

Two directors, one play – A struggle for authority

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A Vice a középkori moralitásjátékok egyik legkiemelkedőbb alakja. Mint olyan, az évszázadok során is képes volt fennmaradni és több, a középkori moralitásoknál későbbi színpadi műben is megállni a helyét. Mindezt számos olyan karakter segítségével vitte véghez, melyek belőle táplálkoznak és a Vice utódjaiként tarthatóak számon. Karaktere az egyedi sajátosságok egész tárházával rendelkezik, melyek megkülönböztetik a színpadon megjelenő többi szereplőtől. Ezen eszközök segítségével a Vice a színdarab és a nézők közti kapcsolat elsődleges megteremtője. Legfőképpen azonban egy sor olyan tulajdonsággal bír, melyek a szerepet a rendező személyéhez teszik hasonlóvá és melyek némi hatalmat biztosítanak számára a színdarab történései felett. Ez az átruházott hatalom azonban az író és a Vice közötti összeütközéshez vezethet, aminek következtében megkérdőjeleződik, hogy ki is bír nagyobb befolyással a darab kimenetelére. Dolgozatunk a drámaírók és általuk színpadra vitt, a középkori Vice-on alapuló karakterek kapcsolatát vizsgálja. Ehhez különböző Vice karaktereket és azoknak utódait használtuk fel, kiváltképpen Shakespeare *III. Richárd* című drámájának címszereplőjét, Gloucester herceget. Dolgozatunk célja, hogy kiemelje ennek a különleges szerepnek a legjellemzőbb vonásait és tulajdonságait, különös tekintettel azokra, melyek lehetővé teszik, hogy a Vice túllépjen a szerzón és maga vegye kézbe az irányítást a darab felett.

Abstract

The Vice is one of the most distinct characters of medieval morality plays. As such, it has managed to retain its place in many later dramas through a number of different successors. Armed with a plethora of unique features which distinguish it from other characters on stage, the Vice also represents the main source of interaction between the play and the audience. Most importantly, however, it also exhibits a set of traits that are similar to those of the director and which provide it with a degree of authority over the events of the play. Yet this notion of transferred authority may also lead to a clash between the Vice and the author, at which point it may no longer be certain who has more control over the drama. The present paper attempts to cast light upon the relationship between playwrights and their Vice-related characters. Demonstrated through a number of Vices and Vice-successors, especially that of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the present paper points out the most characteristic features of this specific role, with particular focus on the features that enable Vice characters to step over the person of the playwright and take control of the play themselves.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	1.
The origins and major features of the Vice.....	3.
Richard Gloucester	10.
Two directors, one play	15.
Conclusion.....	17.
Reference list	18.

Introduction

The history of the drama as a genre encompasses a number of theatrical eras, gradually evolving into the form we perceive now as a theatrical play. Each single step, each period of its history has left a mark on the face of theatre that may be only visible once we recognize its peculiarities. Key features, however, seem to overlap the boundaries of the ages. For sure, albeit frequently adjusted to the needs of the ages, some of these key features succeeded to the new eras. But while some structural foundations and means of performance, considered as core elements of the entirety of the play, may be easily recognized universals, few would argue that single roles could possess such importance. Nevertheless, there indeed are a few roles that have stepped over the temporal boundaries, that managed to hold on to most of their key features as time passed over the theatre but never over the roles themselves. Perhaps the most peculiar of them, born with some of the earliest morality plays, the character of the Vice has remained a unique figure of the dramas for centuries, later to be seen as the root of the character of the villain in Shakespeare's era of the English Renaissance theatre. As such, the Vice and its successors continue to fascinate us with their role, their performance and their distinct features. Although frequently portrayed as the evil of the play, Vice-related characters display a wide array of personalities, sometimes representing merry jesters, other times cruel tyrants. Whatever their intentions may be, the characteristics entrusted on Vice characters enable them to distinguish themselves from other roles, a feature to which they frequently call the audience's attention. Vice-related characters establish a certain distance between themselves and the other characters of the play, sometimes looking at the events almost like mere bystanders. In the majority of cases, however, it is exactly the role of the Vice that moves the whole play forward, carefully directing the events of the drama, yet ever staying in the background. Jestings with the audience about the evil or comical deeds it has done, the Vice is also unique in that it serves as a mediator between the audience and the play. Therefore, the Vice may be easily recognized as a multifunctional character of each play in which it is featured.

