A Mirror for Spectators: The Dramaturgy of Participation and Unreliable Mirror Figures in Sixteenth-Century Drama

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DEDICATION

For my family: Mom, Dad, Liz, and Brett.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines mirror figures in three interlude dramas and two of Shakespeare's histories. I argue that these plays use characters who function as spectators by interpreting the dramatic action. Each mirror figure, however, makes unreliable interpretations that force the audience to reject their assessments. The plays offer no characters to act as alternatives to the unreliable mirror figures, and as a result, the audience must step in to make their own judgment of the plays' messages. This creates a dramaturgy of participation as the playwrights constantly provoke the audience to actively engage with the action on stage and challenge the interpretations of the unreliable figures. I engage with theories of performance and metatheatricality to challenge the majority of interlude criticism, which argues that each of these plays insists on a single, specific message.

I begin with John Redford's *Wit and Science*, which includes a material mirror as its central prop. In this play, the unreliable mirror figure, Wit, becomes a literal figure in the mirror as he peers into the physical prop on stage. Each of the other chapters explores another iteration of the unreliable mirror figure. My last chapter examines the way Shakespeare reuses this interlude tradition in *Henry IV Part One* and *Henry IV Part Two*. Shakespeare marks Prince Hal with characteristics of the interlude Vice and positions Falstaff as an unreliable mirror figure who helps draw the audience's attention to Hal's Vice-like qualities. Thus, in addition to rethinking the didactic purpose of interlude drama, this project also considers, in a new way, how Shakespeare used his audience's

familiarity with native dramatic traditions to enhance the complexity of his characters and how they relate to the audience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I Introduction 1
Interlude History and Criticism 4
Mirror Literature 10
Rethinking Performance 13
Chapter Summaries 15
CHAPTER II Wit's Mirror 19
Scholars on the Mirror 21
Reason's Mirror 24
Wit's Portrait 26
Confronting the Mirror 32
CHAPTER III A and B and Multiplicity 47
Multiple Interpretations 50
Multiple Theories 53
Multiple Beginnings 55
Multiple Roles 63
Multiple Endings 73
Chapter IV Ambidexter The Actor 81
Cambises and the Mirror Tradition 83
Criticism of Ambidexter 88
Ambidexter as Actor 91
Ambidexter and the Audience 106
CHAPTER V Hal as Ambidexter and Falstaff as Mirror Figure 112
The Ambidexter and His Mirror 116
Hal's Damnable Iteration and His Corrupted Saint 126
The Play Extempore 131
Becoming King and Rejecting the Mirror Figure 137
Chapter VI Conclusion 142
LIST OF REFERENCES 146
Vita 154

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the early modern period, both playwrights and spectators used the idea of the mirror to describe drama. The play-as-mirror metaphor was so ubiquitous in this period that Hamlet himself describes drama as "hold[ing]…a mirror up to nature."[1] Anne Righter insists that Hamlet's statement is an idea "about the theatre upon which both the dramatist and his audience were agreed" and that "Hamlet himself speaks as though his Elizabethan idea of drama were part of some immemorial order of things."[2] Both Hamlet and Righter point to the common assumption that plays worked as mirrors for audiences in that audience members would see themselves in the action on stage, which would then lead to some kind of self-understanding or reveal an essential truth. Shakespeare was not the first playwright to voice this idea of drama through one of his characters; many sixteenth-century plays also called attention to their role as mirrors.[3] And even contemporary playgoers viewed drama in these terms.[4] This emphasis on plays

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 5e, ed. by David Bevington (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004) 3.2.22.
[2] Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962) p.15.
[3] For example, in *Like Will to Like*, the idea of the mirror or glass is used repeatedly. The Prologue tells the audience, "Heerin as it were in a glasse see you may: /
the aduauncement of vertue and of vice the decay" (17-18). Later, Cuthbert Cutpurse cautions the audience against his bad choices by saying, "For I to you all a mirrour may be" (1100). Similarly, in *Impatient Poverty*, Peace tells the audience that the play "is but a mirror vice to exclude" (104). See Ulpian Fullwell, *Like Will to Like* (New York: AMS Press, 1970); *Impatient Poverty* in *The Tudor Interludes:* Nice Wanton *and* Impatient Poverty, ed. Leonard Tennenhouse (New York, Garland Publications, 1984).
[4] Most famously, Sir Thomas Elyot described comedies as, "a picture or as it were a mirrour of man's life wherein iuell is nat taught but discouered." See Sir Thomas Elyot,

as mirrors is unsurprising given the coinciding importation of mirror technology and the proliferation of mirror literature during the medieval and early modern period. My dissertation examines sixteenth century drama, both interludes and early Shakespearean histories, as another iteration of mirror literature. Rather than focusing on the entire play as a mirror, I investigate specific characters that act as mirror figures for the audience. The playwrights I discuss create characters that function as spectators in that they interpret the dramatic action. These spectator characters, however, always fail to provide reliable interpretations, and playwrights offer no viable alternatives to these interpreters. I argue, then, that the failure of these characters encourages a dramaturgy of participation. In their failure to morally or accurately comment on the dramatic action, mirror figures provide the audience with an example of how *not* to interpret the drama. As a result, real spectators are invited to reject the interpretations of these figures in favor of their own. However misguided they may be, the mirror figures are necessary because they consistently remind audience members to engage their interpretive faculties when watching a play. In this way, the playwrights I discuss draw attention not only to the issues their plays address but also to the way audiences interpret what they see on stage.

Importantly, this argument challenges current criticism on interludes that seeks to find single, specific messages in these plays. I insist, instead, that the plays I examine are purposefully ambiguous so as to require the audience to make their own determination about the message of the play. This argument, then, rethinks the idea of didacticism in sixteenth-century theater. Coming out of a humanist tradition focused on education and

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The Boke Named Gouerner, ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft (London: K Paul, Trench, and Co., 1883), 1.124.

specifically education through questions and debate, these plays repeat humanist methods.[5] Instead of teaching audiences a specific message through their play, playwrights were teaching audiences how to engage with drama, to think through their own ideas about the issues presented, and to confront their expectations of the theater itself.

The mirror figures in the plays I discuss draw attention to themselves in a variety of ways that constantly reinforce to audience members that they should be actively engaged with the dramatic action they are seeing. One way playwrights accomplish this is using these mirror figures similar to Prologue/Epilogue characters that are familiar to the audience from other medieval and interlude drama. They provide a running commentary and judgment of the action on stage, frequently making direct statements about how the audience should interpret the play. These direct statements are likely crucial to protecting the playwright from patrons and officials who might perceive their drama as unorthodox. But close examination of these plays reveals that the messages these plays pretend to support do not always stand up to the dramatic action. The playwrights I discuss all systematically undercut the message that their own plays purport. Additionally, these characters create metatheatrical moments that remind spectators of the conditions and conventions of the theater, asking them to consider the purpose of such conventions and how they contribute to meaning making. Finally, the playwrights manipulate well-known dramatic tropes so that they are recognizable to the audience but new in form. This

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[5] See Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1-11.

manipulation and novelty catch the audience's attention and insist that the audience work to interpret these newly formed tropes and their place in the theatrical experience.

Interlude History and Criticism

My dissertation takes three Tudor interludes and Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV* as its subject and examines characters from these plays that function as mirror figures. These plays I refer to as "interludes" dominated the dramatic scene for much of the sixteenth century. I use the term "sixteenth-century drama" instead of "interlude drama" to describe my project because the scope of my dissertation moves into the public stages with Shakespeare. The first three chapters, however, and thus the majority of my project, focus on interlude drama. Interludes date roughly from 1471 when *Mankind*, often considered the first interlude, was produced to the late 1570s and early 1580s when the permanent theaters were established.[6] These dates are, of course, estimations, and more important than the time period of the plays are the style and content. One of the explanations behind the term "interlude" comes from their performance between other activities.[7] These plays were most often staged during a banquet or celebration at the homes of nobles, at court, or at universities. Acting troupes, sometimes travelling and sometimes stationary, performed interludes usually in a great hall. A great hall was a long, rectangular room, typically off of the kitchen with two doors by the wall leading

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[6] Given their time period, these plays are also often termed "Tudor interludes" or "Tudor drama" because they roughly coincide with the Tudor dynasty beginning with the rise of Henry VII (1485) until about mid-way through Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603). As such, this dissertation will consider a play from each of the three major Tudor monarchs: Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I.

[7] For other explanations of the term "interlude" see Glynne Wickam, *Moral Interludes* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), v-ix.

into the kitchen that provided for entrances and exits. Very little scenery was used, and evidence suggests that not until the second half of the sixteenth century did some plays perhaps employ a raised surface that we might think of as a "stage."[8]

The performance conditions of interludes make them different from what we often think of as "theater" because they were not performed on purpose built stages. As Greg Walker explains, what makes Tudor drama both unique and exciting is that "the interlude drama was precisely not 'theatrical' (in the sense of taking place in a building designed for drama)."[9]And these plays "lived in the spaces in which the real events which they allegorised also took place, and it drew rhetorical and symbolic strength from that fact."[10] It is this "rhetorical and symbolic strength" that also allows interludes the opportunity to challenge dramatic conventions while tackling topics central to the political, social, and religious conflicts of the period. These topics were neither simple nor straightforward. Rather, the complexity of the issues addressed in interludes encourages the more open style of interpretation that I argue for.

This genre began to receive scholarly attention in the early twentieth century from critics seeking to understand the interludes' place in the history of drama. E.K. Chambers pioneered the investigation into these plays in his two landmark works, *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903) and *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923).[11] Chambers places interludes within a

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[8] T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1958), 10.
[9] Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),1.
[10] Ibid.
[11] See E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1903) and E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

larger trajectory from medieval drama to the drama of commercial theaters. He tends to describe interludes more as a transitional form between these two periods rather than as a distinctive genre. Chambers' work, however, was essential to bringing attention to this style of drama.

In the wake of Chambers, a variety of critics in the 1950s and 1960s began to examine interludes more closely, often in relation to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. T.W. Craik's *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (1958) defended the performative nature of these plays through extensive discussion of the performance condition. Without much external evidence, Craik uses the play texts themselves to better understand what this drama looked like in its original live form. Much of what we believe about the acting, costumes, staging, and props in the production of these plays comes from Craik's work. Glynne Wickham's *Early English Stages 1300-1600* (1959) and *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage* (1969) follow Craik in arguing for the performativity of these plays. Wickham also addresses the content of interludes and describes them as "overtly critical of political institutions and social justice."[12] Finally, David Bevington's *From* Mankind *to Marlowe* (1962) explains the dramatic structure of these plays and how their allowance for doubling accommodated smaller acting troupes. Like Craik, Bevington relies on the internal evidence from the plays themselves to better understand their performances in terms of structural elements, which he then sees repeated in the plays of Christopher Marlowe.

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[12] Glynne Wickham, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage: Collected Studies in Medieval, Tudor, and Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 26.

More recent criticism has investigated the topical nature of interludes and has provided important insight into the way that these playwrights engaged with the political, social, and religious landscape of sixteenth-century England. Bevington's second book on interludes, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (1968), focuses, as the title indicates, on interludes and contemporary politics. Bevington moves away from an interpretive strategy that aligns interlude characters with individual political or historical figures and argues for a more general political purpose behind plays: "religious politics was virtually the whole substance of drama, inevitably creating a tradition of both political commentary in the drama and various dramaturgic techniques by which ideology could be given maximum propagandistic effect."[13] Many critics have followed Bevington in examining these plays as pieces of propaganda. Suzanne Westfall, for example, focuses on the patron instead of the playwright, but like Bevington argues that these plays provided an opportunity for patrons to present their political ideas to audiences. Her book, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (1990), emphasizes interludes' insistence on maintaining the social order, an idea that would clearly be important to the head of a noble household. She sees the "dramatic structure of the interludes…[as] part of a conscious plan to inculcate a firm acceptance for the ideology of social concepts of hierarchy, retention, and ceremony by using these very things as patterns for dramatic development."[14]

Greg Walker has two influential books on politics and interludes, *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (1991) and *The Politics of*

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[13] David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 3.
[14] Suzanne Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 6.

Performance in Early Renaissance Drama (2006). His first book focuses strictly on plays about "political issues and themes rather than those which refer to them only incidentally."[15] And he believes that these plays "were political documents, designed to plead particular cases and sway minds."[16] His second book follows a similar trajectory in its effort to look at the politics in drama from Henry VIII through Elizabeth I. Again he emphasizes the specific messages that each of these plays seem to contain: "Analysis of this material prompts a number of broad general conclusions concerning that nature of political drama…in addition to suggesting *specific interpretations* of the individual texts and issues concerned."[17]

Paul Whitfield White's *Theatre and Reformation* (1993) and Kent Cartwright's *Theatre and Humanism* (1999) focus on specific political and social issues from the period. White argues that Reformers openly endorsed and used drama as a means to spread Protestantism. He explains, "[E]arly reformers found the presentation of images in public performance and in print an acceptable and useful means of propagating their views."[18] Ultimately, White concludes that playwrights were no different than other men working to promote Protestantism: "playwrights of the English Reformation *did* operate under conditions and for purposes comparable to those of other Protestant publicists, and…the players they wrote for, and in many instances organized and participated with,

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[15] Walker, *The Politics of Performance*, 2.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 3 (my emphasis).
[18] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2.

were similarly involved in the dissemination of Protestantism."[19] Similarly, Cartwright narrows his focus to the influence of humanism, the most significant philosophical movement of the time. While many other critics locate the origin of interludes in the medieval religious drama, Cartwright suggests a strong connection to the humanist tradition, especially given the university backgrounds of most interlude playwrights. Cartwright does not ignore the important influence of medieval drama but rather argues that "a great virtue of early Tudor drama is its capacity to absorb and refashion a range of influences."[20] In particular he emphasizes the "tension between knowledge and experience" central to both humanist concerns and many interludes. He also discusses drama's ability to bring this tension to life by "test[ing] the scripted and the felt, the conceived and the experienced, against each other."[21] Cartwright's argument lends weight to my own in his emphasis on tension and testing. As Cartwright and many other scholars observe, this was a volatile time in political and social thought for England. Drama did, as Cartwright articulates, allow for testing of ideas against one another. My argument differs from these scholars, however, in that I include the audience's participation in this testing and tension. While some interludes did have single, overt messages, the interlude stage afforded playwrights the ability to include the audience in their grappling with crucial issues.

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[19] Ibid., 7.
[20] Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.
[21] Ibid., 17.

Mirror Literature

Playwrights were further enabled to create their dramaturgy of participation by the proliferation of mirror literature in the period. Not surprisingly, the explosion of mirror literature coincided with and was likely heavily influenced by the importing and development of mirrors. As the English began importing convex, glass mirrors in the fourteenth century, the mirror became increasingly important in medieval literature. Around 1570, merchants started to import crystal glass mirrors into England, though convex glass mirrors, made of silver and steel, remained the most common.[22] The mirror literature this importing influenced generally split between two tendencies: the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition and the *speculum* tradition. The latter tradition suggests a collection of encyclopedic knowledge. Adding "mirror" or "*speculum*" to the title of one's book indicated that the author was creating a compendium of his or her subject, reflecting all the available knowledge on the topic. The former tradition was a type of advice literature and provided instruction for princes and rulers through past examples of fallen rulers. This tradition was not, however, limited only to exemplum texts for magistrates; authors produced mirrors for a variety of professions and lifestyles.[23] Although *A Mirror for Magistrates* was not published until 1567, when this genre was already well established, it remains the most popular text of its kind. It is in this first tradition that I place the

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[22] Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 107.
[23] See Herbert Graves, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48-53.

Tudor interludes. In the same way that *A Mirror for Magistrates* gathers examples of historical rulers who failed because of their shortcomings in an effort to teach magistrates how not to rule, these dramas use mirror figures that function as spectators to show the audience how not to spectate. Lack of scholarship on the function of these figures provides an ideal opportunity to examine these plays in a new light but within an already established literary tradition. It also affords us the opportunity to see, in a new way, how later Renaissance drama, including Shakespeare's, is, as David Bevington insists, "popular and national, deriving its themes and forms of expression to a considerable extent from its own native traditions."[24] For this reason, the last chapter presents a crucial part of my argument by examining how Shakespeare drew on his audience's familiarity with this native tradition. In the same way that interlude playwrights use mirror figures to complicate the meaning of their plays, Shakespeare uses a mirror figure to complicate our understanding of Prince Hal.

Recently, scholars have begun to examine mirror literature as more unorthodox than previously thought. This genre, much like interludes, has often been described as a straightforward, didactic literature. While much of mirror literature did include overt exhortations on proper behavior and decorum, these works also had the potential to be subversive. Scott Lucas, in his work on *A Mirror for Magistrates*, comments,

> For over seventy years, critics have generally portrayed the *Mirror* as anything but politically controversial and locally engaged. Instead, most have treated the work as a serene, univocal storehouse of orthodox

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[24] David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965), 1.

> sixteenth-century political, philosophical, and literary 'ideas,' as a collection consciously designed to avoid specific political engagement and to display only uncontroversial, familiar, and universally acceptable 'truths' to its readers."[25]

Lucas argues instead that the authors of *Mirror* "convey elliptically to public audiences their controversial political or religious opinions while preserving their ability to deny any such controversial content if called to account for their writings."[26] Precisely because the individual poems *seemingly* reflect the accepted political doctrines of the time, Lucas argues, the authors remain protected while actually promoting their own potentially less acceptable positions. In other words, authors distorted the reflection in the mirror so that it might appear to offer one reflection while actually revealing another. This manipulation also complements the development of mirror making: until crystal glass mirrors appeared in England, convex mirrors often failed to produce accurate and clear reflections. Thus, distorted reflections are just as important to mirroring concepts in literature as accurate ones are. Like Lucas, I want to rethink the idea that these dramas functioned as propaganda for the political and social ideas of the playwright, the host, or more broadly the monarch. Similar to *Mirror for Magistrates* authors, interlude playwrights construct their plays in ways that come across like "serene, univocal storehouse[s] of orthodox sixteenth-century political, philosophical, and literary 'ideas'" in order to protect themselves from persecution. Like Lucas, many of the critics discussed above have

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[25] Scott Lucas, A Mirror for Magistrates *and the Politics of the English Reformation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 4.
[26] Ibid., 14.

worked to uncover more controversial ideas embedded in these plays. My dissertation goes further than both Lucas and these critics, however, to suggest that what makes certain plays in this genre even more radical is their ambiguity and lack of a specific message.

Rethinking Performance

In order to highlight how mirror figures bring ambiguity to these dramas, I rely on recent work by Erica Lin, whose ideas about the power of the theater help us to rethink common notions of metathreatricality, and on Robert Weimann's concepts of *platea* and *locus*. Lin's book, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (2012), argues,

> Metatheatrical moments…did not serve as self-conscious commentary on 'the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality,' as most scholars would have it. What was at stake for early modern spectators was not the aesthetics of representation (art as a reflection of life), but the spiritual implications of negotiating theatre as a semiotic system (art as an allegorical index of larger truths). Plays within plays…articulated broader anxieties about interpreting seemingly real sensory experiences, and these epistemological challenges and their moral consequences were not merely thematized within the drama but enacted in performance.[27]

Or as Lin says more simply, "metatheatricality is imagined not as mirroring device commenting on the similarity of art and life but as an endless regression of frames that

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[27] Erika Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 73.

foregrounds the act of interpretation itself."[28] Lin's theory of metatheatricality sheds new light on how these moments work in early modern drama. She takes her argument beyond the standard idea that metatheatrical moments call attention to the artificiality of theater to suggest that metatheatricality instead reminds the spectator about what is at stake in the drama and emphasizes the issue of interpretation. While I would not dismiss the importance of metatheatrical moments in accenting the interplay between illusion and reality, my dissertation also follows Lin's insistence that metatheatricality calls attention to the "implications of negotiating theatre as a semiotic system." The mirror figures that each chapter examines create metatheatrical moments through acting in plays-within-plays, directly addressing the audience, and other methods that in turn invite the audience to participate in the meaning making of the drama.

Lin also rethinks Robert Weimann's theory of *platea* and *locus* in terms of dramatic privilege instead of purely physical location. At its publication, Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition of Theater* (1978) became one of the most influential books for thinking about Shakespeare's use of native traditions. Weimann uses his two terms, *platea* and *locus*, to understand how the use of different stage areas affected meaning in medieval and Renaissance drama. Weimann designates the *locus* as the "fixed symbolic locations near and on the larger unlocalized acting area" and the *platea* as the unlocalized acting area.[29] Mimetic elements, Weimann argues, are always performed in the *locus* and non-mimetic elements in the *platea*. Lin redefines these terms

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[28] Ibid., 104.
[29] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, trans. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 74.

so that "the more characters are aware of the playhouse conventions through which visual, aural, and verbal cues onstage come to signify within the represented fiction, the more they are in the *platea*."[30] Functioning as spectators and interpreters, the mirror figures discussed are all highly cognizant of playhouse conventions and frequently work to manipulate these conventions. Furthermore, their knowledge allows them the privileged position to comment on the dramatic action, even though their commentary is ultimately flawed. The combination of participating in metatheatrical moments and being positioned in the *platea* draws attention to the mirror figures and their spectator-like positions. As real spectators watch the mirror figures watching, they (the real spectators) are forced to confront and ultimately reject the figures' flawed interpretations. With mirror figures who provide only unreliable commentary and who manipulate theatrical conventions, the plays I analyze do not simply create but rather *insist* on a dramaturgy of participation. The mirror figures make clear to spectators that they must participate in the meaning making of the play because the mirror figures will not provide the meaning for them.

Chapter Summaries

My dissertation begins with the three chapters on interludes and concludes with a chapter on two of Shakespeare's histories. My first chapter looks at John Redford's *Wit and Science* (c. 1530-1548), which includes the first appearance of a physical mirror on stage. The drama combines romance and morality traditions as it chronicles Wit's attempt to defeat Tediousness and win the hand of Lady Science, daughter of Reason. The main

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[30] Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, 35.

character Wit—our bad spectator and mirror figure—looks into a mirror after he has undergone a physical and intellectual degeneration but uses the terms "like" or "as" when describing his reflection. He only understands the mirror as a technology that can create a superficial, socially acceptable self. Additionally, Wit says that he "plays" the character he sees in the reflection, reminding the audience that the actor on stage is indeed playing. This combination of the mirror and the use of "playing" creates a metatheatrical moment that invites the audience to consider the way they interpret staged events. Unlike the other plays in this dissertation, Wit, enabled by the mirror, interprets his own dramatic development rather than commenting on the dramatic action in which others participate. Wit, then, is literally the figure in the mirror. His failure to fully understand his transformation, however, invites the audience to step in and consider their own ideas about self-understanding. At one point, Wit even turns the mirror toward the audience, forcing them to look in the mirror and thus confront their essential position as interpreters.

My second chapter examines a more conceptual use of mirror figures in Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* (c. 1497). Medwall creates two lively, unnamed characters, differentiated in the text only as A and B, who serve as the bad spectators, in this play that takes up the question of true nobility. A and B comically interpret the action between Lucrece and her suitors, but their interpretations lack sensible reasoning, and they waffle among various contrasting interpretations. Medwall also creates metatheatrical moments by manipulating medieval stage conventions. A and B almost take on the role of medieval presenters but ultimately refuse to fulfill this position. For example, B offers what may be considered a prologue to the play but delivers it

specifically to A and not the audience as a whole. These moments force the audience to reevaluate the purpose of the stage and challenge them to step in and make their own assessment of the drama.

My third chapter looks at Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (c. 1560-1561), which falls into the popular mirror for princes genre and addresses questions about the appropriate reaction to a tyrant. The most charismatic character on the stage, however, is not King Cambises but the Vice Ambidexter, who is the only character to offer a feasible alternative to tyrannicide. Ambidexter's catchphrase for the play is that he can "play with both hands," a refrain that suggests he, like other Vice characters, can equivocate. Unlike other Vice characters, however, Ambidexter uses his ability to read situations, not primarily for evil but to ensure his survival. As a result, he is both a good—in terms of intelligence—and a bad—in terms of morality—spectator. This complicated binary that never receives condemnation from other characters provides the audience with little interpretative aide.

