RHETORICAL SUBVERSION IN THE
ENGLISH MORAL INTERLUDE

by

Douglas William Hayes

A dissertation submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of English
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Douglas William Hayes 2000
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-49881-6
Rhetorical Subversion in the English Moral Interlude

Doctor of Philosophy, 2000

Douglas William Hayes

Department of English, University of Toronto

My focus of study is the popular English moral interlude and later related plays, from *The Castle of Perseverance* (circa 1425) to the end of the Tudor period. I view these plays from a perspective that centers on the use of rhetoric as a means of persuasion, and the ways in which that means of persuasion is placed in the service of good and evil ends—often simultaneously. The ambivalent and often hilarious words of a Vice figure are supposed to lure the audience into complicity with sin, and they do their job well in many moral plays and their later counterparts. The attraction of these characters goes beyond the entrapment of other characters and the audience. They often deliberately use rhetorical tropes and figures to further their own ends, and thereby undermine any notions of the inherent stability of language as a truth-bearing medium. The good characters, on the other hand, generally do not have enough of a dramatic presence to counteract the effects of the Vice figures upon the audience even though the static nature of the good characters is precisely what this moral drama tries to emphasize. The moral interlude communicates 'good' moral doctrine, but its dramatic structure would seem to make it a theatre of subversion. Although the relationship between the Vice and the audience has been a mainstay of studies of medieval and Tudor drama for a generation, the subversive nature and methodology of the Vice have not been examined in any detail. I make such an examination the basis of my study by tracking this figure from his appearance as Backbiter in *The Castle of Perseverance* and the N-Town plays, through some of his manifestations in the Vices of *Mankind*, Nichol Newfangle from Fulwell's *Like*
Will to Like, and Ambidexter from Preston’s Cambises, to his role as
Mephistophilis in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, and culminating with an
investigation of Shakespeare’s Falstaff in I Henry IV and Iago in Othello. I
attempt to recover those aspects of performance that support rhetorical
subversion in tandem with an examination of the plays as sites of eloquence.
Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those organizations who generously supplied the funding that made the research for and writing of this dissertation possible: the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto, for University of Toronto Open Fellowships during the 1994-95, 1995-96, and 1997-98 years; the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, for Ontario Graduate Scholarships in 1996-97 and 1998-99; and the Department of English at the University of Toronto for a Viola Whitney Pratt Memorial Scholarship in English for 1999.

Thanks are also due to Professor David N. Klausner, my supervisor, for his sustained guidance, and to Professor Alexandra F. Johnston and Professor David Townsend for their insightful commentary at every stage. Professor J. A. B. Somerset of the University of Western Ontario undertook his role as external examiner with generosity and substantial critical acuity, and Professor Michael Dixon contributed his considerable experience as a rhetorician. Professor Joanna Dutka lent critical, moral, and practical support to this project from start to finish. Once again, my thanks to all.

To my parents, Calvin and Donna Hayes, and to my spouse’s parents, Dan and Eleanor Wong, I owe a debt of gratitude that words are insufficient to repay. Perhaps an undertaking of this sort is best measured in the countless accommodations, large and small, financial and personal, that one’s family makes to allow one to complete it. Chow Lien-Hung, my grandmother-in-law, was generous both with words of encouragement and with financial support. Finally, my partner, Angie Wong-Hayes, deserves my greatest thanks for her scholarly judgement and unstinting generosity of spirit.
Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgments iv
Introduction 1
1. Backbiter 9
2. *Mankind* 43
3. Nichol Newfangle 71
4. Ambidexter 89
5. Mephistophilis 116
6. Falstaff and Iago 143
Conclusion 173
Works Consulted 177
Introduction

My focus of study is the popular English moral interlude and later related drama, from *The Castle of Perseverance* (circa 1425) through to the end of the Tudor period. I view these plays from a perspective that centers on the use of rhetoric as a means of persuasion, and the ways in which that means of persuasion is placed in the service of 'good' and 'evil' ends--often simultaneously. Characters that subvert the sanctioned uses of rhetoric can be seen to be more attractive to an audience than the static, morally correct 'good' characters; the increasing incidence and formal naming of the Vice figure in plays throughout the 1500s can be interpreted as evidence of this attraction on the parts of the original spectators. The ambivalent and often hilarious words of a Vice figure are supposed to lure the audience into complicity with sin, and they do their job very well in many moral plays and their later counterparts. Indeed, they seem to work too well. The attraction of these characters goes beyond the entrapment of other characters and the audience. They often deliberately use rhetorical tropes and figures to further their own ends, and thereby undermine any notions of the inherent stability of language as a truth-bearing medium. They undermine the officially sanctioned norm of the period, that is, that "wordes moote be cosyn to the dede," and present subversive rhetoric to the audience as an alternative to that norm. The 'good' characters, on the other hand, generally do not have enough of a dramatic presence to counteract the effects of the Vice figures upon the audience even though the static nature of the 'good' characters is precisely what this ostensibly moral drama tries to emphasize. God's word may be unchanging, but it is often upstaged by what is supposed to be evil. The moral interlude communicates 'good' moral doctrine, but its very dramatic structure would seem to make it a theatre of subversion. I intend to try to
demonstrate the extent to which this is the case. Although the relationship between the Vice and the audience has been a mainstay of studies of medieval and Tudor drama for a generation, the subversive nature and methodology of the Vice have not been examined in any detail. I make such an examination the basis of my study by tracking this rhetoricized and rhetoricizing figure from his appearance as Backbiter in *The Castle of Perseverance* and the N-Town plays, through his various manifestations as a corrupter in the Vices of *Mankind*, Nichol Newfangle from Fulwell's *Like Will to Like*, and Ambidexter from *Cambises*, to his role as the persuasive Mephistophilis in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and culminating with an investigation of the extent to which he inheres in the language of Shakespeare's Falstaff and Iago. My approach is both rhetorical and, to a limited extent, dramaturgical; I recover those aspects of performance that support rhetorical subversion in tandem with an examination of the plays as sites of eloquence.

Much like social satire as a broadly defined genre in our own time, these plays pick up on popular trends, discourses, ultimately, what we would call ideology, and transform that in their representations. Consequently, I avoid the overly rigid designations of 'morality play,' 'biblical drama,' 'interlude,' 'history play' and 'tragedy' because, for my purposes, these plays as a whole exhibit more similarities than differences.¹ In each case, the morally ordered play-world, no matter whether it is populated with dramatically realized allegorical abstractions, biblical personages, fictional characters or historical figures...

women and men, is disrupted by a figure or figures who in part stand outside that morally ordered world. What this suggests is not only a deep and abiding anxiety over the moral ambiguity of rhetoric, but also a continuum of dramatic representation that finds its center in the deliberately ambivalent deployment of language. The Vice figure and his descendants become the primary sites where all this is enacted. One cannot deal with the Vice figure without addressing his ambivalence, and one cannot address his ambivalence without recourse to his language, the primary means whereby he is constituted and by which he acts.

Theorizing ambivalence is complicated not only by the nature of the concept, but also by the slipperiness of the term itself. Coined in the early part of the twentieth century in psychology to denote, according to the OED, "the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing," its meaning has expanded to the extent that it is now employed by a number of disciplines, including literary study, where it may be broadly defined as "a balance or combination or coexistence of opposites; oscillation, fluctuation, variability." Although neither of these definitions fully captures the sense in which I employ the term here, both can be usefully applied to form an accurate picture of the Vice figure and his effects. The Vice is not a psychological entity, that is, a person, or even a 'realistic' character; nevertheless, he finds his being in the coexistence of contradictions, be they seriousness and humor, the service of evil and (ironically) good, moral fluidity and stasis. This contradictory being finds dramatic expression in oratorical rhetoric, and the effects he produces in the audience for whom he performs are likewise a "combination or coexistence of opposites," be those effects attraction and repulsion, laughter and disgust, complicity and disengagement, credulity and disbelief. I argue that these
effects are simultaneous, and it is in that simultaneity that I read the potential for subversion.

Subversion is, itself, a potentially difficult idea to communicate. Its literal meaning, from the Latin *subvertere*, "to turn under," does little of the work of transmitting the theoretical concept. However, one of the seven definitions that the *OED* offers for "subvert" is helpful: "to disturb (the mind, soul); to overturn, overthrow (a condition or order of things, a principle, law, etc.)." This is a useful definition not just for its focus on the personal in its reference to minds and souls, but also for its recognition of the potential effects of subversion rather than just its actual effects. Subversion can be a 'disturbance' as often as it can be an 'overturning.' What this means is that the political order, the moral order, the intellectual order of a society need not be in revolution for subversion to take place. Rather, it is in the potential for revolution, even in the occurrence of revolt as a conceptual possibility, that subversion finds expression. This is a vitally important distinction to make in order to correctly read the Vice figures without needlessly grounding them in the moral topography of the genres from which they emerge and with which they are so inextricably bound up.

Useful and relatively comprehensive surveys of the Vice figure, his predecessors, and his descendants do exist, and I deal with some of that critical work in the body of my study. However, no examination of the culmination of dramatic and linguistic features that we call a Vice figure has been extensively investigated from the vantage-point of the use of

---

eloquence. This is a particularly glaring gap because, as I demonstrate, much of the effect of the Vice figure depends on his use of language as a morally moldable medium of communication. The subversion of the moral order of the play-world, no matter how momentary that subversion may be, relies on it. Beyond all else, the Vice figures in these plays serve as an index of the radical proximity of evil to good. Their use of rhetoric, a system itself imbued with ambivalence, thus becomes the most effective means of communicating that radical proximity. All of their other 'Vice characteristics,' for example, their formalized dramatic functions (such as directly addressing the audience) become tied to their use of rhetoric which in turn acts as a 'master code' for interpreting their characteristic ambivalence.

All of the figures examined here share a dramatic heritage that gives them a family resemblance to one another and strengthens their primary similarity in their subversion through language. All of these figures exhibit a vigorous physical energy that is the gestural parallel to their linguistic activity. All avoid serious punishment or death for their mis-sayings; they remain vital when physically threatened. All have a dramatic presence, again, enacted primarily by means of rhetoric, that derives from their ability to have one-on-one conversations with the audience; when they are on stage, all eyes are on them. These similarities are bolstered by and in turn support the shared rhetorical fluency that is at the heart of their attraction; they also serve to form a continuum of dramatic tradition.

Consequently, the distinctions that have been drawn between Vice figures, devils, braggarts, machiavells, and any of various figures from the continental dramatic tradition have little bearing on my argument. A number

---

of studies have been devoted to these distinctions over the course of the last century; none of these studies has engaged extensively with the use of language and its effects, and so none of them sustains observations about the remarkable degree of similarity these figures display in this respect. This is not to say that there are no important differences between these figures or that drawing such distinctions is a waste of critical effort; rather, it means that the study of such differences lies outside the scope of an examination that focuses on a particular similarity.

Ultimately, my goal in this study is to demonstrate the ideological malleability of rhetoric that is expressed in these plays. The Vice figure is the locus primus of that malleability, and his rhetorical maneuvers, regardless of their function within a homiletic structure, emphasize attitudes concerning the moral instability of language. In this sense, there is no Darwinian paradigm of evolution to be found here; rather, the Vice figures in each of these plays constitute interestingly particularized manifestations of the same general phenomenon from its first full appearance in Backbiter to its expression some two hundred years later in Shakespeare's Falstaff and Iago.

Rhetorical subversion takes on two basic forms in these plays. On the one hand, it gives rise to a Vice who manifests an unmotivated evil that attacks all inhabitants of the play-world regardless of their moral standing. Backbiter and Raise Slander, Mephastophilis, and Iago belong in this camp. On the other hand, the subversive arts of language become the arts of verbal play. No one

---

inside the play-world--or out in the audience, for that matter--is immune to attack here either, but the overturning of morality is achieved not so much by means of unmitigated evil as it is by what is finally sympathetic laughter. The Vices of Mankind, Nichol Newfangle, Ambidexter, and Falstaff belong here. However, these general distinctions are not rigidly upheld; Mephostophilis is dryly funny at moments and Nichol Newfangle and the Vices from Mankind are far from harmless. Both forms of subversion are to be found in the Vice's rhetorical arsenal.

Part of my analysis of rhetorical subversion in some of these plays centers on what may, at first sight, seem to have little to do with it: the presence of same-sex desire or sodomy as an attribute of the Vice figure and a tool for subversion. In fact, I want to argue that the concept of sodomy functions as a subset of the rhetorical subversion employed by Vice figures. As Jonathan Dollimore points out in his ground-breaking contribution to queer theory, "[t]he use of [rhetorical forms], especially their ironic use, can question (for example) gender hierarchies and teleological legitimations of the social order."5 Sodomy becomes the physical manifestation of the linguistic insubordination in the Vice figure and heightens the tension over the potential for subversion. Although studies of sodomy and its implications have been made for a number of the plays I examine here, I have chosen to discuss it only when it most pertinently intersects with the rhetorical subversion that is the primary focus of my analysis.

The state of rhetorical study in England during the period of each of the plays examined is briefly outlined at the beginning of each chapter, and there is no need to go into minute detail here. In general, classical--Roman--

rhetoric provides the continuity in this whole study because, although there was an explosion of vernacular rhetorical and logical treatises published in the sixteenth century, Roman rhetoric never lost its primary influence. Consequently, the scope of the arts of language broadens as my study progresses but does not alter beyond recognition; the rhetorical theory of the anonymous author of *The Castle of Perseverance* is the rhetorical theory of Shakespeare.

Although some of the figures under examination here have been investigated extensively by scholars of early theatre, they are, on the whole, an underappreciated and frequently misunderstood component of English popular and dramatic culture. Their language and the action that results from it drives each of these plays to their inevitable conclusions, even when, as is the case with Backbiter in *The Castle of Perseverance*, their part in the larger drama is comparatively small. As I intend to show, it is not primarily the quantity but rather the quality of their eloquence that has the most devastatingly destabilizing effects on the moral order of their plays. It is to that demonstration that I now turn.
Chapter 1: Backbiter

I want to begin this study by looking at the development of one proto-Vice figure, Backbiter, as he appears in two East Anglian playtexts from the fifteenth century. *The Castle of Perseverance* and the N-Town “Trial of Joseph and Mary” share this character in common, and although his performances in the two plays are not the same, his functions derive from the same potentialities that are enlivened by rhetoric. I will start by discussing the earlier *Castle of Perseverance* and follow with a discussion of the N-Town “Trial” play in an effort to show how the subversive quality of Backbiter’s rhetoric--indeed, Backbiter as rhetoric--impacts on the operations of the plays.

Although his role in *The Castle of Perseverance* (circa 1425) has not seemed significant to many previous students of the morality tradition, Backbiter (referred to as Detractio in the speech-headings and as Flibbertigibbet at lines 775, 1724, and 1733) occupies a complex position in this play. Backbiter is not simply a ‘bad’ figure in the play who leads Mankind away from the path of righteousness and into sin in the same way that the Bad Angel and Covetousness do; on the contrary, this messenger of the World, the relative brevity of his appearances notwithstanding, manages to ‘serve’ Mankind by bringing him to Covetousness--and hence sin--and to subvert the

---

1 All line numbers refer to *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles (Oxford: EETS, 1969). In fact, Backbiter’s 155 lines comprise about 4.25% of the play, and this may provide a partial explanation for his being almost entirely overlooked by scholars working on *The Castle of Perseverance* and on the development of the Vice figure. Covetousness, for example, is identified as the primary Vice of the play in Bernard Spivack’s *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia UP, 1958) 143. Backbiter is correctly identified as a forerunner of the Vice in Peter Happé’s “The Vice: A Checklist and An Annotated Bibliography,” *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 22 (1979): 17-35 but loses this distinction to Pride and Wrath in Nan Morelli-White’s “Evolution of the Vice Character from Medieval Through Restoration Drama,” diss., Florida State U, 1990.
authority of his evil superiors by pitting them against each other, pulling it all off without suffering punishment. Backbiter crosses—transgresses—boundaries between what is ostensibly good and evil in the play and renders those boundaries susceptible to ambivalence in the process. More is at stake here than comic appeal. The medium Backbiter uses and, indeed, embodies allegorically and dramatically, to transgress these boundaries is language, and an examination of Backbiter's language in *The Castle of Perseverance* demonstrates the extent to which he represents the coalescence of rhetorical views on detraction and the uses of rhetoric in general in order to present the audience with a conception of evil that is at once highly rhetoricized and markedly ambivalent and, further, the extent to which this rhetorical ambivalence is an index of Backbiter's moral positioning as a representative of evil in the play who suffers no retribution for his wrongdoing.\(^2\) A discussion of some of the rhetorical background behind Backbiter will be followed by a consideration of his allegorical and rhetorical representation in the play as evidenced by his relationship with the audience, with Mankind,

\(^2\)It should be pointed out that work has been done on the language in *The Castle of Perseverance* and that some of it does attempt to read the play through medieval rhetorical traditions. See Michael R. Kelly, "Fifteenth-Century Flamboyant Style and *The Castle of Perseverance,*" *Comparative Drama* 6 (1972): 14-27 for an attempt to contextualize the play as an expression of medieval rhetorical principles and Michael T. Peterson, "*Fragmina Verborum:* The Vices' Use of Language in the Macro Plays," *Florilegium* 9 (1987): 155-67 and Joerg O. Fichte, "The Presentation of Sin as Verbal Action in the Moral Interludes," *Anglia* 103 (1985): 26-47 for two especially pertinent examples that unfortunately fail to deal with Backbiter or with rhetorical ambivalence. For a recent discussion of the influence of rhetoric on medieval drama in general (drawing primarily on French texts) see Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992). Such an application of rhetorical principles to medieval dramatic texts is supported in Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge, 1979) 71, where Curtius asserts that antiquity (and, as inheritor of the ancient tradition, the medieval period) "had rhetoric for a general theory of literature."
and with the 'bad' figures.\textsuperscript{3} The shifting image of a complex and polymorphous realization of a rhetorical abstraction emerges from such an examination, and it is to that study that I now turn.

The first thing that needs to be established by way of background is a sense of the parts of rhetoric as they would have been understood by an educated medieval English audience. Two classical texts, the anonymous \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} and Cicero's \textit{De inventione}, are especially good sources to draw upon for this summary because they were widely known in England during the medieval period.\textsuperscript{4} An excerpt from \textit{De inventione}, for example, provides such an encapsulation of rhetoric:

\begin{quote}
partes autem eae quas plerique dixerunt.

inventio,

dispositio, elocutio, memoria, pronuntiatio. Inventio

est excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{3}I hesitate to refer to the other representatives of evil in the play as Vice figures not only because their primary significance as allegorical representations of theological concepts (for example, Pride and Wrath) or abstractions (the World and Flesh) is lost in such a naming or because there is no extant evidence of any figures being referred to as Vices in English plays before the early sixteenth century but also because it is Backbiter who most accurately conforms to the identifiable characteristics of the named Vice figures that appear in extant plays towards the end of the 1520s. See Happé, "The Vice" 17-23 for a brief discussion of the evidence relating to the evolution of the Vice figure and for a listing of these Vices, named and unnamed, and compare David Bevington, \textit{From "Mankind" to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama in Tudor England} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1962) esp. 121-23 for a more detailed examination of the development of the Vice tradition.

causam probabilem reddant; dispositio est rerum inventarum in ordinem distributio; elocutio est idoneorum verborum ad inventionem accomodatio; memoria est tirma animi rerum ac verborum perceptio; pronuntiatio est ex rerum et verborum dignitate vocis et corporis moderatio.5

All the main parts of rhetoric as they were understood by medieval English rhetoricians are described in this passage.6 Used as a template for constructing eloquent expressions designed to persuade an audience, this rhetorical framework is general enough to be deployed in a wide range of situations. Such general applicability did not go unexamined, as a look at an explicitly Christian conception of rhetoric will show.

The next place to take a discussion of the rhetorical background behind Backbiter lies in Augustine's De doctrina Christiana.7 This important work was widely copied throughout the middle ages and would almost certainly have

5[The parts of it, as most authorities have stated, are Invention, Arrangement, Expression, Memory, Delivery. Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style.] Cicero, de Inventione, de Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell, (London: Heinemann, 1960) 18-21.

6Of course, each of these parts can be further subdivided; see, for example, Book IV of Rhetorica ad Herennium, ed. and trans. Harry Caplan, (London: Heinemann, 1989) 228-411, where elocutio (style or expression) is divided into forty-five figures of speech and nineteen figures of thought. Murphy in Medieval Latin, 630, points out that this section was so popular that "book IV containing the figures was frequently circulated in the Middle Ages as a separate publication."

7Cf. Peterson, 157-59 where rhetoric in the Macro Plays is also read from an Augustinian perspective, albeit with an interpretation that sees Augustine as rejecting rhetorical study.
been available to the author of *The Castle of Perseverance*.\(^8\) This "metarhetoric," as James J. Murphy calls it, draws on the Roman rhetorical tradition set out in *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and places that tradition into an overtly Christian context.\(^9\) It is at the beginning of Book IV of this "defense of Ciceronian rhetoric"\(^10\) that Augustine, writing about the reasons for cultivating rhetorical competence, mentions the general applicability of the discipline that is a key to understanding Backbiter's representation:

*Cum ergo sit in medio posita facultas eloquii, quae ad persuadenda seu praevia seu recta uael plurimum, cur non bonorum studio comparatur, ut uilitet ueritati, si eam mali ad obtainendas peruersas uanasque causas in usus iniquitatis et erroris usurpant?\(^11\)

---

\(^8\)See *Macro Plays*, xi for an analysis that establishes the play as East Anglian in origin and James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974) 47ff. for evidence of the importance and dissemination of *De doctrina Christiana* in the middle ages.


\(^10\)Murphy, *Rhetoric* 286.

The interesting thing about this excerpt is the anxiety it communicates over the ambivalence of rhetoric itself. Couched in this call to rhetorical arms is a recognition that the art of eloquence can be plied for good and/or evil ends and that its effectiveness is not diminished in either case. Rhetoric, for Augustine, is a useful tool and a dangerous weapon at the same time. This observation, itself a small part of the argument of Book IV, is important because it firmly establishes an attitude towards rhetorical practice that imparts a polymorphous quality to language that is just as susceptible to deployment as a web of shifting sites of evil as it is of acting as a stable expression of Christian theology.12

This concept of rhetorical ambivalence is linked to the last important element behind Backbiter's representation: the tradition of the "sins of the tongue" of which backbiting or detractio forms a part.13 Every bit as

12 I do not mean to imply here that Augustine sees the evil use of rhetoric in an anachronistically postmodern sense as a fractured locus of power but neither do I intend to suggest a straightforwardly lateral binary model. See St. Augustine, De libero arbitrio, ed. W. M. Green, in Aurelii Augustini Opera (Turnholt: Brepols, 1970) I. ii. 3 where his own words explain his view best: "male facere nihil est nisi a disciplinara deviare" [to do evil is nothing but to deviate from discipline] (translation mine). "Nihil" [nothing] is a loaded term here; compare Augustine's discussion of evil as nothingness or an absence of good in City of God, Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols. with English trans. by Philip Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966) XIV. 13. That is, evil is essentially an absence, a void, but this absence does not preclude activity for Augustine. Evil can have no substance for him and still be a dangerously effective series of actions, or, I would add, words. In fact, it is precisely this ambivalent quality of evil that links it to rhetoric most effectively and renders eloquence adaptable to a representation and furtherance of that 'empty action' that Augustine sees as evil.

13 See The Book of the Vices and Virtues, ed. W. Nelson Francis (London: EETS, 1942) 54-68 for a listing of these sins in the Midland dialect that can be dated roughly from the fourteenth century. This book is but one of nine extant English translations of the French original, the Somme le Roi of Lorenso d'Orléans, and is cited here due to its temporal and linguistic proximity to The Castle of Perseverance. Compare G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961) esp. 450-58 for a discussion of the wide dissemination of the concept of the sins of the tongue with a special emphasis on backbiting and Edwin D. Craun, Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker (New York:
technically complex as the Ciceronian rhetorical framework known to medieval rhetoricians, these sins of the tongue are likened to a tree by the author of *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and are further subdivided into ten “branches”:

But we wole sette ten chef braunches pat comep of pis tree of wikkedede tonge: ydely. auantyng. losengerie. apeyre a man bihynde hym. pat is bakbityng. lesynges. forsweynges. struynges. grucchynges. reellynges. blasphemye. pat is speke euele of God.\(^1\)

This system looks like a detailed framework for the identification and classification of evil uses of rhetoric. It can be read as an attempt to delimit the ambivalent quality of rhetoric by mapping the various kinds of ‘deviation from discipline’ that evil eloquence constitutes. This is not to say that it comprises a kind of anti-rhetoric that is in binary opposition to the Ciceronian tradition as it was understood in the middle ages. Rather, it inheres within the very heart of the ambivalence of that tradition; it is rhetoric used for evil ends. Backbiter, in name and in representation, comes directly from this complex conceptual web, and it is to him that I now turn my attention.

Backbiter enacts this conceptual web of rhetoric not just in his speeches but in his name, or, rather, names, as well. When this dramatized allegorical/rhetorical abstraction first appears in *The Castle of Perseverance* at line 647 as the World’s ‘messenger’ he tells the audience his name is “Bacbytere” (659). This is significant because his name indicates that he is a

\(^1\) *Vices*, 55. These ten “branches” are then subdivided further into a series of kinds (from two to seven in number depending on the “branch” being discussed) that detail the “sins of the tongue” quite specifically.
performer of actions as well as a dramatized representation of an abstraction, that is backbiting.\textsuperscript{15} His name tells the audience that he stands for sins of the tongue and commits them as well. This appears to be straightforward enough until one notices that in the Latin speech headings that are used throughout \textit{The Castle of Perseverance}. Backbiter is referred to as "Detraccio" (e.g. 647 s.h.). \textit{Detractio}, or detraction, is a rhetorical abstraction that inheres within the framework of the sins of the tongue (and, by implication, within the framework of Ciceronian rhetoric), and can be translated into English as 'backbiting'. Although it is true that this designation would not be available to an audience viewing a performance of the play and that the Latin speech headings are a convention of the manuscript, it is nevertheless the case that at some level of textual production someone saw Backbiter as susceptible of being read as a dramatized perpetrator of sins of the tongue and as a rhetoricized abstraction at the same time and registered that reading consistently in the form of the Latin speech heading. To complicate matters further, he is also referred to by a third name at lines 775, 1724, and 1733: "Flypergebet" or 'Flibbertigibbet' in modern English. One of the meanings for this Middle English word, an "onomatopoeic representation of unmeaning chatter," is a "chattering or gossiping person" (\textit{OED}).\textsuperscript{16} Thus, Backbiter's names classify him not only as a performer of verbal action and as a representative of

\textsuperscript{15}Backbiter is referred to in English as "Bakbytyngge" only three times: once by the World at line 773, once by the Good Angel at line 794 and, interestingly, once by Backbiter himself at line 777 where he refers to himself in the third person as "Bakbytyngge and Detraction" thereby using two of his names at once in the abstract and adding to the ambivalence surrounding the allegorical representation of this figure at the level of naming.

\textsuperscript{16}However, the \textit{OED} begins its listing of occurrences of this word in documents starting in the year 1549. Compare the \textit{Middle English Dictionary} where the word is defined as "a chatterer" and lines 779 and 1727 from \textit{The Castle of Perseverance} are quoted as evidence of usage.
ordered rhetorical abstraction but also as the embodiment of rhetorical action that deviates from discipline and means—in a loaded sense—nothing. The most important point to take from these observations is that these three names are not entirely synonyms for each other and that they work to represent Backbiter in a shifting and non-symmetrical fashion that highlights his simultaneous inheritance within superficially differentiated sites of rhetorical power. All of this ambivalence takes place at the level of Backbiter’s name; it is in his speeches that this polymorphous figure appears at his most rhetorically and morally ambivalent.

Backbiter’s opening lines, delivered directly to the audience, function dramatically as a means of identifying and contextualizing him as a physical presence in a production of a play and as a means of attracting the attention of the audience. However, a closer examination with some of the rhetorical background outlined above kept in mind reveals a complexity that extends beyond dramatic utility:

All pyngys I crye agayn pe pes
To knyt and knaue. pis is my kende.

3a. dyngne dukys on her des
In byttyr balys I hem bynde.
Cryinge and care. chydynge and ches
And sad sorwe to hem I sende.

3a. lowde lesyngys lacchyd in les.
Of talys vntrewe is al my mende.

Mannys bane abowtyn I bere.
I wyl pat ge wetyn. all po pat ben here.

17That is, nothing in the Augustinian sense of the term where evil is the absence of goodness and discipline is equated with God.
For I am knowyn fer and nere
I am þe Werldys messengere.

My name is Bacbytere. (647-59)

This introduction operates at a number of levels. Backbiter's opening assertion that he cries "agayn þe pes" (647) functions not only as a boisterous line that can be delivered loudly and thus serve as a dramaturgical call to attention, but also as an example of one of the five subdivisions of the sin of the tongue known as "vaunting," that is, the boasting of accomplishments where people "blepely rehersen here deedes and here douztenesses."¹⁸ This boasting is maintained with Backbiter's claim to bind "dyngne dukys on her des" (649) in "byttr balys" (650) and in his insistence that he is "knowyn fer and nere" (657), and all of this is marshaled by way of an introduction to the audience.¹⁹ This is not the only sin of the tongue mentioned in this opening speech: the sin of "lesynge"²⁰ (lying) is mentioned five times at lines 653-54, 662, 670, 680, and 685; the sin of "losengerie"²¹ (flattery) is evoked at line 669; "stryyung"²² (strife) surfaces at lines 675 and 689; and, not surprisingly,

¹⁸*Vices,* 56.

¹⁹It is true that Backbiter's boasting here also places him firmly within a tradition deriving from the cycle plays of 'bad' figures using elaborate and boastful language. See Alexandra F. Johnston, "At the still point of the turning world: Augustinian roots of medieval dramaturgy," *European Medieval Drama* 2 (1998): 5-25 for the argument that this boasting tradition is linked to Augustinian notions of sound as inherently worldly and therefore removed from the tranquillity and 'silence' of God. It also ties in--perhaps most pointedly in Backbiter's case--to the Augustinian anxiety over the susceptibility of rhetoric to evil use and the ambivalent characterization of evil as a substanceless activity.

²⁰*Vices,* 60.

²¹*Vices,* 57.

²²*Vices,* 63.
Backbiting is referred to at line 664 in Backbiter's assertion that it is his nature to "speke fayre befor and fowle behynde." This is a veritable *tour de force* of sins of the tongue to pack into a speech of only fifty-one lines and Backbiter embodies them all for the audience.

