problem, gives a diagnosis and already makes a gesture towards a new ideal, the system of Mathematics, a reliable language to deal with reality, a language that fits within the emerging episteme.

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[26] Michel de Montaigne, *Essays. John Florio's Translation* (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), 560.

[27] Francis Bacon, *A critical edition of the major works.* Brian Vickers ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 186–9.

[28] Bacon, 188.

[29] Bacon, 228.

1.2 Dialectical Tragedy: epistemic change in theatre

"Perplexed in the extreme"
Othello (5.2.47)

I have mentioned above that I intend to introduce three contexts which help me approach my specific topic, the comparison of Iago and the Fool. The second issue concentrates on an understanding of tragedy, and particularly understanding its specific function within the given epistemological setting. In other words, I wish to describe the relationship of this mentioned context and drama – especially tragedy – of the age. In my argument I am deeply indebted to and relying upon the ideas of Timothy Reiss about the function of Elizabethan tragedy within a dynamic epistemological frame.

In an age where the traditional and accessible modes of knowledge are undermined by fundamental doubts, the same doubts are continuously negotiated in the outputs of social-cultural production. As we have seen, one such vivid example is Montaigne's understanding of the relationship between acts and deeds, words and things, signifiers and signifieds. Since drama by its very nature deals with representation, it is full of such instances. Great tragedy is traditionally considered to be the medium of expressing doubts, painful dilemmas and unfathomable questions. The focus on such issues may open up unexplored perspectives; as Spencer says in the passage quoted above on great tragedy, great tragedy is about the violation of conventional patterns of thinking, and in Shakespeare's case it included an overall violation of all the spheres of culture and convention. What I find important for my focus is to stress that the resulting crisis of such an overall violation is not merely about doubts concerning the ways we understand things; it is not only that perhaps we misunderstood the ways our social, moral, religious etc. setups work. The crisis is also about the possibility or rather the impossibility of *approach,* i.e., the defect of the tool that serves us dealing with things, the impossibility of making meaning. This is the impossibility – a tragic impossibility in a curious sense of the word, as we will see – that I term "representational crisis." It resides partly in what Debora Shuger calls "struggle for meaning": "Renaissance works noticeably lack a systematic coherence, their discontinuities instead exposing the struggle for meaning that fissures the last premodern generation."[30] But it is also more than the "struggle for meaning," since this struggle to a certain degree implies the hope in the possibility of success. My understanding of the representational crisis, as it will unfold from my interpretations, includes not only the realisation that the ways knowledge is produced are questionable, that the approach, the method, the language – the tools of exploration – are inappropriate, but also that the supposed reality this knowledge tried to explore seems to fade away. Once the tool to understand it, to reveal its order in an intelligible way is proven untenable, reality becomes questionable itself, revealed as absent, empty of any potential meaning to be explored – as in Ursus's view reality

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[30] Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 16.

seemed to disappear among the myriads of acceptable and different hypotheses he could daily come up with.

I would like to expand the notion of the representational crisis and expose this "struggle for meaning" with the help of Timothy Reiss's study entitled *Tragedy and Truth*. As for the positioning of renaissance drama in an epistemological context, the parallel Reiss draws between the flourishing of Athenian and of renaissance drama is highly revealing:

> In Greece, tragedy is part of a general development toward a particular order of rationality. Prior to the 'Hesiodic rupture,' as Marcel Detienne has termed it, the Greek would have lived in a world of analogies, of sympathies between the material, the divine and the human in many ways comparable to the multiple discourse of the European Middle Ages, indicated by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* under the name 'Renaissance'.[31]

Reiss gives a crucial role to tragedy in these periods of epistemological shifts, because there it performs "a specifiable role in the establishment of the episteme of analysis and referentiality."

Before I introduce briefly how we are to understand this role of tragedy, I would like to reflect on why it is tragedy of all the other discourses that is so specific. As already mentioned, theatre is frequently considered as a place where issues of representation become more explicit than elsewhere. This is no surprise, since theatre is intrinsically about presenting, depicting or standing for things that are not in direct reach, but are depicted, made present by the play. In Jonathan Baldo's words "In the theatre, literature's capacity for representation seems extended, the degree of 'standing for' seems heightened."[32] Reiss uses the process of "coming to signify" epitomised by tragedy, although it may be characteristic of all the discourses of a given society. Still, he finds tragedy specific because in his view "[t]ragedy makes it possible for its companion discourses to take the possibility of referential truth as a given."[33]

One essence of Reiss's theory is a differentiation between tragedy and tragic. In this system tragedy would be the ordered discourse that deals with the tragic, which is a "dimension of life," and is by definition inexpressible; it is "the mark, the presence there of chaos, of the impossibility of order."[34] But it is exactly tragedy that names the tragic as tragic, that speaks of the tragic as some extradiscursive reality: "The tragic [...] is an extrapolation from the naming that occurs through the discourse, tragedy."[35] This is the way that tragedy, within the discourse which seeks to create a referential truth, is capable of grasping and enclosing a certain "absence of significance." This absence of significance "may well be common to all discursive acts at the 'inception' of the discourse making such acts possible, and that renders *im*possible, before such particular ordering,

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31 Reiss, 18.

32 Jonathan Baldo, *The Unmasking of Drama. Contested Representation in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 12.

33 Reiss, 37.

34 Reiss, 16.

35 Reiss, 11.

the meaningfulness of any such discourse." Reiss's argument is that in the moment of a shift in the discursive order that rules a society, tragedy makes this new class of discourse possible. Tragedy in his view shows "the manner in which that discourse which seeks to create a referential truth overcomes all questioning (as to how, for example, it can in any sense whatever come to mean anything outside itself - and communicate such meaning."[36]

For the purpose of focusing on Shakespearean drama, Reiss's distinction between two kinds of tragedy during the Renaissance is particularly useful. The two types of theatre are the dialectical and the analytical. The former is the one that "seeks to draw the spectator almost physically into action, to cause the condition of his life to be fused momentarily with what is carried out not so much in front of him as with his participation." This, he says, is represented by Shakespeare, Alexandre Hardy, and Lope de Vega. In their tragedies there is "a play of theatrical elements, of interference of several semiotic systems."[37] The other, analytical type of theatre has no such semiotic interference, and is the one where the spectator is not drawn directly into the action, the conditions of his life do not mingle with the action going on on stage, the spectator is "involved" in the action to the extent that he may identify with the dramatic situation or a character. This is the type of theatre "in whose terms Shakespeare, for example, will be recuperated by neoclassical critics."[38]

1.3 "If a code is crumbling..."

At this point it is possible to clarify why I feel the need to introduce the term "representational crisis." I accept Reiss's definition of an episteme, namely that it is "that accumulation of discourses whose process of producing meaning characterizes a sociocultural domain at a given time and place."[39] Everything that connects to the doubt about the outcome of the process producing meaning, everything that makes clear its limits, everything that problematises its possibility or makes its validity questionable is a matter of an epistemological crisis. As for my understanding of representational crisis, it is an element and consequence of the epistemological one, and appears when a self-reflexive discourse is commenting on the problems that arise in the process of accumulating discourses, as the failure of the method, of discourse itself, in the very mechanism of making meaning. At certain periods in time, as in the Renaissance, tragedy is an agent of searching for truth. And "[t]here [in the Renaissance] one can follow a gradual *enfolding* of a particular trace within discourse of the impossibility of signifying, of ordering something supposed as outside it."[40] This trace of discourse reflecting on the impossibility of signifying is what I term representational crisis.

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36 Reiss, 3.
37 Reiss, 4.
38 Reiss, 5.
39 Reiss, 2.
40 Reiss, 36–7.

This definition of "representational crisis" reveals that my understanding of the notion "representation" is quite different from understanding it as *mimesis*, since mimesis implies an imitation of something outside of it. I cannot identify with understanding representation as mimesis because it contradicts one of my basic assumptions: in a period of epistemological crisis as described above, the imitation of reality becomes impossible if we accept that the solid concept of reality itself is shaken. Thus, representation is not a mimetic reproduction of a reality that is outside, but rather a struggle to create one within. This double meaning of representation is inherent in the root of the term, "represent" as well, which appeared in England in the 14th century: on the one hand it meant "making present to the mind and the sense," even in the sense of presenting oneself to some person of authority, and on the other "standing for something that is not present."[41] The first meaning would allow synonyms like "learn," or "gain knowledge of," where representation is the way we get in touch with elements of reality, while in the second, representation is a substitute for some element of reality that is out of reach – in their advancing and distancing, the two meanings are almost opposites of each other.

Representation in the first sense understood radically already implies the impossibility of a reality unmediated by representation, thus foreclosing the possibility of mimesis.[42] The same problem is addressed by Attila Kiss and formulated as the duality of photographic mimesis versus metadrama: "Dramatic art either suppresses the representational insufficiency arising from the gap [between signifier and signified] in mimesis, or foregrounds it in metadrama, and involves the spectator in a game where borders merge and identities come into play."[43]

Reiss's term "dialectical theatre," tragedy where what Reiss calls "a certain absence of significance" has not been enclosed entirely, is perhaps similar to the notion of Kenneth Burke who says for *Hamlet* that it is *essayistic* (subjective) and is in opposition to another way of thinking that he calls *dramatic* (objective). In this sense "The essayist, in contrast to the dramatist, can dispense with a maximum of certainty in ideology. If a

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[41] Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 266.

[42] An interesting explanation of the term is given by Felperin, who maintains the notion *mimesis*, but says that the imitation it refers to is not the imitation of a reality, but of previous art. Thus his understanding is close to mine, because in the end representation will mean not "standing for" any reality directly, but will be a constructed view of it, an understanding of a reality that would otherwise be unattainable: "What art does manifestly imitate is previous art or the artistic constituent of human life without which human life would be literally inconceivable and unimaginable. This is implied whenever we use the term 'representation' as a synonym for mimesis, since there is no reason why life should have to be *re*presented if it could be presented directly. It is the mediating convention of presentation, which is art, that is presented again and again in continually altered forms." Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Representation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 39–40.

[43] Attila Kiss, *The Semiotics of Revenge* (Szeged: Department of English "József Attila" University, 1995), 69.

code is crumbling he can, with all the convenience of the world, say so."[44] The reason Burke feels the need to term this attitude essayistic even in a drama, is perhaps that drama gradually developed in a direction where such a self-reflective questioning of the code disappeared, or at least was not customary.

Thus the definition Reiss gives for tragedy, according to which "[t]ragedy is a discursive process that creates order and makes it possible to ascribe meaning to that order,"[45] is actually *revealed* and reflected on by examples of dialectical theatre itself, which is capable of creating a new reality as not seen before, via its power of addressing epistemological questions and (re)arranging epistemological boundaries. In later periods and in analytical theatre, tragedies merely enact the already established epistemological order; they do not work as original interpretations of a reality outside discourse, but imagine reality within, and follow the truth of that order. Consequently, when I am interested in dialectical theatre, I see my task in detecting not only the kind of reality these dramas attempt to create, but rather what they say about the methods and tools of creating it, about how reality is *manufactured*.[46]

A major inference about Shakespearean tragedy based on Reiss's theory on the difference between tragedy and tragic, and the creation of the latter by the former is the following. If it is indeed the "analytico-referential" discourse that is being formed in Shakespeare's time precisely through the plays of Shakespeare and his intellectually adventurous contemporaries, what they wrote are not proper tragedies, in the sense that the tragic as something outside discourse has not been created yet. In other words, there is *no* Shakespearean tragedy proper, because a major element of tragedy is missing: the dignity of the idea that the tragic that belongs to real life with all its anguish and torment is encapsulated by the tragedy as the discourse about it. And the reason for this is that a play ("tragedy") as *life* and tragedy as *discourse about life* are not yet clearly separated. In other words, the "source" of tragedy, the tragic experience, the experience of the absence of meaning is not encapsulated securely within a play that can be watched and contemplated upon by the spectator from a safe distance: his life is fused with the unresolved cruxes and uncertainties pried into by the play.

1.4 Representational crisis in Shakespeare

It is clear by now that I rely heavily on a tradition that is influenced by the history of ideas, when delineating the background against which I deal with the issues of the representational crisis and the ways it manifests itself in semiotic terms. The history of ideas as an approach is far from being significant today in mainstream Shakespeare criticism. Still, there are contemporary scholars, representatives of influential schools who, like

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[44] Quoted by Baldo, 84.

[45] Reiss, 17.

[46] This is, of course, to say, that representation itself is a culturally produced discursive version of reality, a sort of fiction, which understanding is one of the semiotic/philosophical implications of those poststructuralist theories of meaning and signification that are in the focus of current cultural theories of the post-modern.

Jonathan Dollimore, a representative of cultural materialism, consider that a major context for understanding the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries is exactly that this drama was a response to a crisis, and that "certain Jacobean tragedies disclose the very process of historical transition which brings them into being."[47]

Taking into consideration that the different practices of signification, if compared, can serve as very tangible examples of epistemic changes, it is perhaps not surprising that within Shakespeare criticism it is scholars dealing with semiotics or questions of representation who like to regard the dramas within a broad epistemological context. Alessandro Serpieri, for example, talks about a crisis between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries as a consequence of the conflict between different world models, between a classical-medieval-renaissance heritage and the modern age.[48] Another scholar, Franco Moretti, puts the emphasis not on the clash of two systems but on the crisis of a previously dominant one, claiming that "[a]t the bottom of English tragedy is nothing less than the negation and dismantling of the Elizabethan world-picture."[49] At the background of such semiotic investigations of the dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries there is a strong reliance on the Russian formalist school, particularly the semiotician Jurij Lotman, and his modelling of the semiotic modalities of cultures.[50] Lotman differentiates between a symbolic and a syntagmatic model. As Serpieri has it, the two models reflect "two distinct visions of language itself as the primary modelling system of a culture: *motivated* language versus *arbitrary* language."[51] Language is motivated in a system where the words belong intrinsically to the things they signify, where signifier and signified are not separated, but are elements within a vast organic system, and according to the logic of resemblance belong together and reflect each other within this system – this is also how Foucalt describes the system he calls Medieval. On the others side of the epistemic divide, as we have seen, for Montaigne language is arbitrary because there is no intrinsic relationship between signifier and signified, and as a consequence, what the signifier seems to imply may not even be there: although a heroic act is interpreted as the manifestation of virtue, it may not necessarily be a result of it.

In the past decades such a crisis worked as an assumption of several studies exploring the early modern period. An exciting volume of collected essays titled *Refiguring Mimesis* has been published on the same question in early modern literature in general, in which the term "crisis of representation" is a central concern, and is taken for granted in rela-

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[47] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8.

[48] Alessandro Serpieri, "Reading the signs: toward a semiotics of Shakespearean drama," in John Drakakis ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 125.

[49] Franco Moretti, "Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken For Wonders. Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 48.

[50] Jurij Lotman, "Problems in the Typology of Cultures," in D. P. Lucid ed., *Soviet Semiotics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 214–20.

[51] Serpieri, 126.

tion to the era.[52] Although I have no knowledge of anybody using the term "representational crisis" systematically within a Shakespearean context in the strict sense of the meaning I described above in 1.2, as it will turn out below, others have already dealt with similar issues in Shakespearean drama, namely, with the crumbling code that is revealed in the plays. It seems to me that there are two basic ways of addressing the issue of representation, and the approach to some extent depends on an understanding of mimesis. Critics who claim that "mimesis is mimesis *of* something, or it is not mimesis,"[53] quite obviously will not see the ambiguities of a struggle for creating meaning in Shakespearean drama that I ascribe to the plays. Much closer to my approach are scholars who do see systems of signification questioned in and by the dramas themselves – as I have noted, this is exactly what I consider as a manifestation of the representational crisis. Such scholars include Howard Felperin and Jonathan Baldo, who both see that a critical self-reflection on representation can be detected in Shakespearean plays, which is a consequence of changing practices of representation in the age, in the context of a larger cultural and epistemic shift. Felperin in his admirable book, *Shakespearean Representation,* outlines a pattern of Shakespearean drama where the understanding of plays is strongly determined by an intermingling of two facts: one, that the dramas are embedded in a representational context still strongly defined by medieval drama, and two, that plays are at the same time our contemporaries, approachable with our modern notions of the individual, his or her psychological motivations, even existential indeterminacy. He admits both an archaeological approach trying to resolve the problems of tragedies in the morality tradition, as well as a "romantic, or modernist, or even characterological" approach, no matter how remote the composition of the dramas examined was from us in time. Representatives of the former method (e.g., Spivack) see the tragedies as displaying a strong medieval dramatic heritage, where this heritage to a significant extent defines the drama, which is sometimes reduced to being seen as the repetition of the prototype. Critics employing the latter approach, like Coleridge, treat the dramatic characters as real people, and the dramas as autonomous pieces without artistic precedent. In Felperin's view the tragedies inherently display these two possibilities precisely because they are "structures which can never quite reunite with their own dramatic models nor leave those models definitely behind."[54] The interplay of an older system of representation and its constant questioning, which makes the plays modern, contributes to a "truer, more austere mimesis,"[55] exactly because in this way the outdatedness of the old system is made explicit, but that system is never completely repudiated.

According to Felperin, the heart of Shakespearean tragedy is the way sign systems coexist: compared to the received, morality mode, the other is a departure from the

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[52] As the editors themselves claim in the opening of the Introduction, "the early modern period is characterised by a crises of representational practice". Jonathan Holmes and Adrian Streete eds. *Refiguring Mimesis* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005), 1.

[53] A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis, Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), 182.

[54] Felperin, 87.

[55] Felperin, 102.

older in direction to present life. The same coexistence exhibits at the same time a discrepancy between forms of prior art versus life. It appears from Felperin's argument that he does see here an attempt and a possibility of representing life within tragedy, an attempt to try to find more adequate ways of representation in order to reach a "truer and most austere mimesis." The way he imagines the older and the new systems, their interplay, their coexistence and mutual questioning of each other, is in fact very close to my understanding of the representational crisis, since in my view, too, the dramas express the untenability of the old system. Still, I do not see a possibility for "truer mimesis" in them, because the ultimate problem is not the demystification of the old model, but rather the possibility of any model of representation, embedded in the recognition of the illusory nature of what is regarded as reality.

Thus, if this dynamism of the two systems does contribute to a representation that is truer to life, in my opinion the subject of this truer representation has to be precisely the untenability of the old system, which does not contain or express any other "reality." Still, in spite of the fact that at this point I disagree with Felperin, because I see more cynicism in this coexistence than a solution towards a new and more adequate mimesis, I perfectly agree with him on another matter. This concerns what he says about the way the tragedies exploit the coexistence of binary opposites, such as morality versus madness, meaning versus absurdity and accommodation versus disaccommodation: the old one is continually discredited by the new one; nevertheless, it is never completely left behind.

Jonathan Baldo in the foreword to his book *The Unmasking of Drama* states the following: "The tragedies stretching from *Hamlet* to *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* constitute English Renaissance tragedy's most strenuous attempts to unmask its representational practices and to penetrate its ordering principles."[56] This is exactly what makes the dramas I intend to discuss so interesting for my examination of the representational crisis: these texts offer an example of critical self-reflection on their own practices of signification. Baldo's idea is that "the shifting structures of Shakespearean representation belong to a larger history of the concept and practice of representation."[57] He, too, does not deal with the question of representation as mimesis or the imitation of reality, since the thing he finds important is to view Shakespearean representation culturally and historically, by placing the accent not on *what,* but on *how* and *whom,* on the questions "that govern discussions of political representation." Baldo is looking at major tragedies in which modes of representation meet resistance either from within or from emergent, alternative modes of representation.[58] Under modes of representation he includes the following: the representation of the whole body politic by a universalised protagonist; representation of specific by general; visual by verbal; power by its manifestations; wholes by parts. In my examination of representational crisis I am not so much examining how Shakespearean tragedy challenges the relationship between words and

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56 Baldo, 13.

57 Baldo, 12.

58 Baldo, 12.

things. This is an issue among the ones in Baldo's focus, positioned in a Foucauldian context of epistemological change. I am rather interested in the way the tragedies simultaneously challenge the validity of words and at the same time seem to state that the only way to "get hold of" or represent things is through words.

Yet, the period when the code, the method of representation (be it language or theatre) acknowledges its own incompetence is followed by an obscuration of such an insight, or in Reiss's words it is followed by a "...denial, an occultation, of the acknowledgement that the human view of the world is necessarily a perspectival one."[59] As for the effect of such a denial and occultation of acknowledgement on tragedy, it looks as if it was not tragedy that *created* such a view and such a reality, but rather it is *imitating* a reality that exists outside itself: "It is as though tragedy has created a meaningful order which has in turn been transferred into the world itself. The order is no longer one of discourse: it belongs to the 'real world'."[60] Here the code is seen as a tool to serve and mirror this reality. The converse side of this reality is when methods of procedure explicitly intermingle with things themselves and the code may come in focus. In such a case it is inevitable that the problem inherent in modelling any reality is made explicit. Knapp,[61] when explaining a certain tension in Shakespeare that may be called "ambiguity, complementarity, dialectics, or indecidability" gives an interesting explanation. In his understanding this tension is not due to the contradiction between meanings of two versions of reality, one of which is medieval and the other early modern, but instead it is "the dramatic manifestation of a tension inherent in language – and perhaps in any modelling of reality – between two not quite complementary poles that have been variously conceived and named." The terms used are, for example semiotic and symbolic by Kristeva, performative and cognitive by de Man, metonymic and metaphoric by Jacobson, scandal and structure by Felman. Knapp describes the two poles the following way: "...we have on the one side an independently figured, but finally unbounded reality (the body of the sign); and on the other, representation (the idea of the play)."[62]

Through examining the successors of the Vice in Shakespearean tragedies it is precisely this ambiguity that I am interested in and propose to scrutinize, and not the tension dwelling in the contradiction between two versions of reality – a contradiction that I consider a prerequisite for the representational crisis to become manifest. I will analyse how the impossibility of signifying anything outside the system is reflected on by Iago and the Fool, whose self-reflexive questioning of the code is combined with the possibility of not signifying outside, but creating within the system. I will argue for the interference of the semiotic systems within the dramas not only as "a tension inherent in language" (an indirect consequence of conflicting epistemes), but also as a consequence of the Vice's inherent ambiguity deriving from the interference of a Christian versus a popular understanding of the figure.

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59 Timothy Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 37.

60 Reiss, 1980, 8.

61 Robert S. Knapp, *Shakespeare – The Theater and the Book* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 128.

62 Knapp, 129.

CHAPTER 2

HAPHAZARDLY AMBIDEXTROUS: THE VICE-FAMILY

2.1 Problems of definition

My interest in the Vice is fuelled by his unique position, his essential function within the play as well as his effect on the audience. I am interested in both mapping out his possible effects on a hypothetically constructed contemporary audience as well as a present day account and interpretation of those effects in their larger theatrical, social and critical contexts.

As will be seen in the following discussion of some important works on the Vice, apart from the problem that there are no precisely given guidelines as to which character in which play can be classified as the Vice, the definition of his function and moral evaluation is even more contradictory. Can we call a figure "Vice" if this title is not given to him in the play, but in his function he seems to comply with those figures that are? Does the term apply to characters that appear in morality plays only? If a figure is called Vice in the play but does not feature characteristics that are usual for other Vices, can we still regard that character as a Vice?

Although my intention here is not to provide finite answers to these questions, I will have a closer look at different accounts of the character, by which I hope not only the main concerns of the discourse on the Vice will emerge, but also that we will get a sketch of a range of suggested characteristics of the figure– although not all of them are compatible with each other – as well as the possible explanations of these characteristics. As a next step I will look at the applicability and relevance of these characteristics to actual examples of morality Vices as well as successors of Vices in later drama, and particularly to the two Shakespearean figures discussed in my subsequent chapters.

The basic problem with the morality Vice is the sense of comedy that makes him, although evil, appealing. His comedy has long worried critics because of its obvious moral implications. They tried to explain this comedy in several ways. Some tried to justify the comedy by interpreting it as fitting into the morality structure, or by presenting it as a safety valve that makes it possible to sustain the otherwise rigid moral structure, or by understanding it as offering simple "comic relief,"[1] a non-significant, perhaps even

[1] As Hillman reminds us, "[c]riticism of Shakespeare's tragedies has long outgrown the impulse to excuse (and therefore the impression of not excusing) the presence of fools and clowns as 'comic relief'." Hillman, 4. He is certainly right, but the question becomes the more intriguing since it may question in retrospect the understanding of the comedy of the ancestors of Shakespeare's clowns, the comedy of the Vices in the same way.

artistically clumsy intermezzo within the treating of a serious theme. Some critics, however, acknowledged a possible threat in this comedy either to the unity of the play or to the morality as a literary genre or, as a consequence, have seen it to present a possible threat to the social and religious structure that served as its context. The comedy of the Vice can be, according to some, a source of condemning laughter, or a tool for deceiving mankind – therefore it is not so easy to dismiss it, because the Vice's comedy presents a real threat, a dangerous sport: he has to be genuinely appealing to the audience in order to be strong enough to seduce the main hero and make the seduction plausible for the audience. Another possibility is to see that character either as "Vice-as-clown" or "Vice-as-tempter."[2] The former type is the more problematic in critical literature because of the assumptions that in the Vice-clown the figure's original signification has been lost.[3] Let us see now in detail different views that can be developed on the function and effect of the same figure.

"You will learn to playe the vice": problems of interpretation

The harsh critic of theatre, Philip Stubbes, in his *Anatomy of Abuses* describes everything bad that can be learned from playing and acting:

> ...[I]f you will learne falshood; if you will learne cosenage; if you will learne to deceiue; if you will learne to plaie the hipocrite, to cogge, to lye and falsifie; if you will learne to iest, laugh and fleere, to grinne, to nodd, and mowe; if you will learne to plaie the vice, to sweare, teare, and blaspheme both heauen and earth... [etc., etc.] and to commit all kind of sinne and mischeefe, you neede to goe to no other schoole, for all these good examples maie you see painted before your eyes in enterludes and plaies.[4]

The Vice in Stubbes's text most probably refers to the character in theatre, because he uses the phrase "learn to play the..." three times in the long (and in the above quoted version cut) passage, and in all these cases he continues the phrase with mentioning stock characters on stage, like the hypocrite, the vice, the glutton. There is no question about whether the Vice is condemnable or not in this context, actually he can even be understood as the epitome of all the immoral falsities of theatre, since he features most of the elements of the sinful behaviour described so minutely by Stubbes: he not only lies and falsifies by profession, but laughs, jests and fleers, as well as murders, steals and robs. The Vice may be seen as a character who embodies all the attributes of an actor in theatre, and perhaps it is no incident that Stubbes himself uses the word "ambidexter" [name of the Vice in *Cambises* and in Gascoigne's *The Glass of Government*] as synonym for

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[2] Discussed by Alan Dessen, *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Play* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press: 1986), 33.

[3] This view is held by Bernard Spivack in his *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*. I will discuss his views below when exploring the connections between the Vice and the Fool.

[4] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*. Reprinted from the third edition of 1595. (London: W. Pickering, 1836), 166.

actors.[5] But even if theatre is not perceived as an institution spreading immoral practices, and not all actors are seen as identical to Vices,[6] the Vice is most frequently seen as condemnable. In my discussion of different views on the Vice I have chosen to introduce in greater detail ones that offer some possibilities of the acceptability of the Vice together with his appeal and humour. I have chosen to do so because, as it will turn out below in my argument, the extent to which the Vice can be accepted and the specific features that make him acceptable are of crucial importance because of their broader theatrical and critical implications.

Two comprehensive and major accounts of the Vice were included in books published in 1958 and 1962 respectively. One is Bernard Spivack's *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil,* and the other is David Bevington's *From Morality to Marlowe.* Bevington discusses the development and structure of morality plays as well as their effect on later drama, while Spivack centers on Shakespeare's villains and their dramatic heritage from earlier drama. I will refer to both of these books as I develop my argument concerning interpretations of the Vice. I would like to start with a detailed discussion on essays that illustrate the main currents in understanding this character.

Somerset in his article entitled "'Fair is foul and foul is fair': Vice-Comedy's Development and Theatrical Effects" deals with the Vice characters of the early period of the morality play's development, which he places around 1480–1540.[7] He suggests that by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of the Seven Deadly Sins "had more or less run its course."[8] Earlier literary and artistic depictions served to show the horrible nature of evil, grotesquely portrayed and deformed in a way that it horrified the viewer, and the sins appeared to the audience exactly as they appeared to the hero.[9] Later on, however, much more attention was given to deceit and the complexity of the

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[5] "Beware, therefore, you masking plaiers, you painted sepulchres, you double dealyng ambodexters..." (Stubbes, 161). A parallel passage that sees the Vice as the epitome of theatre can be found in a later antitheatrical treatise, William Prynne's *Histriomastix.* Prynne is grieving over the unfortunate fact that "witty, comely youths" devote themselves to the stage, "where they are trained in the School of Vice, the play-house..." (Pollard, 291). However, not only Vices can turn out to epitomise actors but fools as well. Welsford notes that "supposed early references to fools prove to be references to 'histriones', 'buffoni', 'joculatores' and other vague terms for actors and entertainers." Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 114.

[6] It is an interesting addition that Stubbes developed his radical opinion on actors and plays after the first edition of his *Anatomy,* since in the first edition he still included a preface that was cut from the subsequent editions, and in which he states the following "...some kind of plays, tragedies, and interludes in their own nature, are not only of great ancientness, but also very honest and very commendable exercises, being used and practiced in most Christian commonwealths..." Pollard, 117.

[7] Somerset, J. A. B. "'Fair is foul and foul is fair': Vice-Comedy's Development and Theatrical Effects," in G.R. Hibbard ed. *The Elizabethan Theatre V.* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 1975), 54–75.

[8] Somerset, 60.

[9] Somerset, 58.

problem of sin. Somerset says, "[t]he usual solution, it seems, was to make the vices comically appealing, so that the hero's amusement (which we share) enables us to understand how he is misled. (...) Comedy is the main vice weapon."[10] He points out that since the vices do appeal to us as audience by making us laugh, many critics have termed the effect caused this way either functionless comic relief or they have suspected that the play was faulty. In his opinion, this type of the comic may be called relief, but it is part of the method of the play in presenting the conflict between virtue and vice. He claims,"[t]he vices succeed at times in detaching us from our moral attitudes and making us relax, momentarily suspending our moral judgments or making us add to our sense that they are evil the further response that they are entertaining and funny."[11]

Although Somerset does not make it explicit, he manages to develop a double view of the vices by dividing their functions as dramatic characters and as players, actors of a play: "They realize (and remind us) that we are 'come to se a play,' and they forge, through laughter, a group of individual spectators into an audience. Hence they remind us of the communal nature of theatre, and show that they realize their function as entertainers."[12] This double view of the Vices, dealing with this character in terms of his theatrical reality, no matter how remote that reality is from us now, is essential for making their comedy legitimate: together with the hero they try to corrupt the audience as well, but what the audience finally gets is entertainment, at the end of which a moral lesson is taught. Had it not been so, as Somerset himself points it out, we may as well call the plays that feature the vices "immorality plays."[13]

Although I agree with Somerset that in many cases this is exactly what happens in a morality, namely, that evilness and the funny nature of the Vice do not exclude each other and these attributes often seem to coexist without any trouble in the same character, the case, as I will try to argue below, is more complicated than that. I am somehow reluctant to accept the idea that evil should be depicted and accepted within this duality without any problem: it seems to me contradictory to acknowledge genuine evil as genuinely entertaining and funny, even if it is clear that such a combination gave no moral misgivings to the majority of theatre-goers of the period. In the mysteries, as Somerset himself reminds his readers, evil was depicted as horrifying and disgusting, inviting repudiation from the part of the audience. If the funny and entertaining attribute of the Vice is taken to be genuine, that is, the deception is not carried out solely with the specific and exclusive aim of luring the hero and the audience into the world of sin, but also to offer joyous entertainment, then we cannot be completely satisfied with Somerset's idea of "making us add to our sense that they are evil the further response that they are entertaining and funny."

Happé takes the Vice to be the heir of the following figures: "the folk-play fool and the presenter, the court-clown, the cheeky servant, the impertinent messenger, the

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10 Somerset, 63.

11 Somerset, 64–5.

12 Somerset, 68.

13 Somerset, 69.

mystery-play Devil, all roles which are not characters so much as embodiments of dramatic forces directing the attention and controlling the response of the audience."[14] Somerset focuses his exploration on the period between 1480–1540, while Happé starts where Somerset finished: he considers plays written after 1547, the year from which he sees it indispensable for a writer of moral interludes to include a Vice. The plays included in the list he deals with "are written to a conventional outline which involves the mockery and destruction of the hero by the Vice. Often the hero is vindicated and there are variations in which the Vice is punished or escapes."[15] He sees the Vice offering the audience a licence for virtue, but with a sense that his activities are restricted. Happé claims this sense "may be intensified at times by his relationship with the Devil, whom he mocks and yet who has power over him." Another connection between the Devil and the vice is that the latter inherits "from the Devil a desire to humble all men."[16] The general function of the Vice, as Happé sees it, is as tempter and destroyer, while in the world of the audience he is "a successful performer who exercises great virtuosity."[17] As for the characteristic comedy of the Vice, Happé claims that the final joke is not on the victim, but on the Vice: "His comedy is full of false notes and crude deceptions," and its function, which both disarms the audience and involves him in self-ridicule, "is to bring about the downfall of the hero in such a way that we cannot but perceive the workings of justice."[18] Happé, although he recognizes that the actor of the Vice may separate himself from the other actions in many ways, even, for example, by abandoning formal style or by employing special kinds of ridiculous movement characteristic only to him among the characters, suggests that the Vice fits well in an overall moral setup because he has an expository function: "He acts for the dramatist, fulfils the cultural code of explaining the moral doctrine of the play," through which the didactic experience is reached, building on "satire, ridicule, and an assumption of agreed values."[19]

Later I will argue that the successors of the Vice clearly lack this didactic trait and it is much more problematic, eventually even impossible, to assume that they are explaining some moral doctrine. Still, as I will try to show in my analysis, in case the Vice is taken merely as a tool of the workings of justice, he is not realising his enormously exciting potential.

Alan Dessen addresses the issue of the comic and diabolic associations of the Vice in a way that acknowledges its entertaining appeal, but does not give any real threatening force to it, by saying simply that the association of the Devil with the Vice gives its humour a distinct edge.

> Admittedly, the late morality play Devil is often a comic, blustering figure who sets the Vice in motion and is mocked in the process. Nonetheless, the association between the

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14 Happé, 17.
15 Happé, 19.
16 Happé, 21.
17 Happé, 27.
18 Ibid.
19 Happé, 28.

two figures (with the consequent link of the Vice to sin, Hell and damnation) is prominent both in the extant plays and the memories of the next generation. Thus, the entertainment function of the Vice-comedian is to be found in the late moral drama and is remembered, but the diabolic associations (as well as the implications for the Vice's victims and society) give that humour a distinct edge.[20]

In his view the Vice is dangerous both to the victims on stage as well as to the audience of the play.

The way the vices are presented by Somerset, Happé and Dessen shows that these scholars are sensitive to the morally problematic nature of the character. Still, they feel that this figure fits in a larger, complex system, capable of encompassing comic evil: a system where the comic vices are indirectly supporting a moral world-view, where finally the audience laughs not so much *with* them, but *at* them. This would be indeed difficult to apply to the descendants of the Vice I am interested in, because in their context it is exactly the assumption of agreed values that is challenged, which makes the target of satire and ridicule unforeseeable. Still, it is not necessarily the dissolution of the moral universe behind the morality plays (this moral universe being at its most only residual in Shakespearean tragedies) that makes the descendants of the Vice impossible to contain safely. In Mares's opinion the morality Vice is not devoid of this feature either. He claims that this Vice comes into the drama from the popular festival, he is established as a stage clown before he appears in the morality at all, and does not do so until the morality is in decline.[21] After listing plays from the period between 1533 and 1579 in which there is a character explicitly named Vice, Mares finds that it is not moral allegory that is a common feature of these plays, but rather the company, which was of limited size, and in which the Vice, who was a favourite with the audience, was played by the major actor of the company.[22]

As we have seen, according to Somerset the Vice stands outside moral law to the extent that the Vices are acknowledged and accepted entertainers, and their game serves to teach a moral lesson. The idea of the "outsider" Vice is formulated differently by Mares. He points out that there was a non-dramatic Vice figure in popular festivals before any dramatic Vice would have appeared on stage. By this, in my opinion, he implicitly explains the fact that the Vice is obviously an outsider in the plays when he addresses the audience: with his comments he foretells the action of the play or lets the audience into his confidence but is really not part of the play's events. Still, Mares does not make a distinction between the Vice as an extra-dramatic versus dramatic figure when he comments on his being outside the moral law. It seems to me that to some extent both Somerset and Happé make that distinction: it is as if the morally acceptable "side" or layer of the Vice in their view was in his being the chief entertainer. If we consider moralities as strictly homiletic, the conclusion of Mares is challenging: "[The Vice] is not subject to the limitations of the other characters, and seems often to be outside

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[20] Dessen, 22.

[21] Frances Hugh Mares, "The origin of the Figure Called 'the Vice' in Tudor Drama," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 12 (1958–1959): 11–23, 11.

[22] Mares, 13.

the moral law. He is not evil disguised as good as the conventional morality explanation would lead one to expect, but does both good and evil 'Haphazardly'."[23] Perhaps this attribute of the Vice is the one that makes him potentially more subversive than simply being the embodiment of tempting evil, since if it was not a haphazard operation but the world clearly turned upside down by him, then in its effect the Vice would also acknowledge order, by constituting its exact opposite. In being merely a character standing for the opposite of virtue he would more obviously occupy a definable place in the moral setup. By being unpredictable, however, this is not what he does. Still, this does not have to mean that as a consequence he necessarily undermines the same moral setup.

Mares gives us a quotation to illustrate the unpredictability of the Vice's behaviour. In the morality *The Tide Tarrieth no Man*, the Vice Courage says the following:

> *...Corage contagious,*
> *And eake contrarious, both in me do rest:*
> *For I of kind, am always various,*
> *And hange, as to my mind seemeth best. (sig. C3v)*[24]

Like Mares, I find this characteristic of the Vice essential, although it is usually not taken into account in his interpretations by others, who see the primacy of the morality pattern essential. I do not suggest that anyone who sees the Vice clearly and safely fitted within the overall pattern supporting the moral message is necessarily wrong, but I would like to draw attention to the fact that the moral position of the Vice varies. It is quite inconsistent, even within one play. At the beginning of the same play Mares refers to, for example, the Vice informs the audience that he will try to corrupt as many people as possible in the short time that is available for him.

Although I will deal in much more detail with the comedy and sense of humour of the Vice and his successors in Chapter 4, I would like to provide insight into the Vice's comic behaviour, particularly a type of his verbal humour that I see a possible key for the moral evaluation we make of him. Apart from making us aware of the similarities between the dress and equipment of the Vice and the fool in the morris and sword dance, as well as the fact that the Vice, like the Fool, was the leader of his team of actors, Mares finds "a type of verbal humour that is common to both vice and mummer plays."[25] He quotes Chambers, who "sternly called it [...] 'an incongruous juxtaposition of contraries...purely verbal jesting without salt of mind...The folk at its worst.'"[26]

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[23] Mares, 14.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Mares, 18.

[26] Mares, 19. Mares does not qualify Chambers' opinion, but it is possible to disagree with Chambers not only because after Bakhtin, Weimann, Gash and others (whom I discuss in my Chapter Four on laughter) we have learned to appreciate the "popular" type of comedy and comic, both dramatic and non-dramatic, but also because this type of humour was not restricted to products of popular culture. For instance Heywood's Vice in *The Play of the Weather*, a product of an author who was writing and working for the court, is displaying similarly "empty" verbal jesting when he, as a typical well-travelled Vice is enumerating for more than twenty lines the places where he has been (cf. ll. 198–211), not to mention that he likes to make scatological and

Distorted language as one source of comedy in the Vice's repertoire can be included under what Chambers calls "purely verbal jesting" and speaks reprovingly about its nonsense. A good example is Mischief's mocking (actually levelling) of Mercy in *Mankind*[27] for the use of his pompous language flaunting Latin expressions.[28] Mischief comes up with nonsensical language, actually a riddle that is nonsensical, except for the punch-line that encourages the listener to give money to the Vice:

> *I beseech you heartily, leave your calc'ation,*
> *Leave your chaff, leave your corn, leave your dalliation;*
> *Your wit is little, your head is mickle, ye are full of predication.*
> *But sir, I pray this question to clarify:*
> *Mish mash, driff, draff,*
> *Some was corn and some was Chaff*
> *My dames said my name was Raff;*
> *Unshut your lock and take an halpenny.*
> *ll.45–52.*

Mischief in this example refutes the very idea of a riddle, namely, that it has a meaning that can be reached if one is intelligent or witty enough to solve it, because the core of his riddle is that it clearly has no solution, no meaning. Still, it is called a "question" and looks like a riddle formally, no matter how nonsensical. I have not come across anyone criticising this particular type of humour of the Vice for its being threatening to the moral well-being of either the audience or the characters on the play. Chambers' critique is directed towards the lack of intellectual witticism, not the possibility of moral corruption. I would like to suggest that the above example and the type of verbal humour it represents is organic to the other schemes of the Vice, and may be seen as just as ambiguous in a moral sense as the Vice himself is. It can be regarded as a parallel to the ambiguity of the Vice's moral evaluation, his haphazard behaviour: this character maintains meaning as unreliably as a required pattern of even evil behaviour.[29]

Not surprisingly, the examples we choose for talking about the Vice will to some extent determine the view we present of them – or perhaps we choose the examples al-

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lewd jokes too. I find it unfortunate to dismiss such Vices as allegedly "not quite Vices" when they lack the moral dimension regarded typical of the type. Cf. Happé: "Nevertheless, it appears that John Heywood's Merry Report and Neither-Loving-Nor-Loved were not quite Vices because they lacked moral dimension." Happé, 18.

[27] Cf. ll 45–52 in *Mankind.* The edition I refer to is J.A.B. Somerset, *Four Tudor Interludes* (London: Atholone Press, 1974), 25–51.

[28] Janette Dillon remarks that although critics usually interpret Mercy as having clerical authorship based on his Latinate speech, this authorship is undermined and ridiculed by Mercy: "The audience is thus encouraged to focus its discomfort with an incomprehensible language and to allow such discomfort to contest the more automatic response of reverence". Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaidssance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54–5.