In the present paper we argue that the character of the Vice, as well as its successors, possess a role which no other character is entrusted with in the plays, specifically the role of the director. Through its unique features and extraordinary means of performance, the Vice can be considered a second director of the play, manipulating its main events and outcome, as well as providing interaction between the play and the audience. We intend to show that Vice-related characters not only fulfil these roles, in fact, they may be considered the primary force

propelling the drama, a suggestion that immediately entails the issue of hierarchy between the actual director and the character of the Vice. Therefore, we set out to investigate the role of Vice-related characters as directors of the play, also paying attention to the hierarchical relationship between the director and the Vice, as the two struggle for authority over the events of the drama.

To offer a clear outline, the present paper will continue with a brief overview of the origin of the Vice character, followed by a list of the most peculiar features the character is armed with, distinguishing it from other characters and establishing its connection to the audience. These features will be demonstrated extensively by a number of examples from a variety of primary sources. Following that, we turn our attention to the director role of the Vice character, highlighting its importance in each drama and the issues of hierarchy it entails. This segment will also focus on the struggle for authority between the director and the Vice character, attempting to determine which enjoys more control over the drama. To support our claims, one of the most well-known Vice-successors, Shakespeare's character, Richard of Gloucester will serve as an example with which we demonstrate how his most distinctive Vice features enable him to assume the directorial role, hence an entire segment will be devoted to the tyrant of *Richard III*. The paper will conclude with a summary of the points made, offering overview of our claims and findings.

The origins and major features of the Vice

In order to have a better understanding of the relationship between the Vice – or the Vice successors – and the Author, we should take into consideration the historical background of the character itself. The first Vice appeared in the medieval religious dramas, namely in morality plays. Morality plays were usually performed by vagabond, but “professional” theatrical companies. Based on the old medieval cycles, allegories, miracles and mysteries, morality plays generally had a moral message to convey, but they, as Gassner implies, represented the next step towards the Elizabethan theatre. (Gassner 1987a, 204) In spite of the religious message, however, they were not strictly tied to biblical themes or to hagiographies.

The protagonists of moralities were frequently called Everyman, Mankind or Everyone – as they stood for the whole humankind. Everyman always had to face some difficulties and obstacles in his Christian life and he was hindered or helped by several allegorical characters like Good Deeds, Knowledge, Strength or Death. The members of the company generally played more than one of these allegorical roles and switched them during the play (this is called doubling) – as it is even indicated sometimes on the printed versions of the play, for example on the copy of *Like Will to Like*. Its title-page indicates not only the author and the characters, but also the fact that this play of sixteen roles can be easily performed by five actors. The speciality of the Vice is reflected even here: the actor personifying it had only one role. Vices were generally played by the leader actor of the company who did not have any other role during the play as opposed to the other actors. He continuously kept contact with the audience, both verbally and physically. He used numerous theatrical tricks and methods to achieve this goal and to manipulate both the audience and the other characters on the stage. They reacted to events happening both on and off the stage, thus mediating between the audience and the performers. Happé suggests that, first of all, these tricks were played in order to gain some time for the other members of the troupe who had to switch their clothes. (Happé 1972, 14) In this sense, the Vice was important in a practical sense, too, but, naturally, its significance goes far beyond such pragmatic issues.

The primary role of the Vice was to make a trap for the protagonist and to tempt him into committing sins. His negative position is even reflected in his name which, according to one interpretation, derives from the Latin *vitium* meaning “defect, offence, blemish, imperfection”. (“Etymonline...” 2014) (However, there is a current debate about the etymology both of the name and the figure behind it.)

Although they were the main tempters in moralities, they had rarely been punished in the end as other antagonists, and, despite their mischievous and sometimes evil features, they contributed to the deliverance of the message of the morality. A representative example of this is when at the end of *Like Will to Like*, Nichols Newfangle, the Vice of the drama – who is the godson of the Devil himself – is riding away on his godfather's back uttering the last jokes, instead of being confined like the ruffians he tricked. Although Nichols Newfangle was the one who planned to make a trap for the two executed thieves, the audience – or the contemporary reader – would not feel at all that this injustice should be remedied, because the Vice is such an appealing character that it can easily get away with murder.

Still, in spite of their antagonistic role, Vices could have been of many kinds: merry jesters, intriguing villains but most often both. As Matuska points out, “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”. (Matuska 2011, 44) Vices were what we would call negative characters or antagonists in moralities, but because of their appealing and jolly way of acting they were the favourites of the audience. As Matuska points out, we always try to tell apart the “evil Vices and comic clowns” while “for the Elizabethan audience they would not come as clearly separate characters”. (Matuska 2011, 81) That is why the border between the merry trickster and the representative of the Devil was and is not that clear-cut, and the contemporary audience did not even expect such clear-cut borders either. This kind of equivocation of their nature also made the Vices more complex characters than the others on stage.

