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Deceptions: "The Vice" of the Interludes and Iago

Peter Happé
University of Southampton

In my paper I would like to interpret the theme of this collection of essays in two ways. In the first place it is possible to address the process of watching a play, which might well be regarded as participating in it, so as to reveal a difference between what is performed and what is perceived. Secondly, by taking a closer look at the Vice in sixteenth-century interludes it is possible to perceive a process and convention of deception which become the main action of many such plays. I hope that by the end of what I have to say these two approaches can be brought together to bear upon one another and so to illuminate in some ways some conditions of stage illusion and experience.

I begin with a few simple principles. There is some ambiguity between what is shown from the dramatist's, actors' and director's point of view, something which in itself is not one entity, and what the audience derive from it. What is derived is also partly, largely perhaps, dependent upon what the audience bring to the performance. This baggage might be seen as personal, and it might be thought cultural. The latter will be a concern in this paper, including, as it does, matters of ethics as well as of belief. It is also apparent that the political contexts play their part in determining how an audience experiences what they see. Nevertheless, there is also a kind

of link between intention and derivation, because the makers of plays have to determine what can be taken for granted and what they might be able to get away with, and perhaps also what they want to challenge in the perceived expectations of the audience.

I

I find it desirable to begin with an historical and chronological look at the Vice, outlining through such a narrative the structure upon which I can hang a number of observations relating to how the audience might be able to perceive him and to respond to his theatrical presence.[1]

The name of the Vice emerges in the 1530s in the printed plays of John Heywood and John Bale. If the convention it adumbrates existed before this time we have lost any direct or positive examples of it. It is apparent there were many evil characters in earlier plays, especially the moralities, like Mischief in *Mankind* in the fifteenth century (*c.* 1461) and Fansy and Foly in Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (written *c.* 1518), but I don't think that they exhibit the configuration of characteristics of the Vice sufficiently to suggest that they are palpable examples of it, even though the Vice convention did draw upon some earlier forms of evil behaviour, identification and performance.

In their differing dramatic contexts, Heywood in *A Play of Love* and Bale in *Three Laws* invented or found a word that could be used for one sole character who was active at the centre of their plays. The differences between the two dramatic modes of their plays are, however, distinctive and remarkable. Heywood was writing for the court, or perhaps very near it, using court idioms and resources for performances, and then publishing his plays as part of a process of sustaining his conservative Catholic belief in order to slow up or change Henry VIII's approach to Protestantism. He was probably influenced by Skelton, whose surviving play was printed around 1530 for his father-in-law, John Rastell, but he chose not to write moral allegories, and his dramatic intentions are closer to farce or witty comedy. This mode had near analogues in French farces and sotties, with which he was certainly familiar. Almost certainly Heywood used boy actors for his productions. Bale, a recent convert, was linked with Thomas Cromwell and working in favour of a Protestant ideology, and he performed his plays in the form of touring entertainment, which we happen to know included the house of Archbishop

1 The principal studies of the Vice are by Cushman (1900), Withington (1937), Mares (1958) and Spivack (1958).

Cranmer in Canterbury. Conspicuously, they involved doubling, as the printed edition of *Three Laws makes* clear: a process which was primarily aimed at making the actors work as hard and as economically as possible, and one which became standard for most subsequent interludes. The Vice was useful in this particular theatrical configuration as a linchpin of the action and was usually played by the chief actor in the company. This was even possibly the case for Bale himself in *Three Laws*, as the part of Infidelity, the Vice, is doubled with Baleus Prolocutor.

After the 1530s Bale and Heywood were still interested in drama. For example, Bale revised *King Johan,* originally written in about 1536, after 1558 in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, and in doing so he enlarged the part of Sedition, the Vice, preserving also the doubling scheme within the considerable expansions he inserted (Happé, "Sedition"). But others also used the Vice. Among these was the author of *Respublica*, thought to be Nicholas Udall. The play certainly seems to match a school or boys' environment, and the manuscript does use the phrase for Avarice: "the Vice of the plaie". The implication is that the word has a special meaning, and sure enough Avarice exhibits a large number of Vice characteristics and plays a leading role in attempting to defraud the heroine Respublica. This is not exactly an ethical procedure, even if Avarice is by name one of the Seven Deadly Sins: the emphasis, as has been shown, is more upon a political statement against financial corruption (Walker, pp. 163-95).