[29] Another such example, a nonsensical speech of a Vice is discussed below in 2.2.1., from *The Tyde Tarrieth no Man.*

ready having the view in mind. An interesting instance is Alan Dessen's interpretation in his book quoted above.

Dessen's opinion is that "the emergence of the Vice as the central figure in the interludes of the 1560s and 1570s represents a practical theatrical answer" to the problem of the sinful world corrupted by a particular force, which is in the end defeated and the sin corrected."[30] Thus he sees that the Vices are necessarily defeated as part of a clear moral pattern:

> The spectator was therefore regularly confronted with a lively, often very funny figure who sets up a special bond with his audience and then acts out with wit, energy, and comic violence the power of some corrupting force upon society (e.g. Covetousnesse, Revenge, Newfanglednesse, Infidelity, Inclination) only to be defeated or transcended in the play's final movement.[31]

This final movement of the play is called a "second climatic movement" by Dessen, who thus considers the Vice's function in "a two phased movement," a first part in which the Vice is active and influences the events in his often funny way, and a second in which he is defeated and order is restored. The Vices Dessen enlists as examples indeed are unambiguous in their standing for a particular sin, made explicit in their names. However, in his choice I see inherent his overall opinion of the Vice. What to do with Vices whose name is Merry Report[32], or Ambidexter, or Haphasard, even Nought or Courage – names that Dessen does not include in his examples? The vices suggested by these names are not as clear-cut sins as Dessen's examples, they invite a more philosophical problematization and a more complex moral interpretation of the character, and subsequently the plays as well. Dessen has it that it is the "modern aversion to didactic" that leads us to "casually dismiss the original logic of these morality plays,"[33] and sees that "with the translation of the Vice into a mere clown or buffoon, the interpreter often metamorphoses this distinct figure into terms more amenable to the twentieth century, which finds the process of temptation more accessible than the allegory of the health of a kingdom."[34] I would rather suggest that perhaps it is precisely the insistence on the Vice's comedy as one perceived of as a "mere clown or buffoon" by others that simplifies this distinct figure. He may be included in a nicely presented allegory, but does not have to support its moral message – nor is he merely a clown or buffoon, as his clowning can cut to the heart of a structure delineating a moral message.

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30 Dessen, 22.

31 Dessen, 24.

32 A later Vice in Thomas Garter's *Vitruous and Godly Susanna* (1569) has a Vice called Ill Report who pretends in the play that he is really Will, but with the appearance of True Report he is deemed to fall. Compared to Heywood's Merry Report who is not vicious and serves Jupiter rightly even though at one point he says he would rather be the devil's servant, these two opposing Vices actually may be considered as embodying a moral shift: when the good and bad characteristics of the same figure are split and made black and white.

33 Dessen, 35.

34 Dessen, 34.

Considering the accounts of the Vice character, in summary on the issue of moral problematics, I would like to make two points. The first is that I see no strong evidence suggesting that we should stick so eagerly to the idea that the Vice in the end contributes to the moral stability of the system he is presented in, particularly when, like the quoted critics, we acknowledge facts that may contradict this idea. Somerset, for example, gives an insightful account of the Vice's comedy, but still maintains that the audience sees him as evil. Happé refers to examples where the Vice is not punished but escapes in the end – an idea that makes difficult the application of the workings of Justice. Should a strict moralist frown on reading this, they will be soon relieved, because Happé points out that the final joke is still on the Vice. Dessen gives a detailed overview of the entertainment function of the Vice comedian and his relatedness to the jester and the fool, and still, finds the "diabolic associations" so significant as to dismiss this comedy in the end by simply saying that it has a distinct edge.

I would like to suggest, and this is partly what I will try to demonstrate in my account of morality Vices as a next step, that perhaps we should accept that even if a play has a clear moral doctrine, the Vice, by being outside of it as he frequently indeed is outside, *does not* need to contribute to this doctrine, quite on the contrary. Also, since he is *not* necessarily evil, he does not necessarily have to be punished – again supporting the idea that he may have nothing to do with the moral doctrine of the play. Perhaps critics in the quoted accounts of the Vice feel that if it is acknowledged that the Vice is outside the morality pattern, it would make the whole system supporting this pattern questionable – an idea that seems rather anachronistic in the given period. However, the fact that a character is or may be outside the dominant pattern does not necessarily question the pattern itself; it rather questions certain ideas about that pattern, ideas that cannot imagine elements within the system contradicting its foundations. In other words, instead of eliminating "not characteristic Vices," we should rather broaden our understanding of the category "Vice."

The issue is further problematised when the character who has the last word and who gives the final interpretation of the events is not a virtuous character, such as, say, the one called Remedy, as in *Wealth and Health,* but a Vice. If he is both involved in evil schemes and is a director-entertainer Vice, the origin and prime mover of the whole play, the worst thing we can say about him is that he presents himself paradoxically in his own play in a morally condemnable way, in order to make the moral message complete. Another problem with the Vice's comedy, also to be discussed below, is that it may be in many cases justified to laugh *with* rather than *at* the Vice. In these cases the audience may completely identify with the Vice's stance, as for example in *Mankind,* when Mercy is mocked for his pretentious and pompous Latin.

The interpretation of the term in most recent criticism may be illustrated by articles in an edited volume on Tudor drama, in which several authors mention the Vice respectively, but the exact meaning of the term or the function of the figure remains ambiguous, and not entirely coherent within the same volume.[35] Debax, for example

[35] Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken eds., *Interludes and Early Modern Society* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007).

makes a distinction between Vices and vices, and the latter he uses for "the ordinary dramatic character", by which he probably means opposites of virtue, who are not central to the dramaturgy – but this is not made explicit.[36] While he draws attention to the two representational modes (mimetic and non-mimetic) employed by the figure, he thinks that the non-mimetic mode is a later development, and what Shakespeare had in mind when he alluded to the Vice was not Heywood's, but a later version of the figure.[37] As it will appear below, I see important connections between Heywood's and later Vices, and thus treat them together, partly because, contrary to Debax, I see Heywood's Vices similarly non-mimetic than the figure's later cohorts. In Debax's terminology the "Vice effect" is a narrative mode creating a connection between the show and the people in the hall, while when Lynn Forest Hill quotes a corresponding moment (Nicholas Newfangle, the Vice in *Like Will to Like* addresses the audience at the beginning of the play), she stresses the occasion for the audience to deny the Vice as opposed to virtue.[38] Another confusion is triggered by the fact that Vices and proto-Vices are frequently accompanied by minions (c.f. *Mankind*), who may represent "Vices" in the sense of sinful characteristics, as opposed to virtues, but are not theatrical leaders in the sense I interpret the figure. Jannette Dillon in the quoted volume, for example, thinks that in *Godly Queen Hester* Hardydardy "may be a very early prototype of the Vice",[39] while Darryl Grantley thinks about the same character that he is "in the role of jester and fool", and by the capitalized term Vices he refers to other characters within the same play, namely the group of Pride, Adulation and Ambition.[40] I regard this confusion as primarily terminological, since we may distinguish between characters that are opposites of virtue (and whose names suggest that they are allegories of sin) and others that are playful figures who play tricks on others – tricks that are not exclusively malicious – and who are central to the dramaturgy, and act as engines of the plot. While these may sometimes be blurred, I find it important that the characteristics of a jester and a fool are regarded as crucial to the figure.

2.2 Vices

I would like now to have a look at actual plays containing a Vice in order to show the colourful palette of his appearance, to support my argument that he is perhaps not best understood as contributing to a structure of a clear moral message, and also to provide basis for further analysis of the successors of the same character. My choices of plays are purposely diverse. I will discuss in relative detail the vice of a play that is called a

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[36] Jean-Paul Debax, "Complicity and Hierarchy: a Tentative Definition of the Interlude Genus," in Happé and Hüsken, 23–42.

[37] Debax, 33–34.

[38] Lynn Forest-Hill, "Maidens and Matrons: The Theatricality of Gender in Tudor Interludes," in Happé and Hüsker, 53.

[39] Janette Dillon, "Powerful obedience: *Godly Queen Hester* and Katherine of Aragon," in Happé and Hüsker, 137.

[40] Darryl Grantley, *English Dramatic Interludes 1300–1580*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129–130.

comedy, another vice that appears in a combination of history play and morality, an exemplum, and I will draw on examples taken from other texts as well, such as moralities illustrating proverbs – in order to show that no matter how different the genres are (and probably the aims of the several authors as well), there are significant similarities in Vices even in plays as different as the ones I examine.

Merry Report

The first instance of the description "the Vice" among characters of a play appears in two comedies by John Heywood, *The Play of Love* (from the 1520s or early 1530s)[41] and *The Play of the Weather* (1527–33). Heywood's Vices are considered atypical by many interpreters because they lack a supposedly essential characteristic: they hardly seem to be evil at all.[42] This is why, for example, Bernard Spivack delivers a carefully structured argument in which he explains why these "Vices" are not representative vices in the first place, and also, why it is erroneous to draw consequences about the genus vice based on these instances. Spivack refers chiefly to Chambers[43] when he disagrees with earlier commentary on the Vice, and presents his own view on Heywood's vices in the above mentioned plays:

> Both roles, superficially examined, seem to present nonallegorical comedians, provoking at least one scholar to argue that the Vice is essentially a dramatic outgrowth of the medieval clown or jester, extraneous to the morality drama and brought into it merely to create its comedy.[44]

Spivack even explains how such a Vice appeared on stage. He claims that the vice who distinguished himself from his allegorical cohorts and developed into a theatrical personality (I take it that he means the master of ceremonies-type vice who is surrounded by similar minor and less potent vices, such as Mischief and his three companions in *Mankind*) subsequently "could be lifted out of his allegorical and homiletic context and cultivated in comedy of the type Heywood was writing."[45] Such an explanation eli-

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[41] I give the dates of the dramas I discuss in this part of the paper following the data given by Darryl Grantley, *English Dramatic Interludes 1300–1580,* Cambridge University Press, 2004

[42] Interestingly, however, these comedic figures may be linked to a stage device with demonic connections, as in *The Play of Love* the figure called No-lover nor-loved, who is referred to as "vice" in the cast, runs among the audience crying "water, water, fire, fire," while his head is full of squibs, implying that his hair caught fire while off-stage. The connection is made by the use of "squibs," fire-crackers: these were used by earlier stage devils, and thus Heywoord's Vice could at this point probably be associated with them by the audience. For this remark I am indebted to Kent Cartwright.

[43] "...the character of the Vice is derived from that of the domestic fool or jester. [...] the Elizabethan writers speak of his long coat and lathen sword, common trappings of the domestic fool. Whether he ever had a coxcomb, a bauble, or an eared hood is not apparent. A vice seems to have been into one or two of the later miracle-plays. At Bungay in 1566 he 'made pastime' before and after the play, as Tarleton or Kempe were in time to do with their'jigs' upon the London boards. And probably this was his normal function on such occastions" (Chambers, 204–5).

[44] Spivack, 136.

[45] Ibid.

minates any other ideas about vices that would not fit into Spivack's main view about the Vice as *radix malorum,* the origin of all evil, an explanation that in my view leaves out a crucial attribute of this figure.

Heywood's Vice in *The Play of the Weather*[46] is indeed not evil, but I would not like to exclude him from a discussion of the Vices exactly because he has much in common with the allegedly "all-evil" Vices. Also, he is impudent enough to mock the chief god, Jupiter, already at his entrance on the stage. As Merry Report enters, Jupiter asks him who he is: *"Why, what arte thou that approchyst so ny?"* (l 101), to which the Vice answers:

> Mery Report. *Forsothe, and please your lordshyppe it is I.*
> Jupiter. *All that we knowe very well, but what I?*
> Mery Report. *What I? Some saye I am perse I*[47].
> *But what maner I, so ever be I,*
> *I assure your good lordshyp I am I.*
> *(ll. 102–6)*

As he himself gives an explanation of his name, it is Merry Report because he will report even the sad news merrily:

> *And for my name, reporting alwaye trewly*
> *What hurte to reporte a sad mater merely?*
> *(ll. 136–7)*

I find it interesting how Merry Report seems to imply that until the report is true, there might be nothing wrong with its indecorously merry delivery. Another characteristic of his is that he has no prejudice, no attachment to anything. All weather is the same for him, therefore he is able to report on people's opinion without bias:

> *For all wethers I am so indifferent,*
> *Wythout affeccyon standynge so up right –*
> *Son lyght, mone lyght,[...]*
> *Temperate or dystemperate – what ever yt be,*
> *I promiyse your lordshyp all is one to me.*
> *(ll. 154–60)*

He employs the characteristic tool of audience-involvement of Vices and addresses the audience after Jupiter sends him away to his job:

> *Now good my lorde god, Our Lady be with ye!*
> *Thynke ye I may stand thrustyng amonge you there?*
> *Nay by God, I muste thrust about other gere.*
> *(ll. 175–8)*

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[46] In *The Plays of John Heywood.* Richard Axton and Peter Happé eds. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

[47] In editorial notes, p. 289: *"I am perse I:* I am unsurpassed, the thing itself (*per se* spoken as one word)."

Also, he says,

> *Now syrs, take hede for here cometh goddess servaunt.*
> *Avaunte, carterly keytyfs, avaunt!*
> *Why, ye drunken horesons, wyll yt not be?*
> *By fayth, have ye no ther cap nor kne?*
> *(ll. 186–9)*

On the one hand, he is humiliating members of the audience ("drunken horesons"); on the other, he is stressing his own importance as being "goddess servaunt." Although Merry Report has mocked Jupiter at the beginning with his entrance by not giving due respect to the main God, in the end he indeed makes a good and faithful servant considering how he carries out his job. He does give a truthful account of the different opinions of people, representatives of different social types about what sort of weather they would like to have. He boasts about his position of being god's servant, but establishes a questionable reputation when saying that being the devil's servant could be more fun:

> *I thynke goddess servauntes may lyve holyly*
> *But the devils servauntes lyve more meryly*
> *(ll. 988–9)*

Still, no matter what he says, he seems rather merry even as Jupiter's servant. He is not cruel or mean, apart from his longing to be the devil's servant instead of serving God. The only thing that makes him potentially condemnable is when after having presented their wishes the suitors leave him, he pretends not to care for them. But again in the end he does not betray either of them, and indeed he is indifferent in presenting their various wishes to Jupiter. He does not have to escape or be punished either in the end.

In the introduction to *The Plays of John Heywood,* the editors describe Heywood's Vices the following way:

> They are playmakers and go-betweens, not fixed in any social 'estate', but able to mimic any. They relate as easily to the audience as to other players, taking liberties with both. Their capers and apparent improvisations add movement, dance perhaps, and song-like antics often reminiscent of children's games. But the Vice figures are the least innocent of Heywood's roles: knowing, verbally clever, and irrepressibly bawdy.[48]

Based on this view another opinion can be formed that opposes Spivack's ideas. The comedy of this Vice is not entirely benign, but there are other things that are much more important: the fact that his behaviour is not consequent or logical (he does not behave according to his opinion expressed in his side remarks), that he relates to the other characters and the audience in the same mockingly disrespectful manner, he does not belong to a social position but, as was pointed out in the quotation above, he can mimic any such position.

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[48] Axton and Happé, 13.

Ambidexter

Similarly to Merry Report who was reluctant to reveal his name to Jupiter, Ambidexter from *Cambises* (1558–69)[49] is creating suspense too by delaying disclosure of who he is, what name he is called by. He pretends to have forgotten his name, but once he remembers, he gives an explanation of its meaning.[50]

> *Ha, my name, my name would you so fain knowe?*
> *Yea, iwis shall ye, and that with all speed:*
> *I have forgot it therefore I cannot showe,*
> *A, A, now I have it, I have it in deed.*
> *My name is Ambidexter, I signifie one,*
> *That with bothe hands finely can play*
> *(ll. 146–51)*

This half morality, half history play, a transition towards the chronicles, similarly to the previous play, features a Vice who is capable of behaving as people belonging to different social level; he very skilfully plays his different parts. After Ambidexter has fought with the ruffians and taken part in the lewd and comic conversation with Meretrix in scene 2, at the beginning of scene 3 he prepares to meet Sisamness and says he will behave like a gentleman:

> *Beholde where he cometh, I wil him meet:*
> *And like a gentleman I meane him to greet*
> *(ll. 305–6)*

As it turns out, however, in this particular scene his "gentleman-like" behaviour is restricted to showing some respect to Sisamenes in acting as benevolent advisor and suggesting that he *"play with bothe hands and turn with the winde"* (l. 321).

Ambidexter proves to be a forerunner of Iago when he very skilfully makes the King suspicious of his brother, no matter how ungrounded this suspicion is. The Vice is withholding the truth: he pretends to be reluctant to utter a lie, intensifying the tension when suggesting the king Cambises that his brother is looking for his death. His method is to reveal, while acting as if he were denying what he reveals.

> King. *How sayst thou? speake the trueth, was it so or no?*
> Ambidexter. *I think so if it please your grace, but I cannot tel*
> *(ll. 685–6)*

Ambidexter is capable of displaying histrionic skills in a spectacular way on stage. The way he pretends to be sorry for the dead queen is highly ironic, since the audience has just witnessed the sad event of the Queen's song, an improvised, psalm-like farewell before she leaves the stage to be executed.

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[49] *A Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's Cambises.* Robert Carl Johnson ed. (Salzburg: Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universitat Salzburg, 1975).

[50] "The earliest sense in English (1532) was restricted to law: 'one who takes bribes from both sides.' In 1555 the word is used by Bishop Ridley with the sense of a 'double-dealer,' but these are the only two recorded usages prior to our play. The sense of double-dealing or playing on both sides is germane to our character." In. Johnson ed., explanatory notes, 170.

A, A, A, A, I cannot chuse but weep for the Queene:
Nothing but mourning now at the Court there is seen.
Oh, oh, my heart, my heart, Oh my bum wil break:
Very greef so torments me that scarce I can speake.
Who could but weep for the losse of such a lady?
That can not I doo, I sweare by mine honesty.
(ll. 1127–32)

Funnily in the last line, when he swears he is true and honest, he indeed cannot identify with crying from heart – although we have seen him cry ironically in the previous lines. But actually there is nothing he will identify with, since he is constantly playing. His laughter is no more true than his weeping, as he himself points it out in another example; laughter is just the other side of his ambidextrous quality. Ambidexter's pretence of weeping and being sorry after another execution, the one of Lord Smirdis, displaces the audience's genuine sorrow after they saw the tragic circumstances of his death. Ambidexter first pretends to weep and then ironically bursts out in laughter: *"Ha, ha, weep, nay, laugh, with both hands to play"* (l. 744).

As these two examples show, Ambidexter comes very close to being the epitome of actors, whose tears and laughter are no more real than his. But he is indeed the explicator of the moral message: before the king enters dying at the end of the play, he foreshadows the fate that the King deserves.

He hath shed so much blood that his wil be shed:
If it come so to passe, in faith then he is sped.
(ll. 1151–2)

And the moral message is reinforced by the dying King as well:

A just reward for my misdeeds, my death dooth plain declare.
(l. 1166)

At the end of the play Ambidexter is not punished for anything; he just leaves the stage:

Farewel my maisters, I wil go take barge.
I meane to be packing, now is the tide.
(ll. 1178–9)

Johnson in his critical introduction to the play stresses several times how the play does not necessarily need Ambidexter's character to go on. He sees the employment of this character as evidence of his popularity and as a problem of historical structure (the tradition, the historical function of the Vice) versus artistic motivation.[51] After showing how Ambidexter's presence was not essential for any of the main events, he summarises the Vices's function in the following way: "Ambidexter's role is reduced to that of expositor; he is the link between scenes, the reporter of off-stage events, the prophet of future events, the philosopher, the knave. He exists to entertain and elucidate."[52] The two comic scenes are Ambidexter's, and although they counteract the serious tone of the main plot, as Johnson points out, they also "suggest a secondary theme: men play

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[51] Johnson, 18.
[52] Johnson, 22.

with both hands and turn with the wind at all levels of society." In this function the Vice is the one to reveal how corrupt people are, rather than corrupting them himself. It is clear also that the only character in the play he ostensibly "corrupts," namely Sisamnes, had been corrupt already, even before he met Ambidexter.

To sum up Ambidexter's role in *Cambises,* I would like to draw attention to his presence in the play rather as an idea of playing and entertainment than as a powerful and vicious character. If we accept Johnson's view of the subplot supplementing the main one and showing how people are the same in all layers of society, then the corrupting schemes of the Vice depend rather on revealing the corruptedness of society on its several layers than actual, "original" corruption. Outside his element, the comic scenes, as Johnson reminds us, Ambidexter is quite ineffective, an ineffective courtier of some sort.

Haphazard

The prologue of *A New Tragical Comedy of Appius and Virginia*[53] (1559–67) makes clear that the play is an exemplum. In the prologue we read that both married women and virgins are to follow the way Virginia remained pure and chaste, even if the only way of preserving her chastity was to ask for her own death. The Vice of the play is called Haphazard. At the Vice's first entry, before he reveals his name, he asks the audience who they think he is. Although they may probably guess that he is a Vice-like character from his reference to the devil *("Who dips with the devil, he had need have a long spoon...")*, the Vice enters into a long but, in its heterogeneity, quite funny and intriguing monologue enumerating a whole colourful spectrum of real and metaphoric occupations and characteristics, ranging from lawyer through "sower of lies" to mackerel.

Yet, a proper gentleman I am, of truth:
Yea, that may ye see by my long side-gown:
Yea, but what am I? A scholar, or a school-
master, or else some youth:
A lawyer, a student, or else a country clown?
A broom-man, a basket maker, or a baker of pies,
A flesh or a fishmonger, or a sower of lies?
A louse or a louser, a leek or a lark,
A dreamer, a drumble, a fire or a spark?
A caitiff, a cut-throat, a creeper in corners,
A hairbrain, a hangman, or a grafter of horners?
By the gods, I know not how best to devise,
My name or my property best to disguise.
A merchant, a may-pole, a man or a mackerel,
A crab or a crevis, a crane or a cockerel?

And at this point, although he has not yet completed his list, which goes on for another dozen of lines in a similar fashion, Haphazard gives an answer to the questions he posed before:

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[53] John S. Farmer ed., *Five anonymous plays* (London: Early English Drama Society, 1908), 10–11.

Most of all these my nature doth enjoy;
Sometime I advance them, sometime I destroy.

Thus, the answer to the question which one of all these should be accepted as his identity is that he can be anything, quite freely, just the way he fancies to advance or destroy his nature, or in other words, his "identity." The other possible explanation of these lines is intriguing as well: it is according to his fancy that he will destroy or advance the enumerated occupations, or their representatives. I would like to stress again the actor-like playfulness in his juggling with his self, and his "identity" that is exactly inconstancy, a no-identity, a function that is a possibility of anything.

The haphazardness of the Vice is not a distressing or a threatening one. It fits well in the topsy-turvy tradition of the comic, as is clear from his monologue describing the world turned upside-down haphazardly, where wives wear the cod-piece, and maids are the masters:

Hap may so hazard, the moon may so change,
That men may be masters, and wives will not range:
But in hazard it is, in many a grange,
Lest wives wear the cod-piece, and maidens coy strange.
As peacocks sit perking by chance in the plum-tree,
So maids would be masters by the guise of this country.

The effect of such topsy-turvydom is entirely comic in its fiction of infinite possibilities where even a gentleman may have to go begging, where anything that does not comply with the existing order may happen. The effect of the comic is intensified by the twist that Haphazard makes in the lines quoted above: it is now the existing order that may happen by hazard, namely, that the men be masters if the moon changes so. But no matter what happens (and the Vice is playing with "hap" meaning both his name and things that happen), even events that should signify the end of the world, everything is comic in the end, even if the sky falls on the earth: *"If hap the sky fall, we hap may have larks."* The speech is ended elegantly by Haphazard urging the audience to pay:

Well, fare you well now, for better or worse:
Put hands to your pockets, have mind to your purse.
(p. 17)

As for his corrupting force, Haphazard is not very strong in that, since Appius is already prone to lust even before Haphazard arrives, and positive allegorical characters, Justice and Conscience, try to counteract the Vice's influence in vain. Funnily, Haphazard does not promise the judge he corrupts that he will surely get Virginia; this is just a suggestion, a mere tip:

There is no more ways, but hap or hap not,
Either hap or else hapless, to knit up the knot:
And if you will hazard to venture what falls,
Perhaps that Haphazard will end all your thralls.
(p. 20)

Still, Haphazard knows beforehand that the Judge has no chance, and in this he reinforces the audience's expectations of rightfulness. Although it may seem from his explanations that there might be some haphazard chance for anyone and it is worth giving

it a try, the play shows that he is not trustworthy: the events demonstrate that following his advice leads to destruction. The speech in which Haphazard reveals this to the audience contains humorously nonsensical elements:

When gain is no gain, sir,
And gauds nought set by,
Nor puddings nor pie-meat
Poor knaves will come nigh,
Then hap and Haphazard
Shall have a new coat.
And so it may happen
To cut covetousness' throat.
Yea, then shall Judge Appius
Virginia obtain;
And geese shall crack mussels
Perhaps in the rain.
(p. 22–3)

The nonsensical elements reveal a partly comic and fictive, partly deadly time, a quasi-future, which on the one hand makes Appius ridiculous because he has no chance to have Virginia (have her when geese crack mussels), and on the other hand makes clear that he will be punished for his sin and will die. So it is not only that the Vice will reinforce the audience's ideas about sinful behaviour and its punishment, but also he actually seems to be the one to punish the sinner. As he puts it, it may happen that Haphazard may cut covetousness's throat.

When Appius is just about to meet his death, Haphazard comes and has a confusing speech of seven lines, which are hardly intelligible because he speaks half-nonsense, half a riddle, as if it meant something. And actually Appius does pick up the important idea that foreshadows his doom:

Haphazard. *I came from Caleco even the same hour,*
And hap was hired to hackney in hempstrid:
In hazard he was of riding on beamstrid.
Then, crow crop on tree-top, hoist up the sail,
Then groaned their necks by the weight of their tail:
Then did carnifex put these together,
Paid them their passport for clust'ring thither.
Appius. *Why, how now, Haphasard, of*
What dost thou speak?
Methinks in mad sort thy talk thou dost break.
Those three words, chopt all in one
Is carnifex: that signifieth hangman.
Peace! no such words before me utter.
(p. 38–9)

At the end of the play, Haphazard turns to Reward to get reimbursed for his services of keeping Appius informed following the logic that he advised Appius earlier, namely that the worst answer we can get is a no. However, Reward informs him that his reward is a rope. Haphazard attempts an escape first, but he is held back, after which he pleads for his life in a manner that suggests that even before being hanged he is still in his comic element rather than desperate:

Must I needs hang? By the
gods! It doth spite me
To think how crabbedly
this silk lace will bite me.
(p. 44)

His humour, however, does not save him. He is given no mercy, and exits the stage while urging his cousin Cutpurse to follow him, in fact to "follow the livery." Haphazard's example is such that in the end the final joke is on him, and the idea he stood for has proven unwise to follow. Thus he reinforces morally correct behaviour, including in the scene where he was explicitly critical of the covetousness of the judge.

Punisher or punished?

Another example of a play in which the Vice receives his final punishment is *Horestes* (1567),[54] where he appears as a beggar in the end of the play. Still, I would like to draw attention to the fact that no matter how sad the end may look from his of view, the Vice's own opinion may be different about it. We have seen above how the final joke is indeed on Haphazard, but still he is capable of commenting mockingly on the sad end of his career. The instance of *Horestes*'s Vice is even less clear-cut. It seems that although he (who called himself Revenge in the same monologue) does advertise his poor and lamentable condition of becoming a beggar at first, he does not identify with this condition in the long run. First he perceives it as punishment for his "labor," and feels miserable:

I woulde I were ded and layde in my grave.
Oundes of me, I am trymley promouted.
Ah, ah, oh! Well, now for my labor these trynketes I have.
(ll. 1038–40)

But he soon changes his mind about it, and finds the bright side even of being a beggar:

But peace! Who better then beggars doth fare –
For all they be beggares and have no great port –
Who is maryer then the pooryste sort?
(ll. 1049–51)

I am not considering here how inconstant the Vice is even in this second and more cheerful opinion, namely, that after having found the merry side of being a beggar he decides rather to be a servant, and offers his service to members of the audience. What are the moral implications of the fact that the Vice became a beggar? Can this demotion be

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[54] Marie Axton ed. *Tree Tudor Classical Interludes* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer and Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982). In his commentary on the play Darryl Grantley says that this play is the first English one to draw upon classical tragedy as well as the first extant English Revenge play. On the Vice he points out the following: "The Vice of the play is never given a name, though he does at one point briefly adopt an alias. Though in some respects he fulfils the traditional function of a Vice, for much of the time he provides narrative infill and choric comment on the action. Ha also, however, embodies strife, as his redundancy at the end of the play confirms" (Grantley, 48).

seen as a final punishment for his schemes? Once the Vice has found the merry side of being a beggar, the punishment does not seem to be severe because it has no bad effect on him, at least in his interpretation: he was simply able to reinvent the negative context he was put in. Although in the eyes of the audience he may be an ignorant fool not to understand his real situation and perhaps even be laughed at, his perspective cannot be entirely dismissed, as we will see in examples when Lear's Fool similarly creates extra contexts to the otherwise sad events of that drama which in this way become comic.

It is not only the final punishment of some Vices that is not clear-cut, but also their evil nature is unreliable as well. In the next example, the Vice is much less a corrupting force than an agent who plays in order to punish the corrupt. In *Like Will to Like*[55] (1562–8), Nichol Newfangle the Vice offers Tom Tosspot and Rafe Roister lands of St. Thomas-a-Watering and Tyburn Hill – both places of execution:

> *But thou shalt have it, if thou prove thyself the Verier knave;*
> *A piece of ground it is, that of Beggars' manor do[th] hold,*
> *And whoso deserves it, shall have it, ye may be bold –*
> *Call'd Saint Thomas-a-Waterings or else Tyburn Hill*
> *(p. 324)*

By doing this as part of the joke he is playing on them, Nichol Newfangle acts out justice, and the audience will laugh together with the Vice at the stupidity of the ruffians. Laughing with the Vice is quite essential in my argument, because we see here an instance where the audience's merriment regarding the Vice's schemes is connected to the audience's complete approval of the same deeds. Similarly, when he hands over his former companions Cutpurse and Pickpurse to Severity the judge and helps him to tie them up, Nichol Newfangle has a double function: he betrays his friends, thus appearing clearly untrustworthy, but at the same time he is an agent that helps the workings of justice be realised – no matter that he admitted at his entry that Lucifer is his godfather, and it is the devil who taught him "all kinds of sciences" (p. 310).

Two explanations are possible for the fact that the Vice may be working in line with justice. One is that he is indeed part of the moral scheme: he is engaged partly in corruption and partly in punishing of the corrupt – the way it is expected from him in a given situation, so that in the end he contributes to the overall working of justice. We see that Lucifer fits well in the moral structure, too, and he makes it clear that he is proud and arrogant and cannot stand seeing vicious people in the company of virtuous ones.[56] Here Lucifer, the embodiment of evil, openly acknowledges its corruption and thus fits himself into the system. The other explanation for why it is sometimes *with* and sometimes *at* the Vice that the audience laughs is that the Vice is indeed an outsider, not an intrinsic element of the moral world, a character with exemption who is quite inconsistent in his malevolent behaviour and whose schemes are not clearly predictable.

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55 W. Carew Hazlitt ed. *Old English Plays.* Vol. III (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874).

56 "Thou knowest I am both proud and arrogant,
And with the proud I will ever be conversant;
I cannot abide to see men, that are vicious,
Accompany themselves with such as be virtuous" (Hazlitt, 312).

At the end of the same play, Nichol Newfangle is carried out on the Devil's back, and he bids merry farewell to the audience, and speaks of his return:

> *Farewell, my masters, till I come again,*
> *For now I must make a journey into Spain.*
> *(p. 353)*

The beauty of these lines I see as the way the Vice makes the play open-ended and at the same time presents himself as somebody who transcends the confines of a single play. Another example of how it is not necessarily and always categorical deception that the Vice is up to is a scene from the play *The Tide Tarrieth no Man* (1576). If we compare the chief vice and his three minions in the drama, we see that the Vice does not necessarily hide his evil identity behind an appealing and cheerful façade with which he is trying to mislead people, but that he is rather ambiguous. When the evil characters decide to go about the business of corrupting humans (Courage informs the audience about this in his entry), the Vice's three minions all change their real names to other names by dropping the negative and revealing adjective, so that Hurtful Help, Painted Profit and Feigned Furtherance become Help, Profit and Furtherance. Courage, however, clearly can remain "himself" with his original name. He even gives a nonsensical explanation of what they are about to do and why. Actually it is a whole nonsensical story, constantly involving breaches of logic, like dead men first being buried some miles away from December, and later running away, or lines such as *"And after they louved like brother and brother / For very louve, they did kyll one another."* If we are looking for his consequent malevolent behaviour and we want to perceive him as the root of all evil, the fact that the others had to change their names but he did not makes about as much sense as his nonsensical tale. The idea of the Vice as not exclusively malevolent is stressed by Darryl Grantley in connection with a Vice called Common Conditions, a name that is identical with the title of the play in which he appears:

> The Vice is an interesting hybrid of the narrative specimen and the scheming servant of classical comedy, and though he often plots evil, his actions are far from consistently malevolent. He also repeatedly draws attention to his cowardice. At times, especially in the pirate episode, he appears to be used as a general-purpose character to animate the narrative.[57]

The question remains still, how we are to interpret the power of the Vice, how temporary and transitional its validity is. Dessen quotes a transitional play *Wealth and Health* (1554) where in the end of the play the deeds of the two vice-like figures, Ill Will and Shrewed Wit, are restored by Remedy, who says that the vices may *"reign a while, wrongfully and unjust / Yet truth will appear and their misdeeds blame"* (ll.931–32). Dessen says, "The power of these Vices (and later the Vice) is temporary, for the short term only, a formulation that lasts throughout the period and indeed becomes basic to the dramatic career of the Vice" (23–24). Dessen's opinion may well stand; however, the message of a Vice leaving the stage while joking is not as clear as it would be if the Vice were entirely humiliated.

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[57] Grantley, 61.

It seems that the Vice does not subject his view to the moral one, he does not act according to a logic where he, as evil, has to be the loser. Still, even if here we may account for the Vice's comic and not repentant exit as part of the Vice's comic tradition, and remember that finally the audience laughed at him, the same device will still maintain a perspective (that of the unrepentant Vice) that is not contained within the moral one, and will be much more disturbing when the same behaviour appears in later drama, for example at the closing scene of the *Revenger's Tragedy,* where Vindice, after being sentenced to death by the representative of the newly established order, Antonio, exists to be executed, but feels that all is perfectly well: *"I'faith we're well– our mother turned, our sister true, / We die after a nest of dukes! Adieu"* (5.3.125–6).[58]

An opposite of this exit would be plays where the Vice is spectacularly punished and humiliated on stage, and is shown as a coward – despicable for the audience. I have no knowledge of such Vices, and it seems to be a characteristic of the Vice to face whatever punishment may come in a cheerful mood when he exits the stage.[59] I claim that this tradition is much more than simply making the Vice a butt of laughter due to his alleged ignorance of his "real" situation, and it is very problematic to interpret it within the moral message of the play.

In conclusion, I am suggesting that we accept the Vice, a recurring character of non-cycle interludes, as a game-maker who is quite unreliable in his malevolence, whose schemes may work in order to sustain moral order, who may be but does not have to be punished after misdeeds, and who has affinity for nonsense and playing – in other words, a character who does enjoy and display a sense of liberty within the drama. We have seen examples above where he is reluctant to reveal his name – a parallel to his lack of a real occupation and his ability to play any of them. Dessen's opinion is that it is not fashionable in critical literature to concentrate on the moral unity and the temporary nature of the reign of the Vice. He is surely right, but there is another side of the coin: it is also fashionable rather to look for a larger pattern than to explain ambiguities not fitting an otherwise valid pattern as being merely inconsistencies in that pattern.

Still, I do not insist that the Vice always and necessarily enjoys the exemption and can get away unpunished, although I do insist that he sometimes does. In a morality such as *Like will to Like,* written in the tradition of Protestant interludes, it is quite probable that the seemingly inconsistent actions of the vice (corruption as well as punishing corruption) were consistently contributing to the didactic point of the play – just like in a sermon. However, once the didactic message of the sermon is not controlled by a

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[58] Cyril Tourneur. *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Brian Gibbons ed. (London: A&C Black, 1989).

[59] It is typical of Vices not to care about the punishment that awaits them, if there is punishment to come at all. The closest a Vice comes to humiliation is his being rather desperate, although defiant and aggressive at the end of *Nice Wanton* (ll.420–30 and l. 434). Leonard Tennenhouse, ed. *The Tudor Interludes: Nice Wanton and Impatient Poverty* (New York: Garland, 1984). Another example shows the Vice badly punished, however, he is not punished by the representatives of virtue for his evil deeds, but by the Devil for not carrying out his task properly. See Thomas Garter, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna,* 1578, W.W. Greg ed., (Malone Society Reprints, Oxford University Press, 1936), ll. 1392–1403. For the references I am indebted to Kent Cartwright.

single narrative voice and the narrative is scattered among characters, let alone when it is exactly the Vice who is delivering the moral message, when we have a Vice who is the "controlling narrative voice," interpretations may arise that would be perhaps impossible if the "message" were delivered in a non-dramatic form. The dramatic form itself already contributes to the possibility that some voices within it may have an effect that is not consistent with the intended moral message.

As I tried to point out in my argument on the Vice, quite a substantial effort of critics was spent on *separating* the dark and vicious Vice from the buffoonish agent who is comic but not harmful. I see that such a separation can be made only at the expense of his force, underestimating the Vice's comedy and its effect. If the Vice is seen either as supporting a homiletic structure or as mere buffoonery, we are missing the point. Instead of separating the comic and destructive elements in the Vice, we should rather see them inseparable: a unique merger that is intrinsic to the character, and that gives him the unfathomable energy and power he possesses.

The Fool in the Vice

> *Merry Report.* Well than, as wyse as ye seme to be,
> Yet can ye se no wisdome in me. (ll. 119–20)

For the purpose of comparing Iago and the Fool, it is of major interest that Mares sees two distinct classes of characters claimed to be Vices or ancestors of the Vice.[60] Into one class fall those who are wearing the fool's costume and act like a fool. The fool also has two types: the natural and the artificial, the former being often a half-wit, and the latter being one who, in spite of the knowledge of good, acts as if he was not aware of true values. Into the first class, thus, falls the fool (both the natural and the artificial), while into the other class of Vices falls the tempter, who represents the secular spirit and the enjoyment of pleasure. According to Mares, until 1533 it is easy to draw a line between the two classes: "the realistic representation of the riotous man and the allegorical fool figure."[61] He claims that it was not general practice to apply the title "the Vice" to a buffoonish agent of evil in a morality play as long as the vice was a popular figure on public stages, "and, even where he appeared as an agent of evil in a morality play, he always maintained a degree of freedom from the allegorical framework most difficult to explain by the generally accepted 'moral' theory of his origin."[62] The vice depicted here does not fall readily into the morality pattern, because he embodies a sense of freedom, something that makes him an outsider in the play not only because he is an entertainer, a link between the play and the audience, but also because he enjoys exemption from the strict moral rules of the allegory. Compared to later interpretations, I find it highly significant that Mares stresses the freedom of the Vice from the alle-

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60 Mares, 27.
61 Ibid.
62 Mares, 28.

gorical-moral framework of the play. He seems to imply that it is the popular origin of the figure that makes him difficult to fit in the morality pattern.

I am not dealing with the extent to which the comedy of evil in moralities is morally problematic. But I see the trait of the popular fool-clown who allows the possibility of a particular, morally quite complex kind of laughter in the case of Iago and the Fool – a type of laughter that will become essential in my interpretation of these characters, but which some critics consider impossible in a Christian context.

Mares's analysis posited two important classes within the characters who can be considered Vices or ancestors of the Vice, on the one hand the fool and on the other the tempter. Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century dictionary entries and passages from translated works quoted by Alan Dessen show how the terms "jester," "fool" and "vice" are used as either synonyms or closely related terms. For example, he says, "[i]n his translation of Pliny, Philemon Holland expands the Latin *mima* into 'a common vice in a play' and, a sentence later, describes 'such another vice that played the fool and made sport between whiles in enterludes'." Dessen also shows examples of how the traditional attribute of the Vice, his dagger of lath, would be accompanied with furred hood, a fool's coat or coxcombs — actually attributes of the fool.[63]

Bernard Spivack uses the morality *Like Will to Like* in support of his argument that the Vice is misunderstood if taken as a fool or buffoon. He stresses the miseries Nichol Newfangle has brought on the characters of the play in order to remove him from the merely jovial side of his role. In my view, however, the example makes the complexity of the Vice explicit: in cases where the Vice's actions, his comedy, are morally justified because his comedy clearly serves the punishment of evil characters, then from the audience's perspective the character "Vice" appears here as one whom they can embrace with no reservation as both comic and supporting the accepted system of values. If this were true, there would be no debate about the place of the character in the moral setup. Part of the quotation from Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses* is inserted by Spivack in his argument in order to support "a very much darker picture of the Vice" that he wants to argue for as opposed to a farcical characterization. However, the quotations actually do not support his interpretation, because if the Vice did have a "homiletic substance,"[64] people like Stubbes would not have been so outraged about him and the plays in which he appeared to the audiences delight.

Spivack, in order to provide background for his view of the Vice as a figure whose humour is wrongly stressed, quotes a passage from a poem of the eighties against Martin Marpelate, which "shows that even in the final period of the moralities he [the Vice] was not regarded only as jester."

> *Now Tarleton's dead, the consort lackes a vice;*
> *For knaue and foole thou maist beare pricke and price.*[65]

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[63] Dessen, 18–9.

[64] Spivak, 200.

[65] "A Whop for and Ape: Or Martin Marpelate Displaied" (1589) in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R.W. Bond (Oxford, 1902), III, 417.

Spivack seems to acknowledge that the jester indeed is an important component of the Vice. Still, he does not allow another interpretation of the figure than the moral one. The problem, however, is not in regarding the Vice *only* as jester, as the quotation would imply, but rather in regarding the Vice only as knave, a devilish intriguer, whose function within the play is ultimately to be condemned. By regarding the clown or fool or jester element in the Vice as significant, the potential moral interpretation does not disappear; rather, it becomes puzzling: a crux that invites engagement.