Penny Gay provides one explanation why Vices and Vice successors are favourites of the public: it is because they are the most powerful, innovative and intelligent characters on stage. (Gay 2008, 8) We can claim that the Vice is not simply powerful: it is powerful enough to rise above the other characters. However, the limits of its power can be debated. We argue that the Vice grew strong and influential enough not only to manipulate the others on the stage, but also to compete for the dominance with the director – nevertheless, this topic is going to be elaborated in later chapters of this paper.

Another explanation for its huge popularity is given by Northrop Frye. Frye argues that the high level of approval of the Vice is rooted in humour. He claims that “any character who gets laughs gets at least some of the audience's sympathy.” (Frye 1953, 276) Happé also admits that the Vice is definitely a comical part (Happé 1972, 15) and as it is the major source

of fun and relief in the play, based on Frye's position, he must receive the greatest amount of warmth from the direction of the audience. Matthew Merrygreek, for instance, is the very figure in Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* who is responsible for the greatest amount of entertainment in the play. According to Gassner, the play itself represents a transitional stage between the Roman comedy and the forthcoming Early Modern English Drama. Hence, it incorporates the older traditions and amalgamates them with the new inventions. The Vice – combined with the traditional Roman “parasite” here – is one of these conventional figures. (Gassner 1987b, 263) Although Matthew Merrygreek is a good-for-nothing rascal – worthy of the name “parasite” –, he is the one who brings round many of the humorous elements of the play (reading the love-letter as an insult, provoking brawl or making fun of the other characters) thus generating laughter among the audience.

Be that as it may, the Vice was a popular character which may explain why it survived the disappearance of the morality plays and reappeared on the Elizabethan stage, albeit in a little bit different form. Northrop Frye when, in his article, examines the different sources of comic characters in Shakespearean dramas, mentions the morality Vice as a significant antecedent of various Shakespearean heroes. (Frye 1953) He distinguishes two forms of characters rooted in the morality Vice: one is the comic trickster whose main motivation is to have fun and laugh a lot at the jokes he has played on others. Here the motif is what Frye calls the “pure love of mischief”. (Frye 1953, 274) Frye illustrates the comic Vice with Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ariel from *The Tempest*. The second alternative, according to Frye, is the Machiavellian villain who turns up in tragedies and who “often acts without motivation, from pure love of evil.” (Frye 1953, 274) For instance, the historically based king, Richard of Gloucester from *Richard III* can be identified as a Machiavellian villain, a Vice of tragedies. Besides these two major types, Frye files more Vice-based roles in Shakespeare's dramas (Frye 1953, 274-275), which proves that the Vice is a very flexible character due its complex and ambivalent nature, a position that can be easily adapted to any kind of play by emphasizing a different feature of it every single time.

Besides being the clown, the Vice had many other ways to distinguish itself, and to attract its audience. One of them, referred to by Happé, is the disguise. (Happé 1972, 15) The Vice often declared delightfully to the audience that it can adopt many roles. This meant assuming different kinds of personalities to deceive the other characters on stage. The audience, however, was initiated into its plans, so it did not mislead them. “His true character – says Happé – is never obscured from the audience.” (Happé 1972, 15) They follow the

Vice's actions of pretence and deception throughout the play while they know that it is just its private game. Happé indicates that the Vice, perhaps, made its identity clear in the very moment of his entrance. Maybe it wore flamboyant clothes – we do not know. Still, it is sure that the audience immediately recognized their favourite who evoked the same reaction in them every time they saw him. (Happé 1972, 15)

Although the audience knew all too well what the Vice had in mind, the other characters on stage had no idea what its true intentions were. The Vice who originally owned the position of the tempter consistently lied to the protagonist persuading him to commit a sin or not to act according to God's order. The aforementioned Matthew Merrygreek begins the play by pretending to be in possession of a fortune and be truly busy in front of his old friend, the wealthy Ralph Roister Doister. (*Ralph Roister Doister* 1.2.19-38) This little game is not absolutely without purpose: he makes Roister Doister believe the lie that he is a rich and occupied person, but also a great friend because he would be able to lend him money and he actually postpones his affairs in favour of his companion. Meanwhile, he informs the audience that he has not got a penny and the offer was solely made out of interest.

However, Nichols Newfangle, from *Like Will to Like*, does not limit himself to joyful playing: he seduces some criminals, namely Cuthbert Cutpurse and Pierce Pickpurse, into committing crimes with the intention of seeing them hanged for their deeds. Newfangle, who, despite his condemnable actions, is an entertaining figure, after cheating the two thieves into stealing, betrays them to Severity, an allegorical character, who in fact, punishes them. (*Like Will to Like*, 1043-1112)

Shakespearean Vice-successors obviously inherited the affection for masks from their predecessors, because they also love to assume them. Puck, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, is proudly boasting about his adventurous and knavish role-playings:

I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her burn, down topples she,

And "tailor" cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips and loff,
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there."
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.43-57).