There are really two significant strands to the development of the interludes from this point. One is the boys/schools context, and the other is drama performed by adult companies. The latter, under patronage, is concerned with earning a living, and it is in these plays that doubling remains a key feature. But that is not to say that boys' plays did not have such schemes, perhaps with the possibility that other companies might undertake production. This commercial aspect is further emphasised by printing the doubling schemes on title pages to make clear that only a small number of actors could conveniently perform the play—even if, in some cases, this is not in effect a workable proposition. Thus the development of the Vice is part of the economics of the acting trade, even if his allegorical names, used more and more frequently between 1550 and 1590, may look like ethical entities. Moreover, writers might well have found such a convention a great help in assembling their plays—for entertainment and for polemical purposes. We should also notice that there are a number plays surviving from these years where the name "the Vice" is not actually used but the performance is clearly in line with the convention and dependent upon its central mechanism.

I have found twenty plays where he is named and a further twenty-three which ought to be included on the grounds of similarity, even though he is not named explicitly: a total of forty-three examples (Happé, "The Vice").

The subject matter of plays using the Vice became very varied, and it is impressive that the Vice was found indispensable in so many varieties. Some examples may illustrate the range. He was used in the tragic interludes, which derived ultimately from classical sources, *Cambises* (Ambidexter), *Horestes* (Revenge) and *Apius and Virginia* (Haphazard); in Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like*, the subject is a variety of immoral activities surrounding tavern life and fashion in which the Vice is called Newfangle; he is part of the tormenting of the heroines as Ill Report in *Virtuous and Godly Susanna*, and Politic Persuasion in *Patient and Meek Grissell,* two plays about the suffering and ultimate vindication of innocent women; and, finally, in the second revision of John Redford's school comedy, complete with a giant monster, a duel and a beheading, a Vice is inserted by Francis Merbury in his *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* in the form of Idleness. In many of these plays the Vice is less a tempter than a manifestation of an evil tendency which in the course of the action he encourages to emerge and whose consequences he relishes. But his moral role is often ambiguous, and this is one of the places where he gives us some evidence for the differences between seeing and believing, as in Ambidexter or Courage.

At this point might be useful to recall some of the characteristics of the Vice. A detailed list is too long for full discussion here, but I can offer some broad headings together with a few illustrative details. Among his homiletic features we find alliance with the hero, using persuasive powers, sometimes involving temptation. There follows desertion and mockery of the victim. His significance is often laid out in a soliloquy, and his allegorical import is further communicated by his taking on a physical disguise and by using an alias for himself and his allies. There may be reluctance about giving his name and also a game about forgetting the alias, the effect being to focus more sharply upon it. He may disguise himself, discuss his plans with the audience, commenting upon the progress of his schemes. Sometimes he appears as a comic doctor, a personification which may suggest an association with the folk plays. In pursuit of a moral structure he may be punished at the end, but often punishment runs off him, leaving him ready for more evil deeds. His moral corruption is expressed by boasting, cowardice, money-making, association with drunkards, thieves and pickpockets and often a group of licentious evil abstract characterisations, and also by salacious wooing.

As we shift along a spectrum from his moral significance to his theatrical and entertaining characteristics, we find that the Vice shows a satirical turn of mind attacking the Church, particularly on a sectarian basis. As it happens, because Tudor government was Protestant rather than Catholic, most of his extant satire is anti-Catholic. He also ridicules love, virtue and particularly women. He acts as a general factotum, messenger, executioner, herald and prophet. As an entertainer in words, he is noticeable for his proverbs, his account of a remarkable but incredible journey, nonsense, bits of Latin, songs, logic chopping, oaths and obscenities, slips of the tongue and a general virtuosity and flexibility of language which allows him to be all things to all men. He has some favourite phrases which occur at intervals, including the specific words and phrases *geare*, *policy* and *cock lorell's boat*. These verbal devices are matched by plenty of physical tricks, like jumping about, dancing, quarrelling, sometimes using a wooden sword or dagger, weeping and laughing, often in quick succession. Sometimes he comes on in peculiar costume, which adds much to the stir characteristic of his arrival; and in some plays he famously rode off to hell on the devil's back.

