The Origin of the Figure Called “the Vice” in Tudor Drama

By Francis Hugh Mares

More than fifty years ago E. K. Chambers pointed out the disparity between the commonly accepted account of the Vice’s origin in the early morality plays and the evidence of the twenty plays in which a character specifically called “the Vice” had a part. Commenting on L. W. Cushman’s The Devil and the Vice in English Dramatic Literature before Shakespeare (Halle, 1900), he said:

Unfortunately it proceeds by disregarding several plays in which the vice does occur, and reading him into many where there is none... the vice is not found under that name in the text, list of dramatis personae, or stage directions of any popular morality or of any pre-Elizabethan moral interlude except the Marian Respublica. The majority of plays in which he does occur are not morals, even of the modified Elizabethan type; and although in those which are he usually plays a bad part, even this is not an invariable rule.¹

In spite of this, the explanation of the Vice’s origin based on what A. W. Pollard called the “obvious etymology” of his name is still current. It is tacitly accepted by Hardin Craig in English Religious Drama (Oxford, 1955),² and the New Cambridge edition of Richard III (1954) offers on

Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity,
I moralize two meanings in one word. (III.i.82-83)

this gloss: “Vice, comic character in the old Morality plays; also called ‘Iniquity’” (p. 279).

The purpose of this paper will be to suggest that the Vice comes into the drama from the popular festival, that he is already established as a stage clown before he appears in the morality at all, and that he does not do so until the morality is in decline. It has been

¹The Mediaeval Stage (Oxford, 1903), II, 204.
²See Chs. ix and x passim, and particularly p. 378.
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*Dates of printing are given only when they differ materially from those proposed for composition.
suggested by R. J. E. Tiddy in *The Mummers' Play* (Oxford, 1923) and by Robert Withington that the folk-game fool had an influence on the mystery-play devil, and thence on the morality Vice. In a later article, Withington seems to retreat to a more conventional position. Neither Tiddy nor Withington ever questions the allegorical meaning of the term "the Vice," and both assume that he came into the Tudor plays in which he is found by way of earlier religious drama. Both also accept as Vices many figures that are nowhere so called. Since this sort of assumption is very common in discussions of pre-Shakespearean drama, from John Payne Collier's edition of Bale's *King Johan* to F. S. Boas' note on the recently discovered morality fragment, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, I list the twenty plays in which there is a named Vice, and the two in which the reference is to Vices in the plural, in chronological order. Dates of printing are those given by W. W. Greg, in *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1939); of composition, by E. K. Chambers, in *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923).

It is plain that moral allegory is not the common feature of these plays. But all, with the exception of *The Three Estates*, are written to be played by a company of limited size, often with considerable doubling. The Vice was a favorite with the audience, and the man who played the Vice seems to have been the major actor of the company. His is almost invariably the longest single part. He has less time for doubling than the others, and it is his job to keep the audience amused in the lulls of the action while other characters are off stage changing for another part.

And (Courage) fighteth to prolong the time, while Wantonness maketh her ready.

He is often left free to extemporize:

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3"The Ancestry of the 'Vice,'" *Speculum*, VII (1932), 525-529.
4"Braggart, Devil, and 'Vice';" ibid., XI (1936), 124. See also Withington, *Excursions in English Drama* (New York, 1937).
Here the vyce shal turne the proclamation to some contrarie sence at everie time all for money hath read it...".

He is on intimate terms with his audience and cracks jokes with individual members of it. He acts as a presenter and chorus, introducing other characters to the audience and commenting on them aside. Nichol Newfangle, alone on the stage when his play opens, has a long chat with his audience. When he is joined by Lucifer, he ends it with these words:

Sancte benedicite, whom have we heer?
Tom Tumbler or else some dauncing bear?
Body of me it were best go no near:
For that ought I see it is my Godfather Lucifer
Whose prentice I have been this many a day?
But no more words but mum: you shall hear what he will say.