From this passage, it is clear that Puck's favourite hobby is to pretend to be something other than himself. The Duke of *Measure for Measure* seems to share this interest although with a different motivation. While Puck acts for the fun, to make himself (and others) laugh, the Duke feigns to be a monk in order to reveal the secrets of his royal subjects and to catch them red-handed.

Vices were usually far more intelligent than the others on stage, a fact that becomes apparent once we take a look at their utterances. They were also absolutely aware of the fact that they are smarter and they knew how to use their intelligence as a weapon. Happé points out that the role of the Vice is enriched "with many kinds of verbal tricks, puns, proverbs, ambiguities, oaths, obscenities, and fanciful nonsense." (Happé 1972, 14) Vices are genuine tricksters who will never miss a chance to outwit the others and play pranks on them. Among their weapons the linguistic ones may be the mightiest. Their puns and ambiguous utterances guide the other figures on the stage according to his will, while they also get the audience rolling in the aisles. An excellent example for this is when Matthew Merrygreek reads out the love-letter of Roister Doister to Dame Custance. (*Ralph Roister Doister* 3.4.35-70) The worthy lady is doubtlessly offended; albeit it turns out a few minutes later that the text itself was absolutely fine: the fault is hidden in the presentation, for Merrygreek read it out with a bad punctuation thus giving the exact opposite of the original meaning. By putting the punctuation marks to the incorrect places, Merrygreek mocks his friend's – in fact ridiculous – love thus providing an excellent opportunity to the audience to laugh.

Nichols Newfangle plays the same joke, though with a more melancholic outcome, when he promises the "land of the two-legged mare" to the thieves. (*Like Will to Like* 637-650) By the "two-legged mare" he, in fact, means the gallows – which he declares to the audience initiating them into the pun. Here, we can see a true Vice in action: gay, clever, but acting with obviously malevolent intentions.

What Newfangle does in the aforementioned example is that he addresses the audience directly. Talking to the spectators of the play is also a specific Vice-feature, as the most evident way of creating and maintaining contact with them. While mocking the others

and playing their own games on the scene, Vices usually prefer to share their plans with their audience, as we are going to see later in the play *Richard III*. Besides talking about their intentions, Vices often pick somebody from the audience and talk directly to and about them:

How say you, woman, you, that stand in the angle,
Were you never acquainted with Nichol Newfangle?
Then I see Nichol Newfangle is quite forgot;
Yet you will know me anon, I dare ieopard a grote.
Nichol Newfangle is my name; doo you me not knowe?
(*Like Will to Like*, 47-51)

Here, Newfangle commences to introduce himself and he is absolutely disappointed by the fact that nobody actually knows him. Not only the text itself, but the instructions also imply that he chose some members of the audience and established both verbal and physical contact with them.

There is also another attribute Happé mentions to belong to the Vice: it is its relationship with the Devil. As the tempters of the play, original Vices had not only ambivalent, but downright negative roles. In religious dramas, the primary purpose of which was to transfer a moral message, their connection to the Evil One definitely marked their dark affiliations. Still, neither the audience nor they seem to care, as it is clear from the jokes Vices usually make of this unfavourable relationship. Nichols Newfangle, for instance, presents his godfather, Lucifer himself, immediately after his self-introduction. He is not ashamed at all about his family relations but does not seem to respect his godfather at all. The tricky, mocking nature of the Vice is so strong, that even the Devil himself cannot escape from it. When Lucifer wants to bless him, the ungrateful godchild ridicules every single word of the blessing. (*Like Will to Like* 201-206)

The features listed above are essential weapons of the character we can call the Vice. The complexity of this role, the great number of linguistic and theatrical arms at his disposal, its unique nature: all of these elements distinguish him and raise him above the other figures on the stage. It uses them to gain time, to entertain the audience and make them laugh, and, last but not least, to manipulate everybody around it. The Vice is powerful because it can pull the strings and act as a puppet master: all the other characters presented in the performance are tricked to behave according to its will. Moreover, it also manipulates the spectators into growing friendly with it and liking it to such a degree that they might overlook its morally questionable deeds and intentions due to its comic features.