Spivack insists on the Vice whose farcical aspect "is only a dramatic glitter of his role, not its homiletic substance,"[66] and sees a subsequent "comic degeneration of the role," which is not possible to discover "so long as he performs in a context of allegory, where his characteristic intrigue is never without its sharp edge of homiletic significance and his effect without grave consequences."[67] However, the passage Spivack refers to in my view supports exactly the intrinsic connection between the Vice and the Fool, the fact the Fool is underestimated as a mere jester (the same way as comedy is underestimated as superficial, mere glitter), and the fact that the fool and the Vice have never really separated, from the time the Vice appeared on stage, to the moment when he went out of fashion.

Looking at all the contemporary examples that Dessen and Spivack enumerate, the close relation of Vice and fool becomes clearly evident, and I find it indeed noteworthy that the scholars adduce all the illustrations merely to confute in the end the idea that the Vice in a number of cases is justly understood as fool, and they insist that in the end the Vice is defined by his "homiletic substance," while if he is taken as identical with a fool, then he is not a real and representative Vice.[68]

A critic with whom I agree on this matter is Enid Welsford who, although merely in passing, deals with the Vice of the Interludes, and mentions two examples where "the Vice is unmistakably a court-jester."[69] David Wiles, too, deals in a few sentences with the matter of distinction between fools and Vices, partly drawing on Welsford's examples given on the costume of Vices and fools, and points out the close connection between the fool and the Vice.[70] Similar to Mares's distinction between the natural fool and the artificial one, Wiles thinks, too, that there was a difference between the born or natural fool and the agent who played this fool, and he claims that the term "vice" was used as a synonym for fool: "The word 'vice' is often used as a synonym for fool in the sixteenth century. We can trace, however, a fine distinction between the Vice who *acts* the fool's part and the born or natural fool."[71] This formulation of Wiles, apart

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66 Spivak, 200.

67 Spivack, 202.

68 Similarly to Spivak's reluctance to accept the Vice's subversion as potentially positive, Greg Walker in his interpretation of Merry Report regards the actor-author Heywood a good advisor to the King, but does not take into consideration the parallel potentials of the figure Heywood impersonates, and understands Merry Report, the Vice as an evil councelor (see above in the Foreword).

69 Welsford, 285.

70 David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2–3.

71 Wiles, 4.

from drawing attention to the interchangeable nature of the words "fool" and "vice," seems to imply the amazing fact that the fool – not the born or natural fool but the one who acts – may appear as the *function* of the Vice; that is, the fool is a mask or a role put on by the Vice.[72]

This passage is important for my argument because the fool I am looking at, Lear's Fool, is a "dramatic" fool in the sense that it is an actor who takes on the role – although the issue is more nuanced than that, as I will explicate when discussing the authenticity of Vices and Vice-successors later in my paper. This characteristic helps our understanding of the figure by regarding him not merely as a successor of the fool of popular festivities,[73] but specifically as the successor of the Vice-fool. In the former case all the dramatic potentials of the Vice are easily disregarded, however, these features are crucial for Lear's Fool: he is a fool and plays a fool at the same time, both on and off stage, both on locus and platea, where following Weimann's terminology, locus means a place of an illusionary character, the setting of the playworld, while platea is "an entirely unlocalised and unrepresentational setting; [...] the broad and general acting area in which the communal festivities were conducted."[74] His playing on locus might be surprising, because the characteristic theatrical logic of the locus is what Weimann calls after Alter "I am not acting, I am another person" as opposed to the other one "I am acting." However, such a character within the drama, the role of the fool is the epitome of playing, exactly the role that is the non-identity (this issue will be expanded in detail in 3.3.2), an identity that can be played but cannot borrow the reality of "another person" –since borrowing the reality of "another person" is rather what a conventional locus-oriented character builds upon. I would even say that the fool is a character who is *intrinsically unsuitable for mimetic representation.* He does not believe in mimesis, since mimesis has to be a mimesis *of* something, a representable, stable content, but the fool cannot *stand for* anything or anybody, because such behaviour would mean the loss of the dynamism in the fool's ever-changing character, which is his main attribute.[75] However, once the fool is not just a non-dramatic entertainer but is included in the list of dramatis personae, the fact that the Fool is part of the world of the drama opens up intriguing possibilities for reflecting on drama and representation.

Detecting the evolution of the fool in the Vice is essential for the consequent comparison of Iago and Lear's Fool. As I have noted in my Introduction, within the context

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[72] At the same time, testifying to the changing relationship between the terms under discussion, in the 17th century we find this relationship reversed, and it is the fool who plays the vice: In Bristol as late as 1620, "Kendal a foole in a stage play" was "being m[e]erie[,] acctinge the part of the vize." Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Entry number 418, page 91. For this reference I am indebted to Karen Kettnich.

[73] For examples on the popular fool see Francois Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambrige University Press) 122–7.

[74] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in Theater* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkis University Press, 1978), 78.

[75] As Hillman has it on the trickster: "The trickster's essence is his shape-changing, and he can only be known indirectly, through his entanglements" Helman, 3.

delineated by Hillman, there is a larger frame from where the comparison of these figures emerges clearly. This frame is the wide variety of subversive practices within Shakespearean drama, which Hillman explores in his book, and which he metaphorically attaches to the mythological figure of the trickster. In this sense both of my focal characters in this thesis belong to the same category, namely that of the trickster (and they are justly discussed so by Hillman), and clearly their ancestor that I am so allured by, the Vice, is a pretty trickster-specimen himself. This frame explains a great deal about the common characteristics of these figures and is very useful for interpreting the unique function these characters perform in their plays. However, to regard their differences while keeping in mind their generic relatedness, as I will show, throws light upon larger issues in the change of their acceptance as well as changes in the ways of representation.

2.3. Vice-successors and Fools

In this section I will present some descendants of the Vice and examine to what extent they can be regarded as similar to the two characters that I will discuss in much greater detail, and whether they can be regarded as similar agents of representational crisis. I will deal with three figures: Falstaff from the *Henry IV* plays, Feste, the clown of *Twelfth Night,* and Parolles from *All's Well that Ends Well* - all characters that, in certain respect, belong to the same family as Lear's Fool and Iago.[76] Before I start this investigation, however, let me just briefly reflect upon some other Vice-descendants: intriguer-villains, who do not fall into my narrow focus but who also display crucial characteristics of the Vice. When Bernard Spivack established in Shakespeare scholarship the systematic relationship between the morality Vice and Iago as well as some other Shakespearean villains, these characters were mentioned together with Iago.[77]

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[76] Northrop Fry in his discussion on different comic types includes both "the vice or iniquity of the morality plays" under the type of the tricky slave *(dolosus servus)* and the parasite whom he discusses under the buffoon (including fools, clowns, pages, singers), and considers the latter the "master of ceremonies." Thus for Frye the fool and the Vice are separate types, while I argue for their interrelatedness. Still, I agree with his definition of the vice as well as the Shakespearean characters with which he exemplifies his idea, because for him playful and benevolent characters (Puck and Ariel) may qualify for that title together with the Machiavellian villain (Edmund). The discussion of the comic types is included as part of the third essay ("The Mythos of Spring: Comedy") of his *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), but a very similar, earlier version discussing specifically Shakespearean characters is the following: "Characterisation in Shakespearean Comedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4.3 (1953): 271-7.

[77] Spivack argues that there are intelligible criminals in Shakespeare, who "are bound by the moral convention of human life and exist in moral relationship to their crimes," and a separate group, that are not: "It is just here - in their relationship to crime - that the great point of difference appears between the majority of Shakespeare's malefactors and those four who are obviously related to each other and belong to a class apart - Aaron, Richard, Don Jon, and Iago." Spivack, 38-9.

Intriguer villains

Aaron, the moor in *Titus Andronicus,* is one such intriguer-villain. He moves the plot forward, he is a great deceiver, and it seems he has no other drive than to perform horrific and vicious deeds in which he admittedly takes delight. An illustrative example of his Vice-like behaviour is when he speaks of Titus ironically after the old Andronicus, in hope of getting back his two sons, lets his hand be chopped off. Titus is in a hurry, he wants to be quicker than Marcus or Lucius, who would rather offer their hands, and decides to "deceive" them.

> Titus. *Come hither, Aaron; I'll deceive them both:*
> *Lend me thine hand and I will give thee mine.*
> Aaron. *[Aside.] If that be call'd deceit, I will be honest,*
> *And never, whilst I live, deceive men so.*
> *(3.1.190)*

The term "deceit" invites ironic contempt from Aaron, who clearly sees himself the master-deceiver, far excelling the others in this trade. It is also characteristic of him that in the end he does not repent, not even when he is facing his sure death. On the contrary, he is rather sorry for the crimes he did not commit.[78] Just like Iago, Aaron is quick and intelligent. He, too, is described as devilish, and indeed his wickedness and cruelty are infinite. Still, as it will appear from my discussion, there is a major attribute of Iago that Aaron lacks: the latter, no matter how intelligent and shrewd he is, can never have the audience on his side. There is no genuine allure about him; the only response he is likely to get is sheer horror. He is downright evil, explicitly and unquestionably so, and too immersed in his devilry to have the playful and elegantly witty attitude that makes Iago appealing despite his villainy.

Another master-deceiver, Gloucester of *Richard III* may be closer to Iago in this respect. He has much playfulness in the way he, just like many Vices as well as Iago, is the proper director of the plot, first conceiving a plan, then carrying it out, and taking great delight in accomplishing it with great skill and success. Still, I see Iago much more forceful in his schemes than Gloucester. Richard III seems to be ready to stop after a while, after he is king, but he cannot, because the surge of events carries him on, and he loses overall control:

> *Murder her brother and then marry her?—*
> *Uncertain way of gain! But I am in*
> *So far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin.*
> *(4.2.62–4)*

The nightmare at the end of the play shows him falling apart. He is shaken and weak, all his sins sit heavily on his chest, he is confused by his conscience, and he loses the creative and genial power he had earlier in the play. Although he will collect his strength for the final battle and does not die a coward, it is clear that he and what he

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[78] Nicholas Brook argues that Aaron's unrepentance "stands alone to question the complacence of the conventional ending." Nicholas Brook, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies* (Harper and Row, 1974), 45.

stood for are gloriously defeated. This outcome will retrospectively weaken his seemingly overall power, which is not the case with Iago, who never gets confused, who always remains at the top of his intrigue, whose goal is much less definite, and who does not let himself be carried by the events. It seems that a major characteristic of Iago compared to other intriguers is that he does not have a sole specific goal, and thus there is no moment in the play where he could either stop after having achieved it, or instead be carried on by the swell of the events after he has completed his goal.

Let me make a small detour here on the level of the composedness of a character. When dealing with director-player intriguers such as Iago and Gloucester, an important figure at the beginning of the genealogical line should also be mentioned, namely Hieronymo from *The Spanish Tragedy*. I do not think that we should regard him as related to the Vice in any respect in order to understand him, although I have stated above that the Vice and the Revenger may be as closely related as a Vice actually called Revenge, and the main function of Hieronymo is to move the events forward and stage his revenge at the end of the play. I mention him here for two reasons, one, because he too likes to see himself as the director of the play, the author of the events after his son is murdered, and he actually directs plays within the play, and two, because in comparing the two player-directors, Iago and Hieronymo, it appears that *Othello* is wrongly conceived if regarded as a revenge play. The key in this respect is the end of *The Spanish Tragedy*.[79] This is where Hieronymo successfully completes his play, being "at last revenged thoroughly" (4.4.176), and after he is unsuccessful in hanging himself, he bites out his tongue, so that after his deeds speak for themselves, he does not have to speak any more. This is explained by Huston Diel as the renunciation of speech for the "speech of deed."[80] At the end of *Othello,* Iago, too, decides not to speak: *"What you know you know. / From this time forth I will never speak a word"* (5.2.300–1), and his silence in retrospect similarly turns his "words" into "deeds." However, while Hieronymo is carried forward by inertia and commits another murder with a knife he pretended to ask for sharpening his pen, Iago stops playing and doing anything, although a consequence of his actions, Othello's suicide, is still to come. I see Iago as much more composed at the end of the play than either Gloucester or Hieronymo, who are at some moments mad with a passion for murder and are not entirely in control.

This loss of control, or perhaps the point when the intriguer seems to be involved personally, with genuine interest and passion in achieving some specific goal, is one of the reasons that another non-Shakespearean member of the Vice-successor intriguer villains, Mosca, although similar, is again less powerful in his subversive schemes than Iago.[81] After tricking everybody out of an inheritance, he, too, is interested in gaining his master's wealth. A more important reason for the difference between Mosca and

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[79] Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*. in C. F. Tucker Brooke and Nathaniel Burton Paradise eds. *English Drama 1580–1642* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Co., 1933).

[80] Huston Diel, "The Iconography of Violence in English Renaissance Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama XI* (1980): 39–40.

[81] On the connection between Iago and Mosca, and more generally between *Volpone* and *Othello* see Brian V. Tyson, "Ben Jonson's Black Comedy: a Connection between Volpone and Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.1 (1977): 60–66.

Iago, however, is that the former features in a satire, where the satirical depiction of an overall corrupted society implicitly builds on the audience's moral sensibility. As Donald Gertmenian writes about the opening speech of Volpone, "Jonson gives us an open window to see the moral order violated."[82] Although the audience can find genuine delight in the gusto, the creative power and the energy of the main characters, the conflict between judgement and delight that is set by the first scene, as Gertmenian argues, is resolved in the end against delight and in favour of judgement.[83]

In conclusion on the intriguer-villains, it can be stated that they do display a Vice-inheritance based on which they are comparable to Iago. Still, what they stand for is either not as admirable or alluring, or if it is, the intriguer-villains are more clearly defeated within the play. They lack the ultimate power of Iago, and thus they are unable to generate an atmosphere where issues of representational crisis could surface. Aaron lacks the easy trickery that Iago, Mosca and even Gloucester have. Gloucester becomes afraid of himself in the end when his conscience haunts him, while Mosca, no matter how witty, creative and shrewd, is presented satirically, just like all the other characters in the play.

Sir John Falstaff: The Vice-Fool

John Falstaff, the merry companion of Prince Henry in the *Henry IV* plays is a character whose Vice-allusions are easier to note due to the textual references to the character as a Vice: he himself mentions his dagger of lath – the attribute of the Vice in Part 1 of the play (2.4.134),[84] and the Prince explicitly names and describes him as Vice when Harry plays his own father in the improvised playlet. He scolds the prince (played by Falstaff) for being in bad company with *"that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years"* (2.4.447–9), and the Chief Justice says that he follows the young prince *"up and down like his ill angel"* (Part 2; 1.2.163). In the two plays, the motif of the prodigal son underlies the events and decisions of Prince Harry's life. The prince returns in the end to his father and breaks with his earlier life abundant with vices, choosing to be a virtuous, responsible king. In his speech of rejection directed to Falstaff and beginning with *"I know thee not, old man"* (Part 2; 5.5.47) he positions himself as the proponent of virtue, identifies with the opinion of his father that he played earlier when he called Sir John a Vice, and rejects Falstaff as his misleader.

Thus the structure of the play presents Falstaff banished in the end as a danger to virtue; he appears as the element that needs to be overcome (or perhaps first needs to be experienced and then overcome) in the pilgrimage towards a virtuous life. Still, this is

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[82] Donald Gertmenian, "Comic experience in Volpone and the Alchemist," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 17.2. (1977): 247–58, 252.

[83] Gertmenian, 251. Gertmenian in the article convincingly argues that the same is not true for *The Alchemist,* which differs from *Volpone* by being amoral and delighting, and quotes Alan C. Dessen's *Jonson's Moral Comedy* where the central characters of the two dramas are related to the morality Vice, "preying upon a gullible and greedy society" (113).

[84] References from the play part 1 and 2 are taken from the *Arden* edition, edited by A. R. Humhreys.

not the only perspective from which Falstaff's character is presented. During the play he seems to have an independent life of his own: his "virtues," or rather the characteristics for which he is liked by the audience, are his humour, his invincibly cheerful attitude, his wit, and his infinite ability to play and improvise. He is indeed rejected by the new King, but he is not and cannot be expelled for good as he stands for a *principle;* he is indispensable at least in theatre precisely because he embodies the elements used by theatre and playing in general. In the epilogue, in fact, the audience gets a promise about Falstaff's comeback. He may be refused by the new King, but he is (actually similar to a Vice) a recurring theatrical presence. The epilogue informs the audience that the author will continue the story to make the audience merry, "with Sir John in it." The epilogue is fascinatingly witty in flirting with the audience's desires: with the probably rather strong appeal of Falstaff for the audience on the one hand and on the other with the fact that such a character has to be condemned as the opponent of virtue. Thus the epilogue alluringly promises the return of the character, but allows that he might be already killed by the assumption of the audience's rejection, given that the audience is virtuous – building on the audience's guilt, should they not have rejected him already.

> *If you be not too*
> *much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will*
> *continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you*
> *merry with Fair Katherine of France; where, for*
> *anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless*
> *already he be killed with your hard opinions.*
> *(Part 2, Epilogue, 26–31)*

In perpetual deferral of closure, the drama creates the rejection of Falstaff as infinite and thus never quite complete task. He is rejected first by Harry, then by the promised play to be written in the future, then by the audience's reproof, as if in a never-ending denial, where, until the denial is ongoing, the rejected element is still in play.

Apart from the Vice-allusions surrounding Falstaff, there are references to him as "fool," and not the bumpkin, but the jester, the one who – as Mares has pointed out in connection with the Vice – *plays* the fool. He is referred to as a fool and is condemned in this respect both by the Chief Justice and the new King. The Justice says to him, *"Now, the Lord lighten thee! Thou art a great fool"* (Part 2; 2.1 190). The new Henry V in his rejection speech refers to him twice as fool and jester. Falstaff, however, has a different opinion of himself as Fool. He identifies himself both as the butt of laughter and the author of it, the ultimate source of wit and merriment:

> *Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me: the brain*
> *of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to*
> *invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I*
> *invent or is invented on me; I am not only witty*
> *in myself, but the cause that is wit in other men.*
> *(Part 2, 1.2.5–9)*

I would suggest considering Falstaff both Vice and Fool, had I not argued earlier that in my opinion the two are not clearly distinguishable, and this is the case with Falstaff as well. In contrast to the idea of Falstaff as the condemnable character lacking moral principle, an extreme portrayal of Falstaff as holy Fool is presented by Roy Batten-

house.[85] He refers to Lord Raglan's intuition according to which "Falstaff's vocation, in the public world, is that of court fool and soothsayer," and stresses Auden's opinion of Falstaff as radiating happiness without apparent cause and serving as "a comic symbol for the supernatural order of charity." Battenhouse makes an interesting argument in which Falstaff can be seen as the self-humiliating truth-teller. He, too, acknowledges the festive roots of Falstaff's behaviour in the Feast of Fools and the Lord of Misrule traditions, but he sees that these traditions fit perfectly in the Christian holiday exercises, strengthening the Christian worldview. He accepts Harvey Cox's argument that the feast of Fools can be paralleled with the understanding of "the mystery of Christ the harlequin, the spirit of play amid a world of utilitarianism."[86]

Such an understanding of Falstaff is indeed challenging, and I agree with Battenhouse in his interpretation of Sir John as an Elizabethan fool *par excellence* from a certain perspective. However, I see that the play does not exploit explicitly the soothsayer / holy fool potentials that are clearly inherent in a fool character. In other words, it is not primarily this aspect of the fool that the play builds upon. I have argued above about the intrinsic interrelatedness of the Vice and Fool, and I see Falstaff's case in the same way. Understanding him as fool does not conflict with understanding him as Vice if we have a sufficiently complex interpretation of the Vice, who is morally condemnable and desirable at the same time, who can be a ruffian lacking moral principle, while simultaneously radiating a non-worldly aura seemingly detached from and uninfluenced by worldly events, making playing and imagination his guiding principles.

I see many similarities between Falstaff and the two characters that I will examine in detail, Lear's Fool and Iago. Some of these parallels are seen in Falstaff's numerous explanations in which he tries to validate his earlier lies or give new explanation to the events, once his earlier version has proven to be untrue. Similar to Iago and Lear's Fool, he, too, is playing with versions of reality, creating alternative plays within the play, experimenting with meaning, playing with identities and creating new meanings with new contexts. A good example to help us ponder the very idea of real and counterfeit meaning is in his soliloquy over the dead body of Hotspur, where he implies the baffling idea that the true and perfect image of life is, paradoxically, acting, or more precisely acting a dead person:

> *'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit or that hot termagant Scot had paid me, scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit: to die is to be counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. (Part 1, 5.4.110–118)*

Still, in spite of all the similarities and functional analogies, I don't see Falstaff as a real agent of representational crisis, because the type of subversion he stands for is not

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[85] Roy Battenhouse, "Falstaff as Parodist and Perhaps Holy Fool," *PMLA* 90.1 (Jan. 1970), 32–52.

[86] Battenhouse, 35.

at all a genuinely threatening or destructive force within the play. He does reflect on matters of reality, lies, playing and meaning, but there is a certain detectable biblical logic within the play, and while Falstaff may be understood accordingly as an alternative perspective or a necessarily rejected element within the Christian setting, neither he nor anything else seems to present a threat to the existing order that would be impossible to overcome. In other words and perhaps in a more simple explanation, this means that since the play itself is not a tragedy but rather a history, there is no opportunity within it for the radical questioning of the values that sustain its structure, nor for a radical crisis of any sort.

The "corrupter of words": Feste

It appears that the Clown in *Twelfth Night* shares several common characteristics with the later clown of *King Lear*, and that his function as the domestic fool is the same. However, in a comedy the same behaviour exhibited by the clown will have a different effect than in a tragedy. Falstaff could be a perfect agent of representational crisis based on his behaviour, but the context within which he appears does not give him an overall validity within the play, contrary to the example of Lear' Fool, because the logic of *King Lear* can be considered to be parallel to the logic of the Fool within that drama. The case of Feste is similar to Falstaff in this respect: his jests and songs have the power in them to undermine the representational logic of society. Feste's context of the benign, comic universe, however, perfectly heals the potential wounds caused by such subversion. The undermining logic of Feste is enfolded in a larger comic scheme, within which such a "threat" is allowed – or indeed, perhaps it may remain a comic scheme precisely because it allows the symbolic threat.

Feste's official status is reflected on in Olivia's speech where she admits in a pun, actually taking over the logic of her clown, that the effect of the fool is to mend: the fool is indeed capable of offering a new and comic context for the miseries of his mistress and thus easing her pains. In Olivia's question "What do you think of this fool, Malvolio? Doth he not mend?" (1.5.71) Malvolio does not perceive the hidden meaning. Malvolio is the very character who takes words at their face value and does not see the possibility of play in them, the possibility that "mend" may refer not only to the fool, but to the people mended by his jests. Olivia, however, will scold him openly for not accepting the joke of the fool:

> *O! You are sick of self love, Malvolio, and taste*
> *With a distempered appetite. To be generous,*
> *guiltless, and free of disposition, is to take those*
> *things for bird-bolts, that you deem cannon-*
> *bullets. There is no slander in an allowed fool,*
> *though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing*
> *in a known discreet man, though he do nothing*
> *but reprove.*
> *(1.5.89–6)*[87]

[87] All references from the play are taken from the *Arden* edition, edited by J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik.

The pun of Olivia that Malvolio does not perceive is the basic technique of the fool, who, in a conversation with Viola, calls himself a corrupter of words: "I am, indeed, not her fool but her corrupter of words" (3.1.40). It is even more interesting that he complains a few lines above about the fact that words are grown false:

> Clown. *But indeed, words are very rascals, since bonds disgraced them.*
> Viola. *Thy reason, man?*
> Clown. *Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words,*
> *and words are grown false, I am loath to prove*
> *reason with them.*
> *(3.1.20–5)*

Such an idea of the importance of words in a tragedy would have to be taken seriously, at least partly because they are the reason for the tragic events. In this case, however, the idea may go almost unnoticed, as part of a jest that is the clown's everyday duty. An interesting comparison is made in this respect by Julian Markels, who examines Lear's Fool and Feste as parallels. At the beginning of the article he considers parallels between Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies in general, and argues that one similarity is their shared reliance on "the function of the old intriguer of the Moralities, the Vice, [which] Shakespeare assigns indiscriminately to such as Puck and Iago."[88]

Markels argues that the difference between the two Fools in *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* is the different attitudes of the other characters towards these Fools. Olivia acknowledges that her fool mends, while Lear offers whipping as an answer for his Fool's similar jests.[89] Markels formulates the difference as follows:

> When man becomes impervious to the ministrations of the domestic fool, he must descend into the destructive element and reconstitute himself by becoming a natural fool. That is what happens in *King Lear,* and conspicuously does not happen in *Twelfth-Night.*[90]

Markels does not elaborate on the possible inheritance of the two Fools from the morality Vice, but apart from the self-reference of Feste as the corrupter of words – a typically Vice-like attribute, there is another passage in the play where Feste makes an explicit parallel between himself and the Vice, in a song he sings to Malvolio, who bids him go and help him. Feste sings the following song as a reply:

> *I am gone sir, and anon, sir,*
> *I'll be with you again,*
> *In a trice, like the old Vice,*
> *You need to sustain;*
>
> *Who with a dagger of lath, In his rage*
> *And his wrath,*
> *Cries, 'Ah, ha!' To the devil:*

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[88] Julian Markels, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy: *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15. 2 (1964): 75–88, p. 75.

[89] Markels, 85–6.

[90] Markels, 84.

Like a mad lad, 'Pare thy nails, dad,
Adieu, goodman devil!'
(4.2.125–32)

The parallel between the Clown and the Vice is not merely superficial - that Feste will simply leave and be back in a trice like a Vice - but that he, exactly like a proper Vice, is playing a trick on Malvolio: he is indeed deceiving his victim, and he does it for the fun of both himself (and his companions in the trick) and the audience. Bernard Spivack discovers that the way the clown tortures Malvolio "recaptures the typical features of the comic passages between the Vice and the Devil, whenever in the moralities the former comes to the aid of the frustrated demon ('you need to sustain') and badgers him unmercifully."[91]

The Clown of this drama can be compared not only to the Vice but to its successors as well. An especially valuable similarity is detected between Feste and Iago by Joan Hartvig.[92] She sees a parallel between the two characters' implications of their own role in the intrigue as being merely agents who are "bringing about time's inevitable retributions."[93]

I have said above that Feste might make a good agent of representational crisis, were it not for the comedy he is placed in. As a typical example I quoted his views on the corruption of words and the impossibility of reason with the already corrupted words - although he characterised himself as the very corrupter of words. Another attribute through which he displays the logic that will become essential for later Vice-successors, agents of the crisis, is his ability to recontextualise events and thus change their meaning (as in his conversation with Olivia, at the end of which his mistress acknowledges that he does mend), and his metadramatic effort to have a similar effect on the audience. These devices will be analysed in detail in the forthcoming chapters, and it is of particular interest that the devices that will be so hurtful and powerful later are deployed here in a benign form. The example I think of particularly is the epilogue, the song that the Clown sings at the end of the play.[94]

At the end of this song Feste addresses the audience directly. As Hartvig observes, "[t]urning to the audience and shattering the dramatic illusion is typical in epilogues, but Feste's inclusion of the audience into his consciousness of the play as a metaphor has a special significance here."[95] I perfectly agree with Harvig that Feste is engaging characters within the drama in "dialogues of self-determination" - a device that is essential for

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[91] Spivack, 203.

[92] Joan Hartvig, "Feste's 'Whirligig' and the Comic Providence of *Twelfth Night*," *ELH* 40 (1973): 501–13.

[93] Hartvig, 503, in footnotes.

[94] Another example, although not connected to Feste, is a line of Viola that will be uttered by Iago as well. She says mockingly, half hiding and half revealing her self to the Duke *"I am not what I am"* (3.1.143). No matter how horrific the echo of the sentence will be in the tragedy, in the comedy it has no serious consequences other than creating comic excitement.

[95] Hartvig, 512.

the agent of crisis, after which it is "more than merely appropriate that at the end of the play Feste engages the audience in its own definition of the self."[96]

When discussing the metadramatic characteristics of Iago and the Fool, I will elaborate in detail how important it is in their case to provide new contexts for characters within the play, and how essential it is for their designs as agents of representational crisis to make the audience self-reflective in their perceptions of the play. However, Lear's rejection of his Fool, not to mention Iago's horrific schemes, will be reflected in the audience's much bigger trouble with these characters compared to the acceptance of Feste by others within his drama, whose official licence is to be the corrupter of words.

Deceiver among deceivers: Parolles

Although Parolles from *All's Well That Ends Well* is not the most typical Vice-descendant, and traditions that may refer to other comic types are detectable in him – the *miles gloriosus,* for example – he does bear obvious parallels with other members of the Vice group, and by examining him in the particular context of the play, it will appear how important it is to see the function of such a character embedded in the overall setting.

A most important feature that makes Parolles akin to the Vice can be found in references to him by those characters who see through his lies and deceit. There are several references to him as *"tainted fellow, and full of wickedness"* (3.2.87),[97] *"vile rascal"* (3.5.84), *"an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise-breaker"* (3.6.10), *"damnable, both-sides rogue"* (4.4.218). Lafew describes him as a man with no substance behind the show: *"there be no kernel in this light nut; the soul of this man is in his clothes"* (2.5.43). Just like the Vice, he is supposed to have travelled a lot, and in general he may be likened to a morality Vice first of all based on the "verbal facade" with which he deceives.[98] Similarly to Falstaff, when his lies are discovered, he does not feel humiliated but tries to see the positive side of the unfortunate event. Since he does not exhibit any extraordinary potency as a Vice during the play, he is the most powerful at this point in the drama, when he is discovered, but decides to take the discovery lightly (like several actual Vices before him), and rather turn into a happy fool, who does not have to care about everyday worldly business:

> *Captain I will be no more;*
> *But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft*
> *As captain shall: simply the thing I am*
> *Shall make me live. Who knows himself a braggart,*
> *Let him fear for this; for it will come to pass*
> *That every braggart shall be found an ass.*
> *Rust, sword; Cool, blushes; and, Parolles, live*
> *Safest in shame; Being fool'd by fool'ry thrive.*
> *There's place and means for every man alive.*
> *(4.4.320–27)*

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[96] Hartvig, 513.

[97] Quotations from the play are taken from the *Arden* edition, edited by G. K. Hunter.

[98] "Most critics, I believe, would agree that Parolles attempts to deceive *tout le monde* by a verbal facade and, in so doing, repeatedly identifies himself with the morality Vice" W.L. Godshalk, "All's Well That Ends Well and the Morality Play," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 25.1 (1974): 61–70, 63.

Although his words here suggest no particular wisdom apart from a carefree vitality, the idea of *"simply the thing I am"* echoes the *"I am perse I"* of Merry Report, and reverberates in a much more serious manner when Lear applies it to Edgar, *"the thing itself."*

As has been detected, Parolles, being the corrupt companion of Bertram, can be contrasted to Helena, the chaste but shunned companion, and in this scheme the traditional morality pattern emerges: the psychomachia-type struggle for the soul of the everyman between the good and the bad angels. The interesting thing, however, is not that the bad angel is incapacitated when there is still more than a complete act to come in the play, but rather that, on closer inspection, the deceits of Parolles are not necessarily so different from the deceits of his supposedly good counterpart. Helena at the beginning of the play explicitly verbalises her liking of Parolles, despite his being a liar, a coward and a fool, since *"these fix'd evils sit so fit in him"* (1.1.100). Just like the beginning, the end of the play is no less ambiguous. As Godshalk suggests, "deceptive means have led to the union of two deceivers"; the King summarises that all *seems* well, and the cycle has not ended, because Diana will choose a husband in a similar fashion as Helena gained Bertram.[99] The "moral," if it may be called so, is that the biggest deceiver wins.

Ironically, this play that seems to propagate deceit, finally celebrates it the least. Although in this drama deceit is clearly presented as a tool that can be positive if used well for accomplishing "lawful" goals, a *"wicked meaning in a lawful deed"* (3.7.45), the outcome is less clear-cut.[100] What prevails is not a *l'art pour l'art* deceit of Falstaff or Feste, let alone Iago. What is cherished by Bertram and Helena is not deceit for its own sake, for the joy of it. They both have a clear aim, a specific goal that they want to achieve through their schemes.

In summary: although Helena wins the play of deceit, Parolles is the one who does it more in the tradition of the trickster, though he does not have a big role within the play. Curiously, however, in this context of overall deceit, his schemes simply lose their power.

Afterlife of post-vices and the common life of Iago and the Fool

As we have seen, Vices typically realise their function as entertainers. And an important goal of the entertainment, according to Somerset, one of the Vice's functions, is to make us "relax and suspend our moral judgements." Suspension in the cases he discusses is meant to last for the time of the performance, not cancelling the moral lesson. The way I see the situation is slightly different: the Vice need not contribute to the moral lesson, and what is more, he may embody a "logic" that is plainly counteracting that lesson,

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99 Godshalk, 70.

100 The opposite happens in *As You Like It,* where the positive side of deception, its creative power is celebrated. Here Rosalind impersonates the chief deceiver, and disguised (or transformed?) as Ganymede, she is able to show the limitless freedom and rich potential of creative deception. Maslen has an enlightening discussion of this potential of Ganymede: "The infinite flexibility of Ganymede's wit, generated by his temporary state of suspended animation – free from the rules that enclose less fortunate beings – exemplifies better that anything else the extent to which time, thought and speech are free in Arden, where Jacques's seven ages of man are no trap but a basic scale on which themes and variations may be playfully improvised, limited only by a boy's imagination". R.W. Maslen, *Shakespeare and Comedy* (London: Arden, 2005), 183–4.

even if he does not cancel it. To infer such a moral lesson, however, is clearly much more problematic in the case of either of the tragedies I examine. I feel for any audience that, when encountering an appealingly comic and/or evil character, is reluctant to relax and suspend their moral judgements, if they fear these judgements may remain suspended in mid-air. Still, this is exactly what I think both the Fool and Iago are trying to teach their audiences – with different degrees of success.

As I have mentioned above, Happé sees a didactic experience of popular theatre "working through satire, ridicule, and an assumption of agreed values." His idea is that the vice is a tempter and destroyer, but part of the overall working of justice. One way a post-Vice can be an element of a general setup of universal justice is seen in the example of Shakespeare's Richard III, the scourge of God. Such an explanation, however, would hardly make Iago's deeds acceptable: a clear sense of purification is impossible in a play where pure characters like Desdemona fall victim to the tempter's machinations, too. What makes the Fool and Iago as successors of the Vice so intriguing is the fact that we can clearly see the elements of satire and ridicule in their relation to the others, but the dramas themselves do not offer a system of agreed values, where this satire and ridicule would take their clear place and agreed function. (This is why, in my opinion, Bristol is only partly right in reading *Othello* as charivari – see below in 3.2.1. The satiric effect of the charivari is really powerful only if there is a common agreement within a society about what counts as deviant behaviour that should be punished.) The levelling aspect is surely there, as both Iago and the Fool work in their respective ways towards the destruction of the former integrity of their heroes. Clearly, the Fool's function is enhancing and making clear the events that have already started to head towards their end, while Iago is a more active destroyer. Still, the question might be asked, to what extent is this distinction sustainable? I will address this issue when suggesting an explanation about the similarities and differences of Iago and the Fool.

In the dramas I examine the lack of agreed values is much more clear than in earlier plays where this problem was not explicitly staged, and where such an agreement must have indeed been present. At the same time, as Anthony Gash convincingly argues, even in medieval moralities there was possibility and room for alternative messages apart from the moral one. The difference is perhaps the extent to which the audience is struggling to grasp a coherent moral message—or whether the idea that the drama may actively question the moral setup may arise in the first place.

Concerning the big family of the Vice and his relatives (not those whom he claims to rule within the audience, like his Cousin Cutpurse, but rather the dramatic relatives) perhaps one of the most intriguing things is how scholars who are interested in him construct his story to account for why he is or is not necessarily condemnable. These opinions can later be related to interpretations of the successors of the morality Vice, among which we again find "tamed" villains, almost benign ones or simple mischiefs, such as Puck or Biron or Feste, as well as those who are dangerously alluring and wicked or even devil-like, such as Gloucester, Aaron or Iago. There are critics who find the

humour of both morality Vice and his later successors invariably condemnable.[101] However, it is interesting to see that along with the changes the morality Vice went through to reach the forms in which he appeared on Shakespearean stage, the "original" Vice was still lurking in the background. The figure appears "in person" too, in a customary ambiguous context, familiar from the moralities. There is an example in Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* where the Vice carries off Pug, the devil on his back – just the opposite way as in moralities, where the Vice was carried away by the devil. The Vice explains the unusual situation the following way: *"The Devil was wont to carry away the evil; / But, now, the Evil out-carries the Devil"* (5.6.76–7). Dessen refers to the same passage, and concludes that the quotation presents "a deliberate inversion that twice equates the Vice not with 'fool' or 'jester' but with 'the Evil."[102]

I would like to draw attention to the fact that the Vice here seems to have more power than in his earlier appearances, leaving the stage on the Devil's back, as in Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* from 1568. The inverted tradition in Jonson's play could stress his evil and deceptive nature – actually this is what Dessen points out in his comment – but there is another possibility to interpret the passage, and it is the playful and comic quality of the scene, featuring a Vice who misbehaves from the point of view of the devil and deviates from the pattern applied in some morality plays, but who behaves according to the "haphazard" and comically subversive convention, namely to disregard all authority and all prescribed modes of behaviour. If we do not stick to the idea that the foolish Vice is either unrepresentative or a degeneration of the homiletic original, we can see Jonson as continuing the original tradition, which did allow such liberties to the Vice.[103]

I have discussed above the epistemological prerequisites for the appearance of tragedy in the form of the Renaissance dialectical theatre as well as the conditions of the rep-

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[101] Such a view is held by Charlotte Spivack, who sees that it is only the perversity of evil that is humorous, not only in mysteries and morality plays, but Shakespeare and his contemporaries as well: "Several of Shakespeare's villains are virtuous in their art, dedicated to the endless pleasure of the game, and alarmingly witty in their frank verbal revelations of technique. At times their horrendous deeds are almost overshadowed by double meanings, mocking asides, paronomasia, and miscellaneous wordplay (...). But it is not the humour that is perverse: evil by definition is humorous in its perversity." Charlotte Spivack, *The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1978), 143.

[102] Dessen, 18.

[103] The idea of the Vice-buffoon as degenerated is based primarily on C.H. Herford's comment on Puttenham's equation of the "vice" and the "buffoon," where Herford maintains a view according to which "Jonson is wrong, historically, about the Vice; in the earlier interludes this character was, as the name implies, the opponent of goodness as personified in some other character and the corrupter of mankind [...] But in Jonson's day the original significance was lost, and the Vice had sunk to the level of the clown: Puttenham can talk of 'buffons or vices in plays' (*The Arte of English Poesie,* 1589, II. Ix, p.169)" in C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson eds., *Ben Jonson: The Man and His Work* vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925). The passage from Herford is referred to both by Dessen (33) and Spivack (199), and both of them see that such an identification would lead us astray from the homiletic substance of the Vice. As referred to it above, Spivack maintains: "It is not necessary to minimize his farcical aspect to realize that farce alone is only the dramatic glitter of his role, not its homiletic substance" (200).

resentational crisis – conditions that disappeared gradually as the new discourse and tragedy in its new form became consolidated. Baldo talks about "the tremors in the epistemological ground that would soon make tragedy in its Renaissance form obsolete."[104] A question naturally arises about the transformation of the figures who were able to embody, generate and expose such a crisis. What happened in the long term to characters whose dramatic heritage included the morality Vice? The scope of activities of such a figure, namely, revealing uncertainties and undermining certainties, disappeared together with the idea that they can walk off the stage and merge the realities of play and audience. David Wiles says the carnivalesque Vice/clown was obliterated during the seventeenth century:

> In the long term, social realism proved a limiting factor. The stage became a mirror of society, but only part of society was reflected in the mirror, only one angle of vision was possible. In the course of the seventeenth century the stage servant became a mere cipher, unable to make any impact upon the decisions and life-chances of a gentleman. When the carnivalesque model of the Vice/clown was finally obliterated, the clown/servant fell victim to decorum and verisimilitude.[105]

With this shift it was not only the Vice/clown who was obliterated, but also the possibility of interpreting the Vice/clown in a way that the tension he creates is not necessarily taken as a threat to the existing order but rather as a process that "perpetually renews precisely because it never resolves."[106]

2.4. The Vice-clown on the Shakespearean stage

Before I turn to discuss the parallel metadramatic and comic behaviour of Iago and Lear's Fool and make comparisons between the two figures, I would like to clarify an issue that makes this comparison valid and which concerns the stage presence of these two characters compared to the stage presence of the Vice. I argue that for a contemporary audience the similarities between Iago and Lear's Fool on stage could have been still appreciable, and much more obvious than for us. This is, of course, not to say that the audience of the Globe would interpret the two characters in the same way, but that they would recognise crucial elements in their character, features that clearly connected these figures to the same family of trickster-Vices. As I have shown, it is easy to fall into the trap of separating evil Vices and comic clowns, but for the Elizabethan audience they would not come as clearly separate characters, rather as the complex one I described above, a character for which we only retrospectively say that it is a "blend" or a mixture of two. For the contemporary audience it was not unusual at all that there was not much difference between the clown, the devil's servant, a tricky villain and the master of the game. As already referred to, the terms *fool* and *vice* could be used interchangeably, and there are instances in contemporary texts where fools and vices or fools and devils as "parts," i.e., characters on stage, are mentioned as belonging together, used

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104 Baldo, 179.
105 Wiles, 10.
106 Hillman, 5.

even as near synonyms, like in Stubbes's *Anatomy*: "For who will call him a wise man that playeth the part of a fool and a vice?"[107]

Different "roles" of vices and fools could belong so strongly together that they were even played by the same actor, similarly to earlier Vices and masters of ceremony played by the leader of the company. This I see as a very strong evidence to my presumption that the stage presence of the clown-Vices bore distinctive and surely recognisable features. Let us see a few examples that illustrate this connection.