No single Vice could have shown all these characteristics, but I think there is little doubt that his verbal and physical tricks could be readily and conveniently employed by dramatists and perhaps by performers to make greater impact and to offer a means of recognition to the audience. All this leaves out inevitably the possibility of improvisation, which is not easily discernible from this distance in time except for a few interesting hints. At one point Courage, the Vice in George Wapull's *The Tide Tarrieth No Man* is given the following instruction: "And fighteth to prolong the time while Wantonnese maketh her ready" ($E3^r$). It is a burden and a responsibility at the same time, and it is also an opportunity. In another example, the intention of setting free improvisation seems to be to increase the entertainment to be got out of a comic fight involving a female character: "Here let her (Marian) swinge him (Ambidexter, the Vice) in her broom: she gets him down, and he her down, thus one on top of another make pastime" (*Cambises,* l. 833).

But what actually would the audiences have recognised? A few of these tricks in the circumstances of performance would have put the spectators into what we might call "Vice-mode". But what the Vice offered was entertainment and familiarity in a process not unlike the use of stock characters like Widow Twanky, Humpty Dumpty or Boots in a pantomime. Once they appear, one knows how these characters are going to behave. The very familiarity might take some of the sting out of them, particularly in the light of their pursuit of well-known gags

about women, love or priests. Some ingenuity acts as a sauce, and if there is originality in a given performance, it is more likely to be connected with the re-presentation of familiar material, rather than shedding new light in dark corners.

So we might ask how the audience would have approached the Vice, knowing that he was an evil impersonation and yet at the same time appreciating his capacity to entertain them and to contradict his apparent moral significance in all sorts of ways. This would be enhanced by the Vice's ability to belittle himself and make himself ridiculous or his moral teaching quite transparently bogus. We can therefore ask whether the audience believed what they saw in seeing and hearing the Vice. The metatheatrical devices we have noticed, whereby the audience are continually reminded of the theatricality of what they are watching by means of the Vice's self-explanation, are bound to encourage disbelief in his powers. But sometimes his activities are threatening and the outcomes terrible. A case in point is John Pykeryng's *Horestes*, where the very active Vice called Revenge (*alias* Courage) prompts the hero to take revenge for his father's death and his mother's adultery (following the pattern of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*). The dramatist makes the agony of the protagonist serious enough in the arguments before the climax, and there is a violent outcome and one designed to produce a pitiful effect, summed up by the stage direction: "Fling him [Egistus] off the ladder and then let one bring in his mother Clytemnestra, but let her look where Egistus hangs" (l. 804 SD). This dramatic effect, which cannot be other than grim in itself, is, however, framed, circumscribed or even contradicted by the Vice's subsequent behaviour. After the crisis he comes in singing a song about having to find a new master because Horestes has come to regret his actions of revenge. His skittish and inconsequential character is encapsulated in the following stanza, in which we find several of the Vice characteristics noticed above. He starts to talk to Mistress Nan, presumably a member of the audience, or perhaps a planted mute actor, about where he should go:

> To heaven? Or to hell? To pourgatorye? Or Spayne?
> To Venys? To Pourtugaull? Or to the eylles Canarey?
> Nay, stay a whyle! For a myle or twayne
> I wyll go with the I sweare by Saynt Marey.
> Wylt thou have a bote, Nan, over seay the to carey?
> For yf it chaunce for to rayne, as the wethers not harde,
> It may chaunce this trym geare of thine to be marde.
> (ll. 881-87)

I would identify here several Vice traits: nonsense, blasphemy, muddled journey, plain contradiction, male chauvinist mockery of a female member of audience and the use of the keyword "geare". Thus the dramatist hits unmistakably the mode of the Vice's superficial nonsense within a few lines of the terrible scene we have witnessed and one which he obviously meant the audience to take seriously. This juxtaposition is remarkable if the play was indeed performed at court, as has been suggested (Axton, p. 29).