Two directors, one play

As demonstrated above, the Vice character is armed with a plethora of distinctive features which distinguish it from all the other characters of each drama. The Vice, however is not merely separated from the other roles due to its peculiar characteristics, it is also given an eminent position over several actors of the play. In all the examples given before, the Vice seems to fill in the singular role of the puppeteer, the character which stays out of the limelight, yet pulls all the strings nevertheless. It forever seeks to manipulate people to its ends, utilising all the tricks of the trade to see that its will is done. Be it changing people's allegiances, creating feuds or fuelling wars, the Vice controls what happens on the scene. ("Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous" *Richard III* 1.1.32.) Through lies and deception, subtle nudges, threats or assassinations, it relentlessly pushes its victims towards its own goals, sometimes for power, other times for the mere jest of it. These features, nevertheless, have undoubtedly earned the character prominence over other roles to the point that we may argue it is one of the most important characters of each play in which it is portrayed. To be sure, its control over the events of the play may be best compared to the author's command over the entirety of the drama. Hence, it is not at all far-fetched to imagine the Vice as a second director of the same play, who dwells within the pages but influences the events just as well.

Should we attempt to define the role of the director, we would come to a list of properties that, one would think, were supposed to be possessed by one entity only per play, that of the original director. It is the person of the director that plays the most important role, determining the outcome of the play and controlling all the actors. In addition, this is achieved with the director hiding behind the scenes, influencing the events from the shadows, indirectly. However, one may notice, this description fits not only the person of the director but also that of the Vice character. Similarly to the director, the Vice, too, prefers to stay away from direct actions, accomplishing his goals through other actors. Through this indirect interaction the Vice gains control over the events of the play, influencing the final outcome. Added to that is the Vice's interaction with the audience, another particular feature, which creates a bridge between the character and the real world, a task that would otherwise fall on the person of the director. Therefore, due to these similarities, we may incline to accept that Vice characters, in fact, act as secondary directors within the drama.

However, referring to the director role of the Vice as secondary, that is, compared to the authority of the author, brings up the question of hierarchy. To be sure, the literary work of art, as such, is first and foremost written by the author. Nevertheless, it may be entirely possible for the author to create the characters only, unleashing them in the context of the play. From this point on, however, it is up to the characters and their given qualities as to what exactly can happen within the pages. The author may have provided the basis, yet it is the individual characters that influence the events of the drama. Whenever the Vice character is involved, though, it seems to take over the control of these events entirely, filling in the role of the director to all intents and purposes. As such, the authority of the original author suddenly becomes questionable, as well as his position in the hierarchy. Therefore, the manipulations of the Vice character can be seen as attacks on the authority of the original playwright. This is all the more visible in the Vice character's interactions with the audience, basically establishing itself as an entity of two worlds, the world of the play and the real world. In the meantime, the character attains the role of the mediator, connecting the two worlds. Once again, this is a clear attack on the author's position in the hierarchy, as it is the responsibility of the author to maintain connection between the audience and the play. As far as the hierarchical positions are concerned, it further complicates the situation that the audience generally shares no connection with the author. Instead, it is the Vice character the audience sees the most, ever interacting, drawing them into the events of the play. Therefore, from the audience's point of view, the original author's struggle for the authority over their own play may have already been lost.

What makes the Vice character's struggle for authority even more fascinating is the fact that this conflict is played out on more than one levels. First of all, the Vice character's primary aim is often complete control over the events of the play. Hence, the Vice, armed with its key tools of manipulation, lies and deception, is first and foremost in a battle with the other characters for control over the actions of the drama. However, as we suggest, Vice characters are present on another battlefield, the one for the authority over the play itself, in direct conflict with the director. The tools that enable them to rise above the other characters on stage also serve them well in their struggle to assume the director's position. In addition, Vice characters wage war on a third level, this time targeting the actual audience of the play. Due to their significance as a mediator of the two worlds, that of the real world and that of the play, Vice characters maintain an almost constant interaction with the audience. However, true to their peculiar traits, Vice characters can also attempt to manipulate the members of the

audience, typically through jests, hence winning their affection. As we have pointed out earlier, Vice characters often acted as single sources of amusement, even though they frequently played dubious, sometimes even outright negative roles. Thus, we may safely suggest that Vice characters proved to be rather successful on more than one battlefields, waging war against the other characters, the director while gaining the audience's affection as well.

Though the Vice definitely tries to assume the traits of the director, it is not the only character who does so. In his article titled *Hamlet Q.E.D.*, Lionel Abel makes an attempt to analyse and explain *Hamlet* in a different, revolutionary manner. In his understanding, all the significant figures of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* behave as, as he puts it, "playwrights". (Abel 1963, 46) He brings evidence to support his claim namely that Hamlet, Claudius, the Ghost of the King and Polonius all try to operate like directors of the play. He defines them based on their level of success as directors and the types of dramas they try to direct. He draws examples how they make efforts to shape the outcome of the play and give orders to others how to behave. (Abel 1963) Nevertheless, in his interpretation, Hamlet and the other candidates fight for the dominance with each other, not with the author himself. Also, none of these characters could be regarded as a Vice-successor primarily because they do not show the general characteristics of it, and they act more explicitly than a traditional Vice would do. Still, Abel's interpretation proves that there are certain positions that are more powerful than others and can reach beyond the limits of the stage acquiring the responsibilities of the director.