It is thought that Falstaff's role was written for Will Kempe, the clown who in Shakespeare's company succeeded Tarlton. After an established link between the Vice and the fool or clown, we should not be surprised at all that the role of *"that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father ruffian"* was written having in mind the acting and the performing style of the company clown. As for Lear's Fool, we know that the role was not only written for the actor Robert Armin, the successor of Kempe in the troupe, but that the clown himself most probably contributed to the formation of the role and presumably to Shakespeare's interest in wise fools as well.[108] It probably comes as no surprise that the same actor played the roles of Touchstone and Feste, and we readily accept that the personality of this company clown must have connected these figures together. This connection was established much in the manner of *Commedia dell' Arte* actor-characters, where the stock roles were always played by the same actors in the troupe, who improvised on the "theme" of the given stock character, and to some extent were even identical with the character they played, such as the Dottore, the Capitano, Pulcinella or Zanni. Unless we see the Vice-connections of the clown, we could indeed be surprised that the roles written for Armin included not only fools, but also characters who were not at all in the wise fool-tradition, rather admittedly evil ones.[109] One of them is the Clown from *All's Well*, who talks about a prince that he serves. Who else could that prince be than the one whom the morality Vices served too? It is *"The black prince, sir alas the prince of darknesse, alas the divell"* (4.5.54–55). There is an interesting moment in the play from the perspective of the separation of the heterogeneous figure into a fool-clown and a villain. It is when Lafew asks the Clown whether he is a knave or a fool. The question is symptomatic of the change, and it is automatically asked by the 20th century audience too, unaware of the original intrinsic connection between the two figures. This audience, together with Lafew, is already on the "other side" compared to

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[107] Similarly, Jonson speaks ironically of "wiser patriots" who desire "to see fools and devils and those antique relics of barbarism retrieved" (Pollard, 202). For Jonson fools and devils, although not identical, definitely belong together as relics of an earlier type of theatre. This quotation becomes relevant for my argument regarding the fact that the style of acting employed by the clowns in Shakespeare's theatre was considered as outdated by many. On this topic and the types of clowning see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially 152.

[108] Charles Felver discusses the impact of Robert Armin on the Fool-roles he played in Shakespearean plays. See Charles Felver, *Robert Armin, Shakespeare's Fool.* Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1961.

[109] For Armin's supposed roles, not only in Shakespeare's company, but in others as well see Felver, 55–7.

the Clown, for whom the fool and the villain are not separate. The Clown has admitted to be servant of the devil. However, as Felver notes, "when he answers Lafew's catechism as to whether he is knave or a fool, [...] he refers to his bauble; but he uses the term in its vulgar reference to his penis."[110] I see that for the Clown, a representative of a fading world, this question of either-or, of knave or fool, clown or devil, is still irrelevant. From his point of view he is neither, because the distinction is not valid. On the other hand, from our point of view he is both, because he cannot be classified within the latter system to be clearly and only one or the other.

Thus, we should not be surprised that another role of Armin, Thersites from *Troilus and Cressida* was also written for the same actor, Robert Armin. As Felver notes, "in most discussions of *Troilus* Thersites is treated as a foul-mouthed malcontent rogue, which indeed he is, but it should also be noted that Shakespeare describes him as a fool – a combination of Touchstone and Jacques might be the aptest comparison."[111] Therefore we know that Thersites was the role of Armin just as Lear's Fool, which shows that he was considered an equally fitting actor to play an evil trickster as a clown, given the intrinsic connectedness, the similarity of the stage presence of the two figures. Following this logic it does not matter that in *Othello* Armin played the Clown and not Iago, since on the one hand, villains were not aliens in his repertoire, and on the other hand the histrionic tools used by Iago still connect him strongly to the trickster-Vice tradition. The most obvious and significant ones of these tools, such as his metadramatic qualities and involvement function, i.e., serving as a connective link between the world of the audience and the world of the play will be treated in the following chapter. But there are other features of Iago that mark his stage behaviour and which make him more complex than a simple villain. I perfectly agree with Seltzer who, in his article on Elizabethan acting in *Othello,*[112] likens Iago's stage presence not only to Vices like Avarice from *Respublica,* or Ambidexter from *Cambises* based on his direct addresses to the audience, but also to Parolles or Falstaff,[113] and describes the way the role was acted in the following way: "The swagger, self-confidence, and friendly good humor, give some indication of the stance of the character on stage."[114] This friendly good humour is, of course, the attribute of the "merry companon" as well, who might be a clown or fool, but a Vice too.[115]

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110 Felver, 56–7.

111 Felver, 55–6.

112 Daniel Seltzer, "Elizabethan Acting in *Othello,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10.2 (1959): 201–10.

113 Seltzer, 204.

114 Seltzer, 205.

115 When discussing the evidence for the "merry companion" or the jesting parasite in England, Welsford refers to the sixteenth-century Interludes, "where we sometimes find the hero of the play falling in with some traveller who converses with him in a jocular manner [...the hero] takes him into service, but not at all to his advantage, for his new acquaintance is in fact the Vice of the play." Welsford, 25.

Theresa J. Faherty also deals with the stage presence and acting style of Iago, and places him in the stock trickster-actor tradition.[116] Although she does not take into account Iago's indebtedness to the Vice at all, and thus in her view the type to which Iago belongs is not the trickster-Vice, she, too, considers Iago a trickster, and discusses Iago's central role in the play as characterised by his connections to the comic tradition in theatre. She sees the *commedia*'s tricky valet *(zanni)* in Iago, whose "*lazzi* (interpolated bits of comic business), are the snares and knots that hold the total performance together."[117] Among the tricky servants of the *commedia,* she says, there is one who bears a particular resemblance to Iago: "Among the *zanni* (Arlecchino, Francatrippa, Bertoldo, *et al.*), Brighella is defined as 'the Intriguer,' the plot mover and schemer on the *commedia* stage."[118]

I do not choose to attack Faherty's view according to which Iago belongs to the family of the *zanni* instead of the trickster Vice. Rather than trying to cut the labyrinthine connections between the different branches and specimens of the trickster, I would like to put emphasis on the living tradition of the potentially comic trickster on stage, which had clear markers (even the dagger is a common attribute of both the Vice and Brighella)[119] and with which Iago was quite probably associated by the Elizabethan audience. This way the contemporary audience could see in Iago the representative of the stage trickster with its characteristic schemes and humour. I assume that exactly by recognising him as trickster, the original audience was far less reluctant to respond to the appealing potentials of Iago than we are. In Faherty's words, considering the imagery of his jokes, "in the context of *commedia* humor, Iago's disgusting and disturbing imagery must also be recognised as having, at least initially, a positive comic charge."[120]

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[116] Theresa J. Faherty, "'Othello dell' Arte: the Presence of 'Commedia' in Shakespeare's Tragedy," *Theatre Journal* 43 (1991): 179–194.

[117] Faherty, 183.

[118] Faherty, 183.

[119] "His [Brighella's] two invariable accoutrements are a large leather purse and a dagger" (Faherty, 184).

[120] Faherty, 191.

CHAPTER 3

METADRAMA

3.1 Metadrama and the Vice. A definition of the term

It will appear from my analysis that the metadramatic quality of Iago and the Fool has strong roots in the metadramatic tradition of the morality Vice or, as Robert Weimann terms it, the Vice's "extradramatic awareness" (the variations of the terminology is discussed below). Before giving an explanation of how I understand metadrama in my analysis of Iago and the Fool, I will first give some illustrative examples and thus delineate the traditional metadramatic devices of the Vice. These techniques will be the ones that later gain a new function and appear in a new form, when they become what I consider the metadramatic tools of Iago and the Fool.

3.1.1 The Vice as mediator

A crucial function of the Vice is to mediate between play and audience, involving the audience in the performance. In Weimann's words, the Vice is both a *conférencier* and chorus:

> The Vice, already removed a step from the Psychomachia as a result of his manipulation of it, achieves an even greater distance from the allegorical convention through his role as *conférencier* and chorus: In so standing between the text of the play and its theatrical realisation, the Vice mediates between fiction and reality, the drama and the social occasion.[121]

This mediatory function of the Vice gains an additional essential function in Knapp's view, which sees the Vice not merely as a go-between, but as the character who makes the point, who formulates the gist, or the "message," of the play.[122] The irony inherent in this setup is, of course, that a character who is morally at least dubious, if not the embodiment or drive of moral corruptions, is the one to usher the audience to the message of the morality.

The character is the more compelling because apart from being the play's chorus and commentator, he frequently seems to be the very prerequisite or source of the play itself. An intriguing picture of the complexity of the Vice as agent of involvement is dis-

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121 Weimann 1978, 157.

122 "Serving as the analogue or companionable *raissoneur* for those persons who are the titular heroes or villains of the action, the Tudor Vice gives us a merry report of what the action is about, abstracting a narrative context into a thematic statement, helping us to formulate the rhetorical point of the play..." Knapp, 99-100.

cussed in David Wiles's analysis of *Mankind,* where he explicates the dramatically multifaceted nature of this character. Wiles points out the moment where *Mischief* informs the audience in his entrance that he came in order to entertain: "I am come hither to make you game" (l. 68). According to David Wiles he is "at once a villain, whom the audience learn to shun, and the welcome game-maker who makes the play possible."[123] Wiles claims that Mischief as a game-maker and master of ceremonies is central to the dramatist's conception, and introduces an intriguing idea: although we cannot be sure about which "other" character doubled Titivillus, the chief devil – a character who is advertised as a major attraction to the audience before he actually appears on stage – we have good reason to suppose that the player of Mischief was the one to put on Titivillus's mask in the play-within-the-play. That is, the character who originally introduced himself to the audience as the prime mover of the "game" is the one to play the devil within the inset play.[124] Wiles points out that the Vice is the chief comedian, and he is the one who dominates the play whenever he is present. Likewise he has the power to juggle layers of reality:

> He plays at one and the same time the devil, the allegorical person Mischief, and a crooked actor organising robberies from houses that are empty because everyone has come to see the play. At the same time, the player is himself, gathering real money to fund the itinerant troupe in which he is the principal. There is no fixed boundary between actor and role – for to perform a play is in a sense necessarily to create 'mischief'.[125]

This multitude of the Vice's roles, namely, playing the chief comedian and game maker, an actor trying to earn money, as well as playing the chief devil, is interesting not only because it lends a highly complex existence to the player/character, but also be-

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[123] Wiles, 1–2. Not everyone has given so distinguished a dramaturgical position to Mischief compared to the other Vice-like mischievous characters of the same play. For example Jean-Paul Debax in his essay entitled "Vices and Doubledeckers" observes how Mischief is performing his "duties" with three other characters: Newguise, Nowadays and Nought, and Debax is not making a distinction between them. In Francois Laroque ed. *The Show Within: Dramatic and other Insets. English Renaissance Drama* (1550–1642), (Publicacions de Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III, 1990). Still, I find David Wiles' argument convincing, taking into consideration that the Vice had minions in other moralities as well.

[124] Wiles bases his argument on the fact that before the appearance of Titivillus there are only three other players visible. Actually, they are collecting money from the audience before the big spectacle. He suggests that the exit of Titivillus may be interpreted as the entrance of Mischief. It also seems appropriate that the *par excellence* showman doubles the part (Wiles, 3). Still, there is a lot of evidence that would support that Mercy played Titivillus instead of Mischief. Because of the limited number of actors the two poles of psychomachia were frequently played by the same actor. It is difficult to decide who is right, but regarding the complexity of the Vice and the multiplicity of dramatic layers he is involved in, we cannot rule out Wiles' suggestion. The other solution is more characteristic to moralities where it is not the mischievous evil character who rules the stage, but rather the allegory of mankind. In the latter case, the allegorical mankind-figure would be the protagonist, and the other characters would be doubled. C.f. David Bevington, *From* Mankind *to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 87. – Bevington relates the same to *Mankind* as well.

[125] Wiles, 2.

cause this complexity is present in his relationship with the audience. Since he is capable of shifting the boundaries of the action between the fiction of the play and the real world of the audience, the audience is put in a peculiar situation, "on the move between the polar position of observer and participant."[126] The spectators, who are the audience of the game, the play and mischief, and the carnivalistic disturbance of order, become accomplices when they pay to see the devil, or when they witness how the vices organise the robbery of the empty houses. Titivillus, the chief evil makes this explicit when he suggests to the audience that they not warn Mankind of the perils that are ahead of him. J. A. B. Somerset points out lines from the play which suggest that although the audience, or in his words, we, are in a position to warn Mankind, we do not, since "[w]e enjoy a 'good sport' instead, performed by a villain who reminds us of vaudeville in his close rapport with us, playing upon dramatic illusion."[127] *"And ever ye did, for me keep now your silence; / Not a word, I charge you, pain of forty pence"* (ll. 590–1). Temptation in the play is clearly parallel to the play as temptation, and the devil is a director not only of the play but of the audience as well.

To sum up, the peculiar quality of this particular character, Mischief, shows that the same actor can embody morally contradictory functions: as the game-maker, actually the organizer of the morality and the explicator of its message, he is clearly acceptable. As the embodiment of temptation and moral corruption, he is the figure whom the audience recognises as the allegory of evil that presents a temptation, and the morality play thus becomes one of the sources from which a good Christian learns how to reject this temptation.

A very clear example where it is not the Vice but the play itself that is identical with temptation, and the audience identical with sinners, can be found at the beginning of *Like Will to Like*. The Vice, Nichol Newfangle, enters with a knave of clubs in his hand, and, according to the stage directions, he passes it over to a member of the audience: *"he offerteth to one of the men or boys standing by."* His irony in uttering the title of the play in his first line immediately puts the audience in a position of meeting the Vice by the very logic of the proverbial title and makes them accomplices. Nichol makes the most out of the fact that the audience now has the opportunity to meet him. He reminds them of himself, whom they may have forgotten. The whole scene is alluring, where Nichol is directly addressing the audience and is evidently trying hard to win their sympathy.[128]

Before I move on to discuss how Shakespearean post-Vices implemented and developed the metadramatic characteristics of their predecessors in the moralities, I would like to point to a very common feature of the Vice's involvement, in this case not of the whole audience, but of pick-pockets, who must have had wonderful opportunities for business in a crowd watching a play. The Vice would typically refer to pick-pockets as

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126 Wiles, 3.

127 J. A. B. Somerset, *Four Tudor Interludes. Introduction* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), 9.

128 The fact that the prologue has announced that, in order to please everybody, the author has mixed mirth and sadness (seriousness) may point towards the author's concern about the eventual negative reception of the comic scenes. Actually he points out how "myrt"—and in his drama it is the comic foolery of the Vice - should be taken with measure.

his men, and would encourage them to carry out their job. In *Appius and Virginia* Haphasard says:

> *At hand (quoth pick-purse)!*
> *Here ready am I.*
> *See well to the cut-purse: be ruled by me.*
> *(p. 22)*

Ambidexter in *Cambises,* as referred to above, is talking about how he plays with two hands, and as if it were an a-propos on playing, he remembers his cousin Cutpursse:

> *But how now Cosin Cutpursse with whom play you?*
> *Take heed for his hand is groping even now.*
> *Cosin take heed, if ye doo secretly grope:*
> *If ye be taken cosin, ye must looke through a rope.*
> *(ll. 702–5)*

The way both Vices refer to things happening off the stage and make the present and probably active thieves related to them (be it a thief ruled by the Vice or his cousin) is to integrate the off-stage events in the world of the play, and also to warn criminals to be aware that it is the Vice in them who operates, that they are ruled by the Vice, as well as (in the latter example) making them aware of the punishment that awaits them. The fact that thieves are referred to as cousins or relatives of the Vice, that they are ruled by him, may be a moral warning to them. This moral warning, however, does not always provide the message we might expect. A variation of the topos of the Vice addressing Cutpursse at his final exit is found in *Horestes.* In this example, the Vice suggests that the thief will not be caught in case he is ruled by him:

> *Farewell, Cosen Cutpursse, and be ruled by me,*
> *Or elles you may chaunce to end on a tre.*
> *(ll. 1120–1121).*

Taken that, as we have seen, the Vice did not receive any serious punishment, it does not seem to be a necessarily bad idea for Cutpursse to be ruled by the Vice and follow the advice of his master – and in this case not because the Vice refers to the punishment that awaits his cousin, but rather because the Vice was tricky enough not to end on a tree. Supposing that the thief is as tricky, he will escape punishment too.

3.1.2 Metadrama in Shakespeare-criticism

To contextualise my understanding of the term "metadrama" that I use in my analysis, let me give a brief overview of some major works on metadrama in Shakespeare criticism. A major groundbreaking work on metatheatre, including its Shakesparean form, was published in 1963, a book by Lionell Abel entitled *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form.*[129] Abel claims that he does not insist on the term metatheatre, but he does insist that the kind of play he discusses needs designation.[130] The volume, a collection of analyses of individual plays, includes one Shakespearean play, *Hamlet.* In this essay Abell

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[129] Lionell Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).
[130] Abell, vii.

gives a fascinating argument on why and how he considers Hamlet the character who is the "first stage figure with an acute awareness of what it means to be staged."[131] Such an approach enables Abel to defend the drama against T.S. Eliot's judgement of the play as a defective tragedy, because in Abel's opinion the play should not be judged a tragedy. Eliot's objection about the impossibility of the "objective correlative" for the experience Shakespeare was trying to express while writing *Hamlet* is answered by Abell the following way: "to be sure, Hamlet is an objective expression of Shakespeare's inability to make his play a tragedy. But Shakespeare made something else of his play, something quite as extraordinary as tragedy."[132] As I have already stated in my first chapter, in my opinion it is not just that *Hamlet* should not be judged as tragedy in a traditional sense, but also that there is no Shakespearean tragedy proper, no matter whether we see this as the playwright's fault or inability, or quite to the contrary, his ingenuity, or simply an accurate answer to a peculiar situation in dramatic history. This is, in Knapp's words, "an unprecedented way sharp wits filled the gap created by Tudor interludes that educated the audience in the dubious ways of representation."[133] Thus, I perfectly agree with Abell's defence; it is just the degree of Shakespeare's consciousness implied in the argument that I rather choose not to deal with. This is partly because I see it as futile to try to decide whether Shakespeare was consciously writing against the tragic decorum, and partly because even without his consciousness I see the same effect of the plays and their place in a larger history within the metamorphosis of dramatic form.

In the opening of his book *Shakespearean Metadrama* (1971), James Calderwood suggests the term metadrama instead of metatheatre in order to broaden the scope of the term.[134] In his opinion "metatheatre" suggests that the plays it designates strain the limits of the drama[135] and make "forays across or at least like to flirt around the borders between fiction and reality."[136] He proposes that such plays, examples of metatheatre, "would become a species of metadrama devoted to exploring the nature of contextual form and the function of aesthetic distancing," while metadrama would be a more general term used in the argument of his book, according to which

> Shakespeare's plays are not only about the various moral, social, political, and other thematic issues [...] but also about Shakespeare's plays. Not just 'the idea of the play,' as in Ann Righter's fine book of the same title, but dramatic art itself – its materials, its media, its language and theater, its generic form and conventions, its relationship to truth and the social order – is a dominant Shakespearean theme, perhaps his most abiding subject.[137]

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131 Abell, 57.

132 Ibid.

133 Knapp, 127.

134 James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

135 Calderwood, 4.

136 Calderwood, 5.

137 Ibid.

I accept Calderwood's terminology in the sense that I also use the term metadrama and not metatheatre, yet I do not see a difference between what Calderwood classifies as plays on the idea of the play (metatheatre) as opposed to plays on dramatic art itself (metadrama). The idea of artistic hubris that he wants to avoid by broadening the relevance of the term, the hubris he sees inherent in a play's going beyond drama by dissolving "the boundaries between the play as a work of self-contained art and life,"[138] in my opinion is inevitably there in any self-reference of a play, no matter how general this reference is. The effect will necessarily be a discontinuity in dramatic illusion. The real important thing concerning the metadramatic nature of a Shakespearean, or indeed, any renaissance play, is that the same device that is potentially disillusioning or straining at the limits of drama in a later period is a matter of dramatic convention in earlier plays. Boundaries between playworld and reality have to start to solidify so that they can be strained. Thus, I see no difference between metatheatre and metadrama, and the reason I use the latter is that although a theatrical environment is needed for the world of theatre and reality to mingle, elements of such "minglings" can be coded within the dramatic text. It will be these codes that I focus on within the present chapter.[139]

A truly comprehensive and systematic analysis of metadrama is Richard Hornby's *Drama, Metadrama and Perception,*[140] a book that I rely on heavily in my explanations. Hornby's definition of the term metadrama is broad in the sense that he defines it as drama about drama, "whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself."[141] In this sense any dramatic work is experienced as metadramatic at least secondarily, because the subject of the drama, according to Hornby, is always the drama/culture complex, the definition of which is the following:

> The drama/culture complex, like a myth complex of a primitive tribe, provides our society with a vast model of understanding reality. A play is 'about' drama as a whole, and more broadly, about culture as a whole, thus drama/culture complex is 'about' reality not in the passive sense of merely reflecting it, but in the active sense of providing a "vocabulary" for describing it, or a "geometry" for measuring it.[142]

I completely agree with Hornby concerning this definition; however, in his analysis he is concentrating on varieties of what he calls conscious or overt metadrama – varieties

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138 Calderwood, 4.

139 A possibility in differentiating fruitfully metatheatre and metadrama could be that metadrama is used for references to drama within the play-text, which may be "contained" in that they do not have to create a *metatheatrical effect,* because in this distinction "metatheatre" could stand for an extra-theatrical spectacle, and a true effect of alienation, distancing the audience from the illusion that is presented on stage. Such a distinction could be used well in analyses that try to examine the application of metadramatic elements in actual theatre performances, as well as the effect of extra-theatrical ways of performance on the audience. I am grateful for this suggestion to Attila Kiss.

140 Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses), 1986.

141 Hornby, 31.

142 Hornby, 22.

that are helpful in my analysis and will be discussed later on, but with which not all the metadramatic activities of Iago and the Fool I discuss can be labelled.

My view is close to the ideas of Judd D. Hubert,[143] who stresses the performative aspect of metatheatre, understands "performative" in a metaphorical sense, and looks for "performative indicators within the text instead of deriving them from stagings by famous directors."[144] He acknowledges to "have conveniently bracketed content and mimesis in order to focus on Shakespeare's dramatic genius and discover in his plays revealing aspects of playwriting."[145] In my analysis I focus on the aspects of playwriting as they are revealed by Iago and the Fool.

For the present purposes I will understand the term metadramatic in a broad sense: I will use it for those devices in the play that direct the audience's attention to theatre, both in the sense of stressing the theatrical aspect of the performance the audience is experiencing, and also the theatrical aspects of reality. In a certain sense metadramatic devices work against mimesis in this respect, because they, working against the achievement of some ideal verisimilitude, make the audience aware of the fact that what they see is not reality, but a play. On the other hand, metadramatic devices by their alienating effect create a tension or a gap not only between audience and play, but also between audience and reality. The best example of this is the play metaphor in drama, the idea so widespread in Renaissance England that "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" (*AYL* 2.7.139–140).[146] Thus, the effect of metadramatic devices is double: they reflect on the play as fiction, but they are capable of attributing to reality characteristics that "originally" applied to theatre or fiction. The whole problematic, of course, is rooted in the question discussed in Chapter One: to what extent should theatre be regarded as illusion – illusion in the sense that there may be a problem with its "realness," as if it had some false way of existing, actually endangering the realness of reality in the way anti-theatricalists feared. The interesting thing about a metadramatic character like the Vice is his capability of creating a space where the fiction versus reality distinction cannot be made. In Weimann's words,

> the relationship between Vice actor and audience does not operate at the level of moral fiction or dramatic illusion, but exists rather on the very boards of the stage; for the Vice stands, as champion of 'sporte' and game, between the fiction of the moral action and the audience's festive expectations.[147]

As long as these festive expectations are there, as long as theatre is not simply a fictitious representation of a place and time that does not coincide with the one of the audience, the play fulfils its function as "real" and not as mere illusion. Clearly, understanding the function of a play in society is of crucial importance when examining the

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[143] Judd D. Hubert, *Metatheater. The Example of Shakespeare* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

[144] Hubert, 1.

[145] Hubert, 11.

[146] The issue is examined systematically by Ann Righter. *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

[147] Weimann, 153.

extent to which it can be considered fictitious. The problematics of fiction was clearly not a relevant one in the case of a mystery play, as in morality plays such as *Mankind* the ritualistic nature of theatre was strong enough not to direct the audience's attention towards questioning the reality, the mimetic adequacy or the ontological validity of the play. Characters now understood as metadramatic constituted a bridge between play world and audience reality as masters of ceremony, as characters of audience involvement. The most prominent among them, as I have argued, was the Vice of the late moralities. Curiously, it will be the descendants of this same character who will carry out, apart form their involvement function, the ostensible opposite of audience involvement, namely alienation. The effect of alienation, a consequence of the focus on theatricality, as I have mentioned, is not restricted to the play only, but expands to the reality which the audience is set into. Not only the play but also the world will be conceived as theatre. But in this case, alienation and involvement are the same thing: the audience is forced to reflect on the events on stage in a way that what they see is perceived not merely as happening in a theatrical world separate from the "real" one but is happening to them, with them, no matter that they are "just" in the theatre. Metadramatic devices, devices that alienate the audience from the theatrical experience as safely remote, in fact involve the audience in the experience by not letting them apply automatised ways of understanding and forcing them to reflect on what they see in a personal way. The really troubling problem is not that the world will be conceived as theatre, but its epistemological implications: the fact that *reality* becomes theatrical.

Iago and the Fool both function similarly on the metadramatic plain of their respective dramas: they are both outsiders in the network of the other characters, they are reflecting on and criticising the social context they are set into as well as its practices of signification, and they explicitly reflect on theatre, playing and fiction. This is what I will discuss in the following: how and why I see them as outsiders, how they reflect on social practices and signification as well as how they address the question of theatricality and what they say about it.

3.2 Meaning as an event – Iago and Metadrama in *Othello*

As has been mentioned, one of the most important features - perhaps functionally the crucial one - of the morality Vice is his metadramatic quality, or his "extradramatic awareness." We have seen above that the actor playing the Vice (usually the leading actor of the troupe) was present on the stage on different levels of the game, because apart from the role or roles he played within the drama, he constituted a direct link with the audience, in Weimann's words "creating and distancing the values and illusions of the play,"[148] which necessarily endowed him with a unique quality. Weimann terms this quality as "extradramatic," by which he stresses that aspect of the Vice that makes him different from the other characters in a morality play because he is not "present" in the plot of the play simply on the level of other characters. In my interpretation, however, there is an additional, highly significant aspect of the unique dramatic quality

[148] Weimann, 154.

of the Vice, namely, that he is capable of *reflecting on* the multi-layered dramatic situation and even his peculiar role within it. This reflection I find crucial in my understanding of the metadramatic activities of both the Vice and the Vice-successors. Thus, since the Vice or the Vice-successor character is making comments on drama itself from his extra-dramatic position, the term *metadramatic* is more appropriate to designate his function.

An interesting thing about the Vice is, as we have seen, the different layers of his functioning, one of which is involvement. Crucially, Iago, like the Vice, has several layers in which he performs and is present within and without the play. As for the layers or aspects of the Vice, Weimann suggests the following three: 1. the Vice as protagonist and opponent to the figure of virtue; 2. the Vice as intriguer and manipulator of the representatives of humanity; 3. the Vice as producer, manager, and commentator. Although Iago has all these aspects of the morality Vice, in the following analysis the third aspect will be discussed in detail. While Weimann groups under the heading "producer, manager and commentator" elements that are similar in contributing to the play not so much from "within" but rather from "without," I will place special emphasis on the respective elements of this aspect, even above the ones Weimann names, since I hope to show that they all contribute to the rich metadramatic quality both of the character and the play.

3.2.1 Commenting on drama, involving the audience

Iago as commentator on the actions is an easily detectable instance of his metadramatic schemes. The simple fact that he comments on what he does and how he designs his plot (examples for this will be given and analysed below) results in his making the audience part of *his* game. Still, as I will show, this function of a liaison-commentator can be interpreted from different, even contradictory points of view, and thus can be seen as the source of various functions and effects.

Even critics such as Grudin who do not deal with Iago's (meta)dramatic heritage point out those attributes of Iago which are characteristic of the Vice as well: Grudin describes Iago as the liaison between action and audience, since Iago confides in the audience, explains what is happening and why he is making it happen.[149] "He not only conceives and directs the action," Grudin says, "but also is the play's chorus, satirist and fool (...) he obviously delights in his own schemes and artfully ornaments them in their execution. In short, he thoroughly reflects, on one level, the values of the dramatist."[150]

Clearly, Iago's relationship with the audience is rather complex. He wins its sympathy with his wit and stagecraft, but he also makes the audience his accomplice by revealing his sinister plans to it. The same function of Iago, namely, his audience involvement, and particularly its effect, is analysed by Bristol from a different perspective. He reads *Othello* as a rite of "unmarrying," and in Iago he sees not the dramatist but rather the organiser of charivari "organized in the protest over the marriage of the play's

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[149] Robert Grudin, *Mighty Opposites. Shakespeare and Renaissance Contrariety* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 125.

[150] Ibid.

central characters."[151] He claims that the play makes visible the "normative horizons against which sexual partners must be selected and the latent social violence that marriage attempts to prevent, often unsuccessfully, from becoming manifest."[152] From Bristol's perspective, being Iago's accomplice implies participation in and endorsement of his performance, which is aimed against the deviations of social norms. It is, on the one hand, participation in the burlesque and caricature of the racial otherness of the protagonist, and on the other hand participation in "pervasive misogyny typically expressed in the charivari."[153]

I find it important to point out how different the perspectives are that unfold concerning the effect of Iago's scheme when he is making the audience part of his game by addressing them in his comments. As we have seen, from Bristol's point of view the audience will assist in a wicked performance. I do agree with Bristol that on the play's primary level it is possible to see it as misogynous, a mockery of racial and cultural others as well as of an improper marriage. By focusing on the play's and Iago's comments on themselves from a metadramatic perspective, there is much more we can learn by participating in the play.

3.2.2 Iago's book of identity and role-playing

One reason for the complexity of this character, similar to the multi-levelled function of the Vice, is clearly his presence at different levels of the drama or within different qualities of the stage. Borrowing Weimann's terminology: his being rather a platea than a locus-oriented character.[154] A different set of angles of Iago's manifold character are rooted in the different theatrical traditions of the play in which he appears. In other words, in the play's archaeology the allegorical structure is clearly detectable, but beyond the allegory, from the perspective of psychological drama and proscenium stage he – along with the other characters – is a much more complex character compared to the ones personifying allegories; he has detectable psychological drives, motives and doubts.[155] Consequently, the collection of Iago's roles will include not only the roles he

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[151] Michael Bristol, "Charivari and the Comedy of Abjection in *Othello,*" in Ivo Kamps ed., *Materialist Shakespeare* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 142–56, 142.

[152] Bristol, 144.

[153] Bristol, 145.

[154] Weimann, 79.

[155] For a more detailed analysis of the play interpreted from both sides of the boundary between theatrical traditions see Howard Felperin, 77–8 and Ágnes Matuska, "An Ontological Transgression: Iago as representation in its pure form," *The Anachronist* (2003), 46–64. Felperin examines the Iago – Othello pair so that they together create the allegorical structure, but only in order that the allegory lose its validity later. I rather see the drama's structure as double, based on the Desdemona – Iago pair of virtue and vice as allegory, and on the Othello – Iago axis of different levels of definiteness of being and the envy of this definiteness of being as psychological drama. The opposition between the two interpretations of the drama's morality-layer is ostensible. With the three aspects of the morality Vice offered by Weimann, it is possible to reconcile the two views: I take him as the opponent to the figure of Virtue, while the way Felperin regards him is in Weimann's words "the Vice as intriguer and manipulator of the representatives

inherited from the metadramatic Vice, but also the role he feigns as a deceitful human being. I would like to examine now this latter Iago, and the methods and effects of this particular role playing of his.

The weight of Iago's falsity is subtly accentuated by the repeated references to him as "honest Iago" by various characters at different point of the drama. Richard Hornby, when discussing role playing within the role among conscious metadramatic devices pays special interest to this type, the "white devil":

> The white devil, or a devil with a fair outside, whose 'false face must hide what the false heart doth know,' was of special fascination in Shakespeare's time, since it challenged people's basic Christian ideas about identity. In theory, the soul was supposed to be stamped on the face, beauty supposedly reflected a person's goodness, and ugliness a person's wickedness.[156]

If we examine Iago's deceitful role-playing, we see that he is clearly presenting a false picture about himself to the others, but apart from playing a role within the role, he is adding a twist to role-playing by acting in a uniquely playful (and thus, as I will try to explain, perhaps even more frightening) manner. Hornby points out that when a character takes on a role that is different from his usual self, this will add a "third metadramatic layer to the audience experience: a character is playing a role, but the character himself is being played by an actor."[157] Hornby's perception of the function of a role within the role may help us clarify the threat Iago's role playing poses to the other characters as well as the audience.[158] In my view, the claim "using a role within the role raise[s] questions of human identity,"[159] is especially applicable to Iago for several reasons.

He is not only playing the white devil, but also is making his play ambiguous. He is a white devil within the drama, but for the audience he is a white devil constantly reminding the audience of this, making playful comments about it, and demonstrating the inherent ambiguities of such basic values as truth and identity. One such example is when he ironically points out that his advice to Cassio serves the advantages of the dismissed lieutenant, so he cannot be a villain:

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of humanity" - see above. For a similar, double understanding of the play's structure see Alessandro Serpieri's "Reading the signs: toward a semiotics of Shakespearean drama," in John Drakakis ed. *Alternative Shakespeare* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

156 Hornby, 77.

157 Hornby 68.

158 Hornby also discusses the question of gender-identity in the context of multiple cross-dressing, a situation that Shakespeare loves to set up: "the multiple ironies of having a male play a female who in turn plays a male, for example, explores interesting areas of gender identification" (68). Similarly, Bristol discusses Iago, Othello and Desdemona as the respective representations of the 'scourge of marriage', the clown and the transvestite - roles of participants in a charivari (146) - and he sees the "transvestite" Desdemona's character (and generally female characters played by boy actors) "a category of woman in quotation marks" that reveal "that both 'man' and 'woman' are socially produced categories" (148).

159 Ibid.

How am I a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course
Directly to his good?
(2.3.343–5)

His tactics of lying by telling the truth also contribute to this sort of rather puzzling than straightforward villainy. Even if it is the truth he utters, it will not function as truth; it will be poisoned and corrupted. It is the truth he utters, but at the same time he creates a context in which he makes Othello disbelieve his true but simultaneously deceitful words. The best instances of this are in the scene in which he claims that he thinks Cassio's an honest man (3.3.132), or when he is not actually admitting that he is false, but with his questions he is implying it, and in the meanwhile he knows that Othello will take it as modesty:

Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false?
As where's that palace whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure
But some uncleanly apprehensions
Keep leets and law-days and in session sit
With meditations lawful?
(3.3.139–44)

Iago's lines such as the above, or the ones like "though I perchance am vicious in my guess" or

It were not for your quiet nor for your good
Nor for my manhood, honesty and wisdom
To let you know my thoughts
(3.3.144)

have a painful truth in them, a truth that is not comprehended by Othello, but that makes the audience constantly see double. Iago turns honesty inside out, and the value of the line results in an oscillation between truth and falsehood. Members of the audience are constantly made aware of the several layers of playing with meaning: the words are true, but are uttered within a false scheme, are mistakenly understood by Othello as untrue, while the whole scene, including Iago, is mere illusion taken to be true: presented on stage, acted out by players. The illusion, however, may be taken to be true because it may show an ideal, not corrupted reality that is accessible merely through the stage. Still, the play does not serve as a transparent device, it is not pointing to that ideal the way earlier drama may have functioned.

I have said above that Iago's role playing within a role contributes to the questioning of human identity for several reasons. One reason is the problem of the deceitful appearance, which Hornby himself examines:

> The fact that both Duncan and Othello turn out to be wildly wrong about identity would have been seen in Shakespeare's time as a result of man's fallen state; [...p]robing a little deeper, however, we can see that such misgivings about identity reflect the growing size of cities, the rise of international commerce, the increases in the size and

complexity of government, and the resultant increased amount of social intercourse in the Renaissance as compared to the Middle Ages.[160]

Hornby points out that in medieval drama usually the hidden identity was the good one – as in the case of Robin Hood or Jesus. If we compare the ugly and repulsive-looking allegorical representations of sins in early moralities with "honest Iago," who is artfully mastering the stage, the change in the understanding of evil's nature by the end of the sixteenth century is evident. Evil identity is no longer revealed by appearance.

The other question Iago raises about identity springs from the ambiguous ways he presents himself as a white devil. In the audience's eyes, the fact that appearance may be misleading is not the real problem, but rather, as I was trying to demonstrate above, that truth may be corrupted. Identity can be corrupted as well: Iago is able to deprive Othello of his identity. This again contributes to Iago's metadramatic repertoire: by turning his noble master into a jealous monster he is actually suggesting that it is not only he who plays with identity: selves of the characters may be taken as simply assumed; they are not intrinsic to their identities – whatever this word may mean after being emptied and equated with roles actors play in a drama.

Perhaps the most radical way of Iago's questioning human identity is his apparent lack of it. Since Coleridge, many critics have analysed the motives of Iago's actions. Clearly, we do not need to search for an explanation for his deeds if we take him to be a Vice, because then he is merely carrying out his duty in a larger setup. But since the larger setup, the background of the morality play, although residual, is not so easily accessible, it is important that we try to look at him as a human being: after all, he is a member of the represented Venetian society just as are the other characters in the play. The numerous and the diverse motives of his villainy that are offered by him and the play, however, are indeed so puzzling and some of them quite improbable, that it is almost impossible to take them for granted.[161] Even if we take no notice of his playful and play-oriented, explicitly metadramatic nature and interpret him as a human being, it will still be his emptiness or nothingness that seems the most characteristic. Alessandro Serpieri in his semiotic analysis of the play[162] describes Iago as not being able to identify with any situation or sign or *enoncé,* which is Serpieri's term for something that represents the definiteness of being. Facing the lack of his own self, in his envy of the

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160 Hornby, 78.

161 His jealousy of Cassio, his frustration and anger towards Othello of not making him lieutenant, his fear that Othello has made him cuckold, and his love (!) towards Desdemona. An example of the other opinion can be found in A. L. Rowse's Introduction to *Othello* of 1978. "It [Iago's hatred] has usually been found inexplicable, but though rare, it is understandable." He claims that Iago's hatred is understandable exactly because of the reasons listed above, and the ultimate reason being Iago's consequential unhappiness. A.L.Rowse. Introduction to *Othello.* In *The Annotated Shakespeare* (London: Orbis Publishing), vol. 3, 268.

162 Serpieri, 119–143.

others' *énonciations,* he deconstructs them and transforms them into simulacra.[163] He defines Iago's identity exactly by the lack of it: "Iago, in fact, is a prisoner of his own *imaginaire,* and thus condemned to *not being* in reality: his manifest desires and motives are only the slidings of an *unspeakable* desire. If criticism considers him at the level of *being* (and identity: jealous, Machiavellian, diabolic etc.), it is in danger of missing his actual dramatic depth."[164]

Iago, an ensign, a nobody on the social scale, and a character lacking identity and eating away the identity of the others, on a metadramatic level not only shows how he can juggle with identities, but also reflects on the issue with his comments on honour, good name and reputation. The novelty of his ambiguity seems never to wear off: he may utter radically different opinions of the same issue yet he may be right in both cases, although in the meantime he is misleading his listener within the drama.

Cassio, who thinks he lost his reputation, the "immortal part" of himself, is consoled by Iago with the following words:

> *Reputation is an idle and*
> *most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost*
> *without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all,*
> *unless you repute yourself such a loser.*
> *(2.3.254–7)*

On the other hand, when he is ostensibly reluctant to share his negative opinion of the same Michael Cassio, he argues thus:

> *Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,*
> *Is the immediate jewel of their souls:*
> *Who steals my purse steals trash – 'tis something-nothing*
> *'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands –*
> *But he that filches from me my good name*
> *Robs me of that which not enriches him*
> *And makes me poor indeed.*
> *(3.3.159–64)*

Is good name or reputation, then, intrinsic, or is it a "false imposition?" Will you be annihilated when robbed of your "immediate jewel of the soul" or are you the one to generate your own name in society?[165] It is indeed spectacular how Iago is right in both

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[163] Serpieri does not define the term simulacra. In Baudrillard's use simulation is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality," it is "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" cf. Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations" in *Selected writings,* ed. Mark Poster (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). 166–7.

[164] Serpieri, 136.

[165] Another Shakespearean example of the same dilemma of the age appears in Edmund's soliloquy on his being a bastard: an outcast, a stigmatized person of society – although the stigma stands for no necessary intrinsic quality. The fact that the bastard Edmund is the bad boy and the legal Edgar the good one does not lessen the legitimacy of the bastard's critique of society's logic of signification:

> *Wherefore should I*
> *Stand in the plague of custom, and permit*

cases: as for Cassio, it turns out that his reputation could have been regained indeed, since Desdemona was willing to help, and Othello would have been inclined to accept Desdemona's plea to put Cassio back into office[166] had Iago not enveloped him in a cloud of suspicion. In the second quotation, on the other hand, we learn that depriving someone of his or her good name does not bring profit to the "filch" (is not Iago himself doing it for the sheer pleasure of the game?), but destroys the "immediate jewel" of the soul. And as the drama shows, with this tactics Iago is paving a direct road towards Desdemona's death.

The question here, however, does not seem to be primarily whether reputation or good name are important, whether they reflect man's immortal self . The real problematic issue is rather that it is questionable in both cases whether there is something genuinely immortal in us, and supposing there is, whether that something is or can be manifest. In other words: does the opposite of "false impositions" exist? Once the "essence" does not make itself manifest, once it is not represented, it seems it is lost. This predicament, together with Iago's multiple ambiguity, casts a rather sinister shadow on society's logic of representation. It is inevitable that the question of identity and truth, essence and falsity are considered, and they appear as anything but unproblematic.

3.2.3 Plays within - Iago as director

No matter how much Iago is in some sense the embodiment of evil according to a religious moral scale (and according to the references to him in the drama after his machinations are revealed), he is a necessary and ultimate driving force behind the game. His function as director and dramatist is discussed by Patricia Parker as well. Counterfeit representation and juggling with time by precipitating and delaying events are interpreted as tools of Iago in manipulating his environment, in his making the others see a reality that he wants them to see.[167] And similarly, he is making the audience see his presentation, or perhaps his presentation of reality as a play - in its two senses.

An objection could perhaps be raised against Iago's function as director and dramatist, since in the end he is incapable of controlling events and finds himself enmeshed in his own web. This objection is answered if we look at him from the Vice tradition,

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> *The curiosity of nations to deprive me,*
> *For that I am some twelve of fourteen moonshines*
> *Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?*
> *When my dimensions are as well compact,*
> *My mind as generous, and my shape as true,*
> *As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us*
> *With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?*
> *(1.2.2–10)*

Edmund's repetition of the word "base" has the effect of emptying it of its meaning.