Finally, I use Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1* (c. 1596-1597) and *Henry IV Part 2* (c. 1597) to highlight the popular stage's use of interlude tropes, particularly the Vice and the mirror figure. Shakespeare, like his predecessors, positions Falstaff as the bad spectator. Most criticism that works to connect these plays to their dramatic predecessors focuses on Falstaff as a medieval Lord of Misrule. Perhaps for this reason, critics have overlooked the way that Shakespeare fashions Prince Hal after the interlude Vice. Much like Ambidexter, Hal is able to play with both hands. And it is Falstaff's running commentary that reinforces Hal's connection to Vice. Like the audience, Falstaff watches Hal's activities and works to understand this complicated character. Falstaff is able to

accurately and correctly point to Hal's connection to the Vice, but it is Falstaff's other activities that undermine his credibility. Still, his running commentary and interpretation invite skepticism from the audience as they too work to understand the prince.

CHAPTER II
WIT'S MIRROR

John Redford's *Wit and Science*, first performed sometime between 1530 and 1548, contains, as Kent Cartwright tells us, "the first known use of a mirror as a significant physical property on the English stage."[31] But critics, including Cartwright, have yet to pay substantial attention to this moment of important theatrical innovation. This is perhaps because, with the excessive amount of mirror literature from the period and with the overwhelming consensus that interludes served a specific didactic purpose, most scholars take for granted what the mirror is doing in this play. They acknowledge that Redford highlights the play-as-mirror metaphor when the character Wit peers into the mirror, and they see the mirror as a means for understanding the self. Redford does playfully acknowledge, through his use of this particular prop, that early modern people viewed drama as a mirror, providing examples either to be followed or to be avoided in order to help viewers improve their selves. But Redford challenges his audience to resist any simplistic understanding of this relationship between drama and the audience through his unreliable mirror figure, Wit. Wit attempts to use the mirror for self-understanding (literally becoming the figure in the mirror) and reflects the way audience members might approach a play, but he ultimately fails at anything other than a superficial understanding of what he sees. While the mirror may work perfectly well, Wit's flaws and biases prevent him from any substantial self-discovery. Thus, Redford uses his drama to insist that the mirror alone cannot do all the work for its gazers. Wit's failure pushes the

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[31] Cartwright, Kent, *Theatre and Humanism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1999), 62.

audience to actively engage in dramatic interpretation and resist surface level understandings. By refusing to provide an alternative to Wit's unreliable reading, Redford insists on this active engagement, as the spectators are forced to reject Wit's method of self-understanding and discover their own.

Redford uses a mirror as both the central prop and the central metaphor in his allegorical romance to create a metatheatrical moment that allows him to make this challenge to the audience. Redford sets up the mirror to fulfill audience expectations. He introduces it as an instrument of reason and self-understanding. He further emphasizes the mirror's alleged powers by juxtaposing it with a portrait. But as Redford acknowledges the Renaissance tradition of mirror literature when the play begins, he dismantles the tradition as Wit peers into the mirror in soliloquy. By the end of the play, he has used his unreliable mirror figure to ask that the audience reconsider the idea that the play-as-mirror metaphor provides neatly packaged messages through drama that can on their own provide self-knowledge. Instead, Redford insists that audience members must actively engage with the dramatic process to go beyond surface-level meaning and discover their own messages and own selves in the play.

Because Redford was the schoolmaster at St. Paul's Cathedral, *Wit and Science* most likely would have first been performed by a boy troupe, and some speculate that the first performance occurred at court during the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine Howard.[32] It is unsurprising, given Redford's occupation and its potential presentation at court, that the play centers on humanist concerns about the pursuit of knowledge.

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[32] See Hillary Nunn, "'It lakth but life': Redford's *Wit and Science*, Anne of Cleves, and the Politics of Interpretation," *Comparative Drama* 33 no. 22 (Summer 1999): 271.

Because of manuscript corruption, we do not have the first lines of the play, but the first legible lines begin with Reason giving Wit a mirror to use on his journey to defeat Tediousness and thus woo Science, Reason's daughter, for marriage. Before Wit sets out on his quest, he gives Confidence a portrait of himself to deliver to Lady Science. He is joined on his quest by Study and Instruction, but Wit quickly abandons his two companions and, as a result, Tediousness kills him. Honest Recreation is able to revive Wit, and the two dance. Wit flirts with Honest Recreation and even proposes marriage to her. Soon after, Idleness and her son Ignorance enter, and Idleness seduces Wit away from Honest Recreation. When he falls asleep in her lap, she dresses him in Ignorance's clothes and gives Ignorance the cloak Wit removed when dancing with Honest Recreation. Idleness and Ignorance leave Wit, and Science enters with her mother, Experience. They do not recognize Wit, and Wit does not understand why. They leave Wit, who then pulls out his mirror. After looking into the mirror and turning the mirror to the audience, Wit realizes what has happened and Reason comes on with Shame to punish Wit. After Wit then changes back into his previous garb and defeats Tediousness, he is allowed to marry Science.

Scholars on the Mirror

There seems to be a general assumption and implicit agreement among critics that the mirror in this play functions as an instrument of self-understanding for Wit and that Wit successfully uses the mirror to find his "true self." In one of the earlier essays on the play, Edgar T. Schell names Wit's mirror "the glass of self-examination" and identifies it

as the means through which Wit sees a change in himself.[33] Later critics follow this assumption in their reading of the mirror. Cartwright, for example, reads *Wit and Science* as a dynamic humanist drama that "encourage[s] the spectators' emotional embrace of the transformative vision of education through their engagement with the protagonist's self-discovery."[34] Cartwright locates this important moment of self-discovery in the material mirror that Wit uses and suggests that the mirror "allows him to recognize his corrupted behavior and present shame and to acknowledge his foolish forfeiture of Lady Science."[35] His brief attention to the physical property assigns the mirror a function consistent with other critics: it provides clarity and reason, somehow penetrating Wit's exterior appearance and revealing something about his inner character.[36] Victor I. Scherb, who focuses on the boy players who performed the drama, articulates a similar argument: "Wit keeps Reason's gift of the glass throughout [the play], suggesting that Wit always has the capacity for self-analysis and social examination."[37] These critics all unquestioningly use the language of "self" to interpret the use of the mirror in this play.

The most substantial reading of the mirror comes from Hillary Nunn in her article, "'It lakth but life': Redford's *Wit and Science*, Anne of Cleves, and the Politics of Interpretation." Her main focus in the essay is the portrait of Wit that Redford juxtaposes with the mirror. The concerns that she addresses relate to the problems with portraiture,

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[33] Edgar T. Schell, "*Scio Ergo Sum*: The Structure of *Wit and Science*," *Studies in English Literature* 16 no. 2 (1976): 182.
[34] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 49.
[35] Ibid., 61.
[36] Ibid., 62-64.
[37] Victor I. Scherb, "Playing at Maturity in John Redford's 'Wit and Science,'" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45 no.2 (2005): 273.

particularly in reference to the inaccurate portrait Henry VIII received of Anne of Cleves. Nunn, too, though, opens her article with a traditional reading of the mirror and mirror metaphors:

> In *The Boke Named the Gouerner* (1531), Sir Thomas Elyot upholds the merits of staged comedies, arguing that 'they be undoutedly a picture or as it were a mirrour of man's life, wherein iuell is not taught but discouered.' Elyot's comment proves particularly fitting in regard to John Redford's play *Wit and Science* for not only does the play use both a portrait and a mirror as stage properties, it also exploits its audience's investment in these objects to create a drama that represents as well as reflects its viewers' concerns.[38]

This oft-quoted passage from Sir Thomas Elyot supports critics' arguments that interlude audiences and playwrights saw interludes as part of the mirror literature tradition. Specifically in relation to *Wit and Science*, Nunn argues that the mirror "calls upon medieval and early modern notions of the unmasking powers of mirrors to reveal the foolishness that underlies both Wit's and his courtly audience's attempts at explicating portraiture."[39] Nunn's reference to the "unmasking powers" assumes and repeats the idea that the mirror contains an ability to strip off the exterior and expose the inner character of both Wit and the audience. Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter also discuss the mirror scene as a moment of unmasking. They argue, like Nunn and others, that this play is about self-knowledge, and they take their argument even further than Nunn's by

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[38] Nunn, "'It lakth but life,'" 270.
[39] Ibid., 271.

connecting the mirror to divine revelation: "since the faculty of Reason is that which most closely reflects the divine Logos, the glass of Reason can reflect Wit as the image of God."[40] Thus Nunn, Twycross, and Carpenter focus more specifically on the mirror's ability to unmask or strip away the exterior and reveal the interior, which may even mean revealing God's own image. Like other scholars, they assume Wit successfully uses the mirror the way he is supposed to, perhaps because Redford begins the play by preparing the audience for that to happen. Close analysis of Wit's interaction with the mirror, however, reveals that he fails to fulfill the expectations Redford has created in the audience. Critics are not incorrect to suggest that this play is about the search for self-knowledge, but they are incorrect to assume that Wit finds it.

Reason's Mirror

Nor are scholars incorrect in their arguments about audience expectations concerning the role of mirrors as well as the role of the drama in general as a metaphorical mirror. Indeed, *Wit and Science* itself begins by preparing the audience for precisely this reading of the play. The first legible sentence of *Wit and Science* introduces the mirror that is so integral to the play:

> then in remembrance of reson hold yee
> a glas of reson wherein beholde yee
> youre sealfe to youre selfe namely when ye
> cu[m] neere my dowghter science then see

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[40] Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 272.

that all thyng be cleane & trycke abowte ye

least of su[m] sloogyshnes she myght dowte ye

thys glas of reason shall show ye all

whyle ye have that ye have me.[41]

Speaking these lines, most likely to Wit himself and to Instruction,[42] Reason explains the importance and purpose of the mirror. The mirror should show Wit's "self" to himself so that he can ensure that everything is "clean and trick about" him when he courts Science. Reason's instructions suggest that the mirror will not only show cleanliness (or its lack) in outward appearance but, because the mirror can show your "self" to your "self," that the mirror also has the ability to reflect inner cleanliness (or its lack) as well. Even more specifically, because Redford uses an allegorical genre, critics assume that both Wit's name and his outer appearance have a direct connection to his inner character. The assumption that his outward reflection in the mirror also reveals his inner qualities comes not simply from the mirror's powers but also from the allegorical nature of his character. Redford creates these expectations in the opening of the play and acknowledges the literary traditions in which he is working.

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[41] Redford, John. *Wit and Science* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healy, 1994) 1-8. All further references to *Wit and Science* come from this edition and line numbers will be cited parenthetically.

[42] There is some debate over whether or not Wit is actually on stage at this point. Without the opening lines, it is difficult to be certain because he does not speak during this scene and the stage directions indicate that he enters at line 63 but make no direct reference to his exit before then. Most scholars agree that he would have been on stage during this opening scene. W. Roy Mackenzie, however, makes a valid argument for the possibility that Wit is not on stage. See W. Roy Mackenzie, *The English Moralities From the Point of View of Allegory* (Boston: Ginn, 1914), 155.

When Reason directly connects the mirror to himself and to the concept of reason, Redford further fulfills audience expectations. Reason does not refer to the mirror as "my glass" but as "a glass of reason" and "this glass of reason." He does not simply own the mirror; rather the mirror is imbued with the properties of reason. The implication, then, is that it reflects the viewer without bias or emotion. Reason explains that as long as Wit has the mirror, he will have access to reason or the opportunity to be reasonable. But as the play continues, Reason's description of what the mirror can do becomes problematic. That is, if the beginning of the play sets up the expectations of what the mirror should reveal when Wit uses it later in the play, Wit ultimately fails to see this revelation.

Wit's Portrait

After introducing the mirror in a way that heightens audience expectations, Redford juxtaposes it with Wit's portrait that Confidence will show to Science in a way that further heightens expectations of the mirror. Confidence claims that the portrait is a "goodly pycture [of] / of wyt hym sealfe hys owne image sure / … / as lyke him as can be in every point / yt lakth but lyfe" (50-54). Nunn uses the portrait plot to associate this play with Henry VIII's search for a wife because he would send Hans Holbein the Younger to produce a portrait of each potential spouse.[43] Furthermore, Nunn points to the important belief that the portraits of these women "penetrated beneath the [subject's] outward beauty to unveil her inner being."[44] More generally, David Summers' explanation of Renaissance aesthetics supports Nunn's assertions when he contends,

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[43] Nunn, "'It lakth but life'" 272.
[44] Ibid.

"Renaissance images were presumed to make us see more than we are shown and, more specifically, to make us see something higher than what we are shown."[45] Summers continues, "The viewer of a Renaissance portrait, then, was assumed to see, by means of the painting, the spirit of the sitter."[46] The description of the portrait that Confidence provides, then, suggests that the portrait has some power to show—or even reflect like the mirror—the inner character of Wit as it portrays him in "every point."

Additionally, because of Wit's allegorical nature, a perfect portrayal of his outer appearance should also perfectly portray his inner character. Although Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones argue that "portraits…are as much the portraits of clothes and jewels as of people,"[47] the central importance of clothing and costume to allegorical drama suggests that this portrait in some way reflects the spiritual and intellectual self of Wit. Wit's costume changes throughout the play mark an important aspect of Renaissance drama: "As he changes clothing, W[i]t alters behavior, thereby expressing another motif of character transformation in Renaissance drama."[48] If, as Jones and Stallybrass argue, the portrait of Wit would focus more on Wit's clothing than on his face, the portrait should still represent Wit's characteristics because, in allegory, clothing is expected to create the self of a character. Through this understanding of both Renaissance portraiture and Renaissance allegory, we can see that Redford uses common Renaissance practices at the opening of *Wit and Science* to suggest that the portrait can

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[45] David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 110.
[46] Ibid., 111.
[47] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.
[48] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 67.

show Wit's inner-character in the same way the mirror can provide an accurate and penetrating reflection that would also show Wit's inner-character to himself.

But Confidence plans not simply to show this picture of Wit to Science; he will use this picture in combination with "sweete words so well savrd / dystyllyng from the mowth of confidence" to win Science over. He further comments on "ho[w] neately…[he] shall warke yt" (57-58, 63). Redford's word choice here suggests that Confidence's pursuit of Science on Wit's behalf will not be driven by truth. Instead he will have to "distill" his speech, implying a removal of certain impurities either from his speech or from the portrait, and he will have to "work" the situation, further implying some sort of manipulation. Confidence's statements suggest that the portrait, then, does not offer the most flattering portrayal of Wit, and Confidence is not in fact confident that the portrait alone will be enough to woo Science. But, true to his name, Confidence feels sure that he himself can make the best of this portrait that has been given to him and sell Science on the appearance of Wit. As an accompaniment to the portrait, he will use persuasive rhetoric to describe Wit's character and overcome the insufficiencies of the portrait.

We have no evidence of what this portrait may have looked like: it potentially portrayed a likeness to Wit's appearance at the beginning of the play; it potentially portrayed a likeness to Wit's appearance at the end of the play; or it potentially did not portray any likeness to Wit at all. All of these possibilities allow Redford the opportunity to showcase the problems with portraiture. Wit's costume and character devolve over the course of the play and thus potentially take on a likeness similar to the one portrayed in the portrait, which would then suggest that Confidence must use persuasive rhetoric

precisely *because* the portrait accurately portrays Wit's shortcomings. But at this point in the play, Wit has not undergone any changes and, to Confidence's knowledge, remains true to the allegorical meaning of his name. Furthermore, the portrait cannot change along with the transformations Wit experiences over the course of the play. Even a stellar drawing of Wit's appearance at the start of the play would not be enough to show both his exterior and interior character accurately because it would not change as he changes. Thus, from the moment the portrait appears on stage, we can already see Redford questioning its ability to expose Wit's self. This presentation of the mirror and the portrait highlights the contrast between the two. It implies that the mirror provides a true and unbiased reflection while the portrait provides an inaccurate and biased one.

The introduction of the portrait also offers an opportunity for comedy that further highlights the problems with portraiture. As I mentioned above, the portrait chosen by the company for the production could have been wildly inaccurate or even a caricature of Wit, eliciting laughter from the audience when Confidence turns the portrait toward them after extolling its virtues. Critics debate whether the company would have chosen a portrait to produce laughs or to be accurate.[49] It is difficult to believe, especially given that this play was performed by a boy troupe, that they would not take advantage of a moment so ripe for laughter. The play itself makes use of a variety of other comic traditions from the medieval period: "Tedious imitates a ranting Herod; Honest Recreation and Idlenes engage in a female flyting; Idlenes orchestrates a hilarious classroom send-up of Ignorance's spelling lesson; and Reason as audience-guide

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[49] See Nunn, "'It lak'th but life,'" 278-279; Schell, "*Scio Ergo Sum*," 195.

declaims patrician wisdom."[50] Given these other comic touches in the play, it seems likely that Redford would have taken advantage of yet another opportunity to make his audience laugh. If we work with the assumption that it was at least highly likely that the portrait was inaccurate, Confidence's statement about using rhetoric to persuade Science becomes even more important as he would have to work even harder to accommodate for the inadequacies of the portrait. A comic portrait becomes even more unreasonable and biased in opposition to the reasonable and unbiased mirror. If this allegedly accurate portrait of Wit is so comically inaccurate, then we can see Redford challenging the ability of a two-dimensional piece of artwork to penetrate the surface and showcase the true self. A portrait is always insufficient, and in mocking portraiture, Redford leads his audience to believe that the mirror will provide a flawless contrast.

Most importantly, although Confidence syntactically underplays the fact that the portrait "lakth but life," this limitation of the portrait becomes its greatest failure over the course of the play. Certainly a reflection in a mirror lacks life, but the mirror does retain the ability to change as its subject changes; a portrait does not. No matter how Wit changes, the portrait remains constant throughout the course of the play, and in contrast to life, it is a stable and static entity. As previously mentioned, when Reason bestows his mirror on Wit, he tells Wit to use it to ensure he is clean before he presents himself to Science. We can safely assume, especially before Wit's transformation by Idleness, that when Reason gives Wit the mirror, Wit's clean appearance satisfies Reason's expectations of an appropriate suitor; otherwise it is difficult to think that Reason would

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[50] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 57.

agree to the match. Thus, when Reason tells Wit to make sure that he is clean before presenting himself to his daughter, he admits the possibility that Wit could change on his journey. He admits the possibility that this journey could corrupt Wit, making him an unfit suitor and implies that the mirror would reflect this external and corresponding internal change. The portrait, on the other hand, will not change. No matter what happens to Wit on his journey, the portrait—already a questionable likeness to Wit—will present Science with an unchanged representation of Wit.

Ultimately, whether the company chooses an accurate or inaccurate portrait of Wit, this prop shows itself to be inadequate precisely because Wit does indeed change. When Science meets Wit for the first time, she does not recognize him because he does not resemble his portrait. Even if the company chooses a portrait in the true likeness of Wit at the beginning of the play, his appearance by the middle of the play no longer matches his previous one. Thus, in multiple ways, this play calls into question the problems of portraiture as a way of interpreting reality and its ability to show inner motives, especially given the malleability and fluidity of living beings. The shortcomings of the portrait, then, focus the play on the mirror. The mirror, not the portrait, advances the plot and produces the resolution in the play precisely because of its more life-like qualities. In fact, we never see the portrait again after Confidence presents it early in the play. While Science and Experience later refer to the portrait, it is the mirror that reappears later in the dramatic action and constitutes the play's central prop.

Confronting the Mirror

When Wit does undergo his change, the mirror accurately reflects this outward change and even seems to reflect his internal fall into ignorance. Wit, however, does not recognize this change as a failure of his mental and spiritual fortitude. After approaching Science in Ignorance's garb and after Science rejects him because he looks nothing like his picture, Wit is utterly confused: "am I so fowle as those drab wold make me?" (792). Remembering his mirror, he decides, "now shall this glas of reson soone trye me / as fayre as those drab that so doth belye me" (794-795). Wit firmly believes that Science and Experience, who have admonished his appearance and have associated him with Ignorance, are mistaken, and he believes that the mirror will provide the vindication that he needs. Before he sees his reflection, he confirms what Reason suggests in the opening of the play, which is that the mirror can provide an honest trial. This statement emphasizes the unbiased nature of the mirror against human judgment that is necessarily biased. But Wit places a condition on his endorsement of the mirror in his next line: his trial will undoubtedly reveal that he is fair and that Science is wrong. Wit misses the point of the unbiased mirror when he confidently states that it will show him exactly what he wants it to show rather than what is true. Wit immediately makes his assessment of the mirror's reflection unreliable by exposing this bias. Wit's inability to understand how the mirror should function stresses the fact that he has not just been dressed as Ignorance but that he has taken on the qualities of Ignorance as well.

The mirror then provides the climax of the play in its ability to prove to Wit that he has changed, but it cannot or does not produce in Wit any greater understanding of his new condition. Instead he is able to manipulate public expectation through superficial

change so that his reflection—one that only reveals what is on the outer surface—will present a more acceptable self. While still using the mirror in isolation on stage, Wit's belief that the mirror will exonerate him carries over even when he actually sees his appearance in the mirror: "hah gog sowle what have we here a dyvyll / this glas I se well hath bene kept evyll / gog sowle a foole / a foole by the mas / what a very vengeance aylth this glas" (796-799). He readily recognizes the reflection: that of a devil. Wit simply does not believe that it is his reflection in the glass. When the mirror shows him something undesirable and unexpected, he either forgets or refuses to believe that the mirror is the glass of *reason* and instead believes it is evil and susceptible to vengeful, human emotions. He then considers that perhaps "this glas is shamefully spotted / or els am I to shamefully blotted / nay by gog armes I am so no dowte" (800-803). Here he points to an actual fault mirrors from this period sometimes had when he states that the mirror needs polishing. At a time when mirrors were still being developed, steel mirrors did need polishing and could become spotted without it.[51] It is entirely possible that looking into an unpolished mirror, one would appear to have a blackened face even if one, in reality, did not. Thus, we see Wit slowly becoming somewhat more reasonable but then quickly dismissing even that possibility. Wit recognizes some changes that have occurred when he says, "I am so no dowte." Importantly, though, the use of "or els am I to" and the repetition of "shamefully" equates the "blotting" that he recognizes on himself to the "spotting" on the mirror: it is a superficial issue that can be easily solved with a little polish. Furthermore, in Wit's lines that follow, we see that his ignorance

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[51] See Rayna Kala, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007) 107-110.

prevents him from truly believing his statement that he is blotted because he still needs the audience to confirm that the mirror's reflection is accurate.

Although Wit admits that he has changed, he still needs further confirmation of the mirror's accuracy because, peering into the mirror alone on stage, he cannot understand what the mirror reflects. It is not until he turns the mirror onto the audience, transforming the mirror into a public and communal technology, that he finally confirms the changes he has undergone. Without social confirmation, the recognition is incomplete. He faces the mirror toward the audience and wonders, "how looke ther facis here rownd abowte / all fayre & cleere they evry chone" (803-810). When turning the mirror on the audience, he suggests that their reflections appear unspotted in the glass. This moment, of course, could be used as a moment of flattery if, in particular, the mirror shines on the host or patron while Wit says that everyone is fair and clear. This moment also provides the social interaction that allows the mirror to "work" on Wit. He needs the audience to join in before he is willing to trust the mirror's reflection because social acceptance—not self-knowledge—is Wit's primary concern. Here, the audience joins the action to provide Wit with the information he wants. Looking into a mirror at this moment ceases to be an individual activity. It becomes an activity that can only succeed when placed in a social context because Wit is unable to construct a self in isolation. He only sees himself insofar as others see his self. Significantly, too, it is Wit who makes the judgment of the audience. If, as Reason tells Wit, the mirror shows "your selfe to your sealfe," then it should be the audience members themselves who make the judgment of their reflection, but Wit refuses them the opportunity. We can see here more problems with Wit as a reader of the mirror. The audience's reflection suggests that they are "fair

and clear" in the same way that Wit's reflection suggests that he is "so blotted": it is a superficial judgment. Redford thus challenges readers of mirrors and the hermeneutics applied to the mirror. Although the mirror can easily expose external transformation, Wit does not use the mirror to understand the changes to his character nor does he use the mirror to make a substantive judgment of the audience. He specifically references their faces and not their selves, and he does not pause before returning to his own reflection. The mirror cannot reveal for Wit anything other than a surface reflection of the audience because the mirror must work as an instrument of self-reflection not of social judgment. Wit does not understand that and attempts to use the mirror to accurately judge others.