Lucifer
Ho myne owne boy I am glad that thou art heer:

Nichol Newfangle
He speaketh to you sir I pray you come neer
(pointing to one standing by)\(^8\)

In these direct comments to the audience the Vice often foretells the action of the play or lets the audience into his confidence, as Jack Juggler and Avarice do. He is not subject to the limitations of the other characters, and seems often to be outside 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." Common Conditions is "Nere kind to dame fortune to raise and let fall." Even in a morality, The Tide Tarrieth no Man, the Vice Courage can say:

...Corage contagious,
And eake contrarious, both in me do rest:
For I of kind, am alwayes various,
And change, as to my mind seemeth best. (sig. C3\(^v\))

\(^7\) Thomas Lupton, All for Money (London, 1578), STC 16949, sig. D1\(^v\). (In all cases where an early edition has been used, the Short-Title Catalogue no. will be given.)

\(^8\) Ulpian Fulwell, Like Will to Like (London, 1568), STC 11473, sig. A3\(^v\).
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A number of the Vices—for no obvious dramatic reason—make themselves out to be great travelers.⁹

There is general agreement among those who have considered the problem that the dress of the Vice was not unlike that of the domestic fool, and that he carried a wooden sword or dagger. There is evidence in the vice plays themselves and in some nearly contemporary comment, such as the often quoted account in Archbishop Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, and *The Staple of News*.

*Mirth.* . . . . . . . How like you the *Vice* i'the Play?

*Expectation.* Which is he?

*Mirth.* Three or foure: old *Covetousnesse*, the sordid *Penyboy*, the *Money-bawd*, who is a flesh-bawd too, they say.

*Tattle.* But here is never a *Friend* to carry him away. Besides, he has never a wooden dagger! I'd not give a rush for a *Vice*, that has not a wooden dagger to snap at every body he meetes.¹⁰

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence is to be found in an inventory of the wardrobe in the Revel's Accounts for the year 1555.

One frock yolowe velet all cheveroned with brode gardes
Crymsyn grene & black Saten with one hed pece to
the some of grene Satten & whyte golde Sarcent with Eris.

The three lines are bracketed together at the end, and against them is written "for a vyces to a playe after to the lorde mystruell"¹¹ The only dissentient voice is that of Cushman, who bases his opinion on the dubious assumption that "A reliable source of information regarding the Vice's costume is the old woodcuts" (p. 120). He cites two: one comes from *Hickscorner*, a play in which the term "the Vice" is not applied to any character. The other is from the second Copland edition of *Jack Juggler*—the only edition known

⁹E.g., Merry Report, Nichol Newfangle, Sin, Idleness, Politic Persuasion.
¹¹*Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Louvain, 1914), p. 194.
to Cushman. Eduard Eckhardt, discussing the same woodcut, comes to a different conclusion.\footnote{Die lustige Person im älteren englischen Drama; Palaestra, XVII (1902), 165.}

In *The Morris Book* and *The Sword Dances of Northern England*\footnote{Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. Macilwaine, The Morris Book, 3 pts. (London, 1911-14); Sharp, The Sword Dances of Northern England, 3 pts. (London, 1911-14).} details are given of the dress and behavior of folk dancers at the beginning of this century that tally remarkably with what can be deduced of the appearance and activity of the Vice. The Fool was the most important of the extra characters that accompanied the team of dancers—the others were the King and Queen, the Hobbyhorse, and the “Bessy” or man-woman. He was the leader of the team, he was master of ceremonies and comedian, and he was on intimate terms with the audience. All this is certainly true of the dancing I myself have seen in Oxford on May Day. According to Sharp a favorite opening gambit was, “Here we be, masters, six fools and one dancer,” and in fact the Fool was always an expert dancer, and often had a special dance of his own to show off his prowess. The part he took in the group dance, though slight, was of great significance; and where, as in the Plow Monday games, there was a play associated with the dance, he was an important actor. Sharp gives the following generalized description of his dress:

A tunic made of brightly-coloured stuff, or patchwork, edged with a silver fringe, with a pad of bells on each shoulder, breeches, stockings of different colours, rings of bells round the ankles, and a hat shaped something like a mitre, lavishly trimmed with artificial flowers, feathers, and animal skin. In his hand he always carries a short stick, with a calf’s tail attached at one end and a bladder attached to a string at the other.\footnote{The Morris Book, Pt. I, p. 28.}