[166] C.f.

> *"Let him come when he will,*
> *I will deny thee nothing" (3.3.75–6)*

[167] Patricia Parker, "Shakespeare and rhetoric," in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman eds., *Shakespeare and the question of theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) 54–74, 65.

since similar characters – let us just think of Weimann's three aspects of the Vice – are able to be present in the play on several levels at the same time. The play does not feature Iago's clear-cut victory if we suppose some sort of vaguely specified revenge to be behind Iago's intrigue: although he achieved a bloody goal, he was consumed by it as well. Iago as the master of ceremonies, however, may account the play to his credit, since he successfully manipulated both the characters and the audience throughout the play. And his defeat is not unambiguous either: with his last words *"From this time forth I will never speak a word"* (5.2.103), with his refusal to speak he also refuses to take part in whatever will happen to him or the others.[168] We will not see him executed either. The only death still to come is Othello's suicide, suggesting that the machinery Iago set into motion is still running.

Perhaps the most obvious dramatic self-reference, a reference of a play to itself as theatre, is the play within a play. Evidently, Iago does not direct any overt plays within the play that would be set apart from the main action as clearly as, say, the Mousetrap in *Hamlet*. Still, apart from the play as a whole, there are play-like, minor scenes as well, the effect of which may result in the audience's "seeing double" or estrangement the same way as Hornby finds it characteristic of "proper" metadramatic devices, like play within a play, where the two (or more) plays and layers are clearly separable.

One such significant instance is at the beginning of act two, actually foreshadowing the method Iago will use later on: he theatricalises reality in order to re-interpret it. In other words, he watches a scene of the play's reality, cuts it off from its original meaning, and applies another one that is equally plausible, if the participants of the scene are taken to be actors, acting out a different situation from the original one. If the meaning is not taken automatically, as a matter of routine, the same signs may carry different meanings. In this particular scene we see Desdemona and Cassio in conversation, but Cassio's body language is followed by Iago's comments, through which the lieutenant's gestures take on a new significance.

> *He takes her by the palm, ay, well said,*
> *whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as*
> *great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do: I will*
> *gyve thee in thine own courtesies.*
> *(2.1.167–70)*

It is almost as if Iago were giving stage directions to Cassio, and the context Cassio is playing in instantly becomes the one envisioned by Iago. The audience sees the two interpretations of the same scene run parallel, or perhaps they see the two scenes in two different plays at the same time.[169] Cassio's courtesy becomes a sign of his adulterous relationship with Desdemona, and his thus endangered present lieutenancy a mere mask as well:

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[168] Géza Kállay interprets the line as Iago's refusal of the basic prerequisite of the possibility of communication, and by denying this prerequisite, there is no use in speaking, its meaning is lost completely. Géza Kállay, *Nem puszta szó* (Budapest: Liget Műhely, 1996), 46.

[169] If the audience indeed sees two plays at this point, that of Iago and the play *Othello*, the latter one is not directed by the intriguer. The problem springs from the fact that the intriguer is also a character with a metadramatic awareness, which places him above the level of the plot.

If such tricks as these strip you out of
your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not
kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you
are most apt to play the sir in.
(2.1.171–4)

The method is indeed contagious. The next time the audience witnesses a scene where the dramatic world is further theatricalised by somebody's comments, the commentator will be not Iago but Othello. When Iago sets him to eavesdrop on his conversation with Cassio and Bianca (4.1.101-66), Othello will interpret what he sees in sentences like *"Look how he laughs already!," "Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out";* [Desdemona's] *"Crying 'O dear Cassio!' as it were: his gesture imports it"* or *"Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber."*

If Grudin says that Iago is the play's chorus,[170] in this scene Othello actively takes over the part of the chorus, and in the metadramatic layer of the scene, Othello is not even singing off-pitch. It is uncanny how Iago's precise words "well said" ring in Othello's line:

Now he importunes him
To tell it o'er, go to, well said, well said.
(4.1.115)

The progress with which Othello uses Iago's method of fictionalising scenes within the play, or creating playlets within the play, is outstanding. Three stages emerge from the three examples. In the first instance, we see Iago corrupting the reality of the world of the play with his fiction or in other words, with his presenting events in a context that he created for them and in which the events gain a new meaning. In the second example, he is setting up a scene in which Othello will have to do the same. The next stage, where the method is completely adopted by Othello, can be found in act four scene two. Here Iago is not needed anymore for Othello to carry on. The moor, in his outrage against Desdemona, sends Emilia away to leave them alone, and starts playing a wicked game of casting, in which Emilia is the bawd and Desdemona a whore:

Des. *What horrible fancy is this?*
Oth. *[to Emilia] Some of your function, mistress,*
Leave procreants alone and shut the door;
Cough, or cry hem, if anybody come.
Your mystery your mystery: nay, dispatch!
(4.2.26.30)

At the end of his visit, after more than 60 lines of conversation, he still has not fallen out of his role of a "procreant":

You! Mistress!
Enter Emilia.
That have the office opposite to Saint Peter
And keep the gates of hell – you, ay, you!
We have done our course, there's money for your pains,
I pray you turn the key and keep our counsel.
(4.2.92–6)

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170 Grudin, 125.

Clearly, Othello is acting and setting up this scene because he thinks it is closer to what he believes to be true, namely, that Desdemona has made him cuckold and Emilia must have been a witness to and accomplice in it. But no matter why he is doing it, it demonstrates how the method of corrupting reality by fiction is increasing in impact. The estrangement effect of the scene within will spring not only from the increased number of layers, but also – because of the seemingly automatized process of fictionalization – from the uncertainty whether the "original" or "real" meaning of the event is lost or may be restored.

3.2.4 Representation as fiction

The problem of reality fictionalised does not start solely with Iago in the drama. Hubert in his analysis of *Othello,* discussing the central role of narrative fiction in Othello's understanding of himself and his successful wooing of Desdemona, points out Othello's fictionalised existence and states that the "admirable fables have actually initiated a betrayal that the villain's lies will eagerly complete."[171] He concludes his essay on the drama with the following: "Fictional discourse stands out as even more dangerous than the villain, who without the eminently theatrical separation between stage presence and stage persona might never have found a way to destroy his master."[172] In his view, thus, it is not necessarily Iago himself who can be blamed for the events of the tragedy. The main problem is not posed by the devilish intriguer but rather by the gap between representation and perception, which is a threatening force behind the scenes of an assumed reality. However, to reach to this point we need to be critical of the society represented to a certain extent, a degree that we would be unable to reach without detecting the play's self-references and its references to the signifying practices of society. It is not Iago who is corrupting reality with fiction and making Othello carry on with the project he initiated, it is not pretence and playing that are turning the world into a theatre, but it is rather the logic of any representation itself that is problematic to the extent a theatrical representation may be regarded as questionable or unreal.

3.2.5 Iago's metadramatic effect—summary

The most important metadramatic effect of Iago's machinations is, in the end, that he shows how it is possible to shape and generate reality. His strength is not so much in deception and misleading others, but much more in imposing his own machinations upon the world perceived by others and thus making everybody part of his game, a functioning element in the world that he generates. He is producing a plot and a play, making the others act the way he wants them to, by making them fit in his scheme, and by giving his own interpretations of their speeches as well as creating contexts which will generate meaning in accordance with his destructive plans. As for his effect on the audience, his deception is of a different kind, since it is the audience in whom he confides. The spectators will be enmeshed in his web in a different way: it is their partici-

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171 Hubert, 82.

172 Hubert, 87.

pation that matters, the fact that they witness such an event. But in both cases Iago is simply able to deprive others of whatever reality they thought they were living in and make them enter his own world.

Keir Elam has an intriguing explanation of "worlds-within-world: characters' and spectators' subworlds" – these subworlds being possible developments of the state of affairs in a drama hypothesized by dramatis personae and audience members. "When characters or spectators hypothesize a state of affairs in WD [world of the drama], whether it proves true or false, one can talk of the *subworlds* projected on to it."[173] Using Bertrand Russell's *propositional attitudes,* he distinguishes between different modalities a subworld can be founded on, "indicating the speaker's attitude to the proposition uttered." Such worlds are the world of the speaker's knowledge, beliefs, fears etc., including the world of his commands, which is called the deontic world, "the state of affairs that he orders to be brought about."[174] It is compelling to think of Iago as director (and indeed all the Vice-director intriguers) controlling the WD in such a way that they will assimilate it into their own deontic world. The audience has to face the fact that the engine of the state of affairs is not some divinity or essence that the world is based upon, but rather the director-villain is shaping them according to the way he "orders" them to be brought about. Although it is not directly his orders as such that move the play of Iago forward, the moments in the play when he conceives of the elements of his scheme can be understood as something similar to giving an order, something like "this is how I want it to be." Such examples are when Iago exclaims *'I have't, it is engendered! Hell and night/ Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light"* (1.3.402–3) or *'No, he must die. Be't so! I hear him coming"* (5.1.22).[175]

Similar to Iago as a character, metadrama as a device works towards *doing* rather than *representing,* since it constantly reminds the audience not only of the fact of being in the theatre but also of the problematic nature of reality. Reality appears as problematic because it is theatrical in the sense that it can be manipulated, or even worse, that there is nothing to manipulate: it is constructed, and it can be constructed by a player-director in front of their eyes. To the extent constructing or "doing" is outweighing "representing," the play is not so much theatrical in its representational sense, but rather a ritualistic event. In a further step metadrama makes us see reality as a play, it makes us see perceived reality in the process of its production. Reality, thus, appears not as something that is possible to understand and in this way be contained in a play for safe examination as in a laboratory (and indeed as "representable" as in later, Enlightenment-type theatre), but rather something that seems to be intermingled with the way it is represented, as if reality were entrapped in and by the play, something impossible to distinguish from its representation or rather, from the way it is presented – since this presentation coincides with its creation or birth. This is why the appeal of metadrama

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173 Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), 114.

174 Ibid.

175 It was originally Bradley who expanded the idea of Iago as dramatist and conceiver of the plot: "Iago, finally, is not simply a man of action, he is an artist. His action is a plot, the intricate plot of a drama, and in the conception and execution of it he experiences tension and the joy of artistic creation." A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 188.

is so strong: what metadrama (and in our case also Iago) *does* can be understood as making a ritualistic performance out of theatre, a ritual in which we are involved in a performance which is not mirroring or representing any specific, pre-existing cultural content, but is making this content, is making it happen.

The "meaning" of the play will thus unfold as a process of the play, which necessarily involves the audience as active participants: Iago is directing the play, and as discussed above, is making the audience his accomplice in a set of complex processes. He puts us on trial by making us see and reflect on what we are perhaps unwilling to face: the ways basic assumptions about what reality is and how it behaves may be proven false by showing that they are created and can be manipulated and are not necessarily different from fiction.

3.3 Metadramatic aspects of the Fool

I have already referred to Mares in chapter 2, who claims that the morality Vice had been established as a stage clown before he appeared in the morality at all. It seems to me thus that when considering Lear's Fool we are facing a figure who is both a descendant and a root of the morality Vice. (He is a root because as a clown, he was originally part of the amalgamated figure of the Vice who ran a brilliant dramatic career.) Still, although sometimes on stage, the fool was originally not a specifically dramatic character, but rather a figure of entertainment with more or less precisely prescribed functions in society. The figure in *King Lear*'s case is set into a play which enacts a legendary world including a court of a king, and here the Fool as a character can be considered a necessary element of the playworld in which, following the principle of verisimilitude, he is part of the royal court represented, and there he carries out the usual functions of a fool. These functions do not need a drama as a context to be carried out. On the other hand, taking the play itself as some sort of festivity, the fool is still fulfilling the traditional role of involvement and entertainment.

This latter role of Lear's Fool is not as explicit as in the case of Iago. While we understand the intriguer of *Othello* as essential for the play to move on – as we have seen Iago is making the whole play in a sense – the Fool's centrality to *King Lear* or being its "drive" is of different sort. It is exactly this "different sort" that I will try to explore by analysing how the Fool fulfils his metadramatic role. I have said above that the Fool is both root and descendant of the Vice. I have discussed in my second chapter why I see the fool and its tradition as an important root of the Vice. But I see the Fool as a descendant of the Vice too: in the specific case of Lear's Fool it is possible to establish links that connect some central aspects of him to the Vice-tradition. A crucial one of these aspects is exactly that the Fool has learnt the acting trade from the Vice, and has learnt to be metadramatic in a Vice-like fashion.

3.3.1 The Fool and his audience

There are several instances in *King Lear* where the fool is explaining and commenting on the events – some of which I will analyse below – and there are many among them where it is not clear whether anybody on stage gets the point or whether it is instead

the audience to whom he directs his speech.[176] There are two instances in the play, however, where it is the audience whom the Fool addresses directly. Unfortunately, both examples are rather obscure (similar to the case of Lear, sometimes not even the audience is able to get the point, supposing that there is one), but even if we cannot find a perfectly plausible explanation, it is clear that the Fool, occupying a platea-position, is establishing a contact with the context of the play – the audience in the theatre – thus drawing attention to the theatrical quality of the situation. One of these instances appears at the end of Act 1:

> *She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure,*
> *shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter.*
> *(1.5.48–9)*

The couplet, according to Kenneth Muir, means that "the maid who sees only the funny side of the Fool's gibes, and does not realise that Lear is going on a tragic journey is such a simpleton that she won't know how to preserve her virginity."[177] If Muir is right, this instance is unique in the play in its pointing out the reverse side of the jokes or the sad side of the events. Normally the Fool does just the opposite: he tries to draw attention to the comic side of the tragic events. The other example where the audience is directly addressed by the Fool is a 15-line speech at the end of 3.2. included in the Folio version, after Lear and Kent leave and the Fool is left alone on stage. The Fool himself calls the speech a "prophecy," at some points quite in the manner of Haphazard's "When geese shall crack mussels"-speech. The Fool's speech begins with enumerating first the small vices of present times, such as "when priests are more in words than matter." These examples are followed by Utopian visions (e.g., "when every case in law is right"). The time to which all the examples apply, the time that they illustrate is the following:

> *Then shall the realm of Albion*
> *Come to great confusion:*
> *Then comes the time, who lives to see't*
> *That going shall be us'd with feet.*
> *(3.2.91–4)*

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[176] Although I am aware of the differences between the Quarto and the Folio versions of the Fool, the part in the *dramatis personae* which is affected most by the revisions and with almost a quarter of his lines changed in the Folio, I feel that my overall interpretation of the Fool as successor of the morality Vice and agent of the representational crisis applies to both versions, although perhaps intensified by the Folio version, where, according to Kerrigan, the Fool has a growing sense of irrelevance, and is drifting apart from the King, while at the same time he uses the stage convention of engagement with the audience to a profound dramatic effect. If not indicated otherwise, the lines of the Fool I use for my interpretation are present in both versions. Kerrigan discusses the difference between the Q and F versions of the Fool systematically. See his "Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool," in Gary Taylor and Michael Warren eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 195–245.

[177] Kenneth Muir, Introduction to the Arden edition of *King Lear* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 55.

The whole speech may be taken as typically nonsensical "wisdom" of the fool in the traditional nonsense of the Vice's rhetoric, but if taken literally, it suggests that the prophesied future coincides in time with the present of the speech, and that present is characterised both by petty vices of the times like brewers marring beer with water, as well as by a Utopian state of affairs when bawds and whores are building churches of repentance. That future, which is both a confused and a perfectly normal time when feet are used for walking, is the present.[178] And that present in the Fool's speech becomes clearly the present of the audience. It is in this manner that the Fool curiously concludes the speech by saying "This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time" – that sentence cannot be uttered without the perspective of the audience's sense of time, and the Fool's double awareness of his being both an element in a play set in a legendary and remote past, and a character playing that role in front of an audience who need some guidance. We can, of course, congratulate the Fool for trying to fulfil the function of the commentator, and perhaps wish for a clearer explanation.

3.3.2 "All thy other titles"

We have seen Iago juggling different masks in the previous section of this chapter, his repository of roles within the role, and the emptiness of his character which, in a certain sense can be regarded as a prerequisite for the parading of different roles he plays. Lear's Fool is not wearing masks or putting on a disguise like Iago; on the contrary, it is always the truth that he is trying to direct attention to, no matter wheter it is likeable or easily acceptable or not.[179] But he is similar to Iago in his representing an emptiness of character, a non-character. Through both his behaviour and his explicit references to the question of identity, the fool seems to present his own role, his own position within society as a "zero" position of character, something that provides a possibility for casting: being a fool is being ready to play and take on "other titles" by choosing any from the long-long line of occupations enumerated by Haphazard.

His two most explicit remarks in this direction are both in act 1 scene 4. In the Quarto version of the play the Fool first hints that Lear was a bitter fool to give away his land, and Lear cries out of indignation *'Dost thou call me a fool, boy?"* upon which the Fool answers: *"All thy other titles thou hast given away, that thou/ wast born with,"* suggesting an ambiguous understanding of being a fool, positive and negative at the same time; the king is mocked and rightly offended by being a fool on the one hand, but on the other,

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[178] John Kerrigan has a similar interpretation of the prophecy of the Fool, although he emphasizes the importance of hindsight in true knowledge, while in my opinion the Fool stages (in this prophecy as well as elsewhere) the appreciation of the presence of the action: the understanding of events without an overall frame of reference and meaning. This, however, is in line with Kerrigan's admirably apt description of the irrelevance of a poetic justice in the play: "Poetic justice is not even negatively relevant to the play's profound sleight of hand, its tragic duplicity. *King Lear,* though not lifelike, shows us what life is like; in itself it makes no concessions to what we would like life to be." Kerrigan, 225–6.

[179] In this sense the Fool may be likened to Foucault's Parrhesiastes. Michel Foucault, Fearless Speech, ed. Joseph Pearson (New York: Semiotext[e], 2001). For this reference I am indebted to Mona Bower.

as the fool implies, being a fool is an inalienable characteristic of all humans, a "title" that remains beneath our unsteady social positions and statuses.

In the other example where the fool qualifies his position, being a fool appears as similarly ambiguous, something that, although rather worthless, is still better than the King's loss of his position:

> *[N]ow thou art an O without*
> *a figure. I am better than thou art now, I am a*
> *Fool, thou art nothing*
> *(1.4.189–91)*

In the first quotation the Fool is defining his own position as one that is outside the social game of titles, "names" and positions that are not intrinsic to one's identity and can be given away. Being a fool is a place that, although potentially derogatory, everyone starts from, a position that makes it possible to take on titles and start playing the assigned roles. In this setup, being a fool appears superior to "other titles" in its being intrinsic to humans. In the second example, the hierarchy again shows the Fool in a superior position, but this time it is not because he is representing the inalienable nature of a human being as opposed to mere titles, but because he is fulfilling his social position as a fool and is recognised to be one, while the king has given away his opportunity to be recognised as somebody, to fulfil his role in the given social setup, to be the king. Thus, in the second instance being a fool has a different meaning than in the first (according to the quote from the Quarto, the King is in a better position since, just like anybody else, has the inalienable, original quality of being the fool, and is thus equal with the Fool); it is exactly the social title, condemned in the first example, that distinguishes the two of them and makes the Fool superior in the second quote. He may be intrinsically a fool too, but he is recognised to be one, he has the "title" of being a fool as well. In other words, the Fool can always relate to or create contexts for himself, as opposed to Lear, who lost his context and thus his "meanings" as well.

Although both quotes present a rather ambiguous evaluation of what it means to be a fool, the Fool's interpretation of the value of social titles is different. As it will appear through my analysis, I find this typical of the fool's "logic" (and perhaps the curious "logic" of the drama as well): making obvious the emptiness or the lack of meaning of something (c.f. the value of a social title referred to in the Quarto), but still assigning it value in the social game; no matter that certain things are empty of meaning, it is still possible to play with them. If the Fool's behaviour is taken as an example, it is actually our task to do as he does, to play our roles in the game, if we want to avoid being nothing, like the king who gave away his title.

We cannot say that Lear has no feeling for playing with his identity in the way that seems advisable according to the Fool. I would like to illustrate this with an image of Lear begging for forgiveness from one of his daughters. The image appears three times in the play, and I will deal with two of them here, and return to the third one in 3.3.4. When Regan urges him to ask forgiveness from Goneril after Lear left her house, Lear ironically starts to pray and play as if he were talking to the unkind Goneril, pretending that he is just an old man who is not required, who is begging for some food and bed:

> *'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;*
> *Age is unnecesary: on my knees I beg*
> *that you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed and food.'*
> *(2.4.151–3)*

These tactics, this sort of ironic role-playing, could save Lear from madness, but the problem is that he thinks that playing is not all. He believes that there is a reality behind: the real irony is not this, not what Lear sees as ironic, but rather the fact that he still considers himself a king (in a position to play and pretend that he is not one), while actually he is rather a superfluous old man, and who is really in need of somebody else's help to get shelter and food. Later, when Lear has no choice but to identify with a wretched old man who is left at the mercy of the elements, the fool urges Lear to join this very pretence-game and the blessing of his daughters, foreshadowed by Lear's ironic role-play analysed above:

> *O Nuncle, court holy-water [i.e., flattery, pretence] in a dry house is better*
> *than this rain-water out o'door. Good Nuncle, in,*
> *ask thy daughters blessing; here's a night pities*
> *neither wise men nor Fools.*
> *(3.2.10–3)*

It seems the Fool, although he earlier expresses his regret about Lear's situation through his puns, can very well imagine Lear in the role that the king ironically played earlier. In this situation the Fool is not bothered either by the King's dignity or by moral issues such as sticking to the truth as opposed to the falsity of pretence: to take part in a false social game implying "court holy-water" is simply much more attractive than soaking in the wild storm. Earlier he is trying to make Lear see all the pretence that he is surrounded with and is taking part in, but perhaps since Lear is starting to get the point, in this particular scene the fool seems just to shrug his shoulders. Pretence? So what?

3.3.3 Plays of the fool within and without

I have shown above that even without a proper play-within-a play, *Othello,* featuring the multiply metadramatic Iago, can be considered Iago's play, the play of the Vice-actor, the main performer and organiser of entertainment. Thus, a similar effect of alienation is achieved within the audience as Hornby finds characteristic of the operation of the play-within-a-play device: suddenly, reality within and without the play is multiplied in its layers, and it seems impossible to grasp or conceive it as a unified whole. Iago can achieve this effect by being the prime mover of the game. Although Lear's Fool is similar to Iago as commentator and chorus of the play, in his metaphoric summaries of the significant events, he is not central to his play to the extent Iago is; he is far from being the director of the chain of events.

Still, he presents something that is the essence of playing, although not on the level of the plot. I consider him, or rather his playfulness, to be a prime mover of the play, a prerequisite of all theatre. He is playfulness *per se,* even professional playfulness if you wish, which is realised within the play in his remarks on the level of the play's events, and outside the play-world in his addresses to the audience. Professionally or not, he surely does not take anything too seriously, because in his opinion everything is just a game. He

seems to understand the weight and the consequences of Lear's defective behaviour but is still capable of playing with the serious events and of presenting them in the shape of comic metaphors, like Lear putting down his breeches and offering the rod to his daughters (1.4.168–74), or giving the crown away like two halves of an egg and leaving nothing in the middle (1.4.155–160). This method of the Fool I will analyse in more detail in the chapter on the comedy of the Fool. Suffice it to say here that he is playfully creating new, extra contexts for the events and is thus recontexualising the happenings and pointing out the gist of the events through which he makes them part of his funny games. No matter that he is not directing the events or is not making them happen, he is still influencing them in his own way. Not in advance, but after they have happened, he is giving them a new, comic meaning by integrating them in his own world.

He is similar to a stage, because just as the stage is the site of playing in the real world, he is the site and agent of playing among human beings. He is playing constantly. Metaphorically he never comes off stage, because he behaves the same way no matter who he is talking to or where he is – whether offstage or on.[180]

This is what Lear's bitter exclamation, *"When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools"* (4.6.182) suggests as well. In his view where the whole world is meaningless, and both the stage and the fool refer to the emptiness of things, life is as empty of real meaning as a stage, where no reality can be presented but in play. Similarly, people are fools because they lack reason and are empty of real personality, just like actors, who pretend to be somebodies, but really are nobodies, just like fools. In the above quotation Lear is capable of identifying the play and game aspect of the reality surrounding him, but he is incapable of appreciating it and actually is made desperate by the recognition.

3.3.4 "The mystery of things": fiction as reality

In the opening ceremony of the play, Lear divides his kingdom according to his daughters' compliance with the roles he assigned them and their faithfulness to the playscript in Lear's mind. He is an author of an imagined ceremony but fails to be its successful director. He cannot conduct it to the end the way he planned and cannot force his vision of how things should be on the actual reality of the play. Another ceremony he will conduct later in the quarto version of the play is the mock trial, where he will accuse his evil daughters. Although the trial will not be played until the end, what is completed of it shows that Lear places himself in a different position in the game compared to the one at the beginning of the drama. When he is dividing his kingdom he is frustrated by his failure as an author of the scene. In the mock-trial the scene already involves the possibility of and need for improvisation: Lear will accuse his daughters, but he also includes an element of the indefinite, since he arranges the scene so that he does not know what the verdict of the authority will be. This element was lacking from his script of the opening ceremony, and here it is achieved by Lear's appointing the disguised Edgar and the Fool as judges, and ordering Kent to join them (*"You are o'the commis-*

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[180] A good example for this is Will Kempe, who was practically constantly on stage, even when physically being off it, and who was constantly playing and acting, even when supposedly in "real life." For this remark I am grateful to Anikó Oroszlán.

sion, / Sit you too." (3.4.38–9)). It seems he wants a fair trial, a fair play. He will do the casting but will play the role of the offended plaintiff only. There is a clear shift in his idea of controlling and directing these scenes or ceremonies. I see in this his improved sense of playing, the master of which in this drama is clearly the Fool.

The fool is "directing" reality in his special way. The improvised metaphors he uses to cast a different light upon the crucial events of the drama offer a different way of understanding them. He offers another option for Lear and the audience to conceive them. By presenting Lear as a child waiting to be beaten by his mother-daughters (1.4.168–70) or doing foolish things with both his golden and his bold crown and cracking his kingdom into halves like an egg (1.4.155–159), or unlike a snail, preserving no house to put his head in (1.5.27–30) – with all these examples, in these miniature but comprehensive "scenes" the Fool is using fiction to produce different versions of reality, to offer a different mode, a comic mode of its perception. He speaks as if in the meantime he were tipping out from reality its homogeneity and tragic weight.

Thus, the purpose of the Fool's use of fiction seems quite different from Iago's. In *King Lear* it is only Edmund who uses fiction for his villainous lies in Iago's manner, in his negative use of fiction. Edmund's machinations (like feigning a real fight with his brother before Gloucester appears in 2.1.28–36) are solitary examples. Fiction prevails over deception; even lies are healing in this drama. Disguise will appear as entirely positive, actually life-saving in the case of both Kent and Edgar. When Gloucester is on the verge of committing suicide, Edgar even makes it explicit that he lies to his blind father in order to save and heal him: *"Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it"* (4.6.31–2).

Similarly, the Fool's trifles seem to work upon Lear: the king is gradually taking over the Fool's sense of reality and fiction, where the dividing line between the two is not a particularly strict one. The peak of the healing power of fiction for Lear appears in Act 3 Scene 5, when he, happy to be reunited with Cordelia, would not be bothered even by being put into prison:

> *No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;*
> *We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage:*
> *When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,*
> *And ask forgiveness: so we'll live,*
> *And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh*
> *At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues*
> *Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,*
> *Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;*
> *And take upon's the mystery of things,*
> *As if we were God's spies*
> *(5.3.8–17)*

Reality for Lear loses its weight, and he imagines himself finding his joy in telling old tales and songs (Muir explains "old tales" as "improbable fictions of bygone times"[181]), which would be indeed far from the cruel reality of their imprisonment, but Lear feels himself capable of transforming that reality into his and Cordelia's own fiction. Howard Felperin justly explains the scene as Lear's awakening, in the spirit of

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181 Muir, 189.

contemptus mundi, where he has "renounced his maddening effort to explain the world, to find out its true causes, he has renounced the world itself." The king "welcomes his life with Cordelia in prison with a religious joy," and he is similar to "several converted morality protagonists before him, clothed in fresh garments traditionally emblematic of an inner and spiritual reaccomodation."[182]

I would like to draw attention here to the reappearance of the image of Lear kneeling down before a daughter and begging for forgiveness: *"When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask forgiveness."* The image has been already discussed in 3.2.2, and aptly illustrates the change in Lear's personality. It appeared first as Lear's ironical role-play, then as an unfulfilled suggestion of the fool during the storm, and here finally becomes a blissful event in Lear's imagination.

The fiction of songs and tales in the quoted speech is juxtaposed with praying, and it involves both dealing with the petty and meaningless events of the court "game" of winning and losing, as well as playing their own game of being God's spies. Do the two types of playing appear here together because Lear sees no big difference between playing the game of the court and that of God's spies? Perhaps. This idea would certainly comply with the Fool's apparently inconsistent behaviour: his notion of titles bearing no intrinsic meaning but still scolding Lear for giving away his. In my reading, the passage shows how we are to imagine "the mystery of things" according to Lear, after he has learned the Fool's lesson: the way reality is transubstantiated with plays and tales and songs and prayer, and the way it exudes the aureole of fiction.

3.3.5 Metadrama of the Fool - summary

There was a potential in Elizabethan theatre to understand play and theatre as having a levelling power, because at the end of a play both king and subject, rich and poor, all took off their attributes. But this levelling power of theatre can be extended far above social difference, a difference that is annihilated by the end of the play in theatre in a similar fashion as death was traditionally represented: at the end of the worldly pilgrimage of a human being death makes everyone equal.

The levelling power of theatre can refer not just to roles, but to society as a whole. There are references in plays where it is not only that social statuses lack intrinsic significance, and not that the social differences of individuals are shown to be mere roles, but essential meaning *per se* is missing from life. Life as a whole itself, since theatrical, is meaningless. In Macbeth's exclamation, life as a play, since fictitious, is equated with an idiot's tale, thus having no meaning. *"Life is but a walking shadow; a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by and idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing"* (5.5.16–27). Similar to Lear's negative interpretation of life as a stage of fools, fiction, the lack of meaning is doubled in Macbeth's quotation too: a fancy tale told by a *non*-idiot or *anything* told by an idiot would already meet the requirements of fiction. It is, as I was trying to show, no accident that Lear in his exclamation *"When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools"* (4.6.182) juxtaposes two elements that embody the opposite of order, stability and integrity and reason: comparing the stage

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182 Felperin, 102–3.

to "normal reality" is the same as comparing individuals to fools. The other side of the coin is, of course, that life is as meaningful (and playful) as any play is, and that without internalising the Fool, Lear cannot find his identity.

Comparing the Fool to Iago as per Keir Elam's above mentioned system of subworlds, the subworld that Iago represents, as I was trying to suggest, is indeed one of his command, much more than the Fool's is of his. The Fool's subworld is not the one of his beliefs, knowledge, fear, or his command, but rather the one of his playing. This subworld cannot suffer frustration to the extent Lear's subworld of command at the opening ceremony of play was frustrated. But Lear will learn a lot from the Fool during the play, because in the Fool's subworld of playfulness there is nothing to be unfulfilled or frustrated. This is because all the knowledge, fear, belief, command etc. – in other words everything that can generate subworlds, according to Elam – are contained by the Fool as parts of his play. In other words, his playfulness stands for the elimination of any idea that necessarily wants to impose itself upon the flow of events.

3.4 Metadrama: conclusion

> So you can go ahead and forget that things, at bottom, rest upon shaky ground, the world an illusion, your own concoction, all built on hypotheses, including the similarity of other people to yourself; forget that your life is experimental in nature – because even if you don't, there is nothing you can do about it. If you accept what everyone else calls reality as existing for certain, it may lead to catastrophe, but in the meantime it is the best you can do – at least with your amalgamated spectator-actor self, which is at the mercy of the arbitrary incidents of the free movie.
>
> Géza Ottlik: *Buda*

The fundamental question here is this: what is the difference between fiction and pretence? At this point the difference seems to be merely "haphazard": sometimes there is a difference, but sometimes there is no difference between the two. This is why, although perhaps we may say that the Fool loves Lear and Iago hates Othello (and consequently we like to see the Fool a positive and Iago a negative figure morally), the difference between Iago and the Fool is not necessarily that big at all in regards to Iago's most heinous crime, that of corrupting reality and meaning, playing with empty signs, concerning the game of role-plays and pretence, the lack of intrinsic meaning behind mere signs. This is so for two reasons. On the one hand, Iago is actually corrupting no reality, he is just showing that – since it can be proven corruptible – it does not exist as "real" in the sense it was taken to be real, and it applies both within and without the drama. On the other hand, the Fool is also pointing out how the difference between reality and fiction is vague, and in this context the idea of pretence is also blurred, because the notion of "pretence" is dependent on a clear picture of its opposite. Once the whole world is shown as pretentious, it is impossible to define this opposite.

If we compare Iago with the evil understood as the privation of reality[183] we see how far from the roots of the medieval Christian tradition of comic evil we have come. Perhaps here we also witness a privation of reality, but with a reversed sign, not necessarily the privation of reality it was before: Iago does not represent the lack of reality in his iniquity, but rather shows that all reality is illusion,[184] making the characters of the drama as well as the audience realise that what they thought to be reality can be deprived of its realness by being turned into illusion. The Fool is not so radical in his actions. He does not work actively towards destroying the assumed reality of the others, but he does show the contextual nature of it, and shows how, with staging different contexts, different versions of reality can be generated.

The real difference between Iago's and the Fool's metadramatic activities, I would like to suggest, is in the ways they fictionalise the assumed reality of their respective playworlds. The new context the Fool creates to ridicule tragic events liberates them from the unbearable weight of their sincerity, their tragic pain, and with the help of this attitude he actually teaches Lear and the audience to survive. The way Iago shows that reality can be arranged and directed in a similarly fictitious way as plays in theatre, achieves the opposite effect: he seems to "eat away" the genuineness, the authenticity of supposed reality.

Thus, it is possible perhaps to assert that the difference of the effect of Iago's and the Fool's metadramatic behaviour is rooted in their different attitudes towards fiction. Both characters, as the descendants of the Vice of moralities, act as Masters of Ceremony, and in this case it does not matter how much Iago's metadramatic role as the director of the play is more intrinsic to the play's dramaturgy than the counterpoint the Fool provides in the process of Lear's suffering. And both characters feature traditional involvement techniques and improvisation, encouraging the audience for more active participation, as it is typical for the platea-oriented characters. Also, they both stress the play's theatrical quality, making this quality part of their game. As for identity and role-playing, they both seem to suggest that there is no intrinsic identity, only roles. Still, the "fiction" generated by the Fool is healing nonsense. In addition, this nonsense seems to be closer to the logic of the play's universe than the reality Lear thought himself in possession of at the beginning of the play. Thus, the Fool's nonsense shows that what sounds fictional may be taken as a version of reality. On the other hand, the theatrical separation between play and reality, theatrical persona and offstage, non-fictional individuals is used by Iago as a threatening and immensely powerful tool. When he utters sentences that are actually true but make Othello disbelive what he says, he is creating a context where reality *cannot* function as *not fictional*: the fictional discourse he creates is capable of invalidating the Venetian reality and the identity of its distinguished individuals.

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[183] According to a certain explanation of medieval laughter at the comedy of evil, "laughter is the response on the part of Being to the exposure of non-Being. In other words, then, laughter occurs when that which is real perceives the absence of reality, and when that which is good becomes aware of that absence of good which we call evil." Charlotte Spivack, 26.

[184] Another way to explain the way Iago seems to "eat away" or corrupt reality is to say that it is exactly *illusion* that is his *reality*. It is not such an illusion that hides a deeper reality, but an illusion that hides nothing: an illusion that is perfectly *real*. Cf Kállay, 119.

Iago's fiction, it seems, works against the reality it corrupts exactly because he can count on the gap between assumed identity and fictional role, because this gap is a monstrous secret, a taboo. The Fool, on the other hand, wants to teach Lear, and apparently manages to teach him, exactly the fact that the gap, the tension between role and identity, is generated by the false idea that the identities, social functions and positions are more than mere roles played in specific contexts and specific situations. Similarly, I find it the effect of the Fool's activities that Lear, as in the Fool's examples, is capable of integrating fiction in his own world and appreciating it as the "mystery of things" – although, of course, this is not the point where the play ends.

Once fiction is expelled from reality, it will turn into a sneaking monster, threatening that reality will be eaten up by fiction. As Jonas Barish has pointed out, the deepest root of the anti-theatricalism of the age belonged to the conservative ethical emphasis in which order, stability, constancy and integrity play a crucial role.[185] The trickster in this sense is the epitome of theatre, entertainment and everything that anti-theatricalists were against.[186] This is why it is fortunate that Iago's trickery on a marked place in front of the audience – the stage – does not have to be identified necessarily with the trickery he plays on Othello. At least to this extent the monster is not put behind curtains: Iago is certainly not a devil on the metadramatic level, although he knows how to play one.[187]

As I was trying to suggest, metadrama works towards doing rather than representing. This kind of literary presentation can be described in Stanley Fish's terms as dialectical (versus rhetorical):[188] he analyses different ways of presentation, and says of a dialectical presentation (versus rhetorical) that it is "disturbing, for it requires of its readers a searching and rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by." Both Iago's and the Fool's activities are disturbing because they invite the audience to see things they are not particularly at ease with, or do not want to see.

The metadramatic qualities of the discussed plays unveil some major structural inconsistencies in the ways by which the audience perceives itself and the world. The effect of metadrama identified by Hornby as alienation will have a wide scope: the audience will be alienated not only from the play but also from the world they are set into,

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185 Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 117.

186 For a more detailed discussion of the idea that the term "Vice" could be used as a synonym for "actor" in anti-theatrical tracts, condemning actors of corrupting reality with fiction, see my "'Masking players, painted sepulchers and double dealing ambidexters' on duty," *Sederi Yearbook* 18 (2008): 45–60.

187 Iago and the Fool thus become "generators of fiction" in the sense that the "fiction" of saying something becomes reality. It is perhaps similar to the way Austin imagines "performative utterances," when "to *say* something is to *do* something, or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something." See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Harvard University Press, 1975), 12. A perfect illustration of this logic could be the line of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where he exclaims: "Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up / In stock for heavier vengeance? *[Thunder]* There it goes!" (4.2.196–7).

188 Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 3.

as well as from themselves: under such an experience all the familiar ways of perception are shaken.

Bristol asks about the problem of boys playing female roles and its effect on the understanding of gender and its coding. "Were the boy actors in Shakespeare's company engaging in a conventional form of ridicule of the feminine? Or were they engaged in a general parody of the artifice of gender coding itself?"[189] The question is clearly applicable, apart from the question of gender identity and gender coding, to "the artifice of coding" in general. Were Iago, the Fool, Shakespeare or Robert Armin engaging in a ridicule of the conventional forms of understanding reality? Where they parodying the ways the world was perceived as real? We do not have to answer it, we do not have to identify the drive behind Iago's or the Fool's, or the actor's or the author's parody, because even without that we can identify its effect on the audience and the necessity that the audience will have to reflect on their own ways of perception.[190]

Utterances that communicate doubt about some fact, according to Fish, can be communicated in different ways. He makes a difference "between an uncomfortable, unsettling experience in which the gradual dimming of a fact is attended by a failure in perception, and a wholly self-satisfying one in which an uncertainty is comfortably certain, and the reader's confidence in his own powers remains unshaken, because he is always in control."[191] Perhaps we can use this distinction to come closer to the nature of the above mentioned effect of a need to reflect on the artifice of coding, generated both by Iago and the Fool. The first instance Fish mentions, the "meaning" of which is not any reportable "content" but rather an *event,* is characteristic of what Iago and the Fool make of their plays: they will feature the great Signifying Machine at work, plays in which no curtains hide - yet - the ways meaning is produced. And it is produced exactly in the way fiction is produced.

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189 Bristol, 148.

190 We are facing here situations where some problematic devices force us to reflect on the ways we perceive reality, by facing us with obvious problems in our method, via creating situations where our "normal" ways of understanding prove untenable. Thomas Kuhn's example of reactions of experimentees who were asked to identify cards with unconventional combination of colour and shape illustrate the puzzling experience when the automatized ways of perception fail to work. The result is an experience of crisis that opens the possibility for a new framework of understanding. One of the experimentees who failed to identify the unconventional combination but realised that something was "wrong" exclaimed: "I can't make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn't even look like a card that time. I don't know what color it is now or whether it's a spade or heart. I'm not sure I even know what a spade looks like. My God!" Thomas S. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 63-4.

191 Fish, 389.

CHAPTER 4

LAUGHTER AND COMEDY

"The Fool is a creator not of beauty but of spiritual freedom."
Enid Welsford[1]

"He [the vice] is in fact the spirit of comedy."
Northrop Frye[2]

4.1 Carnival and subversion in the comedy of the Vice, Iago and the Fool

4.1.1 *Elements of Vice-comedy in Iago and the Fool*

I would like to reflect now on how and to what extent some major attributes of the morality Vice and its comedy discussed in Chapter Two are applicable to Iago and Lear's Fool, as well as to see to what extent the Bakhtinian context of carnival laughter is applicable to the comedy of the Vice.

As shown in my discussion of morality Vices, these characters would frequently corrupt the hero, perhaps in a satiric way attacking his moral weaknesses, and in this way generating in the audience the same "corrective," morally condemning laughter which Keith Thomas regards as typical laughter of the Elizabethan era.[3] The same type of laughter would frequently be directed towards the Vice character himself: the audience, in a Christian context, having in mind the Last Judgement, would see him as weak as the weaknesses of the fallible hero. This is the sense in which the Vice is carrying out a role in the moral setup. Happé is thinking along the same lines when he points out that one of the Vice's functions is to "humble all men." I will suggest that this is a parallel to the levelling function not only of the traditional fool, but also of Lear's fool, and is applicable to Iago as well.

As I have already claimed, the fool and the tempter can be understood as the two components of the Vice. In this distinction, surprising as it may sound, Iago is still closer to the first one, because his temptation is not based on the allure of traditional tempter Vices, namely secular spirit and pleasure. These would apply instead to a Falstaff-like character. Typical foolery, "verbal jesting without salt of mind," is not characteristic of Iago at all; in fact, it is rather the opposite, since the way Iago's words

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1 Welsford, 326.