The opening speech at line 647 is not the only point in *The Castle of Perseverance* where Backbiter is obviously addressing the audience. The boasting lines he delivers as he leaves the Bad Angel also employ the sins of the tongue as a structural framework but add an element not present in his first speech:

\[
\text{I make men masyd and mad}
\]
\[
\text{And euery man to kyllyn odyr}
\]
\[
\text{Wyth a sory chere.}
\]
\[
\text{I am glad. be Seynt Jamys of Galys.}
\]
\[
\text{Of schrewdnes to tellyn talys}
\]
\[
\text{Bopyn in Ingelond and in Walys.}
\]
\[
\text{And feyth I have many a fere. (1739-45)}
\]

Backbiter employs rhetorical strategies that move him closer in moral proximity to the audience here. Swearing by "Seynt Jamys of Galys" (1742) may be a sin of the tongue but it is also the language of the audience and implicitly moves Backbiter closer to them. The references to "Ingelond" and "Walys" (1744) and to having "many a fere" (1745) or companion in those regions also moves Backbiter closer to the audience by identifying them as friends of his and thus verbal sinners. This 'friendly' tone is maintained in subsequent addresses to the audience, as at line 1778-79 where he exclaims

---

23 About 84 (54.2%) of Backbiter's lines seem to be directed at the audience.

24 *Vices*, 61.
"3a. for God, pis was wel goo./\Prs to werke wyth bakbytynge" or at line 1823: "Now, be God, pis is good game!" The fact that Backbiter is plying his craft on the other representatives of evil in the play highlights the moral ambivalence that this language communicates and makes the audience complicit with that ambivalence. He confides in them: "[i]f I had lost my name,/I vow to God it were gret del" (1825-26) and in so doing draws the audience into his efforts to cause internal conflict among the other evil figures. He tells the audience he makes "euyer man to kyllyn odor" (1739) and still manages to laugh with them. It is his rhetorical representation that allows him to speak "fayre" and "fowle" (664) simultaneously.25

The impact of these speeches upon the audience is powerful and takes any examination of its effects to the heart of the ambivalence it creates. On the one hand, Backbiter’s deployment of clearly identifiable sins of the tongue signals his innate evil and provides the audience with a dramatized example of rhetoric used for sinful ends. He is certainly honest enough about his intent towards the audience: "I schape zone boyis to schame and schonde" (677). He cannot help appearing to be evil when viewed from this perspective. This perspective, on the other hand, cannot hold. The problem lies in Backbiter’s ‘honesty’, that is, his rhetorical clarity. The audience can recognize the sins of the tongue in Backbiter’s speech, thereby identifying an ‘evil’ use of rhetoric, and still lend credence to the statement. Thus, Backbiter can claim to

25See Peterson, 165, n. 2 for a reading that links the folk tradition and notions of the carnivalesque to the relationships between Vice figures and the audience. Compare Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. H. Isowolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) for a full discussion of these ideas. The main problem with placing too much emphasis on the folk tradition and concept of the carnivalesque that Bakhtin outlines lies in the fact that most of the book draws on reported rather than documented traditions from France that are in danger of being culturally and temporally inappropriate to a study of early English drama.
be "Mannys bane" (655) as part of a boast that is identifiably a sin of the
tongue and the audience can understand that while believing Backbiter to be
"Mannys bane" indeed. This is the case because the inherently ambivalent
faculta eloquii (the faculties of eloquence), to use Augustine's words quoted
above, are available to Backbiter even through the sins of the tongue. In
Inventio, the discovery of plausible arguments to render the speaker
believable in the terms prescribed by Ciceronian rhetoric, is satisfied.
Elocutio, or expression, is also answered in the fitting of the language of the
sins of the tongue to Backbiter's self-representation. Dispositio
(arrangement) is discovered in the inclusion of various sins of the tongue in a
speech ostensibly designed to rhetorically represent the allegorical
expression of a single sin of the tongue. Memoria and pronuntiatio, or
memory and delivery, are largely dependent upon the actor playing the role
of Backbiter but can be assumed to be fulfilled. The audience recognizes
Backbiter as evil language personified and mobilized and still believes him,
finally, because his lines constitute a good argument on terms that are not
easily rejected. Ambivalence washes over Backbiter's rhetorical and moral
representation for the audience at precisely the moment that recognition and
belief coincide.

26De doctrina, IV. ii. 14.
27Cicero, 18.
28Cicero, 18-19.
29Cicero, 18.
30It is perhaps the reception of this ambivalence by the audience that has caused scholars such as Peterson, 157 to register a "critical anxiety
concerning the Vices...ability to verbally subvert the medium of conflict, the
medium used to assert doctrine, and thus undermine the homiletic project" of
morality plays. Couched in this anxiety is an assumption that a conception of
evil as active and yet essentially nothing cannot be represented in morality
The relationship between Backbiter and Mankind requires some examination. Although Backbiter and Mankind do not interact to a great extent at the level of language, it is interesting to note the terms on which such interaction as does occur is based. Backbiter's declaration to Mankind upon being assigned to him by the World provides a case in point:

Bakbytyng and Detracion

Schal goo wyth pe fro toun to toun.
Haue don, Mankynde, and cum doun.
I am pyne owyn page.
I schal bere pe wyttnesse wyth my myth
Whanne my lord pe Werlde it beyth. (777-82)

Backbiter refers to himself by two of his names as abstractions here. This may or may not be an intentional shift in representation on the part of the playwright, but, in any case, this shift implicitly--rhetorically--relocates the agency of commission of sins of the tongue outside of Backbiter the rhetorical and rhetoricized performer. Mankind is not served by a sinner but by sinning in the abstract sense and the implied distance between those two distinctions may serve to convince Mankind of the trustworthiness of Backbiter. Lines such as "I am pyne owyn page" (780) and "I schal bere pe wyttnesse wyth my myth" (781) would tend to confirm such a reading with their emphasis on dependability and service. Backbiter's rhetorical and moral ambivalence re-surfaces in the last line, though, when he qualifies his offer to bear witness by implying that he will only do so when commanded by the World. The offer, in effect, turns in on itself; Backbiter uses the powers of rhetoric to shape an

plays outside the terms of absolute subversion of the genre. I would argue that it is the very ambivalence of such a conception of evil and its expression through the essentially ambivalent medium of rhetoric that allows for this representation.
offer to deploy the powers of rhetoric for Mankind that only thinly—if at all—veils from Mankind the full extent of its evil. Mankind is not threatened directly, but he is implicitly warned of the powers that Backbiter offers to marshal for him. An example of the kind of lines that Backbiter delivers concerning Mankind when they are not together is most telling: “[f]or whanne Mankynde is clopyd clere,/Panne schal I techyn hym pe wey/To pe dedly synyns seuene” (692-95). His delivery of Mankind into the hands of Covetousness at lines 815-27 fulfills this rhetorically enacted sin of the tongue, that is, boasting, with a representative dramatic movement from the scaffold of the World to that of Covetousness. It is in that shift between rhetorical enactment and physical action that the ambivalence of Backbiter impacts most forcefully upon Mankind.

Backbiter’s relationship with the other representatives of evil in The Castle of Perseverance constitutes another site where rhetorical and thus moral ambivalence is enacted. At first sight, his encounters with them seem innocuous enough, as his meeting with Covetousness at lines 815-27 or his response to the Bad Angel’s command at lines 1736-7 suggest. Backbiter plays his part as a messenger dramatically and rhetorically in both cases, and his language is conventional rather than sinful. However, this relationship does not remain stable. His response to Belial’s command to “telle [him] pe sothe” (1752)—a likely indication that he has obvious reasons to suspect that Backbiter might not tell the “sothe”—is deceptive in its subtlety:

Teneful talys I may pe sey.

To pe no good, as I gesse:

Mankynd is gon now away

Into pe Castel of Goodnesse. (1754-56)
It is true that the Bad Angel has sent Backbiter to deliver this message to the World, the Flesh, and the Devil and that Backbiter is not the originator of the message, but Backbiter is the agent by which the message is delivered and it is this fact that is most significant from a rhetorical perspective.Disturbing news is a subdivision of idle language and is thus classified as a sin of the tongue.31_Pronuntiatio_is emphasized in these lines and their delivery has an immediate effect upon Belial. The ‘friendly’ ambivalence that Backbiter enacts in his lines directed to the audience as he leaves the Bad Angel at line 1738 can be read as driving Backbiter’s commission of a verbal sin at the expense of one of his own allies at lines 1754-65. Backbiter’s exclamation at lines 1778-9 that “for God, pis was wel goo./Pus to werke wyth bakbytynge” is further evidence that the delivery of the news is meant to be read as the commission of a sin of the tongue and that Backbiter views the other representatives of evil in the play as legitimate targets.

The effectiveness of Backbiter’s _pronuntiatio_ only intensifies when he delivers the same message to Flesh, who is expecting to hear “[f]ul glad tydynge” (1797):

3a. for God. owt I crye

On pi too sonys and pi dowtyr ʒynge:

_Glotoun, Slawtho, and Lechery_

_Hath put me in gret mornynge._

_Dey let Mankynd gon up hye

Into ʒene castel at hys lykynge._

_Derin for to leue and dye.

_Wyth po ladys to make endyne._

---

31_Vices, 55.
Vo flourys fayre and tresche.
He is in pe Castel of Perseuerauns
And put his body to penauns.
Of hard happe is now pi chauns.

Syr kynge. Mankyndys Flesche. (1799-1811)

Backbiter uses the form of a single sin of the tongue, the delivery of disturbing news, to contain other verbal sins that strengthen the force of what can appropriately be called his argument. His “crye” against Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery (1799-1801) is pure backbiting while the details of Mankind’s salvation at lines 1805-07 can be read as striving. Backbiter’s assertion that the loss of Mankind has caused him to be in “gret mornynge” (1802) implicitly absolves him from any share of the blame for Mankind’s loss and functions as a species of vaunting, namely, the disparagement of others (Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery). The last two lines of the speech constitute a variety of backbiting that puts a situation in the worst light possible. Backbiter’s attitude towards using these sins of the tongue against his superiors is best summed up in his own words: “Now, be God, pis is good game” (1823). Once again Backbiter’s rhetorical deployment is highly complex and highly effective.

The message Backbiter delivers to his own master, the World, is at once shorter and more pointedly inflammatory than the previous two speeches. His response to a question of tidings is interesting:

Nobynge goode. pat schalt pou wete.

Mankynd. Syr Werld, hath pe forsake.

---

32 Vices, 57.
33 Vices, 60.
Wyth Schryfte and Penauns he is smete
And to ȝene castel he hath hym take
Amonge ȝene ladys whyt as Lake.
Lo, Syr Werld, ȝe moun agryse
Dat ȝe be servyd on pis wyse.
Go pley ȝou wyth Syr Coyeytyse
Tył hys crowne crake. (1844-52)

The same sins of the tongue employed in the message delivered to the Flesh are
combined with an admonition at line 1849 and an imperative at lines 1851-52.
This is certainly not the way that a servant is supposed to speak to a master and
as such portrays Backbiter at the height of his rhetorically derived power.
The emphasis placed on *dispositio* here in placing the imperative at the end of
the message urges the World into action. Backbiter has no more lines after
this point and there is no linguistic or dramaturgical evidence in the text to
support his appearance for the rest of the play. He rhetorically transgresses
the boundary between servants and masters and then leaves, seemingly
without punishment.

Interestingly, all three receivers of Backbiter’s messages are convinced
by his arguments and all three respond by flying into a rage and beating the
underlings they hold responsible for the loss of Mankind.34 Although there is
some evidence that at least the Devil has some awareness of Backbiter’s facility
as a perpetrator of sins of the tongue--note his demand that Backbiter tell him
the truth at 1753—all three are taken in by the ambivalent nature of his
message. After all, Backbiter *is* telling the truth as he was instructed to by the

34Compare II. 1769ff. where the Devil beats Pride, Envy, and Wrath;
1822ff. where Flesh beats Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery; and 1863ff. where the
World beats Covetousness.
Bad Angel, and the eloquence with which he tells that truth simultaneously inheres within both the tradition of sins of the tongue and Ciceronian rhetoric (bound up together as this reading has shown those two superficially differentiated constructs to be). Enacting rhetorical ambivalence becomes the means of enacting moral ambivalence at this point in the play as Backbiter—a rhetorically constituted site of evil as active nothingness—turns the full weight of the ambivalence of evil thus constituted on evil itself and in the process embodies ambivalence to an even greater extent. Rhetoric is not unidirectional even in the hands of its abusers and evil, the essential nothingness, turns in on itself.\textsuperscript{35}

As outlined above, each message Backbiter delivers to the evil figures gains in rhetorical pitch and momentum and Backbiter's enthusiasm as expressed in the verbal sin of vaunting gains proportionately in each address to the audience that follows a message. Compare his assertion that he has "many a fere" (1745) to the advice he offers for the improvement of would-be backbiters at lines 1780-88, and finally to the sinful yet accurate acknowledgment of his power in the following lines: "I Bakbyter, wyth fals fame/Do brekyn and brestyn hodys of stele" (1829-30). Apart from their function as a means of communicating to the audience the ambivalence inherent in evil turning upon evil, these addresses serve to map the expansion of Backbiter's rhetorical means until he reaches what may be the fullest expression of rhetorical and moral ambivalence in the play: the point at which he disappears from the text and thus steps outside of the rhetorical and moral consequences of any of his actions.

\textsuperscript{35}See City of God, IV. 13.
The representation of Backbiter in *The Castle of Perseverance* is far too complicated to be summarized either as an expression of unmitigated evil rigidly fixed in a binary opposition to good or as a series of subversions that deconstruct the play and its intent. Rather, Backbiter constitutes and is constituted by an Augustinian conception of evil that is inextricably bound up with ambivalence and, in turn, with the ambivalent nature of rhetoric. The essence, or, rather, non-essence, of Backbiter resides in this complex web of interrelations and it is there that one must look in order to examine this all too frequently ignored figure. When he next appears in the extant plays, he entangles not just the other inhabitants of the drama in that ambivalent web of interrelations, but also the audience.

Alison M. Hunt's observation that the detractors Backbiter and Raise Slander from the N-Town "Trial of Joseph and Mary" have not "excited much critical curiosity" is largely an accurate one.\(^{36}\) Attempts at dealing with these figures:

two figures are generally slight—Hunt's article on them represents an substantial increase in the amount of specific attention they have received in the past and since—and does not involve much examination of their function in the play. Indeed, Hunt's own assertion that the detractors have some relation to "a deep anxiety over the potential of speech to destroy individuals and weaken communities" suggests where such an examination ought to begin and refer back to: use of and attitudes toward language. The insertion of Backbiter and Raise Slander, two abstractions made concrete through allegorical representation, into this apocryphal biblical play from the fifteenth century constitutes more than the deployment of stock 'types' to entertain an "unregenerate" audience; rather, they operate as rhetorically constituted and enacted agents of mouvance that draw the attention of the audience and demand interpretation. Allegory and rhetoric are bound up

37Hunt, 11.


39Kahrl, 111.

40Although I am aware of recent scholarship that suggests that the N-Town Plays as represented in Cotton MS Vespasian D.viii are more a compilation for reading than a book of plays to be performed as a coherent cycle, I use the term "audience" to identify the interpretive community of the N-Town Plays throughout this chapter. This is merely in deference to the fact that they are plays and to avoid the awkward "reader/audience." See Alan J. Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 163-88 for a discussion of the plays as a compilation.

41I am using mouvance in the extended sense employed by Enders, 3 n.4 to indicate an instability between genres—namely, the fifteenth-century English forms of morality play, with its allegorized Vice figures, and the biblical drama that the N-Town plays conform to (with a number of interesting differences, the inclusion of the detractors being only one)—and I want to retain her linking of this instability with the performative aspects of rhetoric. See Paul Zumthor, Essai de poétique médiévale (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 65-
together in the detractors to force the audience into a moral interpretive action that extends beyond the historical (biblical) confines of the play and into the world of the audience who are responsible for their interpretations. An examination of the position the detractors occupy as allegorical figures in this play will be followed by a discussion of their rhetorical strategies as they are directed outward at the audience and inward to the inhabitants of the play in order to establish the extent to which they function as compelling rhetorical invitations to interpretive action.

That allegory, as a trope, "says one thing and means another" seems, on the surface, to be a fairly general assessment of its workings. However, consideration of Backbiter and Raise Slander in the "Trial of Joseph and Mary" pushes that deceptively simple assessment to a depth that reaches to the core of their complex representation and to a fuller understanding of allegory itself. First, it is bound up with rhetoric: allegory, or permutatio as it is called in the pseudo-Ciceronian Rhetorica ad Herennium is one of the "exornationes verborum" [figures of diction] listed under the category of elocutio and defined as "language [that] departs from the ordinary meaning of words and is, with a certain grace, applied in another sense." Thus, the boundaries

72 for his concept of *mouvance* as an instability between the oral and the written.


43Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville, "Allegory and Allegoresis, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics" *Exemplaria* 3.1(1991): 178-79. Copeland and Melville take their definition from *allos agoreuein* "speaking otherwise" and then go on to examine the postmodern difficulty with allegory as a concept through the lens of medieval allegorical theory.

44"...ab usitata verborum potestate recedatur atque in aliam rationem cum quadam venustate oratio conferatur." Cf. *ad Herennium*, 332-33. Murphy notes that a "later tradition assigned [these special figures of diction] the title of *tropi*, or tropes." Cf. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 20.
between allegory and rhetoric were at least partly blurred at a conceptual level for fifteenth-century England. Allegory is constituted by rhetoric and can be read by an audience as a meaning-bearing component of the text itself.

Indeed, allegory in the "Trial of Joseph and Mary" demands interpretation. The detractors, as dramatically realized embodiments of abstractions, sharply disrupt the temporal and semantic framework of the biblical narrative that the "Trial" rests on. Simply put, historical figures such as Joseph and Mary and the socially/temporally particular bishop and doctors of law don't mean in the same way that dramatized abstractions do, and the audience must engage in an act of interpretation in order to digest the disruption. This is important for two reasons. First of all, the disruption itself focuses attention on the detractors and intensifies interest on the part of the audience. This is crucial for much more than reasons of entertainment when moral interpretation is a requirement of the text as it is in the "Trial of Joseph and Mary." Second, the audience is forced to think in terms of

45Certainly it may be argued that allegory is not exclusively a trope but can also refer to a genre or an interpretive category (see Copeland and Melville, 159-84 for a discussion of allegory and allegoresis that usefully problematizes attempts at radically distinguishing the two). Alastair Fowler, in Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982) 191-95 discusses allegory in the middle ages as a genre that comes out of its existence as a trope and as an interpretive category. Nevertheless, I would argue that the rhetorical nature of allegory exists in all its manifestations.

46Cf. Wolfgang Iser: "Thus, by reading, we uncover the unformulated part of the text, and this very indeterminacy [disruption] is the force that drives us to work out a configurative meaning while at the same time giving us the necessary degree of freedom to do so." See "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. David Lodge (New York: Longman, 1988) 222.

47The most obvious support for this assertion lies in the fact that the play is a dramatized trial, the outcome of which the audience already knows along with the innocence of those on trial. This supposes moral interpretation as a condition of understanding. In addition, the medieval hermeneutical tradition with its emphasis on Christian morality also suggests that the
particularity and abstraction simultaneously while forming any
interpretation and consequently to consider the moral implications of that
interpretation in a historical, contemporary, and universal sense.\textsuperscript{48}

"Temporality, . . . always a rhetorical [and thus allegorical] issue, . . . becomes
also a hermeneutical issue"\textsuperscript{49} and one that the audience must address to make
meaning of the "Trial." The very presence of the detractors has to be
accounted for; the structure of their representation demands as much.

The audience is introduced to the detractors immediately and the means
by which this introduction is effected immediately situates all concerned in an
interpretively problematic position:

\begin{quote}
A A . serys god saue zow all
here is a fayr pepyl in good ffay
Good serys telle me what men me calle
I trow ze kan not be pis day
zitt I walke wyde and many way
but zet per I come I do no good
to reyse slawdryr is al my lay
bakbytere is my brother of blood. (1-8)\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48}Of course, all of these senses would have been conceived of in
Christian terms by a majority of the interpretive community in fifteenth-
century England.

\textsuperscript{49}Copeland and Melville, 164.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ludus Coventriae, or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi}, ed. K. S. Block
(London: EETS, 1922). All subsequent references will be from this edition of
the N-Town Plays and will be documented with line numbers in parentheses.
more recent but much more heavily edited version of Cotton MS Vespasian
D.viii (the unique fifteenth century manuscript that contains the plays).
Raise Slander addresses the audience directly and the effect of this rhetorical strategy is more significant than it may first appear. The temporal continuity of the historical/biblical narrative framework is disrupted and the audience is forced into contemporaneity with Raise Slander and with the historical world in which the trial takes place. In addition, the reverse is also the case from the moment Raise Slander says “A A . serys god saue 3ow all” (1), and the audience must consider that the events of the play will involve them and have an impact on their lives. The rhetorical technique of direct address renders interpretation necessary right from the beginning of the play. In fact, this opening speech can be read as an exordium (introduction), one of the six parts of a debate, that Raise Slander uses so that “the hearer’s mind is prepared for attention.”

Raise Slander continues to force interpretation by using the figure of ratiocinatio (reasoning by question and answer) to engage the audience: “Good serys telle me what men me calle” (3). The act of interpreting is required by the question itself, but Raise Slander extends the query to ratiocinatio by asserting that wherever he goes he does “no good” (6), that his practice is to “reyse slawdyr” (7), and that “bakbytere” is his “brother of blood” (8). The audience is not directly given Raise Slander’s name in answer to his question; rather, he must be interpreted through his actions--and his actions are the use of words--in order to be identified. The audience must interpret him through rhetoric--indeed, as rhetoric--to accommodate for the words he directs at them. The temporal/narrative disruption that Raise Slander constitutes is furthered by this rhetorical strategy because the audience is forced to interpret Raise Slander by general rhetorical actions

51 ad Herennium, 9. Exordium falls under the rhetorical canon of inventio or invention and constitutes the beginning of an argument.

52 ad Herennium, 284.
rather than by temporally/spatially specific identifiers; his allegorical status is highlighted by his rhetoric. This is borne out by his mention of “bakbytere” at line 8; the audience has to come to some interpretive conclusions to make sense of a name that sounds like the personification of an abstract concept. When Raise Slander is finally named at line 33 it can come as little surprise to an audience that must have already taken up some kind of interpretive position to hear him at all.

If the introduction of the detractors forces the audience into an interpretive position, their rhetoric in the rest of the “Trial of Joseph and Mary” brings on a kind of hermeneutic crisis. Having been established as realized disruptions that “spylyth all game” (29) and “reyse per with de-bate” (39), they act as orators before the audience and continue to use inventio to set up the narratio or statement of facts53 of their debate:

1st detractor [Raise Slander]: Syr in pe tempyl a mayd per was
calde mayd mary pe trewth to tell
Sche semyd so holy withinne pat plas
men seyd sche was ffedde with holy Aungell
Sche made A vow with man nevyr to melle
but to leve chast and clene virgine
How evyr it be . here wombe doth swelle
and is as gret as pinne or myne. (41-8)

Of course the fifteenth-century English audience knows who Mary is and how she came to be pregnant. However, these facts are still open to debate (at least potentially) because of the two debaters who bring it up. As demonstrated above, the detractors disrupt temporal and narrative boundaries by using

---

53ad Herennium, 8.
rhetoric to bring the audience into contemporaneity with them. The audience must interpret the detractors in order to understand their presence; it then follows that they must interpret their arguments in order to continue to understand their presence. In short, the audience is forced into the position of a jury that must listen to evidence and take hermeneutic action. The overall effect of this is to make the audience interpret how it is that Mary's "wombe doth swelle" for themselves. A hermeneutic crisis is set up where the audience must share worlds with the detractors and consider a major tenet of Christianity from a perspective where the implied sarcasm of "How evyr it be here wombe doth swelle" has the ring of common sense about it—regardless of the fact that such 'common sense' is blasphemy when correctly interpreted and that sarcasm is classed as a species of "ydele wordes."54 Hence the crisis.

This crisis is only furthered when Backbiter and Raise Slander move from implication to argument:

ijus detractor [Backbiter]: 3a pat old shrewe joseph my trowth I plyght
was so Anameryd upon pat mayd
pat of hyre bewte whan he had syght
He sesyd nat tyll had here a-sayd.

1us detractor: A nay nay wel wers she hath hym payd
Sum fresch zonge galaunt he loveth wel more
pat his leggys to here hath leyd
and pat doth greve pe old man sore. (49-56)

The audience can recognize this as pure detraction as put forth by "mysseyers" as they "controuen and fynden bi lesynges to brynge a-noper man bi euele wise in-to a gret blame."55 However, it is also divisio (the

54Vices, 56.

55Vices, 59.
clarifying arguments to support a position)\textsuperscript{56} enacted openly. The detractors reach the arguments that ‘common sense’ dictates and the audience must reach those arguments with them. The detractors may be recognizably evil but they also arrive at ‘plausible’ arguments to explain Mary’s pregnancy; the important thing to note is that the plausibility inheres just as much within the world of the audience as it does within the world of the play. Indeed, these are seemingly effective arguments (from a rhetorical perspective) within the forced contemporaneity of the “Trial.” The sense of an interpretive crisis deepens.

Not content to leave their arguments at the level of \textit{divisio}, the detractors make their next rhetorical move against Mary and increase the hermeneutic tension in the process:

\texttt{ijs} detractor: be my trewh al may wel be

\texttt{ffor fresch and fayr she is to syght}
And such a mursel as semyth me
Wolde cause A gonge man to haue deylght.

\texttt{1us} detractor: Such a gonge damesel of bewte bryght

\texttt{And of schap so comely Also}
Of her tayle ofte tyme be lyght
and rygh tekyl vndyr pe too. (57-64)

Once again, these lines can be recognized as a species of “ydele wordes,” that is, “iapes and knakkes ful of filpe and of lesynges.”\textsuperscript{57} The overt sexual innuendo as applied to Mary (and to women generally) identifies them as such. On the other hand, they also constitute effectively applied instances of

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{ad Herennium}, 6.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Vices}, 56.
confirmatio or proof\textsuperscript{58} that lend support to the detractors' arguments. The audience cannot easily dismiss them because they draw on (potentially) commonly held generalizations for their strength. The assertion that a "zung man" would be lustful and "haue delght" in Mary can be a convincing (if stereotypical) generalization for both the 'evil-minded' and the theologically 'correct' members of the interpretive community, as can the misogynist claim that a "zung damsel" can be "lyght" of her "tayle."\textsuperscript{59} Backbiter and Raise Slander continue to bolster their proofs with indirect appeals to a general bias in the audience—the argumentum ad populum—by stressing that Joseph must "faderyn A-notyr mannys chylde" (67) and by using sententiae (maxims)\textsuperscript{60} to maintain that "A zonge man may do more chere in bedde/to A zonge wench pan may An olde" (69-70). That these instances of confirmatio are sinful is obvious to the correct interpreter, but they require an effort of interpretation on the part of the original audience who may have seen some truth in them. Once again, the detractors function in such a way as to force the audience to engage in interpretation and to reject 'common sense' to be in line with Church doctrine.

It is at this point in the "Trial of Joseph and Mary" that the Bishop and Doctors of Law appear and the Bishop Abizachar condemns the proofs of the detractors as "schamen (73), "velany" (77) and a "fals cry" (79). This is important not only because it reinforces the interpretation of the detractors' proof.

\textsuperscript{58}ad Herennium, 8.


\textsuperscript{60}ad Herennium, 288.
arguments as "synnes of pe tongue" but also because the audience is required to interpret the detractors' rhetoric in a contemporaneity that connects biblical/historical figures and themselves directly. The allegorical/rhetorical function of the detractors is now complete in the sense that the audience must take hermeneutic action in a context where biblical/historical figures must also interpret the arguments. The audience is inside the biblical/historical moment and has to make sense of it.

This is also the point in the play where the detractors' rhetorical strategies begin to be explicitly directed at other inhabitants of the play-world rather than the audience:

[Episcopus]: I charge gow sese of zoure fals cry

Ffor sche is sybbe of myn owyn blood.

ijs detractor: Syb of pi kyn pow pat she be

all gret with chylde hire wombe doth swelle

Do calle here hedyr pi-self xal se

pat it is trewthe pat I pe telle. (79-84)

This is an interesting response from Backbiter; it is a direct answer to Abizachar's protestation that the detractors' proofs are a "fals cry" that functions as a dangerously convincing refutatio (refutation). The innuendo ad hominem (suspicion directed at the man) that is implied in "Syb of pi kyn pow pat she be" suggests that Abizachar cannot be trusted to judge the case reasonably because he is Mary's relative and is picked up on throughout the

61 Vices, 54.
62 ad Herennium, 8.
63 ad Herennium, 19.
rest of the debate as a key feature of the detractors' refutatio. As such it is hard to ignore and the audience is yet again forced into taking an interpretive stance in reaction to what appears to be a seductively (if theologically incorrect) reasonable refutation. Backbiter's insistence on the fact of Mary's pregnancy and the invitation to prove it ocularly would seem to lend support to the 'common sense' of the detractors' arguments: Mary is pregnant, it shows, and a man must have gotten her that way. In fact, the detractors' refutation is so convincing that even the Doctors of Law come to believe them. The second Doctor accuses Joseph: "pis woman pou hast pus be-trayd" (187). Later, the first Doctor chastises Mary: "to us pi wombe pe doth accuse" (270). The cumulative effect of these accusations is to force an interpretive crisis on the audience who must decide whether or not words that seem reasonable are ultimately convincing.

Although the ultimate proof of the innocence of Joseph comes not from words but from the seemingly infallible "botel of goddys vengeauns" (201), the detractors continue their refutatio unabated and continue to require the audience to make a choice based on their rhetoric. Perhaps the most striking instance of their refutation takes the form of a sarcastic mock-divisio to explain Mary's pregnancy:

1st detractor: in Ffeyth I suppose pat pis woman slepte

With-owntyn all covertt whyll pat it dede snowe
And a flake per of in to hyre mowthe crepte
and per of pe chylde in hyre wombe doth growe. (273-6)

This sarcastically offered 'plausible' argument is complex in its hermeneutical demands. On the surface, Raise Slander is referring to the tradition of the

---

64See lines 95-96, 167-8, and 321-4 where Abizachar is accused of partiality with increasing intensity.
“snow baby” that is “[derived] from Latin poems of the tenth to the twelfth century and later fabliaux”\textsuperscript{65} in order to foster an obvious sense of implausibility concerning Mary's innocence. Cruel as his attack is, Raise Slander's refutation through implied comparison of Mary's claims to a fiction once again appeals to 'common sense.' However, the refutation also ironically functions as a near-analogy for the conception as represented in medieval art where the Christ Child enters Mary through her ear.\textsuperscript{66} Either way, Raise Slander's lines force the audience to take hermeneutic action concerning Mary and to interpret her innocence—and the potential limits of rhetoric—for themselves.

The weight of the responsibility of that action sits heavily on the shoulders of the audience at this point in the play. As mentioned above, the Doctors of Law are persuaded by the rhetoric of Backbiter and Raise Slander. This means that figures who (at least at the level of visual identification) stand in for legal and religious authority offer the audience a hermeneutic example that runs counter to the 'correct' interpretation.\textsuperscript{67} The innocent Mary and Joseph have no verbal defense and the audience must rely heavily on their prior knowledge of these two in order to make that theologically 'correct'

\textsuperscript{65}Cf. Spector writing in \textit{The N-Town Play}, 2. 469.

\textsuperscript{66}Cf. Gail McMurray Gibson, \textit{The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages} (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 137-77 where she discusses the cult of the Virgin in East Anglia and representations of the Annunciation and Conception that show the Christ Child entering Mary through her ear. This would suggest that the original readers/audiences of the "Trial," as East Anglians, may have had some knowledge of this tradition of representation.