He wore, in fact, a crude version of the variegated dress of the professional fool of Tudor times, with actual animal relics in place of the stylized “cockscomb” and the long ears on the hood. The instances Sharp gives from particular dances are even more suggestive. At Brailes the Fool blackened his face and wore a calfskin over his shoulders, reminding us of the French *Sotties* and the
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Bastard's repeated taunt to the Archduke of Austria in King John, III, i. At Grenoside the Captain wore a cap of rabbitskin retaining the rabbit's head, and with the head and ears pointing forward. The Fool at Kirby Malzeard had a foxtail fixed to the back buckle of his trousers, and called attention to it by nonsense verse and antics. Inclination in The Trial of Treasure had a tail at his rear, while Iniquity in King Darius (1565) gave "a blowe with a foxe taye." Injury in the fragment Albion Knight also has a foxtail on his coat, though in the surviving part of the text he is nowhere called the Vice. The clown in the Escrick dance wore a jacket with different colored sleeves, odd stockings, and "a gay cap with a fox-tail hanging from the back of it."

It is possible also to trace a connection between the Vice and the popular mummers' play, though it is less direct. The common origin of the sword dance, the morris, and the mummers' play in pagan sacrificial or sacramental rituals has been often argued, most notably by Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough, and the central act in these fragmentary rites that have survived so long is found in the death and resurrection of one of the participants. In the sword dance this person is almost without exception the Fool who is master of ceremonies, or else his deputy or double. At Escrick, for example, it is the Fool's son, a person called Woody Garius who is the victim. He also wears a cap with a foxtail, and in the play that goes with this dance is explicitly said to resemble the Fool:

Clown: Here's Woody Garius I'd like to forgot
His beauty's so much like my own.

In the Plow Monday plays, such as those from Bassingham, Revesby, and Ampleforth, the Fool, besides being "caller" and master of ceremonies, is a major actor. In the Bassingham play, in the combined text given by Chambers, he is killed in a fight with St. George and revived by the doctor before he wins the Lady. In the Revesby play the Fool fights the Hobbyhorse and a "wild

17Ibid., p. 24.
worn” before being executed in the sword dance. When he is revived, he courts and wins the lady “Cicily.” At Ampoleforth the wooing comes first and leads to a symbolic rather than actual combat with the King. After this a bystander claimed to be the Fool’s son is killed and revived by the Fool after a number of fruitless attempts by the Doctor. As in the simple sword dance, it is the Fool (who is the leader of the team and the presenter), or his deputy or “son” who is killed in the Plow Monday plays.

It is most unusual to find the caller one of the combatants in the mummers’ play; what we do find, so frequently that it must be accepted as part of the regular pattern, is the assertion of the father-and-son relationship between the caller and the killed man. In the normalized text given by Chambers in *The English Folk Play* it appears thus:

Presenter: O cruel Christian, what hast thou done?
Thou hast wounded and slain my only son. (p. 8)

This is the same as the situation in many of the sword dances and Plow Monday plays, where for the original victim, who was Captain and Fool, a substitute has been found who is asserted to be the double or son of the leader.

Similarities of dress and equipment between the Vice and the Fool in the morris and sword dance and the apparent association in the popular mind of the sword-dance Fool with the killed and revived combatant of the mummers’ play who is the “son” of the presenter would not alone be sufficient to justify the conclusion that the vice plays of the sixteenth century have more than the remotest connection with the traditional mummers’ plays that have survived into our own day, even when we recognize that the Vice, like the Fool, was probably the leader of his team of actors. Both Chambers and Tiddy see the influence of the popular tradition on our early drama in such episodes as that of the Doctor and his Boy in the Croyton *Play of the Sacrament*, but there is more precise evidence than this. Verbal echoes are slight, but a type of verbal humor is common to both vice and mummer plays. It is the “incongruous juxtaposition of contradictories . . . purely verbal jesting without salt of mind. . . . The Folk at its worst,” as Chambers
sternly called it. The description applies without qualification to a good deal of the Vice's humor.