2 Frye 1953, 274.

3 Keith Thomas, "The place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England," *TLS* 21 (1977): 76–83.

always have a meaning is rather frightening: the lack of meaning never characterises his words in the sense that what he says always has a place in his overall destructive scheme.

Although not a traditional tempter-vice, Iago is close to the Vice described by Somerset or Happé in his being morally condemnable. Still, as we have seen, on a metadramatic level he is acceptable as an entertainer. Lear's Fool, however, in this respect is closer to the type of Mares: there is space for his foolery and absurd jokes, and it may be considered a relief that the audience does not necessarily have to condemn him.

4.1.2 Bakhtinian carnival laughter

The "temporary suspension" referred to by Somerset, the "momentarily suspending our moral judgements" can be interpreted as the carnivalistic topsy-turvidom that is controlled to a certain extent: a subversion that – as a built-in and officially licenced subversion – may even sustain the system rather than pose a real threat to it. Mikhail Bakhtin's highly influential description of carnival in the literature and culture of medieval and Renaissance Europe can serve as a background for interpreting the comic elements in the behaviour both of the Vice and his successors.[4] Bakhtin talks about the carnival as the most important manifestation of the "folk culture of humour." "Carnival laughter" and the "carnivalistic spirit" refer not only to the laughter of ritualistic popular festive forms, such as mock-reversals, feasts of fools and the like, but several other social and literary phenomena, including the obscenities of the "language of the marketplace," parodies, riddles, popular curses, and references to the grotesque image of the body that emphasize its ambivalence and the lower bodily stratum. In his view, laughter is ambivalent because it is both degrading and triumphant, it celebrates egalitarianism and it has an overall validity concerning the world as a whole:

> Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the most essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.[5]

Since laughter thus can create a world of its own, parallel to or counter to the serious one, Bakhtin sees a revolutionary potential in folk humour and carnival. It is for that reason that he is sometimes criticised for being Marxist.[6]

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[4] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge MA and London: The M. I. T. Press, 1968)

[5] Bakhtin, 66.

[6] The irony in this accusation is that Bakhtin himself was sentenced to internal exile in Kazakhstan for alleged association with underground members of the Russian Orthodox Church. See Ronald Knowles ed., *Shakespeare and Carnival* (London: Macmillan, 1998), Introduction, 2.

4.1.3 Types of laughter in Medieval drama

Treating the Baktinian tradition of laughter in the popular festive forms as a possible context of the Vice's comedy is an approach that is embedded in the debate on laughter in medieval English drama. In Chapter Two I have discussed the issue of the characteristic sense of humour that is attached to the Vice if we are unwilling to disregard its clownish-foolish aspects. I argued for the existence of that aspect of the Vice. Here I would like to argue for the possibility of understanding the laughter and comedy attached to him as popular, plebeian counterculture in the Bakhtinian sense, as opposed to the type of laughter that Kolve calls "Religious Laughter" in the title of a chapter in his book entitled *The Play Called Corpus Christi*.[7] He reminds his reader of the Wycliffite critic of drama[8] who made an essential part of his attack the fact that Christ never laughed.

> A powerful case was established and reiterated throughout the Middle Ages that laughter and frivolity, the temporary abstention from involvement in all that is serious in the human condition, was an offence against God, a negation of the example of Christ, and a peril to men's souls.[9]

As for comic elements in miracle plays, he holds the view that the dramatist "guided the spectator in understanding the comedy as part of a coherent and reverent whole," and that there was serious meaning behind the laughter."[10] The tradition of popular laughter that Bakhtin describes stands for a very different culture of laughter, elements of which can clearly be detected in the behaviour of the Vice or playful villains that belong to that type, such as Mischief in *Mankind*. Such a view is held by Anthony Gash, and is convincingly illustrated by the Corpus Christi plays as well as *Mankind*. Gash argues that at least some specimens of medieval drama are ambiguous in displaying two contradictory schemes of value: the religious parts of plays may be in perfect harmony with the liturgy, but there are other parts where the popular, carnivalistic-type of blasphemy and mockery prevails. Gash suggests that in *Mankind* such a division may appeal to the difference in perspective among the audience of different classes: "What is diabolic 'perversion' from one point of view is festive reversal from another."[11] Still, not everybody agrees that this perspective was easily and always available to the contemporary audience. Diller, for example, argues that our ancestors may have had different prejudices than we do, and laughed at different things.[12] His view is that criticism of recent

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[7] V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 124–44.

[8] Clifford Davidson ed., *A Treatise of Myraclis Pleyinge* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993).

[9] Ibid. 126.

[10] V.A. Kolve, 174.

[11] Anthony Gash, "Carnival against Lent: The Ambivalence of Medieval Drama," in David Aers ed., *Medieval Literature. Criticism, Ideology and History* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986), 74–98, p. 96.

[12] Hans-Jürgen Diller, "Laughter in Medieval English Drama: A Critique of Modernising and Historical Analyses," *Comparative Drama* 36. 1–2 (2002): 1–19, 5.

years interprets most laughter in medieval English drama to be the laughter of the marketplace (again, in the Bakhtinian sense) too easily, and does not consider the possibility of a different laughter, laughter at somebody else's misfortunes. This other type of laughter he calls *Schadenfreude,* and describes it as pious, since it involves a good Christian or saint laughing at the misfortunes or humiliation of evil.

Diller says that "it is by no means self-evident that the plays represent the 'universal' laughter of the marketplace rather than the 'anathemising' variety preferred by the medieval Church."[13] I agree with Diller that surely the 'universal' laughter of the marketplace is not the only possible laughter in medieval plays, and that *Shadenfreude* can be an effective alternative where laughter stands for moral condemnation or, Diller's 'anathemising' laughter. I would like to point out, however, that *Schadenfreude* is not necessarily pious. It is possible from points of view other than religious doctrine, and it can work according to a logic that is not necessarily incompatible with the laughter of the marketplace. One example can be found in *Mankind,* a play that Diller also brings to illustrate his point. He recognizes the spirit of the Carnival in the play but objects to the argument that the play is dominated by "folk-laughter." He analyses the speech habits of characters, the strongly latinized English of Mercy, the same style of Mankind in the state of grace and the macaronic Latin of Mischief, and comes to the conclusion that the variety of styles demonstrate that "the play contains a moral not only for its eponymic hero but also for his pseudo-intellectual tempters," suggesting that the Latin of the tempter reveals "a satire on linguistic half-knowledge and theological pseudo-arguments."[14] Such a satire could indeed generate *Shadenfreude* when the tempters are defeated, but I see an important counterpart of the same satire that makes the picture more complex: Mischief's parody of Mercy may generate *Shadenfreude* as well, as I have analysed in 2.1, exactly because of Mercy's pompous and pretentious way of speaking. Mischief's logic rhymes wonderfully with the obscene jokes and gutter speech of the tempters, a speech that the audience certainly found delight in, specifically when they were invited to join in singing the obscene song. David Bevington appreciates the significant strength of the passage: "The stage direction indicates that all sing, and the resulting chorus is one of the most remarkable passages of scatology ever printed."[15]

Diller does acknowledge the "spirit of the Carnival" in the play, but objects to calling it "popular." My sense is that part of the problem is merely terminological, and the other part springs from the Marxist overtones in Bakhtin's interpretation of the carnival as a quasi-revolutionary phenomenon. The idea of Carnival is that it *does* counteract, or momentarily suspend, or subvert the dominant doctrinal structures of society, but as Peter L. Berger shows in his work on the "comic dimension of human experience," although there was hardly ever an intent of overthrowing either secular or ecclesiastical authorities with a carnival, it

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13 Diller, 6.

14 Diller, 15.

15 Bevington, 16.

> does not touch upon the accuracy of Bakhtin's description, nor on the profoundly subversive force of the Dionysian comic, though this subversion must be understood in a metapolitical sense [...] such laughter is indeed subversive, but in the sense far removed from any Marxist theory of revolutionary consciousness.[16]

So even if we see a moral message in our example, the play *Mankind,* given that it evokes the spirit of the carnival, has opposite messages as well. The second reason Diller sees the term "popular" as problematic in this context of laughter is that the author of the play was most probably more than a "clergyman of modest training" as Bevington suggests, while the laughter in the play according to Diller "would not have originated in the marketplace but in the student's hall."[17]

The fact that the author of the play was probably fairly learned while the audience could have been composed of present or former university students in my view does by no means exclude the possibility of terming its laughter "popular." Bakhtin's term "popular" in "popular laughter" does not refer exclusively to the laughter of lower social classes, but stands for the type of laughter not appreciated by medieval official Christian doctrine. The hostility of the Church to laughter is a well known fact and is best captured in Berger's witty phrase[18] in his reference to the long line of grim theologians in medieval Christianity. Bakhtin himself points out the problem of folk humour embedded in texts displaying considerable learning.[19] It is in this sense that the term *popular* laughter in the Bakhtinian sense refers to the type of laughter that created a counterworld, a counterculture versus the official one:

> Medieval laughter is directed at the same object as medieval seriousness. Not only does laughter make no exception for the upper stratum, but indeed it is usually directed toward it. Furthermore, it is directed not at one part only, but at a whole. One might say that it builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state. Laughter celebrates its masses, professes its faith, celebrates marriages and funerals, writes its epitaphs, elects kings and bishops. Even the smallest medieval parody is always built as part of a whole comic world.[20]

To summarize the possible laughters in the comedy of the Vice, it can be said that the *Shadenfreude,* the ridicule and the satire directed towards him are by no means the only kind of humour that the Vice can stand for. Elements in his behaviour that evoke the

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16 Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 83

17 Diller, 15.

18 "The negative attitude toward laughter continues in the patristic and medieval periods of Christian thought. There is a long line of grim theologians. Repeatedly there are negative comments on laughter, which is understood as expressing worldliness, sinful insouciance, and lack of faith [...] one does not have to be a Nietzschean to look upon the history of Christian theology as a depressingly lachrymose affair." Berger, 198.

19 "There were other parodies of Latin: parodies of debates, dialogues, chronicles, and so forth. All these forms demanded from their author a certain degree of learning, sometimes at a high level. All of them brought the echoes of carnival laughter within the walls of monasteries, universities, and schools" Bakhtin, 14.

20 Bakhtin, 88

Bakhtinian understanding of carnival spirit – ridiculing authority in a carnivalistic fashion, nonsensical humour, coarse gutter speech – as we have seen earlier major elements in the Vice's comic repertoire, must have been appealing at least partly to the audience, and identified as elements of licentiousness, such as misrule, the Feast of Fools, mumming, topsyturvidom, May Games, Land of Cocaygne etc.[21] As for the effect of such behaviour, we cannot fail to notice the general problem of the impossibility of controlling humorous effects in a play. This problem has not resulted from the shattered medieval world view, since we can find examples showing the discrepancy between intention and comic effect in drama as early as some mysteries, such as the masons of York who in 1431 complained that the audience did not take their play seriously and with devotion but instead laughed at it, and subsequently the masons were given another play by the city authorities.[22] Philip Sidney was already perfectly aware that no matter how much pedagogical value satire may have, the laughter it generates cannot be regulated safely, implying that eventually other contexts for interpretation than the intended one were possible and imaginable. Sidney enumerates different examples that generate laughter and/or delight, and includes the following:

> We delight in good chances; we laugh at mischances. We delight to hear happiness of our friends and country, at which he were worthy to be laughed at that would laugh. We shall contrarily laugh sometimes to find a matter quite mistaken, and go down the hill against the bias, in the mouth of some men as, for the respect of them, one shall be heartily sorry, yet he cannot choose but laugh, and so is rather pained than delighted with laughter.[23]

No matter that Sidney "validates" ideologically the latter example in a way that he takes away delight from laughter where one should not laugh, he still admits that there are cases when people who should be respected are degraded because they are laughed at. He does not try to prevent laughter that is disrespectful of authorities, but says that there is no delight in it. Still, his example implies that laughter is difficult to regulate. It cannot be controlled because its context cannot be prescribed. And it is the same context as the one that allows the Vice to be understood as something else than simply immoral and condemnable, the sufferer of *Schadenfreude*. Nobody can take away by force the delight that an audience feels at watching and laughing at their favourite tricksters on stage, even if these players are Vices. Bristol accounts for Sidney's position in the following way:

> What Sidney recognizes in the *Apologie*, and what is overlooked or neglected by more conventional theorists and apologists for the corrective or pedagogical value of satire, is that laughter cannot easily be regulated. It is linked not only to clearly recognizable

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[21] Cf. Weimann, 20–30

[22] The event is referred to by Diller, 4. as well as by V. A. Kolve, 130, where Kolve says the following about the play in question: "We know it was a source of great embarrassment to them, for they complained to civic authority in 1431 that it caused more laughter and clamour than devotion. They were given *Herod* to perform instead. The guild itself sought the change – the lay people too wanted a dignified and useful entertainment."

[23] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*. In Pollard ed. 146–165, 161.

> aberration or deformity, but also to structural ambiguity in the social system and to discord experienced as a result of that ambiguity. Furthermore, laughter is [...] in some texts at least [...] a full and genuine alternative to all serious world views.[24]

This is another reason that laughter at the Vice's comedy can be directed not only towards a supposed aberration or deformity, but also against ambiguity within the system, and even the comic celebration of that ambiguity.

To sum up, I would like to point out two things here. One is the fact of different explanations within the discourse on laughter in medieval English drama, and the other is the Vice's potentially subversive, carnivalistic comedy. I agree with scholars who see an important source of this potential comedy in the popular roots of the figure. What is true for the institutionalised form of carnival as social festivity is true on a small scale of the carnivalistic figures on stage and their carnivalistic behaviour, including the Vice and his trickery: we may argue that the comic Vice as character was institutionalised and contained the way Carnival was the time of institutionalised disorder. However, this is just half of the truth. Burke's explanation of the complex meaning of Carnival can be illuminating in regards to the Vice as well. He states that it "is clear that the carnival was polysemous, meaning different things to different people," and in it "Christian meanings were superimposed on pagan ones without obliterating them, and the result has to be read as a palimpsest."[25] Parallel to this, the interpretation of the Vice as unambiguously evil and devil-like should be understood as simplifying. I am in no way trying to rule out the possibility of Vices who are safely contained and actually reinforce an official doctrine, either by acting as a safety valve or as a didactic means of reminding the audience to avoid sinful behaviour. But I am insisting on their strong subversive potential, similar – again, on a small scale – to the one that Burke gives to the carnival. In spite of acknowledging the great value of 'safety valve' and 'social control' theory, Burke describes specific occasions when Carnival revels lead to actual minor revolutions. In his words, "Protest was expressed in ritualised forms, but the ritual was not always sufficient to contain the protest. The wine barrel sometimes blew its top."[26] We may be uncertain about when the Vice blew the top of the barrel, but the Shakespearean Vice-successors I focus on undoubtedly did.

4.1.4 Bakhtinian carnival and laughter in Shakespeare

By the time Bakhtin's book on Rabelais had a considerable influence on Shakespeare studies, the appreciation of Shakespearean comedy had been influenced by works of C.L. Barber and Northrop Frye on the relationship between comedy and folk customs

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[24] Michael B. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 129.

[25] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 191.

[26] Burke, 203. Berger discusses the subversive potential of the carnival in similar terms: "The carnival may be seen as the final stage in the progression of the comic from brief interruption of social order to the full-blown construction of a counterworld. These comic intrusions are temporary, but they are always there as haunting possibilities, simultaneously liberating individuals and making the guardians of order very nervous." Berger, 84.

of Saturnalia, the reversal of everyday standards, the outburst of vitality and the return to the "green world."[27] These works, however, concentrate on the comic in comedies and the perspective they take is, in Knowles's words "a fundamentally conservative approach" compared to Bakhtin's radical analysis which "brings out the deeply ideological significance of such phenomena in a way that has been claimed by Marxist, anarchist and humanist."[28] Two books that deal with comic elements in Shakespearean tragedy and Jacobean tragedy respectively were published in 1979 by Susan Snyder and Nicholas Brooke.[29] Susan Snyder thinks that Shakespeare used the dramatic convention of comedy "as a point of reference and departure in developing tragic forms," and she treats comic and tragic elements in Shakespeare as parts of a single compound that contributes to the strong paradoxical feelings concerning tragedy which is "ultimately responding to the universal fact of mortality."[30] Nicholas Brooke's book is not primarily on Shakespearean plays, but he too comes up with a vision in which comic elements in tragedies are not merely normative but express "laughter that celebrates anarchy or generates chaos, and in either sense is hostile to any normative process."[31] Such an understanding of laughter is in many respects similar to interpreting comic elements in Shakespearean plays with the Bakhtinian concept of carnival. Bakhtin himself makes many references to Shakespeare in his book on Rabelais, the most substantial of which is the following:

> The analysis we have applied to Rabelais would also help us to discover the essential carnival element in the organization of Shakespearean drama. This does not merely concern the secondary, clownish motives of his plays. The logic of crownings and uncrownings, in direct or indirect form, organizes the serious elements also. And first of all this 'belief in the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life' determines Shakespeare's fearless, sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism. This pathos of radical changes and renewals is the essence of Shakespeare's world consciousness. It made him see the great epoch-making changes taking place around him and yet recognize their limitations.
>
> Shakespeare's drama has many outward carnivalesque aspects: images of the material bodily lower stratum, of ambivalent obscenities, and of popular banquet scenes.[32]

The first systematic collection dealing with the specific topic of the Bakhtinian carnivalistic elements in Shakespeare, entitled *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* came out

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[27] C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press: 1959) and "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy" from Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[28] Knowles, 7.

[29] Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), and Nicolas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (New York: Harper and Roy, 1979).

[30] Snyder, 9.

[31] Brooke, 2. Brooke's view is that in Shakespeare's tragedies powerful comic elements are accepted on the condition that the end is "purely solemn" and the conclusion is or seems to be "unalloyed emotional satisfaction." Therefore in his view what he calls "horrid laughter," where the grandeur and grotesquery are simultaneous, primarily apply to Jacobean dramas such as *The Revenger's Tragedy, The White Devil or The Duchess of Malfi.*

[32] Bakhtin 275.

as late as 1998,[33] but an essay written a decade earlier by Manfred Pfister provides a genuine in-depth discussion of the possibilities of the Bakhtinian view of the comic in Shakespeare.[34] Pfister poses the same question I have dealt with above concerning the type of laughter possible in medieval dramatic contexts: is the comic and laughter in Shakespeare rather the condemnatory, *Shadenfreude*-type, or is it perhaps the triumph of the carnivalistic, or in Pfister's terms, "Is it the comic of ridiculed deviations from established norms, or is it the Bakhtinian comic, celebrating transgression and the levelling and inversion wrought on established hierarchies?"[35] The sensitivity with which Pfister manages to treat the complex subject in a finely nuanced way is exemplary. By providing instances of comic characters who rebel against authority, he is able to show how in some cases a double comic perspective emerges, like the Jack Cade's revolt in the fourth act of *2 Henry VI* and the trio of Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban in Act 2 Scene 2 of *The Tempest*: the characters presented are simultaneously origins and objects of laughter. This is how Pfister sees that although the rebellious figures are ridiculed, the laughter they generate is not contained. What he writes about the first example, the Jack Cade revolt, fits particularly well in my argument, because in the end it is the Vice-like characters who embody the ultimate ambiguity:

> The containment of the carnivalesque impulses within a framework of political orthodoxy is, however, not absolute. In vivid imagery of levelling down feudal hierarchies and of down-grading ideological abstractions to their material basis it survives the built-in strategies of containment. This applies particularly to Jack Cade's followers, who turn their corrosive wit against both the official power *and* Cade's upstart regal pretensions. Armed like the Vice of the morality plays with sword of lath, they share the Vice's ambivalent wit.[36]

The cases of Iago and the Fool are interesting because they seem to reflect on the idea and possibility of subversion; in other words, they seem explicitly to reflect on this problem. The consequence of the shifting epistemological background is a context in which the successors of the traditional Vice characters get a role that is even more specific than originally. Earlier Vices may have been comic in a carnivalesque way, and as I suggested, may have been such that they did not fit in the moral message of a play, the message itself – as in *Mankind* –perhaps carrying two contradictory systems of value. Still, although they embodied a different, carnivalistic logic, they may have counteracted but not discredited the moral message for good. Otherwise, no authority would have tolerated them from the moment they appeared on stage. Later however, when the logic of the Medieval/Renaissance episteme is shaken, the subversive behaviour of the Vice-successor characters is no longer a temporary, isolated phenomenon within an otherwise stable setup, and it is also much more intermingled *dramatically* with the "serious" voices.

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[33] Knowles.

[34] Manfred Pfister, "Comic Subversion: a Bakhtinian View of Comic in Shakespeare," in Werner Habicht ed. *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch* (Bochum: Verlag Ferdinand Kamp, 1987), 27–43.

[35] Pfister, 35.

[36] Pfister 36.

The role of Vice-successors such as the Fool or Iago will be not simply to subvert (and this subversion later may or may not be contained within a play), but rather to make the already subverted context of the epistemological crisis (their own element) explicit, reflect on it, so to say "deal with it," or react to it. This is where the unique possibility of the post-Vices lies compared to their ancestors: there is no unquestionable authority anymore; in other words, subversive potential unfolds in the instability or crisis of the system. In this new context they may indeed have posed a much more explicit threat to the official system of values than earlier, and this is supported by the later development, when such trickster-like characters are expelled from plays and stages.

I have discussed above how the problems in the Vice's interpretation are embedded in his comedy: as Keith Thomas pointed out, the effect of humour is hard to control, and this is what makes it dangerous. From the viewpoint of an authority – be it the one who is the actual author of a given morality or the one that permitted its performance – the problems with humour and comedy, as stated above, are that their effect can easily deviate from the path that it was designed to take. As for Lear's Fool and Iago, the effect of comedy is much more out of control, as it will appear from the following discussion. It is so complex and its interpretation so ambiguous that this mere phenomenon could make us re-evaluate the safety-level of containment of similar humour in earlier plays.

4.2 The comedy of the Fool

Kent. But who is with him?
Gentleman. None but the fool, who
labours to out-jest
His heart-strook injuries.
(3.1.15–7)

4.2.1 Levelling

According to Keith Thomas, a main source of humour in Tudor and Stuart England was against the deviant and the eccentric.[37] Actually, the fool's mocking of Lear can be interpreted from this perspective, because he is satirically commenting on Lear's deeds of giving away his land and crown, making his daughters his mothers, putting down his breeches etc.; in other words, he is ridiculing Lear's deviation from the royal and patriarchal norm. Lear from this perspective appears not only as a deviant king but also as a deviant father and simply an eccentric, foolish person. The vocabulary the Fool uses in his metaphors is perfect for levelling the king. As Susan Snyder points out, it is characterised by homely images, homely situations, and the commonplace wisdom of proverbs: "As mirrored in this reductive foolery, Lear is not primarily a king, but any father without 'bags,' any old man who was fool enough to give away his land. His experience is not peculiar to royalty or uniquely his, but is common to other men and even snails and hedge-sparrows."[38]

But to regard this kind of mocking as one directed against the deviant, we must suppose that there is an "ideal" in the Fool's mind that he is implying with his mockery, compared

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[37] Thomas, 77.
[38] Snyder, 161.

to which Lear is deviant. In other words, we must answer the question whether the obvious fault in Lear's resignation from his throne and his idea to *"retain/ the name and all the'addition to a king"* (1.1.135–6) should be mended by restoration. Although the Fool never fails to point out Lear's foolishness whenever he has a chance to do so, he is not giving suggestions to Lear about what he should do. He sticks to comments. (However, we have good reason to believe that it is partly these comments that drive Lear to madness – or enlightenment.) In other words, he offers no "solution." The Fool does not suggest any "proper way" of behaviour as opposed to the ridiculed, wrong one; in fact, he seems to have no attachment to an idea of "proper" conduct.

The relationship of the Fool and Lear is a highly complex one not only in their personal relationship but in their functions in the dramatic structure as well. Traditionally, the fool should be a figure to turn everything upside down, and Lear should be the actual authority, carrying out his role and manifesting his authoritative position. This is not the case in this drama, however, because the king is the one who causes the topsy-turvidom himself. This carnivalistic topsy-turvidom and Lear as a deviant king are explicitly comic elements with the potential to generate laughter.[39] But in this drama we cannot easily respond to the carnival-king-Lear's foolishness with laughter, because, as Susan Snyder defines our response to Lear as comic *senex iratus* "we are painfully inside his confusion and impotence, not outside looking on."[40] Or perhaps we could say that it is not our being inside Lear's confusion, but we are *too much outside, doubly outside* from normal order. This is the root of the deep distress: a carnival king or a fool alone could be comic in themselves, and there is an identifiable tradition for that, but the two combined seem to be out of control. So the fool's role is not simply, as usual, to create a "counterculture" of topsy-turvydom within or against the existing order, because the carnival king has demolished the order already. There is no existing order any more, and the fool is not, as a traditional trickster, creating a sense of liberation by undermining and questioning the existing order. The order is given up here by authority itself, but since the carnival king acts his part badly, not identifying with his role, the audience within and without the drama does not find it comic, so the fool's role is to remind us, as if we have forgotten to appreciate foolery, of the comic perspective inherent in the lack of order. His numerous references to Lear being a fool may point to the same: Lear does behave like a fool, or as a potential carnival king. Unfortunately, the king lacks the transforming power inherent in the magic of the comic perspective owned by his fool. This is why "that lord that counselled" Lear to give away his land, i.e., Lear himself, is a bitter fool, as opposed to the real, the sweet one (1.4.134–44).

The Fool's levelling mockery degrades Lear in several respects. With the homely metaphors his royalty wears away. He is made a ridiculous father, behaving like a naughty child, who foolishly offers the rod himself to his daughters. Lear is multiply deviant: as a king, as a human being, or a child. He is bitter even as a fool. And he does not make a good carnival king, either.

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[39] An essay by Natália Pikli discusses exactly the possibilities of seeing Lear as a carnival king: Natália Pikli, "Lear, a karneválkirály," in István Géher and Attila Atilla Kiss eds., *Az értelmezés rejtett terei* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2003), 111–28.

[40] Snyder, 144.

What the Fool does with his satiric levelling is similar in its effect to the function of the morality Vice's "humbling all men." Lear, a king who had no consideration or genuine sympathy towards other humans because of his royal pride, will suddenly remember his subjects when he is going through the strain of miserable events:

> *Poor naked wretches whereso'er you are,*
> *That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,*
> *How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,*
> *Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you*
> *From the seasons such as these? O! I have Ta'en*
> *Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;*
> *Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,*
> *That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,*
> *And show the Heavens more just.*
> *(3.4.28–36)*

Lear is humbled finally not by the fool but by the storm. But while there is the potential for comedy in this gesture, and the storm's cruelty is just a more explicit manifestation of the Fool's cruelly comic remarks; the scene does not lend itself to comic interpretation. The erring human being humbled may have been comic in a morality, but not here.

4.2.2 A pretty reason: the sense-nonsense game

Compared to the ways he humbles Lear, the Fool's sense of humour is less complex and more direct, more easily recognised and appreciated by an audience when he is playing with language, adding and taking away meaning from it as he pleases. He seems to employ pure verbal nonsense, sometimes mixing sense with nonsense, presenting absurdities and logical paradoxes. But since in some cases these absurdities convey the gist, the underlying meaning of events, we can never be sure which technique we should apply when approaching his words. In other words, the Fool seems to display the whole existing spectrum of degrees of meaning, from the absolute lack of it to the depths below the everyday surface.

His words seem to carry no meaning whatsoever when he bursts into singing the first line of a song (or starts to sing a song but stops?) after identifying himself with an ass, Lear with a horse and Goneril with a cart that draws the horse: *'May not an ass know when a cart draws the horse? / Whoop, Jug! I love thee"* (1.4.221–2). Another (ostensible or real?) gibberish is the Fool's sentence after a satirising song on the cod-piece that will house too early and the man who mixes his heart with his toe, referring to Gloucester and Lear. The fool comes up with the nonsensical line as if it would follow from the song, maximising the effect of the non sequitur: *'For there was never yet a fair woman but she made / mouths in a glass"* (3.2.35–6). The curious thing is that, although it seems nonsense, because of the fool's unreliability, we can never be sure of it. Even the comment on this line by Kenneth Muir maintains the idea of nonsense as only a probability: "Probably an irrelevant piece of nonsense, such as was often used to distract attention from too keen a piece of satire."[41]

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[41] Muir, 102.

This comment suggests that it may be pure nonsense, but not certainly so. Even if it is nonsense, it may have the function of distracting attention from – and thus maintaining – a deeper sense. Even if Muir is right, I find it remarkable regarding our interpreting practices how unwilling we are to accept the lack of sense for its own sake, for the joy and the humour of it. How reluctant we are to interpret these lines of the Fool as a playful joke on logic, downright nonsense, the nonsense internalised by the mad Lear that is echoed, for example, in his *"Peace, peace! this piece of toasted cheese / will do't"* (4.6.89–90). Still, the fact that we encounter ambiguous lines that seem to carry some enigmatic meaning, such as *"Winter's not gone yet, if the wild-geese fly that way"* (2.4.45), which is similar to (the mad?) Hamlet's *"When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw"* (2.2.374–5), makes the game of sense-nonsense intriguingly inexplorable.

The paradoxical self-references the Fool employs, however, undeniably present a straightforward assault on logic, featuring the ambiguity that we are familiar with from Erasmus' *Encomion,* as Enid Welford pointed out: as if human life was a vast sottie.[42] The fool may say anything, be it verity, lie or gibberish, because the true "meaning," the truth value of the utterance, will be impossible to determine, just as in the case of the model paradox, Epimenides' Cretan, who claims that all Cretans are liars. The following two examples are such paradoxical self-references of the Fool:

> *[T]hou hads little wit in thy bald crown*
> *when thou gav'st thy golden one away. If I speak*
> *like myself in this let him be whipp'd that first finds it so.*
> *(1.4.158–62)*

The expression "If I speak like myself," i.e., "if I speak like a fool," is the culprit: it does not let us decide on the meaning. The Fool is protesting against his being identified as someone who utters foolish nonsense and threatens to use physical aggression to endow his words with authority. But is it possible that someone does not speak like himself? In other words, is it possible for a fool not to speak foolishly, even if it is meaning in madness, or even if there is method in it? The bad news both for those sticking to precise meaning and those who are ready to exempt words from meaning, is that it seems quite impossible to interpret the lines so that we avoid whipping.

The riddles of the Fool are again unreliable as to whether they contain any sense or not. As riddles, they invite the audience to solve them, and as a genre they make the audience believe that there is a solution to them. The solution frequently displays unexpected logic and is thus usually comic – another device targeting automatised ways of understanding. The riddles of Lear's Fool at the end of Act 1 sometimes indeed involve intellectual solutions, like in the case of *"Why one's nose stands i' th' middle on's face"* (1.5.20)[43] or why a snail has a house (1.5.27),[44] but the humour in the example quoted below (which is followed by the latter one of the above examples and is thematically connected to it) is really that there is no answer to it. Our expectation of the effective solution is simply frustrated, the convention disregarded, and meaning spectacularly left out:

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[42] Welsford, 255–6, 267.

[43] *"To keep one's eyes of either side's nose, that / what a men cannot smell out, he may spy into"* (1.5.21–3).

[44] *"[T]o put's head in; not to give it away to his / daughters, and leave his horns without a case"* (1.5.29–30).

Fool. *Canst thou tell how an oyster makes his shell?*
Lear. *No.*
Fool. *Nor can I neither.*
(1.5.25–7)

The Fool, after criticising Lear for his bad performance as a fool, acknowledges Lear's skills when he demonstrates that he too has a knack for these foolish riddles. The lines in the following example are perhaps preparing our acceptance of the Fool's disappearance and his internalisation by Lear, as well as Lear's defiance of reason in the acts that follow:

Fool. *[...] The reason why the*
seven stars are no mo than seven is a pretty reason.
Lear. *Because they are not eight?*
Fool. *Yes, indeed: thou would'st make a good Fool.*
(1.5.33–6)

The verbal nonsense of the Fool fits well into the tradition of the nonsensical language which I touched upon concerning the Vice in Chapter Two, with examples of Mischief mocking Mercy in *Mankind,* or Haphasard mocking Appius in *Appius and Virgina.* This tradition is discussed by Berger in connection with the absurd: Berger refers to Esslin and his study on the topic.

> There is one important feature that recurs in the long history of the absurd: an assault on language. The experience of the absurd beats against the limits of taken-for-granted language, which is simply not made for expressing it. In this, once again, the absurd as a manifestation of the comic resembles both religion and magic. (...) Thus Esslin includes in the tradition of the absurd such phenomena as the distorted Latin of the goliards, the peculiar language of Rabelais and Villon [...][45]

We can read the Fool's playing with sense and nonsense – and the play's playing, as I will discuss in Chapter Five – as absurd and a manifestation of an important aspect of the comic. We have seen that according to Berger "the experience of the absurd beats against the limits of taken-for-granted language." Here we face instead an assault on language through its deprivation of meaning. The effect is that we learn to take neither language nor meaning for granted, just as we have learned from Iago that the social reality taken for granted can be mere illusion and play.

4.2.3 Generating extra perspectives: the Fool's way of recontextualization

In *King Lear* we see the centre of society, the anointed king, resign, performing a carnivalesque act: Lear is not waiting to be levelled by mockery; he dethrones himself instead. It is only the evil characters who do not see this abortively comic act as tragic – and the Fool who, with his grotesquely humorous comments on Lear in the tragic moments of the torment of his soul also offers the audience an example of how it is possible to refrain from submerging in the heart-breaking pain and sorrow and instead to identify the inherent comic potential in it. The Fool does this by providing a comic per-

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[45] Berger, 176–7.

spective, actually as a late successor to the example quoted in Chapter Two, the character called Merry Report from Heywood's drama, who claims that he will report even the sad news merrily, or the Vice from *Horestes,* who did not want to identify with the negative context he was supposed to suffer at the end of the play. There are a number of examples in which the Fool, in providing a new context or a new perspective of an event, is stripping it from its tragic meaning. The best example is his overtly comic response to Lear when in Act 2, Scene 1 the king sees Kent in the stocks and cries in indignation: *"O me! my heart, my rising heart! but, down!"* (2.4.118).

The Fool responds: *"Cry to it, Nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels/ when she put 'em i'th'paste alive; she knapp'd 'em o'th' coxcombs with a stick, and cried 'Down, wantons, down'"* (2.4. 119–23). Snyder analyses the scene in a wonderfully vivid way, making the best of the comic potential:

> The figure before our eyes is an old man on the verge of a heart attack. On this the Fool superimposes a ludicrous kitchen scene with a foolish woman struggling to slap down wriggling eels in a pastry. The degrading image, slipped in all at once between us and Lear's royal pathos, creates a distance in which there is room for perspectives other than sympathetic identification. The king is as stupid as that cockney. His suffering is no more consequential than a spoilt pie. He may give orders all he wants, but he is as little in control as an inept kitchen wench with a bunch of live eels.[46]

Snyder ends the paragraph by saying that we feel strain and disequilibrium once this comes through, and our laughter is uneasy and without release. Although I agree with her, I would like to point out that the stress should be laid not so much on the impossibility of the audience's identification with the Fool's utterly comic perspective, but the fact that he does embody and realise that perspective and is directing us towards it. The fool with his remarks is constantly preventing the audience from submerging into the "tragic" feeling. He does not let us sit back and identify with the horrific happenings but always forces us to recontextualize the tragic events in a way that they lose their otherwise truly heart-breaking sorrow. At the same time this last example embodies an immensely powerful paradox: while joking at Lear's tragedy, recontextualising him in a comic kitchen scene so as to reveal the comic potentials in the sorrowful events, the rhetorical figure the Fool uses as a means for his comedy contradicts to what he is doing. To make it more clear: the Fool, by teaching the audience to alienate themselves from the tragedy makes the king a butt of laughter when the king struggles to alienate himself from his misery and attenuate his sorrow, i.e., when the king wishes to keep down his "rising heart." It is as if the Fool was implying that such an attempt – to which he gives the example to the audience – is perfectly in vain.

Reading Lear as carnival king, the Fool is actually not doing anything else but showing the real function of the king within the world of misrule. The effect, however, is not pure comedy but confusion – a confusion that may, in fact, aggravate the effect of the already tragic events. As we have seen in the above quotation, the Fool's recontextualisation works towards alienation (Snyder calls it "distance"), because it generates a new layer as a different context for understanding an event. It works similarly to the way dif-

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[46] Snyder, 160.

ferent levels in a play within a play hinder us from perceiving any single layer as genuinely real. A new meaning is superimposed on an earlier one either in chronological succession, as in the above kitchen scene, or in the example of Iago screening his story simultaneously with the ongoing reality of the play. The effect in all cases is puzzling. Identifying completely with the Fool and attaining his perspective would make us mad, but it is exactly madness that we are pushed towards, since re-examining our taken-for-granted reality makes it almost inevitable.

Lear has certainly managed to identify with the Fool's method of creating extra perspectives, of comic recontextualising.[47] Indeed, he has gone mad too. He trivialises Glocester's situation, which is genuinely tragic, but Lear jokes about it, employing precisely the sense of humour of the Fool when making a parallel between a light purse and a blind man:

> *O, ho! are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light: yet you see how this world goes.*
> *(4.6.143–6)*

Earlier in the play when the Fool offered his coxcomb to Kent and then to Lear (1.4.93–107), he was urging them to identify with foolery. At that point Lear was explicitly unwilling to identify with the Fool's role, and in answer offered a whip for the suggestion. Still, the Fool stands for a hidden layer of Lear's identity, one that he – just like all humans – was born with, which Lear does not seem able to liberate within him, but he gains it by the time the Fool disappears from the play near the end of Act 3. This interpretation clearly accounts for the Fool's disappearance: when he is not needed any more, when he, as a potential, is activated in Lear's personality, he can leave the stage.

The Fool succeeded in teaching Lear by presenting his examples of how it is possible to see tragedy as latently ridiculous. And he is teaching us, too, how to laugh at Lear, to laugh at ourselves taking seriously Lear's tragedy, to laugh at contextual meaning in a dissolving context and to laugh at the possibility of a radical shift in perspective, a startling change in meaning, or to laugh because we have to acknowledge that there is nothing (or nothing is precisely what there is) instead of essential meaning. In other words, the Fool's behaviour shows that it is on us to adorn the tragic events with a comic halo.

4.2.4 The Fool's final score

It is as if at the beginning of the drama the natural element of the Fool, i.e., the potential carnival, had been first corrupted by Lear's failure to recognise himself as carnival king but then restored by the Fool. The exclusion of the counter-culture of folly that

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[47] The example Snyder gives for Lear taking over the fool's ways is at the mock-trial of Goneril and Reagan, (included in the Quarto version of the play only). The King's accusation only starts in a formal way: *"I here take my oath before this honourable assembly she kick'd the poor King her father"* (3.6.47). Snyder points out that here "[w]e are back in the world of domestic bickering [...i]t is like the Fool's sudden contractions of scope, and all the more absurd here because we have recently learned from Gloucester that Goneril and Regan have in fact gone far beyond small domestic cruelties and are actively seeking their father's death" (165–6).

works against the existing order in society perhaps reflects the uncertainty of power and authority in its own validity. If the validity is indeed intrinsic and unquestionable, there is no reason to fear its mocking. The disappearance of the medieval type of Folly was a topical issue in the age. Fools were an endangered species at the rise of the early modern period.

Lear's Fool cannot create a counter-culture against the authoritative one, because there is no real, coherent authoritative system. Lear should have been the authority, but he gives his authority up willingly and thus eradicates the power position within his playworld. Instead of creating a comic counter-culture – as would be usual for a fool – in a situation like this he can create a "counterculture" of the "normal" *reaction* to the tragic disintegration. And not perceiving the tragic event as tragedy in this situation of the collapse of order is a perfectly irrational and absurd answer. But this is not so much true for the restoration of the comic potential in the failed carnivalesque collapse of order. The Fool here is an anachronistic figure, soon to be expelled both from society and from the subsequent stagings of the drama, a character who is given here a last chance for explicit action.

The paradoxical utterances of the Fool in their effect are similar to the effect of metadrama's estrangement, but it is not precisely drama that they alienate us from, rather conventional meaning, or meaning altogether. In other words, on the one hand, the theatre audience would tend to perceive a difference between play and reality, and would insist on meaning in both cases, concerning both theatre and the reality that is outside theatre. On the other hand, the metadramatic activities of the Fool and Iago showed us that they do not see a difference between playworld and real world, and what is more, here we see the Fool try to alienate us from our conventional expectations concerning meaning.

Rosalie Colie has a complete chapter on the paradoxes in *King Lear* in which she deals with the peculiar idea of meaning in paradoxes. She shows that the play operates with stock paradoxes of the age, and concludes: "The essence of paradox is its doubleness, with its concomitant detachment and postponement of commitment. [...] Though they must call forth 'wonder' from their audience, paradoxes do not require – indeed, normally they repel – identification on the part of their audience."[48] Thus, the alienation effect of paradoxes is parallel to that of metadramatic devices. Actually, metadrama can be taken as a paradox in itself in the way all self-references are paradoxical. Colie notes that self-reference, a paradoxical form itself, forces considerations of relativity.[49] On the effect of Hamlet's play-within-the play she points out that "[t]he Chinese box effect serves to remind us of the illusion involved in all imitation, of the tautology of identity involved in perfect matching. Paradoxes exploit the same critical relativism..."[50]

In the Fool's riddles and jokes and paradoxes, the "postponement of commitment" or the deferrance of meaning Colie discusses, thus results in a meaning that is more an

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[48] Rosalie Littell Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[49] Colie, 362.

[50] Colie, 363.

event than a *content,* just as discussed above in 3.4 concerning the effect of metadramatic devices, since the event in question is exactly the event in which the content is being postponed or deferred. The Fool presents a mode of behaviour as (and even instead of) "meaning," and as we have seen, some crucial elements of this mode of behaviour are gradually taken over by the king and are perhaps appreciated by the audience as well. If they are appreciated, then we may realise that the lack or unreliability of reason in the comic games of the fool is parallel to the lack or unreliability of reason in the whole play. Several critics have already commented on this from different perspectives. G. W. Knight, for example, although he sees a healing potential in the Fool's laughter, characterises it as a "cruel, ugly sense of humour,"[51] and finds that this sinister laughter is at the heart of the play. Empson compared Cordelia's death to "a last trip-up as the clown leaves the stage."[52]

Susan Snyder detects elements of two different comedies in *King Lear*: the play's grotesque comedy and the comedy of redemptive learning. The Fool, she suggests, mostly belongs to the former but has a role in the latter, too.[53] How redemptive can the Fool's method of mockery be in the Lear-universe, which seems to defy redemption? G. W. Knight reminds us of the grim humour of the play and warns against sentimentalising the cosmic mockery of it. He finds *King Lear* "supreme in that, in its main theme, it faces the very absence of tragic purpose."[54]

Keeping all this in mind, my suggestion for the understanding of redemption in which the Fool takes part is the following: the Fool with his characteristic cruel or grotesque or absurd jokes is presenting the lack or ambiguity of meaning. He is unveiling and joking with the way meaning can be produced; he endows events with, and at the same time, strips them of significance. In other words, he is aware of the events, he reflects on them and could be desperate as well, but paradoxically with his behaviour he is keeping up a careless, playful attitude. He points towards redemption to the extent we are willing to understand redemption as a confirmation of the playful attitude (from the point of view of reason, a mad attitude) that the Fool maintains in his behaviour.