II

But perhaps an even larger aspect of the gap between seeing and believing is the Vice's deception of other characters. Here the maxim works somewhat differently from the method we have been observing, because this time the deception is complete and our study underlines the comprehensive way in which the Vice goes about his business. I should like to discuss this part of the topic by looking more closely at how the Vice influences his victims in two interludes. Both the ones chosen here are specifically called "the Vice": Haphazard in *Apius and Virginia* in the text itself, and Politic Persuasion on the title-page of *Patient and Meek Grissell*.

Haphazard gives a dazzling performance in a play which shows much theatrical ingenuity and a consistent ethical stance. It begins with an extended serious introduction, comprising a learned prologue and an elaborate family scene in which Virginius and his wife and daughter celebrate their mutual love, culminating in a song for the three voices. The Vice's arrival is therefore a theatrical contrast to this happy start, and he comes in with a bravura monologue of some thirty-five lines. He demonstrates that he can appear in many different circumstances, and he does so in a form of speech which has strong rhythmic and auditory effects, chiefly because of alliteration and rhyming tetrameter couplets:

> Yes but what am I; a scholer, or a scholemaster, or els some youth
> A lawyer, a student, or els a countrie cloune,
> A brumman, a baskit maker, or a baker of pies,
> A flesh or a fish monger, or a sower of lies,
> A louse or a louser, a leek or a larke,
> A dreamer, drommell, a fire or a sparke…
> (*Apius and Virginia*, ll. 181-86)

This may seem a bit like the nonsense mentioned above, but it isn't quite so because it implies a truth about his many-sided activities in making people take

a chance. The moral basis for this is not in the same order as one of the Deadly Sins, yet it is indeed a risky business, and the play goes on to show how those who follow his persuasion to have a go might or might not prosper: the play, we notice, is designated a "Tragicall Comedie" on the title-page.

The main action, his influence over the lustful judge Apius, is held back while a further preparation takes pace. The Vice now encounters Mansipulus and Mansipula, who are already at variance with one another. Haphazard goads them into fighting with him, and the bout is ended when Mansipula intervenes to save Mansipulus. At this point the Vice sets about persuading the two servants to avoid their responsibility and stay away from their master, to "skive off", in short. He does it by using his own theme: "It is but a hazard and yf you be mist" (l. 171); and so he prevails. Joined by another servant, they all sing a song to celebrate; the Vice is once more left alone to address the audience, and he returns to his chief ethical motif. This time, in taut and lively comic language, he dwells upon an upside-down comedy:

> Haphazard eche state full well that he markes
> If hap the skie fall, we hap may have larkes.
> Well fare ye well now, for better or worse,
> Put hands to your pockets, have minds to your purse.
> (ll. 341–44)

This last line brings in the recurring joke about pickpockets, with whom he has a relationship, working the audience.

After this extended preparation, the dramatist is now ready to proceed to what Ben Jonson would call the *epitasis*, as in *The Magnetic Lady* (I.Cho.7–13), in which Apius enters and reveals his tormented and adulterous desire for Virginia. The mood turns heavily tragic in Senecan fourteeners. Haphazard, ready at hand, offers advice to Apius, who offers reward for access to Virginia. Haphazard wins by telling the judge exactly what to do: the plan is to claim that Virginia is not legitimately Virginius' daughter, and so Apius, distorting justice, would gain possession of her. The Vice's triumph is marked by a dumbshow in which abstract figures called Conscience and Justice "come out of him", from which Apius realizes that he risks the fire eternal (l. 428 SD). Haphazard strikes again, telling Apius that justice is already at fault and that conscience is useless. Apius is overwhelmed, and his words reveal how Haphazard's dominance has control over him: "Hap blunt, hap sharp, hap life, hap death, though Haphazard be of health" (l. 455). It is a line which, fortuitously for my purpose below, anticipates

Iago's "I am your own forever" (III.iii.482). The Vice rejoices again that he has set the world upside down:

> Lerkes shalbe leverets
> And skip to and fro,
> And chourles shalbe codsheads,
> Perhaps and also. (ll. 491-94)

In a further prompt, Haphazard induces Apius to have Claudius arrest Virginius. There follows the climax of the play (the *catastrophe*), in which Apius presents Virginius and Virginia with a tragic dilemma, the outcome of which is her complaisant death at the hands of her father rather than face the dishonour threatened by Apius. The Vice is not present in this long sequence, but he reappears as Apius awaits the outcome of his plot, still unaware of the death of Virginia and still thinking of taking a chance—"Well hap as hap can, or no" (l. 856)—in order to possess her. Haphazard has indeed been on a strange journey, apparently to Caleco (Calcutta?), and in telling the tale he mentions Carnifex, thus injecting a sinister threat to Apius. Virginius reveals his daughter's death, and immediately Justice and Reward come to exact vengeance. As punishment becomes inevitable for Apius, Haphazard now deserts him: "I wyll serve him no longer; the devil him shame" (l. 945). He turns to Reward for some recompense for his success with Apius, commenting that "halfe a loafe is better then nere a whit of bread" (l. 953), but in spite of his optimism he receives a rope and is led off by Virginius to be hanged. His parting shot returns to the pickpocket joke:

> Then come, cosin Cutpurse, come runne haste and follow me;
> Haphazard must hange; come follow the lyverie.
> (ll. 1005-6)

This gallows humour prevents us from taking his death seriously, but he has indeed done much damage by his plot, and Apius was completely taken in by the false hopes Haphazard had offered. Against this, however, we need to recall that Mansipulus and Mansipula got away with it in spite of all risks.

The Vice Politic Persuasion, named on the title-page of John Phillip's *Meek and Patient Grissell*, gives a virtuoso performance for much of the play. The word "politic", in keeping with the related variations on "policy" in other interludes, suggests wicked intentions, and the prevailing feeling about this Vice is his exercise of malice, though he operates in a limited way by intervening only at a few critical

points in the narrative. This may be because Phillip has used a good deal of specific narrative detail from his sources in the *Decameron*. He is much less intimately involved with the detail of the play than Haphazard in *Apius and Virginia*, and to that extent the moral allegory underlying the Vice proves to be less productive. Nevertheless this Vice has a number of performing tricks, most of which are verbal rather than physical. He has several soliloquies, in which we see him establishing conventional elements and also informing the audience about his growing sense of achievement. His language includes some of the trademark words, phrases and verbal tricks, like the word "geare" (ll. 896, 956, 1491), "cock lorell's boat" (l. 106), word slips (ll. 209-11, 945), proverbs (ll. 898, 1014, 1166), and oaths (ll. 46, 476, 940, 1590, 1665). He plays with his name, making much of the device of forgetting what it is (ll. 92-100), and he puts on an appropriate face to achieve his ends, in this case "grave, sad and demure" (l. 916). He thrusts in several derogatory comments at times when the main characters are involved in serious emotional experiences, especially in his mockery about women and marriage (ll. 165-69, 209-11, 366-381, 1518). His strange journey is intriguingly muddled up with nonsense. He describes in his opening soliloquy how he has been on a remarkable adventure, riding upon a comic horse from which he had a sudden fall. During this account the classical pantheon, including Venus (milking a cow), Jupiter (eating bread and cheese) and Mars, is mixed up with the Christian heaven, where he has found St Peter's pancakes.

His main object is to test Grissell's patience, but this reading of the *Decameron* story leaves a great deal of initiative with the Marquis Gautier, the protagonist and husband of Grissell. The Vice does prompt him to the main ethical theme, which Politic Persuasion maliciously develops when he decides to upset her happiness: "I will not cease prively her confusion to worke" (l. 897). He does this by setting out to make it difficult for her to remain patient in the face of cruel and arbitrary adversity. But part of the adversity is that Gautier should do much on his own behalf: he carries out the wooing without the Vice, and once he has accepted the Vice's prompt to test his wife he remains in control. The only exception is that it is the Vice who apparently suggests that Gautier should decide to remarry as part of the test, casting Grissell aside, and that he should, outrageously, propose their daughter, whom Grissell believes dead, as the new bride. Politic Persuasion does this by a "secrit geare" (l. 1491), in which he apparently whispers a plan to Gautier, and the audience does not find out the outcome until later. Thus he is at the centre of the manipulation of the plot in accordance with his evil intention,

and by a theatrical unheard aside Gautier is seen to follow him. The limitations of the play are further revealed by the absence of supporting detail from any subplot, and his departure well before the final happy resolution of the plot, having, as he boasts, "playd the man" (l. 1666).