But in fyne, these three began to agree,
And knit them selves up in one trinity,
And after they loved like brother and brother,
For very love, they did kill one another.
And then they were buried, I doe well remember,
In Stawtons strawne hat, vii mile from December.
Where they had not lyen the space of a day,
But fower of those three, were thence run away.
The Constable came, with a backe on his bill,
And because they were gone, he did them kill.19

I have mentioned that it is common for the Vice to give an account of extraordinary travels. In the mummers' play it is the Doctor who has traveled the world, and he describes his journey on his first entrance in some such formula as

Italy, Pitaly, France and Spain
Round the world and back again.

In thirteen of the plays collected by Tiddy, the Doctor rides in on the back of one of the other characters. At Longborough the Doctor's horse is Beelzebub. When the Vice rides off on the Devil's back at the end of Like Will to Like, he announces Spain as his destination. In the Camborne play, the body of the Turkish Knight, who has been killed a second time after revival by the Doctor, is carried off by Beelzebub, just as the Devil carries off the body of Ill Report at the end of Susanna.

In the "education" play Misogonus the part of Cacurgus, the "Morio," shows the features I have deduced as typical of the Vice. In a cast list divided for ten to play he is doubled only with the Prologue and one small part; he is on the stage a good deal, often alone, and has special privilege with the audience. In one of his "turns" he pretends to be an Egyptian doctor and gives a recital of the cures he can perform and of the travels he has been on. He certainly wears motley, and as an Egyptian, whose father was a "natural Ethiopian," no doubt has a black face.20

19The Tide Tarrieth no Man, sig. B3r.
Accounts of the dress and appearance of mummers are scanty and unreliable; in the nineteenth century, when most of the plays were collected, the tendency seems to have been toward dressing the parts realistically, but some interesting details are preserved. One of the combatants in a version called *Galations*, printed in Edinburgh in 1835, is the Admiral of the Hairy Caps. At Thenford (according to Chambers) one of them wears a cap of hareskin or foxskin. The Turkish Knight—or his equivalent—frequently has a black face; so sometimes do other or all of the characters. Sometimes the Doctor or the Fool-presenter has a red face. In the Camborne play red ocher is smeared on the face of the Turkish Knight after he has been killed, an attempted realism that may be no more than a relic and rationalization of an earlier practice. A folklore figure with a reddened face is found in *Wily Beguiled* (printed in 1606) and in *Grim the Collier of Croydon* (not printed until 1662, but plainly belonging to an earlier period); both are called Robin Goodfellow, so it seems possible that Shakespeare's Puck would have been similarly decorated. This face-reddening habit may offer an explanation of an obscure passage in Thomas Tusser's *Five hundred pointes of good Husbandrie*:

His face made of brasse, like a vice in a game,
His gesture like Davus, whom Terence doth name.
His brag as Thersites, with elbowes abrode,
His cheekes in his furie, shall swell like a tode.\(^{21}\)

It probably explains:

In comes I old Oliver Cromwell and that you may suppose
For many nations I have conquered with my copper nose.\(^{22}\)

In John Redford's play *Wit and Science*, when Wit is dressed in the garments of Ignorance, he says when he sees himself:

- & I by the mas a foole alone
  deck't by goges bones lyke a very asse
  Ingnorance cote hooede eares/ye by the masse
  kokscome & all / I lak but a bable
  & as for this face / is abhominable
  as black as the devyll / god for his passion.\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\)Sixth ed. (London, 1580), *STC* 24380, sig. Q3^e.

\(^{22}\)Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play*, p. 81.

Ignorance himself is certainly intended as a rustic fool, for he speaks the "cham cholde" dialect. The episode of dressing the hero in the clothes of the fool occurs in all three "wit and science" plays, and in the latest—The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom—the fool is called "the Vice." These plays also provide an interesting parallel to the death and resurrection of the mummers' play, for the monster Tediousness is killed only at the second attempt; at the first—like the Red Cross Knight in The Faerie Queene—Wit is defeated and has to be revived from death.