Wit's assertion that the audience has a clear and fair appearance also implies that the audience should take a look at themselves in this mirror, thus creating a metatheatrical moment that challenges audience members to consider their own self-knowledge *and* their expectations of theater. The play asks the audience whether they too see a devil in the mirror or if they see a clean and pure reflection. While direct address would be typical and even expected by these audiences, seeing themselves in a mirror and being forced to confront that reflection would not have been typical. In fact, it would have been the very first time this happened on stage. Nunn correctly observes that Redford uses the mirror as a potentially jarring moment and forces the audience members to join the play, to *see themselves in the play*, literally and metaphorically: "Having seen themselves on stage, the audience members must now imagine the play's events in more immediate, personal terms."[52] But the audience does not get to judge their own reflection.

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[52] Nunn, "'It lakth but life,'" 288.

That job is given to Wit. Preventing spectators from having a chance to make their own judgment before interjecting his own, Wit likely frustrates audience members and makes them even more likely to consider seriously what they might have seen in the mirror given more time or perhaps more importantly what they should see in this play-as-mirror. The audience is invited to look into the mirror and compare the reflection that they see with Wit's assessment of them, perhaps even allowing them to recognize the superficiality of Wit's judgment. To Wit, their faces are clean and fair, and this exterior is all he cares about. If the audience has the same understanding of drama as Sir Thomas Elyot, the mirror object that Wit points at them also reminds spectators of the metaphorical mirror they peer into while watching the play and challenges them to resist the superficial hermeneutic that Wit applies to the mirror.

In addition to tackling hermeneutical problems with the mirror metaphor, Redford tackles problems with allegorical drama. We can categorize *Wit and Science* as an allegorical drama in the way that it uses "language…whereby one thing, which may be either concrete or abstract, is suggested through the appearance, the behavior, or the nature of another."[53] In earlier medieval morality plays, however, allegorical characters were fixed; Pride was always a vice, Patience always a virtue. The selves of these allegorical characters were predetermined. The everyman character did vacillate between virtue and vice, but as Bernard Spivack explains, "Each part of the action [in a morality play]…has its homiletic compulsion as part of a schematic exposition of vice and virtue, their operation and effect. Each moment of the performance was a transparent allusion

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[53] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia UP, 1958), 96.

and solemn exhortation to every member of its audience."[54] Thus the everyman character too had a fixed path. As we transition into the more secular interludes, however, we see that the questions these plays explore are more complicated and lack the assurance of answers that can be provided through Christian dogma. In the same way, then, that Redford questions our abilities for discovering self-knowledge through mirrors, he also questions the simplicity of allegory.

Wit's final judgment of his appearance confirms his inability to understand the reflection that the mirror provides and also allows Redford to make this challenge of allegory. Once Wit realizes that his appearance has changed and that he has acquired the appearance of Ignorance, he does not turn back to the mirror again to judge his reflection. Instead, he uses the audience as a guide to judge himself and repeats a surface level understanding of what he first saw in the mirror. Wit immediately follows his assessment of the audience with,

> & I by the mas a foole alone
> deckt by gog bones lyke a very asse
> Ignorance cote hoode eares
> ye by the masse
> kokscome & all
> I lak but a bable
> & as for this face
> is abhominable

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[54] Ibid., 103.

as black as the devyll. (803-810)

Importantly, Wit calls himself a fool, but the way he describes his transformation is purely surface level. He is "deckt" or dressed like a fool. He has on Ignorance's coat and ears. He never actually ascribes Ignorance's characteristics to himself, and critics assume Wit's self-analysis is correct in that he is only superficially ignorant. David Summers argues,

> Costume may be a true sign [of who a character is], but may also mislead, as when Idleness gives Wit the appearance of her son Ignorance by changing his dress and blackening his face…But there remains an essential difference. Ignorance is a 'natural fool'…But Wit, even in his fallen state, cannot change his essential being.[55]

Similarly, Cartwright contends, "Wyt recognizes himself as Ignorance, and in that ironic discovery of metaphor, similitude, or even shared identity, the possibility of transformation begins. To become 'himself'…Wyt must embrace the knowledge that he also *resembles* Ignorance."[56] Both critics argue that Wit never actually becomes Ignorance but instead takes on some of the qualities evidenced by the costume change. Wit's "true"—or fixed allegorical—character still remains, they argue; it is simply masked by the veneer of Ignorance. This argument, however, underestimates the complexity of Redford's drama. Characters on stage, especially allegorical characters, are supposed to be marked and understood through their costume. While dialogue enhances this characterization, costumes are expected to constitute the character. Wit even points to

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[55] Summers, "Wit to Woo: The Wit Interludes," 178.
[56] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 68, my emphasis.

this when he recognizes himself as a fool through costume. He recognizes that his fool's costume is incomplete without the "bauble" that would normally accompany a fool's dress. Wit makes no references to his foolish actions, only to his foolish clothes. Thus, it seems that Wit's costume change would signify his transition to Ignorance.

Redford plays with the idea that costume is supposed to constitute character by seemingly aligning Wit's costume changes with Wit's oversimplified self-understanding. Before Wit changes into Ignorance, his costume is suggestive of his character. The cloak of Science that he wears marks him as Wit; when he loses the cloak, he becomes Ignorance, and when he regains the cloak, he seemingly returns to his previous witty state. Wit's redressing in his cloak, however, is complicated by his lack of recognition in the mirror scene. Wit seems to still be ignorant of the changes his character has undergone; he only changes his external appearance to conform to social expectations and thus remains ignorant. It is not, as critics suggest, that Wit never turns into Ignorance or that Wit's "essential being" is free from ignorance. Redford makes a much more complicated argument than that. Redford suggests that Wit's "essential being" cannot be reduced only to name and costume, even though Wit himself does not seem to realize this. Redford reminds the audience of the allegorical conventions as he has Wit change clothes with his change of character, but in the same way he begins by fulfilling audience expectations of the mirror, he uses this set up only to challenge this convention. Wit himself believes that clothes make the man: he attempts to fix his shortcomings through a simple wardrobe change in the same way a dirty mirror can be fixed by simple polishing. Already aware of Wit's interpretive shortcomings, the audience should recognize the problems of Wit's attempt at using clothes to create the character he wants to be.

Although Wit does go through a public shaming, this seems to be an act put on to satisfy Science and Knowledge. Wit, then, still lacks self-understanding and thus remains ignorant even when he changes out of Ignorance's garb.

Redford's challenging of allegorical simplicity is especially significant given that allegory as method for making sense of the world became much more unstable in the Renaissance. Michael Bristol points out,

> In order to sustain a social structure based on hierarchy, there must be substantial belief in the authority of symbols and in the capacity of a natural system of ideal social ranks to reveal itself in the temporal world. A crown is not just a fancy hat. In Renaissance culture, however, the principle of similitude is no longer an uncontested principle of knowing and representing. Symbols begin to appear more arbitrary and less reliable, the results of this being funny or alarming depending on the viewpoint of the individual writers.[57]

Bristol explains that as we move out of the medieval period and into the Renaissance, the traditional understanding of allegory begins to unravel. This unraveling makes audience engagement with the drama even more important. Redford reinforces the need for audience participation by calling attention to instability of allegory: Wit becomes Ignorance while still maintaining the name Wit, and Wit remains ignorant even when he is not dressed as such. It stands to reason, as well, that if Wit can retain ignorance after shedding Ignorance's clothes that he likely already contained ignorance as part of his

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[57] Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 64.

character before he put on the fool's clothes. For Wit, this idea of dress and costume becomes important for the construction of the self because it is the way that he recognizes and assesses the self of others, but Redford reveals this method as an insufficient way of truly creating the self. Thus, we can see the beginnings of what Bristol describes in Redford's play before allegorical drama almost disappears when the permanent theaters open. Redford uses the allegorical structure, but he suggests that self-understanding cannot come from a simple costume change and that reductive allegory lacks the capacity to provide the answers to the questions that these new, more secular plays are asking.

It is only at the very end of the play and because of stage make-up practices that Redford—willingly or not—can finally showcase this hybrid Wit/Ignorance character through costume. It is likely that before 1624, it would be difficult to remove blackface paint from an actor: "Prior to [1624], race is either a fixed property …or a disguise that is acknowledged but not removed during the course of the play."[58] Although Wit does not appear in complete blackface, he does see a blackened face in the mirror. Before Idleness gives Wit Ignorance's coat, she says, "whyle he sleepth in Idlenes lappe / idlenes mark on hym shall I clappe" (407-408). It is likely that at this moment Idleness smears Wit's face with black make-up. If, as scholars contend, this make-up were difficult to remove, even when Wit returns to stage "trym[ed] in new aparell," his face would retain the mark of Idleness (869). Instead of being an impediment to Redford's transformation of Wit, this

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[58] Andrea R. Stevens, "'Assisted By a Barber': The Court Apothecary, Special Effects, and *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*," *Theatre Notebook: A Journal of History and Technique of the British Theatre* 6 no. 1 (2007): 6.

would enhance the complex nature of Wit's character and would mark for the first time in the play costume accurately constituting Wit's character.

We can recognize that much of Wit's ignorance remains even without his costume changes when he continually refuses to recognize any internal change. He laments, "now it is so the stark foole I playe / before all people now se it I maye / evrye man I se lawhe me to scorne" (816-818). Wit does indeed play the fool for everyone to mock. Wit does not look inward to see the change he has undergone but rather looks outwardly at his public reputation. He does not attempt to perform penance or repent—as we might expect from a medieval protagonist. Instead, Reason brings on Shame, a necessarily public entity, to punish him while Reason recounts the shameful acts Wit has committed. And it is only as Shame comes on the stage that we see Wit acknowledge any of his foolish acts. Before Shame enters, Wit remains tightly focused on the superficial appearance. It seems, then, that Wit's admission of shame is a performance in which he fulfills the expectations of Reason, his future father-in-law, who looks on. In the same way that Wit plays the fool for the audience, he plays the role of repentant suitor for Reason. Wit is unable to use the mirror to discover both the interior and exterior changes he has undergone and instead, it affords Wit the opportunity to use the politics of public identity so that he can alter his appearance and actions to get what he wants: a marriage contract to Science. When he realizes his appearance has changed, he worries that he has "lost [Science], / whome all the world lovth & honoryth most" (824-825). Significantly, Wit does not claim to love and honor Science the most; he only recognizes that the world loves and honors her. In losing her, then, he loses "favor / ryches / [ye] worshyp / and fame" (832). He is concerned about losing her because he is concerned about losing status and fame. This

provides further evidence that Wit gains no self-knowledge or understanding through the mirror process but that what he does understand is the necessity of constructing a particular self to advance socially, a self that requires only a veneer.

Importantly, too, Wit never uses the term "self" to suggest self-understanding over the course of the play. The term "selfe" or "sealfe" appears twelve times in what remains of the manuscript. Wit uses the term two of those times. First, as Wit goes on his quest to kill Tediousness, he leaves Diligence and says, "no more shalt thow nether dylygence / ayde me wyth your presence both you twayne / & for my love my selfe shall [illegible word] take payne" (210-212). Here, Wit leaves behind Diligence, as he similarly left Study earlier, to take on Tediousness by himself. This statement lacks any kind of self-recognition. He simply uses a reflexive pronoun to emphasize that he ignorantly wants to take on the monster alone. If, as critics suggest, Wit's journey of self-recognition and self-knowledge is central to the play, it seems strange that Redford would use the term "self" multiple times, but never have Wit use it as a term for self understanding. It seems clear from Reason's explanation of what the mirror can do that Redford was well aware of this language of the self. Yet, Wit only uses the term in a way that suggests lack of self-knowledge: he does not understand that to defeat Tediousness he must use Diligence and Study to help him. In fact, this error in self-understanding is so egregious that it gets Wit killed. If Wit truly gains self-knowledge after this experience, then we would assume that a parallel statement of self would appear later in the play. But the only statement about the self Wit makes at the end of the play is in reference to another person: he uses the term "your selfe" when speaking to Experience in the final moments on stage (1054). Never in his soliloquy with the mirror does he make reference

to the self nor does he make reference to the self after he has changed back into his original clothes.

We continue to see in the final moments of the play Wit's inability to use the mirror as prescribed by Reason. We can also see the problem with critics' arguments that Wit finds self-knowledge and understanding through the mirror. The play certainly does tackle self-construction, but this construction does not penetrate beneath the outer appearance and the construction only matters in so far as it allows for public approval and social advancement. Wit cannot believe that his Ignorance-like reflection is real until he compares it to and judges it against public standards found in the audience's reflection. His concern is not the actual moral problems that come with ignorance; it is that he has displayed himself as a fool in public and lost the affections of Science. To correct this negative reputation, Wit makes no attempt to better himself and even places the blame on Idleness: "this same is Idlenes a shame take her / this same is her wurke the devill in hell rake her" (812-813). He never takes responsibility for his actions, which would have suggested some inner change or self-improvement and instead displaces all responsibility.

The inability of the mirror object to provide self-understanding for a superficial gazer like Wit also speaks to the inadequacies of the stage-as-mirror metaphor to provide self-understanding for a passive audience member. As critics and Sir Thomas Elyot argue, Tudor drama asks the audience to judge itself by using the reflection provided on stage. These reflections require constant active engagement. Spectators could use drama to determine whether they play the fool for everyone to scorn and could potentially learn from the play the same thing that Wit does: a simple change of costume will change the

self. Most audience members, however, will likely realize that Redford does not present Wit as an example to follow, especially because Wit maintains a certain amount of ignorance after his change. At the same time, Redford offers us no alternative to Wit's interpretative strategy. Audience members may realize that Wit's reading of the mirror feels inadequate and superficial, but Redford provides no solution for how to properly read the mirror. Spectators must discover their own way. In much the same manner that Redford reveals a more complicated rather than singular and unified character in the Wit/Ignorance hybrid that graces the stage at the end of the play, Redford suggests audience's selves selves are equally as complicated and complex. We see, then, that Redford argues for the difficulty of dramatic interpretation and the difficulty of self-construction.

Wit and Science provides a useful model for reading early Tudor drama because it employs the mirror object in a way that highlights the mirror metaphor present in every other Tudor interlude. But this play ultimately cautions spectators against an oversimplified interpretation of the mirror metaphor and against an overreliance on the mirror metaphor to construct a complete version of the self without any effort on the spectator's part. Redford is able to dispute the abilities of both the physical mirror and the stage-as-mirror metaphor only after first acknowledging his understanding of how both the object and the metaphor are supposed to work. He draws even more attention to the mirror by presenting it in opposition to the portrait that lacks the life-like qualities of the mirror. But most importantly, he places an unreliable character in the reflection of the mirror creating a literal mirror figure to go along with his literal physical mirror. As the mirror figure, Wit models audiences watching a play as he watches his reflection. In a

playful and humorous way, he fails over and over again to make a satisfying interpretation of that reflection forcing audience members to reconsider their understanding of self-knowledge *and* their understanding of drama.

CHAPTER III
A AND B AND MULTIPLICITY

"Ther is so myche nyce aray / Amonges these galandis now aday / That a man shall not lightly / Know a player from a nother man."[59]

These lines, delivered at the beginning of Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* (c. 1497), have been seen as referring to the problems of a burgeoning middle class and the subsequent blurring of class distinctions in early Tudor England.[60] More specifically, though, these lines address the occupation of players and the potential problems that could arise if a player were to be confused with another man; and it is precisely this potential for confusion that Medwall capitalizes on when creating two mirror figures who act as literal audience members and spectators. These two mirror figures complicate what may otherwise be considered a straightforward discussion of true nobility by forcing the audience members to think through their own opinions of this topic. As we saw in the previous chapter, Wit's insufficient interpretation of his reflection in Redford's *Wit and Science* warns the audiences against similarly insufficient interpretations of their own. Medwall, like Redford, tasks audiences with being active interpreters of staged performances through the insertion of two unnamed characters, marked only in the text as A and B. He reinvents these characters over and over again throughout the play, allowing them to serve first and foremost as interpreters of the action. And much like Wit's poor

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[59] Henry Medwall, *Fulgens and Lucrece*, in *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield Inc., 1980), Part 1, lines 2-56. All references will be taken from this text and all further line numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.

[60] See, for example, David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 48-49.

reading of the mirror, A and B provide both poor and inconsistent readings of the play, which forces the audience members to produce their own. To further the dramaturgy of participation, Medwall also complicates traditional dramatic tropes to create metathreatrical moments that force audiences to reconsider the purpose and efficacy of drama. He even refuses to provide a definitive beginning or ending for his play, two elements of dramatic performance that most audience members likely take for granted. By consistently asking the audience members to confront their expectations of interludes through novel use of old devices and through unreliable mirror figures, Medwall challenges them to reevaluate their interpretive approach to drama and make sense of what they see.

Medwall's play, described as the first secular play in English, [61] tells the story of Fulgens' daughter Lucrece, who is courted by two men, Gayus and Cornelius. This play is told in two different parts. The first part introduces all of the characters and the courting plot. At the end of the first part, Lucrece decides to allow Gayus and Cornelius to each present their case on why they would be the better choice of spouse. In the second part, the men present their cases. Cornelius' argument rests largely on the nobility of his family and their financial means. He tells Lucrece of all the material possessions that he has and all of the possessions she would have if she married him. Gayus, on the other hand, is not as economically prosperous and dismantles Cornelius' argument by showing that Cornelius himself has not done anything noble and can only depend on the nobility of his family. Gayus explains that he has a better reputation than Cornelius, and this

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[61] Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 216.

prompts Lucrece to ask "the commune fame" what they think of these men (2.726). After confirming Gayus' good reputation, she decides to take him as her husband. This plot comes from and closely follows Buonaccorso of Pistora's *De Vera Nobilitate* (1428), but Medwall makes an important change to his source text by injecting the hijinks of the two unnamed characters and Joan, Lucrece's maid, into this classic story. Mixed in throughout the courting plot, A and B open and close both the first and second parts of the play with discussions about the plot. They also decide early in the first part that they will become counselors for Gayus and Cornelius and act as the go-betweens for these men and Lucrece. In this role, they come into contact with Joan, Lucrece's maid, and engage in their own courting plot to win Joan's hand. This leads to burlesque contests of singing, wrestling, and jousting between A and B, though Joan finally admits that she is already promised to another man.

Early criticism of the play often focused on the Buonaccorso story that involves Lucrece and her two suitors. Although this plot does bring up topical questions important to early modern audiences, A and B's lines comprise the majority of the play and should therefore be examined as the more significant part of the play.[62] Medwall uses A and B to

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[62] Howard Norland provides the following break down of the play's parts:

> The disputation of nobleness does not begin until 1,836 lines have been delivered…Medwall's debate occupies just 367 lines; if Lucres's judgment, for which there is no precedent in Buonaccorso, is added, the issue is completed in 404 lines. If all the lines exchanged by the rival wooers, the lady wooed, and her father are added together, they number but 667 of the 2353 lines in the play, or 28.3 percent of the total. The choric comic servants, A and B, and Lucres's maid Jone, dominate *more than 70 percent of the play*.

Howard Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor Britain 1485-1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 237 (my emphasis).

act as surrogates for the spectators as they insist that, like the real spectators, they have come to the house for a banquet. But their failure at logical and sensible interpretation demands that the real spectators have their own agency in understanding the play presented to them.

Multiple Interpretations

Scholars have acknowledged the large part that A and B play in the drama and the questions it raises about the status or meaning of nobility. But many still relegate A and B to the subplot. Suzanne Westfall, for example, argues that "in early Tudor interludes such as *Fulgens and Lucrece*, we may trace the beginnings of the conscious double strand, as playwrights attempt to weave the same theme on two different social levels, thus ensuring its reception while once again stressing class distinctions."[63] Westfall, who explains earlier in her book that "characters are often relegated to the sub-plot, itself a new direction in the structure of the plays that indicates an acute-class consciousness," suggests that A and B function to highlight the important question of nobility and the distinction between social classes.[64] According to her argument and use of the term "subplot," the A and B plot is less important and less central to the play than the Lucrece plot. Other critics such as Robert Merrix and Howard Norland give more attention to the dominance of the comic plot but still see A and B as characters who reemphasize the lessons of Lucrece's plot. Merrix explains that "by creating a comic dimension mimetically similar to the serious dimension, [Medwall] offered parallel and equally

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[63] Suzanne Westfall, *Patrons and Performance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990),174.
[64]Ibid., 154.

significant interpretations of a moral situation—'true' nobility—in both a passive (rhetorical) and an active (mimetic) way."[65] Even Howard Norland, who points out the large number of lines dedicated to A and B's characters, makes an argument similar to Merrix and Westfall that A and B's "primary purpose is to guide the audience's response to the characters and themes of the serious action."[66] Each of these critics sees the role that A and B play as pivotal to the central message of the play. But they only see their significance in so far as they bolster the message from the other plot. Certainly A and B do engage in a mock courting plot with Joan and act as foils to Gayus and Cornelius, but this is only a small part of the role or roles that A and B have in the play. Additionally, these interpretations focus on the role of A and B within the Roman plot and do not provide a sufficient explanation of their roles outside of the courting plot.

Robert Jones pays more attention to the theatricality involved in the play but still contends that A and B's main purpose is their ability to say something about the other plot. He explains that because of the stage conditions of the Tudor hall, A and B would have been in close proximity to the audience and

> Medwall capitalized on this circumstance of his theater by making the distinction between his dramatic fiction and life as his audience knew it a central part of the play's lesson. *Fulgens and Lucres* is about the fictive, idealized quality of its Roman story as much as it is about true nobility, and A and B, in addition to providing the play's 'myrth and game,' drive

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[65] Robert Merrix, "The Function of the Comic Plot in *Fulgens and Lucrece*," *Modern Language Studies* 7 no. 1 (Spring 1977): 17.
[66] Howard Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor England 1485-1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 237.

> this point home by keeping the spectators fully conscious that they are watching a play and that its lesson, though perfectly valid, is not one that men live by in their world.[67]

Jones recognizes a fuller range of character for A and B's roles: they are not there just as foils to Lucrece's suitors; they are also there to make a distinction between the "stage world" and the "play world." Jones believes that the Roman story of Lucrece and her suitors is overly simplistic and the addition of A and B reminds the audience of this superficiality: "they [A and B] do not destroy the play by breaking its illusion of reality; rather, they continue to prevent the possibility of any such illusion."[68] Jones makes a strong argument for *Fulgens and Lucrece* as a play that points to the artificiality of the stage but only in so far as it exposes the artificiality of the Roman plot. Jones stops short of seeing their more encompassing commentary on the purpose of playing and the challenges that this commentary makes to the audience.

Most recently, Rick Bowers has made a compelling argument that "A and B constantly focus and deflect attention away from the usual expectations of Tudor theatre."[69] He discusses the way in which Medwall situates A and B at the center of the play's concern and "intend[s] to argue for the play's even more obvious relationship to theatre and performance."[70] He focuses on the way that A and B blur the line between audience and performer through metatheatrical moments. His insightful argument,

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[67] Robert Jones, "The Stage World and the 'Real' World in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 32 (1971): 132.
[68] Ibid., 133.
[69] Rick Bowers, "How to Get from A to B, *Fulgens and Lucres*, Histrionic Power, and the Invention of the English Comic Duo," *Early Theatre* 14, no. 1 (2011): 49.
[70] Ibid.

closely aligned with my own, however, returns to the same conclusion as earlier understandings of the play: "any spectator quickly realizes the play is all about social and political positioning."[71] Although Bowers brings important attention to *Fulgens and Lucrece* as a metadrama that explores the boundaries of theater, he ultimately reiterates earlier critics who see the main purpose of this drama as addressing class structure. Additionally, Bowers and other critics all discuss A and B as single, unified characters rather than the fractured, multiplied characters that I argue they are, and the metatheatrical moments that he rightly observes become much richer with a more complete understanding of the multiplicity in this play.

