

MAHDI ALIZADEH ZIAEI
University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

THE VICE AS A COMIC DEVICE IN THE MECHANICS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH COMEDIES

Abstract:

According to conventional histories of Tudor drama, one of the central characters of the morality plays, and of Tudor drama in general, is a character called the 'Vice'. As early as 1900, scholars tried to explore this familiar and yet mysterious character. But who or what is a, or in some Tudor interludes, "the Vice"? Where does he spring from? What dramatic function does this character play in the overall structure of early English comedies? Is his role an integral part of the plays in which he appears? Is he a static figure or does he develop over the years? How is he manipulated by later playwrights who did not explicitly use any "Vice" in their plays? One of the central difficulties in answering such questions is, as we shall see, the terminology itself. The term 'The Vice', first employed by John Heywood in his interludes of the late 1520s or early 1530s invites comparison with those characters in the later medieval morality plays and early interludes, who personify individual vices or sins, such as Newguise, Nowadays and Nought in *Mankind*, or *The World, the Flesh and The Devil* in *The Castle of Perseverance*. But the roles of these figures are sufficiently distinct to suggest that they are not directly analogous, or not always so. So just how 'vicious' are the Tudor vices is another question that we shall have to confront in due course. But if 'the Vice' cannot necessarily be traced directly and unproblematically to the morality vices as was once claimed, where might the figure have come from? And what was his function? These questions have provoked considerable scholarly controversy.

Keywords:

Late Medieval Comedies, Early Modern English Comedies, Interludes, Vice, comic figures