There is evidence from another quarter for the existence in popular rituals of a figure analogous to the Vice. There is a report of the annual performance of plays at "parish wakes" in Shropshire—"at Churchstoke in May, at Shelve in July, and at Chirbury in October."²⁴ Four of the five plays reported seem to have had their origin in the Elizabethan theater; they are Mucidorus, Valentine and Orson, Doctor Forster, and St. George and the Fiery Dragon. The fifth, The Rigs of the Times, is perhaps related to a ballad. All recollection of a printed source—if it had ever existed—for these plays was lost. None of the manuscripts were known to the author of the report, writing about fifty years after the performances stopped, but the burning of two was recalled. When the plays were performed, a book keeper who acted as prompter and callboy sat on stage in full view of the audience, as in the accounts of the Cornish mystery plays. It was rare for more than two players to be on stage together. In all the plays "a kind of fool or jester" was a most important member of the company and "played all manner of mummings." He wore a paper mask and a hareskin cap with the ears up, and had bells at his knees. One passage of his wit, from The Rigs of the Times, is recorded:

(Jester enters, and stumbles over a man who is pretending to be drunk.)

Hello! What's here lying at length?
I will struck (sic) at him with main strength.
Some good lusty man's assistance I do lack

²⁴Sir Offley Wakeman, "Rustic Stage Plays in Shropshire," Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1st Ser., VII (Shrewsbury, 1884), 383. The bulk of the article is reprinted with further information in F. Jackson and C. S. Burne, Shropshire Folk-Lore (London, 1883), pp. 493 ff., which is the source for the account that follows.
To help me with this monster on my back.
I’ll take him to Cardiganshire if its fine weather,
and there I’ll bury him, nose and heels together. (p. 495)

It seems possible from the second line that this fool had something like the wooden sword of the Vice. In this one surviving passage are recalled both the popularity of dramatic pickaback rides and the activity of the Fool in the Ampleforth play, who raises laughter by stumbling over the body of the victim. Tiddy records a similar episode at Icomb in Gloucestershire. Falstaff, “that reverend vice,” “kills” the dead Hotspur and carries him off stage on his back at the end of 1 Henry IV.

From the account given of the Mucedorus play there is no doubt that it is related to the Elizabethan best seller; the identity of name and the episode of the bear are too much for coincidence. Whatever this relationship—whether the village play is a garbled version of the old stage play, or whether the Elizabethan Mucedorus itself belongs to some such tradition of popular romantic drama as C. R. Baskerville postulates, and the printed version is one furbished up for London performance—“the kind of fool or jester” who played “all manner of megrims” must have a popular origin; he can hardly be identified with Mouse in the printed play.

In The Medieval Stage Chambers quotes from the Churchwardens’ accounts for Chelmsford, Essex, a payment to “Willm. Hewet, for making the vices coote,” and in an inventory for the following year appear “ij vyces coate, and ij scalps, ij daggers (j dagger wanted).” At Bungay in Suffolk on the occasion of the “interlude in the churchyarde” in 1566, payment was made to “Kelsaye, the vyce, for his pastyme before the plaie, and after the playe, both daies, ijs.” There are also records of fools “by which is meant the same thing” (he says) at Heybridge and New Romney in Kent. Chambers appears to suggest that the Vice has been imported into the late mystery play from the “popular” farce or morality, but it is to be noted that there is no evidence of a part for a Vice in a cycle drama. Kelsaye was paid for “pastyme” before

29 Some Evidence for Early Romantic Plays in England; Modern Philology, XIV (1916), 229-251, 467-512.
20 II, 349, 343.
21 Ibid., 141.
and after, not in the course of the play. And is it certain that “the interlude in the churchyarde” was a cycle play at all? On the other hand, it seems probable that on festival days the favorite traditional entertainer of the folk—a character popular in a double sense—would almost certainly have put in an appearance. There is pictorial evidence that on the Continent he did. The Archduchess Isabella made a triumphal entry into Brussels on May 31, 1615, and Denis van Alsloot recorded the event in the painting known as “Isabella’s Triumph” now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The picture shows the triumphal procession of “pageants” moving through the city, each gorgeously decorated wagon carrying a tableau vivant of allegorical or scriptural significance, one of them representing the Nativity. In the right middle ground, threatening two urchins with a bladder on a stick is a figure in an animal mask with a hairy tail at his rump. Elsewhere are other grotesques, one with brightly colored trappings, diverting the spectators. In an illustrated monograph on this painting (London, 1947) James Laver calls these figures “devils,” but they are much less seriously evil than the devil shown in combat with St. Michael in Plate 5, who is armed with a two-pronged steel hook, not a bladder on a stick.