Multiple Theories

Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre* has shaped much of how we understand medieval and Shakespearean stage practice, especially through his famous discussion of the *locus* or "fixed symbolic locations near and on the larger unlocalized acting area" and *platea*, or the unlocalized acting area.[72] His distinction between these two areas provides a useful way of thinking about Medwall's drama, which uses the *platea* and *locus* both in the way Weimann describes and in ways that undercut and call attention to the traditional—or medieval—distinction between these two areas. Mimetic elements, Weimann argues, are always performed in the *locus* and non-mimetic elements in the *platea*. Characters performing in the *platea* were generally lower class characters while those in the *locus* were upper class, but the rapport

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[71] Ibid., 50.
[72] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, trans. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 74.

created between the characters in the *platea* and the audience, given their close proximity and the frequent direct address, made these characters more privileged. Still, the interplay between the *locus* and *platea* remains crucial as the site at which plays achieve their significance: "each…meaningless without the functioning assumptions of the other" create meaning in the play as reality and illusion, the real world and the play world, consistently interact.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Erika Lin has extended and reexamined Weimann's argument about *platea* and *locus* to suggest that these distinctions are indeed about highlighting "which elements might have been most privileged" but that they have less to do with actual physical location.[73] She redefines these terms so that "the more characters are aware of the playhouse conventions through which visual, aural, and verbal cues onstage come to signify within the represented fiction, the more they are in the *platea*."[74] This argument about *platea* and *locus* connects with the larger argument of her book, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, which concerns itself with the presentational and representational (similar to Weimann's non-mimetic and mimetic) modes of performance, often separated by *platea* and *locus*, respectively. In the same way that Weimann insists on the mutual necessity of *platea* and *locus*, Lin argues,

> Nonverbal spectacle and other *pre*sentational effects…impact the way spectators experience theatre as a *re*presentational system. Interlocking puzzle pieces, representation and presentation are mutually constitutive

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[73] Erika Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2012), 23.
[74] Ibid., 35.

> citational practices that, taken together, impact the cultural attitudes and practices that give rise to the particular specificities of their relationship in the first place.[75]

This interplay between representational and presentational modes of performance is precisely what allows A and B to function as mirror figures, and the way Medwall blurs the lines between these distinctions adds to the novelty of his play. Additionally, one of the main theatrical elements Lin discusses is metatheatrical moments, which are essential to understanding *Fulgens and Lucrece*, and she insists that these moments "served not as dramatic commentary on the interplay between illusion and reality; rather they integrated early modern understandings of spectatorship's moral and epistemological stakes into the very medium of performance."[76] In other words, these metatheatrical moments did not—as Robert Merrix argues—comment on the "real world" and the "play world" but instead challenged the audience members' understanding of the theater. Because of the constant clash between presentational and representational modes, Medwall is able to make his audience rethink the expectations and interpretive strategies of theater.

Multiple Beginnings

Before turning to A and B's roles as interpreters, I want to first discuss the way Medwall uses them to create multiple beginnings, thus destabilizing audience members' expectations—or causing them to question the epistemological stakes of theater as Lin might argue—by creating three different "beginnings" to the play and through creative

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[75] Ibid., 8.
[76] Ibid., 21.

use of the medieval "presenter."[77] It is A and B who function in the role(s) as presenter(s) and who create these various beginnings. This in turn undermines the audience's ability to see A and B as reliable mirror figures because A and B cannot provide a transparent understanding of the drama for the audience. The first beginning of the play occurs when A steps out of the crowd to begin speaking. This moment is where the text begins and is what we may consider the technical opening of the play. Medwall grabs the audience's attention in this moment by using a character who *should* function as a presenter and offer a prologue that, according to tradition, *should* "[fix] the attention of the audience [and give] them an understanding of the plot piece."[78] Instead, Medwall begins his play with A, positioned as a mere dinner guest, who says, "A, for Goddis will, / What mean ye, syrs, to stond so still? / Have not ye etyn and your fill / And payd no thinge therefore?" (1.1-4). Unlike the medieval presenter, A does not ask the audience to be

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[77] I am borrowing the term "presenter" from K. Janet Richt, who rightly insists that this term "is preferred…because some of these figures do not appear at the beginning of the play, and many of them also convert to Epilogues at the end." "Presenter," then encompasses a variety of interpretive or presentational roles from medieval drama that can include the prologue and epilogue. K. Janet Ritch, "The Role of the Presenter in Medieval Drama," in *"Bring Furth the Pagants": Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. David N. Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 231.

[78] This is part of the definition that David Hobart Carnahan provides for a mystery play prologue in his study of medieval French drama. See David Hobart Carnahan, *The Prologue in the Old French and Provencal Mystery* (New Haven: The Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor Company, 1905), 7. The role of the medieval presenter is a difficult one to reduce to precise definition. Ritch suggests that these characters "perform a stage-manager function, a didactic role as interpreter of the theology actualized by the plays, or an edificational role to create a 'pious mood.'" Ritch, "The Role of the Presenter," 233. Many scholars' definitions, like Carnahan's and Ritch's, come more in the form of lists or options for the presenter because he could fulfill a variety of roles. Not every presenter delivers a prologue, but when they do, it generally fulfills the purpose described by Carnahan or one of the purposes described by Ritch.

quiet and pay attention; quite the opposite in fact.[79] He seems utterly confused as to why exactly the other dinner guests are so quiet, and, more than that, he wonders why, if everyone has been properly fed, they are all loitering around. Medwall immediately places the audience in a position of discomfort by inverting the medieval protocol and refusing to even acknowledge the existence of the audience as such. He begins the play with a beginning that refuses to be a beginning.

Because A makes no reference to the audience as an "audience," he blurs the line between presentational and representational modes. He seems to fulfill some of the presenter's role but constantly stops short and refuses to fulfill it. Medwall teases his audience with A's line, "Ye ar welcome eche oon / Unto this house withoute faynynge," which sounds like something a presenter would say, but then A follows with, "But I mervayle moche of one thinge / That after this mery drynkynge / And good recreacyon / There is no wordes amonge this presse" (1.13-14, 1.15-17). A is not introducing a play. Nor is A himself welcoming the audience. Instead, he simply observes that everyone has been welcomed to the house but, for some strange reason, remains silent after so much drinking. A's lack of recognition that the people milling about in the hall are an audience forces the audience to consider their own role in the action. Though it is unlikely that any of the audience members were fooled into thinking that A was just another dinner guest and that this was not in fact a play that was beginning, Medwall still unsettles the

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[79] A "conventional opening" for Northern medieval cycle plays in particular was "blustery characters paradoxically screaming for silence," Ritch, "The Role of the Presenter," 235.

audience by refusing to provide the beginning that they would expect and establishes A as a spectator character.

Medwall provides a second and equally problematic beginning with the introduction of B, who comes on to help explain everything to A, and although B mixes prologue elements into his discussion with A, the characters still never take a directly presentational approach. B steps out of the audience to explain to A that "the play" is about to start (1.33). B seems to have some knowledge of what "the play" is, though not because he is himself a player. He even gets offended when A asks if he is a player: "Nay, I am none. / I trowe thou spekyst in derision / To lyke me therto" (1.43-47). B's subsequent explanation of the play takes a form similar to other medieval and interlude prologues, but B never acknowledges the audience at all. It becomes difficult to see B as presentational when he too refuses to fully take on the role of presenter. He, like A, is merely a dinner guest. A at least speaks to the audience when he asks them why they are standing around; B never does. B responds directly to A's statement, "It semeth than that ye can tell / Sumwhat of the matter [of the play]" with, "Ye, I am of counsell— / One tolde me all the processe" (1.62, 1.62-63). B summarizes for A what he has been told, so that A has a good idea of what he is about to see. Once B has completed his summary of the plot, A asks, "And shall this be the proces of the play?" to which B responds, "Ye, so I understonde b[y] credible informacyon" (1.126, 1.127). B never gives any indication that he wants the dinner guests to stop and pay attention (although they likely already are) or that he intends to address them. B's lack of concern for the audience and private conversation between himself and A continue to delay the start of the play and creates a voyeuristic feel that refuses to let the audience to settle comfortably into their role as

audience. Even if the audience begins to settle in during B's 55-line long description of the play and assumes that it is the prologue, the play does not immediately begin after B's plot summary; A and B discuss their opinions of Lucrece's decision for another seventy-five lines before Fulgens enters.

The third beginning to the play occurs when Fulgens enters and delivers a speech similar to the opening of a medieval religious play, similar even to Medwall's own religious play *Nature*. After A and B have finished their conversation, Fulgens enters. Because B describes Fulgens as one of the main characters, the audience may assume that his entrance marks the start of the play. And his entrance does in fact signal the beginning of the action as described by B. Furthermore, when Fulgens enters, he says,

> Everlastyng joy with honoure and praise
> Be unto our most drad Lord and Savyour,
> Whiche doth us help and comfort many ways,
> Not lefying us destitute of his ayde and socour,
> But lettith his son shyne on the riche and poore,
> And of his grace is ever indifferent
> All be yt he diversely commytteth his talent (1.202-208).

This invocation of God, aside from being obviously anachronistic for an ancient Roman, would have been another familiar opening for a medieval play. Medwall's own play, *Nature*, written around the same time as *Fulgens and Lucrece* (though the exact date of composition is unknown), shows Medwall's familiarity with this medieval tradition. This play opens with a prologue provided by the character Nature:

> Thalmyghty God that made eche creature

As well in heven as other place earthly

By hys wyse ordynaunce hath purveyd me, Nature,

To be as mynyster under hym immediately

For thencheson that I shold perpetually

Hys creatures in suche degre mayntayne

As yt hath pleased hys grace for theym to ordeyne.[80]

These two speeches sound very similar, except that the latter is delivered by a character in the presentational mode, while the former by a character who subsequently insists that he is in the representational mode.

Medwall pushes this moment with Fulgens further to destabilize the distinction between *platea* and *locus*. According to Weimann's definitions, Fulgens, physically located in the *locus*, recites the lines of a presentational character traditionally physically located in the *platea*. As Fulgens continues, he even blurs the lines of Lin's *platea-locus* distinction as he has privileged knowledge of the play's meaning but does not acknowledge it as such. In the same way that the opening elements in the conversation between A and B unsettle the audience by the fact that the two do not acknowledge the audience as such, Fulgens similarly teases the audience with attention and then takes it away. After Fulgens begins by praising God, he fulfills another role of the presenter when he provides a moral or a message for the audience. He talks about how God doles out different gifts to different people and then he says, "Every man oweth to take gode hede / Of this distribution, for who so doth take / The larger benefite, he hath the more need /

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[80] Medwall, Henry, *Nature*, in *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 1980), 1-7.

The larger recompense and thank therefor to make" (1.216-219). But Fulgens follows with, "I speke these wordes onely for myne owne sake / And for non other person, for I know well / That I am therein charged as I shall you tell" (1.220-222). Fulgens delivers his directive and immediately qualifies it: he is not preaching to an audience. He is simply talking to himself about his own life and his own experience. This moment with Fulgens likely produced laughter, as certainly no one speaks in such a way to one's self. Despite Fulgens' insistence to the contrary, these lines are clearly meant for the audience, but Fulgens' very insistence still allows Medwall to undercut this tradition through a collision of the presentational and representational modes.

Once the plot of Lucrece and her suitors begins, we may assume that the play will run smoothly from this point forward, but then we have an announcement that the play has not yet begun. And we finally have the fourth start to the play. After Fulgens reviews the courting situation with Lucrece, Cornelius comes in to plead his case with Fulgens, after which Fulgens exits. Cornelius then says, "Now a wise felow that had sumwhat a brayne, / And of suche thingis had experience, / Such one wolde I with me retayne / To gyve me counseile and assistence" (1.347-350). Likely watching the play from amongst the audience, B decides that he has "spied a mete office" for himself and that he will be this man of good counsel and assistance (1.360). When A objects to B interjecting himself in the play, B responds, "Distroy the play, quod a? Nay, nay, / The play began never till now!" (1.364-365). The audience, which may finally be settling in to the Roman plot, gets interrupted by B who decides that he needs to take part in the play, despite the fact that in the opening exchange between A and B, B vehemently denies being a player. Medwall uses this moment to highlight a variety of important aspects of

his drama. First, in B's description of the play, he tells A, "This play in like wyse I am sure / Is made for the same entent a[n]d purpose / To do every man both myrth and pleasure" (1.154-156). Without the insertion of B and then A into the Roman plot of the play, it would lack "mirth." Although certain moments with the Roman characters, like the one above with Fulgens, might produce laughter, it is the bawdy humor and hijinks of A and B that inject the mirth into the Roman plot. The implication, then, is that Lucrece's story would be incomplete without the roles A and B will take in it. Secondly, it suggests that A and B's conversations at the start of the play are separate from their roles within the play, and they should be considered as such. This is the main point that seems to have been overlooked by previous critics. No other critics separate A and B's conversations—before the play begins, according to B—from the actions A and B perform as representational characters within the drama. By separating these different roles, we can better see the way that Medwall plays with the idea of presentational and representational characters to create unreliable mirror figures.

If, as the play insists, A and B's initial conversations are not the beginning of the play, we must then either take B's announcement of the beginning or Fulgens' entrance to be the start because both A and B deny having anything to do with the play's content and performance before these two moments: A: "And yet there can no man blame us two, / For why in this matter we have nought to do." B: "We? No, God wott, no thing at all, / Save that we come to see this play" (1.146-148). A and B repeatedly emphasize that they are not in any way involved with the play being performed that night. Clearly, the audience would recognize that they are in fact part of the play, but we must take into account that Medwall reminds the audience over and over again that the play does not

begin with their conversations and further reminds the audience that these early conversations are the conversations of two spectators.

Multiple Roles

In addition to unsettling the audience with multiple beginnings, Medwall reinvents A and B, making these characters more complex than critics have suggested. These two players take on a variety of roles as they progress through the play and cannot be reduced to a single role or understanding. Given their lack of names and thus a lack of unified identity, it makes sense that we should understand A and B as a fractured variety of characters housed within two actors. Furthermore, each role that Medwall creates for A and B is an interpretive role; they are our constant mirror figures and constantly privileged *platea* characters. Even when they function as foils to Gayus and Cornelius, the foiling provides a type of interpretation. But because each time A and B switch roles they offer a different interpretation of the plot—and usually a poorly reasoned one—Medwall clearly intends the audience to distrust their analysis. Additionally, each of their presentational or pseudo-presentational roles further emphasizes the importance of audience engagement because, like the multiple beginnings, these roles create metatheatrical moments that play with the *platea-locus* distinction.

As we have seen, A and B open the play in their first role as simple spectators, immediately positioning themselves as mirror figures. They, much like the audience, have come to dinner to partake in the banquet festivities. B has also come to enjoy the play, while A does not even realize that a play will take place. B sets himself up as more knowledgeable, both about the particular play to be performed and about the conventions

of interlude drama more generally. A seems unaware of these conventions. By having A and B play this particular set of characters, Medwall creates a metatheatrical moment that challenges audience expectations of characters in the *platea*. A and B are positioned in what we would consider unlocalized acting space as they mingle among the guests. A and B are both in the physical space that Weimann would define as the *platea* and in the privileged position of watching Lucrece's plot rather than being watched. But A is not actually aware that he is watching a play; he is even unaware that he is part of an audience. Similarly, although B has privileged knowledge about the plot of the play, he denies being a player, displaying a clear a lack of self-knowledge. Of course, their lack of knowledge is all a playful strategy of Medwall's; A and B know that this is a play and that they are both players. But their denial of such knowledge subverts dramatic conventions, blurs the lines between the *platea* and *locus*, and makes these characters untrustworthy to their fellow spectators.

Additionally, as I mentioned previously, while they are playing these pseudo-presentational characters, who refuse to acknowledge their role as players or characters, A and B also refuse to acknowledge their audience as such, different from typical characters in the *platea*. Part of their character in this role is to speak to one another and only refer to audience members as two people talking in a crowd would refer to those around them. This suggests that the decision not to use the term "audience" was a purposeful decision of Medwall's that in fact emphasizes the role of the audience. Audience members are reminded of their role through the refusal of A and B to acknowledge it and are further spurred to consider what that role is or should be.

As the audience works to understand these characters who claim to be no characters at all, A and B suddenly decide to become characters, and once they do, they immerse themselves completely in the Roman play. This moment marks one of the beginnings of the play, but it also marks a change in character for A and B. They transition from pseudo-presentational characters to comic representational characters. Before jumping into the play, B says to A,

> Hold thy pece! Speke not so hye,
> Leste any man of this company
> Know oure purpose openly
> And breke all oure daunce!
> For I assure the faithfully
> If thou quyte the as well as I,
> This gere shall us both advaunce. (1.387-390)

B may be referring to the "company" of actors in this speech, but he is more likely referring to the audience or the "company" around him as they are the ones in the direct vicinity of A and B. Again, we have a very purposeful avoidance of the term "audience" before B exits in his original presentational role. B leaves the acting area after his statement that successfully playing counselors for Gayus and Cornelius could help their social status, and when B reemerges on stage, he has transformed into the representational character of Cornelius' servant. B's sudden decision to enter the play suggests that he is not simply initiating his pre-planned transition from presentational to representational character. He is improvising. Of course, the audience recognizes that he

is not actually improvising, but it furthers the idea of B as unreliable because he changes his mind about who he is and what his role is.

In response to B, A remains in his pseudo-presentational role until he realizes that he too could potentially profit from joining the play. Then he changes characters. A responds to B by saying, "Nay then, let me alone hardely! / Yf ony advauntage honge therby / I can my selfe thereto apply / By helpe of gode counsell" (1.394-397). In the very next line, A changes character, evidenced by his direct address to the audience: "This felowe and I be maysterles, / And lyve most parte in ydlenes, / Therefore some maner of besenes / Wolde become us both well" (1.398-401). We can tell that A has turned to address the audience directly because he is now alone among the audience with no other actors to address.[81] The only other time A has been alone with the audience is at the very beginning of the play. There he does speak alone but not to an "audience"; he addresses the company around him in an effort to understand what is going on. Here, A turns to the audience and introduces his new character, a standard medieval and interlude convention. We can see then that A is transitioning into a more recognizable character type. B similarly begins addressing the audience directly once he has changed characters. As A and B begin courting and fighting over Joan, Lucrece's maid, A leaves B alone, and he says to the audience, "I tell you it is a trull of trust / All to quenche a mannes thrust /

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[81] Additionally, we can tell that A changes character because he seems to know about B's background. When B returns to the stage later, A tells Gayus that B "hath knowen [him] many a day" and that B can vouch for his character (1.635). At the beginning of the play, however, we have no indication that A and B have ever met before and seem instead to be strangers to one another: if A and B have known one another for "many a day," A would likely know whether or not B is a player and would have no need to ask. Thus, we see a radical change in character for both A and B.

Bettyr then ony wyne" (1.838-840). Later, when he is teasing Joan, he turns to the audience again and says, "Here ye not, syrs, what she sayth?" (1.914). And finally when Gayus asks A who will come to hear Lucrece's decision, we have the word that A and B so purposefully avoid in the opening: "Mary, here shall be Fulgens / And Publius Cornelius hym selfe also, / With diverse other many moo / Besyde this honorable *audience*" (1.1312-1316, my emphasis). Medwall did not by happenstance avoid direct audience address in the opening of the play, nor was he unaware of this ubiquitous stage convention. Rather, he very deliberately avoids direct address in the opening of the play and only uses it when A and B have changed characters. At this point, however, A and B have now performed as two different sets of characters and denied knowledge that the audience knows they possess. Once they begin addressing the audience and attempting to establish a relationship with them, the audience must already be skeptical of these men and what they have to say. This disconnect that Medwall creates between A and B and the audience even destabilizes the characters' role as foils to the main plot because the audience has seen these other character roles. Even though the actors portraying A and B play different characters, that the actors stay the same maintains a connection between the characters.

A and B remain in this second set of character roles for the majority of the first part of the play. They act as counselors for Gayus and Cornelius and as go-betweens for the men and Lucrece. They also engage in a mock tournament as they fight over Joan for her hand in marriage. Their courting plot provides a nice parody of the upper class characters. In this sense, A and B provide what we might consider to be a typical "subplot" in which "we find the subservient characters attempting to imitate the behavior

of their 'betters' in the main plot," and this relationship "tends to establish them [the subservient characters] as parallels to or comments upon the main action."[82] This description offered by Richard Levin's famous work on subplots has influenced much of our understanding about the relationship between aristocratic characters and their servants in early modern literature and has similarly been the main way of understanding A and B's role in the Lucrece plot.[83] Medwall does certainly create a subplot. We cannot, however, simply extract this portion of the play and interpret it separately. Although A and B have transformed characters, they are played by the same actors in likely the same clothes and thus intrinsically linked to their other characters. Their mirroring of the main plot becomes distorted, then, when the audience sees them in their other roles.

At the end of the first part of the play, A and B take on a third set of roles. In fact, they reverse roles from the opening, which provides an indicator to the audience that another change in character has occurred. As the first part draws to a close, A and B are alone with the audience in their roles as comic relief: B addresses the audience as "sirs" (1.1325) and both characters refer to Gayus and Cornelius as their masters. After A and B have discussed when the meeting between Lucrece and their masters will take place—business appropriate for the counselors of these men—A and B change characters again. The change in character this time is indicated by a stanza break in the text and the introduction of a question. We can tell that they remain in their comic characters up until this point because A explains that before a meeting can take place between Lucrece and her suitors, "she [Lucrece] wyll nedis know the certain / Whether is the most noble of

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[82] Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot*, 10.
[83] Levin himself offers *Fulgens and Lucrece* as an example of this relationship.

them twayne-- / This she sayeth alway" (1.1368-1370). A knows this about her not because it is a plot point in a play that he is familiar with but because she has repeatedly said this to him in his comic character, which he continues to play at this moment. B then responds, "Why, this is easy to understonde / Yf she be so wyse as men bere in honde," and A replies, "Ye so I hard you say,"—something he would have heard B say while still in his comic role, which he must still, therefore, inhabit (1.1373). Then, there is a break in the stanza as A and B transform into yet another new set of characters. A asks, "Let me se now, what is your oppynion / Whether of them is most noble of condicion?" (1.1375). This moment suggests a change in character because A steps away from his representational role as comic servant and into a presentational role of outside observer. Now, the two discuss the major questions that the play asks rather than the specific interactions between them and their masters. B emphasizes this change in character when when he says, "He that hathe moste nobles in store, / Hym call I the most noble ever more" (1.1377-1378). B does not directly refer to any action that has happened during the course of the play; rather he seems to more generally give his opinion on the question of what makes a person noble. He does then go on to name Cornelius as the noblest but only because he has the most money. It does not seem to have anything to do with his own interactions with or loyalty to him.

This conversation will likely remind the audience of the conversation A and B had at the beginning of the play. In that conversation, however, it is A who insists that Cornelius should be considered nobler. Here, the two have switched roles. Further emphasizing this role switch, A proceeds to tell B, "Ye but come hether sone to the ynde of this playe / And thou shalt se wherto all that wyll wey-- / It shall be for thy lernynge"

(1.1386-1388). In their first conversation, it was B who knew about the play and about the conventions of playing, and it was A who seemed unaware of these things. At the end of the first part, A also tells the usher to fill everyone with good wine, "For it is the wyll and commaundment / Of the master of the fest" (1.1425-1426). A is now the one who has knowledge of the play, the conditions of performance, and the master's desires. A and B, then, have changed back into the pseudo-presentational roles from the beginning, but their positions vis à vis each other are reversed. B even takes over A's role of not understanding the performance conditions when he refuses to come back the next day and does not understand "Why myght not this matter be endyd nowe" (1.1396). Robert Jones suggests that this change in positions shows how interchangeable A and B are and that "clearly Medwall was not particularly concerned about the solidity or credibility of A and B as characters in the frame."[84] This reading is unsurprising, especially for the modern reader who likely only has access to the play as a text. As a reader, it is difficult to keep A and B straight. On stage, however, even if dressed in similar costumes, they would have been distinguishable based on the simple fact that they were different people. Interchanging their roles here suggests not that A and B themselves are insignificant but rather that even as they deny their role as players, they are, in fact, the ultimate players, able to move seamlessly between the variety of roles that Medwall creates for them. It suggests that even as they deny knowledge and deny the privilege of *platea* characters, they are the ultimately privileged characters. This constant change in character also reinforces their role as unreliable mirror figures: the audience cannot trust any of A and

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[84] Robert Jones, "The Stage World and the 'Real' World," 136.

B's interpretations knowing that they could change their minds—or their characters—at any moment.

While this constant change in character seems somewhat confusing, it allows Medwall to keep the audience engaged and working to understand these two characters while also making that understanding impossible. Keeping up with the rapidly changing characters was likely an exhausting task for the audience. It is also likely that that audience members would become less concerned with Lucrece and her suitors as A and B demand more of their time and attention. This suggests, then, that the primary focus of the play is its commentary on playing and the theater. Spectators spend much more time considering A and B as interpreters and the questions of theatrical interpretation than they do actually interpreting Lucrece's plot.