\textsuperscript{67}Of course, it may be argued that the Bishop and Doctors of Law represent the 'old law' of Judaism for the fifteenth-century audience and that as such they misinterpret the situation on that basis but this does not change the fact that they would have to be costumed in a way that would visually signify authority for that fifteenth-century English audience in order to be correctly interpreted themselves.
interpretation. It is at this moment in the "Trial" that the thrust of the drama takes on a catechetical import and the audience must interpret and judge, ultimately not with the fates of Joseph and Mary in their hands but with the soundness of their own beliefs (and, as the fifteenth-century Church would have construed it, their souls) in the balance.

The "botel of goddys vengeauns" (201) thus comes into play as an aid to Church-sanctioned interpretation at a critical juncture in the drama. This test, from Numbers 5:11-31, shifts the burden of proof away from language and onto the codified ritual of biblical law. What this means for the audience is that they are given an official visual reinforcement of the appropriately religious judgment they are expected to make. It also communicates a potential anxiety over the 'common sense' rhetoric of the detractors; their arguments are too potentially persuasive to be left unmitigated in their effects on audience members unable to resist their rhetorical sophistication. The "botel" functions at once to reaffirm power of God and to underscore the dangers of speech used for evil ends.

The "Trial of Joseph and Mary" ends with at least one of the detractors (Raise Slander) drinking from the "botel" and repenting his "cursyd and ffals langage" (334); the correct interpretation is firmly established by non-verbal means. However, this does not nullify the important function of the detractors as agents of interpretive crisis for the audience. They serve, through a mouvance between allegory and rhetoric, to bring the audience into a living contemporaneity with Christian history and doctrine so that the weight of decision, of interpretation falls on the shoulders of each individual who must separate the truth from the "ydele wordes."

Interestingly enough, there are no lines to indicate definitely that Backbiter is repentant along with Raise Slander at the end of the play. There
are no indications that he drinks from the "botel" and no lines to confirm his being sorry for his language. Just as in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Backbiter slips out of hearing and possibly out of view when retribution is at hand. Unlike the audience of the "Trial," nothing of moral value comes of the judgments he passes on Joseph and Mary. In fact, he is 'nothing' in the Augustinian sense, and just as he does in *The Castle*, he confirms his 'nothingness' in his silence. His lack of substance stands outside of the temporally/spatially specific world of the audience and confirms his constitution in the ambivalence of rhetoric; his silence is not an indication that he won't be heard again.
Chapter 2: *Mankind*

*Mankind*, it may be argued, has in recent years increasingly been the focus of a vigorous critical inquiry into the English moral plays.\(^1\) If *Everyman* was for many during the first half of the twentieth century the archetypal English morality, then *Mankind* has certainly usurped that position today. The reasons for this have a great deal to do with changes in scholarship on the play and on early drama in general, and no analysis of the rhetorical complexity of the Vice figures in the play can omit a brief discussion of the critical background that has implicated them so completely. As I hope to demonstrate, *Mankind* is, in many ways, a play about rhetoric and its dissident effects; previous attempts to come to grips with this fact only underscore its importance. Therefore, I intend to set up a matrix of critical opinion on *Mankind* in this chapter because views of the play have vacillated between two points on the critical spectrum: one which sees the play as scurrilous and one which attempts to contain that scurrility by asserting the presence of a superior theological and moral purpose. It may be allowed that a third point on the spectrum has recently emerged and that it is constituted by a view of the play as inherently subversive, but this argument is, to date, incomplete in that it falls short of its own implicit goals by tying itself to the methods of the

---

\(^1\)Cf. Sidney E. Berger, *Medieval English Drama: An Annotated Bibliography of Recent Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1990) 488 where there are sixty-one entries listed that point to work done on the play since 1972. Cf. Carl J. Stratman, *Bibliography of Medieval Drama*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972) for the pre-1972 writing. No comprehensive bibliography has been compiled since 1990 but there is reason to believe that interest in the play has grown; 1995 alone saw two Canadian productions of the play that took place at important conferences. Garrett P. J. Epp's University of Alberta production was staged at the Eighth International Colloquium of the Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval (SITM) at Toronto, while Linda Phillips' Poculi Ludique Societas production played for audiences attending the Annual Conference of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto.
second point on the spectrum (theological containment). What all of these critical vantage points suggest is a profound anxiety over language in *Mankind*—particularly the language of the Vices—that predetermines the meaning to be made out of the play. With this anxiety in mind, I want to focus on dissidence in *Mankind* as it is rhetorically enacted and as it is otherwise manifested as a result of that rhetoric. I shall begin with a discussion of critical attitudes toward the play and then move to a brief overview of the rhetorical features of the Vices' language and beyond that to its effects and transgressive implications. I will look beyond rhetoric to its effects in this chapter because, as Paula Neuss puts it, “verbal images become visual as the ideas are developed” in *Mankind*.²

Hardin Craig, in his *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*, provides his readers with a succinct if somewhat biased assessment of the dramaturgy and stage history of the morality play *Mankind*:

> It is difficult to see [*Mankind*] in its present form as an original composition either of a rural poet or of a man with any pretense to education. If changes have been made, they were of course introduced by the necessities of staging with a small troupe and by a comic appeal to yokels and the toughs of small towns.³

Craig's readers already have some idea of their author's opinion of the play by the time they reach this passage; he has earlier referred to it as "...ignorant, corrupt, probably degenerate, and vulgar to the point of obscenity."⁴

---
⁴Craig, 351.
However, Craig's efforts to pronounce closure on this "poor thing" by assigning it to a "low-class company of strolling players" who staged such "vulgar" plays for the entertainment of the "uneducated" are only the most vehement expressions of a strand of critical opinion on the play that stretches behind him into the nineteenth century and forward to recent times. What his words make clear is that a good number of the most respected names in early English drama scholarship have been upset by this play. Their collective anxiety underscores the importance of what is said in this short drama of 914 lines, and—however inadvertently and implicitly—it leads all of those scholars to the fact that words and their deployment as rhetoric are of the utmost importance in Mankind. Little else can be said for this critical perspective on the play; it functions as an attempt to shut down discussion. It has had the opposite effect.

---

5 Craig, 350.

Sister Mary Philippa Coogan’s 1947 dissertation from the Catholic University of America, *An Interpretation of the Moral Play, Mankind*,7 is of central importance to the critical history of *Mankind* precisely because it represents a first sustained effort to see the play as something other than “irrelevant low comedy.”8 Coogan wants to see the text in its entirety as a furtherance of Catholic theology. She asserts that the ‘vicious’ language and action are vital components of the play because “it is through his struggles with evil as personified by Titivillus and his companions that Mankind is supposed to work out his salvation; through his conquest of them he is to prove the supremacy of his spirit over his flesh.”9 This is, on the one hand, a reasoned attempt to make sense of a text in the terms of what seems to be its own dominant ideology; it is also an attempt at containment. By containment I mean the notion that the subversiveness of a text is figured as a reinforcement of the dominant ideology of that text, but note that I am extending the definition beyond containment as a phenomenon produced by the text itself to a strategy employed by critical readers.10 Coogan’s work thus prefigures later studies (and productions) of *Mankind* that focus on elaborating its officially


8Williams, 156.

9Coogan, 93.

10This extension of the definition of containment is in keeping with the critique of containment theory as understood by critics broadly designated as new historicists that Jonathan Dollimore offers in the introduction to his *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) xxi-xxii. Cf. Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 82+n.1 for a useful discussion of the versions of containment theory and bibliographical documentation of its various manifestations.
sanctioned rhetorical/theological/dramatic structure. All the work in this vein is based on the assumption that the play must reflect a unified authorial intention (whether conscious or otherwise on the part of the anonymous playwright) and that ‘proper’ readings of the play must attempt to recover the meaning that it is assumed is the product of such intention. This critical stance functions not as an attempt to shut down discussion of Mankind but to hone and delimit it in an effort to make sense of the (potentially) jarring and offensive rhetorical and gestural features of the text. It, too, has ultimately had the opposite effect.

Garrett P. J. Epp’s recent essay, “The Vicious Guise: Effeminacy, Sodomy, and Mankind,” provides a convenient example of a critical response to this attempted containment. In reading the play through the lens of contemporary queer theory, he sees possibilities for the recovery of alternative histories in the ‘vicious’ language of New Guise and the other Vices:

In its inclusion of a character that personifies sodomitical effeminacy itself [New Guise], Mankind gives homoerotic desire visible representation—a name, and a costume. Much like the


12Epp’s essay is in Becoming Male in the Middle Ages, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1997) 303-20. Many of the ideas in this chapter were developed and organized in parallel with Epp’s theories when we worked together on the play from 1991-94. Because of this, there is some unavoidable overlap between his work and mine, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge his contribution to the work that follows. As will be seen below, however, the conclusions I draw from this work on Mankind differ from Epp’s findings.
lesbian novels of the 1950s, mentioned earlier, the play condemns what it represents. However, once the possibility of desiring otherwise has been admitted, it becomes difficult to shut down, at least for some, under some conditions. The performance would certainly make a difference—we cannot know, now, how New Guise was actually played, or what the actor or his costume looked like. More crucially, we cannot know whether the body under that costume was considered desirable; we cannot know the desires of the audience, or whether they recognized them, or—if they did—whether and how they acted upon these. We can only know the possibilities that the playtext itself allows or encourages. . .We cannot know. . .whether the performance of this new guise, or the desirability of the body that performed it, led any of the men in the audience to realize that maybe they, too, were in some way “like that.”

The effect of this reading is to emphasize precisely those elements of Mankind that the critics mentioned above have either scorned or attempted to contain. This is in itself useful as a means to redress the imbalance of critical opinion on the play. However, it also functions as an attempt to recover (at least partially) a subcultural history in an effort to solidify a sense of identity, be that identity performed or essential. This, too, is a useful and therefore

---


14The social constructionism versus essentialism debate is one of the shaping arguments of contemporary queer theory. Cf. Edward Stein, ed. Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy (New York: Routledge, 1992). Epp’s reading would seem to lean toward the constructed (performed) pole of that debate. See John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) for an important history of same-sex desire that has essentialist implications.
politically charged project; the very real political import, though, forces Epp into a rhetorical structuring that echoes the arguments of critics who expound contained readings of the play. Hence the implied reliance on confirmatio or proof and the sustained use of concessio in the listing of what the contemporary reader/audience cannot know about Mankind. The possibility that the playtext can be used as a window for viewing same-sex desire in the late middle ages is the necessary goal that Epp reaches in his argument; I want to argue that it is this insight into possibility that provides a starting point for an alternative reading of this moral drama.

I propose a reading of Mankind that remains open to all the possibilities of the playtext. Such a reading is not, in itself, a new thing: Alan Sinfield outlines the reasoning behind this open examination of texts:

...the texts we call "literary" characteristically address contested aspects of our ideological formation. When a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we reorganize and retell its story, trying to get it into shape--back into the old shape if we are conservative-minded, or into a new shape if we are more adventurous. These I call "faultline" stories. They address the awkward unresolved issues; they require most assiduous and continual reworking; they hinge upon a fundamental, unresolved complication that finds its way, willy-nilly, into texts.15

---

Jonathan Dollimore has elaborated this concept of faultlines as an answer to readings of texts that emphasize containment:

Finally, in a materialist critique of the notion of containment Alan Sinfield describes a way of approaching texts which shows them not so much as either conservative or subversive, but as sites of struggle.¹⁶

So, Mankind can be read as constituting one of these "sites of struggle" and the dissidence effected by the Vices' rhetoric can be allowed to stand as just that without supposing that the text necessarily supports one ideological stance over another. Certainly, I am not suggesting that this results in a 'disinterested' or 'objective' reading of the play;¹⁷ it does, however, open up the possibility of responding to the complex and contradictory web of meanings that Mankind constructs. This is the reading I will now attempt to produce.

Mankind is a learned play composed for a largely learned audience and was probably performed for that audience indoors rather than outside on a booth stage. The play has elements of social and theatrical satire that are expressed in the characters' class positions in the medieval estates framework, scatological humor, and, in one dissident reading, an emphasis on same-sex desire that makes this play seem entirely "queer" at moments.¹⁸ All of this is


¹⁷Cf. Sinfield, Cultural Politics, 4, on the supposed 'universalism' of Shakespeare: "...there is no disinterested reading." My own political stance should be apparent in my deployment of the language and methods of cultural materialist critique. I am arguing for a reading of the play that deliberately acknowledges its own cultural and ideological investment and situatedness.

¹⁸I use the word "queer" here in acknowledgment of its etymology and current sexual politics, both of which apply to Mankind. The OED lists "queer" as a word of doubtful origin, the supposed Germanic root of which means
borne out in the text of *Mankind*, and rather than try to effect closure I will
turn to that text now and try to engage in an analysis that is open to the
complex details of this moral interlude.

*Mankind* is now bound up with *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Wisdom*
in Folger MS. V. a. 354 and is commonly referred to as one of the Macro
plays.\(^{19}\) However, these plays were not bound together until 1819 and the
manuscript of *Mankind* can be thought of as an independent document for
textual purposes.\(^{20}\) It contains thirteen leaves of an original fourteen, the
second leaf having been lost at some point. The result of this loss is a lacuna of
substantial proportions--about eighty lines\(^{21}\)--that complicates any modern
attempts at staging the play or considerations of original staging. One can
assume that the names of New Guise, Naught, and Nowadays were mentioned by

"cross." This definition is entirely appropriate because the same-sex desire in
this play crosses the Church-sanctioned boundaries of sexual desire and
simultaneously satirizes and supports the sodomy that it stages. My analysis of
*Mankind* is also queer in that it is informed by current critical models and
practices labeled as queer theory and in that any acknowledgment of the
dissident elements in the play crosses the boundaries of analysis that critics
such as Craig defined by condemning the play as "vulgar to the point of
obscenity." (351). For a detailed discussion of the homoerotic elements of the
play and how they are supported cf. Garrett P. J. Epp, "Vicious Company:
Homosexual Representation in *Mankind.*" (Unpublished paper delivered at the
Twenty-eighth International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan
University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 1993) and "The Vicious Guise:
Effeminacy, Sodomy, and *Mankind.*" I differentiate my own reading from Epp's
in that I focus more explicitly on the play as a "site of struggle" for
conflicting ideologies and attempt to consciously allow for the presence of that
struggle in the simultaneous inherence of those conflicting ideological
stances.

\(^{19}\)The plays are named after the Rev. Cox Macro, an owner of the plays
in the eighteenth century. For a detailed history of the manuscript(s) of these
plays cf. *The Macro Plays*, vii-li. All quotations from *Mankind* are from this
dition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

\(^{20}\) *Macro Plays*, vii.

Mercy and that this mentioning summoned them onto the stage. As for the text of the leaves that are extant, ink color and letter formation suggests that two different scribes were involved in writing down the play: one scribe wrote ff. 122-32 and another set down 132v-34v. Nevertheless, this does not indicate, as Craig implies, that changes were made to the text of Mankind at some point; in the words of one editor, "[t]here is no proof that the play was revised." Any argument that claims that changes have been made to the text of this moral interlude in order to entertain "yokels and the toughs of small towns" does not have bibliographical evidence to support it.

The subject of just who Mankind was supposed to entertain when it was first written circa 1470 is in itself an interesting question. The "yokels and toughs" may provide a convenient audience for a critic whose comments beg questions of personal bias, but they do not immediately jump to mind as the people Mankind was originally composed for. The reason for this is relatively obvious: complete literacy among the laity in rural towns throughout Europe was not entirely common in the fifteenth century, and, as one scholar has pointed out, a basic knowledge of Latin is essential for a complete

---

22Cf. line 111 where Naught says "I harde yow call 'New Gyse, Nowadays, Nought,' all pes thre togethere."

23Macro Plays, xxxvi.

24Macro Plays, xxxviii.

understanding of *Mankind*. An example from the text shows just how much of an understanding of Latin is required:

NEW GYSE. The wether is colde. Gode sende ws goode ferys!

'Cum sancto sanctus eris et cum peruerso peruerteris.'

'Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum,' quod pe Deull to pe frerys.

'Habitare fratres in vnum.' (323-26)

Mankynd follows this speech with the line: “I her a felow speke: wyth hym I wyll not mell” (327). There is no translation of this speech in the English lines that precede or follow it. The audience must know the Latin or miss the joke; even obvious stage action would not tell an illiterate audience member that at line 324 New Gyse is quoting Psalm 18:26: “With the holy you will be holy and with the perverted you will be perverse,” or that Psalm 133:1 makes up the Latin portions of lines 325-26: “Behold how good and how merry it is for brothers to live as one.” The assertion that an illiterate audience would have had enough knowledge of Scripture through the Church to understand these lines without knowing Latin or having read them for themselves seems far-fetched; such an audience would surely have needed the help of an English gloss in the form of the lines preceding or following the speech in order to be reminded of the meaning of a quotation given in a language in which they were not conversant. No aid of this type occurs here or with most of the other fifty-two lines of untranslated Latin in the play that are drawn from sources as diverse as the Scriptures and legal terminology. One must also

---


27Paula Neuss makes a similar point. See her “Active and Idle Language: Dramatic Images in Mankind,” 54+n. Plays such as The Castle of Perseverance and The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdelene also exhibit this phenomenon.
consider lines such as Nought's mocking reply to Mankyn's use of Latin: "No, mary. I beshrew yow, yt ys in spadibus. Therfor Crystys curse cum on your hedybus" (398-99). These lines, a mixture of English nouns and Latin third declension ablative plural suffixes in the words "spadibus" and "hedybus," have little effect on someone who does not know the case endings of Latin nouns. Lawrence Clopper cites these lines as an example of the few places in the play where a knowledge of Latin is not required to understand the Latin being used because it consists of a simple "tag." I would argue that such lines constitute a sophisticated grammatical joke that requires a literate knowledge of the Latin language in order to be funny and that such lines point to an educated audience just as strongly as the untranslated biblical quotations do. The audience for which Mankind was originally intended must have been more educated than most of the people of villages and towns. This is not to say that the play was directed exclusively at a literate audience; lines such as "O ge souerens pat sytt and ge brothern pat stonde ryght wppe" (29) seem to indicate that a mixed audience of educated people and servants were expected to see the play at the same time. The support for this claim lies in the fact that Mercy refers to the people who "stonde ryght wppe" as "brothern," that is, servants who, like actors, make their living in the service of others. This mixed audience can be conjecturally explained by a discussion of the auspices of the play, and it is to that discussion that I now turn.

Craig's notion of auspices for Mankind has the play in the hands of a "low-class company of strolling players" who toured around the countryside and performed in villages and small towns. Other scholars see the play as having been performed in innyards in these hamlets and thus connected to

---

28Clopper, 242.

29Adams, 304.
the origin of the concept of Elizabethan theatres.  
Leaving aside the fact that the innyard theory requires a very specific type of building in order to make sense, such a notion of auspices ignores what the text of the play itself offers as evidence of where it was performed. Mercy's line as already quoted above, "O ze souerens pat sytt and ge brothern pat stonde ryght wppe" (29), suggests that Mankind is meant to be performed somewhere where the higher-ranking members of the audience would be seated and the servants would remain standing. A hall setting with seated guests and standing servants along the sides of the room immediately comes to mind. If the play was performed in a innyard it would have to be performed on a booth stage; if Mercy is to be trusted, not everyone is standing. The notion of auspices in a Cambridgeshire hall also has the advantage of explaining the learned content of the play because a hall audience would likely have been made up at least in part of an educated nobility. However, there are also lines that trouble this notion of auspices:

[NEW GYSE.] At pe goodeman of pis house fyrst we wyll assay.  
(467)
MANKYND. I wyll into pi gerde, souerens, and cum ageyn son.  
(561)

[MANKYND.] A tapster, a tapster! Stow, statt, stow! (729)  
NEW GYSE. What how, ostlere, hostlere! Lende ws a football! (732)  

It is not a hall but an inn that seems to be indicated here; references to the "goodeman" of the "house," an "ostlere," the "gerde," and a "tapster" are all


\[31\] Clopper, 242.
linked to the language of inns and inn-keeping. An effort has been made to explain this as a joking reference to the noble owner of a private hall, but a glance at the line numbers of these references shows them to be spread relatively widely through the play. If it is a joke, it is an elaborate one and hardly worth the trouble since lines addressed to the noble "goodeman" like "Gode blysse yow, master! ze say as yll, ze ty wyll not sey nay" (468) when New Gyse is trying to get money out of the audience seem to suggest that the playwright knew that such a joke would be ill received; the tone of New Gyse's last line, "ze pay all alyke; well mut ze fare" (470) becomes biting to the point of not being funny at all if read in this manner. Clopper acknowledges this tension and explains it as a "...humorous aside addressed to the insufficient patronage of their employer and as a recasting of him in the role of a common purveyor of refreshment." However, he doesn't address the possibility that such an aside could be seen as insolence in actors who were servants, that is, "brothern" of the standing members of the audience. All of this tension is resolved, though, when the play's auspices are located in some room of an inn. The references to inns and servants make sense and the play can still be located indoors rather than on a booth stage in the yard. Further, these auspices do not necessarily preclude the presence of an educated audience or prove that the play toured; in the absence of evidence indicating exactly where Mankind was originally performed there is no reason to assume that the play could not have been written for a room in an inn just as easily as it could have been written for a specific hall. Clopper does posit another location that could reconcile the references to an inn and the learned content

32 Clopper, 242.

33 Clopper, 242.
of *Mankind*: "It may belong to a university town. Cambridge, therefore, rather than to the provinces." Mark Eccles situates the play in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, so this explanation is reasonable. The learned members of the audience may have been people associated with the university rather than the nobility that Clopper suggests. However, there is no definite proof to support any theory of auspices for this play, and I am not attempting to pronounce closure upon the debate; a location inside an inn simply makes the best sense of the complex textual evidence that puts "souerens" and a "ostlere" in the same room.

The rhetoric of the Vices in *Mankind* has been well documented and analyzed. This is hardly surprising given that rhetoric and its use figures so prominently as a concern of the play. Mercy admonishes the Vices: "Thys ydyll language ge xall repent" (147); New Guise recharacterizes Vice language for his partners: "Goo we hens all thre wyth on assent: My fader ys yrke of owr eloquence" (149-50). Thus, critics who have attempted to engage with the play at all have had to account for Vice language to some extent, and those who have made it the primary focus of their study of the drama have produced excellent results. Consequently, there is no need to reproduce such an

---

34Clopper, 248n.2.

35Macro Plays, xxxviii.


37The analyses of Neuss, Ashley, Beene and Chaplan are particularly useful.
analysis here; the central issue at stake in a study of *Mankind* is the interpretation of those results. The effects of the contradictory and conflicted rhetorical strategies enacted in *Mankind* provide the most fertile ground for interpretation, and it is those effects that will occupy me for the remainder of this chapter. I intend to concentrate primarily on two elements of the play where Vice language is inextricably implicated and where the playtext arguably harbors much of its dissident potential: the conflicted representations of despair and same-sex desire. I hope to demonstrate that Vice language charts these elements as faultline sites in *Mankind* and that, as such, they offer windows onto central concerns of the cultural context(s) from which the play emerged and continues to emerge.

*Mankind* opens with a sermon by Mercy, the allegorical embodiment of the dominant Christian ideology of the late fifteenth century. That despair will be a central concern of the play, and that many of the biblical and patristic arguments against it will be employed during the course of the drama, becomes obvious by the third stanza of Mercy's speech:

1 haue be pe very mene for yowr restytucyon.

Mercy is my name, pat mornyth for yowr offence.

Dyverte not yowr sylfe in tyme of temtacyon,

Pat ze may be acceptable to Gode at yowr goyng hence.

Pe grett mercy of Gode pat ys of most preemmynence.

Be medyacyon of Owr Lady pat ys euer habundante

To pe synfull creature pat wyll repent hys neclygence.

I prey Gode at yowr most nede pat mercy be yowr defendawnte

(17-24)

The echoes of 1 Corinthians 10:13 in the reference to "temtacyon" and of the stress Augustine places on repentance are clearly audible in these opening
lines. The audience of *Mankind* is given a textbook summary of the Christian perspective on despair and Mercy, as an allegorically charged physical manifestation of an abstract concept, comes to embody that perspective for them. He constitutes a living picture, a “quicke bok.”

Apart from the playgoers themselves, Mankind makes up the primary audience for Mercy’s doctrinal reinforcement. In fact, he is inundated with Mercy’s admonitions for most of the first part of the play: lines such as “[t]he temptacyon of pe flesch ge must resyst lyke a man” (225) and “yf ge dysples Gode, aske mercy a non...[e]llys Myscheff wyll be redy to brace yow in hyss brydyll” (305-6) are specifically designed to arm Mankind against despair. Mischief, the character, is named with a word that had suicidal connotations for the original audience of this play, and his “brydyll” can certainly refer to the noose of a rope for hanging. The striking thing about these lines is not just that they are abstract warnings delivered figuratively; the anonymous playwright uses allegory to make these warnings very concrete, indeed.

When Mankind is finally won over by the Vices Mischief. Nowadays, New Guise, and Nought, he casts aside the ideology of Christian logic and agrees to a self-serving life of crime. Having been foiled in his attempts to earn an ‘honest’ living as a farmer (due to the intervention of the devil Titivillus), he consents to “robbe, stell, and kyll, as fast as [he] may gon” (707).


39Cf. the OED definition for mischief as an archaic transitive verb meaning “to inflict injury upon.”
He tells the Vices that he “drempt Mercy was hange” (655) and, ironically enough, asks mercy of the Vices for repelling them earlier in the play (658). Mankind trades Christian logic for the logic of what he perceives to be his material reality, and decides to subvert the social norms of his day in order to best serve his own material needs. This ‘conversion’ is so effective that he repels Mercy, both at the allegorical and concrete physical levels, when he next sees him:

MERCY. What how, Mankind! Fle pat felyschyppe, I yow prey!
MANKYNDE. I xall speke wyth pe a noper tym, to-morn. or pe next day.
We xall goo forth together to kepe my faders zer-day.
A tapster, a tapster! Stow, statt, stow! (726-9)

Mankind thus dismisses Mercy with a vague brush-off and an insincere promise and then calls for a tapster—that is, a barmaid, who stereotypically functioned as a prostitute as well during the period of this play—to satisfy his newly legitimated physical desires. This dismissal of Mercy is simultaneously a grievous and foolish sin from a Christian perspective and an efficient avoidance of that which would hamper Mankind’s pursuit of bodily maintenance and satisfaction. In effect, Mankind “fle[s]” the “felyschyppe” of Christian logic here. The outcome of that flight, however, soon becomes apparent.

Mercy’s decision to seek out Mankind and attempt to win him back to the Christian viewpoint triggers the central moment of despair in the play. The reaction that Mankind has when he learns of Mercy’s imminent appearance—and thus, allegorically, of the validity of Christian logic—is self-explanatory:

MYSCHEFF. How, Mankind! Cumm & speke wyth Mercy, he ys here fast by.
MANKYNDE. A roppe, a roppe, a roppe! I am not worthy.

MYSCHEFF. Anon, anon, anon! I haue yt here redy.
Wyth a tre also pat I haue gett.
Holde pe tre, Nowadays, Nought! Take hede and be wyse!

NEU GYSE. Lo, Mankynde! do as I do: pis ys pi new gyse.
Gyff pe roppe just to py neke: pis ys myn avyse. (799-805)

Mankind, devoid of the support that Mercy’s Christian viewpoint offers, is confronted by his own ideological inadequacy and attempts to commit suicide.
It is no accident that the Christian playwright puts the notice of Mercy’s return and the readiness to assist in the hanging in the mouth of Mischief, who in turn directs the other Vices to help. The primary ideological thrust of this scene involves the visible assertion that the bodily logic of the Vices is ineffective in handling despair. The dominant message for the audience is that care of the body leads to the destruction of that body (and, more importantly for Christians, the soul). That this is at best ironic and at worst illogical from a material logical perspective is deliberately de-emphasized at this moment in the play. The playwright attempts to offer Mankind the materialist nothing but a crisis and thereby bolster the persuasiveness of the play.

Mercy’s dispersal of the Vices and reclamation of Mankind serve as a furtherance of the ideological goals of the drama. Whatever the attractions of the Vices may be, the audience is strongly encouraged to follow Mankind’s Catholic example and to remain steadfast in their acceptance of the Christian logic of the Church. The tension between the opposing logics is barely alluded to in the remainder of the play where Mercy delivers a long sermon—supposedly to an attentive and contrite Mankind—on the effectiveness of Christian doctrine in combating despair and the distractions of the flesh. The
audience, like Mankind, becomes the audience for this sermon and is thus brought into the fold of Christian thinking by their very presence as auditors. If the dissension of material logic is not finally contained, neither does it echo very loudly at the end of the play. For the playwright of Mankind, at least, despair is conquered. For an audience left to question whether or not the dominant ideology of the play is truly as effective as its presentation suggests, despair is avoided—for the time being. Mankind walks away—to what consequences? Leaving allegory aside, every person watching the play knows that to "robbe, stell, and kyll" (707) is to invite very real material responses from those in power. The playwright may not mention this because of the ideological questions it raises but I argue that it is always present—if only by implication—to the audience. Thus, the tension between Christian logic and material logic is maintained and the doctrinal successes of the drama, however resounding, are not absolute.

The dissident aspects of the Mankind have been a source of difficulty for some scholars for quite a while. Francis Edwards, for example, sees the play as an irreverent send-up of morality drama rather than a genuine specimen with any serious message. For Edwards and many other critics of this anonymous dramatic work, moral and doctrinal content is merely an excuse for the staging of "bawdy" humor. Although this view fails to come to terms with the importance and effectiveness of the play’s moral message, it inadvertently addresses one of the key features of the playtext: an "other" message of the play, that is its treatment of sodomy. Mankind not only

---


41 See Four Tudor Interludes, 6 for J. A. B. Somerset’s discussion of this critical outlook on Mankind.
espouses Church-sanctioned moral doctrine, but also asserts a more subversive view that plays on the popular conceptions of actors at the time, and that both condemns and celebrates sexual intercourse between men. This binary opposition is central to an understanding of the interlude, and is a perfect expression of what Jonathan Dollimore refers to as the perverse dynamic. A brief discussion of the assumptions and stereotypes surrounding actors in the fifteenth century, followed by examinations of the relationships between the Vice figures, the relationship between Mercy and Mankind, and a discussion of some of the dialogue of the play will all help to emphasize the significance of this "other" message of Mankind.

The relationships between the Vice figures in Mankind are important sites of commentary on sodomy within the play. At first sight, this seems to associate the act of sodomy with corruption because the Vice figures of a morality play are meant to be seen as concrete expressions of evil abstractions. Indeed, Mankind stresses this association, but it also subverts it at the same time. A look at an exchange between Mischief and New Guise highlights this fact:

[MISCHEFF]. Alasse, alas, alasse, cum hether! I shall be your borow.
Alack, alack! Vene, vene! Cum hethere, with sorrowe!
Pesse, fayer babys! Ye shall have a nappyl--tomorrow.
Why grete ye so, why?
NEW-GUISE. Alasse, master, alas, alas, my privite!
MISCHEFF. A, wher? Alacke, fayer babe, ba me!
Abide! Too sone I shall it se. (425-31)

These few lines are loaded with multiple and contradictory messages. Mischief's response to New Guise's complaint about his battered genitals
clearly identifies both of them as sodomites in the medieval view. The fact that Mischief doesn't want to see New Guise's private parts suggests the kind of interaction that is also echoed in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 20" with the line "By adding one thing to my purpose nothing." Like the poet and the young man in the sonnet or the narrator and the boy in the love poetry of Hilary the Englishman, Mischief is the older and active partner in a sexual relationship with New Guise, who is the stereotypically passive younger man. In the cases of both Shakespeare and Hilary the Englishman, the younger partner is effeminized and the one overt sign of his masculinity, that is, his penis, is either explicitly or implicitly rejected. This pattern seems to occur frequently in references to relationships of this type, and Mischief falls into it perfectly when he says "Abide! Too sone I shall it se" (431). Mischief is the 'master' Vice in this relationship, and he seems intent on maintaining his 'masculine' stance.