I have been able to find three plain examples of the use of the term “the Vice” in connection with folk games. The first is that already given from Tusser; the second is a gibe in the Marprelate pamphlet, Hay any Work for Cooper:

There is a neighbour of ours/ an honest priest/ who was sometimes (symple as he nowe standes) a vice in a playe for want of a better/ his name is Gliberie of Hawsteade in Essex/ he goes much to the pulpit. On a time/ I think it was the last Maie/ he went up with a full resolution/ to do his businesse with great commendations. But see the fortune of it. A boy in the Church/ hearing either the sommer Lord with his Maie game/ or Robin Hood with his Morrice daunce going by the Church/ out goes the boye. Good Gliberie/ though he were in the pulpit/ yet had a minde to his olde companions abroad (a company of merrie grigs you must think them to be/ as merie as a vice on a stage) seeing the boy going out/ finished his matter presently with John of Londons Amen, saying/ ha/ ye faith boie/ are they there/ then ha with thee/ & so came down & among them hee goes.28

28(London, 1589), STC 17456, pp. 3-4 (B3, r & v).
The third is from the middle of the seventeenth century, but from a remote part of the country. In the sessions record of Much Wenlock dated August 9, 1652, is a charge against a morris-dance party from Brosely, who created a disturbance in a neighboring parish. It contains this statement: "The leader of them or lord of misrule was William Homes junior; the vice called the Lord's son, was John Johnson, junior." That "the Lord's son" was a well-known title for the morris Fool is plain from a quibble in Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1601). After the dance the Fool collects money:

*Ed.* .... Hold Cousen hold. *He gives the Fool money.*

*Foole:* Thankes Cousen, when the Lord my Fathers *Audit* comes, weel repay you again. Your benevolence too sir.

*Mam.* What a Lords sonne become a begger? (sigs. A3v-A4r)

In the records of the Revel's Office can be found further evidence to support the suggestion of a popular origin for the Vice. The term is not found in Feuillerat's volume for the reign of Elizabeth, but in that for the reigns of Edward VI and Mary it occurs five times. In 1551 a payment was made to: "Nicolay Germany for one vyses dagger & a ladle with a bable pendante by hym garnished & deliverid to the Lord of mysrules foole... in decem-ber" (p. 73). Among the accounts for Christmas in the same year are details of three suits for "My lordes (Misrule's) vice or dyssarde" (p. 79). In the following Christmas season Edward Sherad was paid for making "a vices coote for John Smith" (p. 97). I have already quoted the description of the Vice's costume from the inventory of 1555; the fifth reference to the Vice comes from the same year and concerns the making over of one elaborate costume "to tow vyes Coetts for a playe" (p. 194). The entries for 1551, like the record from the Much Wenlock sessions a hundred years later, plainly make the Vice the companion of the Lord of Misrule and not a dramatic person at all. Although in the 1555 inventory the costume was for a "vyees to a playe," it was to go "after to the lorde mysruell" This provides further evidence of the association of the two figures and suggests also that, like the Fool and his double-substitute in the sword dance, they could be dressed

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29 *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, p. 480.
alike. It is plain, too, from other entries—such as the request for hobbyhorses in royal numbers (pp. 90, 91)—that the Christmas revels of the court of this time were still not far from their humble village parallels.

Furthermore it may be noted that at least three, and possibly all four, of the earliest vice plays to be preserved are plays for the Christmas season, and probably for the court. Love, Rerpublica, and Jack Juggler all contain plain references to the season of the year, and in The Weather is found a Vice who resembles more closely than any other the presenter of the mummers' play. The small boy's request for weather for snowballing at the end of the play may well be a hint of the season of performance.