In the second part of the play, A and B take on a fourth set of character roles as more familiar and straightforward presentational characters. When A enters and opens the second part, he begins with a direct address to the audience: "Muche gode do it you everycheone" (2.1). Like many medieval presenters, A speaks directly to the audience, providing a summary of the first part of the play and explaining what will happen in the second part. He also acknowledges himself as a player: "It is the mynde and intent / Of me and my company to content / The leste that stondyth here" (2.42-44). Unlike B's ambiguous reference to "company" in the first part, it is unmistakable that A here refers to a company of actors. After making them wade through the muddy and confusing character switching of the first part, Medwall finally opens the second part of the play with a more familiar beginning and more familiar characters. But this opening is not the start of a play; it is the beginning of the second part. The audience has already

experienced the character switching in the first part, and therefore the "familiar" opening of the second part becomes just as alienating to the audience. By relentlessly refusing to give the audience uniform, traditional characters in A and B, Medwall undercuts the theatrical tradition that he now uses A to fulfill.

As A completes his prologue, the action of the second half begins, and A and B resume their roles as representational characters, which they continue in until the end of the play when we have one final change in character. B—similar to A at the beginning of the second part—takes on the role of epilogue. This marks a new and different character for B because his opinion of the play's ending has changed from his opinion of it at the end of the first part: he disagrees with Lucrece's choice of Gayus at the end of the first part but supports it at the end of the second part. And so he and A have once again switched roles. Additionally, even though he delivered something resembling a medieval prologue at the beginning of the play, he did not address the entire audience. Here, he fulfills the role of epilogue by addressing the audience and providing a moral for the play: "Not onely to make folke and myrth and game, / But that suche as be gentilmen of name / May be somewhat movyd / By this example for to eschew / The wey of vyce and favour vertue" (2.890-894). In this speech, he also directly connects himself with the players, patron, and playwright. These traits align B's speech closely with other medieval epilogues, and so in the second half of the play, we see Medwall using A and B in more familiar ways. However, because of the variety of characters he has them play and the variety of knowledge he has them assume, Medwall never allows the audience to stop trying to figure out who A and B are at any given point and what their purpose is. He offers the audience no opportunity for reprieve and demands constant engagement with

their interpretive faculties. B essentially tells the audience at the end of the play that the purpose of the courting plot was to serve as a mirror of nobility for gentlemen and as a mirror of morality that encourages virtue, but it is nearly impossible to concentrate on this aspect of the play when A and B present much more interesting alternatives for the audience to focus their concentration. And secondly, it is nearly impossible to believe that this message extoling virtue over vice was new to this early modern audience. The unique roles that A and B play, on the other hand, were both new and exciting. And because A and B call so much attention to playing players, this drama shift the focused from the concept of nobility to the concept of theater.

Multiple Endings

While Medwall makes theatrical interpretation central to his play's meaning, he still uses a story of nobility for his method of delivery, and he uses this story to further his argument for audience engagement. Medwall insists at multiple points in the play that the ending, or Lucrece's decision, is specific to this one particular situation and should not be considered a universal truth. To reinforce this idea, Medwall offers alternative endings in the same way that he offers multiple beginnings. The first "ending" of the play comes at the very beginning when B provides a plot summary for A. He tells A that when Fulgens and Lucrece cannot decide on a suitor, they defer to the senate. This ending matches the ending in Medwall's source text; in this sense it is the traditional ending for the story. But as soon as B provides this summary for us, A objects to this ending, insisting that the senate (should) choose Gayus:

> By my fayth, but yf it be evyn as ye say,

I wyll advyse them to change the conclusion.

What? Wyll they afferme that a chorles son

Sholde be more noble than a gentilman born?

Nay, beware, for men wyll have therof grete scorn. (2.128-132)

By objecting to the conclusion, A reminds the audience that there are alternative possibilities for the end of the play and, even before we meet any of the Roman characters, invites the audience to evaluate rather than simply accept the ending of the play. Although we are clearly not meant to believe that Gayus is a "chorles son" or that he is unworthy of Lucrece, A, in this moment, acts as mirror figure and interpreter. His alternative ending, however, is not a well-reasoned one. It seems more of a knee-jerk, emotionally charged reaction. He plays the role of mirror figure in these first moments but the audience would clearly recognize his insufficiency as an interpreter, which forces the audience to consider their own opinions of the play.

Medwall offers another possible ending when no senate appears at the end the Lucrece plot. Instead, Lucrece is left to make her own decision about which suitor she will choose, making the play differ from the plot summary offered by B. This is a novel device, suggesting among other things that the ending has not been predetermined. Although the ending of the play has of course been pre-determined by Medwall, this change adds to the feeling of improvisation. It sets up the Roman plot as an organic occurrence, not bound by the rules of scripted drama. The deviation from the opening summary would have been quite surprising for the audience. Although countless authors in the period deviate from their source texts, I am unaware of any other medieval dramas or interludes that deliberately provide a summary of the play at the beginning that turns

out to be inaccurate. We see, then, that Medwall at every turn refuses to give the audience what they may want or expect from a drama. The audience must consider what they see in the theater and the opinions that A and B offer, but spectators must also ultimately rely on their own interpretive instincts when no clear ending is provided.

If Medwall's audience has not already come to the conclusion that the ending of this play does not have a universally applicable or ubiquitous message, Lucrece works to make sure that the audience remembers that her situation is specific to her individual circumstance. Lucrece insists,

> what so ever sentence I gyve betwyxt [the] two
> After myne owne fantasie, it shall not extende
> To ony other person. I wyll that it be so,
> For why no man ellis hath theryn ado.
> It may not be notyde for a generall precedent,
> All be it that for your partis ye [Gayus and Cornelius] do therto assent.
> (2.428-433)

Her decision is made of her own fantasy; it is not applicable to any other man; and it should not be taken as general precedent. Medwall does not simply have Lucrece make a passing remark about the fact that the decision is her own; he has her insist for six lines in three different ways that this decision should not be taken as a universal rule. Before she even qualifies her decision, she also insists that the question of nobility "is a grete matter whiche, as semyth me, / Pertayneth to a philosopher or ellis a devyne" (2.422-423). She suggests that this question of nobility is outside the scope of her intellectual capacity, and yet she provides an answer to the question anyway. Although Lucrece seems to believe

that the ending should be left to these more erudite figures, her choice of Gayus seems to be the correct choice, and she makes this decision based on reasonable arguments. We should not take Lucrece's insistence that someone more educated should make the decision or her qualification that her decision is unique to her situation to mean that her decision is either invalid or unreasonable. But because of these qualifications and multiple endings, audience members cannot simply take for granted that her decision is a valid and reasonable one or that it is applicable to other situations that they may face in their lives.

If the audience has still missed the message, Medwall creates yet another ending to his play that once again reinforces the idea that playwrights cannot by themselves instruct spectators how to live their lives. Not surprisingly, once Lucrece has made her decision, A and B discuss that decision. Because of the two part play structure, A's objections at the beginning of the play to the choice of Gayus may be forgotten by the audience. Medwall, then, reminds the audience of A's objections and this time B joins in. A rejects virtue as a legitimate reason to choose a husband: "Vertue? What the devyll is that?" (2.842). And because A is so confused by Lucrece's choice, he must appeal to the audience: "How say ye, gode women? Is it your gyse / To chose all your husbondis that wyse? By my trought, than I marvaile!" (2.846-850). This direct address to the audience, not present the first time A objects to the play's end, reminds audience members once again that they should consider their own choices and that they must make their own choices separate from Lucrece. This is not to say that they should completely disregard what they have seen and that they should not consider the reasons Lucrece chose Gayus. A's direct address, though, briefly suggests that the women in the audience may not see

Lucrece as a reflected version of themselves. Her choice in this play is set up to be well reasoned, virtuous, and honorable. The assumption, then, may be that Lucrece's way of reasoning would work equally well for all women in the audience, except that A offers the women in the audience the opportunity to reject Lucrece's decision. Interestingly, he immediately rejects his own suggestion that the women might not see themselves in Lucrece when he follows his question—without even so much as a line break—by saying, "By my trought, than, I marvaile!" which suggests that the women in the audience either nodded their heads very quickly in response to A's question or, more likely, that he answers the question for them before they have had a chance to answer it themselves. While in some ways A's hasty suggestion may imply that Medwall wanted to make sure the women in the audience were aware that they should see themselves in Lucrece and that they should answer the question with a "yes," it seems more likely that by disallowing the audience to answer the question for themselves, A frustrates the women in the audience, making them give more serious thought to what their answer might be. A's last spoken lines of the play, in fact, are yet another statement of disbelief about the ending that Medwall provides: "And I would have thought in vere dede / That this matter shoulde have procede / To som other conclusion!" (2.888-890). A's vague reference to "some other conclusion" offers infinite possibilities for the audience's consideration. While the audience may be skeptical of A's abilities to actually proffer a well-reasoned, alternative conclusion, A's established role as mirror figure helps spur the dinner guests into considering their own version of "som other conclusion."

After A's final lines, B delivers what we might consider an epilogue, beginning with the point that the play strives to teach the audience how to reject vice and embrace virtue. But at the end of the epilogue, B makes a statement that is unique:

> yf there be ony offence
>
> (Show us wherein or we go hence)
>
> Done in the same,
>
> It is onely for lacke of connynge,
>
> And not he but his wit runnynge
>
> Is thereof to blame.
>
> And glade wolde he [the playwright] be and right fayne
>
> That some man of stabyll brayne
>
> Wolde take on hym the labrour and payne
>
> This mater to amende. (2.909-918)

It begins with an apology that occurs throughout medieval and interlude drama. The difference with this epilogue, however, is that it gives the audience authority to rewrite the ending as they see fit. This is another novelty of the play, as I am aware of no other interlude or medieval play that suggests the audience rewrite their own ending.[85] B's apology reemphasizes that it is the responsibility of audience members to consider what

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[85] In David Lindsay's Scottish interlude, *A Satire of the Three Estates*, Diligence closes the play by saying, "Famous peopil, heartlie I yow require, / This lytill sport to tak in patience / We traist to God, and we lei fane uther year, / Quhair we have failit we sall do diligence / With mair pleasure to mak yow recompence." Diligence suggests that there may be some rewriting but it will be the job of the acting company or playwright and not the audience. See David Lindsay, *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed. Roderick Lyall (Edinburgh: Cognate Classics, 1989), 4648-4651.

needs to be improved upon in the play and, potentially as well, what needs to be improved upon in their own lives. Instead of the playwright needing to improve his message, the audience is charged to take action: "Show us," "labrour." Medwall tasks his audience with the responsibility of deciding on their own beliefs about nobility through a variety of alternative endings and finally an open invitation for the audience to conjure their own alternative ending. Additionally, Medwall challenges his audience to actively question drama and its purpose. If we recognize that there are other possible endings, then we are reminded that drama is artificial, that the ending presented has simply been created by the author. The characters' actions are not real, are not externally motivated but rather invented by the playwright. The emphasis on the artificiality of theater does not undercut the power of the theater; rather it simply reminds the audience that the theater is a place of possibility and not reality. In a way, this reminder intensifies the power of theater because it not only allows the audience to see possibilities on stage but also encourages them to imagine or enact their own.

This chapter may at times make *Fulgens and Lucrece* seem unstable and complex. And that is because it is, or at least A and B are. Lucrece, Gayus, Cornelius, and Fulgens are straightforward, easy to understand characters. They are familiar characters that the audience has seen before and would easily recognize as particular types. In fact, next to A and B, they seem quite boring. As a result, it is precisely the unstable parts of the play that make it so innovative and exciting. It is the unstable and complex parts that command the audience's attention. And it is the unstable and complex parts that make the play fit so well into a discussion of mirror figures. As B tells us at the end, this is a play that provides an "example" to teach people how to follow a virtuous life. This example,

however, is not as straightforward as B's succinct moral suggests it is. Audience members must wade through A and B's roles as interpreters to understand the drama, and they must ultimately replace A and B as the true interpreters. They do not want to end up like Wit and only take way a surface understanding of the plays' meaning, and Medwall makes it impossible for the audience to fall prey to such an interpretative strategy.

CHAPTER IV
AMBIDEXTER THE ACTOR

As we move into the second half of the sixteenth century, the interludes begin to transform in significant ways. First, this is the period during which the character of the Vice—distinct from individual, allegorical vices—becomes a central character in most plays. Additionally, this is the period during which the "proverb play" (i.e., *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, etc.) becomes popular. And, finally, plays begin to combine historical characters with allegorical abstractions, resulting in what critics call "hybrid plays." All of these changes are apparent in Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (c. 1560-1561). This play about the historical Persian king Cambyses II (reigned 530 BC-522 BC) not only provides a useful bridge between the interludes and Shakespeare, but it also provides another iteration of the mirror figure. As representative of the *speculum principis* or mirror for princes tradition, this play shows the downfall of a tyrannical king. But more important, Preston positions the Vice Ambidexter, with his repeated phrase about his ability to "play with both hands," as a cunning spectator and adept actor. Ambidexter functions as the mirror figure for audience members and presents them with an alternative to tyrannicide. Ambidexter's clearly immoral activities that result from this alternative, however, create an interpretive difficulty. Preston, like both Medwall and Redford, invites the audience to participate in interpreting the drama by making Ambidexter an inadequate mirror figure. Ambidexter's self-fashioning abilities exceed Wit's and any other Vice or character from the interludes, making him the most successful "player" on the interlude stage. He watches the action on stage and then takes on precisely the role that each character wants or needs him to take on in order

to survive the violent, tyrannical environment and avoid execution. But his impressive abilities as a "good" spectator are simultaneously problematic as he endorses obviously immoral choices. Thus, Ambidexter is also a "bad" spectator and bad mirror figure for the audience. The push and pull between good and bad actor/spectator leaves audience members without a clear message in the play and requires that they actively work to interpret the story Preston presents and discover their own reflection in this mirror.

This play focuses on King Cambyses of Persia, and Preston takes most of his source material from Richard Taverner's *Seconde Booke of the Garden of Wysedome* (1539). Preston's play opens with a prologue that repeats advice to princes from Agathon, Cicero, and Seneca and provides a summary of Cambises' fall. The play then begins with Cambises' immediate rise to power after his father's death and his decision to conquer Egypt. While in Egypt, he leaves the judge Sisamnes in charge, and Sisamnes takes bribes and mistreats the common people. When Cambises returns and learns this information, he kills Sisamnes. This is Cambises' one noble act before, as Bernard Spivack explains, "[h]e becomes addicted to drink and for the rest of his life he is beserk."[86] When one of his counselors, Praxaspes, advises Cambises to be careful with his drinking, Cambises gets drunk and kills Praxaspes' son by shooting him in the heart with an arrow. He then proceeds to kills his own brother, marry incestuously, and kill his wife on their wedding day. Cambises' demise comes when he accidentally stabs himself in the side as he is mounting his horse. Ambidexter, the Vice, moves in and out of the Cambises plot, colluding with Cambises and other characters at various levels. He also

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[86] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 284.

participates in the intermittent comic episodes that include the greedy soldiers Huf, Ruf, and Snuf and the country bumpkins Hob and Lob.

Cambises and the Mirror Tradition

Many of the major critics of *Cambises* place this particular play within the *speculum principis* tradition.[87] David Bevington explains that the use of this tradition in drama was not at all unique to Preston but rather "[a]n unmistakable phenomenon in the 1560s and 1570s" that "implicitly or explicitly flatter[ed] Elizabeth by the contrast between her and the conventional tyrant."[88] Rather than show good examples for kings and queens, plays like *Cambises*, *Virtuous and Godly Susanna*, and *Appius and Virginia* show examples of bad magistrates, which should be avoided by good rulers. Bevington explains that this sort of negative example was only possible because of "a return of hope for political stability."[89] The most well known work from this period in the mirror-for-princes genre is, of course, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, published during Elizabeth's reign and featuring models of bad princes.

Because of the popularity of this genre and because it often uses tyrants to provide an example by contrast, much of the criticism on *Cambises* focuses on determining whether this play endorses obedience to a tyrant. Bevington unequivocally argues yes:

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[87] See, for example, Howard B. Norland, "'Lamentable tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth': The Enigma of *Cambises*," *Comparative Drama* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1992-1993): 332-333. Burton J. Fishman, "Pride and Ire: Theatrical Iconography in Preston's *Cambises*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 201. David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 156.
[88] David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 156.
[89] Ibid.

"These plays [in the mirror for princes tradition] test extremes to define the rule that no exception of obedience is allowable."[90] Critics who ascribe to Bevington's argument cite treatises and sermons from the period that discuss precisely this issue and argue that a tyrannical magistrate may be a punishment sent from God that the people must endure and that God will take care of in time.[91] More recent critics, such as Eugene D. Hill, however, argue that "no lesson in obedience to tyrants is intended here—if anything the tone suggests quite the opposite."[92] Hill believes this argument applies to the play as a whole, but this quotation specifically refers to the scene where one of Cambises' knights agrees to cut out the heart of Praxaspes' young son, whom Cambises has killed. In this scene, a sycophantic knight acquiesces to Cambises' morbid desires, and Hill argues that this knight clearly cannot be an example to follow. While Hill does not suggest that Preston endorses tyrannicide, he does believe that the play urges counselors to object to tyrannical actions. While coming to completely different conclusions from one another, both Bevington and Hill are actively engaged in answering the question that Preston asks about obedience to a tyrant: what are the options to tyrannicide? Is there an option that lies somewhere between active support and active rebellion? How does one successfully navigate the dangerous political landscape under a tyrant? And by refusing to provide a clear or, more importantly, a morally sufficient answer to these questions, Preston creates a dramaturgy of participation. These questions about tyrannicide that *Cambises* addresses

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[90] Ibid., 157.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Eugene D. Hill, "The First Elizabethan Tragedy: A Contextual Reading of *Cambises*," *Studies in Philology* 89, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 406.

also open up a space for Ambidexter, the unreliable mirror figure, who does in fact successfully navigate the world of a tyrant.

The question of obedience is not directly addressed in either the prologue or epilogue, both of which focus primarily on Cambises and his faults rather than on the people and their reactions to him. *Cambises* does perhaps provide a simplistically didactic message to magistrates—don't be a tyrant—but it completely lacks an overt message to counselors or citizens about how to respond to a tyrannical magistrate. The Prologue tells the audience that this play will chronicle the tyranny of Cambises: "His crueltie we wil dilate, and make the matter plain. / Craving that this may suffise now, your patience to win."[93] In the Epilogue, the audience is only told that they "have…perused, / The tragicall History of this wicked king" (Epilogue 1-2). The final stanza of the epilogue does mention a form of counsel, perhaps providing a message for the audience, just not one relevant to Cambises' story:

> As duty bindes us for our noble Queene let us pray,
> And for her honorable Councel the trueth that they may use:
> To practice Justice and defend her grace eche day,
> To maintain Gods woord they may not refuse,
> To correct all those, that would her grace and graces laws abuse,
> Beseeching God over us she may reign long:
> To be guided by trueth and defended from wrong. (Epilogue 15-21)

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[93] Thomas Preston, *A Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's Cambises*, ed. Robert Carl Johnson (Institute Fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur: Austria, 1975) Prologue 34-35. All further references will come from this edition and line numbers will be marked parenthetically.

This prayer specifies a message for the counselors of the queen, but it does not speak to rebelling against a cruel magistrate. Rather it presumes that Elizabeth will not act as a tyrant and that it is Elizabeth who needs protecting from "all those" who will abuse her, rather than the other way around. The only example of this kind of corruption that we see in the play comes at the very beginning when Sisamnes abuses his power while Cambises is away at war, and Cambises swiftly deals with this situation by executing Sisamnes. The play, then, makes no direct statement about how to react to a tyrant.

The lack of a didactic statement on tyrannicide in the play is surprising given the nature of interludes and Elizabethan interludes in particular. Providing a summary of the play's message for the audience is a common trope. Although (as this dissertation argues) accepting these messages without examining the play as a whole is problematic, making no reference to a specific message for the play was somewhat uncommon, especially in plays with an epilogue or prologue. Particularly in the Elizabethan period, proverb plays became popular, and these plays provided clear, succinct morals even in their titles. These messages were then repeated throughout the plays. *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, for example, repeats this titular phrase, an admonition to get right with God before it is too late, ten times over the course of the play. William Wager's *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* even makes a direct statement to the audience that the proverb provides the meaning for the play: "Our title is *Enough is as good as a feast* / Which rhetorically we shall amplify."[94] Even in other "tyrant" plays, a message for the audience is made clear.

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[94] W. Wager, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* in *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, ed. R. Mark Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 78-80.

In *Appius and Virginia*, for example, the prologue tells the women in the audience to "imitate the life you see" and take Virginia as an "example." Similarly, the epilogue explains to the audience that they should imitate Virginia and her virtuous father.[95] In *Cambises*, the Prologue offers examples of advice to princes and magistrates but never directs this advice to counselors or citizens. The epilogue then explains that the company has presented the tragedy of Cambises and "to [their] best intent exprest every thing," but nothing more directive. By refusing to provide a straightforward message on how to react to a tyrannical leader, Preston asks the audience to consider the topic for themselves.

Although critics have associated this play with the mirror for princes genre, the mirror intended for Elizabeth and other magistrates is quite straightforward: do not be a tyrant like Cambises. And especially because, as Bevington argues, we have entered a time of political stability, the assumption is that Elizabeth does not actually need this advice because she is not in fact a tyrant. Thus Cambises' story seems less urgent in terms of providing advice for the current monarch. What becomes much more interesting is the reaction of everyone around Cambises, particularly Ambidexter. The play does not center on the tyrant but rather on the relationship other characters, and thus each person in the audience, have with the tyrant. Preston emphasizes the dramaturgy of participation by pressing each audience member to consider this relationship through ambiguity.

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[95] R.B., *Appius and Virginia*, ed. Gertrude Eileen Trevelayan (New York: Putnam, 1933), 12, 21, Epilogue 6-8.

Criticism of Ambidexter

Ambiguity seems to be, in fact, exactly what this play is about. We can see this in the way Preston avoids a clear interpretive statement about how counselors should interact with Cambises but we can see it even more so through the Vice Ambidexter who, as his name suggests, is the epitome of everything ambiguous and two-sided. Ambidexter belongs to an emerging tradition in interlude plays which concentrates medieval drama's train of vices into one capital V "Vice." Ambidexter himself is designated as "the Vice" in both the list of characters and the stage directions. Bernard Spivack's *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* provides the most extensive study of both vices and the Vice character. Spivack explains that the rise of the Vice is, in part, a practical move as travelling companies did not have access to the large number of actors that earlier interludes and medieval plays did.[96] Additionally, he explains, "allegorical drama came to depend less on pageantry and more on a plot of intrigue," and this plot of intrigue

> required the services of a single intriguer, a voluble and cunning schemer, an artist in duplicity, a deft manipulator of human emotions. His operation upon his human victim is closet work, close and private. After he succeeds in breaking down the pales and forts of virtue and insinuating himself into the bosom of mankind as servant, counselor, or crony, he brings his subordinates through the breach.[97]

As we will see, however, Ambidexter does none of this "closet work" that Spivack describes. He does not manipulate the emotions of other characters and, towards the end

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[96] Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 140.
[97] Ibid., 140, 141.

of the play, distances himself from Cambises rather than being close and private with him. Spivack also argues the lack of centrality the Vice has in these hybrid plays that include historical examples: "His traditional behavior is bent and twisted to accommodate him to events and persons too confirmed in history or fable to be accommodated to him."[98] But when Preston "bends and twists" Ambidexter to fit within the historical context of Cambises' life, he does so in a way that makes Ambidexter central to interpreting the drama rather than in a way that simply forces tradition. Without Ambidexter, the play would lack its complicated comment on reacting to tyranny.

Most critics begin by assigning Ambidexter to the tradition of Vice and the various roles that this character type inhabited. Both Spivack and Karl Wentersdorf point to Ambidexter's choric role in the way he comments on the action after each major event in the play.[99] And, of course, many critics point to his close relationship with the audience and his role as comic relief.[100] The most intriguing and unique aspect of Ambidexter, however, comes from his name and his catchphrase that he can "play with both hands." As Spivack explains, "The whole purpose of the Vice is to illustrate his name and nature and to reflect upon the audience the single moral idea he personifies."[101] But Ambidexter's very name suggests that nothing about his character is "singular." Furthermore, Ambidexter's name is not unambiguous, like Pride or Greed or Lust. This

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[98] Ibid., 278.
[99] Karl Wentersdorf, "The Allegorical Role of the Vice in Preston's *Cambises*," *Modern Language Studies* 11, no. 2 (1981): 54; Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 135.
[100] See, for example, Hill, "The First Elizabethan Tragedy," 432, and Douglas W. Hayes, *Rhetorical Subversion in Early English Drama*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2004), 66-67.
[101] Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 134.

makes understanding precisely the meaning and purpose of Ambidexter particularly vexed.