Here, we have to note that throughout our paper, we often used the terms "author" and "director" synonymously. Although it may appear to be a matter of negligence, we did it on purpose. First of all, these terms sometimes coincided in the period of Shakespeare, as plays were usually performed by amateur troops or professional, but smaller theatrical companies with limited financial and human resources. We have mentioned that actors usually had to play more than one role in a company because the company was short of performers. The members had more tasks; not merely on the stage, but also in real life. It happened that playwrights and directors acted on the stage among their fellow performers. John Heywood, for example, not only wrote plays, but also participated in them. (Johnson 2003, 124)

Second, playwrights were not as important personalities as literary authors are today. Lukas Erne compares them to the screenwriters of today's Hollywood: he claims that the role of the director is and was more stressed than that of the actual author of the play both in the case of Hollywood movies and Elizabethan plays. (Erne 2003, 42-43) As many authors suggest, the concept of authorship went through a transition in the period and the idea itself was being shaped. The public, the printing houses and the playwrights themselves had different ideas what authorship meant. Erne suggests that playwrights were often considered so unimportant that their names were not indicated on the title pages of the printed versions. (Erne 2003, 31-55) Johnson compares contrasting views of contemporary authors on the question of authorship. One of her examples is that of Ben Jonson's, who thought about the author as a sovereign with absolute power over the play, the actors and the audience. Heywood cared much less about his plays and left more space for the actors. Johnson argues that, Heywood, similarly to Ben Jonson, also wanted to build up a concept of authorship, but in another way: while Jonson relied on the printed versions in order to gain ultimate control, Heywood's authorship was rooted in anonymity, in constructed reputation and in dramas which could either be real or not. (Johnson 2003, 8-9)

Third, we used the two terms interchangeably, because the author and the director of a drama play similar roles during the creation of a performance: both of them take part in creative processes and wove their own ideas into the tapestry of the play. In this sense, in the case of dramatic performances, the director and the author are both creators of the play and represent the authority over it together: the authority that Vices and Vice-successors challenge.

A fascinating character from the start, the Vice has become so much more than a role in the theatre. To be sure, its importance can only be attributed to its most distinct features, none of which would be present without the help of the original author. Nevertheless, it seems that all the Vice required was this exact set of properties, enabling it to rise above the other roles, as well as the boundaries of the play. The Vice character has effectively become the director of the drama, a mediator of two planes of reality. And, as such, it can be seen as a real threat to the author's position of authority.

Richard of Gloucester

In the previous chapters, we have already discussed the general features of the Vice, as well as its potential to become the directing force of the dramas in which it performs. Now, we are going to turn our attention to a specific play written by Shakespeare, namely *Richard III*, the story of a king monstrous inside and outside as well. We are going to cite some examples from the play in order to demonstrate how the Vice character has become the most distinct role in the theatre, using the personality traits of Richard of Gloucester, the title hero of the drama, who bears all the features listed above, to show how the peculiarities of the Vice character lift it above the other roles of the play and ultimately establish it as the director of the play.

The first feature we are going to discuss is disguise. Vices adored masks and, even though the actor playing this character was the only one in the troop who always had only one role, the character itself put on disguises frequently on stage. Richard of Gloucester quickly admits that he really enjoys being part of this proud tradition. The most abhorrent and, at the same time, appealing thing about him is that while he is a treacherous villain scheming and plotting throughout the play, nobody among his fellow characters seems to realize it – except the ones he confides in. Some of them hate or despise him, but nobody is really aware of his true potentials. All of this does not matter to Gloucester; he hates and despises everybody else behind their backs and seems to enjoy his games to a great degree.

He plays a saint in order to deceive his relatives and grab the throne. Among these dirty little games, his hands stained with his brother's and nephews' blood, he even dares reproach the queen and her brother, Lord Rivers, for gossiping about him. In this reproach he describes himself as a thoroughly honest man having problems with flattering, not telling the truth and not being virtuous.