The evidence presented here cannot, by its nature, be conclusive. That concerning the folk games, particularly, rests finally on conjecture about the nature and significance of these performances—even though the conjecture is now almost universally accepted. There is enough evidence, however, to establish a close connection between the Vice and a figure in popular rituals. The presence of a Vice (who was not a dramatic figure) at court in the train of the Lord of Misrule before any dramatic Vices known to us except Heywood's, and the fact that the majority of the early Vices belong to Christmas festival plays, suggest that the influence is from the popular tradition to the drama and not the other way. The use of the term "the Vice" for what were without any doubt popular figures makes this all the more likely.

If I am right in assuming that the Vice comes into the drama from the folk game and the Christmas entertainment, it is necessary to explain both his name and the ease with which the identification with the morality tempter was made. Although as late as Cambises the Vice could have a name that was not that of a moral fault, it is plain that by the early seventeenth century the "moral" meaning was already established. When Satan asks Pug what sort of a Vice he would like, he replies:

... why, any, Fraud;
Or Covetousnesse; or Lady Vanity;
Or old Iniquity . . .

\textsuperscript{30}The Devil is an Ass, in Ben Jonson, 165, ll. 41-43.
and by far the commonest of the moral terms used in these later references is Iniquity, although it occurs only once in the list of named Vices. If we reject the usual suggestion that the Vice was a morality figure before we find him named in Heywood's farces, then we must account for what has been argued as the common line of descent from figures like Detractio in *The Castle of Perseverance* or Mischief in *Mankind* to such named Vices as Avarice in *Respublica*, Iniquity in *King Darius*, or Idleness in *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*. If we examine those characters claimed as Vices or ancestors of the Vice, we shall find that they fall easily into two distinct classes: those wearing the fool's costume, and acting accordingly; and those who are comic representations of the person addicted to the grosser forms of worldly pleasure—to frequenting taverns and brothels, and to gambling. The latter type is the obvious choice for the tempter in the morality. He is a representative of the secular spirit, the enjoyment of present pleasure under the threat of extinction; he has a comic gusto and ebullience; and he seduces mankind from a proper concern with eternal values to passing gratifications. The figure in the fool's dress is conceived more purely in terms of allegory. Foolishness in the worldly sense is the inability to look after one's own interests; in the eyes of the church, man's greatest interest lay in the eternal salvation of his soul. Consequently, any act that endangered the soul was folly, and to persist in a state of mortal sin was the height of folly. The obvious symbol for man in this state was the domestic fool, often a half-wit, unable even to keep himself clean. By an easy extension, the "artificial" fool, who was as well aware of true values as other men, and yet chose to act as if he were not, represented a vicious persistence in evil in spite of the knowledge of good. In some plays fools of both types occur: Fancy, the "natural," appears first in *Magnificence*, to be followed later by his brother Folly. In *The Four Elements* are Ignorance and Sensual Appetite—the latter is plainly a fool, in spite of his name. In Redford's *Wit and Science*

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31 E.g., in *Richard III*, III.i.82-83; *Henry IV*, II.iv.499; in *Old Fortunatus* (Thomas Dekker, ed. Ernest Rhys, Mermaid Series [London, 1887]), we find:

Shadow: And you his brother Vice!

Andelocia: Most true, my little lean Iniquity. (p. 308)
ORIGIN OF THE VICE

Ignorance is a "natural," but when Wit is dressed in Ignorance's clothes he is called a "nagty vicious foole." Figures in the fool's dress who have been claimed as early Vices are Ignorance in the anonymous *Wit and Science*, Infidelity in Bale's *Three Laws*, and Folly in *Mundus et Infans*, as well as those in the plays already mentioned. With less assurance Mirth in *The Pride of Life* could be claimed as a figure of the same kind.

The more directly representational figures of the type of the riotous man are: Sensuality and Worldly Affection in Medwall's *Nature*, the name character in *Hickscorner*, Evil Counsell and Idleness in *John the Evangelist*, Sedition in Bale's *King Johan*, Iniquity in *Nice Wanton*, Riot in *The Interlude of Youth*, Hypocrisy in Weever's *Lusty Juventus*, and also, as far as can be discerned, Mischief in *Mankind*, and perhaps Detractio in *The Castle of Perseverance*.