Finally, critics argue over the degree to which Ambidexter influences Cambises and other characters in the play. Howard B. Norland contends that when Ambidexter tells Cambises that his brother Smirdis is plotting against him, Ambidexter "imitates the morality play formula of the vice seducing a central character into evil action."[102] Wentersdorf assigns Ambidexter a slightly less active role and contends, "he participates in the action by *spurring on* the potential wrongdoers" who already have ideas of evil in their minds.[103] And Robert Carl Johnson claims that Ambidexter's relationship to the other characters in the play is "erratic and always minor."[104] My argument resembles Wentersdorf's and Jonhson's in that I suggest Ambidexter's influence is minor and more of a "spurring on" than a seduction, as Norland would argue. But Ambidexter's relationships with other characters are not erratic. They are quite precise. Ambidexter's main goal is self-preservation. He is above all else a survivor. Unlike Sisamnes, Smirdis, and the Queen, he escapes the wrath of Cambises, and unlike Cambises, he escapes the wrath of God. All of which is due to his name and nature, specifically the connection of his name and nature to playing and acting.

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[102] Howard B. Norland, "The Enigma of Cambises," 335.
[103] Wentersdorf, "Allegorical Role," 54, my emphasis.
[104] Robert Carl Johnson, introduction to *A Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's Cambises* (Institute Fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur: Austria, 1975), 15.

Ambidexter as Actor

The connection between Vice and actor has been made by a variety of scholars. Ann Weirum calls attention to the Vice-as-actor tradition in the disguise plots common in the interludes. She explains that in this specific kind of plot, "the Vice must excel as performing 'actor.' He must be able to assume a false face or 'mask' of affection, grief, kindliness, piety, respectability, simplicity, honesty, or 'innocent merriment' as occasion demands; and he often describes his own talents in theatrical terms."[105] This idea of the Vice as actor was particularly important, given the historical period in which these plays were presented, since "the professional actor became increasingly associated with this figure of moral evil."[106] Although Paul Whitfield White has successfully argued that, beginning in the 1530s, Protestants actively used theater as a means to further Reformation ideals, White acknowledges that by the 1580s, "the old consensus of opinion among Protestant leaders and writers in supporting or at least tolerating the theatre was over."[107] There began to evolve a growing uneasiness about actors and their associations with both vagabonds and the deception of the Catholic Church. Alan Somerset explains the transformation of the theater from compatible with to antagonistic to Reformation ideals:

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[105] Ann Weirum, "Actors' and 'Play-Acting' in the Morality Tradition," *Renaissance Drama* 3 (1970), 190-191.
[106] George Oppitz-Trotman, "Staging Vice and Acting Evil: Theatre and Anti-Theatre in Early Modern England," in *The Church and Literature: Studies in Church History* vol. 48, ed. Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2012), 156.
[107] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163-164.

> the drama, which had at first been a potent weapon for Reformers against Catholicism, showed clearer and clearer signs of delighting in 'play' of language resulting in ambiguity, deceptiveness, or absence of meanings. Hence the evangelical Protestants began to distrust the 'play' of the players, the pleasure of their language, even though contemporary plays were still predominantly homiletic and their themes serious.[108]

This delight in play and language aligned drama, and particularly the Vice, not only with vagabonds and vagrancy but with the "'outward show' imputed to the Roman Catholic faith."[109] As George Oppitz-Trotman further explains, "From the late 1570s onwards, the associations of the actor with vagrancy and disorder fed into fresh iterations of the stage Vice. The actor playing Vice became Vice playing actor."[110] Although Oppitz-Trotman locates the beginning of this trope in the 1570s, I would argue that it begins, or perhaps even more important, it is epitomized by Ambidexter.

According to the *OED*, the earliest usage of the term "ambidexter" is as a legal term that refers to "One who takes bribes from both sides." By 1555, the term was also used to mean "A double-dealer, a two-faced actor, generally."[111] This latter association with actors is, for my argument, one of the most important aspects of Ambidexter's character. Ambidexter is further connected to acting through his catch phrase "to play with both hands." The repeated emphasis on his ability to "play" reminds the audience

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[108] Alan Somerset, "Damnable Deconstructions: Vice Language in the Interlude," *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997-98): 575.
[109] Oppitz-Trotman, "Staging Vice and Acting Evil," 162
[110] Ibid., 163.
[111] "ambidexter, adj. and n.," *OED Online*, September 2013, Oxford University Press (accessed November 18, 2013).

that he is doing exactly that. Ambidexter's role as actor makes him unlike the specific vices associated with the seven deadly sins, such as Pride or Lust, or a Vice that can be easily linked with one of those sins like Money (linked to greed) or Revenge (linked to Wrath), Ambidexter's role as a two-faced actor is much more difficult to decipher.

Additionally, his specific "sin" or vice becomes difficult to identify when there is no condemnation of his character by either the prologue or the epilogue. As I mentioned earlier, there is very little if any moralizing of the play in these two speeches that bookend the play. The life of King Cambises is at least mentioned in both, but Ambidexter's name never appears nor does any direct or indirect allusion to his double-dealing. Importantly as well, Ambidexter never gets condemned by other characters, run off, or forced to convert, like Vices at the end of other interludes. Nor do any virtues appear to counterbalance his scheming. Instead, Ambidexter is the last man standing in this play. This makes Preston's purpose for Ambidexter unclear. Why should a Vice connected through tradition to evil be the only successful character in the play? But Ambidexter's very nature—his "sin" of double-dealing—allows him to transform as each situation requires.

Ambidexter is, thus, exactly what his name suggests: an actor. And he stays true to his character by constantly changing the character he plays. As an actor he is malleable and adaptable to an infinite number of situations. That Ambidexter does not have a single "role" or a "purpose" reinforces his very purpose. In the same way that the namelessness of A and B in *Fulgens and Lucrece* enables them to change their character throughout the play, the creative naming of Ambidexter allows him the same freedom. In order to understand the part that he must play, however, he must first watch. He must understand

the dramatic situation before he can become a character in it. He waits for his cues and enters when appropriate; he remains an engaged and active participant while on stage and exits when appropriate. It is for this reason that his role as spectator and actor are inseparable and, equally important, why he has a strong connection with the audience. They too are spectators of the play and subsequently agents or actors in their own life.

Importantly as well, Ambidexter never attempts to disguise who he is. He is honest with Sisamnes, Cambises, and other characters that he is Ambidexter who plays with both hands. This transparency is somewhat different from many of the other plays in the period during which the disguise plot had become increasingly popular. In these plays, vices take on names of virtues in order to trick the main character into doing what they want. In Nicholas Udall's Marian interlude *Respublica* (1553), for example, Avarice, Oppression, and Flattery become Policy, Reformation, and Honesty, respectively. In David Lindsay's Scottish interlude, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (1553), the vices perform a mock baptism as they rename themselves from Flatterie, Falset, and Dissait to Devotioun, Sapience, and Discretioun, respectively.[112] By disguising themselves, the vices are better able to position themselves as counselors to the king or mankind character in these plays and lead them into sin. Ambidexter, however, makes no attempt to hide who he is, evidenced partially by the multiple times he uses his catchphrase about playing with both hands, not just to the audience alone on

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[112] See Nicholas Udall, *Respublica*, ed. W.W. Greg (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); David Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed. Roderick Lyall (Edinburgh: Cognate Classics, 1989).

stage but to other characters. That he does not disguise his character emphasizes the adaptability of his character. As an actor, he is both always and never in disguise.

One of the ways that Preston highlights Ambidexter's success as an actor is by the fact that everyone recognizes who he is. If someone does not recognize him, Ambidexter lets everyone know who he is by constantly announcing his ability to "play." He does not influence Cambises or the others through any type of deception, and he is not "a dramatized metaphor for the evil which invades their [Cambises' and Sisamnes'] natures and governs their behavior."[113] This language of "invasion" and "governance" suggests arduous action and control by Ambidexter. Rather, throughout the variety of episodes within the drama, he remains true to himself by "playing" a role for each situation he encounters that will allow him to remain in the good graces of the king and generally survive in the play world, which almost no one else seems to be able to do. His character is not about luring others into evil and increasing Satan's retinue by having them condemned to hell. This is the role of other Vices, who often collude with Satan. Ambidexter never mentions Satan and his role as Vice has no larger evil purpose. His character is a truly and purely selfish one. And his character can be selfish because all of the other characters are already plagued by their own vices and do not need Ambidexter's help along the way. Because both Sisamnes and Cambises have already succumbed to a vice by the time Ambidexter meets them, Preston is able to create a different role for Ambidexter the actor. He does not have to play the role of seductive Vice and can instead

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[113] Spivack, *Shakepeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 289.

play the role of cunning counselor who gives these magistrates the advice that will allow him to avoid their tyrannical wrath.

Sisamnes, for example, already has the idea to take bribes before meeting with Ambidexter. When Cambises hands over control of the throne to Sisamnes and before Ambidexter even appears on stage, Sisamnes considers, "Doo wel or il, I dare avouch, some evil on me wil speake: / No truly yet I doo not meane, the kings precepts to breake" (123-124). While he says that his decision is to honestly and fairly use the power he has been given, the idea to take bribes and mistreat the commons already exists in his mind. The use of "yet" also possibly suggests that while he does not want to break the king's precepts right now, he likely will in the future. And while he claims he will do what the king asks, he very clearly has concerns that he will not succeed at avoiding evil. Two hundred lines later in the play, Sisamnes comes back on stage and wonders, "What abundance of welth to me might I get / … / But that I fear unto the king, that some, complaint will make" (308-310). Again, he seems unsure about betraying the king but this time his concern seems more about getting caught than doing evil. Furthermore, although the audience has met with Ambidexer at this point in the play, Sisamnes has not. When Ambidexter enters after Sisamnes says this, Sisamnes immediately recognizes Ambidexter with no introduction: "What maister *Ambidexter*, is it you? / Now welcome to me I make God a vow" (313-314). Clearly, Ambidexter plays his part well: he is readily and easily recognizable. Additionally, we see Sisamnes bid him an unreserved welcome, likely because he has already become a double-dealer himself. Thus, when Ambidexter makes a suggestion that Sisamnes do bad things to gain money, he is simply playing the proper role to remain in the good graces of Sisamnes.

Ambidexter comes to tell Sisamnes that he is unwise for not taking bribes, but then we learn that Sisamnes has already done so. Ambidexter asks him, "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?" (319-321). Although we may consider Ambidexter's charge to Sisamnes to be influential, it certainly cannot be construed as invasive or controlling. Sisamnes responds, "In colloure wise unto this day to bribes I have inclined: / More the same for the frequent the trueth I am now minded" (323-324). He does not admit here more than that he has been "inclined" to take bribes, but when Small Habilitie enters after Sisamnes makes this statement, it is clear that Sisamnes has already begun to abuse the commons: "The Commons of you doo complain, from them you devocate: / With anguish great and greevos words, their harts doo penetrate: / The right you sel unto the wrong, your private gain to win" (330-333). Without any entrances or exits by Sisamnes between his conversation with Ambidexter and the entrance of Small Habilitie, the wrongs Small Habilitie chronicles must have happened previously without the intrusion or influence of Ambidexter. We may now count Sisamnes as someone who is himself an ambidexter, but he was not influenced to this way of life by Ambidexter. It seems, then, that Ambidexter is working to insert himself into the good graces of Sisamnes, the current ruler. Unfortunately, because Sisamnes is swiftly killed after this interaction, it is difficult to gauge how successful Ambidexter is in his efforts. But I would argue that we can somewhat see his success in the fact that he does not include himself with the element that Small Habilitie describes as abused by Sisamnes.

Finally, Sisamnes' main vice appears to be greed and the double-dealing that he does only a consequence of this greed. Bernard Spivack suggests that the Vice represents the source from which all other vices in the play's characters spring. Sisamnes makes clear in this play that his primary goal is financial gain; thus his main vice is greed. All of the "playing with both hands" that he does is only a means through which to accomplish this financial gain. Because Ambidexter does not represent Sisamnes' main vice, he is not the one who tempts Sisamnes to evil. Without the power of temptation, Ambidexter must instead use his acting abilities to earn the trust of these characters.

Before Ambidexter ingratiates himself to Cambises, he takes on another acting role and successfully wins the approval of Smirdis, the king's brother, by giving him practical advice. The king's brother, aware that Cambises killed Sisamnes and Praxaspes, voices his concern about Cambises' kingship: "I like not wel of those his deeds, that he dooth stil frequent: / I wish to God that other waies his minde he could content" (624-626). In the company also of Attendance and Diligence, Ambidexter recommends, "Let [Cambises] alone, of his deeds doo not talke: / Then by his side ye may quietly walke" (636-637). Inserted into a situation quite different from that with Sisamnes and later with Cambises, Ambidexter is well aware of the part he must play to succeed with Smirdis and his retinue. In fact, Ambidexter plays the part of good and practical counselor so well that Attendance offers a similar recommendation and Diligence calls this all "good advise" (649). Most importantly, Smirdis thanks Ambidexter for his sage advice and calls him a friend. Given that Smirdis is one of the only virtuous characters in the play, he likely would have distanced himself from his brother even without Ambidexter's urgings. It seems extremely unlikely given his meek character that he would have taken any action

against his brother, and so we see Ambidexter again successfully reading a character's personality and playing the role that best allows him to succeed in winning over that character.

Interestingly, this is the only interaction Ambidexter has with another character where he does not call attention to his name; at the same time, Smirdis never asks his name. This is somewhat curious given that Vices are known to either announce themselves or have their identity requested by other characters. No stage directions indicate a change in costume for Ambidexter, so we must assume that he remains dressed the same for this scene as he was in the scene with Sisamnes. Ambidexter never says that he will disguise himself like a virtue and rename himself "Honesty" or "Sapience," as we see in other interludes. He likely does not feel the need because, like both Sisamnes and later Cambises, Smirdis goes along with Ambidexter's advice because it is what he wants to hear. If Ambidexter is so readily recognizable by Sisamnes and Cambises, it seems likely that he would have been readily recognizable by Smirdis, even if Smirdis does not vocalize it. Ambidexter remains true to his name by making no efforts to disguise the fact that he is an actor. He does not need to use deceptive tactics to win over Smirdis, only acute acting abilities.

Cambises, like Sisamnes, recognizes Ambidexter, and Ambidexter succeeds in being one of the few people to survive Cambsies' wrath because of his excellent and adaptable acting skills. After giving Smirdis such good advice on how to avoid his brother's violent hand, Ambidexter tells the king, "And if it please your grace (O king) I herd [Smirdis] say: / For your death unto the God, day and night he did pray" (676-677). While Ambidexter does, in making this statement to the king, both deceive the king and

perhaps increase the likelihood that Smirdis will die, he mostly reiterates what the king is already thinking and again aligns himself with the person in charge in order to stay clear of persecution. Additionally, even though Ambidexter lies, it is not necessarily a deception of his own creation. Before Ambidexter tells the king his brother is plotting against him, one of Cambises' lords reminds the king, "Yea noble Prince if that your grace, before his honor dye: / He [Smirdis] wil succeed a vertuous King, and rule with equitie" (672-673). And the king responds, "As you have said my Lord, he is cheef heire next my grace: / And if I dye to morrow, next he shall succeed my place" (674-675). Ambidexter, who has been on stage the entire time, overhears this exchange between the king and his lord, and Ambidexter can see the implications of the king's speech: "Like all tyrants, Cambises feels himself surrounded by enemies, especially those with claims to succession."[114] Before Ambidexter even approaches the king for the first time, we can see that Cambises already considers Smirdis a threat, and like both Sisamnes and Praxaspes, this threat must be eliminated. Indeed the episode with Praxaspes adds weight to the argument that Cambises would likely kill Smirdis without Ambidexter's involvement. Before Ambidexter meets Cambises, the audience has already witnessed his needless murder while in a drunken rage of Praxaspes' son. Clearly, Ambidexter had nothing to do with the young boy's death and very little to do with Smirdis' as well.

In this situation concerning Smirdis, Ambidexter simply observes the situation and decides what role he should play knowing that Cambises is threatened by those who could succeed him. He is also aware of Cambises' desire for fame, which is likely why he

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[114] Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 159.

adds to his charges, “He said your grace deserved had, the cursing of all men: / That ye should never after him, get any praise agen” (680-681). When Cambises asks Ambidexter whether or not what he says is true, Ambidexter answers, “I think so *if it please your grace*, but I cannot tel” (686, my emphasis). Ambidexter here readily admits that what he says may not actually be true, and he only wishes it to be true if it pleases the king. This makes clear that Ambidexter is working to play the part the king desires and at no point attempts to disguise that fact. The king responds to Ambidexter, “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” (687-689). The king knows exactly who Ambidexter is. The king recognizes that he plays a particular part, and the king quite likes his acting. Cambises decides to kill his brother to put aside any doubts that Smirdis may—though not likely—want to kill him. Ambidexter’s shows off his skills as an actor in each of these three episodes: he expertly plays the role Sisamnes, Smirdis, and Cambises require in the performance of their good and evil deeds. But most importantly he plays the role required to survive under a tyrant.

Ambidexter’s final interaction with the king is much more limited, but it still provides further evidence of his ability to read the scene and play the appropriate part. Like, Sisamnes, Cambises’ primary vice is not double-dealing. His primary vice is his wrath aided by his alcoholism. As both of these vices become more and more unmanageable, Ambidexter moves into a role that is more similar to errand boy than close counselor; he keeps his distance. In the scene at Cambises’ wedding banquet, Ambidexter helps Preparation prepare the banquet and tells the king what the evening’s entertainment will be. When the new queen displeases the king, he asks Ambidexter to go

get Crueltie and Murder to dispose of the queen. Ambidexter readily agrees, but says in an aside to the queen, "If that I durst, I would mourne your case: / But alas, I dare not for feare of his grace" (1056-1057). Ambidexter is not, as Willard Farnham long ago suggested, "doing both good and evil though always intending mischief."[115] Of course, we may assume that Farnham's interpretation of Ambidexter explains why he provides good counsel to Smirdis only to turn around and make accusations against him to the king. This episode with the queen, however, clearly shows that Ambidexter does not intend mischief—though that is certainly part of the role he plays in the comic episodes. Here, he first and most importantly plays the role that will get him what he wants, in this case his survival. He knows that pleading the case for the Queen will only get him into trouble with Cambises. In fact, we see exactly this when, after Ambidexter leaves, two lords plead on behalf of the queen. Surprisingly, Cambises does not have them killed, but he does say that they have lost his favor. Ambidexter plays his part perfectly and remains in the king's good graces. Additionally, he does not in any way influence the king's decision to kill the queen. Cambises makes this decision without any input at all from Ambidexter. This episode, then, is essential to understanding the player aspect of Ambidexter's character. Without this scene, we may assume that Ambidexter does work to cause mischief and actively seeks the downfall of Sisamnes and Smirdis, but this episode makes clear that is not the case. Instead he observes and then acts; he actively spectates, interprets what he sees, and then plays the role that will ensure his survival.

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[115] Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), 268.

Ambidexter does not only play roles amongst the nobility. As he tells the audience in his opening monologue, “To all kinde of estates I meane for to trudge” (157). We see him expand his character repertoire in the two comic episodes in the drama. Here, as with the other characters in the play, he takes on specific roles to get what he wants from them. Without the same power that Cambises and Sisasmnes have, the comic characters allow him to look after his own interests in a pleasurable way and entertain himself. In the first comic episode, Ambidexter encounters Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, designated in the text as three ruffians. They are also more specifically three greedy soldiers who want to go to the war in Egypt to loot and bring home the spoils. Huf, Ruf, and Snuf are apparently not as well acquainted with Ambidexter as they cannot initially tell who he is. Ambidexter goads the ruffians into a fight that he clearly wins according to the stage direction, “Here let him swinge them about” (s.d. after 187). Ambidexter stops “swinging them about” when Huf asks for mercy. Playing the instigator, Ambidexter takes advantage of their inability to recognize him. The ruffians continue to repeatedly ask him to identify himself and finally he says, “Why I am Ambidexter who many souldiers doo love” to which Huf responds,

> Gogs hart to have thy company needs we must prove.
> We must play with bothe hands with our hostes and host:
> Play with bothe 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. (214, 215-219)

Huf shows his excitement over being in the company of Ambidexter by repeating Ambidexter’s catchphrase three times, but it is equally clear from their earlier

conversation that Huf's main vice is greed and from this statement that he already "plays with both hands" to achieve financial gain but without any input or influence from Ambidexter. As he does with the nobility, Ambidexter does not tempt these soldiers into sin; he only interacts with them for selfish reasons.

Another fight in this same scene works to showcase Ambidexter's adept skills of self-preservation. Ambidexter continues to strategically play with Huf, Ruf, and Snuf when Meretrix, the prostitute, enters. Her entrance creates an argument amongst Huf, Ruf, and Snuf that eventually devolves into a physical fight in which weapons are drawn. Although Ambidexter dominated the first fight, he quickly sees that he is outmatched this time around and, as the stage directions indicate, "the Vice must run his way for feare" (s.d. after line 265). Because we have two different physical encounters with the ruffians, it offers a point of comparison for Ambidexter's flight in fear. Without seeing the first fight, the audience may assume that Ambidexter is a coward. By comparing the second fight to the first fight, however, we see that Ambidexter once again looks out for his best interests and literally does not fight a losing battle. He will fight, but only if he knows he can win. This incident, then, literalizes what we saw with Sisamnes, Smirdis, and Cambises. He knows how to win the "fights" with them, how to ingratiate himself with them, so he inserts himself into their lives and successfully wins them over. This episode also helps explain why Ambidexter would betray Smirdis and would not speak up for the Queen: aligning himself with Smirdis and the Queen against the king would be a losing battle. It is not cowardice; it is not mischief; it is survival instinct.

In the next comic scene, we have two new comic characters—as Huf, Ruf, and Snuf exit never to be seen or heard from again—who are the country bumpkins Hob and

Lob. Their interactions with Ambidexter are particularly interesting because this episode shows the only instance in which Ambidexter perhaps makes the wrong decision about how to "play." Hob and Lob enter discussing the violent acts of Cambises, and Ambidexter, like an astute actor preparing for a part, listens to their conversation before joining in, at which point he says, "Of the Kings crueltie I did hear you talke. / I insure you, he is a King most vile and parnitious" and then they all agree that it would be best if the king died (777-778). As soon as Hob and Lob state their agreement, however, Ambidexter says to the audience, "Now with bothe hands, wil ye see me play my parte?" and immediately accuses Hob and Lob of treason, much to their horror (783). They both begin to bargain with Ambidexter, offering him the produce that they are taking to market in exchange for his not turning them in. When Ambidexter refuses their bribes, Hob and Lob set about fighting one another. Throughout all of this, Ambidexter seems quite pleased with himself. He is playing the part perfectly to get what he wants: "I wil cause them to make a fray" he says, and he does (806). What he perhaps does not expect is that Hob and Lob's wives enter and join the fight. At this point, they turn on Ambidexter, and he is clearly outmatched. Marian Be Good, Hob's wife, helps the two country bumpkins reconcile, sends them away, and sets about beating Ambidexter. This time, however, the two of them fall to the ground, and the stage directions tell us, "Heer let her swinge him in her brome, she gets him down, and he her down, thus one on top of an other make pastime" (s.d. after line 833). Although immediately following the stage direction, Marian calls Ambidexter a villain and runs him off stage, there seems to be something sexual about their tousle on the ground. While Ambidexter's plan to set Hob and Lob on one another may have backfired, he ultimately succeeds in this episode by

"making pastime" with Marian. Thus even though Ambidexter gets beaten and arguably fails as an actor to read and appropriately play in a situation, he still succeeds in getting something he wants.