In keeping with the perverse dynamic that Mankind embodies, however, Mischief subverts his 'masculine' stance in the same breath he asserts it in. The tone of lines such as 'Alasse, alasse, cum hether! I shall be your borow' (425) and "Pesse, fayer babys! Ye shall have a nappyl--tomorrow" (427) is decidedly motherly. Mischief acts as a consoling (and perverse) matron at this point who kisses his "fayer babys" and offers to soothe their pain. This behavior is interesting not only because it undercuts Mischief's implicit claim to be "masculine" with New Guise, but also because it complicates any essential notion of gender in the play. The de-stabilizing of gender identity is important here, and the author of Mankind connects this

---


43 Boswell, 372.
de-stabilization to the Vice figures in the play. However, this connection also seems to be a positive one. The fact that Mischief is so entertaining in this exchange where he is also so perverse sets up a site of audience entrapment that (whether the playwright intended it to or not) does not completely work. By embodying gender destabilization, Mischief becomes an example of the dominant view put forth by opponents of drama. On the other hand, Mischief's remarks at this point in the play are so enjoyable that it becomes difficult to condemn him: to a medieval audience he may be a fictitious Vice figure but he is so funny that he is likable. The whole issue of gender complication with Mischief thus at once provides an opportunity to express the dominant attitude and to potentially undercut it.

Other Vice figures in Mankind also figure in the message about sodomy that the play delivers/subverts, and perhaps the most important of these is Titivillus. Titivillus is the chief of all the Vice figures in the play, and he directs the evildoing of the other four. This is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that a fifteenth-century audience would have identified Titivillus as a devil who arose as a result of bad Latin usage or grammatical error. Although the connection between bad language and sodomy might not be obvious to modern audiences, the metaphorical linkage between the two was strong throughout the medieval period as a result of texts such as De planctu Naturae by Alain de Lille. Therefore, Titivillus represents not only the king of bad grammar but also of sodomy, and it would be reasonable to assume that the play, in keeping with the dominant view that it expresses at one level, would judge him harshly. Nevertheless, lines such as "Yondyr he comith. I prey of counsell" (539) and "Ye shall a goode sport, if ye will abide" (576) seem

---

to win the audience over to Titivillus' favor as much as they portray him as a thoroughly wicked individual. Once again, the entrapment that the playwright sets up does not completely work. The audience may recognize that Titivillus is evil, but he is also fun, and that fact prevents him from being utterly repulsive. The audience is drawn into the plot to make Mankind slip up, and by extension they are also drawn into standing on the side of sodomites. Titivillus leaves the play without getting so much as a damnation from any of the good figures, let alone any serious harm. While this fact can be interpreted as meaning that evil will always exist as long as humanity lives on Earth, it can also be seen as a refusal to condemn the chief of all sodomites who provides the audience with some moments of laughter, and who manages to get the audience to enter into a relationship with him that parallels his relationship with the other Vice figures who also help him in his endeavors. Like the other Vices in Mankind, Titivillus is a manifestation of the perverse dynamic that is central to the play because he is damnable and attractive at the same time.

The Vice characters are not the only ones who manifest the perverse dynamic as it pertains to sodomy in this play. Mercy and Mankind also contribute to the issue of sexual intercourse between men. Mercy's final speech before leaving Mankind in the hands of the Vice figures sheds some light on this contribution:

[MERCY]. Beware of Titivillus—for he lesith no wey--
That goth invisibull and will not be sen.
He will ronde in yowr ere, and cast a nett befor yowr ey.
He is worst of them all, Gode lett him never then!
If ye disples Gode, aske mercy anon,
Ellys Mischeff will be redy to brace yow in his bridyll.
Kisse me now, my dere darlinge. Gode schelde yow from yowr fon! (301-07)

If one reads this speech with the references to sodomy that the play makes in mind, then the resulting content is surprising. In effect, Mercy exhorts Mankind to avoid the seduction of the chief of all sodomites, that is, Titivillus, and to be careful not to allow Mischief to "brace [him] in his brydill" and thus be 'ridden.' Rather, Mercy kisses Mankind and calls him a "dere darlinge." When read in this way, these lines sound as much like the pleas of a jealous lover as they do like the warnings of a spiritual benefactor. Mercy's relationship with Mankind as it appears here starts to look more and more like a parallel to the relationship between Mischief and New Guise; Mercy is the older active partner, and Mankind is the passive youth. Although the kiss can be read as an expression of Christian fraternal loyalty or as a visual parallel of the kiss of the celebrating clergy at High Mass, the sexual overtones are still unavoidable and would hardly be missed by an audience. Standing on stage and kissing one another, these two 'good' characters perform an action that is associated with the 'bad' characters in Mankind. The action becomes acceptable by being performed by 'good' characters. Further, Mankind's response to this consummate kiss suggests a satisfaction that is something other than just heartfelt spirituality:

[MANKIND]. Now, blissyde be Jhesu! My soull is well saciatt
With the mellifluose doctrine of this worschipfull man.
The rebellion of my flesch, now it is superatt.
Thankinge be Gode of the comminge that I kam. (311-14)

This exclamation definitely has sexual overtones that would be unavoidable after the kiss that occurs immediately before it. The "rebellion of [the] flesch" that is "superatt" (that is, conquered) sounds suspiciously like an ejaculation.
No matter if Mankind is “saciatt” due to a spiritual ejaculation or a physical ejaculation or both, he has had an orgasm of some kind, and his speech brings that message home to the audience in a way that is hard to miss. Both Mercy and Mankind do just as much to bolster sodomy in these lines as they do to condemn it, and, like the Vice figures, the perverse dynamic operates in and around everything they do and say at this point in the play.

The dialogue between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters provides another site for commentary on sodomy in Mankind. In this context, individual expressions of the perverse dynamic give way to situations where everyone on stage in their function as both characters and as actors recognize and play off the inherence of the play’s sodomitical message within its moral message.

Naught’s reply to Mercy’s command to “do wey [the] revell” (82) that the Vices are all taking part in by dancing provides an example of this kind of interaction:

NAUGHT. Yis, mary, I prey yow, for I love not this
revelinge.
Cum forth, goode fader, I yow prey!
By a lityll ye may assay.
Anon, off with your clothes, if ye will play. (85-8)

Again, if one reads these lines in terms of the sodomitical message of Mankind, Naught openly solicits Mercy at this point. Even if an audience was completely oblivious to any other information suggestive of sodomy, the line “Anon, off with your clothes, if ye will play” is blatantly obvious in its sexual overtones.

At the level of the text, this line invites the audience to enjoy the evil character that they are supposedly obligated to condemn by laughing with him at Mercy’s expense. The highly moral Mercy is, after all, really an actor
just like the Vice character that is inviting him to "play," and this amusing irony would not be lost on the play's spectators.

The same kind of irony is directed at the 'good' characters' roles within the text that surrounds their roles as actors operating within stereotypes. A brief exchange (or, rather significantly, a non-exchange) between New Guise and Mankind demonstrates this fact:

NEW-GUISE. The wether is colde. Gode sende us goode ferys!

"Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum perverso perverteris."

"Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum," quod the devill to the ferys,

"Habitare fratres in unum."

MANKINDE. I her a felow speke. With him I will not melle.

(323-27)

New Guise's quotations of Psalms 18: 25-26 and Psalms 133:1 are loaded references to authority to which he lends a sexual edge. Mercy is dressed as a friar in Mankind, and quoting the Bible as saying that "with the perverse you will be perverse" and "[it is pleasant] for brethren to dwell together in unity" (in light of the old double entendre surrounding unity) ascribes a sodomitical undercurrent to everything Mercy espouses. A literate audience would almost assuredly recognize these quotes, and would doubtless laugh as they remembered some of the stereotypes surrounding the supposedly celibate clergy. Mercy cannot escape from connections to sodomy even as a character within the text, regardless of how hard he and his pupil Mankind try to separate themselves from it as characters. This is best evidenced by Mankind's response to New Guise, which is highly reminiscent of a child saying "I can't hear you" to someone even though he or she heard enough to respond. This
textual irony is a perfect example of the perverse dynamic in action in *Mankind*. The sodomitical subordinate term inheres within the dominant moral term in spite of the dominant term's efforts to escape. The audience sees these efforts and laughs.

*Mankind* is a complex drama. Its moral and sodomitical messages inhere within and depend upon one another to such an extent that it quickly becomes difficult to sort out the two. The comments that this play makes about the practice of sodomy at the level of both text and performance are far from simple-minded bawdy humor as some critics have suggested. This play is compelling, instructive, intelligent, funny, and, above all, extremely well wrought. It is through no small effort of the anonymous playwright that *Mankind* constitutes such a rich and detailed glimpse into the dominant and dissident aspects of fifteenth-century English culture, drama, and thought.
Chapter 3: Nichol Newfangle

I now want to look at Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* (circa 1568). The Vice, Nichol Newfangle, hearkens back to Detracio in his subversion of 'evil' ends in the play, and in his seeming avoidance of serious punishment. However, he also moves a step beyond Backbiter in the rapport he develops with the audience by means of highly effective rhetoric. In fact, I will argue that Nichol's effectiveness in this play hinges upon a deployment of rhetorical virtuosity, the tradition of sins of the tongue, and the use of sodomy as a physically particularized manifestation of rhetorical excess and as an index of power relations.¹ The result of all this is what seems to be a nuancing of the moral ends of the play by means of a destabilized and complex representation of the dissident power of words. My intention here is to examine Nichol Newfangle's language in *Like Will to Like* in an effort to underscore the extent of his rhetorical subversion; Fulwell's texts are dissident, rhetorically speaking, and *Like Will to Like* can be read as an anticipation of the marked ambivalence present in later plays such as Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. It is to a study of Nichol Newfangle and his rhetoric in *Like Will to Like* that I now want to turn.

It is important to note from the outset that the rhetorical framework in which Ulpian Fulwell wrote in 1568 is essentially the same framework outlined in my previous chapters. Certainly, the best descriptor for English

¹Cf. Chapter 2 n. 46 above for the link between language use and sodomy. Again, many of the ideas regarding sodomy in this chapter were developed and organized in parallel with Garrett Epp's theories when we worked together on *Like Will to Like* from 1991-94. Because of this, there is probably some unavoidable overlap between his work and mine, and, once again, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge his contribution to the work that follows. Epp has presented his findings in an unpublished paper, "*Like Will to Like and the Control of Sodomy,*" that he delivered at a conference on 'Suppression and Unorthodoxy in the Middle Ages' at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto on 17 February 1995.
conceptions of rhetoric from the middle 1570s and on is ‘changing.’ but until 1573 “the directions and observations which made up rhetoric...are perhaps best termed traditional.” By “traditional” the reader should understand ‘Aristotelian’ and understand further that “Cicero, who was a profound student of Aristotelian logic and rhetoric, formulated from that and other sources a rhetorical system to which all rhetorical instruction in western Europe during the period now under discussion must be referred.” Again, as above, Cicero’s De inventione and the pseudo-Ciceronian Rhetorica ad Herennium form the intellectual foundation upon which Fulwell’s use of rhetoric is based. The main difference is that by the time of the publication of Like Will to Like in 1568 there existed an established tradition of English rhetoric based heavily on the Ciceronian model and that the terms and procedures of Ciceronian rhetoric, already well known, became widely known throughout England during this period via the printing press and vernacular translation. Texts such as Stephen Hawes’s Pastime of Pleasure (1509), Leonard Cox’s The Arte or Crafte of Rhethoryke (circa 1530), Robert Copland’s discussion of memoria in The Art of Memory, that otherwyse is called the “Phenix” (circa 1548), and Thomas Wilson’s The Arte of Rhetorique (1553) are just some of the influential works that laid out the Ciceronian doctrine, either in whole or in part, for study in the vernacular. Of course, this does not mean that the Ciceronian texts themselves ceased to be read; rather, books such as Thomas Wilson’s Arte should be seen as digests and adaptations of the Rhetorica ad Herennium and De inventione that reflect the close study to which Cicero’s writings were

\[2\] Howell, 64.
\[3\] Howell, 65.
\[4\] Howell, 64-137.
The important thing to note is that just as there is a certain amount of generic continuity between *Mankind* and *Like Will to Like*, and just as there is a shared structural principle behind the three N's of *Mankind* and Nichol Newfangle as Vice figures, so also is there a common rhetorical framework to be drawn upon, emphasized, and subverted.

Fulwell wastes no time in bringing Nichol Newfangle, laughing and holding a playing card, to the attention of his audience:

> Ha, ha, ha, ha, now like unto like: it wil be none other.
> Stoup, gentle knave, and take up your brother.
> Why, is it so? and is it even so indeed?
> Why, then, may I say God send us good speed!
> And is every one heer so greatly unkinde.
> And I am no sooner out of sight, but quite out of minde?
> Mary, this wil make a man even weep for woe.
> That on such a sodain no man wil him knowe.
> Though men be so dangerous now at this day:
> Yet are women kinde woorms, I dare wel say.
> 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 wil you knowe me anon, I dare ieopard a grote.
> Nichol Newfangle is my name; doo you me not knowe?
> My whole education to you wil I showe. (37-52)

---


6 *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). All subsequent references to *Like Will to Like* will be to this edition and will be indicated with line numbers.
This first half of Nichol's thirty-two line introduction to the audience functions as a highly effective deployment of rhetoric at two levels. At the level of the text as an artifact, Fulwell carefully constructs these rhyming couplets to maximize the comedic suspense surrounding Nichol Newfangle's name--Nichol doesn't name himself for his first eleven lines--and thereby produces a memorable opening for his play. It is Nichol Newfangle's self-conscious rhetorical performance as an inhabitant of the play-world who is able to transcend the boundaries between himself and the audience, however, that is most striking. His use of commoratio (dwelling on the point) in repeatedly asking the audience if anyone knows him serves to underscore the audience's complicity with him--as corrupted or evil--and simultaneously imparts a mock-serious tone to the speech that entices that audience. On the one hand, this is the same deployment of rhetoric to influence the audience that Backbiter uses in The Castle of Perseverance; on the other hand, the level of sophistication evidenced in Nichol's sustained use of a subtle figure of thought heightens the intensity--and seriousness--of his 'evil' use of rhetoric. This is not to suggest that Nichol Newfangle is somehow a more evolved Vice than Backbiter; rather, it suggests that the horizon of expectations for Like Will to Like involves an audience that is more keenly

---

7Nichol's speech to the audience and his playing with his identity also constitute a kind of introductory formula for Vice figures. Cf. Spivack, 119, 181ff. for a discussion of these phenomena in a number of plays. It should be noted that Spivack deals intelligently with the phenomenon of direct address by reading it as an integral part of the allegorical and didactic structure of the plays (which it is) but does not attempt to explain the potentially destabilizing effects of such direct address.

8ad Herennium, 374.
aware of the parameters of Ciceronian rhetoric. The effect of this, of course, is to make Nichol Newfangle's rhetorical dissidence all the more striking.

The second half of Nichol's opening speech, still directed to the audience, constitutes a compounding of the subversive rhetorical play he sets up with his auditors in his first lines:

For first, before I was born, I remember very well
That my gransier and I made a iourney into hell,
Where I was bound prentice before my nativitie
To Lucifer himself, such was mine agilitie.
All kinde of sciences he taught unto me.
That to the maintenance of pride might best agree.
I learned to make gowns with long sleeves and winges:
I learned to make ruffs like calves chitterlings.
Caps, hats, cotes, and all kinde of apparails.
And especially breeches as big as good barrels.
Shoos, boots, buskins, with many prity toyes;
All kinde of garments for men, women, and boyes.
Know ye me not now? I thought that at the last
All acquaintance from Nichol Newfangle is not past.
Nichol Newfangle was, and is, and ever shalbe:
And there are but few that are not acquainted with me.
For so soon as my prentishood was once come out
I went by and by the whole world about.  (53-70)

---

Nichol here uses his personal history—with its note of comic fantasy intact—as an example of *notatio* or character delineation⁴ to define his name and to extend his use of *commoratio* still further. In describing himself by outlining the tricks of the tailor's trade that he learned from Lucifer himself, Nichol simultaneously explains his name (and almost assuredly his appearance) to the audience, satirizes tailors and fashions, and registers a universal appeal with an audience that lives in a world where clothes make the woman and the man, the boy and the girl by identifying their position in the social hierarchy. At the same time, it becomes increasingly difficult for that audience to divorce the 'evil' content of Nichol's speech from the highly sophisticated rhetoric that shapes it, and even as Nichol establishes his considerable comic appeal he renders rhetoric itself ambivalent in much the same way that it was destabilized for Augustine as he addressed its use in *De doctrina Christiana*. It is ultimately Nichol Newfangle's rhetorical facility that not only entertains but also subverts, and that subversion is extended to the means whereby it is enacted.

Fulwell next has Nichol Newfangle interact with Lucifer, and it is here that the extent of Nichol's rhetorical powers and his subversion of rhetoric is manifested. Having made the audience complicit with him by expressing his fear of the devil ("Body of me, it were best goe no neere" he says at line 73) and by signaling that what follows will be worth noting ("But no more words but mum, you shall heare what he wil say" he tells them at line 76), he launches into a dialogue with the devil that leaves little doubt as to the identity of the rhetorical victor. This is all the more effective because Nichol outlines

---

⁴ *ad Herennium*, 386-94.
another aspect of his relationship with Lucifer that is bound up with words and, ultimately, power:

LUCIFER Howe, mine own boy, I am glad that thou art heere!

NEWFANGLE He speaketh to you, sir, I pray you come neer.

*Pointing to one standing by*

LUC. Nay, thou art even he of whom I am wel appaid.

NEW. Then speak aloof of: to come nie I am afraid.

LUC. Why lo, my boy, as though thou didst never see me?

NEW. Yes, godfather, but I am afraid it is now as often times it is with thee.

For if my dame and thou hast been tumbling by the eares,

As oftentimes you doo, like a couple of great beares.

Thou carest not whom thou killest in thy raging minde.

Dost thou not remember since thou brusedst me behinde?

This hole in thy fury thou didst disclose.

That now may a tent be put in, as big as thy nose.

This was when my dame called thee a bottle-nosed knave.

But I am like to cary the mark to my grave.

LUC. Oh my good boy, be not afraid,

For no such thing hath happened as thou hast saide. (77-92)

NICHOL's speech here both provides a reason for--comically--snubbing Lucifer and also ridicules him by disclosing the terms of their relationship in front of the audience. NICHOL's references to being 'bruised' from behind and having a 'hole' so disclosed by the devil that "now may a tent [probe] be put in. as big as [Lucifer's] nose" are certainly references to being forced into the position
of the passive partner in a same-sex encounter.\textsuperscript{11} All of this goes beyond a comic complaint about being the stereotypically demasculinized passive partner, as New Guise is found to be in \textit{Mankind} in my discussion above:

Nichol's use of \textit{licentia} (frankness of speech)\textsuperscript{12} in employing such an obvious metaphor should be read as a public accusation that puts Lucifer on the rhetorical defensive. The force of such an accusation is best appreciated if one recalls Bruce R. Smith's assertion that "homosexual relations between men were made a capital offense under the civil law all over Europe" in the sixteenth century after the relative tolerance of the middle ages.\textsuperscript{13} Viewed from this perspective, Lucifer's assertion that "no such thing hath happened as [Nichol] hast said" can be read not only as a reassurance that he has not been fighting with his dame but also as a rather nervous denial of Nichol's charge of sodomy. Nichol's rhetoric sets even the devil on edge and, in effect, turns the tables on him by appropriating verbal and (metaphorically) sexual power. Nichol's attitude—and his power—is sustained in his refusal to kneel in front of Lucifer's codpiece—probably decorated with a demon's face and a long nose—at line 96 and in his response to Lucifer's request that he "adioyne like unto like alway": "I never loved that wel, I swere by this day" (126). Thus, even the title of the play is subverted from its Ciceronian meaning ("For the vertuous doo not the vertuous company mislike" the Prologue tells the

\textsuperscript{11}See J. N. Adams, \textit{The Latin Sexual Vocabulary} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 35+\textsuperscript{n.2}: It became a commonplace in the Middle Ages that the shape and state of the nose reflected the nature of the genitalia. See \textit{Flos Medicinae Scholae Salerni} 1790, in S. De Renzi, \textit{Collectio Salernitana} V (Naples, 1859), p. 51 'ad formam nasi dignoscitur hasta Priapi', and Michael Scotus, \textit{De Physiognomia} 22.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{ad Herennium}, 348-54.


audience at line 4) to a meaning with sodomitical overtones and the rhetoric of the dominant message of the play is destabilized in the process.

The next instance of Nichol's rhetorical dissidence occurs when he is finally forced to kneel and accept Lucifer's blessing:

LUC. Thou art my own boy; my blessing thou shalt have.
NEW. By my troth, godfather, that blessing I doo not crave.
But if you go your way, I wil doo my diligence.
As wel in your absence as in your presence.
LUC. But thou shalt salute me, or I goe doubtles,
That in thy dooings thou maist have the better successe.
Wherfore kneel down and say after me.
NEW. When the Devil wil have it so, it must needs be.
*He kneleth downe*
What shal I say, bottel nosed godfather, canst thou tel?

LUC. All haile, Oh noble prince of hel.
NEW. All my dames cow tailes fel down into the wel.

LUC. I wil exalt thee above the clowdes.

NEW. I wil sault thee, and hang thee in the shrowdes.

LUC. Thou art the inhauncer of my renowne.
NEW. Thou art Haunce, the hangman of Callis town.

LUC. To thee be honour alone.
NEW. To thee shall come our hobling Jone.

LUC. Amen.

NEW. Amen. (197-215)

Nichol may be forced into receiving the blessing, but he turns that force back onto Lucifer by undercutting the rhetorical power of Lucifer's self-praise.

Nichol's humorous responses completely destroy the *dignitas* of Lucifer's oath...
and render diabolical power ridiculous in the process. Evil, in the form of Nichol Newfangle, turns in upon itself (Lucifer) and the power of rhetoric used for evil ends is rendered highly ambivalent. Once again, Augustine's anxiety in the *De doctrina Christiana* surfaces here as rhetoric is used to overturn the authority of evil just as it can be used to subvert the good. Nichol Newfangle, as enactor of that rhetoric and thus that ambivalence, stands apart from any binary opposition between good and evil even as he serves evil ends as Lucifer's "own boy."

Nichol's next direct address to the audience employs new rhetorical strategies that further characterize him as a Vice figure and further implicate the audience as complicit auditors:

> Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

> Now three knaves are gone, and I am left alone.

> My selfe heere to solace:  

> Wel doon, gentle Ione, why begin you to mone?  

> Though they be gone, I am in place.  

> And now I wil daunce, now wil I praunce.  

> For why I have none other woork:  

> Snip, snap, butter is no bone meat;  

> Knaves flesh is no porke.  

> Hey tisty tosty, an ole is a bird:  

> lack-a-napes hath an olde face.  

> You may beleeeve me at one bare woord (567-78)

Although at first the rhetorical strategies Fulwell has Nichol employ here seem to be similar to those used in Newfangle's opening speech, their effects are in fact quite different. Nichol's laughter, directed at Tom Tospot, Phillip Fleming, and Haunce, is of a different tone than the laughter of his first line
in the play. Instead of a general laugh designed to suggest merriment and to attract attention, Nichol here laughs at ridiculous persons—and the audience laughs with him. This is a perfect example of the rhetorical use of laughter outlined in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* where opening a speech “*ab aliqua re quae risum movere possit*” (with something that may provoke laughter) such as an “*imitatione depravata*” (caricature) is suggested as a means of winning over listeners.¹⁴ Winning over the audience is certainly one of the effects of this speech, and the success of Nichol’s laughter in achieving this is due in only some measure to the fact that Fulwell plays on xenophobic attitudes in his original audience by presenting Phillip and Haunce as foreigners from Flanders. Nichol’s recognition of an audience member’s enthusiasm for the drunkards (“Wel doon, gentle lone, why begin you to mone?”) recognizes and verbalizes the audience’s reaction to the play and allows him to offer himself as a substitute for their continued enjoyment: “Though they be gone, I am in place.” Having already momentarily aligned himself with the objects of “*imitatione depravata*” by implying that he is an (entertaining) knave left alone after three others have left. Nichol begins to “daunce” and “praunce” ostensibly because he has “none other woork.” In fact, it is his primary job here to be so entertaining, for it is through his rhyme of “snip, snap, butter is no bone meat” that he consolidates his rhetorical power over the audience. He can end by assuring them that they “may believe [him] at one bare word.”¹⁵

---

¹⁴ *ad Herennium*, 18.

¹⁵ Cf. Spivack, 119ff. for a discussion of this direct speech as an extension of what he sees as the homiletic function of the Vice figure. He also notes that it can frequently contain “fustian” as an element that furthers its appeal. This is certainly the case and my attempt here is to identify the specific functions of that language, whereas Spivack is concerned with the identification of such language and other characteristics of Vice figures in and of themselves.
The second half of this speech to the audience also has Nichol take a different rhetorical bearing than his previous words allowed:

How like you this mery cace?
A peece of ground they think they have found,
I wil tel you what it is:
For I them tolde that of beggars maner it did holde,
A staffe and a wallet, I wis.
Which in short space, even in this place,
Of me they shall receive:
For when that their drift hath spent all their thrift,
Their mindes I shall deceive.
I trowe you shall see more knaves come to me,
Which whencesoever they doo.
They shall have their meed, as they deserve indeed,
As you shal shortly see these two.
When they doo pretend to have a good end
Mark wel, then what shall insue:
A bag and a bottle, or els a rope knottle,
This shall they prove to true. (579-95)

What Nichol enacts here at the rhetorical level is a confession to the audience of his actual intentions towards the drunkards: "I wil tel you what it is," he says of the "beggars maner." This in and of itself, as a technique for establishing complicity with the audience, is not new to this study; I have noted it before in my discussions of Backbiter and the Vices of Mankind. What is striking is that he tells the audience of the hardship he intends to deal out to the drunkards and justifies it by saying "they shall have their meed, as they deserve indeed." Nichol's words here identify him as a punisher of
wrongdoers—and place him in moral proximity to the audience. The laughter from the “imitatione depravata” is sustained throughout and it works with Nichol’s confession to sway the audience towards the idea that the drunkards are both ridiculous and worthy of punishment. The notion of a Vice figure punishing vice, though, adds a complexity to that swaying that ultimately causes Nichol’s language—and its effects—to double back upon itself in acute moral destabilization. Fulwell has Nichol claim not only that “like wil to like” (133) but also that like will punish like.

The rhetorical strategies Fulwell has Nichol use are intensified and augmented when Nichol next returns to address the audience directly. He enters carrying “a bagge, a staffe, a bottle, and two halters, going about the place shewing it to the audience” (893 s.d.) and singing:

Trim marchandise, trim, trim, trim marchandise, trim, trim.
Mary, heer is merchandise, who list for to buy any:
Come see for your love, and buy for your money.
This is the land which I must distribute anon
According to my promise, or I begun.
For why Tom Tospot, since he went hence,
Hath increased a noble iust unto ninepence;
And Rafe Roister, it may none otherwise be chosen.
Hath brought a pack of wul to a faire paire of hosen:
This is good thrift, learn it who shall. (894-904)

The confessional element, “imitatione depravata,” and suggestion of punishment are all still here, but Nichol now adopts the role and rhetoric of a peddler so that he can simultaneously criticize the economic performances of the drunkards and employ that criticism as a sustained translatio or
metaphor\textsuperscript{16} for their fallen state in the world. This appeals to the audience's sense of humor while undercutting the rhetoric of commerce; the language of peddlers and, indeed, all who sell "marchandise" is not to be trusted. Ironically, Nichol's confessional rhetoric, unlike the rhetoric of sales, can be trusted; he tells the audience what he intends to do and then does it. The \textit{abusio} (catachresis)\textsuperscript{17} in his assertion that Tom Tospot "increased a noble iust unto ninepence" only furthers this irony by lending a sarcastic ring of truth to his delivery. The audience can be fully aware of Nichol's position as an ambivalent figure in the play and still believe him "at one bare woorde." This belief is not diminished when Rafe Roister and Tom Tospot beat Nichol Newfangle at lines 1030ff (the closest thing to substantial punishment that Nichol receives for his words and deeds in the play). Whether or not he leaves rhetoric as a reliable communicator of truth that can be believed is another matter.

An interesting comment on judicial rhetoric is to be found in Nichol Newfangle's brief interactions with Severity. Nichol, lying on the ground and groaning from the thrashing he received at the hands of Tospot and Roister, calls to Severity:

\begin{quote}
NEW. Help me up, good sir, for I have got a fall.
SEVERITY What cause have you, my freend, thus heavily to grone?
NEW. Oh sir, I have good cause to make great mone:
Heere were two fellowes, but right now,
That I think have killed me, I make God a vow.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{ad Herennium}, 342-4.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{ad Herennium}, 342.
I pray you tel me, am I alive or am I dead?

SEVERITY Fellowe, it is more need for thee to be in thy bed
Then to lye heere in such sort as thou doost.

NEW. In faith, I should have laid some of the knaves in the dust
If I had had your swoord right now in presence;
I would have had a leg or an arme, ere they had gon hence.

SEVERITY Who is it that hath doon thee this injury?

NEW. A couple of beggers have doon me this vilany.

SEVERITY I see if severitie should not be executed,
One man should not live by another.
If such iniuries should not be confuted,
The childe would not regard father nor mother.
Give me thy hand, and I wil help thee.

NEW. Hold fast your swoord then, I pray you hartely. (1057-75)

It seems clear from even a cursory glance at this passage that Nichol’s rhetoric is accepted by Severity. On the one hand, this is hardly surprising since Nichol was beaten and the law must address that fact. On the other hand, this exchange indicates to the audience that Nichol’s rhetorical performance disguises his identity as a Vice figure and renders him immune from any responsibility he has for causing the beating. Thus, the impartiality of the law is emphasized (“I see if severitie should not be executed. One man should not live by another”) at the same time as the shaping power of language is foregrounded. Severity helps Nichol up and asks his “freend” (lines 1076 and 1080) if he can provide him with any information (1080). Nichol quickly seizes the opportunity to act as an informant (1082-5). Thus Nichol continues to inflict punishment upon the ‘fallen’ figures in the play and subverts the impartiality of rhetoric as a forensic tool in the process. This is all the more
striking given that the audience recognizes that Nichol has only told the truth.严格 speaking; they learn that the open hand of *eloquentia* is more than capable of covering the closed fist of reason.