These two examples of the Vice may enable us to relate him more closely to he question of how far we engage in belief and how far this engagement is inherent responses to the Vice by the audience. In the first place, we might ask what difference the Vice actually made. Without attempting a history of sixteenth-century drama, one may at least suggest that the phenomena that he was invented, and, once invented, took up such a dominating position in theatrical life, opened up an ambiguity in moral values and facilitated a serious playing with them. This ambiguity promotes the question of whether he was believed or not—by other characters as well as by audiences.

In considering the Vice's effect, we are faced also with a remarkable performance duality. I have suggested that he is very physical, and indeed he certainly is. But you cannot conceive him without his verbal dexterity and the enormous impact which this enables. Susan Brigden recently remarked of the Protestant revolution: "The reformers sought to replace a religion of seeing as believing by a religion of the Word" (p. 131). In an age of the Word, the Vice is a star player because he played with words. We should make no mistake that some of the issues raised by plays in which the Vice appears were dealing with very serious public matters and were written to bring about political change or remedy. For example, *Respublica*, addressed to Queen Mary, is directed at the legacy of Protestant economic abuse under her late brother and his advisors.

What was achieved, however, was essentially a challenge by theatrical means. The Vice looks, behaves and speaks oddly and is designed to be essentially incredible and yet to command attention. The dramatists propel him to the centre of the stage and the centre of their play worlds. But he is never human, though in saying that I don't want to dwell upon the much-debated critical question of whether he is a devil. Rather, I suggest that his failure to exact a response as to a human impersonation is a positive effect, since it concentrates attention upon self-conscious performance. He is always implying, "Look at me, at what I am doing and how I am doing and saying it". Moreover, the plays do not endorse the Vice. They encourage us to separate ourselves from him, but paradoxically they do it partly by engaging us in his activities through skilful theatrical practice. It was a remarkable theatrical achievement, and many dramatists for a generation

or more could not deny themselves its advantages; these, as we shall now consider, included Shakespeare.

III

It is apparent that, like Ben Jonson, Shakespeare knew of the Vice convention. Most likely, when Shakespeare arrived in London in the early 1590s, it was still possible to see performances of plays containing the Vice, as in the case of Richard Wilson's *Three Lords*. However, by 1616 in *The Devil is an Ass* Jonson had come to regard him as ridiculously outmoded, something redolent of a now-dead stage practice (I.i.37-38, 40-52, 80-85), whereas Shakespeare seems to have been attracted enough by the convention to make allusion to it and to use it a number of times. The latter is apparently the case with the characterisations of Richard III, as well as of Falstaff. The former identifies himself with the moral Vice Iniquity (*Richard III*, III.i.82), a common name for a Vice, as it is found in *Nice Wanton* (1560) and *King Darius* (1565). Falstaff is described as a "reverend" Vice and a "grey Iniquity" by Prince Hal (*I Henry IV*, II.iv.375-76). Even Hamlet makes a brief reference, calling his uncle a Vice of kings who has stolen the crown (III.iv.88-91), and there is a comic reference in *Twelfth Night* (IV.ii.111-22). But in *Othello* the allusions, which surround the character and actions of Iago, are ostensibly less direct, though there is, as we shall see, one possible reference to the Vice which may hint at significant recognition and exploitation of the role sustained elsewhere by Shakespeare.