To conclude that Preston includes the comic episodes "only to provide diversion" misses Ambidexter's purpose in the drama and ignores his promise to engage with all of the estates.[116] These comic episodes certainly do provide entertainment, but they also show Ambidexter's range as an actor. He can successfully mingle with nobility, soldiers, and commoners. He can adapt his personality and play the appropriate role for each estate. Ambidexter shows the dexterity of his acting in each of these scenes, and this range would not be as obvious without the comic episodes. And it is specifically through showing Ambidexter's versatility as an actor that Preston invites the audience to make their own interpretations. While impressed by Ambidexter's skills, the audience likely does not condone his actions. Provided with no alternatives for how to succeed in navigating the variety of situations that Ambidexter does, audience members must work to think through their own reaction to these situations.

Ambidexter and the Audience

In addition to playing a variety of roles within the historical plot, all of which highlight his role as the ultimate actor, Ambidexter plays the role of spectator for the audience. As the critics discussed earlier have observed, Ambidexter takes on a common function of the Vice by providing commentary on the action of the play and giving the audience what they want or what they expect. In this commentary, however, Ambidexter

[116] Norland, "The Enigma of Cambises," 337.

also makes obvious to the audience his ability to switch roles skillfully and smoothly from one line to the next. By making Ambidexter's role as actor obvious to the audience, Preston invites cynicism from spectators, who are unlikely to agree with how Ambidexter handles tyranny.

In Ambidexter's very first appearance on stage, he does exactly what an audience would expect of him as he takes on the characteristics of the traditional Vice. This predictable set-up for his character allows Preston to challenge the audience as he later deviates from what is expected. Ambidexter enters the play by calling for room: "Stand away, stand away for the passion of God, / Harnessed I am prepared to the feeld" (126-127). Ambidexter not only makes an entrance typical of vice characters, he is also dressed parodically as a soldier. He then proceeds to talk about the butterfly, snail, and fly that he will fight in battle, providing a comic contrast to the Egyptian campaign that Cambises has just embarked on. Both the calling for room and providing a comic foil to the main character mark him as a Vice figure. He then proceeds to introduce himself to the audience, another common trope of Vices, and he promises that the audience will see the destruction of Sisamnes, supposedly keeping with the tradition of making the audience "his implicit accomplices."[117] Every aspect of his opening speech fits with medieval and interlude traditions and would have offered the audience members a perfectly predictable speech from a Vice.

The audience soon sees, however, that Ambidexter's promise to show them the destruction of Sisamnes is only partially true. Sisamnes is destroyed and the audience

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[117] Hayes, *Rhetorical Subversion*, 66.

witnesses his downfall. The implication in Ambidexter's speech, though, is that he *causes* the downfall, and, as discussed earlier, that is not in fact true. Ambidexter fails to live up to the expected role of the Vice who tempts characters into sin. The audience sees instead that Ambidexter plays a role with them: he plays the role of Vice. Within the play world, however, he plays a different role or a variety of roles. It is perhaps for this reason that many of *Cambises*' critics feel Ambidexter does not really "fit" in the play and that Preston had to work to incorporate the Vice into a historically predetermined story. I would argue, instead, that Ambidexter fits perfectly within each episode of the play; he just does not fit in a consistent way because he adapts his playing to the specific situation. And he plays the role of Vice for the audience quite well in this opening monologue, making sure to check off many of the different Vice traditions. Once audience members see, however, that this Vice is different than what they generally expect from the Vice, they become more aware of his "playing." This awareness should make them also more aware of his role-playing within the play world as well.

Ambidexter continues to call the audience's attention to his role playing in more obvious ways as the play continues. After Smirdis is murdered, Ambidexter returns to the stage weeping and lamenting his death: "O the passion of God, yunder is hevy Court: / Some weeps, some wailes and some make great sport. / … / If I should have had a thousand pound, I could not forebeare weeping" (732-736). Ambidexter goes on with his lament for six more lines, emphasizing his sadness through repeated use of the term "weep." Perhaps mimicking the reaction that the audience might have to Smirdis' death, Ambidexter plays to the audience's sympathies. And he plays this role well. There are no sarcastic asides that undercut this lament, and there is even a stage direction, "Weep," in

the middle of the lament that offers no direction to make the weeping over indulgent or hyperbolic. After this lengthy lament, Ambidexter suddenly says, "Ha, ha, weep, nay laugh, with both hands to play" (744). Ambidexter tricks the audience into thinking that his weeping is authentic but then openly admits his playing as he seamlessly switches from mourner to trickster. Any audience member caught up in Ambidexter's sorrow would immediately be reminded of his skill at "playing." Even the audience members who were not taken in by Ambidexter's speech would still be reminded of his versatility as an actor and his ability to shift and adapt to what the situation demands.

Ambidexter weeps again when the queen dies, but this time he never makes the switch to laughing. After Cambises orders the death of the queen, Ambidexter enters, as the stage directions tell us, "weping" (s.d. after line 1126): "A, A, A, A, I cannot chuse but weep for the Queene: / Nothing but mourning now at the Court there is seen / … / Who could but weep for the losse of such a Lady?" (1126-1131). Ambidexter observes that there is mourning all across the court and that it would be almost inhuman not to weep for the queen. After describing the court's mourning, he even says, "If I make a lye, the Devil let ye sterve" (1136). Although not likely lying about the mourning taking place at court, this line also implies that his own grief is not a lie. And this time he never offers any indication that it is. Rather than moving from grief to laughter, he moves from grief to anger at Cambises, a relatively normal or natural reaction for someone in mourning. Still, because this speech occurs at the end of the play and because the audience has watched Ambidexter's adept acting abilities throughout the play, the audience members are likely skeptical of the genuineness of Ambidexter's weeping. This scene, then, continues to invite the audience to resist Ambidexter as a viable mirror figure or a viable

model of how to handle a tyrannical leader. Instead, it asks the audience to make their own interpretations. Certainly the Vice is never a character to be trusted, but in many ways Vice characters are usually transparent with the audience. Pride is prideful, Ire is angry, and Greed is greedy. Ambidexter, however, lacks the same transparency and requires constant attention from the audience who must work to evaluate his character.

In many ways it is unsurprising that this play would feature a character whose main role is that of an actor. The play itself is consumed by playing and spectacle. From the flaying of Sisamnes' skin on stage—an action for which no critic is quite sure of the procedure—to the shooting of Praxaspes' son with an arrow and subsequent cutting out and presenting of his heart, Preston clearly had a fascination with the possibilities of the stage. Even the Prologue blatantly and without irony states, "I see the players comming in" rather than, "I see King Cambises and his counselors coming in" (Prologue 36). Ambidexter epitomizes this obsession with the stage and with spectacle. Even more than that, he capitalizes on stage conventions to navigate Cambises' world. And he emphasizes to audience members over and over that they must stay on their toes throughout the play as they work to interpret his character. Preston does not provide a simple "evil" Vice. He provides a complicated, successful Vice who craftily and intelligently navigates the volatile world that the tyrant Cambises creates, making the audience wonder if Ambidexter is even a Vice at all. After all, he survives when even the tyrant does not. Having watched the cunning albeit morally questionable success of this character, each audience member becomes responsible for finding his or her own reflection in the play as he or she works to interpret it and especially works to interpret

Ambidexter. This play becomes not only a mirror for princes but a much more interesting mirror for each audience member who experiences it.

CHAPTER V
HAL AS AMBIDEXTER AND FALSTAFF AS MIRROR FIGURE

"Give me a cup of sack to make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein."[118]

Sir John Falstaff delivers these lines in the second act Shakespeare's of *Henry IV Part One* (1596-1597) as he and Prince Hal prepare for a short, improvisational skit in which they each take turns playing King Henry IV and Prince Hal. Standard footnotes to these lines usually read something like, "i.e., in the ranting and (by Shakespeare's time) old-fashioned style of Thomas Preston's *Cambyses*, an early Elizabethan tragedy."[119] By Shakespeare's time, the interlude had indeed fallen out of fashion in favor of the popular stage. In fact, Stephen Greenblatt testifies to *Cambises*'s datedness in his biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World*:

> By 1595, Shakespeare clearly grasped that his career was built on a triumph of the professional London entertainment industry over traditional amateur performances. His great comedy [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*] was a personal celebration of escape as well as of mastery. Escape from what? From tone-deaf plays, like Thomas Preston's *A Lamentable*

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[118] William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth* in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 5e, ed. David Bevington (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 2.4.380-383). All references to the play will be taken from this edition. Act, scene, and line numbers will be noted in parentheses for all subsequent references.
[119] David Bevington, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth* by William Shakespeare in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 5e, ed. David Bevington (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), note 383.

Tragedy, Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth, Containing the Life of Cambises, King of Persia, whose lame title Shakespeare parodied.[120]

It is perhaps true that the Rude Mechanicals' play, "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth," is meant as a parody of Preston's full title for *Cambises*.[121] And it may be equally true that Shakespeare meant to mock the style of Preston's play when Falstaff insists that he will play his role "in King Cambyses' vein." More critically, however, these allusions suggest that Shakespeare was indeed familiar with Preston's drama and that Shakespeare's audience was also familiar with both the drama and the interlude traditions. Although *Midsummer* and *1 Henry IV* were written around twenty years after *Cambises*, *Cambises* held the attention of the stage for quite some time. It was extremely popular around its first performances and was reprinted between 1585 and 1589. Additionally, Shakespeare is not the only playwright to refer to *Cambises*; Thomas Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook* also makes direct reference to it.[122] These references lead Robert Carl Johnson to suggest that "Cambises was sharing the stage with Marlowe, Shakespeare and Dekker[.]"[123] While it is not my intention to argue for or against the idea that *Cambises* played alongside Shakespeare and other early

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[120] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 51.
[121] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 5e, ed. David Bevington, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 5.1.56-57.
[122] In his chapter titled, "How a Gallant should behave himself in a Playhouse," Dekker says, "But on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, yea, and under the state of Cambyses himself, must our feathered estrich, like a piece of ordnance, be planted valiantly, because impudently, beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality." Thomas Dekker, *The Gulls Hornbook* (1609), ed. R.B. McKerrow (London: De la More Press, 1904), 50.
[123] Robert Carl Johnson, introduction to *Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's Cambises* (Austria: Institute Fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur, 1975), 34.

Renaissance playwrights, it does seem clear that *Cambises* was well known. It stands to reason, then, that the traditions making *Cambises* popular in the first place were still familiar to audiences even if they were dated and that Shakespeare, too, was aware of the interlude's most common tropes. Shakespeare's references to *Cambises* do indeed have a mocking tone, but that does not mean interludes were not useful or that Shakespeare would avoid invoking them; their traditions carried a cultural significance with an audience also familiar with "Cambyses' vein."

A new examination of *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV* (c. 1597) will show that Shakespeare, aware of the audience's familiarity with interludes, recycled the Vice trope that we see not only in Preston's Ambidexer but in other interlude Vices as well. More specifically, I argue that Shakespeare positions *Hal* as the Vice figure, with Falstaff serving as a mirror figure to highlight the prince's Vice-like qualities and to encourage a dramaturgy of participation.[124] Falstaff's position as a mirror figure helps audience members resist Hal's attempts to seduce them over to his side. They can, instead, make a well-reasoned assessment of his character on their own. Shakespeare presents Prince Hal from the very beginning of the first play as an interlude Vice and Falstaff as the unreliable mirror figure. Understanding Hal and Falstaff in these terms, we see that Shakespeare invites us to approach Prince Hal, his actions, and his supposed conversion with skepticism. We see early on in *1 Henry IV* that Prince Hal, an ambidexter himself, plays into the growing fears about actors and acting. The antitheatrical connection

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[124] The more common perspective in criticism is to see Falstaff as the Vice figure. See, for example, Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 115; James L. Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad:* Richard II *to* Henry V (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 73.

between players and vices, I have argued, created a new iteration of the Vice, epitomized by Ambidexter. Shakespeare picks up on this connection and combines Hal's acting skills with the Vice's other qualities, specifically the closet work that Bernard Spivack describes. Like Ambidexter, Hal is honest with the audience about his role-playing, but Hal also attempts to deceive the audience into believing that this role-playing will eventually come to an end and to the kind of end that the audience desires.

It is not my intention to argue that Hal *is* a Vice but rather that Shakespeare marks Hal with Vice-like traits audience members would recognize. In fact, what makes Hal more malicious—or at least more disturbing—than an interlude Vice is that he is *not* a pure Vice but rather a fully developed character. While it is perhaps easy to laugh at a stock interlude Vice who deceives other stock character types, Vice-like traits become more pernicious in a more human form. The prince's interactions with other characters, Falstaff most prominently, highlight the damage that these characteristics can do, especially in the hands of someone who has as much power as the prince.

It is easy to be taken in by the charismatic prince who (like the Vice) lets the audience in on his plans to ingratiate himself with the public by indulging in revelry and then reforming. Falstaff plays an essential role in providing useful commentary on the Prince's actions. But like the other mirror figures discussed in this dissertation, Falstaff is not a reliable spectator. Unlike the other mirror figures discussed, however, Falstaff's observations and interpretations of the Prince's actions as disingenuous are correct. What makes Falstaff unreliable—as scholars and audiences alike have observed—is his penchant for drinking, thieving, and other lewd behavior. Furthermore, Falstaff sometimes does not seem to believe or recognize the truth behind his interpretation of

Hal. Thus, audience members may be quick to dismiss Falstaff's conclusions about the prince in order to make their own. Although in this case the unreliable mirror figure makes accurate assessments, the audience's lack of trust in Falstaff still creates the same dramaturgy of participation and insists that the spectators must reach their own conclusions about Hal, separate from what both Falstaff and Hal push them to believe.

The Ambidexter and His Mirror

Scholars offer a variety of perspectives on these two characters as individuals but more often as a pair and in their relationship with one another. The main question about Falstaff seems to be whether or not he is virtue or vice, good or bad, and the main question about Hal seems to be exactly the same. Examining the characters in these terms, critics often regard Falstaff and Hal as either in a dialogic relationship or in a parasitic one. In some instances, scholars use ideas of the carnivalesque and the juxtaposition of Carnival and Lent to interpret these two. For example, Michael Bristol, heavily influenced by Bakhtin, argues that "Falstaff's girth, his perpetual drinking and eating, his disrespect of time, place, and persona are typical features of Carnival as a festive persona."[125] Bristol goes on to say that Shakespeare juxtaposes Falstaff, representative of Carnival, with Hal, representative of Lent. C.L. Barber similarly describes Falstaff as a king of misrule whose banishment restores order to society: "In *Part One*, Falstaff reigns within his sphere, as Carnival; *Part Two* is very largely taken up with his trial. To put Carnival on trial, run him out of town, and burn or bury him is in

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[125] Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 204.

folk custom a way of limiting, by ritual, the attitudes and impulses set loose by ritual."[126] Francois Laroque, on the other hand, while agreeing that Falstaff is "the champion of the carnivalesque misrule," contends that Shakespeare uses Falstaff's carnivalesque character as "a comic counterpoint to the real battles opposing the rebels to the king," thereby exposing some of the key failures of the court at war.[127] More recently, David Ruiter has rejected the idea that Hal, representing order, ultimately triumphs over Falstaff, representing Carnival. Ruiter argues that Hal's attempts to control the festive atmosphere fail. Instead, "festivity is everpresent" and "the motion it creates in its relationship to order is pendulous."[128] Although scholars like Ruiter have complicated the seemingly simple connection of Hal to order and Falstaff to disorder, the scholars cited above still differentiate the two along those lines.

Other scholars approach these two by discussing their connection to theatricality, which often results in a negative interpretation of Hal.[129] David Boyd insists that Hal, "a man for all seasons, a player for all parts," "moves effortlessly among the various worlds

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[126] C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 213.
[127] Francois Laroque, "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered," in *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Ronald Knowles (New York: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998) 86,87.
[128] David Ruiter, *Shakespeare's Festive History: Feasting, Festivity, Fasting and Lent in the Second Henriad* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 35.
[129] Not all scholars who discuss Hal's theatricality paint him in a negative light and Falstaff in a positive one. Anne Righter, for example, uses Hal's theatricality to reinforce Falstaff's association with disorder: "Hal's connexion with Falstaff, that delightful but perilous symbol of disorder, serves to attach further images of the theatre to the person of the prince." While Hal does disguise himself early in the two plays, Righter believes that once Hal has been crowned king, he leaves behind all associations with the actor. Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 115-116.

of the play," making him "a prince of players."[130] Roy Battenhouse examines Falstaff's theatricality in terms of a holy fool, similar to *Lear*'s fool: "while as 'allowed fool' Falstaff is shamming vices and enacting parodies, his inner intent is a charitable almsgiving of brotherly self-humiliation and fatherly truth-telling."[131] In Battenhouse's view, Falstaff acts as a counselor to the unruly Hal. Ellen M. Caldwell follows Battenhouse when she explains, "Falstaff ruthlessly pricks the prince's conscience about his family's theft of the crown" and "Banishing Jack in *II Henry IV* frees Hal to engrave his counterfeit kingly image upon the final plays of Shakespeare's second tetralogy."[132] More directly, in his chapter on the plays, Stephen Greenblatt points out, "We are continually reminded that Hal is a 'juggler,' a conniving hypocrite, and that the power he both serves and comes to embody is glorified usurpation and theft."[133] Or more simply: "Hal is the prince and principle of falsification."[134]

Other critics use Hal's associations with theatricality to connect him with Machiavellianism. Tim Spiekerman insists that Hal acts according "to the Machiavellian contention that the people desire the appearance of morality in their ruler."[135] Hugh Grady, following Spiekerman, explains that the first part's central theme of

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[130] David Boyd, "The Player Prince: Hal in *Henry IV Part I*," *Sidney Studies* 6 (1980): 5, 16.
[131] Roy Battenhouse, "Falstaff as Parodist and Perhaps Holy Fool," *PMLA* 1 (January 1975): 32.
[132] Ellen M. Caldwell, "'Banish All the Wor(l)d': Falstaff's Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in *I Henry IV*," *Renascence* 59, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 219.
[133] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 41.
[134]Ibid., 42.
[135] Tim Spiekerman, "The Education of Hal: *Henry IV, Parts One* and *Two*" in *Shakespeare's Political Pageant*, ed. Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 121.

counterfeiting, a word repeated throughout the first play and clearly tied to deception and acting,

> is in itself Machiavellian, inasmuch as it asserts the efficacy of appearances over interior substance in the human world: counterfeit coins…appear to be made of precious metal but are not, so that in passing them the counterfeiter profits by the power of appearances and reveals the social conventions that bestow value on circulating money and goods—just as a prince who follows Machiavellian dicta receives the advantages of appearing religious without the disadvantages of actually acting religiously.[136]

Grady suggests that Hal's acting allows him to position himself as a successful Machiavellian ruler. While these arguments connect Hal with deception and acting, none make the critical association of acting and vice. Nor do they recognize Falstaff as a mirror figure whose commentary is necessary for exposing Hal as a Vice. Importantly, Hal lets the audience in on his Machiavellian strategy, which is precisely Vice-like, as is his theatricality. Including the influence of the Vice on Hal's character provides us with another means for reconciling Hal's choices throughout the play and particularly his ultimate rejection of Falstaff. It also provides a fuller understanding of the way Shakespeare used his dramatic heritage to create his characters and explains what happened to the Vice with the development of the professional public theater.

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[136] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity From* Richard II *to* Hamlet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the 1530s, as the interlude developed, the Vice became distinct from the litany of vices that paraded across the earlier interlude and medieval stages. This character "appears in the tradition and endures only for about fifty years, from midway through the rein of Henry VIII until shortly after the establishment of permanent commercial theatres near London."[137] Thus, by the time Hal and Falstaff grace the stage, the Vice no longer did, at least not in his original iterations. The Vice was, as Bernard Spivack explains, "the homiletic artist who, as protagonist of the forces of evil, created and sustained the intrigue of almost every morality play."[138] The previous retinue of vices coalesced into one character because these later interludes

> required the services of a single intriguer, a voluble and cunning schemer, an artist in duplicity, a deft manipulator of human emotions. His operation upon his victim is closet work, close and private. After he succeeds in breaking down the pales and forts of virtue and insinuating himself into the bosom of mankind as servant, counselor, or crony, he brings his subordinates through the breach.[139]

Rather than arguing for or against Hal being a "protagonist of the forces of evil," I want to examine more concrete characteristics of the Vice that Shakespeare reuses with Hal: the duplicity, the manipulation, the "closet work," and the bringing of "subordinates through the breach." Importantly, this description of the Vice aligns the character closely

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[137] John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76-77.
[138] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia UP, 1958),135.
[139] Ibid., 141

with players and acting. John Cox, for example, explains that "'craft' is the hallmark of this character" and that Vices always engage in at least one of the three following activities: "sartorial excess, destructive infighting, and *dissimulation in seeking advantage over others*."[140] Cox connects the Vice back to the tradition of stage devils because "Satan delights in betraying and destroying those who attempt to serve him as they deceive and destroy others."[141] Although Cox does not focus on the Vice's relations to acting, the language he uses to describe them very much reflects language that could be and was used to describe players. George Oppitz-Trotman makes a more direct connection between the Vice's penchant for deception and the rising anxiety about players:

> anxiety around the theatrical process of embodiment was transferred from the Vice to the professional actor, thus allowing an ancient theological phenomenon to define a social reality and expand the scope of dramaturgical uncertainty in early modern England. The Vice figure in its familiar form vanished from the Tudor stage at around the same time that the professional player emerged: the ramifications of this transformation are yet to be properly described.[142]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Paul Whitfield White also discusses the rising antitheatrical tradition in connection to the decline of theater as a vehicle for Protestant

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[140] Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, 79, 61 (my emphasis).
[141] Ibid.,79.
[142] George Oppitz-Trotman, "Staging Vice and Acting Evil: Theatre and Anti-Theatre in Early Modern England," in *The Church and Literature: Studies in Church History* vol. 48, edited by Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2012), 169.

propaganda. I think we can begin to see some of the ramifications of this shift in cultural thinking that Oppitz-Trotman refers to in Hal. While Ambidexter's name immediately connected him with ideas of acting, Hal's connection seems more hidden, which makes sense as the Vice became conflated with the actor. Although the Vice may have disappeared, the spirit of the Vice was still present and alive in the actor who automatically embodied the "uncertainty" that was inherent in the Vice. Thus, it is Hal's connection with the professional player that establishes his main connection to the interlude Vice. And from this most important connection, he embodies the other main characteristics of the Vice: deception, closet work, allowing subordinate vices to wreak havoc.

Hal immediately takes on the role of player in his very first scene of *1Henry IV*. In Act 1 Scene 2, Hal plays three distinctive characters in the space of two hundred lines for three separate groups, accomplishing impressive closet work. When he enters the stage for the first time, he plays the role of a quick-witted, sarcastic friend with Falstaff, a role that he performs throughout both plays all the way up to Falstaff's banishment. Hal presents himself to Falstaff as a fellow in thievery, eager to go purse-snatching with him. Importantly, the audience can immediately see the affection that Falstaff has for Hal by the term Falstaff uses to refer to Hal in this scene, twice calling Hal "sweet wag" (1.2.23, 57). Falstaff continues with similar epithets throughout both plays when talking to the prince. Although Falstaff does hurl repeated insults at the prince and provides harsh commentary on the prince's character, Falstaff does not seem to consciously believe the faults he points to in Hal. Thus, from his first entrance, we can see that Hal has clearly mastered this particular role, and much like Ambidexter, Hal plays the role expected or

wanted by his counterpart. Falstaff takes pleasure in the ribbing that Hal gives him, and of course is happy to return the favor. Additionally, unlike Ambidexter whose acting stems from his need for survival, Hal's deceptions, though sometimes an attempt to win favor as the future king, are often unnecessary mischief making.

Hal plays another role with Poins, that of trickster. As soon as Falstaff leaves, Hal changes roles when Poins presents him with "a jest to execute" (1.2.157). Hal remains hesitant at first but only because he wants to understand how they will manage the stage business. He makes no objections to Poins' plan to stay behind Falstaff and his men and then rob them; rather, he wants to make sure the plan is well-executed: "How shall we part with them in setting forth?"; "'tis like that they will know us by our horses, by our habits, and by every other appointment to be ourselves"; "Yeah, but I doubt they will be too hard for us" (1.2.163, 169-171, 176). Hal interrogates Poins to ensure that he has thought through this role that they will play in order to ensure its success. Hal, like Ambidexter before him, enjoys playing roles but only ones he knows will allow him to succeed in his mission, or at least the mission Poins has created for them. After Poins has provided Hal sufficient reassurance that their play on Falstaff and his band will succeed, Hal agrees but reminds Poins, "Provide us all things necessary and meet me tomorrow night in Eastcheap" (2.2.185-186). The third role Hal plays in this scene follows Poins' exit when Hal delivers his famous soliloquy to the audience, which I will discuss later.