Nichol's final speech to the audience extends all his previous rhetorical strategies and consolidates his power as a subverter of language. Having sent two thieves, Cutbert Cutpurse and Pierce Pickpurse, away with Hankin Hangman, he revels with his auditors:

> Ha, ha, ha, there is a brace of hounds wel woorth a dozen crowns,  
> Beholde the huntsman leadeth away!  
> I think in twenty towns, on hills, and eke on downs.  
> They taken have their pray.  
> So well liked was their hunting on hill and eke on mountain.  
> That now they be up in a leace:  
> To keep within a string it is now a gay thing.  
> Doo all you holde your peace?  
> Why then, good gentle boy, how likest thou this play?  
> No more, but say thy minde.  
> I swere by this day, if thou wilt this assay,  
> I wil to thee be kinde.  
> This is wel broughte to passe of me, I swere by the masse,  
> Some to hang, and other some to beg.  
> I would I had Balam's asse to cary me where I was.  
> How say you, little Meg? (1167-82)

Nichol's by now familiar laugh is followed by a use of *conformatio* or personification\(^\text{18}\) to represent Cutbert and Pierce--sarcastically, of course--as

\(^{18}\) *Ad Herennium*, 398-401.
dogs. Newfangle's impressive ability to sustain this figure of thought and apply it to the two pickpockets is humorously impressive. He immediately capitalizes on this effect by addressing an audience member directly: in asking the "good gentle boy" how he likes the play he yet again transcends the allegorical framework of the play and emphasises the constructedness of the whole: law, morality, and especially rhetoric. This effect, too, is sustained in his query for "little Meg." Nichol can "swere by the masse" that "this was wel broughte to passe" and the audience is forced to agree with him. The virtuosity of his rhetorical performance demands as much.

Lucifer's re-entry onto the stage provides an index of just how much power Nichol Newfangle has garnered by means of rhetoric throughout the course of the play. Nichol wishes he had a "nag to see the world wag" (1199) and Lucifer arrives immediately to fulfill this desire:

LUC. Ho, ho, ho, mine own boy, make no more delay.
But leap upon my back straight away.
NEW. Then who shall holde my stirrop, while I goe to horse?
LUC. Tush, for that doo thou not force.
Leap up, I say, leap up, quickly.
NEW. Who, Ball, who, and I will come by and by.
Now for a paire of spurs I would give a good grote.
To try whether the iade dooth amble or trot!
Farwel, my masters, til I come again.
For now I must make a iourney into Spaine. (1203-12)

The symbolic significance of this exchange only becomes fully apparent when Nichol's earlier references to being 'bruised' from behind by Lucifer are recalled. True to form, Nichol continues to deploy the rhetorical facility that has allowed him to take power and become the active partner in his
sodomitical relationship with Lucifer. His concern over who will hold his “stirrop” extends the personification while implying that Nichol is crossing economic and social boundaries and mocking them at the same time: his desire for a ‘servant’ to help him onto his horse suggests the extent of the power that rhetoric offers and the ludicrous uses to which such power is frequently put. Nichol’s wish for a “paire of spurs” extends the personification further still and indicates that he intends to ‘punish’ Lucifer now that he is in a position of power. The reference to Spain only confirms the power of Newfangle’s rhetoric and invites xenophobic and anti-Catholic laughter.

Ulpian Fulwell’s Nichol Newfangle is a remarkable creation. Ambivalent from his first lines to his last exit, he embodies the moral ambiguity of language in its use as a tool for persuasion. Unlike Backbiter and the Vices of Mankind, Nichol Newfangle emerges from a cultural milieu in which rhetoric was not primarily an organizing framework for the learned but a discipline whose instruments were widely available through the printing press and vernacular translations. What this means, I think, for the representation of rhetoric in Like Will to Like is that the overt consciousness of the ambivalence of rhetoric is intensified. Rhetoric, for Fulwell, is inextricably and seriously bound up with the achievement and maintenance of power.
Chapter 4: Ambidexter

Cambises by Thomas Preston was entered on the Stationers Register by John Alde in 1569. Described on the title page as a “Lamentable Tragedie Mixed Full of Plesant Mirth, Containing The Life of Cambises, King of Percia,” it also contains, in Ambidexter, one of the most striking examples of the Vice. Having been identified as a Vice in his first stage direction, this dramatically realized allegorical abstraction, wearing “an olde Capcase on his hed. an olde pail about his hips for harnes, a Scummer and a potlid by his side and a rake on his shoulder,” (125 s.d.) proceeds to dominate the play through his ability to transgress social boundaries and subvert the intentions of everyone he comes into contact with, all without suffering serious harm himself. Ambidexter’s remarkable ability to “play with bothe hands” (321) and subvert on all sides stems largely from his ability to deploy rhetoric not just as a means of persuasion but also as a vehicle for social transgression across the boundaries of estate or class to wreak havoc at every social level for the sheer virtuosic fun of it. A brief discussion of the rhetorical background of Cambises will be followed by a close reading of Ambidexter’s rhetoric itself. As Ambidexter himself says: “Ambidexter, nay he is a fellow if ye knew all/ Cease for a wile, heerafter hear more ye shall” (158-9).

The authorship of Cambises, although not universally acknowledged, is most often attributed to the Thomas Preston (1537-98) who was master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge and who impressed Elizabeth I on her visit to King’s College, Cambridge in August 1564 when he was a scholar there.²


² William D. Wolf notes that the “problem” of attributing Cambises to this particular Thomas Preston was first highlighted by J. M. Manly, “The Children of the Chapel Royal and Their Masters,” The Cambridge History of English
Interestingly enough, his performance as a disputant in the Philosophy Act (successfully negating the claim "Monarchia est optimus status republicae"), his acting abilities in a play entitled Dido that was performed for the Queen by the scholars of King's, and, most notably, his rhetorical facility in delivering a private oration to the Queen all had an effect upon her that was worth recording:

Mr. Preston (who was one of the Replyers in the Philosophy Acte) made an Oracion before the Queene's Matie in her lodging privately; which her grace so well liked, that, putting further her hand for him to kisse, her Highnesse, as himself termed yt, dubbed hym her Scholar, and exhorted him to continue in his studie with diligence, saying, the whole body of the University might rejoynce that even it nourished so profitable a member: and therewithal she gave him viii angels.

Literature, VI: The Drama to 1642, Part 2, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1907-17) 279-92. Wolf further notes that this doubt was echoed by E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923) and Adams, 638 and correctly points out that Robert Carl Johnson, 34 conjecturally assigns the play to an itinerant playwright. See Philip Dust and William D. Wolf, "Recent Studies in Early Tudor Drama: Gorboduc, Ralph Roister Doister, Cammer Gurton's Needle, and Cambises," English Literary Renaissance (1978): 107-19. The problem with the dismissal of the Cambridge Preston is that it rests upon the prejudiced and anachronistic notion that a play such as Cambises is beneath the dignity of a celebrated Cambridge scholar. This notion does not constitute evidence and is insufficient reason to rule out the Preston of King's and Trinity as the author of the play. Acceptance of Preston as author seems to be more common in recent work. W. R. Streitberger, writing in one of the most recent and authoritative histories of early English drama, accepts Preston's authorship of Cambises to the extent that the question is left unraised. See W. R. Streitberger, "Personnel and Professionalization," A New History of Early English Drama, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 340.

3Johnson, 30.

Preston's documented talents as an entertaining philosophical subverter of established political views, as an actor, and as an accomplished rhetorician are, in and of themselves, sufficient background for a reading of Cambises. However, his presence at King's College, Cambridge during the 1560s is equally important in establishing the rhetorical background from which Cambises emerges.

Thomas Wilson (circa 1525-81), the author of The rule of Reason, conteinyng the Art of Logique (1551) and The Arte of Rhetorique (1553; 1560), both works being the first of their kinds to be printed in English, was a student at King's College from 1542-49 and remained at Cambridge as a tutor until he was forced into exile for his Protestantism after 1553. Wilson's Rhetorique, according to one of its editors "the most popular work of [its] kind in sixteenth-century England," assuredly contributed to the establishment of Cambridge as an important center for rhetorical training during the period, and the 1560 edition, released upon Wilson's return from exile, firmly reestablished his reputation as an important Protestant scholar. Wilson's rapid rise to political prominence in Elizabeth's government after 1561 no doubt contributed to this reputation, and it is reasonable to speculate that students of oratory at King's in the 1560s would be familiar with Wilson's work. These students could certainly include the noted orator Preston, and there is little risk in reading the rhetoric of his play through the lens of the work of one of Cambridge's best-known sixteenth-century rhetoricians.

5Thomas Wilson, Arte of Rhetorique, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York: Garland, 1982) lxxiii. Derrick uses the first edition of 1553 as his copy-text and incorporates material from the second edition of 1560. He correctly notes that the 1560s "marked the height of the popular appeal of the Arte" lxxvii. The Arte, dedicated to John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland and the Chancellor of Cambridge in 1552 when Wilson started work on it, went through four editions between 1560 and 1567.
Ambidexter's opening speech, simultaneously a conventional Vice-greeting and an oration aimed directly at the audience, does much to establish both the extent of his rhetorical powers and his subversive potential:

Stand away, stand away for the passion of God,
Harnessed I am prepared to the feeld.
I would have been content at home to have bod,
But I am sent forth with my speare and sheeld.
I am appointed to fight against a Snail,
And Wilkin Wren the ancient shall beare:
I dout not but against him to prevail.
To be a man my deeds shall declare.
If I overcome him, then a Butter flye takes his parte.
His weapon must be a blew speckled Hen:
But you shall see me overthrowe him with a fart.
So without conquest he shall go home again.
If I overcome him, I must fight with a flye,
And a black pudding the flyes weapon must be:
At the first blowe on the ground he shall lye.
I wil be sure to thrust him through the mouth to the knee.
To conquest these fellowes the man I wil play. (126-42)

Wrenched via laughter from the historical narrative of the drama up to this point, the audience is forced to confront Ambidexter directly through his address to them. The effect of his ridiculous appearance is at once explained: he is "appointed to fight against a Snail." The silliness of the list of the battles

---

6Somerset, "Damnable Deconstructions: Vice Language in the Interlude," discusses the greeting as a conventional set-piece repeatedly found in interludes.
to come that follows this statement is far more than nonsense: it is simultaneously a subversively satirical representation of the aristocratic pursuit of martial exercise as a status-enhancing activity. The striking detail Ambidexter employs in his description of his opponents’ weapons and his bravado in declaring that he “will be sure to thrust [the] fly through the mouth to the knee” both underscore the extent to which this speech represents satire at its most subtly subversive. If the humor of Ambidexter’s words cannot be lost upon the audience, neither can his implicit suggestion that knightly pursuits are the equivalent of the actions he claims to undertake. Already, Ambidexter stands apart outside the boundaries of the historical continuity of the play and outside the social hierarchy that shapes both the play-world and the world of the sixteenth-century English audience.

Karl P. Wentersdorf offers a very different interpretation of Ambidexter’s opening lines. He sees Ambidexter as playing “twin roles as pseudo-Christian Soldier and as tempter.” He also goes to great lengths in reading the significance of the snail, wren, hen, butterfly and fly mentioned in these lines. While Wentersdorf’s reading is inventive and suggestive, it obscures the subversive satire that is the main point of Ambidexter’s lines here. Kent Cartwright, writing of the effects of the play as a whole, offers a reading that comes closer to defining what Ambidexter achieves: “Cambises trains the audience in expectation and surprise. Even more, it trains the audience to feel a sequence of emotions that are not just disparate but contradictory—sorrow and laughter, engulfment and anxiety—toward identical objects.” I argue that all of this takes place via Ambidexter’s

---


rhetorical manipulation of the audience and the other figures in the play. Willard Farnham, writing in 1936, sums up the subversion of Ambidexter in one line, noting the effectiveness of "the inevitable Vice, in this play named Ambidexter because he 'plays with both hands,' doing both good and evil though always intending mischief."#9

The second half of Ambidexter's opening speech consolidates his rhetorical power and sets up the ambivalently playful relationship he will maintain with the audience throughout the play:

Ha, ha, ha, now ye wil make me to smile:

\[\ldots\]

To see if I can all men begile.

Ha, my name, my name would you so fain knowe?

Yea iwis shal ye, and that with all speed:

I have forgot it therefore I cannot showe, A, A, now I have it. I have it in deed.

My name is Ambidexter, I signifie one,

That with bothe hands finely can play:

Now with king Cambices and by and by gone,

Thus doo I run this and that way.

For while I meane with a Souldier to be,

Then give I a leape to Sisamnes the judge:

I dare avouch, you shall his destruction see,

To all kinde of estates I meane for to trudge.

Ambidexter, nay he is a fellow if ye knew all:

Cease for a wile, heerafter hear more ye shall. (143-59)

Ambidexter here plays with the figure of communication, “used, when we debate with other, and aske questions, as though we looked for an answer, and so go through with our matter, leavyng the judgement thereof to their discretion.” when he asks the audience “Ha, my name, my name would you so fain knowe?” and thereby implies that his name is of special import. However, he turns this figure upside down—subverts it—in his inability to provide the requisite rhetorically powerful answer: he momentarily forgets his own name. Of course, this is humor of the characterizing sort, but it is also significant humor because it shows Ambidexter mishandling rhetoric and using that mishandling as a means of capturing the audience’s attention. Ambidexter’s name is all the more powerful when he does reveal it because the audience’s interest is won. Is Ambidexter deliberately subverting the figure of communication or is this an example of oratorical fumbling? Regardless of the interpretation, the effect is the same: Ambidexter is the focus of attention and will remain so every time he is seen and heard. This fact allows Ambidexter to relate his plans to the audience; his name signifies one “[t]hat with bothe hands finely can play” and he will use this ambivalence rhetorically to practice subversion across all of the social boundaries in the play. He states this intention clearly: “To all kinde of estates I meane for to trudge.” The audience receives fair warning, but Ambidexter’s rhetoric is such that his promise that “heerafter hear more ye shall” only consolidates his power and leaves that audience waiting for “heerafter,” if only to hear how he will achieve his transgressive goals.

10Wilson, 372.
Ambidexter's interaction with the soldiers Huf, Ruf and Snuf provides him with his first opportunity of social subversion. Having beaten them when they claimed not to know him and threatened to "run his Arse against the poste" (186), he alters his physically aggressive strategy when they draw their swords and turns to his rhetorical powers:

_Ambidexter._

_O the passion of God, I have doon by mine honesty:_

_I wil take your parte heerafter verily._

_All._

_Then content, let us agree._

_Ambidexter._

_Shake hands with me, I shake hands with thee._

_Ye are ful of curtesye, that is the best:_

_And you take great pain, ye are a manerly gest._

_Why maisters doo you not knowe me? the trueth to me tel._

_All._

_No trust us, not very wel._

_Ambidexter._

_Why I am Ambidexter who many soulidiers doo love._

_Huf._

_Gogs hart to have thy company needs we must proove._

_We must play with bothe hands with our hostes and host:_

_Play with both hands and score on the poste._

_Now and then with our Captain for many a delay:_

_We wil not stick with bothe hands to play._

_Ambidexter._

_The honester man ye, ye may me trust._ (206-20)
Once again, Ambidexter employs the figure of communication, this time with an overt tone of incredulity, in his question “Why maisters doo you not knowe me?” Huf’s enthusiastic response to hearing Ambidexter’s name functions not only to condemn him, along with his companions, as vicious men, but also serves the audience as an index of how Ambidexter is to be received. Ironically, the audience recognizes both that Ambidexter is widely known to be vicious and should be seen as such, and, simultaneously, that pleasure can be taken in that recognition. Of course, any pleasure the audience does take in Ambidexter at this point could serve to class-mark them and provide an indication of their moral standards; soldiers may be vicious by nature but surely the audience would not necessarily liken themselves to people of such low estate. However, Ambidexter will undercut this defense against his subversion as the play progresses. For now, it is enough to laugh with Huf, Ruf, and Snuf and recognize the irony in Ambidexter’s approval that they “wil not stick with bothe hands to play”: “The honester man ye. ye may me trust.” Ambidexter’s eloquence has not only prevented the soldiers from killing him, but has turned them to the extent that they can accept his assertions of their honesty and assurances that he can be trusted.

Ambidexter’s address to the audience after Meretrix arrives and beats Ruf provides an indication of just how much he can be trusted:

O the passion of God, be they heer stil or no?
I durst not abide to see her beat them so.
I may say to you I was in such a fright:
Body of me I see the heare of my hed stand upright.
When I saw her so hard upon them lay on:
O the passion of God thought I, she wil be with me anon.
I made no more adoo but avoided the thrust:
And to my legges began for to trust,
And fel a laughing to my self when I was once gone:
It is wisdome (quoth I) by the masse to save one.
Then into this place I intended to trudge:
Thinking to meet Sisamnes the Judge.
Beholde where he commeth, I wil him meet:
And like a gentleman I meane him to greet. (293-306)
The *confessio*, or “confessyng of the faulte,”\(^{11}\) that Ambidexter begins with
serves to undercut any charges of cowardice the audience may lay against
him. He admits his fear outright and turns it into a virtue with *sententia*,
echoing Wilson’s claim that “sentences gathered and heaped together
commende muche the matter.”\(^{12}\) “It is wisdome (quoth I) by the masse to save
one.” This serves both to provide an excuse for his behavior and a humorous
gloss over his abandonment of those who would trust him. Ambidexter’s evil is
open and apparent. When he reveals his plan to meet Sisamnes, a man of
whom Ambidexter has already told the audience “you shall his destruction see”
(156), he only extends the boundaries of that evil by including the audience in
the foreknowledge of it.

Ambidexter’s meeting with Sisamnes highlights this Vice’s ability to
subvert and make sense simultaneously. Yet again, relatively straightforward
rhetorical concepts become subtle tools of subversion:

*Ambidexter.*

Jesu maister *Sisamnes* you are unwise.

*Sisamnes.*

---

\(^{11}\)Wilson, 207.

\(^{12}\)Wilson, 244.
Why so? I pray ye let me agnise.

What maister *Ambidexter*, is it you?

Now welcome to me I make God a vow.

*Ambidexter*.

Jesu maister *Sisamnes* with me you are wel acquainted:

By me rulers may be trimly painted.

Ye are unwise if ye take not time while ye may:

If ye wil not now, when ye would ye shall have nay.

What is he that of you dare make exclamation:

Of your wrong dealing to make explication?

Can you not play with bothe hands and turn with the winde?

*Sisamnes*.

Believe me your words draw deep in my minde. (307-22)

The "Oration deliberative. . .wherby we do perswade"\(^1\) provides the model for Ambidexter's speech. He uses Sisamnes' friendly recognition of him as leverage to "advise our neighbour to that thing, which we think most needful for hym or els to cal him backe from that folie, which hindereth muche his estimacion."\(^2\) The irony--and the subversion--lies in the extent to which Ambidexter's words follow the letter of Wilson's prescription for the "oration deliberative" while perverting the spirit of that prescription. Sisamnes' reply, "Believe me your words draw deep in my minde," emphasize the effectiveness of Ambidexter's rhetoric; the frighteningly seductive physicality of Sisamnes' metaphor here testifies to the power of perverse persuasion.

---

\(^1\)Wilson, 76.

\(^2\)Wilson, 76.
The discomfort communicated to the audience in Sisamnes' seduced—and hopeless—reply to Ambidexter's persuasions is furthered when Ambidexter next addresses the audience directly:

In deed as ye say I have been absent a long space.
But is not my cosin Cutpurse, with you in the mene time?
To it, to it Cosin and doo your office fine.
How like you Sisamnes for using of me?
He plaid with bothe hands, but he sped il favouredly.
The King him self was godly up trained:
He professed vertue, but I think it was fained.
He playes with bothe hands good deeds and il:
But it was no good deed, Praxaspes sonne for to kil.
As he for the good deed on the Judge was commended:
For all his deeds els he is reprehended.
The moste evil disposed person that ever was:
All the state of his life he would not let passe.
Some good deeds he wil doo, though they be but few:
The like things this tirant Cambices dooth shew.
No goodnes from him, to none is exhibited:
But stil malediction, abrode is distributed.
And yet ye shall see in the rest of his race:
What infamy he wil woorke against his owne grace.

Whist, no more woords, heer comes the kings brother. (602-21)

The confession that opens this speech, "In deed as ye say I have been absent a long space," is a wonderfully strategic and effective repetition of Ambidexter's most frequently employed rhetorical device. In one line he re-establishes his direct communication with the audience, ironically and humorously answers
the charge that he has been absent too long, and defines the limits of the audience's reception of him in that implied charge: his interpretation of this implication leaves no room for an audience that does not think that his absence has been too long. This is rhetoric at its most dramatically effective: Ambidexter's re-establishment of communication with the audience provides a great entrance for the actor playing him and further elicits the audience's attention. The rogatio, or "askyng other, and answeryn our self"15 that follows in the lines "But is not my cosin Cutpurse, with you in the mene time?" and "How like you Sisamnes for using of me?/He plaid with bothe hands, but he sped il favouredly" adds a sense of discomfort to that attention. Instead of "muche commend[ing] the matter, and mak[ing] it very pleasant,"16 Ambidexter's rogatio celebrates the power of his Vice-rhetoric and implicitly forces the audience into celebrating it with him. The libera vox, "freenesse of speache. . .when wee speake boldely, and without feare, even to the proudest of them,"17 that follows in the rest of this speech serves to draw the audience's attention away from Ambidexter's contribution to their discomfort by focusing frankly on Cambises' evil (a rhetorical strategy that has the subversive effect of aligning him with the dominant moral message of the play regarding the fruits of tyranny). The reticentia, "whisht, or a warnyng to speake no more,"18 is not just good dramatic writing that focuses the audience's attention on the entering actor; it also serves to silence any challenge to Ambidexter's rhetorical force.

15Wilson, 365.
16Wilson, 365.
17Wilson, 396.
18Wilson, 395.
The "oration deliberative" that Ambidexter delivers to Cambises' brother Smirdis also--ironically--seems to align Ambidexter with what can appear to be good intentions and common sense:

My Lord, and if your honor it shall please:
I can informe you what is best for your ease.
Let him alone, of his deeds doo not talke:
Then by his side ye may quietly walke.
After his death you shalbe King:
Then may you reforme eche kinde of thing.
In the meane time live quietly, doo not with him deale:
So shall it redownd much to your weale.

Smirdis.

Thou saist true my freend, that is the best:

I knowe not whether he loove me, or doo me detest. (634-43)

Rhetorically impersonating a well-meaning advisor, Ambidexter effectively persuades Smirdis in just eight lines. The important thing to note is the tone of common sense that pervades Ambidexter's words; avoiding a tyrant such as Cambises would seem to be a prudent course of action. Smirdis' response, "Thou saist true my freend, that is the best," underscores the extent to which he hears that tone in Ambidexter's words; it will also prove to show the extent to which Smirdis is taken in by Ambidexter's "good" advice. Once again, the audience sees the subversive flexibility of Ambidexter's rhetorical fluency; he is equally at home as an eloquent misleader of common soldiers, powerful judges, and royalty.

When Ambidexter next appears he uses "freenesse of speache" to take on the persona of informant and his information produces startling effects:
King.

As you have said my Lord, he is chief heire next my grace:
And if I dye to morrow, next he shall succeed my place.

Ambidexter.

And if it please your grace (O king) I herd him say:
For your death unto the God, day and night he did pray.
He would live so vertuously, and get him such a praise:
That Fame by trump his due deserts in honor should up raise.
He said your grace deserved had, the cursing of all men:
That ye should never after him, get any praise agen.

King.

Did he speake thus of my grace, in such dispightful wise?
Or els doost thou presume to fil my princely eares with lies?

Lord.

I cannot think it in my hart, that he would report so.

King.

How sayest thou? speake the trueth, was it so or no?

Ambidexter.

I think so if it please your grace, but I cannot tel.

King.

Thou plaist with bothe hands, now I perceive wel:
But for to put all doutes aside, and to make him leese his hope:
He shall dye by dent of Swoord, or els by choking Rope. (674-89)

Interestingly, Ambidexter's words have the desired effect despite the fact that Cambises sees through Ambidexter's pretended role as honest informant:

"Thou plaist with bothe hands, now I perceive wel." Like the soldiers and Sisamnes, Cambises recognizes Ambidexter as a double-dealer and, further,
recognizes the subversive intent behind the rhetoric that Ambidexter directs at him. Nevertheless, "to put all doutes aside," he reacts as though Ambidexter's report of Smirdis were accurate and orders the death of his own brother. This serves not only to show the true corruption of Cambises the tyrant, but also the socially transgressive power of Ambidexter's eloquence: Ambidexter may be physically and verbally cowed by Cambises' interrogation of him, but his words still condemn Smirdis to death. Cambises can see through Ambidexter, but he is a long way from "And if I dye to morrow, next he shall succeed my place," when he says of his brother, "He shall dye by dent of Swoord, or els by choking Rope."

Having managed such a coup as the subversion of the aims of the royal estate, Ambidexter once again checks in with his implicit accomplices, the audience:

How like ye now my maisters? dooth not this geer cotton?
The proverb olde is verified, soon ripe and soon rotten.
He wil not be quiet, til his Brother be kild:
His delight is wholly to have his blood spild.
Mary Sir I tolde him a notable lye:
If it were to doo again man, I durst not doo it I.
Mary when I had doon, to it I durst not stand:
Therby you may perceive I use to play with eche hand.
But how now Cosin Cutpursse with whome play you?
Take heed for his hand is groping even now.
Cosin take heed, if ye doo secretly grope:
If ye be taken Cosin, ye must looke through a rope. (694-705)

Ambidexter opens with his by now familiar figure rogatio in asking the audience how they like the results of his eloquence without giving them a
chance to answer. Also familiar to the audience is his deft shifting of blame for Cambises' murderous intentions away from himself with the use of *sententia* in the proverb "soon ripe and soon rotten." He employs *confessio* in his admission to a particular audience member, "Mary Sir I tolde him a notable lye," but immediately and humorously undercuts it by pushing the *confessio* still further in his disarming admission "If it were to doo again man, I durst not doo it I." This rhetorical playing with the audience transforms itself into disconcerting yet funny dramatic play in Ambidexter's references to his "cosin," a presumably non-existent pickpocket who further serves to blur the distinction between the play-world and the increasingly uncomfortable world of the audience who, in public venues in the sixteenth century, had every reason to fear being pickpocketed. The audience, too, is learning from its discomforted laughter that Ambidexter's words have power.

Not content with the lessons in the subversive force of eloquence that he has taught the audience so far, Ambidexter highlights the rhetorical construction of emotion in his next direct address:

\[\text{O the passion of God, yunder is a hevy Court:}\]
\[\text{Some weeps, some wailes, and some make great sport.}\]
\[\text{Lord Smirdis, by Crueltie and Murder is slain:}\]
\[\text{But Jesus for want of him, how some doo complain.}\]
\[\text{If I should have a thousand pound, I could not forbeare weeping:}\]
\[\text{Now Jesus have his blessed soule in keeping.}\]
\[\text{Ah, good Lord, to think on him, how it dooth me greeve:}\]
\[\text{I can not forbeare weeping, ye may me beleve. Weep.}\]
\[\text{O my hart, how my pulses doo beat:}\]
\[\text{With sorrowful lamentations, I am in such a heat.}\]
\[\text{Ah my heart, how for him it dooth sorow.}\]
Nay I have doon in faith now, and God give you good morow.
Ha, ha, weep, nay laugh, with both hands to play:
The king through his crueltie, hath made him away.
But hath not he wrought a moste wicked deed:
Because king after him he should not proceed:
His owne naturall brother and having no more:
To procure his death by violence sore?
In spight because his brother should never be King:
His hart beeing wicked consented to this thing.
Now he hath no more Brothers nor kinred alive:
If the King use this geer stil, he cannot long thrive. (732-53)
The opening of this speech provides a textbook example of the techniques of
"movyng pitee, and stirryng men to mercie." As Wilson notes, "the wrong
doen must first be plainly told"; Ambidexter tells the audience that "Lord
Smirdis, by Crueltie and Murder is slain." If "there is nothing more heinous,
then to heare that the most honest men, are sonest overthrown by them that
are moste wicked," then the murder of Smirdis at the order of Cambises is
certainly heinous in the eyes of the audience. Wilson notes further that
"neither can any good be doen at all when we have saied all that ever we can,
excepte we bring the same affections in our awne harte, the whiche wee would
the Judges should beare towards our awne matter." Ambidexter tells the
audience that "If [he] should have a thousand pound, [he] could not forbeare
weeping" and "Ah, good Lord, to think on him, how it dooth [him] greeve."

---

19Wilson, 271.
20Wilson, 272.
21Wilson, 272.
Wilson tells his readers that “heate, causeth heate” and that “a wepyng iye provoketh moysture”; Ambidexter says “with sorrowful lamentations, I am in such a heat” and “I can not forbeare weeping, ye may me believe.” Even the stage direction, “Weep,” serves as the actio of Ambidexter’s rhetorical performance. In fact, Ambidexter’s shocking lesson for the audience is to draw their attention to that performance; at the height of his grief-stricken oration, he undercuts the sympathies he has aroused in the audience in one line: “Ha, ha, weep, nay laugh, with both hands to play.” He shows that rhetoric, even when its prescriptions are precisely followed, is a potent tool for subversion and one that can be used to manipulate hearers at will.

The marriage of rhetorical and social subversion in Ambidexter’s language is present in his interaction with the farmers Hob and Lob. His opening statements to them seem innocuous enough:

Goodman Hob and goodman Lob, God be your speed.
As you twoo towards market doo walke:
Of the Kings crueltie I did hear you talke.
I insure you, he is a King most vile and parnitious:
His dooings and life are odious and vicious. (775-80)

The “freenesse of speache” that Ambidexter employs here does much to make him sound like a man to be trusted among the commiserating neighbors. He goes as far as agreeing with them when Hob wishes that Cambises were dead (781), saying “So would I Lob and Hob with all my hart” (782). However, his rhetorical strategy and his tone immediately change:

Hob and Lob, ah ye cuntry Patches:
Ah ye fooles ye have made wrong matches.
Ye have spoken treason against the kings grace:
For it I wil accuse ye before his face.
The for the same ye shalbe martered:
At the least ye shall be hangd, drawn and quartered. (788-93)

Ambidexter separates himself from the estate that Hob and Lob occupy by referring to them as “cuntry Patches” and turns the “freenesse of speache” that he elicited from them into the means for their destruction. The laesio, or speak[ing] to hurt. . .adversaries,”22 that he uses to threaten them foregrounds the potential of rhetoric to subvert the meaning and scope of common speech. Hob, Lob, and the audience learn that a farmer’s wishing death on a king in a casual conversation can be shaped into a capital crime in the hands of as deft a rhetorician as Ambidexter. No estate, no social position, is immune from his subversion.

In keeping with his stated aim “to all kinde of estates. . .for to trudge” (157), Ambidexter uses the banquet-setting role he humorously takes over from Preparation as an occasion to speak directly to the audience about issues of class:

Have ye no dout but all shalbe wel:
Mary Sir as you say, this geer dooth excel.
All things is in a redynes, when they come hether:
The kings grace and the Queen bothe togither.
I beseech ye my maisters tel me is it not best:
That I be so bolde as to bid a gest?
He is as honest a man as ever spurd Cow:
My Cosin cutpurse I meane, I beseech ye judge you.
Beleeve me Cosin if to be the Kings gest, ye could be taken:
I trust that offer would not be forsaken.