Since one of our chief concerns has been to consider performance techniques of the Vice, it is notable that Richard, Falstaff and Iago all have monologues in which they address the audience directly, describing their own characters, and making clear their ethical status, and also giving an indication of what is about to happen as the plot which they are manipulating is unfolded. The effect of these speeches is not always what it seems, in that in spite of some admiration which might be felt for the skill and ingenuity these Vices exhibit, there is also an implied condemnation of what they are doing or planning. This tension between theatrical skill and a moral judgement is entirely characteristic of the Vice convention, and it is my feeling that Shakespeare sought to exploit it—for tragic purposes in *Richard III* and *Othello* but more comically with Falstaff in *Henry IV*.

In the light of what I have said in the earlier part of this essay, I should like now to point out some of the features of Iago's self-presentation, as well as to

look at some aspects of his performance as a homiletic showman. A great deal is established in the first scene of *Othello*, in which Iago manipulates Roderigo and in doing so describes himself. It is in this early scene that echoes of the Vice are critical, and give a particular tone to this characterisation and for our purposes. It seems likely that the reverberations of Vice characteristics were in Shakespeare's mind, as he put together the initial impact of this patently evil character. He makes Iago's self-interest quite clear:

> In following him, I follow but myself.
> Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
> But seeming so for my particular end.
> .....
> .....I am not what I am. (I.i.59-61, 66)

Roderigo does not react against this cynical presentation – rather, he goes along with it—but the audience presumably does, no doubt rejecting the sentiment in spite of seeing the skill with which Iago imposes his objectives on Roderigo; and one might also suppose that some anticipation of the behaviour of a Vice would be aroused. Later he says that in spite of his hate for the Moor, "for necessity of present life, / I must show out a flag and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign" (I.i.154-56). Not only are these signals a means of setting up the character but also they establish some of the ambivalence which is inherent in the Vice. Besides this, in doing so Iago uses Roderigo as a kind of substitute audience: "Now sir, be judge yourself" (I.i.38), inviting complaisance with his objectives.

The self-display is sustained by further direct address to the audience as the situations develop, and this follows a primary Vice characteristic, in that it reinforces his moral significance. It is especially so in the references to his "honesty". Iago uses this word about himself many times, and there is one moment when it is embodied in an aside characteristic of the Vice's linking with the audience and so setting up an ambivalent response:

> [*Aside*] O, you are well tuned now!
> But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
> As honest as I am. (II.i.191-93)

It is indeed in the use of the motif of "honesty" that Iago comes closest to the allegorical methodology of the Vice. Honesty is naturally a virtue, and we recall that the Vice frequently takes on an alias with a virtuous name, as with Envy as Charity in *Impatient Poverty* and Shift as Knowledge in *Clyomon and Clamides*. There

was considerable contemporary stage interest in Honesty as a character and as an oath. "Iago is a knave posing as Honesty, a hunter of knaves", and an oath sworn on the swearer's honesty was a common device for knaves (Jorgensen, pp. 566, 558). True to form, Politic Persuasion, the Vice, swears "by myne honestie" in *Meek and Patient Grissell* (l. 997). But most times when Iago uses the word about himself, or one of the many other characters uses it (Othello, Cassio, Emilia, Desdemona), we come to think of the opposite. Even at the climax of his deception of Othello there is a sort of wordplay:

> *Othello*. Nay stay: thou shouldst be honest.
> *Iago*. I should be wise; for honesty's a fool
> And loses that it works for. (III.iii.382-84)

Iago is, in fact, working for his objectives here, but they are not what Othello thinks they are. There is also a play linking with other abstractions, particularly love: "Pricked to't by foolish honesty and love" (III.iii.413). Picking up on an earlier link—"I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness" (II.iii.297)—he pretends reluctance in telling Othello his suspicions about Cassio: "I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you" (III.iii.214-15). This self-abnegation leads to what is just possibly the clearest indication that Shakespeare is thinking about the dominating moral ambiguity of the old Vice, for Iago says, in this same scene, "O wretched fool, / That lov'st to make thine honesty a Vice!" (III.iii.376-77). If Shakespeare really does mean the Vice here, it is a palpable exploitation of the way in which that conventional character made the most of his own moral status, and here, as in many earlier situations involving the Vice, it is essentially a performative dimension. It is worth noticing that the Folio text, which is thought to derive from a Shakespeare autograph, prints a capital "V" for Vice.