There is good reason to suppose that all these plays just mentioned containing figures that have been claimed as Vices were written before 1553, the probable date of *Respublica*. In them the distinction between the two types—the realistic representation of riotous man and the allegorical fool-figure—is easy to draw. It is in *Respublica* that we find the two types for the first time combined together in one figure. This figure is called "the Vice" and goes by the name of a moral failing—avarice. He is the first Vice whose name carries this suggestion. It is to be assumed that Avarice wore a "Vice's coat"; if he did, he is the first character dressed as a fool who does not maintain the part of the fool in relation to all the other characters of the play. He is jester to the audience, he is a "ruffler" with his three confederates, and he is consistently Policy to Respublica. Although in Skelton's play Folly presents himself to Magnificence as Conceit, and is entrusted with responsibility, he maintains throughout the jester behavior—with which his assumed name is not incompatible. I would suggest that the combination of the riotous man and the fool-figure in one person in "Avarice, alias Pollicie, the vice of the plaie" is the starting point for the confusion of two distinct lines of development. Heywood's Vices were not evil; no tempter in any earlier morality that we know of is ever called "the Vice." Because of the obvious moral connotation of the term "the
Vice,” the application of this title—properly belonging to a popular entertainer—to a comic figure in a Christmas morality play easily stuck, and from being a pun quickly became the established usage. Because of this combination of the fool and the riotous man under the title of the Vice, the two types are often lumped together in discussions of the antecedents of the Vice without the distinction between them being clearly seen. Thus Eckhardt, putting more emphasis on the allegorical figure of the fool, insists that the Vice (in his definition) wore motley. Cushman, on the other hand, more aware of the representation of the riotous man, insists that he did not.

Nicholas Udall—if he was the author of Respublica—combined in his politico-moral play something of the character of the riotous man and the figure of the fool with its allegorical connection with sin. Knowing “the Vice” as the name of a popular fool in the train of the Christmas Lord of Misrule, he called Avarice “the vice of the plaie” either with a deliberate intention of punning or because the part of Avarice was to be played by the Christmas Vice—or perhaps for both reasons. Later playwrights took up the association, either consciously or in ignorance of the real origins of the Vice, and it became not uncommon to find the title “the Vice” applied to a buffoonish agent of evil in a morality play. But as long as the Vice remained a popular figure on the public stages, this was never a general practice, 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. Only when a sophisticated drama, in which there is no place for the Vice as such, has developed, do we find him consistently referred to by some such title as “Iniquity,” and even then the recollections of his activities have little suggestion of moral significance about them.

Finally, we must offer an alternative to “the obvious etymology” of the Vice’s title. Two suggestions have been made; first, that it comes from the Latin vice, in the place of, as do words like “vicar” or “viceroy.” This is the suggestion of John Upton,32 and though he

bases his case on the common assumption that the Vice is first and foremost a morality figure, which we have rejected, it might be thought to receive some support from the association of the Vice with "the Lord's son," the substitute victim of the folk game. This, however, seems unlikely. The earliest example of this absolute use of the word recorded by the OED (Vice sb. 7) is in 1597, and it does not appear to be at all common until a great deal later. A better suggestion, perhaps, is that made by Steevens: "This character was always acted in a mask; it probably had its name from the old French word Vis, for which they now use Visage, though they still retain it in vis à vis, which is, literally, face to face." This has the support of Chalmers and Flögel. It is probably not necessary to go to old French for the origin of the word, for according to OED it is common up to the fourteenth century in England in the sense of "face" or "visage." This explanation fits what we know of the face-blacking habits of the Vice and the folk fool, and is supported by a line in Magnificence. Folly, who wears the fool's dress, twits Crafty Conveyance: "... thou can play the fole without a vyser." The evidence is slight, but in view of the difficulty of accounting for the Vice by the usual "moral" explanation without ignoring—as Chambers pointed out—the bulk of the primary evidence, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that the Vice took his name from his mask or his painted face. The allegorical figure Vice in Dekker's Old Fortunatus enters "with a gilded face, and horns on her head; her garments long, painted before with silver half-moons. ... Behind her garments are painted with fools' faces and heads; and in the midst is written, 'Ha, Ha, He'" (p. 312).