22Wilson, 397.
But Cosin because to that office ye are not like to come:
Frequent your exercises, a horne on your thumb,
A quick eye, a sharp knife, at hand a receiver:
But then take heed Cosin ye be a clenly conveyour.
Content your self Cosin, for this banquit you are unfit:
When such as I at the same am not worthy to sit. (994-1009)

The familiar use of *rogatio* is here in Ambidexter's beseeching the audience to judge whether or not his "cosin" should be invited to the king's banquet, but there is a subversively political twist to Ambidexter's rhetorical playfulness. On the one hand, Ambidexter's invitation firmly locates his "cosin's" class position as being low; Cutpurse is "as honest a man as ever spurd Cow." On the other hand, Ambidexter's invitation also implicitly suggests that the presence of a thief among a king's councilors would not be out of place; the dishonesty of government officials is thus satirized. The subtle use of *significatio*, or "close understandyng. . .when more may be gathered than is openly exprest,"23 in the line "Beleeve me Cosin if to be the Kings gest, ye could be taken" plays on the euphemistic suggestion that Cutpurse could be "taken"—pun intended—as the "Kings gest" to prison for theft. Ambidexter ends by simultaneously allaying the audience's half-real fears of being pickpocketed and underscoring the class differences of which he has been speaking when he says "Content your self Cosin, for this banquit you are unfit/When such as I at the same am not worthy to sit." The audience can rest assured that pickpockets are not welcome in this space and that the social hierarchy will not be disturbed by the presence of members of the lower orders at the banqueting table. Of course, the irony of this assertion is that, according to

23Wilson, 359.
Ambidexter's past orations, Cutpurse has been present in the audience for the entire play and Ambidexter has effortlessly insinuated himself into every position in the social hierarchy to further his subversive goals. The fact that this speech is delivered to the audience while Ambidexter impersonates a servant only highlights the irony of his words; he is in the service of no one and, via rhetoric, stands outside those relations of social power.

This overpowering sense of irony is only enhanced when Ambidexter continues in the role of servant, this time as a messenger for Cambises himself. His ability to "play with both hands" is certainly evident in his contribution to the execution of the Queen:

[King.]
By Cruels swoord and Murder fel, even thou shalt lose thy breth.
Ambidexter, see with speed, to Crueltie ye go:
Cause him hether to approch, Murder with him also.

Ambidexter.
I redy am for to fulfi,
If that be your graces wil.

King.
Then nought oblight my message given, absent thy self away.

Ambidexter.
Then in this place, I wil no longer stay.

[Aside to the Queen.]
If that I durst, I would mourne your case:
But alas, I dare not for feare of his grace. (1049-57)

Ambidexter's willingness to serve as Cambises' messenger to Crueltie and Murder is in sharp contrast to his supposed attitude toward the Queen; on the surface of things, he would seem to be sincere when he says he "would
mourn [her] case.” However, his next line, “But alas, I dare not for feare of his grace,” is more than the perennial excuse of the evil-doing underling; it is also a perfect use of what Wilson terms “shiftyng the fault.”24 To be sure, Cambises is the most physically threatening personage in the play, but Ambidexter’s agency in abetting that threatening stance is glossed over in his use of this rhetorical strategy. Ambidexter’s words follow Wilson’s dictum to the letter: “the servaunt thynketh his Maisters commaundemente, to bee a sufficient defence for his discharge.”25

The last long direct address that Ambidexter makes to the audience shows up both the constructedness of his rhetoric and the subversively ambivalent intent behind it. The Queen’s murder, a tragic event for the audience, stands in as an ideal locus for Ambidexter’s rhetorical invention:

A, A, A, A, I cannot chuse but weep for the Queene:
Nothing but mourning now at the Court there is seen.
Oh, oh, my hart, my hart, Oh my bum wil break:
Very greef so torments me that scarce I can speake.
Who could but weep for the losse of such a Lady?
That can not I doo, I sweare by mine honesty.
But Lord so the Ladyes mourn crying alack:
Nothing is wore now but onely black.
I beleeeve all the cloth in Watling street, to make gownes would not serve.
If I make a lye, the Devil let ye sterve.
All Ladyes mourne bothe yung and olde:
There is not one that weareth a points worth of Gold.

24Wilson, 208.
25Wilson, 208.
There is a sort of fear, for the King doo pray:
That would have him dead, by the masse I dare say.
What a King was he that hath used such tyranny?
He was a kin to Bishop Bonner, I think verely,
For bothe their delights was to shed blood:
But never intended to doo any good.
*Cambises* put a Judge to death, that was a good deed:
But to kil the yung Childe was worse to proceed.
To murder his Brother, and then his owne wife:
So help me God and holidam, it is pitie of his life.
Heare ye? I wil lay twentie thousand pound:
That the king him self dooth dye by some wound.
He hath shed so much blood that his wil be shed:
If it so come to passe, in faith then he is sped. (1127-52)

Ambidexter starts this “lament” straightforwardly enough by using the standard exclamations and tears as a rhetorical means of “movyng pitee.” However, it is at the height of this rhetorical manipulation, in the midst of his use of “doublettes. . .when we reherse one and the same word twice together”26 by repeating “Oh, oh, my hart, my hart.” that he employs “thynges spoken contrarie to expection”27 and says “Oh my bum wil break.” This sudden substitution of a fart for grief is at once humorous and heartless in its deconstruction of the rhetoric of laments. He continues in this vein with the deliberately ambiguous lines “Who could but weep for the losse of such a Lady?/That can not I doo, I sweare by mine honesty.” The audience is left to

---

26Wilson, 398.

27Wilson, 308.
decide how to interpret these rapid alterations of opposing rhetorical stances. Once again he highlights and subverts the constructedness of grief to put his audience ill at ease; the hyperbole, or "mountyng above the truthe," in lines like "I beleev all the cloth in Watling street, to make gownes would not serve" furthers this lack of ease by blurring the line between sincerity and sarcastic overstatement. As he has done so frequently in his direct addresses to the audience up to this point in the play, he shifts the blame and the tension from himself by resorting to his favorite "freenesse of speache" in lines such as "So help me God and holidam, it is pitie of his life" and rogatio in "What a King was he that hath used such tiranny?" He ends by making a bet with the audience that prefigures the ending of the play: "Heare ye? I wil lay twentie thousand pound:/That the king him self dooth dye by some wound." Far from an over-reaching and empty challenge, this statement demands that the audience take it seriously; Ambidexter does not have such an enormous sum to lose and his rhetorical subversion of nearly every other figure in the play affords him the authority to make forceful predictions. Of course, this is primarily yet another example of Ambidexter's use of hyperbole, but, as the audience has come to expect, even Ambidexter's verbal play has an edge that can cut.

The final words that Ambidexter speaks in Cambises, delivered over the body of the king who has fallen on his own sword, act as the culmination of the sarcasm, irony, and subversion that he has executed throughout the course of the drama:

How now noble King? pluck up your hart:
What wil you dye, and from us parte?
Speake to me, and you be alive:

---

28Wilson, 364.
He cannot speake, but beholde how with death he dooth strive.
Alas good King, alas he is gone,
The Devil take me, if for him I make any mone.
I did prognosticate of his end by the Masse:
Like as I did say, so is it come to passe.
I wil be gone, if I should be found heer:
That I should kil him it would appeer.
For feare with his death they doo me charge:
Farewel my maisters, I wil go take barge.
I meane to be packing, now is the tide:
Farewel my maisters, I wil no longer abide. (1167-80)

The familiar rhetorical devices are all here: the "thynges spoken contrarie to
expection" in "Alas good King, alas he is gone/The Devil take me, if for him I
make any mone"; the sententia in "Like as I did say, so is it come to passe";
rogatio in "What wil you dye, and from us departe?"; and confession in "For
feare with his death they doo me charge/Farewel my maisters, I wil go take
barge." The effect of all these devices is to consolidate the rhetorical
subversion that Ambidexter has enacted in plain view of the audience--often,
at the expense of the audience's moral comfort--from the beginning of the
play. When Ambidexter walks off the stage, saying "Farewel my maisters, I wil
no longer abide," he leaves behind nothing so much as the stunned and
disturbed sense that he has had his hands in the orchestration of every
disaster that has befallen in the play, and that he alone has emerged from all
of it unscathed.

Ambidexter's subversive rhetorical facility is matched only by his
resolute moral ambiguity. Able to "play with both hands" and subvert on all
sides regardless of social standing or access to power, Ambidexter stands at the
nexus of ambivalence and rhetoric in this drama. His power as a Vice figure stems directly from this connection, and his exploitation of its possibilities characterizes the unsettling lack of consistent moral focus that lies at the heart of this complex play.
Chapter 5: Mephastophilis

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (written circa 1588-92; entered in the Stationer's Register 7 January 1601)\(^1\) provides the next manifestation of the Vice figure that I want to examine. Unlike the previous plays discussed, the ambivalent and complex function of viciousness in *Doctor Faustus* has been often noted—and debated—by critics.\(^2\) Michael Bristol's view provides one example:

...clowning and devilment are actually the predominant element in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. . .[they] are theatrical practices in their own right, and they exist precisely in order to evade and willfully to misinterpret authority. . .Their presence within the theatre, and their intrusion or capture by a dramatic narrative, are an active discouragement to projects of unity and closure.\(^3\)

---


\(^2\) William M. Hamlin outlines the main parameters of this debate in his "Skepticism and Solipsism in *Doctor Faustus*," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 36 (1997): 1-22.

Bristol locates very real powers of subversion in the vicious elements of *Doctor Faustus*. I wish to take his point a step further by arguing that those vicious elements largely spring from and are contained by the character of Mephistophilis, and that the enactment of Mephistophilis' viciousness takes place at the level of rhetoric. I will argue that the "theatrical practices" Bristol refers to can be read as rhetorical practices that are performed in such a way as to extend the dissident potential of the rhetorical tradition of the Vice figure and, ultimately, actively to disrupt interpretive attempts at closure. My discussion will begin with a brief examination of the extent of rhetorical awareness in Marlowe's day and then proceed to a consideration of Mephistophilis as an extension of the Vice figure. Finally, I will turn to a reading of Mephistophilis' words in an effort to demonstrate the dissident power of his rhetoric.

---

4Bristol's approach is not without precedent. Jonathan Dollimore, writing in 1984, also sees the play as inherently subversive:
Critical opinion has tended...to read the play as ultimately vindicating either Faustus or the morality structure. But such resolution is what *Dr Faustus* as an interrogative text resists. It seems always to represent paradox--religious and tragic--as insecurely and provocatively ambiguous or, worse, as openly contradictory. Not surprisingly Max Bluestone, after surveying some eighty recent studies of *Dr Faustus*, as well as the play itself, remains unconvinced of their more or less equally divided attempts to find in it an orthodox or heterodox principle of resolution. On the contrary: 'conflict and contradiction inhere everywhere in the world of this play'...If this is correct then we might see it as an integral aspect of what *Dr Faustus* is best understood as: not an affirmation of Divine Law, or conversely of Renaissance Man, but an exploration of subversion through transgression.
By the time of Marlowe's student years at Cambridge (from the first mention of his name in the Buttery Book of Corpus Christi College in December 1580 to his permission to proceed to M.A. in March 1587), the study of rhetoric in England had expanded far beyond its previous largely Ciceronian confines. The impact of the work of Petrus Ramus (1515-72), the French reformer of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (and a character in Marlowe's Massacre at Paris, circa 1590-93), is nicely encapsulated by Edward Corbett:

Dissatisfied with the repetitiveness and vagueness that prevailed in the teaching of the subjects of the trivium, Ramus distributed the traditional parts of rhetoric between logic and rhetoric. Inventio and dispositio—that is, the discovery and arrangement of matter—he assigned to the province of logic. Rhetoric had a franchise only on elocutio (style) and pronunciatio (delivery). The fifth office of rhetoric, memoria—the memorization of the speech—Ramus simply ignored. Style would confine itself to a study of schemes and tropes, leaving to grammar the study of etymology and syntax. Ramus was working for a strict departmentalization of knowledge, for he felt that a great deal of the error and confusion that had sprung up in the arts was the result of scholars' mistaking the proper subject matter of the arts. Although the teaching of the two arts would be kept

---

separate, logic and rhetoric in practice would combine and work together.  

Ramistic reform had reached Cambridge (and England as a whole) with Gabriel Harvey's appointment as praelector of rhetoric at that university on 23 April 1574. He gave his first Latin lectures on rhetoric in 1575 and followed with a second course in 1576; the inaugural lectures of both years were published in London in 1577. Harvey established Ramistic rhetoric at Cambridge to the extent that a Cantabrigian, Dudley Fenner, could produce *The Artes of Logike and Rethorike,* “an unacknowledged translation of the main heads of Ramus's *Dialecticae Libri Duo* [published in London in 1574], and an unacknowledged translation, the first in English, of Talaeus's *Rhetorica* [published in London in 1584].” in 1584. Fenner's preface, “To the Christian Reader,” provides

---


7 See Howell, 247-48 for the assertion that Harvey brought Ramistic rhetoric to England.

8 The title page of the published 1575 lectures, known as the *Rhetor,* reads as follows: “Gabrielis Harveii Rhetor, Vel duorum dierum Oratio, De Natura, Arte, & Exercitacione Rhetorica. Ad suos Auditores. Londini, Ex Officina Typographica Henrici Binneman. Anno. 1577” [STC # 12904]. The title page of the published 1576 lecture, known as the *Ciceronianus,* reads: “Gabrielis Harveii Ciceronianvs, Vel Oratio post reditum, habita Cantabrigiae ad suos Auditores. Quorum potissimum causa, diuulgata est. Londini, Ex Officina Typographica Henrici Binneman. Anno. 1577” [STC # 12899].

9 Howell, 255. See Dudley Fenner, *The Artes of Logike and Rethorike,* plainlie set forth in the English tounge, easie to be learned and practised: together with examples for the practise of the same for Methode, in the gouernement of the familie, prescrib'd in the word of God: And for the whole in the resolution or opening of certayne partes of Scripture, according to the same [STC # 10766] (Middelburg, Netherlands: Richard Schilders, 1584). Howell, 219 adds “a second edition, probably published in 1588, bears the imprint of Schilders and identifies the author as “M. Dvdley Fenner, late Preacher of the worde of God in Middlebrugh.” Cf. Robert D. Pepper, ed., *Four Tudor Books on Education* (Gainesville: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966) 143-81 for a facsimile of the 1584 edition. Howell, 220 notes that Fenner “may be numbered among the Cambridge Ramists, although he did not complete his college course, thanks to his expulsion for puritan tendencies.” Howell cites
evidence of the changes that had been made in attitudes towards rhetoric and its study:

Although these treatises following, were begun and ended at the request & for the benefit of som few which were desirous of the, for whose cause they are also now com vnder yᵉ print: t ogh [sic] peraduəture not done (as they say in print) yet because it is not unlikely, but by these means they wil com into the hāds of many who wil enquire upō what grounds I haue aduëtured this thing which to som wil seem strange & newe, yea vnprofitable and inexpedient, that they are made common too all which are wont to sit in the Doctours chayre: to others also (whiche will neither greatly dislike the turning of them into our tongue, nor yet the following of the better sort in that arte, they will carrye notwithstanding the same taste, because they will seem newer then the newest:) I thought it necessary to write these fewe following, if not to satisfie them, yet at the least to encline them to a more moderate judgement concerning my labours, then otherwise the former conjectures willl suffer them to com vnto. There is indeede a thirde sorte, which will looke for a defence of these artes in generall, beeyng by them accused as vain & vnprofitable. But because their reasonings are such as are to bee aunswered by keeping them in the darke and from the noyse of sounde oppositions, which will more hurt them and trouble the worlde, then any defence of good aunswere, profite others: I will

follow the example of many wise, nay the precept of Salomon, to confute them with silence.¹⁰

Fenner packs a great deal into these lines, and much of it goes beyond the conventions of an Elizabethan preface in foregrounding contemporary perceptions of logic and rhetoric. The fact that his work exists at all (being a translation of the Latin Dialecticae Libri Duo and Rhetorica “for the benefit of som few”) points to an extension of Ramistic pedagogical reforms that hinged upon renewed interest and re-examination of the arts of logic and rhetoric.¹¹ That said, Fenner also acknowledges the continuing existence of resistance towards rhetoric in the attitudes of those who see such studies “as vain & vnprofitable.” There is a strong hint of the uneasiness over the ambivalence of rhetoric that permeates (and necessitates) Augustine’s defense of it.¹² Thus, even in Marlowe’s day the study and practice of rhetoric is

¹⁰Fenner, A2v.

¹¹See Howell, 146-281 for a thorough discussion of Ramistic emphases and reforms in logic and rhetoric.

¹²Ramus, too, acknowledges and even asserts the moral ambiguity of rhetoric in his Rhetoricae Distinctiones in Quintilianum (1549):

[And so first of all let us put forward the definition in which Quintilian outlined for us his ideal orator, and let us refer to this point of dispute everything relevant from all parts of his...]

Ponatur igitur primum Quintiliani definitio, qua oratorem nobis suum explicuit, et ad hanc disputationum referantur omnia, quae ex omnibus Institutionum Fabianarum partibus referri conueniet. “Oratorem” (ait) “instituimus illum perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus non potest: ideoque non dicendi modo eximiam in eo facultatem, sed omnes animi virtutes exigimus.” Hunc oratorem Quintilianus nobis instituit, quem postea libro duodecimo virum bonum bene dicendi peritum similiter definit, et illas animi virtutes exponit, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam, prudentiam, item philosophiam totam, legum scientiam, et cognitionem historiarum, et aliqua pleraque laudem ornamenta. Quid igitur contra istam oratoris finitionem dici potest? Ego vero talem oratoris definitionem vanam et inanem mihi videri confirmo: quamobrem? quia superuacanae et vitiosa cuiusuis artificis est definitio, quae plus complectitur, quam est artis institutis comprehensum. . .Rhetorica enim ars non est, quae omnes animi virtutes explicet.
bound up with potentially evil ends, and Fenner feels that he needs to reassure
his "Christian Reader[s]" that the best defense of rhetoric is to "confute [its
detractors] with silence." The irony of this implication aside, Fenner is really
preaching to the converted who understand the usefulness and power of
rhetorical virtuosity; he is also limiting the potentially evil power of rhetoric
by refusing to employ it as a means of detraction.

Peter Happé cites Mephastophilis as an example of "characters who are
influenced by the Vice, or who are significantly reminiscent of him." This
insightful reading of Mephastophilis' constitution and function has been
largely ignored by scholars of Elizabethan drama in general and Marlowe
scholars in particular. As a result, interpretations have ranged widely.
William Empson, for example, sees Mephastophilis as

a Middle Spirit who is a quisling or rather a double agent,
professing to work for the devils, and actually inducing them to
grant their powers to Faust, but on condition that Faust gives his

Institutiones. "I teach," he says, "that the orator cannot be
perfect unless he is a good man. Consequently I demand from
him not only outstanding skill in speaking but all the virtuous
qualities of character." This is the type of orator that Quintilian
constructs for us. Afterwards in the twelfth book, where he
defines him in similar terms as a good man speaking well, he
identifies those virtuous qualities of character as justice, courage,
self-control, prudence, likewise knowledge of the whole of
philosophy and of law, a thorough acquaintance with history,
and many other attributes worthy of praise.

What then can be said against this definition of an orator?
I assert indeed that such a definition of an orator seems to me to be
useless and stupid. Why? Because a definition of any artist
which covers more than is included in the rules of his art is
superfluous and defective... For rhetoric is not an art which
explains all the virtuous qualities of character.

See Petrus Ramus, Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian: Translation and
Text of Peter Ramus's Rhetoricae Distinctiones in Quintilianum (1549), trans.
83-4, 167-8.

13Peter Happé, "The Vice," 17. Mephastophilis is listed on page 22.
immortal soul beforehand to the quisling. Faust is at first delighted by the results but before long the intense experience becomes too much for his nerves; he decides to repent, supposing he may yet go to Heaven. Meph regards this as a cheat, and counters it by saying that he really is a devil, so that Faust has really sold his soul. To prove it he calls up the Devil and his whole court, at the end of act II (they are a charade put on by his Middle Spirit friends). Faust, after a brief crisis of horror, decides to live bravely for his time on earth, and the play mentions that he does grand things that are useful for his countrymen, but he only feels at peace when playing practical jokes... But at the end, when Meph has succeeded in bringing him to the agreed hour of death without having repented, so that Meph gets his immortal soul, nothing happens except that his old friend advances upon him with open arms and a broad smile. The last two words of Faust are 'Ah Mephistophilis,' and the censor could not rule how the actor was to speak them. He dies in the arms of his deceitful friend with immense relief, also gratitude, surprise, love, forgiveness, and exhaustion. It is the happiest death in all drama.14

Admittedly, Empson's reading is a rather extreme example of the critical missteps that can be taken in interpretations of Mephistophilis that consider neither the English Vice tradition nor the general parameters of early English

drama as a whole. But Empson is not alone. Jeffrey Burton Russell, writing about Marlowe's play in a book devoted to the devil as a cultural phenomenon, has this to say of Mephistophilis:

*Faustus* is a traditional Christian play making the moral statement that lust for worldly fame and power leads to destruction. Mephistopholes is, as Dorothy Sayers remarks, a "spiritual lunatic, but like many lunatics, he is extremely plausible and cunning." But Marlowe adds psychological depth to this traditional view of the Devil's character. Mephisto is not entirely evil, for he regrets his loss of felicity; moody and introspective, he is far from the stupid, clowning Devil of the medieval stage and in some ways prefigures the Romantic Satan.15

All his implied prejudices against early English drama aside, Russell's assessment of the dramatic traditions behind Mephistophilis are wholly inaccurate and reflect a lack of familiarity with the material and its surrounding scholarship. Nevertheless, even informed readings of *Doctor Faustus*, such as Pompa Banerjee's, who views Mephistophilis as a "silent, malignant aspect of selfhood [as evidenced] in Faustus' remarkable affinity with [him]"16 have tended to 'reinvent the wheel' in efforts to make sense of Mephistophilis without reference to the dramatic and rhetorical traditions from which he emerges.

The problem with all three of these readings is that they attempt and fail to account for the apparent ambiguity of Mephistophilis. With no


16 Banerjee, 223.
reference to the English dramatic tradition of the Vice figure and little direct attention to Mephestophilis' words, these scholars see the Renaissance as the birthdate of what they read as “psychological depth.” Such readings are unsatisfactory not only because they rest upon the anachronistic assumption of a fundamental ontological division between the medieval and early modern periods, but also because they fail to account for inconsistencies in the psychology of the very character upon whom they mean to impose such “psychological depth.” An analysis of Mephestophilis' rhetoric will clearly demonstrate that his constitution and function are closely related to those of the Vice figures; it is to that analysis that I now turn.

Like Backbiter in The Castle of Perseverance and Nichol Newfangle in Like Will to Like, Mephestophilis is represented as a servant. Backbiter is the World's messenger, Nichol is godson and former tailor-apprentice to the devil, and Mephestophilis, damned for following Lucifer, agrees to wait on Faustus in exchange for his soul. This is an interesting role for a Vice to play because it casts his (damning) rhetoric in the language of servitude; ironically, the figure to be corrupted by the Vice is waited upon to his or her own destruction. Mephestophilis occupies this role perfectly. His first words to Faustus, “Now Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do?” (3.35), establish him in this tradition. However, Mephestophilis also quickly places his own rhetorical stamp on the role when he introduces himself:

I am a servant to great Lucifer,

And may not follow thee without his leave,

No more then he commaunds must we performe. (3.40-42)

True to the parameters of the Vice, Mephestophilis identifies himself as a servant; he also departs from those parameters in being absolutely truthful
about where his loyalty is owed. Unlike Nichol Newfangle, who is reluctant to even divulge his name to Virtuous Living and who uses rhetorical sleight of hand to get Tom Tospot and friends to follow him, Mephastophilis uses perfunctory truthfulness as his primary rhetorical strategy here. Faustus must know who Mephastophilis is and for whom he works; the consequences of his decision to continue to speak with Mephastophilis rest squarely upon his own shoulders. This matter-of-fact introduction serves as merely the first instance of a rhetorical stance to which Marlowe has Mephastophilis return continually throughout the course of the play. Rhetorically, Faustus is to be damned with his eyes--and ears--wide open.

Mephastophilis maintains his rhetorical stance of truthfulness when Faustus questions him about the reasons for his appearance; he avoids flattery in his denial of Faustus' authority as a conjurer and asserts his own agency with the line “No, I came now hither of mine owne accord” (3.44). This avoidance of flattery in favor of the plain truth is no accident but a deliberate strategy and is confirmed in Mephastophilis' reply to Faustus' protestations of his power to call upon Mephastophilis to serve him:

That was the cause, but yet _per accident_,

For when we heare one racke the name of God.

Abjure the scriptures, and his Saviour _Christ_,

Wee flye, in hope to get his glorious soule,

Nor will we come, unlesse he use such meanes

---

17See Judith Weil, “‘Full Possession’: Service and Slavery in _Doctor Faustus_” in _Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe_, ed. Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS, 1998) 143-55, esp. 146-50 for a discussion of Mephastophilis’ servitude that does not, however, characterize this servitude as an inherited dramatic and rhetorical feature. Instead, Weil’s focus is on the distinctions between service and slavery and the resultant social relevance of that distinction for Marlowe’s original audience.
Whereby he is in danger to be damned:
Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring
Is stoutly to abjure the Trinitie,
And pray devoutly to the prince of hell. (3.46-54)

Mephistophilis here moves beyond mere fact-stating or parroting of his representation in Marlowe's 1592 source text. Rather, his function as a Vice is delineated and defined in these lines. Mephistophilis extends his use of the truth as a weapon with which to damn Faustus by shaping his *dispositio* or arrangement in the form of a dispute that is carefully regulated by the parameters of Ramistic logic. Responding to Faustus' indignant query as to whether or not his "conjuring speeches" raised him (3.45), Mephistophilis answers by denying Faustus' conjuring as an efficient or "making" cause of that raising: "That was the cause, but yet *per accident.*" He then goes on to show Faustus the true nature of that efficient cause by discussing it in the form of an "Affirmative special" syllogism. This "more plaine" or simple syllogism would be well known to Faustus, who has already told the audience that he has "attaind the end" (1.10) of disputing well. "Logickes chiefest end" (1.8). Mephistophilis responds in Faustus' own language, so to speak, and uses a relatively simple element of Ramistic logic to simultaneously undermine and inflame Faustus' intellectual vanity; Faustus is stripped of his authority as initiator of the efficient cause and defeated by a simple syllogism, but he is also addressed at the only rhetorical level he sees as fitting, that is, the

---


19Fenner, B1r.

20Fenner, C3r.

21Fenner, C3v.
rhetoric of disputation. Interestingly enough, Mephastophilis also engages in good Ramistic practice by employing the separate arts of logic and rhetoric together in a speech that is at once Vice language and also correct logical/rhetorical practice. Deceptively uncomplicated at first sight, Mephastophilis' tactics here manifest the ambivalence so commonly featured in Vice language in the ability to corrupt with the truth.

Mephastophilis further extends his rhetorical strategy in a dialogue with Faustus that, at first, seems to be reminiscent of a Socratic interrogation:

[FAU.] Tell me what is that Lucifer thy Lord?
ME. Arch-regent and commander of all spirits.
FAU. Was not that Lucifer an Angell once?
ME. Yes Faustus, and most dearely lov'd of God.
FAU. How comes it then that he is prince of divels?
ME. O by aspiring pride and insolence,
For which God threw him from the face of heaven.
FAU. And what are you that live with Lucifer?
ME. Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer.
Conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,
And are for ever damnd with Lucifer. (3.62-72)

Faustus' attempts to examine Mephastophilis, his simultaneous efforts to gather information and, in Socratic fashion, his efforts to cause Mephastophilis to stumble logically and rhetorically, do not turn out as Socratic examinations do, where the interrogator is the victor. Rather, Mephastophilis answers each of Faustus' questions here in a manner that is at once perfunctory and also intellectually titillating for Faustus. Each answer that Mephastophilis provides adds an additional amplifying corollary that serves to pull Faustus the interrogator into the position of Faustus the damned.
This is most obviously demonstrated in Mephastophilis' rhetorical flourish in his use of "Epistrophe, a turning to the same sound in the end"\[^{22}\] to echo Faustus' use of the word "Lucifer." This passage may indeed recall a Socratic interrogation, but, as Marlowe forces his audience to acknowledge, it is the interrogated Mephastophilis who emerges as the victor.

This dialogue takes on yet more import as Faustus continues to interrogate Mephastophilis; discussion turns to the nature of hell, and Mephastophilis' brutal honesty can hardly be lost upon the audience:

```
FAU. Where are you damn'd?
ME. In hell.
FAU. How comes it then that thou art out of hel?
ME. Why this is hel, nor am I out of it:
Thinkst thou that I who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joyes of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hels,
In being depriv'd of everlasting blisse:
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demaunds,
Which strike a terror to my fainting soule. (3.73-82)
```

Mephastophilis' blending of theology, ontology, and rhetoric here is frighteningly effective in its deployment of truth to simultaneously answer, scare, and seduce Faustus. By locating hell in a state of being rather than in a temporal and spatial particularity, Mephastophilis completely undercuts the authority of Faustus' query. This has the effect of seeming at once frightening--Mephastophilis says that it "strike[s] a terror to [his] fainting soule"--and also relatively easy to bear, as evidenced in Faustus' chastising

\[^{22}\]Fenner, D3f.
admonition to Mephastophilis to "Learne thou of Faustus manly fortitude/ And scorne those joyes thou never shalt possesse" (3.85-86). This dual effect is enhanced by Mephastophilis' use of "the excesse of [fine speech], called Hyperbole"23 in his description of "the eternal joyes of heaven" and the torment of "ten thousand hels." Of course, this use of hyperbole is ironic in that it is theologically possible for Mephastophilis to describe the "joyes of heauen" as "eternal" and the torments of hell as numerous, but that theological truth does not change Faustus' perception of the hyperbole as a rhetorical excess to be countered with "manly fortitude." Once again, Mephastophilis damns with the truth.

The dialogue leading up to Faustus' surrendering of his soul once again has Mephastophilis using the truth as a primary rhetorical strategy, but the arrangement of the argument that Mephastophilis offers up is significantly different from what he has deployed up to this point:

[FAU.] Now tel, what sayes Lucifer thy Lorde?
ME. That I shal waite on Faustus whilst he lives.
So he wil buy my service with his soule.
FAU. Already Faustus hath hazarded that for thee.
ME. But Faustus, thou must bequeathe it solemnly,
And write a deede of gift with thine owne blood,
For that security craves great Lucifer:
If thou deny it, I wil backe to hel.
FAU. Stay Mephastophilus, and tel me, what good wil
my soule do thy Lord?
ME. Inlarge his kingdome.