Snyder quotes Thomson's formulation of the grotesque according to which 'it is not just that life is 'now a vale of tears, now a circus' but rather that the grotesque implies that 'the vale of tears and the circus are one.'" He continues, "[i]t places the tragic structure and suffering in uneasy proximity with the laughable, the irrelevant, the reductive."[55] I would like to suggest that redemption would be attained if this proximity were replaced with identification and the uneasiness wore away.

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51 G.W. Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Methuen, 1949), 165

52 William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (The University of Michigan Press, 1951), 150.

53 "[T]he protagonists are forced out from society into educative confrontations in a natural setting and then return to society again; and this process is accompanied by the traditional disorder of comedy – social hierarchies turned upside down, logic and even sanity violated." Snyder, 148–9.

54 Knight, 175.

55 Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque,* Critical Idiom Series (London, 1972), 63, quoted by Snyder, 159.

4.3 The comedy of Iago

4.3.1 Iago's sense of humour dislodged

The way Iago communicates – actually the way he is lying – is fascinating. He is brilliant in manipulating ordinary words so that their ordinary meaning will be transformed into something else. It is as if, with skilful technique, he is making words "behave" in an unusual way, which gives a subtly poetic quality to his texts. He has power over them; he can transform their meaning the way he wants. An enormous power resides in the tension between face value of sentences and another meaning that the audience perceives. An example is Iago's frequent ironic hypocrisy on his iniquity by presenting himself as lacking it altogether: *'I lack iniquity / Sometimes to do me service"* (1.2.3–4). Another similar example: *'I protest in the sincerity of honest kindness"* (2.3.323). In this case the irony is doubled, because on the one hand we know he is wicked and he still protests in the name of "honest kindness," and on the other hand, as I have shown in the section on his metadrama, his advice to Cassio is perfectly reasonable and potentially feasible – were it not Iago to put it in practice.

There are a number of examples of his cynical misuse or puzzling use of vocabulary. Honigmann quotes the following lines:

> *For I mine own knowledge should profane*
> *If I would time expend with such snipe*
> *But for my sport and profit*
> *(1.3.383–5)*

and he notes that Iago, when referring to knowledge, "cynically misuses the word, since his *knowledge* is evil, not sacred as usually understood," and pretends as if this knowledge (already an evil one) could be further profaned.[56] However, it is not profaned from Iago's perspective, because his "sport and profit" validate it. Thus, the fun he gets out of the game is as important and valuable as the profit he gains through the money Roderigo will put from his own purse into Iago's.

Iago has a whole arsenal of misuses of vocabulary. With sentences such as *'I think you think I love you"* (2.3.304) he is pretending to be communicating something, but it is not the content or meaning of his sentence that is important, but rather its puzzling effect. It is, again, not what he says but what his sentence does that is crucial: he slaloms, dodging expertly the flags of straightforward meaning. Another example is the one analysed above in 3.2.2 where he openly admits he is false (3.3.139), but Othello believes he is just modest – the point is that not even the truth in his line can be true, because the line will inevitably be misinterpreted.

Iago is by far the wittiest and verbally most powerful character in the play. This enables him to carry out the traditional levelling function of the Vice, or the traditional levelling function of ridiculing in the carnival, or in its more aggressive form, a charivari – as I referred to it above when describing Burke's view of Iago. Still, no matter what

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[56] E. A. J. Honigmann, Introduction to the Arden edition of *Othello* (London: Thomson Learning, 1997), 383.

kind of ridicule it is on Iago's part, it seems rather obvious that while he may find his levelling actions funny and entertaining, it is morally problematic for an audience to take part in his carnivalesque activities. Yet, we may appreciate his witty humour. Within the play, however, there is no one to appreciate it, and any audience is rightly horrified concerning Iago's falsity within the drama. This is why it is possible to say that Iago's humour is necessarily dislodged from its original context of the world of the drama. His playful ingenuity, if at all, is perceivable and can be appreciated only from without.

4.3.2 Irony and the question of the absurd

No matter how spectacular Iago's juggling with words, the type of verbal nonsense we have seen that was so finely developed in Lear's Fool is not characteristic of Iago at all. It is only his notorious paradoxical sentence that remotely resembles in its atmosphere the silly, paradoxical or nonsensical, but quite Vice-like self-references of the Fool: *"I am not what I am"* (1.1.65). The sentence in an inverted manner, however, does resemble Merry Report's mockery about his identity and echoes his *"I am perse I."* It also evokes the conduct of Ambidexter discussed in Chapter Two, where he too is reluctant to reveal his identity and is playfully hiding it, even pretending to forget his own name.

Iago's notorious sentence may be interpreted on several levels. First, as the textual variation of $A \neq A$, it is opposed to a basic law of Aristotelian logic, or "reason" in its everyday sense. Secondly, Iago may mean that he is not what he seems to be to the others on the stage – which is obvious to the audience. The first "I" of the sentence, the one who is speaking is, therefore, not the one who he appears to be, i.e., the second "I." Had Roderigo been wise enough to get even this message from the sentence, he would not have believed Iago any further.

As a paradoxical self-reference, the sentence fits well in the tradition of self-contradiction, and in that it is similar to the Fool's self references. It is impossible to define the truth value of this sentence since even if he is speaking the truth about his being not what he seems to be to other characters, or what he seems to be in the eyes of the audience, he is undermining his credibility at the same time. On the other hand, there is an even deeper truth in this paradoxical sentence, as Rosalie Colie observes: "Iago lies and does not lie; for he *is* in fact what he is not, since he is, and proves himself by the action of the tragedy to be, not really a man, a member of human kind."[57]

Iago's sentence is also a variation of the tautological sentence of the Lord of the Old Testament: "I am that I am." This, as a mirror image, leads to infinite oscillation between the thing and what it reflects. Therefore Iago in his utterance of this sentence not only identifies his position as the opposite of God's, but blurs his position so that it loses its referent no matter from which side we are examining it. As Géza Kállay puts it, from the point of view of language philosophy this sentence shows that behind Iago's name there is no signified, there is nothing behind the name, and thus Iago in this sense is *nobody*.[58]

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[57] Colie, 243.

[58] Kállay, 118.

It is the same line that Robert Weimann uses to show the two sides of representation.[59] He claims that they both were characteristic of the Renaissance stage. He borrows the terminology of Jean Alter to describe the inherent duality of codes. The two different types of sign and behaviour on stage are as follows: one is a performative statement ("I am acting") and the other is a representational code ("I am not acting" – "I am another person"). Weimann explains that "as opposed to the modern proscenium stage, where a representational mode strongly predominated, the Elizabethan stage tended to project both these codes in intriguing patterns of entanglements." He finds that Iago's sentence is an example when he introduces his *own* inherent duality.

As we have seen, Iago is similar to his predecessor Vices who have employed the method of making jokes about the difficulty in getting to know their identity, because they too were playing with rather than disclosing their names or concocting long riddles about who they were and what their occupation was. Although Iago encapsulates this tradition in his single sentence, the effect of his sentence is similar to the predecessors' not so much in its potentially comic allure – we indeed have to dig down deep to detect the comic appeal in Iago's sentence that reverberates with the antics of his earlier Vices – but in the way it puzzles the audience. The intricate nature of this puzzlement, and its close relation to the puzzlement created by Iago's metadramatic behaviour, can be expounded with de Man's explanations of the comic, the ironic and the way duplication is essential for the understanding of irony.[60] The notion of duplication that de Man takes from Baudelaire's *dédoublement* involves a reflective activity of the self on itself, and he sees it essential for the ultimate comic, "le comic absolu," which Baudelaire also calls irony. The connection between self-doubling and the comic appears from the following quotations of Baudelaire:

> The comic and the capacity for laughter are in the one who laughs, not at all in the object of laughter. It is not the man who stumbles who laughs at his own fall, unless he be a philosopher, a man who has formed by habit the power of rapid self-doubling, and thus assisting as a disinterested spectator at the phenomenon of his own self.[61]

My view of Iago is that he does have this sense of humour, he is capable of self-doubling, and the best examples for it spring from his metadramatic quality discussed in the previous chapter; the director Iago has a sense of humour towards himself as an actor in the play. Moreover, his behaviour reflects on the dramatic quality of drama exactly in the way de Man points out that a self-conscious narrator's intrusion disrupts the fictional illusion.[62] Still, Iago's humour, the irony with which he treats the other characters in the play, in its effect remains indirect. His comic potential is not fulfilled because he does not teach (or at least does not teach directly) the audience what *"le comic*

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[59] Robert Weimann, "Playing with a Difference: Revisiting 'Pen' and 'Voice' in Shakespeare's Theater," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50 (1999): 415–432, especially 425.

[60] Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 198–222.

[61] Charles Baudelaire, "De l'essance du rire" in *Curiosités esthétiques: L'Art romantique et autres Oeuvres critiques,* H. Lemaître, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 215, quoted by Paul de Man, 212.

[62] De Man, 216.

absolu" is. The reason for this failure I will discuss in section 4.4.2. Here I would just like to note that the duplication, the distance of the reflexive self from the empirical self, this reflective disjunction that is so essential according to de Man for irony, works the same way in irony and metadrama, and the effect in both cases is a demystification of earlier assumptions.

A major irony in the play is that we can develop so distinct and different, but nonetheless valid and functioning, views of Iago as, on the one hand, his being the master of hypocrisy, the liar *par excellence,* the master of pure illusion, while on the other hand, as Stallybrass points out, he is "the voice of 'common sense,' the ceaseless repetition of the always-already 'known,' the culturally 'given.'"[63] In other words, it is not merely his wicked intelligence that is at the bottom of Iago's irony. He uses his irony not only to fool the others, but also to unveil the ways – defective ways, as it turns out – of how social mechanisms work to generate meaning He is able to show how commonly accepted things, like the stability of Othello's identity, simply do not exist, or even that ultimately it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the authenticity of what is understood as reality.

4.3.3 Decontextualisation

Charlotte Spivack thinks evil is funny because it represents the privation of reality. This notion is partly true for morality Vices. Iago also features a privation of reality, but with a reversed sign. It is not necessarily the same privation of reality it was before: Iago does not represent the lack of reality in his iniquity, but rather, as I have already pointed out regarding the effect of his metadramatic activities, shows that all reality is illusion, and makes the characters of the drama as well as the audience realise that what they thought to be reality can be deprived of its realness by being turned into illusion. This is what makes Iago as the successor of the Vice so interesting. As I argued above, the Tudor Vice itself comprised in itself different characters. In this case if we go back to its root in the devil, we see that Iago is doing things that the devil traditionally did – what Augustinus termed the privation of reality. However, another aspect of Iago emerges if considered not from the already shattered Christian episteme as a devil, but rather as a trickster that finds its own element in such an ambiguous context. I am not suggesting that as a consequence of appreciating Iago's characteristic sense of humour and his irony we should not consider Iago as evil, but rather that there are relevant perspectives from which he is not necessarily such. This perspective appears most significantly if we imagine him in his element, on stage, acting, because it is in his metadramatic quality that he can be understood as trickster. I suggested that we should not try to expel the fool-trickster tradition from the Vice and should not seek unconditionally to condemn him morally. Similarly, Iago's discrediting others, the audience, us from our notions of reality does not have to be necessarily condemnable. The corruption of reality as perceived according to a given tradition can be carried out not only by the devil, but by a

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[63] Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories," in Margaret W. Ferguson et al. eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 123–42, 139.

trickster as well. By ironically distancing the audience from what they perceive as reality, Iago is decontextualising the "culturally given," and thus becomes the subversive agent in *Othello*.

4.3.4 Iago's sense of humour - conclusion

If the metadramatic, Vice-successor game-maker Iago is the director of the play, the question arises as to why he had to stage such a complicated and painful play, one in which not even he will ultimately triumph. At the end of the play it is impossible for Iago to continue with his ironic witticism. He does not even speak in the end, but merely refuses to talk. Although the Fool disappears rather early before the end of the drama, his grotesquely comic point of view is continued or carried on in the drama. Iago's perspective, on the other hand, after his lies have surfaced, seems to disappear, although the questions he raised in order to discredit the world, "the culturally given" and "always-already known" do not necessarily vanish. Still, his lies are revealed, he is expected to die in the end, and one may ask how such a conclusion, the disclosure of Iago's schemes, can be explained in an interpretation where Iago is given such a powerful position?

I see Iago as a character who did enjoy playing and performance, as well as making "sport and game" and entertaining the audience with his ironic jokes of multiple meaning. Even as the chief entertainer, he may be a trickster-Vice who does not insist on a consistent ending - "consistent" in his overall power as director of the game. Consistency is not the attribute of any Vice, but rather "haphazardness." Iago has directed a play that is rather absurd and difficult to account for from a moral point of view: the evil is revealed and silenced in the end, but virtue perished together with it. The question remains of how we are to interpret Desdemona's and Othello's deaths. If we see the tragic events in the end as noble, dignified and heroic deaths, does this recuperate the otherwise absurd outcome of the play?

I would argue that Desdemona is indeed glorified in her death with her heroic endurance of the realisation that she was betrayed. There is heroism in Othello's suicide as well, because it is the "Venetian" that decides on the fate of the "circumcised dog" in the end. There is genuine tragic pathos in these deaths, while in Lear's case no heroism is achieved; it is rather the pain of madness that dominates the end of that play.

Thus, perhaps the final joke in Iago's play is that, after he has destroyed the faith of the audience in reality and meaning, with an absurd step he does allow the audience to take its share in the pathos of real tragedy - tragedy, that was previously rendered impossible by his machinations, because for real tragedy a solid background and a solid moral worldview are prerequisites.

Since the humour of the clown-fool has been expelled from *Othello*, the jokes of Iago in which the comedy of the Vice-clown reverberates are appreciated at most by the audience. The Clown that appears by that name for a short while in this play is neither a powerful nor an influential character, neither is Iago's function within his own society in the drama that of the comedian. Given the irony in his remarks, which may provide a source of humour appreciated by the audience but not perceived by the participants of the play, his relationship with the characters of the drama is quite different from the one with his theatrical audience. Lear's Fool, on the other hand, was more or less the

same fool within the world of the drama and on the stage. The fact that Iago is necessarily interpreted differently by the audience, the fact that only we, if anyone, will appreciate the humour in his ironic remarks, shows the split in Iago's character between the dramatic and the metadramatic layers. Such a split does not open up in the Fool, because although Lear does not always get the point in the remarks, the Fool is not misleading Lear the way Iago misleads his victims.

4.4 Two comedians: alike, but different

4.4.1 The similarities between the comedy of Iago and the Fool

The sense of comedy that the Fool realises on the verbal level, which Chambers criticised as empty, incongruous and without wit, is realised by Iago as dramatic jesting, and I consider neither to be "without the salt of mind," quite the contrary. This type of nonsense may embody the freedom of not pertaining to meaning and generate the type of laughter that Bakhtin calls the carnivalistic, or the type of laughter that made Foucault laugh while reading Borges's novel on the "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" where fragments of possible systems are juxtaposed in an absurd and highly comic manner, because they are ridiculing the idea of any system, including the one they paradoxically make up.[64] This is the same type of the comic that I have referred to above quoting Berger, who discusses it in connection with, among other things, the theatre of the absurd in his chapter entitled "The Eternal Return of the Folly." It is interesting from my point of view because the theatre of the absurd seems to imply that reality may lack any pattern.

The carnivalistic affinities of both the Fool and Iago make them akin. These two characters, although perhaps with different aims, are nonetheless ridiculing the protagonists and stripping them of their assumed or real dignity. Thus it is not just the positive features of the Fool that are applicable to Iago but also the negative or destructive features of Iago that are characteristic of the Fool. Perhaps we more readily refrain from condemning the Fool's deeds because we accept him as an outsider in a moral system of values (even traditionally an outsider as a fool-madman). Still, the Fool is driving Lear mad, following the script of the Vice on the destruction of the hero by the Vice. The Fool mocks and ridicules Lear, he destructs what remained of him after the king dethroned himself, so in this respect he is not so different from Iago making Othello mad.

These destructions may fit well within the trickster-tradition: Lear's Fool is constantly reminding his master of his nothingness, and Iago is making a jealous monster of his. But beyond that, they are great critics of everything that is culturally given, and they are great craftsmen in creating ideologically ambiguous spaces around themselves. Both the Fool and Iago seem implicitly to touch upon the root of the comedy of the absurd: they deny meaning.

If we accept the Fool's acts only because we see a "rationale" behind them, namely, to address Lear's fault in renouncing his kingdom, we are missing the point. It is King-

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[64] In Michel Foucault 's Preface to his *Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xv-xxiv.

ship in itself, that is, any authority in itself that necessarily invites the possibility and need of its subversion. According to some experts there is an anthropological need for trickster fools in every society.[65] It is not that the faulty step of Lear requires correction by the Fool. It is rather that in a medieval/Renaissance world Folly was a necessary element in the whole setup, and when this setup dissolves, the fool, a remnant of an old world order, indeed, a residual element, is still capable of showing how such a tragedy may be "dealt with": it is possible not to take the whole thing "so seriously," as if he were acknowledging the "absence of significance" of the discourse, but would not make a big problem out of it.

Margaret French points out that the most important values of the play *Othello* are power, control and possession.[66] These are, in fact, the same values that motivate Iago in his actions: "the values that motivate and characterise an Iago are accepted and respected values in the Western world."[67] If the Fool's comedy is targeting mostly one character, the King, then Iago is targeting the whole setup of Venetian society, where values that are considered authoritative are discredited by him through the way he uses them.

In my analysis I have shown that Iago is always concerned with meaning. His verbal humour that the audience can perceive is frequently based on irony. He never uses the sort of verbal nonsense of the Fool. Comparing the two attitudes, the difference in their behaviour emerges: it is not the "absence of significance" found also in the Fool's words that poses the real threat to Iago's environment, but much more an obstinate insistence on meaning. Still, on the level beyond dramatic representation the situation is different: in conclusion about the similarities between the comedy of Iago and the Fool it should be pointed out that on the metadramatic level Iago is sustaining the same absurd, ambiguous, paradoxical playfulness as the Fool, but in the former case this playfulness is not present in the level of the playworld. We might call it the *sub-dramatic* level of the play. Looking at Iago with the metadramatic backdrop (actually if it is a backdrop, it needs to be a transparent one) he may appear in a rather surprising light. What Berger says about the absurd as surreal, i.e., transcending everyday life, can lead to a near apotheosis of this character: "all expressions of the absurd are surreal – that is, they literally transcend what is taken for granted as a real in normal, everyday life."[68] Iago is doing precisely the same. While he shows how he can generate reality, and thus how in turn things taken for granted may be deprived of their reality, how things may be proven to be mere shows and illusions, he is also doing something else: if there is a possibility of any transcendence of everyday reality, it is exactly his way, through discrediting its everyday meaning.

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[65] "It seems plausible that folly and fools, like religion and magic, meet some deeply rooted needs in human society," says Berger, 78.

[66] Margaret French, "The Late Tragedies," in John Drakakis ed., *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 232.

[67] French, 239.

[68] Berger, 177.

4.4.2 The difference in the comedy of Iago and the Fool

Both Iago and the Fool give their own interpretation of the events of the drama; however, their methods are different. The Fool's technique is to create a new context, while Iago's is to decontextualise. Iago is more active (or aggressive, if you like) in realising the collapse of a system himself. He is the one driving the events towards disaster, while the Fool is only making the absurdity of the system explicit. Both characters point out the elusiveness of social certainties, of guarantees of meaning. But although the remarks of both are cruel and wicked, identifying with the Fool's sense of humour can be a genuine relief for the audience. Regarding all the parallels between Iago's and the Fool's trickery, why isn't Iago's satiric and demystifying behaviour as potentially liberating as the Fool's? I call it liberating because the Fool relaxes our strictures and constraints in understanding justice, reality and world order. Actually, he allows the unease of uncertainty but makes it comic, even acceptable. One difference between the effects of the two is probably that the Fool is already one step further in the tragedy compared to Iago: the disaster has been established, and a comic attitude can be developed to recontextualise it and take away the pain and fear that the tragedy (in Reiss's words the "absence of significance") represents. Ridiculing the tragedy of Lear is not equal to anything that we may call "comic relief"; it is not forgetting for a few moments while the jokes last how sadly unreliable and unjust the whole universe is. It is indeed developing a different view of the world, one that Bakhtin emphasizes in his explanation of carnival laughter, the capability to build a counterworld of laughing culture, making the world whole, which necessarily involves a great deal of flexibility, an attitude that does not insist on the original idea of its supposed "wholeness."[69] The audience is given the possibility of laughing at Lear together *with* the Fool. This laughter cannot be a threat to the system that has demolished itself, and it cannot be condemning either but rather is the liberating laughter of the clown/trickster archetype, of the kind that was supposedly not welcome or even imaginable in a morality, one that scholarship is so reluctant to acknowledge.[70]

Both Iago and the Fool seem to deny the existence of the inherent, intrinsic meaning of any phenomenon, and this is indeed the main source of their humour as well, namely that they are capable of presenting satirically the lack of meaning in places or situations where ostensibly there is or should be intrinsic significance. Still, the Fool may allow for a contextual meaning (he shows that meaning exists only within context, but nothing suggests that he would repudiate meaning once and for all). His criticism of Lear's folly

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[69] In Iago's comedy the elements of the Bakhtinian carnival are also clearly detectable, but because of the differences between the two characters, Iago's carnivalesque comedy is pure only on the metadramatic level. For a more systematic discussion of Iago's comedy in the context of Commedia dell' Arte in Bakhtinian terms see Faherty, 190–2.

[70] It would be perhaps interesting to compare Iago and the Fool based on the differences in the ways diverse types of tricksters are generated by diverse social structures. Perhaps the contrast between the two characters examined here could be explained by such differences as the structural setup of the plays: in *King Lear* the King is still the centre of events, and he resigns, while in Othello the centre is missing in another way: all the central characters may be seen as "others" in the Venetian power structure: the woman, the moor and the devil.

rather makes us think that he disapproves of the way Lear squanders his authority as a king – perhaps this is exactly why he tells Lear in the storm as I analysed above to go back and take part in the petty intricacies of the court, and perhaps Iago does not suggest anything positive in this sense. There is no "ideal" in either plays compared to which the mocking is carried out, but in *Othello* there is not even an ideal being stripped of its absolute meaning – as there is in Lear. The Fool does strip Lear and the type of kingdom he should ideally stand for of their ultimate meaning, but by laughing at it, he does not seem to try to annihilate this ideal completely. The Fool's method is not denial, but rather ridicule and demystification, while Iago seems to be actively destructive. Is the Fool perhaps paradoxically denying meaning and *thus* maintaining it? This would accord with the explanations that see Lear's development in his making the role of his Fool intrinsic to him.[71] Unfortunately, although the Fool may succeed to a certain extent as a missing element from Lear's consciousness that is gradually becoming part of the king, or as a repudiated element of Lear's identity finally being acknowledged, on the social-signifying level of society he necessarily has to fail in maintaining anything, because that system has already been shown to demolish itself, just the way the drama can be interpreted as displaying the dissolution of the Medieval way of signification.[72] The way the Fool makes us see the nothingness of Lear, and the way he makes Lear see his own nothingness, is by constantly referring to his embeddedness into his context, as, for example, when accusing him of being "an o without a figure" because of Goneril's frowning.

Iago's technique is different: he cynically shows the entire failure, the intrinsic faultiness of the working of the system based on cultural codes and accepted values, as well as the idea of intrinsic meaning. He does offer the possibility of the absurd, but without the liberation offered by the Fool.

In my argument, Reiss's theory about this age being transitory and capable of disclosing the absence of meaning is relevant, because it is always this trickster figure who has the task of dealing with this absence, or creating this absence, making it an ever-present absence: not because the trickster wants to destroy anything by showing that the whole system is faulty, rather, it is serving society with the necessary sense of the possibility of liberation from its codes. Perhaps the trickster makes us believe that it is our choice to live in "normal" society, since it is clearly shown that an opposite of that "normal" may also exist. In the transitory epistemological age this absence of significance is revealed, and its agents are in this case the Fool and Iago. But in *Othello* the audience is not any more given the opportunity to employ the residual medieval/Renaissance way of dealing with this absence through accepting the existence and the necessity of the comic counter-culture, because this way of dealing with the world is fading, parallel to the solidification of the dominant culture's seriousness. The fact that Nahum Tate's version of *Lear* of 1681[73] seems to have found the play more bearable

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[71] See William Willerford, *The Fool and His Scepter* (Northwestern University Press, 1969), 208–225.

[72] Alessandro Serpieri, "The Breakdown of Medieval Hierarchy in *King Lear*," in John Drakakis ed., *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 84–95.

[73] Tate's version of Lear is available in Christopher Spencer ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 201–274.

when the Fool was expelled clearly shows the logic towards which society was moving: it is not the tool that helps us dealing with the incongruous that is a solution to our feeling of grief, but rather the control of the world in a way that grief and incongruity are expelled from it.

4.4.3 Iago as the missing fool

I have said above that the fool is already one step further than Iago in dealing with tragedy. But this is true only if we consider a theoretical sequence of dealing with a tragic event: it is common in the two dramas that a whole system collapses, which makes it clear that general assumptions about the working of society and signification were wrong. The Fool and Iago, as descendants of the Vice (himself already, according to Mares, a symptom of a dissolving episteme), point toward different directions. The Fool with his acts is embodying a technique that is at home with the culture of carnivalistic folly which existed in the Middle Ages through the Renaissance. He shows a certain ease in dealing with situations when the world comes too close to chaos. He can create a counterworld where the entire universe is comic, and it may be liberating that there is no guarantee of meaning. With all this he is pointing backwards, just like the traditional costume of the fool worn by Robert Armin in *King Lear,* which was already an outdated prop, part of an extant repertoire.[74] Iago, on the other hand, cannot make his humour of destruction appealing – apart from its play and game aspect. We, as audience, are unwilling to identify with the point of view from which the tragic events of *Othello* would lose their weight. Perhaps we may see Lear's fault in giving up his kingdom, and thus see his being forced to come to a certain "enlightenment" as justified, accepting the comments of the Fool as necessary parts of the process.[75] There is no such possibility offered in *Othello.* The comic view of the world, the counterculture of subversion as liberating is not accessible: in this drama there is no proper agent for it.

Iago is a perfect trickster on the metadramatic level. He is carrying out the ritual of levelling destruction through mockery in front of a theatrical audience. The Fool does the same both inside and outside the play. Inside the play *Othello* (actually, Iago's play), however, the trickster's carnivalistic behaviour is restricted to the mockery of a supposedly improper couple, to a charivari, itself supposing laughter of corrective, "normative" nature, not in the least the Fool's liberating kind. That laughter has been expelled from the world towards which early modern England was heading. Jonson already represents this distinctly different view on laughter, when he condemns laughter in his *Discoveries,* and finds "laughter unfitting in a wise man."[76] And I suggest that the way laughter was gradually expelled is precisely parallel to the ways critics sometimes insist on the absence of moral ambiguity in morality plays, the ways we force ourselves to understand the comedy of vice as supportive of the morality structure. Hillman has a most enlightening explanation of Iago replacing the Clown as a doorkeeper in *Othello*'s

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[74] Wiles, 155

[75] On the question of Lear's enlightenment see also Willeford, 208-225 and Hillman 203-206.

[76] Pollard, 299.

act 3 scene 1.[77] This, in my view, is indeed the epitome of the disappearance of the trickster who is capable of the liberating magic, and its turning into Iago, a successor of the trickster-vice, whose magic works only on the metadramatic level. The play *Othello* thus may be a tragedy of the disappearance of the popular fool and the Vice's becoming – perhaps retrospectively – unequivocally evil. Social and consequently theatrical space will become such, so that there is no room for Folly. And once the fool is expelled from the Vice, the only thing that remains, although already in a psychologically rather complex, almost human form, is the devil. I cannot but regard it as fortunate that the antitheatrical writers of the age were not successful in banning theatres completely, and together with them making even the metatheatrical foolery of the late Vices disappear. Regarding the difference between the Fool's and Iago's laughter in the society of their respective dramas, that other, hypothetically complete disappearance could have had more frightening consequences than me not having foolish vices to laugh *with* and talk about.

[77] Hillman ibid. 187–188.

CHAPTER 5

KING LEAR AND *OTHELLO* AS CONTEXTS OF PLAYING

Taking the two dramas, *King Lear* and *Othello* as wider contexts of the findings of my previous chapters, in this final chapter of my study I would like to re-examine the two characters and the logic of representation that manifests itself in their playing. I would like to reflect on how the acts of the Fool and Iago are organically embedded in the world of the plays, and are echoed at several levels in these worlds. I will demonstrate that both these characters can be seen not only as *functions* of the plays in their own respective ways, but also as prerequisites of making meaning which in turn is questioned by their absurdity, yet, is maintained by their play. I will also deal with the consequences of the denial of folly, which in a curious way may be paralleled with the denial of the immoral, and will discuss the wider, philosophical and epistemological consequences of such a denial both in the early-modern and in the post-modern context.

5.1 Meaning and identity in *King Lear*

> [Laughter] leaves behind areas that are accessible to speech to 'hang suspended', neither affirming, nor assuaging anything.[1]

5.1.1 The king who stopped playing

A central and obvious fault in the drama is Lear's resignation from his throne and his idea to *"retain/ the name and all the'addition to a king"* (1.1.135–6). Once he would like to be *called* king but does not want to *behave* and *act* like one, a gap opens up between the sign (the king) and its meaning (that he *is* indeed the king). Such a gap could not open under an earlier logic of signification, when meaning was guaranteed by a precisely set place in the universe on the great chain of being, and when an infinite networks of inherent correspondences, along with signifier and signified were not discrete categories but rather reflected one another. The gap could not open up simply because, as Foucault has described, representation was based on resemblance, and the relationship between sign and meaning was motivated.

Serpieri in his analysis of the drama explains that in *King Lear* we see how "the 'received' (medieval) signs and systems were collapsing into blanks."[2] Within the society depicted in the drama, his vision of the collapse of the medieval system of signification

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1 George Bataille, *Guilty* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1988), 101.

2 Serpieri, 1992, 95.

is as follows: "Whoever is excluded from the medieval hierarchy of signs *is nothing;* and whoever thinks (as does Lear himself) that he may give up his position in the system with impunity and maintain the identity derived from that position will lose his reason and *will be nothing.*"[3] It is as if the drama would suggest that no extradiscursive meaning is allowed. After Lear resigns and loses his context, he becomes an *"Idle old man / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away!"* (1.3.17–19). Lear himself very soon realises that there is something wrong with his identity, when he says:

> *Does any here know me? This is not Lear:*
> *Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?*
> *[...]*
> *Who is it that can tell me who I am?*
> *(1.4.223–7)*

Upon which the Fool answers, *"Lear's shadow."*[4]

While Lear suffers for losing his identity because he lost his context, on the other hand it is also essential within the logic of the play that the loss of identity, the loss of one's "meaning," is a prerequisite for one's survival, at least most certainly so in the case of Kent and Edgar.[5] The play is constantly addressing questions concerning the relationship between men and their social identities, as well as the extent to which social identity is identical with the person. Apart from the Fool' jokes on Lear's and his own "nothingness," it is Edgar's obvious lack of identity as a madman that will help Lear realise that Poor Tom in his wretched nakedness is "the thing itself," with no fake and perishable titles and embellishments. The real significance or the central question regarding this line of Lear's is whether the "thing itself" is a human being or not, whether there is a "thing" as a human being, or rather whether it is the titles, names, clothes etc. that make the "thing" a human being, embedded in social, civilizational, semiotic context, that give him "meaning."

I read the drama as validating the Fool's attitude, who is constantly stressing nothingness and never stops playing with it: one is *not* identical with titles but is born as a fool *("That thou wast born with")* which is the same as a madman *("the thing itself")*, but the task is to put on the role and play, the other alternative being symbolic or real death. Although the Fool sees clearly that Lear is not *intrinsically* a king, because titles are just consequences of the social signifying context, he still seems ridiculous when he stops playing and is explicitly ridiculed by the Fool.

This is why nothingness is equal not to the acknowledgment of the absence of intrinsic meaning behind the idea of self or, in other words, to symbolic death, but to the point when one stops playing. The context may be a dissolving medieval one, or an

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[3] Serpieri, 1992, 87.

[4] The scene is parallel to another scene in *Richard II* (4.1.276–91) where the king, after losing power, examines himself in the mirror and tries to establish if his identity has changed or not with the loss, at the end of which he smashes the mirror. The answer of Bolingbroke, just like the Fool's answer in King Lear, deals with the former king's shadow: *"The shadow of your sorrow / hath destroyed the shadow of your face"* (4.1.292–3).

[5] The idea is formulated by G. K. Hunter, in his Introduction to the New Penguin Shakespeare edition of *King Lear* (Penguin Books, 1972), 43.

improvised one generated by a playful Fool, but in either case, there is still no possibility for any meaning outside it.

I read Cordelia's lines as echoing the same idea when she says to her father in the ominous opening ceremony that she loves him according to her *bond,* no more, no less (1.1.92–3). It is again the context and their relationship within it that will define, in Cordelia's view, how she should behave towards Lear, the king, her father.[6] Cordelia's awareness of her own role within the network of her bonds is thus similar to the Vice's knowledge about the logic of the system. Seeing herself as defined by a place in a system and deciding to act accordingly actually alienates Cordelia from the possibility of identifying completely with this role. It is her decision to take it on. Still, it is always precisely alienation that makes us aware of the play as play and that involves us within its world, a practice that the Vice employs so brilliantly. Cordelia's line scandalizingly exposes the fact that it is not intrinsic qualities that govern the system, but rather the system depends on the interrelatedness of its elements – a knowledge that is constantly explicated by the Fool. The lines the mad Lear utters with the dead Cordelia in his arms – *"And my poor fool is hang'd"* (5.3.304) – underlies the mysterious kinship between Cordelia and the Fool.

When talking about the questionability of identities and roles in renaissance drama, Hornby seems to assume that there is one deep identity within us, one that plays no roles, one with which we can get in touch in rare moments, "who we truly are."[7] I see that the most powerful element of the Fool is his freedom not to have to play a "self." He does not have to pretend that there is something behind the mask, his mask of the Fool, exactly because everyone assumes that he cannot be taken seriously as a person, as an individual. His mask is *par excellence* empty, and in this respect he is as good as a madman. Perhaps an even better example is the fool of Tarot cards who has no number and thus is able to "take on" the roles and numbers or signs represented by all the other twenty one cards in the set. This is following precisely the logic presented by Haphasard, the vice of *Appius and Virginia* referred to in Chapter 2, when he enumerated a huge list of possible identities and selves and stated that he is identical to none but rather juggles all. The example shows why the Fool as a role is not a long-term option for anyone in solving the problem of one's identity. The fool is no identity; he is rather a necessary *function* of a system that is in turn dependent on it.

I have said above that Lear stopped playing at the beginning of the play. In the end, however, in Act 5, Scene 3, he starts playing again, wholly identified with the fictitious nature of play, shifting the scene of life from the reality of a prison to his private reality of gilded butterflies, old tales, praying, singing and laughter. Finally he has gone mad. The only thing that distinguishes him from genuine folly is the lack of a double perspective, the eye for self-reflection that has proven so vital for irony, the *"comic absolu."*

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[6] Tibor Fabiny reflects on the same line the following way: "This bond is in tune with man's fixed nature, which the Elizabethans called: *kind.* Sin, whether it is flattery (sisters) *hubris* (Edmund) or *hamartia* (Lear) is working against man's kind." Tibor Fabiny, *"'Veritas Filia Temporis'* The Iconography of Time and Truth and Shakespeare," in Tibor Fabiny ed. *Shakespeare and the Emblem* (Szeged: JATE, 1984), 215–72, 237.

[7] Hornby, 73.

The dance of Death and the Fool

Seeing Lear as the previous centre of the kingdom who becomes a piece of excess within the community after he does not fulfil his role, may lead one to interpret Lear's Fool as a seer or priest, one who knows that the reintegration of the community is possible only at the expense of the excess through sacrifice and who acts as a hospice-worker, attending Lear on his final journey, escorting him to his death. Although this interpretation is plausible for several reasons, it is only partly accurate, mainly because the fool does nothing actively and explicitly towards reintegration, with one possible exception: he provides Lear with a certain kind of knowledge. This "knowledge" is close to death, because it is the knowledge of the lack of meaning, the knowledge that it is madness, or "absence of significance" behind the fragile meaning within the games of the social context, and this knowledge is parallel to the one that is the ultimate end of the game, which strips everything of its significance, no matter how intricately built the networks of meaning could have been. The Fool acts as hospice indeed, which entails the paradox of teaching the dying king to detach himself from things he insists on, but nevertheless insisting on maintaining the game.

It is in this sense, understanding the fool as hospice who ushers Lear to death, that I see the crucial importance of the parallel representations of Death and the Fool in the iconography at the end of the Middle Ages.[8] The two figures were leading figures in a carnival-like revelry, the ultimate festivity, the dance of death, a picture in which kings and beggars are lead by death the same way in this dance, where the threat of the carnivalesque appears to be much deeper than the threat of a counterculture to a ruling ideology, because it stands for death itself as inevitable, and with death everything will be stripped of its meaning.[9]

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[8] "In the late Middle Ages, in a curious synthesis, folly merged with death, as expressed in the carnivallike 'death dance' *(Totentanz).* Zijderveld observed that folly and death appeared here as 'twin revelers.' Folly, which relativized and subverted all social order, finally foreshadowed death, which obliterates all social order once and for all." Berger, 74.

[9] An interesting connection between the culmination of tragedy and the Dance of Death is made by Willard Farnham. "The Christian European spirit which one may call Gothic is strongly bent upon concluding tragedy with death and giving it a final seal of authenticity in death. In its religious Contempt of the World it dwells upon the ills of mankind as having their origin in the Garden of Eden with the sin of Adam. Chief among these ills, that toward which the others all tend, is the death of the body. Hence, death becomes for the Gothic mind a primary symbol of the imperfection in mortal life. It is thought of as a necessary culmination of tragic adventure. In a sense all Gothic tragedy [...] is a Dance of Death." Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy,* (University of California Press, 1936), 79.

5.1.2 "The tyranny of the open night": The end and beyond

> "Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death..."[10]

As an undercurrent of the unreliability of meaning in the Fool's games there is a tragic irony behind the events of the play itself, exactly because of the unreliability of the meaning of tragic happenings. This again vindicates a multiple-layered, complex perspective on the events. A highly ironic working of "fate" reveals itself when the blind Gloucester utters his deepest wish to have Edgar in his touch, and the wish is fulfilled although he is not aware of it, since he does not recognise Edgar who is there with him.

> *Oh! dear son Edgar,*
> *The food of thy abused father's wrath;*
> *Might I but live to see thee in my touch,*
> *I'd say I had eyes again.*
> *(4.1.21–4)*

The irony here derives again from the possibility of a double perspective. In other words, no matter how miserable we might feel, we can never know how things look from an external point of view. The problem is not that there is no possibility of a metaperspective from which truth and the workings of justice can be safely identified, but rather that this perspective frequently disappears. It simply is not reliable.

At the opening of Act 3, Scene 4, when Lear and his companions find a shelter in the storm on the heath, Kent shows Lear to the hovel with the following words:

> *Here is the place, my lord; good my Lord, enter:*
> *The tyranny of the open night's too rough*
> *For nature to endure.*

These lines in my reading provide us with the metaphor of Lear's experience of the horror when meaning disappears from things and there is not one reliable point in the world that remains meaningful. The tyranny of the open night is the mad experience of the absence of significance, and it becomes an experience that the audience of the play is forced to witness, an experience that has always worried critics of the drama.

It is difficult not to accept the play as a complete renunciation of meaning and see accordingly that by the end of the play, as G.K. Hunter formulates in a dense sentence, "the action of the play has reached the final nothing, not only of death, but of the world emptied of meaningful content."[11] Such an understanding, since it excludes a view of a providential universe where suffering will reach its purpose in a larger setup of redemption, seems strongly anti-Christian. Actually in this respect, i.e., understanding the play where suffering has no purpose, and the play offers no hope for redemption, the effect of the play's lack of a clear cut moral message makes it an intensified, or blown-up

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10 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1978), 256.

11 Hunter, 26.

version of moralities that have slightly ambiguous messages, instances where the activities of the Vice character do not sustain a moral world-view. It is so because in such plays, as discussed above, the Vice may be understood as acting according to a logic that is different from the one of the morality, but is not necessarily immoral in itself.

Kenneth Muir tries to combat the interpretation of the play that I illustrated above with Hunter's opinion. Muir says that "[t]he play is not, as some of our grandfathers believed, pessimistic and pagan: it is rather an attempt to provide an answer to the undermining of traditional ideas by the new philosophy that called all in doubt."[12]

As divergent as these two views exemplified by Hunter and Muir may seem, they are both true in their own right. On the one hand the action of the play has indeed reached the final nothing of the world emptied of meaningful content, but despite the fact that the audience experiences this death, which may obliterate their belief in the meaningfulness of life and the world, it does not obliterate their consciousness. I am not speaking of any sense of catharsis. The pain of the tyranny of the open night, without any answer to it, is far from being an elevated experience, let alone an experience enhancing reintegration in any future. The "answer," however, is that in spite of all that has happened, in spite of our having seen how the world can be emptied of meaningful content, yet, paradoxical as it may seem, we, the audience are still here. Lear died, but we did not. The play ends, while the audience remains – this situation is parallel to the disappearance of the Fool from his play as well as the refusal of Iago to speak at the end of his. It is we who are left after the play ends; it is we who have to do something with what happened. Stanley Cavell's interpretation of *King Lear,* together with the other mature tragedies of Shakespeare, stresses that these plays maintain us in a present. "At the close of these successions we are still in a present, it is another crossroads. [...] as if to say, what has happened has stopped but it has not come to an end; we have yet to come to terms with what has happened, we do not know where it will end."[13]

The meaning of tragic suffering has been obliterated within the play, and it has remained pending outside of it. We do not know where it will end. What we do see is that the loss of meaning as a prerequisite for survival gestures towards acknowledging the nothingness of meaning. Yet simultaneously, this nothingness is a prerequisite of play through which meaning in turn is generated in the Fool's manner, for the sake of play.