They do me wrong, and I will not endure it:
Who are they that complain unto the king,
That I, forsooth, am stern, and love them not?
By holy Paul, they love his grace but lightly
That fill his ears with such dissentious rumours.
Because I cannot flatter and speak fair,

Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive and cog,
Duck with French nods and apish courtesy,
I must be held a rancorous enemy.
Cannot a plain man live and think no harm,
But thus his simple truth must be abused
By silken, sly, insinuating Jacks?
(*Richard III* 1.3.42-53)

This part takes place in an early scene of the play and the words of Gloucester show their ironic edge only afterwards, when the audience realises that he, in fact, keeps flattering and lying all the time. Later he himself confesses to the audience in a confidential, jesting manner that, in spite of his words uttered and emotions pretended in front of other people, he knows exactly how wicked he is in fact:

And thus I clothe my naked villany
With odd old ends stol'n out of holy writ,
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
(*Richard III* 1.3.336-338)

Here, he considers his lies and plots as pieces of clothing he can change whenever and however he wants to. Similarly to a director, he has his own plans and ideas about the outcome of the play and he lies and manipulates as much as he has to realize them.

However, regardless of the fact how much Gloucester seems to enjoy his private performances, at the end of the play he somehow loses track of his disguises and starts to resemble a man who is lost in a room full of mirrors.

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
Richard loves Richard; that is, I and I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
Then fly! What, from myself?
Great reason why:
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O, no! Alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain. Yet I lie. I am not.

Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.
My conscience hath a thousand
several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
(*Richard III* 5.3.183-196)

Although Vices often joked with the fact that they have so many disguises and personalities that it is hard to tell them apart, Gloucester gives the impression of a person who does not even recognize the real himself anymore because he is now lost in the labyrinth of his own plots, schemes and fake personalities.

A great tool in the Vices' armoury, disguise has always served these dubious characters in their endeavours to deceive others, allowing them to be always one step ahead in the chain of events. Similarly, in the case of Richard III, the sole number of personalities displayed leaves the others clueless, hence the Duke of Gloucester can freely pull the strings right under their noses. As such, the disguise enables Richard to control the events of the play, lending him the directorial role.

One of the major features of the Vice is considered to be his comical side. Gloucester, as a Vice-successor, also has a certain sense of humour, but it is not exactly like the one we have seen in plays displaying classical Vices. Gloucester, for instance, often jokes with his own deformity (for example in the opening soliloquy: *Richard III* 1.1.16-29) which is pitiful and deterring at the same time. At the end of the wooing scene he also makes fun of his own twisted shape in spite of which he somehow managed to win Lady Anne, the widow of the prince Gloucester himself killed.

On me, that halt and am unshapen thus?
My dukedom to a beggarly denier,
I do mistake my person all this while:
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marvellous proper man.
I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,
And entertain some score or two of tailors,
To study fashions to adorn my body:
Since I am crept in favour with myself,
Will maintain it with some little cost.
But first I'll turn yon fellow in his grave;
And then return lamenting to my love.
Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,

That I may see my shadow as I pass.
(*Richard III* 1.2. 250-263)

Though Gloucester has fun while he is talking about his success in the field of romance and his hideous body, this kind of humour is more grotesque and displeasing than the one presented by Nichols Newfangle or Matthew Merrygreek.

Another source of laughter – for Gloucester, at least – is the way he manipulates the others and uses them against each other. Like an enthusiastic little boy, he delightfully tells the audience how he is going to generate a conflict between his relatives and different members of the Court. (*Richard III* 1.3.324-338) He generates gossips, counterfeits prophecies and lies while acting as the innocent, modest, pitiful, crippled uncle. Even if these kinds of jokes are different from the traditional pranks Vices played upon their fellow-characters, they are still meant to entertain the audience. Jokes and tricks contributed greatly to the popularity of the Vice as its figure was the main source of entertainment. These comic reliefs helped the Vice to gain the affection of the viewers, regardless of its negative intentions, hence supporting its connection to the audience, strengthening its mediator role.

It has already been stated that the mightiest weapon of the Vice may very well be language. Gloucester is a great linguist and fully exploits his skills in order to deceive and mislead others. He also shares Nichols Newfangle's enthusiasm concerning puns and ambiguities:

Thus, like the formal vice, Inquity,
I moralize two meanings in one word.
(*Richard III* 3.1.82-83)

The scene which these lines are from presents how Gloucester meets the crown prince and how he tries to persuade his young nephew about his benevolent intentions. He is absolutely nice, polite and modest throughout the whole scene; only his half-lines aside reveal his true motivations, that is, to kill the young prince and usurp his throne.

The latest example is cited from a scene where Gloucester addresses the audience a lot during his dialogues, while before that he was more frequently seen doing so when no other character was present, letting the audience into his secrets through his monologues. Gloucester initiates the spectators into his vicious plans from the very beginning and he

maintains the contact with them at the full length of the drama. As a true Vice, he outwits the other figures of the play and because of his manipulative games he reaches a level above them.