23Fenner, D1Γ.
FAU. Is that the reason he tempts us thus?
ME. *Solumens miseris socios habuisse doloris.*
FAU. Have you any paine that tortures others?
ME. As great as have the humane soules of men:
But tel me *Faustus,* shal I have thy soule,
And I wil be thy slave, and waite on thee,
And give thee more than thou hast wit to aske. (5.30-47)

Mephastophilis here recalls Nichol Newfangle's parody of the language of
sales and peddling in his arrangement of words in a legal and commercial
frame. His offer to render service is conditional upon Faustus' agreement to
be bound by a document written as "a deede of gift with [his] owne blood" as a
"security." Mephastophilis is no peddler, as Nichol Newfangle pretends to be,
but instead adopts the persona of the lawyer drawing up a business contract of
significant value. This switch from a primarily deliberative rhetoric to a
forensic rhetoric is striking not only in its heightening of the emotional
impact of Faustus' surrender of his soul, but also in its implicit
characterization of the moral worth of business transactions. This latter
characterization lends a humorous tone to what is arguably one of the most
serious moments in the play, and, once again, Mephastophilis' rhetoric
renders ambivalent all that it represents. Faustus' attempts to avoid the
ultimatum Mephastophilis sets for him in saying that he "wil backe to hel" if
Faustus denies him are answered curtly by Mephastophilis and finally shut
down with a forceful restatement of the terms of the bargain being made: "But
tel me *Faustus,* shal I have thy soule?" It is no accident that Mephastophilis
quickly follows this by assuring Faustus that he will be his slave and give
more than Faustus has "wit to aske." This is *dispositio* or arrangement being
used to its most persuasive limits. That persuasion has the effect that Mephestophilis desires:

FAU. I *Mephestophilus*, I give it thee.
ME. Then stabbe thine arme couragiously,
And binde thy soule, that at some certain day
Great *Lucifer* may claime it as his owne,
And then be thou as great as *Lucifer*. (5.48-52)

Upon Faustus' acquiescence to his demands, Mephestophilis extends his forensic rhetoric, even telling Faustus to "binde" his soul so that "at some certain day" Lucifer can "claime" his property. This language operates as "Metaphor when the like is signified by the like" and as a realistic representation of Faustus' physical actions on stage. Faustus both metaphorically surrenders himself to evil and actually negotiates a deal confirmed by a contract written in his own blood that underscores that metaphorical representation. Consequently, Mephestophilis' words operate simultaneously at the levels of metaphor and physical description and further reinforce the ambivalent representation of commerce that is established at the beginning of the speech. Mephestophilis' assertion that Faustus will be as "great as *Lucifer*" after closing the deal with him has the ironically hollow ring of the stereotypically negative sales pitch; it is not lost on the audience that, for all his worldly power, Lucifer is far from great. What is even more ironic is that it is also not lost on the audience that Mephestophilis has managed to secure Faustus' soul without ever representing Lucifer or his fallen state as being greater than it is. Faustus has fallen to artful truth.

---

Fenner, D2r.
Another common technique of Vice rhetoric that Mephastophilus adopts is that of directly addressing the audience. Verbally stepping over the boundaries between the play world and the world of the audience, he makes statements such as "O what will not I do to obtaine his soule?" (5.73) and "Ile fetch him somewhat to delight his minde" (5.82). The audience is made complicit with Mephastophilis in his corruption of Faustus; an ironic humor prevails as Mephastophilis' direct addresses are simultaneously funny and deadly serious for the audience which laughs while a soul is damned eternally. Mephastophilis lets the audience in on his motivations and thereby implicates them in Faustus' damnation. This is seen most plainly in Mephastophilis' telling the audience that he will "fetch [Faustus] somewhat to delight his minde" just before he brings in a dance of devils to distract Faustus from his despair after 5.82. His answer to Faustus' question, "what meanes this shewe?" (5.83) is yet another instance of the truth rhetorically deployed, but now the audience can clearly see the motivation for that deployment:

Nothing Faustus, but to delight thy minde withal,

And to show thee what Magicke can performe. (5.84-85)

The "shewe" is indeed "nothing" and is designed to "delight" Faustus' mind, but the audience knows the reason for that delight. Faustus has the truth, but the audience understands its use.

When Mephastophilis returns to the dispute-form in his rhetorical interactions with Faustus, he does so by means of a strategy that is subtly different from the means he has previously used. Rather than simply engaging in debate with Faustus and shutting him down with the truth presented in its most logical and convincing form, this time Mephastophilis initiates the dispute and allows Faustus to carry on in spite of his errors:

ME. Now Faustus aske what thou wilt.
FAU. First will I question with thee about hell,
Tell me, where is the place that men call hell?
ME. Under the heavens.
FAU. I, but where about?
ME. Within the bowels of these elements,
Where we are tortur'd and remaine for ever.
Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one selfe place, for where we are is hell,
And where hell is, must we ever be:
And to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shalbe purified,
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.
FAU. Come, I think hell's a fable.
ME. I, thinke so still, till experience change thy minde.
FAU. Why? thinkst thou then that Faustus shall bee damn'd?
ME. I of necessitie, for here's the scrowle,
Wherein thou hast given thy soule to Lucifer.
FAU. I, and body too, but what of that?
Thinkst thou that Faustus is so fond,
To imagine, that after this life there is any paine?
Tush these are trifles and meere olde wives tales.
ME. But Faustus I am an instance to prove the contrary
For I am damnd, and am now in hell.
FAU. How? now in hell? nay and this be hell, Ile willingly
be damnd here: what walking, disputing, &c. (5.117-42)

Mephestophilis' invitation to Faustus to question him is followed immediately
by Faustus' queries concerning hell. Mephestophilis' answers, at once
hyperbole ("Hell hath no limits") and sound theology, yet again ironically damn Faustus with the truth. Seduced by Mephistophilis’ willingness to dispute with him and heedless of the theological truth of the demon’s words, Faustus can only respond with the logically inadequate statement, “Come, I think hell’s a fable.” Faced with this incredible lapse in Faustus’ logical capacities and disputing abilities, Mephistophilis responds with “I, thinke so still, till experience change thy minde.” Faustus’ doubts go beyond academic objections for the sake of argument and enter the realm of the foolish here; Mephistophilis’ response, ironically humorous and a foreshadowing of Faustus’ fate, is the only appropriate answer to a man who argues with a demon about the existence of hell. All of this is only heightened when Faustus asks whether or not he will be damned. Mephistophilis here resorts to ocular proof and humorously recalls his forensic rhetoric when he says “I of necessitie, for here’s the scrowle,/Wherein thou hast given thy soule to Lucifer.” Finally, Mephistophilis even points out the obvious gap in Faustus’ logic that even the most simple member of the audience must see. Responding to Faustus’ assertion that stories of damnation are “trifles and meere olde wives tales,” Mephistophilis counters with “But Faustus I am an instance to prove the contrary.” The fact that Faustus does not take in the full import of Mephistophilis’ refutation but instead uses it to support his own assertion that he’ll “willingly be damnd here/ what walking, disputing” only serves to underscore the extent to which Faustus’ pride is so engaged by the dispositio of Mephistophilis’ words that he cannot recognize the truth. Terribly attractive in his power to tell the truth and condemn with it, Mephistophilis subverts the arts of logic and rhetoric to evil ends without once abusing them.
Faustus receives ample demonstrations of Mephastophilis’ literal truthfulness and manages to ignore them. Mephastophilis plays upon this deliberate ignorance when Faustus asks him for a wife:

[FAU.] ...But leaving off this, let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lascivious, and can not live without a wife.

ME. How, a wife? I prithee Faustus talke not of a wife.

FAU. Nay sweete Mepbastophilis fetch me one, for I will have one.

ME. Well thou wilt have one, sit there till I come, Ile fetch thee a wife in the divels name. [exit.]

Enter with a divell drest like a woman, with fier workes.

ME. Tel Faustus, how dost thou like thy wife?

FAU. A plague on her for a hote whore.

ME. Tut Faustus, marriage is but a ceremoniall toy, if thouonest me, thinke no more of it. Ile cull thee out the fairest curtezans, And bring them ev’ry morning to thy bed, She whome thine eie shall like, thy heart shal have, Be she as chaste as was Penelope, As wise as Saba, or as beautiful As was bright Lucifer before his fall. (5.142-61)

Mephastophilis humorously underscores the ridiculousness of Faustus’ request that he allow him to engage in the Christian sacrament of marriage by doing exactly what he tells Faustus he will do; Mephastophilis gets Faustus a wife “in
the divels name" and even Faustus cannot miss the fact that this "wife" is a devil "drest like a woman." The sarcasm or "mocking Trope... when one contrarie is signified by another" of Mephastophilis' line, "Tel Faustus, how dost thou like thy wife?" serves to answer Faustus' illogical pleas for a demon to provide him with a Christian marriage, "a ceremoniall toy," as Mephastophilis puts it. The sarcasm also serves to bind Mephastophilis to an audience that is ironically--subversively--estranged from Faustus by his own misperception of the truth. It is not by chance but by design that Mephastophilis then quickly switches to the rhetoric of persuasion in his use of anaphora with the repetition of "as" at lines 159-61. It is also no accident that Mephastophilis' comparisons end with "bright Lucifer before his fall."

Mephastophilis' intentions are deliberately transparent even when he is at his most persuasive.

Mephastophilis' persuasiveness allows him to toy with Faustus' inattention to logic and rhetoric to the extent that he attempts to disarm Faustus' despair even as he breaks the logical rules:

FAU. When I behold the heavens, then I repent,
And curse thee wicked Mephistophilus,
Because thou hast deprev'd me of these joyes.
ME. Why Faustus,
Thinkst thou heaven is such a glorious thing?
I tel thee tis not halfe so faire as thou,
Or any man that breathes on earth.
FAU. How proovest thou that?

---

25Fenner, D2Γ.

26Fenner, D3Γ.
ME. It was made for man, therefore is man more excellent. (5.183-91)

Mephestophilis’ faulty reasoning here, a “default of Logike, called Sophisme” revolves upon a “shewe of reason to deceive withall”\(^{27}\) in the faulty assumption that because heaven is made for humanity it is necessarily inferior to humanity. Although, as Fenner states, “the rules of Sophistrie bee needelesse for them that bee perfect in Logike,”\(^{28}\) this obvious logical and rhetorical sleight of hand should not be able to slip by one as practiced in disputation as Faustus. Given Mephestophilis’ consistent use of truth and logical coherence as a rhetorical strategy, this use of “coloured reasons”\(^{29}\) can be read as a deliberate attempt to bait Faustus in his despair and to entertain the audience at the same time. It is interesting to note that Faustus does seem to recognize the sophism, saying of heaven “If it were made for man, twas made for me” (5.192), but still “cannot repent” (5.200). The power of Mephestophilis’ subversive manipulation of the truth is such that Faustus can recognize it and still see no hope of escape. The audience’s view of possible repentance is not shared by Faustus, and the insult of Mephestophilis’ sophism stands unchallenged.

Faustus’ attempts to continue the disputation with Mephestophilis are differentiated from his earlier efforts by the hostility that results from them. Having damned Faustus with the truth, Mephestophilis interacts with him in a way that is perfunctory, playful, and hostile:

[FAU.] Come Mephestophilis, let us dispute againe.

---

\(^{27}\)Fenner, E1\(^\text{f}\)-E2\(^v\).

\(^{28}\)Fenner, E1\(^\text{f}\).

\(^{29}\)Fenner, E1\(^\text{f}\).
And argue of divine Astrologie,
Tel me, are there many heavens above the Moone?
Are all celestall bodies but one globe,
As is the substance of this centricke earth?
ME. As are the elements, such are the
spheares,
Mutually folded in each others orbe,
And Faustus all jointly move upon one axletree.
Whose terminine is tearmd the worlds wide pole,
Nor are the names of Saturne, Mars, or Jupiter
Faind, but are erring starres.
FAU. But tell me, have they all one motion? both situ &
tempore.
ME. All joyntly move from East to West in
24. hours upon the poles of the world, but differ in their
motion upon the poles of the Zodiake.
FAU. Tush, these slender trifles Wagner can decide.
Hath Mephostophilus no greater skill? (5.215-32)

Mephostophilis answers Faustus' questions—as he is bound to do—but his
answers lack the persuasive force of his earlier rhetorical interactions.
Faustus notes this in his assertion that Mephostophilis' answers are "trifles,"
and his use of the rhetorical question in asking "Hath Mephostophilus no
greater skill?" can be read as a challenge to Mephostophilis to attain the level
of his previous performances, of which Faustus was only dimly aware.
However, the audience is well aware of Mephostophilis' disputational and
rhetorical abilities, and his perfunctory performance here may be read as a
simultaneously playful and hostile reluctance to engage with Faustus in the
disputation that he thrives on and which has been his ruin. Mephastophilis no longer needs to work to damn the already condemned scholar.

The hostility that is implicit in the first part of the disputation is open and tangible when Faustus deliberately moves his questioning to a topic he must know to be inflammatory:

FAU. Well, I am answered, tell me who made the world?
ME. I will not.
FAU. Sweete Mephastophilus tell me.
ME. Move me not, for I will not tell thee.
FAU. Villaine, have I not bound thee to tel me any thing?
ME. I, that is not against our kingdome, but this is,
Think thou on hell Faustus, for thou art damnd.
FAU. Thynke Faustus upon God that made the world.
ME. Remember this. (5.247-58)

Mephastophilis' answer, "Think thou on hell Faustus, for thou art damnd," serves as a deflection of Faustus' question, as a demonically realistic admonition, and as a persuasion to avoid having Faustus recognize the possibility of his repentance. Faustus' use of "Anaphora, a bringing in of the same again" in his repetition of "think" at line 257 is undercut by the authoritative force of Mephastophilis' last words before leaving the dispute and the scene: "Remember this." The implications of these words for Faustus, and, by extension, for the audience watching the play unfold, are significant.

---

30Fenner, D3f.
Mephestophilis tells Faustus—truthfully, as it turns out—that he is damned; outside the boundaries of the play-world, Mephestophilis tells the audience, implicated by his subversive rhetoric as co-conspirators, the same thing. Faustus is damned and Mephestophilis uses his language to ensure that the audience sees it.

The near-repentance that Faustus engages in as a result of speaking with the Old Man pushes his relationship with Mephestophilis into new rhetorical territory. The honesty that Mephestophilis has employed as a *modus operandi* throughout the play takes on new characteristics when Faustus attempts to go back on the contract for his soul:

ME. Thou traitor *Faustus*, I arrest thy soule
For disobedience to my soveraigne Lord,
Revolt, or lye in peece-meale teare thy flesh.

FAU. Sweete *Mephestophilis*, intreate thy Lord
To pardon my unjust presumption,
And with my blood againe I wil confirme
My former vow I made to *Lucifer*.

ME. Do it then quickly, with unfained
heart,
Lest greater danger do attend thy drift.

FAU. Torment sweete friend, that base and crooked age,
That durst disswade me from thy *Lucifer*,
With greatest torments that our hel affords.

ME. His faith is great, I cannot touch his soule,
But what I may afflict his body with,
I wil attempt, which is but little worth. (12.57-71)
The force of Mephastophilis' words here is such that Faustus immediately falls back into line. The threats that Mephastophilis levels at Faustus are brutal in their intensity and leave little doubt as to the outcome for Faustus should he continue in the path of repentance. The force of these threats is made more tangible by the honesty of Mephastophilis' statements about the extent to which he can harm the Old Man. The fact that Mephastophilis never lies to Faustus serves to underscore the extent of his brutality even as it renders truth ambivalent in its value.

Mephastophilis subverts the value of truth for an audience that is forced to see the malleability of that seemingly unshapable concept. He joins rhetoric and logic with the truth to damn Faustus with what are technically the most honest of means. No rhetorical vices or sins of the tongue are needed in his arsenal of eloquence; Mephastophilis brings Faustus to hell with syllogisms and figures of diction. The appropriateness of this method lies in its ability to flatter Faustus' intellectual vanity; Faustus can clearly see all the means and ways by which he is brought to his own destruction.

The persuasive power of Mephastophilis' rhetoric permeates the play and brings Faustus to what he comes to see as his inescapable end. The fact that the audience does not necessarily come to that same conclusion for Faustus only reasserts the impact of Mephastophilis' power to convince. His last words to Faustus are telling not only in their delineation of him in a traditional Vice figure role but also in their ultimate contribution to Faustus' 'inescapable' conclusion: "this, or what else thou shalt desire;/Shalbe performde in twinkling of an eie" (12.79-80). It is the rhetorical performance of damnation that is Mephastophilis' most terrible--and impressive--act.
Chapter 6: Falstaff and Iago

William Shakespeare's *Hystorie of Henry the fourth* (entered on the Stationer's Register 25 February 1598) and *Tragedy of Othello the Moore of Venice* (performed at Whitehall on 1 November 1604) harbor the last two descendants of the Vice figure whose rhetorical subversion I want to examine in this study. Both Falstaff in *I Henry IV* and Iago in *Othello* use eloquence as a weapon, be it defensive, as is Falstaff's use, or offensive, as is the case with Iago. Both characters embody different aspects of the Vice tradition: Falstaff employs clowning and humorous asides and Iago engages in surgically executed villainy. However, both have the effect of drawing the audience's attention and, ultimately, fascination, and the means by which all this is

1The texts I have chosen for the purposes of this discussion require some explanation. In an effort to remain consistent in my use of old-spelling texts for this study, and because I believe that the ends of scholarship on early English literature are best reached with texts that are as close to their original forms as possible, I have chosen old-spelling texts for *I Henry IV* and *Othello* from Shakespeare's *Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986). Note that line numbers are continuous for plays in this edition regardless of act and scene divisions. This collection of regularized old-spelling texts, for all its considerable merits, is not free from problems. This is especially the case where *The Hystorie of Henry the fourth* is concerned; Wells and Taylor deviate from all extant texts and critical practice in renaming Falstaff, Bardoll and Peto, and the unmodified use of their edition of this play would be awkward and confusing for the purposes of this study. Jean E. Howard, commenting on the imposition of the name "Oldcastle" into the text of *I Henry IV* in an effort to reverse the act of Elizabethan censorship that forced Shakespeare to change the name to Falstaff, nicely summarizes the problem with such an imposition: "While it is important to point out that an act of censorship occurred, to 'undo' it creates new erasures in the textual and cultural history of the play." See Howard's comments in *The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, et al (New York: Norton, 1997) 1153. I have chosen to follow the practice of the Norton editors in using the Oxford text while retaining the names Falstaff, Bardoll and Peto; the original spelling of these names is taken from the 1598 complete quarto for *I Henry IV*. My retention of these names is indicated by square brackets. An accurate transcript of the *I Henry IV* quarto, electronically checked against the Oxford Text Archive, is freely available for scholarly use on the University of Victoria's website, *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. See the transcription of the quarto of *I Henry IV*, ed. Michael Best, proofread Hannah King, 18 June 1999 <http://castle.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/1H4/index.html>.
enacted lies in their subversive use of eloquence. A brief discussion of Shakespeare's rhetorical background will be followed by an overview of the inherence of Falstaff and Iago in the Vice tradition. I will then turn to their words in an effort to underscore the extent of their rhetorical subversion.

The history of rhetoric in Shakespeare's day and his use of it are examined in great detail in two mid-century studies: Thomas Whitfield Baldwin's massive *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* and Sister Miriam Joseph's *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*.2 These two works, although conjectural in nature due to the complete lack of definite information concerning Shakespeare's education, remain useful for their use of internal evidence from the plays to reconstruct Shakespeare's use of rhetoric. Baldwin, in particular, devotes ample space in his book to the consideration of Shakespeare's rhetorical education. Not surprisingly, his findings place Shakespeare's rhetorical training in a traditional Ciceronian context:

We may now examine Shakspere upon the texts and processes by which composition was taught in grammar school. For his rhetorical training in prose, Shakspere gives us quite clear indications that he had followed the old system, based fundamentally on classical originals. First, therefore, we had better sketch this system for prose composition. The statutes usually aim at naming the authors to be read, and only incidentally happen occasionally to mention subsidiary texts. But

---

in five out of the six cases where oratorical texts are mentioned at all Cicero's rhetoric, or Ad Herennium, is specified.³

It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that Shakespeare was familiar with the Ad Herennium from his probable time at the King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon. However, Samuel Schoenbaum is correct in asserting that “how long Shakespeare attended the free school we can only guess” and it seems prudent to avoid reading Shakespeare's use of rhetoric with references to treatises other than this very popular introduction, since there is no external proof or virtual certainty that he came into contact with anything else.⁴

Alan Dessen summarizes Falstaff's historical link with the Vice figure and the link between I Henry IV and moral drama:

As with Richard III (or Othello or Macbeth), to posit a link between I Henry IV and the moral plays is to tread familiar ground. Indeed, for the first such suggestion the literary historian can cite no less of an expert than Prince Hal himself who describes Falstaff as "that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years" (II.iv.431-32). Using Hal's analysis as their cue, scholars have offered a detailed account of Falstaff's dramatic bloodlines that often includes considerable reference to the Vice and the allegorical tradition. The reader with a genealogical bent can therefore choose among such formidable figures as Gluttony, Riot, Sloth, and Vanity

³Baldwin, 70.

alone or in various combinations) for the honored spot at the top of the fat knight's family tree.  

This synopsis of Falstaff's character, although somewhat over-simplified, does recognize the extent to which Falstaff is derived from earlier dramatic traditions even if the scope and functions of that tradition are largely glossed over. Bernard Spivack has a similar and more nuanced view:

The liar and coward, who exploits himself in these characteristics as if he were a pageant, is also somehow Sir John Falstaff with a reputation for honor and bravery. At least since the time of Maurice Morgann he has been a baffling figure because all interpretation insists on taking him for the coherent image of a human being, morally unified and self-consistent. But Falstaff is neither morally unified nor self-consistent. He was originally a personification, or a set of cognate personifications, to whom, because he was too theatrically attractive to die with the dramatic convention to which he originally belonged, Shakespeare gave a

---

local habitation and a name. Although he walks like a man his innards are allegorical. . .

This reading of Falstaff gets at the real heart of the matter in describing both Falstaff's dramatic lineage and, to a great extent, his function within 1 Henry IV. Like the Vice figures who are his predecessors, Falstaff acts as a locus for the convergence of a number of social ambivalences loosely grouped around the concept of evil, and his expression of those ambivalences finds voice in subversively attractive rhetoric.

Iago has likewise been commonly viewed as a descendant of the Vice figure but, unlike the fun-loving Falstaff, Iago's "allegorical innards" have met with the hostility that frequently follows misunderstanding. A seventeenth-century critical view provides an example of just how much hostility this can be:


But what is most intolerable is *Jago*. He is no Black-amoor Souldier, so we may be sure he should be like other Souldiers of our acquaintance; yet never in Tragedy, nor in Comedy, nor in Nature was a Souldier with his Character; take it in the Authors own words:

EM.: some Eternal Villain
Some busie, and insinuating Rogue,
Some cogging, couzening Slave, to get some Office.

...*Shakespear* knew his Character of *Jago* was inconsistent. In this very Play he pronounces,

If thou dost deliver more or less than Truth,
Thou are no Souldier.——

This he knew, but to entertain the Audience with something new and surprising, against common sense, and Nature, he would pass upon us a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal, instead of an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing Souldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the World.8

Read against Spivack's assessment of Falstaff's character, Thomas Rymer's repudiation of Iago here sounds like an analysis of the very same features, regardless of its hostile intent. The problem is that Rymer cannot recognize Iago for what he is and looks instead for a character drawn from what he calls "Nature." Howard Felperin addresses this modern problem of reading Iago:

---

For those with an archeological interest in Shakespeare, the recognition that Iago resembles the Vice of the moralities is an invaluable aid in discovering coherence in language and conduct that would have to be considered insane by naturalistic or psychological norms. Iago's gleeful self-revelations to the audience, his self-contradictions in setting forth a bewildering array of motives, and his casualness, even lightheartedness, in enacting what is supposed to be a rooted hatred can all be traced back to the behavior of his prototype, the Vice of the homiletic and allegorical drama.9

This reading of Iago manages to make sense of his language and actions in terms that are appropriate to Iago's general dramatic functions. However, it is Spivack who most fully recognizes the subversive import of those functions:

Although Iago is essentially an amoral figure, we fail to grasp the deepest moral consequence of his action upon his victims unless we can appreciate the full meaning of his assault upon the "holy cords" that express Shakespeare's vision of the Good that suffers destruction in all his great tragedies. They are the bonds that knit nature, human society, and the cosmos into hierarchic order and unity and create the divinely ordained harmony of the universe. In the little world of men they are those ties of duty, piety, and humane affection which give a religious meaning to

---

all domestic and social relationships, for in Shakespeare
“religion” frequently has this wider sense.\textsuperscript{10}
It is precisely this “wider sense” of religion that Iago disrupts, overturns, and
brilliantly subverts, and the means by which he achieves it all lies in his
rhetoric.

Falstaff’s first direct address to the audience both establishes his
dramatic lineage as a character with Vice characteristics and sets the tone for
his subsequent rhetorical interactions with the audience. The humor of his
anger at Poines for removing his horse only intensifies the effect that this
speech has upon the audience:

\begin{quote}
I am accurst to rob in that theeeues companie,
the rascal hath remoued my horse, and tied him I
knowe not where, if I trouell but foure foote by the
square further a foote, I shall breake my winde. Well,
I doubt not but to die a faire death for all this, if I
scape hanging for killing that rogue. I haue forsworne
his companie hourly any time this xxii: yeares, and
yet I am bewitcht with the rogues companie. If the
rascal haue not giuen mee medicines to make mee loue
him, ile be hangd. It could not be else, I haue drunke
medicines. Poynes, Hall, a plague vpon you both.
[Bardoll], [Peto], ile starue ere ile rob a foote further,
and twere not as good a deede as drinke to turne true-
man, and to leaue these rogues, I am the veriest varlet
that euer chewed with a tooth: Eight yeardes of vneuen
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10}Spivack, \textit{Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil}, 48.
ground is threescore and ten myles a foote with mee, and the stonie hearted villaines knowe it well enough, a plague vpon't when theeues cannot be true one to another. (2.2.725-39)

The first thing to note about this speech is Falstaff's deliberate employment of the Simple style. The conversational tone of this style allows Falstaff to set up a relationship with the audience that is ultimately personal and friendly even as he uses irony right from the opening of the speech in the line "I am accurst to rob in that theeues companie" to get the attention of his audience and establish the humor that is sustained throughout. The Rhetorica ad Herennium recommends the use of inversio (the ironical inversion of the meaning of words) as a way to provoke laughter and gain the attention of the audience, and this is exactly what Falstaff does with this line. Indeed, Falstaff's deployment of irony permeates the whole of this speech in his assertions that Poines has given him "medicines" to make him love him and that he will "starue ere [he'll] rob a foote further," in his desire to turn "true-man" and his complaint that "theeues cannot be true one to another." The effect of all this irony is to make Falstaff's viciousness appealing to the audience; he is undoubtedly Vice-like and fat and funny, and his representation of evil so undercuts the implications of that evil that it subverts the good in the process.

---

11 *ad Herennium*, 260-1.

12 The *ad Herennium* does not have a separate definition for irony; rather, the pseudo-Ciceronian author sees irony as a species of allegory that he would refer to as *permutatio ex contrario* in describing Falstaff's use of the figure here. See *ad Herennium*, 344-7.

13 *ad Herennium*, 18.
Falstaff's subversive rhetorical facility is not limited just to his interactions with the audience. His ability to avoid mockery at the hands of Poines and the Prince provides an example of his humorous subversion of their arguments:

(PRINCE)  What tricke? what deuice? what starting hole canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparant shame?

POINES  Come, lets heare lacke, what tricke hast thou now?

SIR IOHN  By the Lord, I knew ye as wel as he that made ye. Why heare you my maisters, was it for me to kill the heire apparant? should I turne upon the true prince? why thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct, the lion will not touch the true prince, instinct is a great matter. I was now a cowarde on instinct, I shall thinke the better of my selfe, and thee during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince: but by the Lord, lads, I am glad you haue the money, (calling) Hostesse clap to the doores, (to the others) watch to night, pray to morrowe, gallants, lads, boyes, hearts of golde, all the titles of good fellowship come to you. What shall wee bee merrie, shall wee haue a play extempore? (2.5.1193-1211)

Logic and rhetoric work together here hilariously—and thus all the more effectively—to overturn the attempts to baffle Falstaff and make him embrace his “open and apparant shame.” The “starting hole” (avoidance of direct argument) that the Prince refers to is a reference to a fault in the rules of
disputation outlined by Abraham Fraunce in his *Lawiers Logike*. In fact, this is exactly the technique Falstaff uses to find the matter for his counter-argument; as Miriam Joseph points out, Falstaff “tak[es] his cue from the Prince’s word, *apparent*" and uses *antanaclasis* (punning) to excuse his reluctance to attack the “heire apparant.” The irony that infuses Falstaff’s assertions that he is “as valiant as Hercules” and “a valiant lion” only heightens the effectiveness of his subversion: Falstaff structures his argument such that a denial of his being “a valiant lion” is also a denial of Hal’s being “a true prince.” Thus, logical faults and potent rhetorical figures are used not just to allow Falstaff to vindicate himself but also to allow him to engage in veiled political critique: the Lancastrian usurpation does indeed call into question whether or not Hal is “a true prince” and Falstaff’s linking of this to the question of his own cowardice is a subversive manipulation of the arts of language.

The speech, “in king Cambises vaine” (2.5.1317), that Falstaff delivers to Hal in the “play extempore” constitutes a deployment of rhetoric that is at once political, metatheatrical, humorous, and ironic:

Harrie, I doe not onelie maruaile where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied. For though the cammomill, the more it is troden on, the faster it growes: yet youth the more it is wasted, the sooner it weares: that thou art my son I haue partly thy mothers worde, partlie my owne opinion, but

---


15Joseph, 213.

16*ad Herennium*, 280-1.
chieflie a villainous tricke of thine eye, and a foolish
hanging of thy neather lippe, that dooth warrant me.
If then thou bee sonne to mee, heere lies the poynct,
why being sonne to me, art thou so pointed at? shal
the blessed sunne of heauen proue a micher, and eat
black-berries? a question not to be askt. Shall the sonne
of England proue a theefe, and take purses? a question
to be askt. There is a thing Harry, which thou hast
often heard of, and it is knowne to many in our land
by the name of pitch. This pitch (as ancient writers do
report) doth defile, so doth the companie thou keepest:
for Harrie now, I do not speake to thee in drinke, but
in teares; not in pleasure but in passion: not in words
onely, but in woes also... (2.5.1329-48)

Falstaff's ironic use of the Grand style or "smooth and ornate arrangement of
impressive words"\(^{17}\) in this speech serves to mock--and thereby undercut--
royal authority and the style of earlier drama while effectively
communicating a truthful critique of Hal's behavior that does not leave
Falstaff open to political reprisal.\(^{18}\) After all, Falstaff's speech is just
"excellent sport ifaith" (2.5.1321). His use of the "cammomill" and "pitch"
proverbs\(^{19}\) lend even more gravity to his rhetoric while simultaneously

\(^{17}\)"Gravis est que constat ex verborum gravium levi et ornata
constructione." \textit{ad Herennium}, 252-3.

\(^{18}\)Brian Vickers, \textit{The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose} (London: Methuen,
1968) 105-112 reads the careful parallelism and irony of this passage as a
parody of John Lyly's \textit{Euphues} (1579) and what he refers to as the "Euphuistic
grand manner" (108).