5.2 Social structure and meaning in *Othello*

5.2.1 "Past thought!": Society and its "Others"

Similar to the tragedy of *King Lear,* in *Othello* there are two different logics of representation at work. The one that is working for Othello is what Karen Newman calls "transparent" representation,[14] which means that for him there is a direct link between sign

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[12] Muir, 50.

[13] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112–3.

[14] Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 88.

and its meaning. The opposite of this is a new type of representation, nicely contrasted with the old one in the lines, *"The hearts of the old gave hands / But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts"* (3.4. 46–7). The lines are Othello's, who, as it appears from the quotation, on the level of his speech is aware of the discrepancy which may blur the transparency of representation. However, he is unable to employ this knowledge properly, because he directs it towards Desdemona's behaviour, while he misinterprets Iago's *"flag and sign of love / which is indeed but sign"* (1.1.155–154–59) for a sign that is transparent in its meaning. The crucial problem here is not so much the deception, but rather the possibility of deception, the fact that the flag, the sign of love, can be generated without love because there is no intrinsic connection between the two. The old logic of representation is discredited in the play, or in other words the logic of *motivated* language proves untenable in its conflict with *arbitrary* language.[15] Apart from Othello, there is another important character in the drama, Brabantio, who is unwilling to give up the set of values in which a strong old system of views guarantees meaning and truth. His belief in the old system and the logic of its proper functioning is so strong that he cannot imagine this system to be shattered, only that wicked magic is employed against it. Desdemona's decision to marry Othello and leave her father is a horrific thing for Brabantio much less because he is betrayed by his daughter than because such a betrayal is *unimaginable* for him, it is *"Past thought!"* (1.1.164); such a thing simply *cannot be,* it is *"[a]gainst all rules of nature"* (1.3.102). If "nature" proves to work in a different way than he imagined, his explanation is not that his conception was wrong about what he thinks "nature" is, but rather that what he cannot take is simply not a natural event. It must be due to spells, witchcraft, or simply the lack of sense:

> *She is abused, stolen from me and corrupted*
> *By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks,*
> *For nature so preposterously to err*
> *Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,*
> *Sans witchcraft could not.*
> *(1.3.61–5)*

Brabantio's *"Past thought!"* is the equivalent of Kent's "tyranny of the open night" in *Lear*: it is the horrifying experience of the impossibility of making meaning of what one experiences. It is an experience of losing touch with the world as well as losing the self. In addition to experiences that do not fit one's way of perceiving the world, there are identities of others that can also pose a threat to one's integrity.

The curious thing in *Othello* is that all three main characters can be considered "others" to Venetian society and its dominant values. Desdemona is a woman – and she undermines the patriarchal system by disobeying her father. Othello is a moor, the *"extravagant and wheeling stranger"* (1.1.134), who is an outsider to Venice. He is an unidentifiable sign within its order, although he functions within it well as a soldier – up to the

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[15] As quoted above in the theoretical chapter of this paper, the opposition between motivated and arbitrary language is explained within the epistemological context, the classical-medieval-renaissance heritage versus the relativism of the modern age by Alessandro Serpieri, 1985, especially pages 125–6.

point when he is disturbed and commits two heinous crimes: a murder and a suicide. Iago at the end of the play is described with epithets of the devil, and in the eyes of the audience he is very similar to the Vice, that "other" of the morality plays who in this drama will suspend the everyday set of values and even the idea of everyday reality not just for a moment but for good.

There is a peculiar unity binding the three characters – the woman, the stranger and the devilish villain. All are threats to the existing order, each embodying something that potentially shows the precariousness of society. Fear of the threatening Other is central to the play, where the subversive potentials sooner or later in the drama prove to be indeed destructive to the system: the woman-daughter to her father, the stranger within society to himself and his family, and the devilish villain to traditional ideas about the stability of things tinging all reality with a drop of mad illusion.

If Iago is the ultimate agent of subversion, Desdemona is the ultimate impossible target for subversion because she shows no fear of whatever might come. In her marital choice I see one of the main indicators of her attitude. Although Othello established himself as a noble warrior, an excellent soldier and supporter of the Venetian order, his being foreign and a moor, as well as the exotic tales he told about his past, played a primary role in Desdemona's choice of this *"extravagant and wheeling stranger"* against her father's choices, whom Brabantio describes – and perhaps advertises – as the *"curled darlings"* (1.2.63) of the nation. Marrying the moor in Venetian society is embracing the unpredictable. There are several specific occasions in the play where Desdemona demonstrates her bravery in facing the unknown. She seems to have been aware of the dangers inherent in her choice. When it is debated whether she should go to Cyprus with her husband, she argues in the Senate, *"if I be left behind/ A moth of peace, and he go to the war, the rites for which I love him are bereft me"* (1.3.256–8). She seems to have faith in coming to terms with whatever will happen to her. I find remarkable the contrast between how husband and wife relate to the possibility of their betrayal by the other: Othello's suspicion is unfounded in reality, while Desdemona literally has to face her husband strangle her. Othello wants to *"tear her all to pieces"* (3.3.432) and *"chop her into messes"* (4.1.209), while Desdemona's final reaction to the ultimate betrayal of her are the puzzling lines where she takes the blame off her murderer, announcing that she was the one to kill herself. The paradox of these lines is that although we do not find it likely that Desdemona is lying, it is difficult to find an acceptable meaning in her illogical words. In her last lines I see her ultimate acquiescence to the events, where in her answer she embraces her life and death as they are and regrets none of her choices. The source of her calm at this point I find in her openness towards the unknown, which she does not lose even at the threshold of her death. Desdemona's words seem illogical, because they do not comply with what the audience has perceived as the fact of the play: Othello was the one to strangle her. In her marital choice she acted against the patriarchal standards of Brabantio; here she acts against the audience's understanding of the play's reality, and from this point of view she is in a curious sense destructive; a *pendant* to Iago's schemes through which he reveals the lack of significance, the emptiness of meaning. In other words, her action is a morally impeccable pole to Iago's trickery and lies, and a remote parallel to it in its "disregard" of what one – be it Brabantio or the audience – understands as reality.

5.2.2 The denial of folly

A new understanding of Iago arises from within the drama. He as the great illusion-maker is clearly a representative of a new logic of signification, a logic that is not based on inherent resemblance but rather is arbitrary. Within the drama he appears as an unambiguously wicked destroyer of lives, loves and values, but at the same time the validity of the values he destroyed is questioned. The Venetian system within which Brabantio imagines his life, the system that Othello worked so hard to acquire, is untenable, and in this respect Iago is the champion of the game, because once it appeared that there is no essential difference between truth and illusion, it is impossible to re-establish the former firm belief in its incontestability.

In this respect Iago can be understood as the inherent self-destructive mechanism within modern society: he is the fool, or the one who was supposed to be the fool, but who in this case takes revenge on society for its denial of folly, for the lack of his being acknowledged. If we want to build upon a knowledge of pure sense and solid reason, we have to deny the expense at which such a thinking is made possible. We have to forget that knowledge and reason do not exist in themselves, that they are not absolute categories, but that they work only within a given context that is accepted by a given community. Stanley Cavell addresses the issue in the following way:

> What we forgot, when we deified reason, was not that reason is incompatible with feeling, but that knowledge requires acknowledgement. (The withdrawals and approaches of God can be looked upon as tracing the history of our attempts to overtake and absorb acknowledgement by knowledge; God would be the name of that impossibility.)[16]

Iago, putting the possibility of knowledge or truth into cynical brackets, shows how it is precisely acknowledgement that makes things work. And he also shows that without the liberty of the fool, whom he replaces as doorkeeper in the scene discussed above in 4.3.4., the awareness of the necessity of acknowledgement will become a sheer destructive force. The denial of the fool, that is, the denial of the necessity of acknowledgement in Cavell's sense for the benefit of unquestionable knowledge, will result in the destruction that is carried out by a diabolical fiend, an Iago.

From this perspective the utter incapability of Brabantio, on the one hand, to suppose that he might have been wrong in his perception of reality, and on the other to revise his views of it, depicts him as someone for whom the carnivalesque liberation from meaning (be it merely formal or genuinely subversive) is hopelessly out of reach. Actually, the carnivalesque is similarly out of reach for him (and within reach for the audience only in Iago's metadramatic activities) as it will become inaccessible through the solidification of the new episteme, which required the disappearance of the carnivalesque as well as the disappearance of folly its denial.[17]

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[16] Cavell, 117.

[17] The denial of folly at the advent of rationalism is described in similar terms by various scholars. Berger argues as follows: "Folly as a general cultural phenomenon began to decline in the early modern period. Zijderveld explains this fact in terms of what Max Weber called rationalisation. He is very probably correct in this explanation. If so, the principal culprit is the

The irony in *Othello* is that the faults for which Iago is condemnable, namely his lies and pretence, prove to be an inherent core of a system that tries to deny folly. In other words, it is precisely Iago's lie that the new episteme is built upon, namely, "selling" a fiction as the ultimate reality, presenting a "made up" truth as genuine knowledge, forgetting that it is based on a construct. However, at the same time Iago is showing, in Cavell's terms, that mere acknowledgement can generate the seemingly solid knowledge, while the fact that it is dependent on acknowledgement remains hidden in the background. Iago, the villain who is to be condemned, is no more to be condemned than the idea of reality that tries to deny the illusion at its roots.

One difference between Iago and the Vice is the lack of nonsense in Iago's words and acts. Although he capitalizes on illusion, it is not nonsense that governs him, but rather his vision of himself as director of the play. When comparing him with Lear's Fool it appears that a certain sense of madness, the suspense of reason, is actually missing from him. The lack of verbal nonsense from Iago's speeches is an indicator of this difference. He may act in a way that is difficult to explain, but he gives a plausible explanation to the audience for what he does. And the explanation is nothing else but a thing that admittedly lacks surety, but there is nothing easier to take it for granted for the sake of putting on a play and once the explanation is accepted, one can build whole performances on it:

> *I hate the Moor*
> *And it is though abroad that 'twixt my sheets*
> *He's done my office. I know not if't be true,*
> *But I for mere suspicion of that kind*
> *Will do as if for surety.*
> *(1.3.385–9)*

Iago is not bothered in his play about whether the impetus for his acts (his being cuckolded by Othello) is simply not true. Ironically, this logic of acting or doing "as if for surety" but seeing clearly that nothing is for sure, is not only the logic of Iago's play and his lies, but of theatre plays in general. In Iago's lesson, though, we see this as true of the entire concept that is called "reality."

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rising bourgeoisie, that most rational and serious class" (Berger, 74). The same phenomenon, the disappearance of folly, is described similarly by Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization.* Foucault says that folly is expelled from the seventeenth century forward and the experience of foolish Reason and reasonable Folly, so common in the Renaissance, becomes inaccessible by a new line of division. Between Montaigne and Descartes an important development is realised: *ratio* gains power. The passage I am referring to is translated into Hungarian from a 1972 edition of the original, and is missing from the English edition, which uses a 1961 original from French. Michel Foucault, *A bolondság története* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1991), 72; in English: Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967).

5.3 Moral corruption, amoral presence, or authenticity?

> "Objections, son-sequiturs, cheerful distrusts, joyous mockery – all are signs of health. Everything absolute belongs in the realms of pathology." Nietzsche

I would like to continue the previous train of thought with the discussion of another denial in order to demonstrate why I find it so important to point out the roots of Iago in the trickster-Vice. As it will turn out, disregarding or denying the fool in Iago has surprising and rather unfortunate consequences.

We have seen that the characteristic comedy of the Vice is rather controversial, and there are clear cases in which the final comedy is not upon the victim, but upon the Vice, and in which the audience cannot but perceive the workings of justice. This justice, however, is entirely missing from *King Lear* and *Othello*. And this is why Reiss's terminology is useful in this case in describing such theatre as "dialectical theatre" as opposed to "analytical theatre." The main reasons for the impossibility of perceiving justice at the end of the play are that we cannot be certain about what justice could possibly be in the given situation, and also that the ideas taken up by the play do not end with the performance, but as Cavell has it in a passage quoted above, they maintain us in a present. The task of the audience therefore could be to take on the responsibility of the lack of closure, the lack of a soothing idea of a final explanation, the lack of the perspective from which the ultimate struggle for meaning would turn into an overall understanding.

Regarding the effect of these plays, it is possible to detect a parallel between Iago's and Shakespeare's theatre: they both reveal that whatever is taken as reality is inevitably a construct, just as a play on a stage; it is possible to have a look at the tiring house of events, where there are no identities or selves, just players.

Although such an understanding might seem to lead to utmost disillusionment, there is actually a radically different and positive outcome, namely that Iago and the Fool are the only possible characters who may be regarded as authentic. They are aware of the interrelatedness of role play and identity within the drama, and their metadramatic awareness, their platea-oriented behaviour, endow them with a unique possibility that is out of reach for other characters: they do not have to maintain the pretended difference between the world of theatre and the world of the audience. They are the ones who do not play anything else than what they admittedly are, and this makes them matchless in their authenticity. From the audience's point of view, Iago and the Fool are the possibilities of self-reflection, of double-perspective within the drama.

As Enid Welsford remarks: "The buffoon gives most pleasure, by being most himself."[18] The curious self-identical authenticity of the clown or fool within the drama is nicely illustrated in a stage direction found in the second quarto text of *Romeo and Juliet*, "Enter Will Kemp." David Wiles explains that this line of text not only shows that the

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[18] Welsford, 27.

particular role was played by Will Kemp, but also it provides an example of "how Shakespeare's mind could not separate the actor from the role [...] The scene anticipates Kemp's appearance with the musicians after the play is over, when he will return to sing and dance his jig."[19] This example again gives us good grounds to suppose that Kemp was not the only clown whose "role" was simply to "play" himself, whether on or off-stage. As I argued in 2.4, the same applies to Robert Armin, the fool who was replaced by Iago as doorkeeper in *Othello,* but who fully developed his play in *King Lear.*

An interesting layer is added to the authenticity of the Fool with Wiles's reference quoted in Chapter 2 to the distinction between the Vice who *acts* the fool's part and the born or natural fool,[20] which means that "behind" the Fool who pretends to be foolish but is indeed wise, actually there is a Vice, and this is where the Fool's wisdom derives from. In other words, it is the Vice who is wise in the stage-Fool.[21] Thus the Fool remains authentic as much as he reveals that he is just playing the fool. The curious thing, however, is that the agent "behind" the "mask" of the Fool is actually the *par excellence* non-identifiable, whose essence is precisely shape-changing.

Another understanding of the question of justice in Shakespeare's major tragedies is that there is some sort of moral explanation possible, although the punishments seem unfair in their volume and intensity compared to the fault. The "punishment" is directed towards a particular passion of the main hero by which he is obsessed. Hillmann, when discussing the late tragedies, shows the complexity of such an understanding.

> At the core of each of these plays, by generic definition, lies the 'larger-than life' *agon,* both inward and outward, of a central male character. The external subversive elements function to construct the inner struggle, too, in terms of the trickster-principle. Typically, the protagonist falls victim to a subversive threat, which he then internalises in a self-destructive form – jealousy, madness, heroic fury, and so forth. By itself, this is merely to supply a new vocabulary for the old 'slaves of passion'. But 'passion', in these tragic heroes, is already beyond the pale, wholly negative. By going a layer deeper, cutting below tragic passion to subversiveness itself, with its potential for creation and

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[19] Wiles, 88.

[20] Wiles, 4.

[21] This is, of course, not to deny the obvious importance of the contemporary tradition of the "wise fool" (a very fine and perfectly developed example of which would be Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae*), and the fact that this tradition also influenced Shakespeare's theatre. Most probably a very strong impact was given by Robert Armin who himself wrote texts following this tradition, which brought new elements to the customary stage buffoonery: Armin's foolery is somewhat different compared to the earlier two clowns, who were less wise and more "rumbustinous." Still, I argue that it is impossible to imagine that Armin *on stage* could have avoided to rely on the traditional, metadramatic stage trickster, in whom the Vice and the fool are inseparable. It is in this sense that I understand the authenticity of Lear's Fool on stage, and the idea that his wisdom roots in the Vice. For the comparison of the clowns in Shakespeare's company and the influence of these actors on the parts they played see Felver op. cit. He is explicit in stating that "to the play-going public Armin was a good clown in the older Tarlton-Kempe tradition perhaps before he became a witty fool" (Felver, 11). For the *Praise of Folly* and the tradition of the "sage fool" who could see and speak the truth with impunity see Welsford, 238–40.

> destruction, it is possible to expose the hero's vulnerability as reflecting his prior exclusion of disruptive energy. As Richard III is made monstrous by his world's failure to break its closed cycle of bloodshed, so the microcosms that are the tragic protagonists project outside themselves the deformed and the dangerous incarnations of the form of subversion most threatening to them. They are possessed, in short, by what they refuse to own.[22]

And by a curious leap of logic, it seems that it can be exactly the exclusion of the "immoral" that is severely "punished." Parallel to this understanding would be the interpretation of *Othello* by Long, who sees "Cassio's 'inability to hold his drink' as indicating Venetian society's denial of 'the entire Falstaff-element in man' – the key to the tragedy."[23] Thus in *Othello* the remnant of the Vice-fool is expelled from society to such an extent that society is incapable of normal functioning. It is ironic that the descendant of the expelled Vice (although one in which the tempter-Vice of the moralities has undergone a much greater transformation compared to Falstaff) will carry out the collapse and the tragedy.

I have argued in my chapter on metadrama that there is an essential element of the Vice that Iago can stand for not within the drama, but through his metadramatic awareness. Similar to the situation where a Vice-characteristic was expelled from the dramatic but not the metadramatic layer of the play, from the point of view of the audience, the place where the Falstaff-element in man can be restored is the theatre. This, however, is not possible beyond the historical moment where theatre consolidates as photographic, perfectly mimetic theatre. Parallel to the denial of illusion in reality outside theatre, theatre as an institution will be based on the automatic acceptance of whatever happens on stage "as if real," and will require the exclusion of metadramatic elements that remind the audience that it is not.

This understanding of theatre – one that allows a parallel between theatre and the Falstaff-element or the ambiguously appealing game-maker's, or entertainer's element inherent in the Vice – explains an important aspect of the moral implications of the appealing nature of the Vice's entertainment. The laughter that this type of comic evil generates is also the laughter generated by the actor-entertainer. In Iago's case this means that as long as we are willing to see and capable of understanding him on the metadramatic level as entertainer, we are still operating within the late-Renaissance logic of play, which will soon completely disappear from the new type of theatre.[24]

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[22] Hillman, 187.

[23] Michael Long, *The Unnatural Scene: A Study in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1976), 44, quoted by Hillman, 262

[24] Antonin Artaud in his theatre of cruelty attempted to reach something similar: in his view theatre can maintain an idea of authenticity via play, which is lacking from representational-illusionistic theatre. Jacques Derrida appreciates Artaud's attempt, but finds that such a theatre is impossible. Jacques Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," in *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 232–250.

5.4 "Tarry, take the Fool with thee": On problems with Shakespeare, Derridean spectacles and theatre

5.4.1 Is language enough?

Let us imagine the line *"The world is but a word"* (2.2.156) – from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* – as it is uttered by an actor playing on stage in a production of the play. Or, let us imagine the same line read by a reader of the dramatic text. The problem the line reflects on can be paraphrased in the following way: The world is but a word, because at the place where we should find the world in its reality, the only thing we find is a word. And this does not mean that the place of the world and a mere word have been changed by some regrettable accident, but rather that a mere word ("but a word") has taken the place where the world was supposed to reside. The world in this setup can have no reality, and even if it did in some remote past, it is terminated. Or its reality is the one of a word – a thing that refers to an absent reality.[25]

No matter whether the actor utters the line or we read it in the text of the drama, in both cases we are facing an insolent line, and the insolence unfolds itself when we realise that the word that is uttered by the actor, or the one that we read in the dramatic text, seems to claim an absolute authority for itself, the authority that is supposed to belong to the world. The sentence suggests that the word – uttered or written, a crucial medium of both an actor and a book – makes up the world itself. And albeit this world is but a word this way, still, it is exactly the thing that the actor or the book is in control of.

Another Shakespearean line – and this one has indeed run a distinguished career – is similarly double-dealing: All the world's a stage. The sentence is derogatory of the world if some solid reality is demanded of it, but it gives infinite power to theatre in its conjuring of any reality it decides to put forward, to present. The idea of reality experienced as worthless was not alien to a theatre-goer who witnessed a performance that was a mystery, a miracle-play or a morality: it was exactly on stage, as opposed to the off-stage, everyday world, that the "real" reality, the one beyond the everyday was present in an allegorical way, and compared to it the world of the audience was just a corrupted, defected version. However, the defected nature of reality that these Shakespearean lines refer to do not offer an ideal as opposed to the corrupted version of reality, and they particularly do not offer it on stage, since it is precisely the *theatrical* nature of reality that discredits its validity – or upgrades the world of the stage. If we try to imagine the author of the lines inserting such lines in a script (and again, it does not matter whether the script was written before, during or after the performance), it is impossible not to detect the irony, and perhaps the self-assurance of the author, the one who has power

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[25] The context of the sentence in the play finely resonates with such an interpretation. The words are uttered by Flaminius, Timon's faithful servant, and with this line he draws Timon's attention to how easily the realness or stability of the land, even the whole world may be gone merely by using words. At the same time he also reflects on the power of words which have the world at their disposal.

over words, over stage – that is, over the world – since the sentences suggest that there is no difference between words and world, or stage and world.

The Shakespeare-cult of the Romantic age roots itself in this very image of the almighty playwright: Shakespeare, the creative genius who is creating worlds. Victor Hugo's example is typical, where Shakespeare is compared to God: "Next to God, Shakespeare created most."[26] However, those who do not belong to the group of devoted admirers may object against this same thing, i.e., that Shakespeare created, or conjured up worlds. In this understanding Shakespeare's works are autotelic, he is just playing with words and does not reflect reality. In other words, it is as if he did not fill his words with real, solid meaning, but rather created only illusion in which he seemingly shares the secrets of the world with the audience while actually being just an illusionist, dishonestly serving his audience a trick, or indeed, playing them false.

A similar image of Shakespeare is presented by George Steiner in a lecture given in 1986, in which he analyses fragments of Wittgenstein in which the philosopher reflects on Shakespeare. Wittgenstein complains that he could never make anything of Shakespeare ("nie etwas mit ihm anfangen").[27] According to Steiner, there is a certain "semantic individuation" in Shakespeare which enforces "a *seeming* significance, a spectacular meaningfulness with the emphasis on 'visibility', on 'spectacle' in the root sense".[28] Taking all spectacularity and seeming significance into consideration, for me it seems that Steiner's real problem is not so much this spectacularity *per se* but rather the fact that the spectacle is empty of real significance; behind the playful words there is no content, no acceptable semantic meaning, but mere "semantic individuation."

Neither Wittgenstein nor Steiner refers to the fact that no matter whether it is Shakespeare or any other playwright under discussion, it is indeed difficult to imagine a theatre which lacks spectacle and playful creation of worlds – actually things that Shakespeare is questioned for. Wittgenstein and Steiner would accept that grandeur of Shakespeare's power of creating illusion, but it is illusion itself that they find objectionable, and this is why they find Shakespeare immoral. Still, the counter-example adduced as an opposite and morally acceptable artist is not another dramatist or playwright, but the poet, the Dichter in its Heideggerian sense, and even more Beethoven, the *par excellence* composer. These counter-examples have clearly little to do with the illusion-creating aspect of theatre. It seems that the problem Wittgenstein and Steiner have with Shakespeare can be attributed to the whole institution of theatre. Indeed, what else would theatre be than the world of seeming, illusion and play? The difference between the detractors and the supporters may be only in whether to regard this as positive or negative.

In a small detour I would like to stress that this "seeming significance" in Shakespeare that Steiner and Wittgenstein are criticising is not identical to objections against Shakespeare exemplified by Tolstoy's stance, according to which Shakespeare is not true

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[26] Quoted by Felperin, 87.

[27] George Steiner, *A Reading against Shakespeare.* The W.P.Ker Lecture for 1986 (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1986), 9.

[28] Steiner, 10.

to life, as seen in examples like Gloucester's leap off the Dover cliff. Such examples I regard only as constructed along the lines of a different theatrical logic, one that is not based on a mimetic and referential theatrical code Tolstoy would have expected. Since he was unfamiliar with the code, he thought it defective. In my view Steiner's and Wittgenstein's objections are much deeper, because they feel Shakespeare is betraying both his audience and the tool he uses for representation – words and theatre – since he abuses them, using them in an immoral way through pretence but no content. Their opinion implies that some truth, outside the illusion of theatre, could possibly validate the playful creation of theatrical worlds, but it is simply left out or not taken into consideration by the bard.

The final verdict of Steiner on Shakespeare emerges in his comparison with the Dichter who, in contrast to the bard, communicates an articulate moral vision of life – and is skilful not only in constructing spectacular imaginary worlds:

> The Dichter is not only a matchless artificer and imaginer, but the beneficiary, the communicant with and communicator to his fellow-men of a high, articulate, religious-moral-philosophical vision and criticism of life. What Wittgenstein asks Shakespeare, in the name of an urgent and tragic moral need, in the name, finally, of music, is simply this: is language enough?[29]

No one can accuse a morality or mystery play of the same charges as Shakespeare was accused of, namely that his works are not "real" but playful representations, words empty of genuine meaning and moral substance. This accusation is linked to the appearance of the possibility for reflecting on representation, which is preceded by the idea of a sign understood as separate from the thing it represents. The Renaissance logic of representation was essentially based on resemblances, in which one thing and the other that stood for the first were intertwined within the network of similitudes. This network did not remain valid in the plays of Shakespeare. Whoever accuses Shakespeare of the above mentioned defect, must take a different position from the one I imagine Shakespeare's was, in which the "realness" of reality was not stronger than the "realness" of a play – because of the peculiar epistemological context and theatre's place within it. In this case I do not see that there is any other option, after accepting the lack of any reality to rely on, the lack of point of reference as a fact, than to rely on the play – albeit "empty" or "theatrical" play – of representation.[30]

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[29] Steiner, 15.

[30] The novelty here is not that everybody is playing a role in their lives, since this is implied by the *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor, which in the Middle Ages clearly could not have the same meaning as I am discussing here. It is rather that role-playing is epistemologically reinterpreted. It comes to mean not playing a part in the drama of life that is designed by God, but being part of a play that is played instead of a lost reality.

5.4.2 The Iconoclasts' Scourge

"I know thee not, old man"
(2H4 5.5.47)

"Nuncle Lear! Nuncle Lear! Tarry,
take the Fool with thee."
(KL 1.4.314)

Reading Brian Vickers' very strongly argued book *Appropriating Shakespeare*,[31] and particularly a sub-chapter "Reference, representation, make-believe" in which he deals with mimesis and problems of representing reality in literary world, made me conclude that the accusations he makes against the "iconoclastic theories of the '60s,"[32] and the Shakespeare criticism that was inspired by it[33] are similar to the ones Shakespeare was accused of by those who regarded *him* an iconoclast. In other words, the moral problem of Steiner and Wittgenstein with Shakespeare, in my view, is established along the same lines as the problem of Vickers with Shakespeare critics who read Shakespeare "with Derridean spectacles" and follow the "iconoclastic movement of the mid 1960s," a movement that denied "that language could reliably convey meaning about or reference to the world we live in."[34] Just the way Shakespeare's imaginary world in theatre is morally problematic because of its lack of real significance, the iconoclasts' approach is problematic because they claim that regarding literary texts as if they were denoting reality is indulging in "the referential illusion."

When Brian Vickers is writing to ridicule the post-structuralist, deconstructionist notions of language and literature as a self-enclosed system, he quotes Robert Alter to present the "pseudo-Saussurian inheritance" of the iconoclasts and their attack on mimesis, an attitude to which "even such an intelligent critic as Gerard Genette falls victim, because he believes that a consequence of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is that the motivation of the sign and particularly of the 'word', is a typical case of realist illusion."[35]

Vickers' attitude is revealing not only of his anxiety concerning the criticised notions of language and literature, but also of the parallels between his objections and the ones against Shakespeare discussed above. In his apology for mimesis and representation against the attacks of critics who do not recognise that "reading through Derridean spectacles is not necessarily good for the eyesight,"[36] Vickers is making clear his stance by stating the following:

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[31] Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993)

[32] Vickers, 141.

[33] Cf. p130: "[...] deconstructive literary theory, and its catastrophic effects on the interpretation of Shakespeare – deliberately catastrophic, demonstrating the workings of human intentionality at its most intransingent [...]."

[34] Vickers, 129.

[35] Vickers, 131.

[36] Vickers, 133.

> Only magicians and frustrated Derrideans believe that language could 'literally deliver' an idea or state, as if it could arise from off this page and we could enter into it. Such a confusion between the actual and the represented is amusing when we find characters in films (Buster Keaton's *Spite Marriage*,[37] or Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*) who can walk into and out of the screen. But such a confusion coming from professional philosophers and literary critics, and then being used to discredit language and literature, is absurd and debilitating.[38]

From this quotation it is possible to reconstruct the opinion of Brian Vickers on how his world is not only safe but different from the one represented on screen. He does not see that the films he watches are applicable unproblematically to his world. The two are separate and safe: Buster Keaton on the screen is one thing, while a professional philosopher in the cinema is another: the two simply do not belong together. I strongly oppose his idea, and I find it particularly sad if the two worlds, the one of Keaton and the one of the professional philosopher are so distant. Don't we professionals find most pleasure in Keaton and Allen when we see them show that the denial of the absurd in self-assured professionalism is absurd itself?

Although probably not on purpose, with the distinction between figures walking on and off screen in a Keaton or Allen movie and professional philosophers, Vickers makes his world safe from the otherwise threatening impact of the absurd on screen. It is as if he were saying that he finds it acceptable in fiction to mix the boundaries between reality and fiction, and perhaps this mixture may function as a source of humour, but in reality we should make clear the difference between the two. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, in his defence of mimesis and artistic attempts to represent reality, Vickers does not deal with these instances of "absurd" boundary-crossings as possible cinematic mappings of boundary crossings in reality – say, such, with which even some philosophers, wearing extravagant glasses have the audacity to experiment. And also there are instances, where these boundary crossings between fictional and non-fictional worlds are not deemed absurd, as we have seen is clearly the case with the morality Vices.

Now that, as I hope, I have managed to provide grounds for parallels between the aversions to Shakespeare and deconstructionist Shakespeare critics, I would like to extend the pair of parallels with another element to make it a set of three. I have already mentioned in my discussion of Steiner's criticism of Shakespeare that I see it as no accident that the moral opposite that he matches against Shakespeare is not another playwright, most probably because the objections raised against Shakespeare can be applied to theatre in general. And this is why it is no surprise that the negative attitude towards crossing the boundary between reality and representation, or reality and fiction in se-

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[37] Although Buster Keaton's *Spite Marriage* indeed has a scene when the protagonist makes an effort to become an actor in a theatre play in order to kiss the lead actress on stage, and thus mixes play and reality, Vickers here probably has another film in mind, namely Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.*, where the protagonist literally enters the screen in a movie theatre and takes part in the action of the inset film.

[38] Vickers, 134.

rious circumstances – an attitude that Vickers exemplifies when he implies that deconstructionist critics are being absurd in their mixing the actual and the represented – is based on similar grounds as the fierce anti-theatricalism of the puritans in Elizabethan and Jacobean England,[39] who found faults with the institution of theatre because in their view its fiction seemed to contaminate the realness of reality. Prynne's *Histriomastix* (quoted above as the text that equates playhouses with "the School of Vice") published in 1633 can be read as the peak of the attack, in which the author condemns all types of plays and all theatre.[40] I accept Barish's insightful explanation according to which Prynne's opinion of theatre is indicative of "the fears of impurity, of contamination, of 'mixture', of the blurring of strict boundaries."[41]

Clearly, being in the movies and being in theatre are not identical in regards to the safety factor of the audience. While no Woody Allen or Buster Keaton is likely to walk off the screen so that they will pose a direct threat of walking physically into the life of a moviegoer deconstructionist or anti-decontsructionist critic, one may perhaps see that these comedians are followers of a tradition where the threat of direct contact between the world represented in a play and the world of the audience was real. I have already hinted above that morality Vices could, as it is evident from *Mankind,* not only walk off the (real or imaginary) stage, but they could walk to and fro among the crowd, or even bang the audience on their heads. The two characters I dealt with exhibited similar boundary-crossings between the world of the play and the real world or the actual presence of the audience. The threat they embody is similarly real – a threat that can be detected in theatre, in Shakespeare or in gazes through Derridean spectacles.

In this sense the figures I am focusing on can indeed be "absurd and debilitating," if we expect them to act according to the representational code that Weimann describes as "I am not acting" – "I am another person" rather than pointing out their inherent duality of using both this code and the one that is characterised by the performative statement "I am acting." As quoted above, in Weimann's opinion the Elizabethan stage used the combination of both these codes in intriguing patterns of entanglements. In my understanding Iago and the Fool employ the representational mode of playing in a self-reflexive way and this is how they can show that reality is constructed the same way fiction is, and that that the border between reality and fiction is absurdly traversable. When a proscenium and a curtain were added to the stage, this traversing was ended, and

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[39] The opposers of theatre were not exclusively puritans by belief; in using this term I follow Jonas Barish's practice of understanding and terming the opposers of theatre "puritans". Cf. Barish, 82. notes.

[40] A passage illustrative of the text that is included in the *Argument* of Prynne's work and is later repeated several times with variations is the following: "[A]ll popular and common stage-plays, whether comical, tragical, satyrical, mimical, or mixed of either (especially as they are now compiled and personated among us) are such sinful, hurtful, and pernicious recreations as are altogether unseemly and unlawful unto Christians" (Pollard, 285). In Barish's vivid description Prynne's work is a "a gargantuan encyclopedia of antitheatrical lore which scourges every form of theatre in the most ferocious terms, in a stlye of paralizing repetitiousness from which everything resembling nuance has been rigidly excluded" Barish, 83.

[41] Barish, 87.

the "wound caused in nature by the beginning of representations" in Knapp terms[42] was put behind that curtain. And apart from that, the ways meaning is produced – the process that so disturbingly and painfully revealed itself in Shakespeare's mature tragedies – were started to be taken for granted.

[42] Knapp, 135.

CONCLUSION

Boy. Syr, I pray you, be not you master god?
Mery Report. No in good fayth sonne, but I may say the I am suche a man that god may not mysse me.
Play of the Weather (1003–5)

In my study I have compared Iago and Lear's Fool, arguing that they can be paralleled based on their common theatrical ancestor, the Vice. I re-examined the Vice to claim that he displays a unique merger where the clownish-foolish and devilish characteristics are intrinsically intermingled. I have taken a look at how the fool within the Vice was seen as uncharacteristic of the figure by many and argued that we are missing an essential feature of the character by insisting on his unambiguous immorality, by disregarding his genuine appeal and his powerful sense of humour and satire. By examining several Vices and Vice-successors I showed that they all display similar characteristics and argued that these characteristics have different effects in various epistemic contexts and various genres. My idea was that Iago and the Fool are not unique in the ways they behave, because several other characters within the family can be paralleled with them, but these two are made special because of the explicit context of the dissolving episteme, and thus they may become real agents of representational crisis. Through interpreting these two characters I also reflected on how the disappearance of the Fool from the Vice may explain their different effects, but that Iago can be regarded still not a condemnable but a more complex, foolish Vice on the metadramatic level of the play.

In my analyses of Iago and the Fool I have shown that the appeal of the Vice may remain the same in his successors as well: I gave examples where these characters may be understood as presenting the essence of playing, a prerequisite of all theatre, as well as a prerequisite of making meaning.[43] I came to the conclusion that the effect of their metadramatic and comic behaviour is similar: it is distancing and alienating; they both invite the audience to face disturbing things about our perceptions of reality, and they push us away from what we thought about reason in making us re-examine our ideas of reality taken for granted. I considered a major difference between the two characters, namely the way they generate their "realities" in play, the way they create fictions. In

[43] A complex description and analysis of the ways *play* is essential in the production of meaning is described by Jacques Derrida in his influential article "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in David Lodge ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman 1988), 107–23.

the Fool's case, fiction appeared as a version of reality, while in Iago's case fiction was built on the taboo of reality's fictitious nature. A reason for this difference might be that the Fool can be understood as residual, since he represents a Medieval logic that still has a comic method for dealing with the experience of madness, an experience that is generated by the collapse of what is taken as reality and reason.

Regarding the dramatic changes of the Vice and its successors, I argued that this metamorphosis is part of a larger, dramatic, epistemological and representational change. Vices of the Medieval allegorical theatre may have delivered a message contrary to the official Christian one, but they did not obliterate that message, while Vice-successors of the Renaissance stage, although rooted in the old system, gestured towards modern photographic, realistic theatre. Within the context of epistemological uncertainties they are capable of pointing out the illusory nature of any reality: they are at the threshold of the new episteme, revealing how meaning is produced, and by the time that meaning is taken for granted, they disappear from the stage. Actually, the old stage, *platea* disappears with them, and it is exchanged with a proscenium and a curtain.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the parallel between Shakespeare as morally condemnable, and the playmaker Vice who is supposedly condemnable as well. We have seen some consequences of the denial of folly, of the illusory nature of reality, as well as the denial of the absurd: once the fool is expelled from the Vice, the thing that remains is the devil, once the acknowledgement of truth is replaced by knowledge, truth will be eaten away by the denied fiction. As for the consequences of embracing the idea of "the world is but a word," we can either object, like Vickers or Steiner, and understand the idea of reality created by language as condemnable (be this reality created by a playwright or one claimed to exist by deconstructionist critics), but we can also take it as an infinite opportunity for playing, and understand the word and theatre not as empty tools of signification, but as possibilities for creation. Perhaps the difference between the audience and the Vice is that the latter has knowledge of the creative power of words, the power with which all worlds are built.

If characters, playwrights, theatrical institutions or critics crossing boundaries have an impact, an effect on ours lives (and this seems a point on which we agree with Vickers, namely that the make-believe of fiction will become our experience through participation[44]), it is precisely in making us aware of the possibility of participating in a fictional world and understanding the two as not necessarily and safely different from each other. I hope to have shown through the examples of the Fool and Iago that there are perspectives – and necessary ones, too – from which facing the danger of this possibility is not morally condemnable, but a magically and infinitely liberating one.

A view of Shakespeare's "mature tragedies" as the climax of Shakespeare's development of the tragic genre perhaps obscures the importance of these plays as what Reiss calls "dialectic tragedies." If we stick to the term "greatness" and claim that it is a valid attri-

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[44] Cf. Vickers' discussion of Walton, 141. "Walton's theory is based on the fundamental point, often lost sight of in iconoclastic anti-theories, that works of art exist in order to be appreciated, and that the appreciator's experience involves him or her in participation."

bute of these plays, this greatness is not so much greatness in stating something, but rather in questioning. I feel that Jonathan Baldo is addressing the same thing when he points out the self-subversive elements in these plays. He says that viewing Shakespeare as a culmination rather than a transitional figure has not helped to enrich Shakespeare criticism but caused us to undervalue the self-subversive elements in his "mature tragedies."[45] Such self-subversiveness is hardly compatible with an explicit moral stance. When talking about catharsis, Reiss point out that such "moral uplift" is really "the result of tragedy's affirmation that a knowledge of the kind just indicated *is* possible."[46] Therefore, the role of tragedy is really in the production of a particular episteme, providing the pleasure of overcoming the fear of a lack of all order and knowledge. The tragedies I examine seem too explicit in taking part in the production, the creation of an episteme, to make its acceptance unproblematic as "real beyond discourse." Thus they inherently reject a moral interpretation – one that must be based on a solid episteme. From this point the moral concerns about Shakespeare get a new dimension: whether purposeful or not, if it is indeed a representational crisis that is expressed in Shakespeare's dramas, he had no other choice than to leave no space for a reassuring system of moral values, the establishment of which is no different in its discursive nature than the establishment of any other truth or the playing of a play.

For almost three decades now in Renaissance criticism approaches building upon the premises of new historicism and deconstruction have been widely used and highly influential, or, to use the terminology favoured by the critics of the new historicist school: these were the dominant approaches in Renaissance literary studies. It is difficult to see yet which are the germs of an emergent, new approach that will perhaps displace the ageing assumptions of the early eighties, since scholarship today is still very much dependent on them. In my approach I tried to use a sensitive methodology combining, on the one hand, an analytical and comparative reading of texts, revealing the deconstructive potential in the dramas, and on the other hand a historical perspective, where such potentials are interpreted in a wider dramatic and epistemological context. I hope that such an approach has gained validity with my findings and has supported the overarching idea of my dissertation, of using the Vice-figure as a way to understand the crisis of representation. Some possible paths for the continuation of the same project also emerge. It appears that my questions concerning the comedy of the Vice and its successors could be examined within the current investigations in the realm of ethics and moral philosophy – the route that some students of deconstruction took as well, but this approach was not within the scope of my undertaking. A new task emerges, however, in continuing the research in the context of literary anthropology, and in general, examining Vice-like characters – like Brighella, a version of *zanni* of the *Commedia dell'Arte* – and their potential careers in a broader, European context as metadramatic agents of involvement, as representatives of the carnivalesque spirit, as diabolical tricksters who stand for their own logic, and might be genuinely appealing, paradoxically benign, perplexing, and surprisingly playful and inspiring.

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[45] Baldo 16.

[46] Reiss 1980, 36.

As for the answer to the original question asked by Wittgenstein of Shakespeare, and by Vickers of deconstructionists, namely whether language is enough, the answer might be negative, since even language is capable of reflecting upon its own defective nature, upon the fact that the only truth it can refer to will always be discursive, and that it may obscure but not obliterate the "absence of significance" at the root of a discourse. But perhaps this is exactly why some people, including playwrights, actors and characters, feel they have to play with it. As we have seen, according to some, it is in such playing that the formation of emerging epistemes, tragic and comic truths is made possible.

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INDEX OF PLAYS AND CHARACTERS