We should be well aware, however, that the suggestion that Shakespeare is using the Vice convention does not mean that this is all he was doing. His objectives in *Othello* were not to produce a didactic moral text aimed at entertaining as a means of teaching the way of salvation characteristic of the Vice interludes. It is rather that Shakespeare uses reverberations from this earlier kind of drama in his own context, which operates rather differently and which is manifestly located in the context of the Renaissance tragic drama created by himself and his contemporaries. The same may be true of performance characteristics. The circumstances for which Shakespeare wrote had changed markedly from those aimed at in the interludes. A case in point, which depends particularly upon the

question of motivation, may well be in the soliloquy where Iago refers to the possible reasons for his hatred of Othello. He says:

> I hate the Moor,
> And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
> He's done my office. I know not if't be true….
> (I.iii.368-70)

But he avoids saying that he actually believes the story he is adducing here, and we, the audience, do not quite know whether to believe him or not. This feature is perhaps related to whether we react to him as a human being. Near the end, as Roderigo finally receives the blow which is the culmination of Iago's betrayal of him, he calls out, "O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!" (V.i.62). Iago's final silence—not saying anything about why he has acted so wickedly (V.ii.301-2)—again brings into question whether he is human or a devil. (Scragg). If he does have motivation, it remains difficult to fathom, and this may well be a reaction to evil in some human beings. It is clear that most readers and spectators inevitably recognize him as evil, yet the absence of clear motives has left enormous scope for actors and directors who attempt to give him the solidity of human existence (Sanders, pp. 25, 47-49). It is always tempting to see such individuals as not human but participating in some essential evil which is perhaps supernatural, but it is also very close to the allegorical non-human evil of the Vice. In the end the Vice cannot be punished even in those plays where he is executed, as with Ill Report in *Susanna*, who is killed on stage. Distanced from human existence he remains potentially a figure who challenges our search for motives.

The range of performance characteristics embodied in Iago which seem to parallel those of the earlier Vices is considerable. He stage-manages events, as in the eavesdropping scene, though there is some apparent improvisation, and his control of events eventually fails. A feature of this is that the audience are prepared for what is to be shown, and this creates the theatrical situation in which the stage presence of a watcher induces in the audience an awareness of more than one thing at the same time: Iago's clever conversation with Cassio about Bianca is interwoven with Othello's tumultuous apprehension of the supposed infidelity of Desdemona. Similarly, he prophesies the coming disaster: "Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (I.iii.385-86).

He also gets involved in singing, a frequent feature of the Vice, in the extended rather bawdy exchange with Desdemona which she characterises as "old fond

paradoxes to make fools laugh i'th'alehouse" (II.i.136-37). Both these references have connotations with the tavern, a standard recourse for the Vice and his companions (as with Nichol Newfangle and his associate Tom Tosspot in *Like Will to Like*). Iago's capacity for comic effects is wide-ranging, even if there is a grim undertone. Perhaps the most striking of these is the mockery of Othello as he reduces him to gibberish: "Work on, / My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught" (IV.i.42-43). He describes offstage circumstances and events which enrich and broaden the audience's perception of what is actually being enacted before them. He makes the audience look, and he also makes them imagine things which don't actually happen but which are part of the trickery he is exhibiting to them.

Nevertheless, by the time we get to Iago the Vice convention had disappeared from the stage and was no longer extensively relied upon. Shakespeare most probably drew upon his earlier experience and also perhaps on the recollections of actors who might have had close encounters with the convention. My suggestion is therefore that he saw something in the inhuman, destructive, clever, immoral figure which could help to pinpoint the enormity of what Iago accomplished and also to locate him as a theatrical figure in the drama of the Moor. Even if the Vice in his heyday embodied in allegory and theatrical performance aspects of the portrayal of evil necessitated by the moral issues in plays before his time—whether moralities or mystery plays—the phenomenal concentration of these features in the Vice convention turned out to be a resource subsequently for a different theatre and culture from that in which he originally flourished.

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