\(^{19}\)The \textit{ad Herennium} does not have a separate entry for \textit{proverbium}.
Rather, the author classifies proverbs as a species of \textit{sententia} (allegory). See
heightening the ridiculousness of that gravity. This ambivalent linking of seriousness and humor pervades the entirety of Falstaff's 'kingly' address; the audience can laugh at the thought of Falstaff acting like a king and presuming to dispense moral advice while substantially agreeing with his assessment of the Prince's behavior. Thus, the 'evil' character functions not only as a site of laughter but also of truth.

Falstaff's Vice-heritage, with all its attendant 'evil' characteristics, does not escape address in I Henry IV. Having been charged with being a "reuerent vice," "gray iniquity" (2.5.1385-6) and an "olde white bearded Sathan" (2.5.1390), Falstaff responds—ironically, while impersonating Hal as part of the "play extempore"—with a defense of his viciousness that is a rhetorical *tour de force*:

SIR IOHN  My Lord, the man I know.
PRINCE  I know thou doest.
SIR IOHN  But to say I knowe more harme in him then in my selfe, were to say more then I know: that he is olde the more the pittie, his white haires doe witnesse it, but that he is sauing your reuerence, a whoremaster, that I vterlie denie: if sacke and sugar be a fault, God helpe the wicked; if to be olde and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damnd: if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaos lane kine are to be loued.
No my good lord banish [Peto], banish [Bardoll], banish Paines, but for sweet lacke [Falstalffe], kinde lacke [Falstalffe], true lacke [Falstalffe], valiant lacke [Falstalffe],

*ad Herennium*, 344-7. Vickers, 108 also identifies the reference to pitch at lines 1344-5 as an example of *sententia*.
& therfore more valiant being as he is old lacke [Falstalffe],
banish not him thy Harries companie,
banish not him thy Harries companie,
banish plumpe lacke, and banish all the world. (2.5.1391-1413)

Falstaff opens this defense by appropriating the Prince's *conduplicatio* (reduplication)\(^20\) in the repetition of the word "know"; the force of Hal's figure of speech, so powerful to the author of the *ad Herennium* that he describes its action as being "as if a weapon should repeatedly pierce the same part of the body,"\(^21\) is redirected by Falstaff back onto Hal himself: "But to say I knowe more harme in him then in my selfe, were to say more then I know." He follows this with a brilliant deployment of *contrarium* (reasoning by contraries)\(^22\) in the series of partial syllogisms that begin with "if sacke and sugar be a fault." The humorous but nevertheless very real authority that Falstaff gains here is intensified--ironically, of course--when he harnesses scriptural power to finish this series of syllogisms with a reference to "Pharaos lane kine."\(^23\) The return to *conduplicatio* in the parallel repetitions of "banish" becomes, in the last three lines of Falstaff's defense, not just a figure of speech but also an organizing poetic device that lifts Falstaff out of the world of the "play extempore," indeed, out of the temporal strictures of

\(^{20}\) *ad Herennium*, 324-5.

\(^{21}\) "Vehementer auditorem commovet eiusdem redintegratio verbi et vulnus maius efficit in contrario causae, quasi aliquod telum saepius perveniat in eandem corporis partem." *ad Herennium*, 324.


\(^{23}\) Gen. xli.19-21. Vickers, 114 also notes the irony in Falstaff's use of scriptural authority and sees it as a "consistenc[y] in his character."
Shakespeare’s narrative, and onto the plain of the metatheatrical where the self-conscious deployment of metre allows Falstaff to communicate directly with the audience even as he communicates with the other figures in the play-world. What Falstaff tells the audience in those iambic pentameter lines is the ambivalent nature of his Vice-heritage; he may be evil, but he is also funny, and to banish him—from the world of the play, from life, and from the stage—is to “banish all the world.” Hal may be able to answer with “I do, I will” (2.5.1414) but the subversive force of Falstaff’s rhetoric is such that the audience is not necessarily able to say the same.

Falstaff’s famous “catechism” on honor provides one of the most often quoted examples of his rhetorical facility. Baldwin identifies the source of the matter of this oration in the work of Palingenius, a Latin author frequently assigned in the third form of grammar schools, and in the translation of Palingenius by Barnaby Googe. However, it is what Shakespeare has Falstaff do with this matter that bears further examination:

PRINCE Why, thou owest God a death. Exit

SIR IOHN Tis not due yet, I would be loath to pay him before his day, what need I be so forward with him that calls not on mee? Well, tis no matter, honor pricks me on; yea, but how if honor pricke me off when I come on? how then can honor set to a leg? no, or an arme? no, or take away the griefe of a wound? no, honor hath no skil in surgerie then? no, what is honor? a word, what is in that word honor? what is that

---

honour? aire, a trim reckoning. Who hath it? he that
died a Wednesday, doth he feele it? no, doth he heare
it? no, tis insensible the? yea, to the dead, but wil it
not liue with the liuing; no, why? detraction will not
suffer it, therefore ile none of it; honor is a meere
skutchion, and so ends my Catechisme. (5.1.2622-36)

Again, Falstaff shows off his remarkable ability to appropriate Hal’s rhetoric
and subvert it; he picks up on Hal’s metaphor of commerce in the line “Why,
though thou owest God a death” and uses it to humorously and effectively defend his
own position: “Tis not due yet, I would be loath to pay him before his day.” The
celebrated use of subiectio (hypophora)²⁵ around the word “honor” that
follows is simultaneously funny, impressive in its rhetorical weight, and
potent in its ability to convince the audience of its essential truthfulness.
Falstaff’s cowardice is vicious, to be sure, but it also has the ring of sense about
it and has the potential effect of totally undercutting the desire for military
glory. This effect is not lost upon the audience, the only auditors for Falstaff’s
“catechism,” and the rhetorical component of Falstaff’s Vice-heritage is at its
most obvious.

The rhetorical performance that perhaps most clearly recalls Falstaff’s
Vice-heritage, however, is the speech directed to the audience after the Prince
discovers the seemingly dead Falstaff on the battlefield:

[PRINCE] Inboweld will I see thee by and by.

Til then in bloud by noble Percy lie. Exit.

[Falstalffe] riseth vp.

SIR IOHN Inboweld, if thou inbowel me to day, ile giue

²⁵ad Herennium, 310-14.
you leaue to powder me and eate me too to morrowe.

Zbloud twas time to counterfet, or that hot termagant
Scot had paide me scot and lot too. Counterfet? I lie, I
am no counterfet, to die is to bee a counterfet, for he
is but the counterfet of a man, who hath not the life
of a ma: but to couterfet dying when a man therby
liueth, is to be no counterfet, but the true & perfect
image of life indeed. The better parte of valour is
discretion, in the which better part I haue saued my
life. Zounds I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though
he be dead, how if he should counterfet too and rise?
by my faith I am afraid hee woulde proue the better
counterfet, therefore ile make him sure, yea, and ile
sweare I kild him. Why may not he rise aswell as I?
nothing confutes me but eies, and no body sees me:
therefore sirrha, with a new wound in your thigh,
come you along with me. (5.4.2905-24)

Like so many Vice figures who suffer no dangerous physical punishment for
their misdeeds, Falstaff rises again and addresses the audience directly,
affirming as he does so that the vital ambivalence that constitutes him cannot
be suppressed. As A. R. Humphreys points out, the equivoque on “inboweld” to
suggest the disemboweling of deer after a hunt in addition to the funerary
preparations to which the Prince refers allows Falstaff to carry on with the
figure and to give the Prince “leaue to powder (salt) [him] and eate [him] too to
morrowe.”  

Once more Falstaff appropriates the Prince’s language and uses it

---

26A. R. Humphreys, ed., *King Henry IV Part 1*, by William Shakespeare,
to his own humorous rhetorical advantage. Not content to leave it at that, though, Falstaff appropriates his own words with a barrage of *antanaclasis* on “scot” and especially on “counterfet.” The virtuosic use of this figure allows Falstaff to deny bald-facedly that he is a “counterfet” even as his actions indicate nothing other than that to the audience. Once again, the evil that the Vice figure represents is plain to be seen, but the ambivalence and humor of its rhetorical presentation makes it subversively appealing to an audience that sees right through it and laughs anyway.

Falstaff’s parting words, again directed to the audience, offer a summation of his rhetorical subversion that call back the techniques he uses throughout the play:

```
SIR JOHN Ile follow as they say for reward. Hee that
rewardes mee God reward him. If I do growe great, ile
growe lesse, for ile purge and leaue Sacke, and liue
cleanlie as a noble man should do. Exit. (5.4.2956-9)
```

The allusions to deer-hunting continue in Falstaff’s reference to following (like a hunting dog) for reward (a piece of the deer), and Falstaff builds on this allusion with an *antanaclasis* on “reward” that leads him to apply the same figure to “growe.” His assertion that he will reform is as serious as his earlier resolve: “I must giue ouer this life, and I will giue it ouer: by the Lord and I doe not, I am a villaine” (1.2.200-1) or “ile repent and that suddainly, while I am in some liking” (3.3.1925-6). What is most interesting is that his rhetorical subversion is so complete that no audience wants Falstaff to repent; his ‘evil’ words are too much fun to be abandoned.

---

27Humphreys, 162 n.
Iago employs many of the same rhetorical devices that Falstaff uses, but issuing from Iago their effects are startlingly different. Iago's subversion ultimately hinges not upon his ability to overturn dominant morality, although his language is quite capable of that, so much as it turns upon an unmotivated, malevolent rhetorical flexibility. Like the Vice figures before him who turn their eloquence into a weapon against the 'good' and 'evil' alike, Iago is able to play all sides against each other and emerge at the end of the last scene, alive, with his subversive goals achieved. Again like the Vice figures before him, it is Iago's eloquence that allows him to turn the world of his play upside down.

Iago's explanation of his subversive technique in the opening scene of Othello leaves Roderigo and the audience very little room for doubt regarding his intentions:

IAGO O Sir content you,
I follow him to serve my turne vpon him.
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truely followed, you shall marke
Many a dutious and knee-crooking knaue,
That doting on his owne obsequious bondage
Weares out his time, much like his masters Asse,
For naught but prouender, & when he's old cashierd,
Whip me such honest knaues: Others there are,
Who trimd in formes, and visages of duty,
Keepe yet their hearts, attending on themselues,
And throwing but showes of seruice on their Lords,
Doe well thrive by 'em, and when they haue lin'd their coates,
Doe themselues homage, these Fellowes haue some soule,
And such a one do I professe my selfe,—for sir,

It is as sure as you are Roderigo,

Were I the Moore, I would not be lago:

In following him, I follow but my selfe.

Heauen is my judge, not I, for loue and dutie,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end.

For when my outward action doth demonstrate

The natieue act, and figure of my heart

In complement externe, tis not long after,

But I will weare my heart vpon my sleeue

For Dawes to pecke at, I am not what I am. (1.1.41-64)

Although they are subtle, the figures that lago employs at the opening of this speech characterize his rhetorical subversion. The *commutatio* (reciprocal change)

that colors the “him” in “I follow him to serue my turne vpon him” sets up a series of overturnings in the oration that build toward the end. For example, the *sententia* “We cannot all be masters” is quickly followed by the subversive parallel “nor all masters/Cannot be truely followed.” The *exemplum* of the “dutious and knee-crooking knaue,” with its disdain-laden *imago* (simile) “much like his masters Asse,” functions in the same way but ends with the unexpectedly forceful line, “Whip me such honest knaues.” That force signals a shift in lago’s matter, and he reverses the order of the figures he has just used, beginning with the negative *exemplum* of the “others” who “Keepe yet their hearts, attending on themselues,” passing through the paraphrased *sententia* of “Were I the Moore, I would not be lago” (a leader cannot be a follower), and ending with a striking *commutatio* on “follow”: “In

---

28 *ad Herennium*, 325-7.
following him, I follow but my selfe." The complexity of this impressive display of eloquence is not something that Iago wishes to be lost upon his auditors; his last sentence, an assertion that his "outward action" will never demonstrate "The native act, and figure of [his] heart" (with an instance of antanaclasis on "figure" to underscore his use of them here), is punctuated by an impressively clear—and sinister—final use of commutatio: "I am not what I am." Vickers explains the ultimate result of all this: "Iago is the Janus-faced persuader, and from his first announcement 'I am not what I am' we are keyed up to watching him in the act of persuading others, and varying his whole style, argument, character, even his metabolism to suit the purpose." Iago makes his methods known in these lines, and the audience has been warned—and, ironically, impressed—by the knowledge of them.

This subtle but noticeably effective use of figures is maintained in Iago’s ‘encouragement’ of Roderigo, the would-be suicide who denies Iago’s definition of love:

IAGO It is meerly a lust of the blood, and a permission of the will: Come, be a man; drowne thy selfe? drowne
Cats and blind Puppies: I haue profeest me thy friend,
and I confesse me knit to thy deseruing, with cables of perdurable toughnesse; I could neuer better steed thee
then now. Put money in thy purse; follow thou the warres, defeate thy fauour, with an vsurp’d beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be long that

Desdemona should continue her loue to the Moore.--

---

29Vickers, 336.

30Joseph, 234-6 discusses subtlety as a main feature of Iago’s argumentation.
put money in thy purse,—nor he his to her; it was a
violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an
answerable sequestration: put but money in thy
purse.—These Moores are changeable in their wills:—
fill thy purse with money. The Food that to him now,
is as lushious as Locusts, shall be to him shortly as
bitter as Coloquintida. She must change for youth:
when shee is sated with his body shee will find the
error of her choyce. Therefore, put money in thy purse:
if thou wilt needs damne thy selffe, do it a more
delicate way then drowning; make all the money thou
canst. If sanctimony, and a fraile vow, betwixt an
erring Barbarian, and a super subtle Venetian be not
too hard for my wits, and all the tribe of hell, thou
shalt enjoy her; therefore make money,—a pox a
drowning thy selffe, it is cleane out of the way: seeke
thou rather to be hang’d in compassing thy ioy, then
to be drowned, and goe without her. (1.3.620-46)

The lines of argument and rhetorical symmetry of this passage have been
commented upon at some length,31 but perhaps the most striking—and
subversively potent—feature of Iago’s language here is to be found in his
obvious deployment of repetition. The subtlety of this lies not in the
complexity of the figure itself but rather in the practical economy of the
repeated phrase “put money in thy purse.” This repetition acts not just “so the
prophecy of the split between Othello and Desdemona [may seem] to grow and

wax more certain” as a result;\textsuperscript{32} it also--and just as importantly--serves to show what Iago's terrifying eloquence can do with the simplest of figures and how easily it may be accomplished.

Yet again like the Vice figures before him, one of the key features of Iago's rhetorical facility is his habit of addressing the audience directly. Disruption of the play-world comes easily to Iago, and he is as able a rhetorician outside the confines of the play as he is within it. His delight in taking money from Roderigo provides an instance:

Thus do I euer make my foole my purse:
For I mine owne gain'd knowledge should prophane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe,
But for my sport and profit: I hate the Moore,
And it is thought abroad, that twixt my sheetes
He ha's done my office; I know not, if't be true--
But I, for meere suspition in that kind,
Will doe, as if for surety: he holds me well,
The better shall my purpose worke on him.

Cassio's a proper man, let me see now,
To get his place, and to plume vp my will,
In double knauery--how, how, let's see,
After some time, to abuse Othelloe's eares.
That he is too familiar with his wife:
He hath a person and a smooth dispose,
To be suspected, fram'd to make women false,
The Moore is of a free and open nature,

\textsuperscript{32}Vickers, 339.
That thinkes men honest, that but seeme to be so:
And will as tenderly be lead bit'h nose--
As Asses are:
I ha't, it is ingender'd: Hell, and night,
Must bring this monstrous birth to the worlds light. (1.3.661-82)

The most important thing to notice about these lines is that they are in blank verse rather than prose. This has been described as being the result of a "normal division of dissimulation in prose and frankness in verse," but this pattern is not one that Iago rigidly follows in all his orations to the audience. Rather, its effect here is deliberate; the structure that verse implies lends authority and a sense of control to Iago's language that is not lost upon his auditors. The rhyming couplet that ends the speech confirms all of this and lends a brutal yet brilliant finality to Iago's invention, "ingender'd" as it is with the *translatio* (metaphor) of birth. It also imparts a certainty to Iago's uncertainty that communicates nothing so much as the subversive power of his improvisational skills; this technique and its effects also show up later in the couplet that closes another direct address: "...tis here, but yet confus'd/Knaueries plaine face is neuer seene, till vs'd" (2.1.992-3). The verse also transmits weight to the straightforwardness of Iago's unmotivated viciousness; even as slender an argument as "But I, for meere suspition in that kind,/Will doe, as if for surety" has the power to convince here. The audience cannot choose but admire this fluency even as it is repelled by the evil behind it, and Iago's blank verse becomes the poetry of subversion.

---

33Vickers, 341.
However, Iago's addresses to the audience are not limited to expression in verse. The uncomfortable power of his aside in prose works ironically against formality to draw the audience into complicity:

He takes her by the palme; I, well sed, whisper:
with as little a webbe as this will I ensnare as great a
Fly as Cassio. I smile vpon her, do: I will giue thee in
thine owne courtship: you say true, tis so indeed. If
such trickes as these strip you out of your Lieutenantry,
it had beene better you had not kiss'd your three fingers
so oft, which now againe, you are most apt to play the
sir in: very good, well kist, an excellent courtesie; tis
so indeed: yet againe, your fingers to your lips? Would
they were Clisterpipes for your sake.-- (2.1.852-61)
The exclamatio (apostrophe)\textsuperscript{34} of the phrases "I, well sed, whisper," "I smile vpon her, do," "you say true, tis so indeed," and so on that are interspersed with the rest of Iago's aside serve to draw the audience in as co-conspirators; Iago shares the sarcasm with them that he withholds from Cassio. The casual tone that this figure creates here only deepens the rhetorical violence. The metaphor of fly and web is thus particularly apt, for the unwitting Cassio is at the public mercy of Iago's words in front of the audience in much the same way as an ensnared insect hangs upon a web in plain view. Consequently, Iago is at home confiding in the audience in prose as well as verse and in both forms the frankness so characteristic of his Vice-heritage shows through the elaborate weave of his language.

\textsuperscript{34}ad Herennium, 282-5.
Certainly one of the most remarkable facets of Iago's rhetorical subversion lies in his ability to maintain contradictory views with absolute eloquence. His lecture to Cassio on the value of reputation provides an example:

[CASSIO] Iago, my reputation.
IAGO As I am an honest man I had thought you had receiu'd some bodily wound, there is more sence in that, then in Reputation: reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit, and lost without deserving. You haue lost no reputation at all. vnlesse you repute your selfe such a loser; what man, there are more wayes to recouer the Generall agen: you are but now cast in his moode, a punishment more in policie, then in malice, euen so, as one would beate his offencelesse dog, to affright an imperious Lyon: sue to him againe, and hees yours. (2.3.1266-76)

Again, the rhetorical symmetry and specious logic of this passage have been analyzed in some detail, but their effects bear further comment. Iago's power to convince here extends beyond Cassio and the bounds of the play-world and out into the minds of the audience who are led to see a kind of sense in Iago's words even as they reject them as the outpourings of an 'evil' speaker. This is the ambivalence that Iago's eloquence produces and that lies at the core of his subversive energies. His words can be 'evil' and still ring true.

---

35Vickers, 344-5.
This is all the more striking because Iago touches on the topic of reputation again in the play with very different rhetorical results:

IAGO I do beseech you,
Though I perchance am vicious in my ghesse,
As I confesse it is my natures plague,
To spy into abuses, and oft my icalousie
Shapes faults that are not, that your wisedome then,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,
Would take no notice, nor build your selfe a trouble
Out of his scattering, and vnseure observance;
It were not for your quiet, nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, and wisedome,
To let you know my thoughts.

OTHELLO What dost thou meane?

IAGO Good name in man and woman deere my Lord;
Is the immediate leuell of their soules:
Who steales my purse, steales trash, tis something, nothing,
Twas mine, tis his, and has bin slaue to thousands:
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that, which not inriches him,
And makes me poore indeed. (3.2.1597-1614)

Shockingly enough, Iago's rhetorical aptitude is such that he is able to effect a complete about-face here in his professed attitude toward reputation. The "immediate leuell" of human souls, formerly "an idle and most false imposition," ceases to have meaning for an audience that can be as convinced by Iago's eloquent performance here as by his advice to Cassio. As Joseph correctly points out, "[t]he noble generalities which Iago utters cleverly
instill belief in his own honesty and integrity. . . in the very act of insinuating false suspicion." Iago, by his own honest admission "vicious in [his] ghesse" (with antanaclasis on his dramatic function), "Shapes faults that are not" and corrupts, as Vice figures before him have done, with the truth.

This strategic deployment of the truth finds its fullest expression in a speech Iago delivers to the audience; here, Iago not only tells the damaging truth but revels in it:

And what's he then, that sayes I play the villaine,
When this aduise is free I giue, and honest,
Proball to thinking, and indeed the course,
To win the Moore againe? For tis most easie
TH'inclining Desdemona to subdue,
In any honest suite, she's fram'd as fruitfull,
As the free Elements: and then for her
To win the Moore, wer't renounce his baptisme,
All seales and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soule is so infetter'd to her loue,
That she may make, vnmake, do what she list,
Euen as her appetite shall play the god,
With his weake function: how am I then a villaine?
To counsell Cassio to this parrallell course,
Directly to his good: diuinity of hell,
When diuells will the blackest sins put on,
They doe suggest at first with heauenly shewes,
As I doe now: for whiles this honest foole

\[36\] Joseph, 101.
Plyes Desdemona to repaire his fortune,
And she for him, pleades strongly to the Moore:
I'le poure this pestilence into his eare,
That she repeales him for her bodies lust;
And by how much she striues to doe him good,
She shall vn doe her credite with the Moore,
So will I turne her vertue into pitch,
And out of her owne goodnesse make the net
That shall enmash them all. (2.3.1336-62)

Iago dares an argument in these lines. He uses a simile to link Desdemona with
the “free Elements” and no one can contradict him; he metaphorically
represents Othello as a prisoner “infetter'd” by Desdemona’s love and no one
can deny him; he bluntly calls Cassio an “honest foole” and Cassio’s actions
bear the title. Once again, Iago employs as simple a figure as repetition: “And
what’s he then, that sayes I play the villaine” and “how am I then a villaine?”
The truth Iago deploys to effect his villainous ends makes the answers to those
questions more difficult than they first seem, and the fixed value of that truth
is at least partially subverted.

True to form, Iago’s last appearance in the play confirms his Vice-
heritage and extends his rhetorical subversion to its furthest reach. Othello’s
rage at having been duped so completely leads him to attempt the impossible:

   OTHELLO I look down towards his feet, but that’s a fable,
   (to Iago) If that thou beest a diuell, I cannot kill thee.

   He wounds Iago

   LODOUICO Wrench his sword from him.

   Officers disarm Othello

   IAGO I bleed sir, but not kil’d. (5.2.3189-92)
Iago picks up on Othello's rhetoric even here, and implicitly answers his query concerning his demonic status; he bleeds, but he doesn't die. Just like the Vice figures who suffer no life-threatening retribution for their unmotivated evil, Iago is stabbed and, like Falstaff, rises again. His physical 'answer' to Othello's attack thus parallels his verbal response. Having received an answer other than the immediate death he expected, Othello decides to ask Iago the most important question of all:

[OTHELLO] Will you I pray, demand that demy diuell,
Why he hath thus insnar'd my soule and body?
IAGO Demand me nothing, what you know, you know,
From this time forth, I neuer will speake word. (5.2.3204-7)

Ambiguously, frustratingly, viciously, Iago refuses anything other than the symmetrically enigmatic "what you know, you know." His assertion that "From this time forth, [he] neuer will speake word" ironically consolidates his rhetorical powers of subversion in what ultimately becomes the most potent figure in his linguistic arsenal: his silence.

Falstaff and Iago, two of Shakespeare's most Vice-like creations, deploy similar means to what are, finally, very different dramatic ends. Although Iago's "rhetorical structure" is perhaps less complicated\(^{37}\) than that of Falstaff, both characters employ eloquence in a highly sophisticated fashion as a means of effecting a basic ambivalence in their moral surroundings. Their 'appeal' for an audience, indeed, their dramatic durability, is directly linked to this destabilizing function; their words may well be ultimately 'evil,' but that is in large part what makes those words so compelling.

\(^{37}\)Vickers, 336.
Conclusion

The proto-Vices, Vice figures, and their descendants that I have examined here are not the only figures to use rhetoric subversively; rather, I have chosen them for their representative value as obvious deployers of eloquence. Backbiter and Raise Slander, the Vices of Mankind, Nichol Newfangle, Ambidexter, Mephastophilis, the famous Falstaff and the infamous Iago all pointedly and self-reflectively refer to their use of the arts of language, and, as such, they serve as useful models for the investigation of the phenomenon. The sheer number of proto-Vices, designated Vice figures, and descendants of Vice figures in extant early English drama bears witness not only to the popularity and vitality of this figure, but also to the amount of scholarly work that remains to be done in this area. Even after a century of examination, from Lysander Cushman's pioneering 1900 study to the excellent recent work of Peter Happé and J. A. B. Somerset, a definite understanding of the Vice's constitution, functions, and effects is far from complete. My attempt has been to contribute to that understanding by conducting as focused a study as possible in an effort to provide what is ultimately a close reading of a group of important Vices rather than a general overview.

As I outlined at the beginning of this study, rhetorical subversion takes on two basic forms in these plays, and each of these Vices works loosely within these forms. On the one hand is the Vice who manifests an unmotivated evil that attacks all inhabitants of the play-world regardless of their moral standing. Backbiter and Raise Slander, Mephastophilis, and Iago belong here. Backbiter, in *The Castle of Perseverance*, constitutes and is constituted by a conception of evil that is inextricably bound up with ambivalence and, in turn, with the ambivalent nature of rhetoric. His similar lack of rigidly definable substance in the N-Town "Trial of Joseph and Mary" stands outside
the temporally/spatially specific world of the audience and again confirms his constitution in rhetorical ambivalence. Mephistophilis subverts the value of truth for an audience that is forced to see the malleability of that seemingly unshapable concept; by transparently using rhetoric and logic with the truth to damn Faustus, Mephistophilis emphasizes his terrible power to persuade. Iago's assertion that "From this time forth, [he] neuer will speake word" ironically consolidates his rhetorical powers of subversion in his silence and provides a potent manifestation of the sheer power of unmotivated evil that each of these Vices draw on to shape their respective plays.

On the other hand, for some of the figures examined here the subversive arts of language become the arts of verbal play. No one inside the play-world--or out in the audience, for that matter--is immune to attack here either, but the overturning of morality is achieved not so much by means of unmitigated evil as it is by what is finally sympathetic laughter. The Vices of Mankind, Nichol Newfangle, Ambidexter, and Falstaff belong here. Titivillus, the chief of the Vices of Mankind, is evil, but he is also fun, and that fact prevents him from being utterly repulsive. He leaves the play without getting so much as a damnation from any of the good figures, let alone any serious harm. Nichol Newfangle leaves his audience not only laughing, but also marveling at his capacity to use rhetoric as a means of appropriating and consolidating power while emerging unscathed. Ambidexter's subversive rhetorical facility is matched only by his resolute moral ambiguity. Able to "play with both hands" and subvert on all sides regardless of social standing or access to power, he too leaves his audience laughing, however wryly, and escapes serious injury or moral responsibility in the process. Falstaff's rhetorical subversion is so complete that no audience wants him to take moral
responsibility, let alone injury, for his language; his 'evil' words are too entertaining to be truly repented.

However, these general distinctions are not rigidly upheld: Mep has to philanthropy is dryly funny at moments and Nichol Newfangle, Ambidexter, and the Vices from Mankind are far from harmless. Both forms of subversion are to be found in the Vice's rhetorical arsenal, and both work to produce essentially the same morally destabilizing potential. While the extent of that moral destabilization may be open to interpretation and debate in some of these plays, it is the potential for subversion that is most important. As I have already asserted, this is an important distinction to make in order to correctly read the Vice figures without needlessly grounding them in the moral topography of the genres from which they emerge.

The history of rhetoric in England during the Tudor period, although well-served in outline by a number of the studies I have cited, has yet to move to a detailed and sustained investigation of the attitudes toward and the uses of rhetoric during those years. Many of the English vernacular rhetorics of the period are available only in facsimile; this lack of good critical editions hampers further work in and more widespread knowledge of this important field. Nevertheless, rhetorical studies are currently experiencing a revival; one has only to chart the membership and activities of scholarly organizations such as the International Society for the History of Rhetoric to see the extent to which this is the case. Certainly, this renewed interest in the study of rhetoric can only have positive effects in its application to the study of eloquence in sixteenth-century Britain and to early English drama, one of the most popular sites where such eloquence was put into action. My attempt here has been to sketch, however briefly, what is finally a preliminary outline of
just how influential rhetoric was as a framework for cultural expression and subversion in Tudor England as evidenced in a number of important plays.

Each of the figures under examination shares a common ability to use the arts of language as a means of potentially destabilizing the moral order of their plays. This ability also serves to make them dramatically attractive, even in their moral repugnancy, and the resulting ambivalence leaves lasting impressions on the audiences to whom these figures speak so much. After all, subversion does not need to be complete in order to be effective; as I have demonstrated, even the potential for subversion—dissidence—sends shockwaves through the play-world and out onto the audience. It is no accident that each of these figures is adept at blurring the distinctions between the play-world and the world of the audience; moral complicity is one of the chief outcomes that result when these figures lure playgoers into passive participation by confiding in them. What effect that result has on an individual audience, indeed, on an individual audience member, is not as important as the fact of its producing an effect in the first place. Whether we, as audience members, take a kind of delight in the eloquent overturning these figures attempt or turn away from them in response to the (not always clearly defined) moral aims of the plays, is secondary to the fact that these figures precipitate a crisis that forces such a choice. It is in that precipitation of crisis that rhetorical subversion finds its fullest expression and the summation of its dramatic and moral function.
Works Consulted


---. *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages.* Oxford: OUP, 1946.


Coogan, Mary Philippa. *An Interpretation of the Moral Play,* Mankind.


Epp, Garrett P. J. “*Like Will to Like* and the Control of Sodomy.” Suppression and Unorthodoxy in the Middle Ages, Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario. 17 February 1995.


Happé, Peter and Wim Hüsken. “Sinnekins and the Vice: Prolegomena.”


---.“The Vice: A Checklist and An Annotated Bibliography.” Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama 22 (1979): 17-35.


Manly, J. M. "The Children of the Chapel Royal and Their Masters." The
Cambridge History of English Literature, VI: The Drama to 1642, Part 2.
Ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1907-17. 279-
92.

Manitius, Max. Handschriften antiken Autoren in mittelalterlichen
Bibliotheks katalogen. Ed. Karl Manitius. Zentralblatt für

Marcus, Leah S. "Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: the Case of

Marlowe, Christopher. The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe, Vol. II: Dr

McAlindon, Tom. "The Evil of Play and the Play of Evil: Richard, Iago and
Edmund Contextualized." Shakespeare's Universe: Renaissance Ideas and
Conventions. Ed. John M. Mucciolo, Steven J. Doloff, and Edward A.

Morelli-White, Nan. "Evolution of the Vice Character from Medieval Through

London: T. Davies, 1777.

Murphy, James J. "Rhetoric." Medieval Latin: An Introduction and

---. Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St.

Neuss, Paula. "Active and Idle Language: Dramatic Images in Mankind."
68.