Although it would be the task of the director to build a bridge between the real world and the reality of the theatre, the Vice is an important pillar in the construction. It maintains connection with the viewers of the drama and thus connects them with the world of the stage. In fact, this link proves to be an advantage for the Vice over the playwright in their struggle for authority. While the author or the director do not talk to the audience directly, it may seem that Richard of Gloucester is the one who is in control over the drama: he lays complex and elaborate plots, he shares them with his viewers – turning them into his allies this way – and seems to achieve his goals.

As the audience is quickly initiated into his diabolical plans, Richard of Gloucester is almost immediately seen as the primary villain of the drama. However, his deeds far outweigh the mischiefs of other Shakespearean Vices, such as Puck, lending Richard qualities similar to the Devil. Nevertheless, even the mere comparison to Satan does little justice to his wickedness, as a number of characters openly identify him as the Devil. Indeed, his own mother, the Duchess claims that Richard came on earth to make the earth her hell. (*Richard III* 4.4.164-195) It comes as no surprise then, that Richard himself cannot help but refer to his unholy deeds as the Devil's work, although he is cleverly disguised as a saint. (*Richard III* 1.3.324-338) What may be surprising, however, even for Richard, is that he achieves his goals all the same. Even under incredible circumstances, such as the wooing scene of Lady Anne, where he is explicitly paralleled to the Devil (*Richard III* 2.1.1-221), Richard emerges “victorious”, although he himself admitted that his looks and reputation hardly improved his chances.

Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all,
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
(*Richard III* 1.2.232-237)

Indeed, though widely recognized at court as a villainous manipulator, the Duke of Gloucester always seems to get his will done. Nevertheless, he too must meet his end at the end of the drama, and none of us, not even Richard, doubts where he will reside after death:

March on, join bravely, let us to't pell-mell
If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell.
(*Richard III* 5.5.41-42)

As we have seen, Gloucester bears the attributes of the traditional Vice and he also knows how to utilize his full potentials. These features, however, do not simply make him a powerful character, but someone who reaches beyond the limits of the stage and usurps not only the throne of the king, but also that of the original director. His appears to be the most important role as far as power is concerned. He seems to see and know everything, like a director. He also appears to have ultimate control over the outcome of the events and his actions often function as the engine of the play. He has his own plans and schemes about the outcome and he shares them with the audience, too, who can only sit and observe how he achieves his goals during the whole theatrical piece, one after another. Even if he has to fail in the end, he proved to be a genius and an effective manipulator. He, as a true director, makes his fellow actors act however he wishes them to do, although not directly, through straight orders, but pulling the strings from behind. The lies, the disguises and the masks serve one aim: to make everyone see what he wants them to see.

He also plays a significant role in creating contact between the audience and the reality of the drama. His monologues and half-lines aside not only reveal his true nature, but also initiate his spectators into his plans. He represents the bridge between the two worlds, which would be the duty of the director. However, he might seem to make alliance with his viewers his tricks, puns and addresses towards them are mere illusions of a magician, a juggler, who will never stop until everyone is under his control.

The Vice is traditionally a fascinating character of medieval literature and Gloucester, the crippled king with a bad reputation represents the archetypal villain of its successors. He shares every feature with his predecessors that distinguished them from other characters. Most importantly, the Duke of Gloucester retained his talent for the manipulation of the masses. He knows no moral boundaries that may keep him from his final goal of claiming the throne. His hunger for power is matched only by his intelligence, utilizing a number of means to his end.

Even the slightest forms of manipulation become deadly weapons in the hands of the Vice. Neither assassination, hence, seem to stir his conscience. What he achieves exceptionally well, however, is the manipulation of the masses. Either through the shadiest tricks or through brutal murder, one way or another, Richard of Gloucester lives up to his Vice predecessors and utilizes every tool of manipulation in his command to claim the throne.

Conclusion

The Vice character has come a long way to become what it is perceived to be today. Gifted with a number of distinctive features, it remains to be one of the most peculiar characters of the theatre. Either a merry jester, or a bloodthirsty tyrant, the Vice character has never failed to capture the audience. Through lies and manipulation, dirty tricks or hilarious jests, this role has also become so much more than the other characters on stage. Thanks to its competitive edge of intelligence and of deception, the Vice character has ascended above the other roles, assuming a directing position of the play. As such, the Vice can be seen as a pretender to this position of authority, yet it was the person of the author who entrusted the character with such power, unleashing it among the pages. We have found, however, that through its constant interactions with the audience, who look at it as the only mediator present between the real world and the world of the play, the Vice seems to wage a winning war in the struggle for authority over the events of the play.

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