Hal continues to showcase his abilities as an actor after they have succeeded in their trick against Falstaff and returned to the tavern. While waiting on Falstaff and the others to get back, Hal carouses with the drawers and learns to speak their dialect. He tells Poins, "I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour that I can drink with any

tinker in his own language during my life" (2.4.17-19). In other words, Hal is a quick study in the dialect of any profession or class and easily moves into the role that allows him to "call them by their christen names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis" (2.4.7-8). He even convinces them of his fitness to be king:

> They take it already upon their salvation that, though, I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy, and tell me flatly I am not proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy—by the Lord, so they call me!—and when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads of Eastcheap. (2.4.8-14)

Tom Spiekerman acutely observes that "Hal's explanation here sounds a bit like the condescending private words of a populist politician."[143] Hal not only plays the role that these drawers want him to—a prince who knows and understands their language—but in doing so, he is able to get what he wants: their support and confidence in his ability as king. In the same way that Hal speaks Falstaff's "language" in the opening act and Poins' "language" of trickery, Hal is equally able to play a role with and speak the language of any Tom, Dick, or Francis. In fact, this skill seems highly prized by Hal, who brags to Points, "I tell thee, Ned, thou hast lost much honor that thou wert not with me in this action" (2.3.19-20). If we understand Hal's connection to the Vice, Hal's emphasis on his strong acting abilities as a source of honor is unsurprising. Like a Vice, he takes pride in his ability to trick and beguile.

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[143] Spiekerman, "The Education of Hal," 114.

Hal is so confident in his acting abilities that he takes Poins on as his apprentice and attempts to teach him his art. Because Poins has missed Hal's stellar acting job with the drawer, Hal shows Poins how to deceive others: "I prithee do thou stand in some by-room while I question my puny drawer to what end he gave me the sugar; and do thou never leave calling 'Francis' that his take to me may be nothing but 'Anon.' Step aside, and I'll show thee a precedent" (2.4.28-33). Hal's childish prank on the drawer serves as instruction for Poins. After the initial acting lesson, Hal continues to instruct Poins in a short skit about Hotspur and his wife. This skit also provides Hal, "not yet of Percy's mind," the opportunity to practice for the role he will later play when he kills Hotspur, thus transferring Hotspur's position and honors onto himself. In preparation, Hal rehearses a comical scene in which he plays both Hotspur and his wife:

> [Hotspur] …kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want work.' 'Oh, my sweet Harry,' says she 'how many hast thou killed today' 'Give me my roan horse a drench,' says he, and answers 'Some fourteen,' an hour after, 'a trifle, a trifle.' (2.4.101-107).

This caricature of the Percys draws even more attention to Hal's talent for acting, and allows Hal to practice for the role he knows he must eventually play. While the skit may at first seem like harmless fun, that Hal will eventually literally step into the role of Hotspur highlights the measures Hal will take in order to perfect his deceptions. As Hugh Grady suggests, "Hal values the tavern world because it affords him a kind of theatrical space in which he can try out different roles and project different kinds of identities in a

way that the constrained world of the court would never countenance."[144] The low-stakes environment of the tavern does allow Hal rehearsal time, but the roles he plays within the tavern prepare him for roles that he will later play outside in the world of the court. These tavern roles may seem innocuous, but it sets a dangerous precedent for the kind of person (and king) Hal is (and will be). Reading Hal through Falstaff provides the audience with the opportunity to see the potential harmfulness of Hal's theatricality.

Hal's Damnable Iteration and His Corrupted Saint

The third role that Hal plays in the opening scene is for the audience as he attempts to win them over, just as he has won over Falstaff and Poins. Alone on stage, he performs closet work with spectators, ingratiating himself with them by explaining his plan and making them his co-conspirators. Hal's speech provides a rationale for his actions and promises future change:

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyoked humor of your idleness.
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That, when he please again to be himself,
> Being wanted, he may be more wondered at,
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapors that did seem to strangle him.

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[144] Grady, *Shakpeseare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne*, 164.

If all the year were playing holidays,

To sport would be as tedious as to work;

But when they seldom come, they wished-for come,

And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.

So when this loose behavior I throw off

And pay the debt I never promisèd,

By how much better than my word I am,

By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;

And like bright metal on a sullen ground,

My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,

Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes

Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,

Redeeming time when men think least I will.

The prince will allow Falstaff and the others to indulge in idleness, and he will participate with them in this idleness so that when he changes his behavior upon receiving the crown, he will look like an even better king to the citizens of England. Hal, like an astute ambidexter, reads his audience and adjusts his role accordingly, or as Matthew H. Wikander explains, "When Hal says, 'I know you all,' the actor speaks through the character directly to us. Hal knows what we want—a fully fledged vision of a triumphant,

true prince—and he knows how to give it to us."[145] He provides audience members with an exciting and charismatic protagonist and promises them that although he may seem like a ruffian right now, he has a larger plan at work, which will be revealed in due time. Thus Hal provides the "intrigue" that Spivack describes and that the audience wants.

Furthermore, his rhetoric directly connects him to acting, and he works to gain the trust of the audience by admitting that he is an actor. He states that he is both "imitating" and "falsifying" (2.2.191, 205). Hal seems to claim that his acting will come to an end once his reformation is complete, but the language he uses undermines this insistence when he says, "And like bright metal on a sullen ground, / My reformation, glittering o'er my fault, / Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off" (2.1.206-209). Hal furthers his connection with players by using comparative and surface level terms: "like bright metal" and "show more goodly." The implication is that his transformation will be genuine but the metaphor—that he will *seem*—betrays this intention. Hal uses rhetoric similar to Wit from *Wit and Science* when Wit looks into the mirror, except that unlike Wit, who does not readily recognize the change he has undergone, Hal purposefully and strategically plans for his transformation and plans to seem "like" and "throw off" his bad behavior.

The audience should be even more apt to recognize the duplicity of Hal's rhetoric because of Falstaff, who raises speculation about Hal's character earlier in the scene. The varied interpretations of Falstaff suggest that he is in fact a difficult character to read and understand, but his position in the plays, as Hal's almost-constant companion, allows him

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[145] Matthew H. Wikander, "The Protean Prince Hal," *Comparative Drama* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1992-93): 299.

to provide a running commentary on or an interpretation of Hal's character. In this way, then, he becomes a mirror figure for spectators who also work to interpret Hal and anticipate his career as king. Like the other mirror figures discussed in this dissertation, Falstaff ensures that the audience is not easily overtaken by Hal's charm. His character insists that the audience remain engaged in actively interpreting the prince's character. In the moments when Falstaff provides a more extensive analysis of Hal's actions, rather than when he is name calling, he shows his ability to expose Hal as a Vice-like deceiver.

When Falstaff first appears, he offers his opinions of the Prince and a warning to spectators that they should take with them into Hal's soliloquy. After Hal and Falstaff have bantered back and forth for a while, Hal gets the best of Falstaff, at which point Falstaff responds,

> Oh, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. (1.2.89-94)

Falstaff points to Hal's "art" and his "iteration," both words that characterize Hal's ability to manipulate language and his artistry in fulfilling the different roles that he plays. These words also anticipate Hal's self-descriptors as "imitator" and "falsifier." Furthermore, although Falstaff's suggestion that he is one of the good people Hal has corrupted seems rather dubious, it likely has been the protection Hal provides for Falstaff that allows him to get away with his thievery and other crimes. Indeed, this is yet another characteristic of the Vice: "he brings his subordinates [in this case Falstaff and the other tavern dwellers] through the breach" so that they are free to practice their vice behavior.

Immediately after Falstaff assesses Hal, Hal asks Falstaff to participate in purse snatching with him and Falstaff readily agrees. While we may blame Hal for allowing his subordinate through the breach to practice one of his favorite pastimes, this moment clearly does not show Falstaff to be the most morally upstanding character. Nor does he seem genuine about his desire to reform, making it easy for audience members to dismiss Falstaff's assessment of Hal in order to make their own. Still, Falstaff correctly judges and describes Hal's nature as a deceiver. Thus, even if the audience doubts Falstaff, Shakespeare is able to provide the suggestion to the audience that Hal should not be trusted. Furthermore, because Falstaff's speech precedes Hal's soliloquy discussed above, viewers can take this description of Hal's art and iteration with them into the prince's soliloquy. While they may not believe Falstaff at first, he has at least begun to connect Hal with his Vice-like qualities.

Additionally, watching the prince and Falstaff interact before the soliloquy makes Hal's Vice-like qualities more mean spirited and provides the audience with more reasons to approach Hal's promised reform with apprehension. It becomes "difficult to reconcile Hal's cold plan with his evident joy in the presence of Falstaff."[146] The relationship between Hal and Falstaff, while complicated, seems to provide both men with much joy. The good-natured ribbing and almost constant companionship throughout the first play makes Tim Spiekerman "wonder[ ] whether Hal has not invented a grand rationale for his unorthodox preference for low company."[147] When Hal, then, addresses the audience and uses his Vice-like "damnable iteration," the audience becomes unsettled with the way Hal

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[146] Tim Spiekerman, "The Education of Hal," 114.
[147] Ibid.

describes what seems to be his true friend. Hal suggests that he is playing a role, but audiences recognize a genuine affection between the two, muddling the distinction between acting and authenticity. As the interlude Vice became more popular, he took over the dramatic action, leaving less time on stage for the character he was deceiving and thus less time for the audience to connect with the deceived. In the interludes, the Vice and his target of deception lacked any kind of substantial relationship. In most cases, when the Vice approaches his target, the two seem to have never met, and as a result, the trickery lacks any personal malice. The Vice is simply being a Vice whereas the personal relationship between Hal and Falstaff changes the way audiences see this interaction. Falstaff has won favor with audiences for centuries. He was so popular in fact that legend suggests Shakespeare wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for Elizabeth who "having been so pleased with Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, wished to see him in love."[148] Thus, through Falstaff and the prince's relationship, the audience can begin to foresee the consequences of both the Vice and the deceived in a more human form.

The Play Extempore

We see Hal and Falstaff continue to play the Vice and mirror figure throughout the first play, particularly in the "play extempore" (2.4.76-77). This scene provides both Hal and Falstaff the ideal opportunity to fulfill their respective roles: Hal practices his acting skills and Falstaff provides commentary on Hal's skills. Hal is adept enough in his acting, though, that he can play the role that Falstaff wants—devoted friend—while also

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[148] David Bevington, Introduction to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 5e (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 256.

reinforcing the role that he played for the audience in his soliloquy—prince poised for reform. The famous play extempore that Falstaff proposes in Act 2 Scene 4 allows Hal to try out not one but two different roles: king and prince.[149] Falstaff says to Hal, "thou wilt be horribly chid tomorrow when thou comest to thy father. If thou love me, practice an answer" (2.3.369-371). Hal consents to practice his answer, as Falstaff has requested, and it is Hal who suggests turning this exercise into a full-blown play: "Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the particulars of my life" (2.2.372-373). After Hal's suggestion, Falstaff fully embraces the idea of the skit and determines to play his character "in King Cambyses' vein." Falstaff's acting abilities, however, are not up to par with the prince's expectations. Hal critiques Falstaff's playing of King Henry and decides to show him how a more skillful actor would play that role: "Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father" (2.4.428-429). In fact, Hal does do a better job capturing King Henry's thoughts about Hal and Falstaff than Falstaff did. Despite being deposed as King, Falstaff seems to enjoy himself throughout the skit as he gets to indulge in the bombastic, vain rhetoric that he so enjoys. Thus, Hal appeases Falstaff's desire to have him rehearse the role that he will later play for his father. At the end of their skit, however, Hal makes his ominous promise to "[b]anish plump Jack" in his

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[149] Critics have rightly pointed out that although Hal plays two roles in this skit, he essentially plays versions of himself. Thomas F. van Laan, for example, says, "Unlike Falstaff, Hal does not really do any acting. Both of Falstaff's roles compel him to play alien figures…Hal, on the other hand, first plays himself, and then his father, the king he is already practising to become." While I agree that Hal plays versions of himself in this instance, I do not think it is insignificant that he practices these different roles. The very act of rehearsing or practicing suggests that Hal does in fact require some acting skills, even to play himself or his future self. See Thomas F. van Laan, *Role Playing in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 148.

concise conclusion, "I do. I will." Falstaff perhaps misses this statement as Bardolph's running in distracts him. If he does hear Hal's statement, he does not respond. But these four simple words give the audience what they want: further confirmation that Hal's grand reformation is coming. The audience should also recognize even more now that this reformation comes with a cost. Because of the audience's affiliation with Falstaff, this ominous "I do. I will." cautions the audience against being too hopeful for Hal's reformation as it necessarily means the harsh rejection of a beloved character.

While Falstaff may unknowingly or unconsciously draw out the "I do. I will." from Hal for the audience's sake, the play extempore also provides Falstaff an opportunity to provide a more direct interpretation of the prince for the audience.[150] Falstaff rivals Hal in his playing abilities as Falstaff takes on the role of the prince. Although Falstaff cannot offer a strong portrayal of the king—perhaps because he does not understand the king as well as he understands the prince—he perfectly plays Hal. When Hal-as-Henry-IV levies accusations about Falstaff to Falstaff-as-Hal, Falstaff-as-Hal responds,

> But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know…If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned…banish

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[150] Harry Berger suggests that Falstaff is well aware of the role he plays: "He knows from the beginning both that Harry has chosen him to play the role of misleader and that his misrule must have an end." Berger further argues that Falstaff does not respond to the "I do. I will." because he does not need to; he has already anticipated it and wanted it. While I am not convinced that Falstaff is fully conscious of the role Hal wants him to play, it does seem that Shakespeare uses Falstaff in this moment to make Hal admit his intentions. See Berger, "The Prince's Dog," 41.

not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company—
banish plump Jack, and banish all the world." (2.4.461-475)

Falstaff begins by recalling his earlier statement that Hal is the one who has brought him to wickedness when he suggests that he and Hal are equally bad. From what we have seen so far in the play, we can substantiate Falstaff's claim: Hal participates in all of the same lewd behavior that Falstaff does, arguably more if we consider the trick Hal plays on Fastlaff at Gadshill. He then goes on to defend drinking and making merry. And he insists, emphasizing this point by repeating it twice, that banishing Falstaff would rid Hal of his favorite companion. The response that Falstaff-as-Hal provides differs decidedly from the conversation that the real Hal later has with his father in which he promises to "redeem all this [his bad behavior] on Percy's head" (3.2.132). But these two alternatives provide the audience an opportunity to compare them. Hal promises his father—as he promises the audience—that he will reform his ways and make him proud. The audience sees that while Hal does in fact defeat Hotspur at the end of the play, he continues his association with Falstaff and the others well into the second play. Hal is clearly reluctant to fully embrace his reform and his new role. The answer that Falstaff provides seems much more accurate to what Hal actually does. Hal continues to be merry, to indulge in sack and sugar, and keep Falstaff as his plump company. Falstaff, then, provides the audience with a better interpretation of Hal than Hal himself. But the audience is likely aware that Falstaff is also rehearsing the answer that he *wants* Hal to give, not necessarily an accurate one. This, in turn, makes Falstaff an unreliable mirror figure as his interpretations are potentially overshadowed by his personal investment in the situation.

Still, Hal confirms his desire to keep Falstaff as his company immediately after the skit ends and again after speaking with his father. When their improvisation exercise ends, the sheriff arrives looking for Falstaff because of his involvement in the robbery, and Hal covers for Falstaff. Later, after making promises to his father, Hal immediately returns to the company of Falstaff and friends. Thus, Hal's four words at the end of his role as Henry IV seem hollow: "Hal's 'I will' is no more than a summary of his soliloquy at the end of I.ii…[I]f Hal's words 'I do' promise a present change in his actions, as at first they seem to do, the promise remains unfulfilled."[151] Thus, the audience sees Hal constantly delaying his reformation, a sign that Falstaff is correct in assuming that Hal enjoys his company. And for this very reason, Hal's words make the audience even more apprehensive about his reformation. Falstaff's commentary helps expose both Hal's constant delaying of this glorious reformation he has promised the audience and the consequences that this reformation must necessarily involve.

In the remaining scenes, Hal attempts to play the transformed prince for the audience, but Falstaff is there to remind the audience both that the prince constantly delays this reformation and that the way he is going about the reformation may not be what the audience actually wants. Like the audience, Hal's father wants to see him reform, and Hal plays the role his father wants when the two are together. When Hal saves his father from Douglas, we see the prince succeed in his role when Henry tells him, "Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion" (5.4.48). But his ultimate triumph comes in killing Hotspur. In killing Hotspur, he is able to supplant Hotspur and literally take

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[151] Paul A. Gottschalk, "Hal and the 'Play Extempore' in *I Henry IV*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 606.

Hotspur's life/role from him. As Hotspur dies, he transfers all of his honors onto Hal: "I better brook the loss of brittle life / Than those proud titles thou hast won of me" (5.4.77-78). But Hal allows Falstaff to take the credit for killing Hotspur when he no longer needs this honor to please his father; he has already successfully played that role when he saves the king from Douglas.

Instead, Hal uses the moments after killing Hotspur to further persuade the audience of his reformation. He, then, allows Falstaff to take the honor, undermining his persuasive attempts. When Hotspur dies, Hal is alone on stage—or at least he thinks he is as Falstaff's "dead" body is also on stage—and thus alone again with the audience. The memorial to Hotspur he provides suggests that Hal has matured through this process of war. He recognizes Hotspur as a "great heart" and despite his traitorous activities, he hopes, "Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave, / But not remembered in thy epitaph" (5.4.86, 99-100). Hal then turns to Falstaff who appears to be dead and delivers a memorial for him. This eulogy is not nearly as flattering. He says of Falstaff, "O, I should have a heavy miss of thee / If I were much in love with vanity. / Death hath not struck so fat a deer today / Though many dearer, in this bloody fray" (5.4.104-107). The insults that Hal levies against Falstaff make his choice, less than 50 lines later, to allow Falstaff to take credit for Hotspur's death seem surprising. But if we continue to think of Hal's connection to the Vice, we can see that he plays one role for the audience and another for Falstaff. Circling back to his first interaction with the audience and to his promise—"I do. I will."—to banish Falstaff, Hal performs in this role for the audience once again. He seems to fulfill his promise to change as he honors the noble aspects of Hotspur's personality and rejects Falstaff for the first time. That Hal believes Falstaff to be dead

makes fulfilling his promise to the audience much easier. He does not even have to hurt Falstaff's feelings doing it.

Unfortunately for Hal, Falstaff is not in fact dead, and he must switch roles again when Falstaff resurrects. After denouncing Falstaff to the audience, he allows Falstaff to take credit for killing Hotspur, saying, "For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have" (5.4.155-156). This quick change in attitude might be surprising had we not seen Hal seamlessly switching between roles in the earlier scenes. In his resurrection, Falstaff shows audience members that they are deceived if they believe Hal has truly reformed. Thus, at the end of the first play, Hal's promised reformation remains part of a role that he plays in his attempts to win over the audience, and it is Falstaff who provides the necessary commentary for the audience to recognize Hal's Vice-like attributes. It is not until the second play that Hal finally fulfills his promises and that the audience becomes fully aware that this promised reformation does not have the glorious end that Hal promised and that the audience had hoped for.

Becoming King and Rejecting the Mirror Figure

In *Part 2*, we see Falstaff continue his running commentary on the king and hinting to the audience members that they should actively work to interpret Hal rather than accept his or other characters' analysis. When the Chief Justice says to Falstaff, "You have misled the youthful Prince," Falstaff responds, "The young Prince hath misled me. I am the fellow with the great belly, and he my dog" (1.2.144-145). Falstaff's statement here turns out to be prophetic when the prince banishes Falstaff. Although Hal does act as though he loves Falstaff throughout the first two plays and there seems to be

something genuine in his actions, Falstaff's banishment shows the audience how callous Hal will be in his transformation to the role of king. When Falstaff gets accused of misleading the Prince into thievery and other vices, Falstaff recognizes, though perhaps without fully understanding, that he is the one who is being misled. Falstaff's unconscious prophecy provides foreshadowing to Hal's ultimate public rejection of him. It should also remind the audience that Hal does not simply "uphold / The unyoked humor of [Falstaff's] idleness" but consciously and willingly misleads him. While he may be a criminal and a drunk, Hal's mistreatment of Falstaff is unjustified when Hal himself participates in their lewd activities and seems to enjoy it. Falstaff's statement that the Prince misleads continues to build skepticism in audience members about Hal and reluctance in their desire for him to reform.

We then, of course, see at the end of the second play the culmination of this misleading when Hal rejects and banishes Falstaff. Falstaff's disbelief in the legitimacy of the new king's edict suggests to the audience that they too should be skeptical of Hal's transformation. After Hal delivers the banishment, he exits and leaves Falstaff alone with Master Shallow. Instead of being upset or feeling betrayed, as one might expect, Falstaff explains to Master Shallow, "Do not you grieve at this. I shall be sent for in private to him. Look you, he must seem thus to the world" (5.5.78-79). And he insists again a few lines later, "This that you heard was but a color" (5.5.86-87). Falstaff knows that Hal "needs a public occasion, a ritual of exorcism, to dramatize his reformation."[152] Falstaff essentially claims that he expected this reaction (though his excitement earlier in the

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[152] Berger, "The Prince's Dog," 41.

scene to see the new king betrays his apparent lack of surprise). We could certainly consider Falstaff's statements to be naïve; Falstaff does not want to believe that the Prince would betray him in this way and therefore refuses to believe it. And in this case, we see through Falstaff's naivety the damage that Hal does to Falstaff's character. Audience members would perhaps eventually learn from *Henry V* that Hal never does call Falstaff in for a private meeting and that Falstaff dies from a broken heart.[153] This rejection of a beloved character shows the audience the true cost of Hal's role playing and scheming. Unlike in interludes, when the Vice is often a comic character who unleashes his evil on characters that hardly even appear on stage, Hal unleashes his evil on a character not only loved by the audience but seemingly loved at some points by Hal himself. As a result the arrival of the promised reform is a disappointment. The grand and wonderful "throwing off" of his "loose behavior" lacks any kind of satisfaction.

And yet Falstaff's seemingly naïve assessment of the situation rings true given everything both Falstaff and the audience know about Prince Hal. Falstaff fully understands the importance of a king's public role and recognizes that Hal, in his new role, must play to the people in a particular way. Furthermore, Falstaff has seen Hal play this role before. Accompanying Hal to war, Falstaff sees the role that Hal plays when he is with his father and how different that role is than the one he plays in the tavern. And every time Hal has played that role with his father, he always comes back to the tavern

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[153] In Act 2, Scene 1 of *Henry V*, Mistress Quickly describes Falstaff's state: "Ah, poor heart, he is so shaked of a burning quotidian tertian that it is most lamentable to behold" (118-120) and Pistol then says, "His heart is fracted and corroborate" (124). See William Shakespeare, *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare 5e*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004).

and returns to the boisterous role he plays for Falstaff. While making the transition to king does mark a more significant change than any of the other role changing moments we have seen in Hal's life so far, the evidence shows that every time Hal "reforms," he is actually only playing a different role, and he continues to switch back and forth given the situation. Falstaff's belief that Hal will send for a private conference with him does not seem unfounded. Spectators may think Falstaff is naïve for expecting reprieve, but insofar as they were expecting that reprieve too, they would be naïve as well. Falstaff's running commentary throughout the play should help the audience avoid this naivety as his constant opining on Hal insists that the audience must not complacently accept—or at this point even desire—Hal's transformation.

Without Falstaff as constant commentator, it would be easy for Hal to win over the audience. Anyone who has attended a performance of either play knows that Hal is most often charismatic, attractive, and charming. It is easy to be caught in his snare. Of course this is precisely what a Vice does: he works his way into the conscience of the characters and the audience by telling them what they want to hear. Shakespeare, however, gives the audience Falstaff to complicate Hal's charming nature. Falstaff over and over insists that viewers remember Hal as an actor and deceiver. As I said in the beginning of this chapter, I do not want to argue that Hal *is* a Vice but rather is *like* a Vice and marked with Vice characteristics; he is not, as Harry Berger Jr. points out, one of Shakespeare's "villainous *platea* addicts as Richard III and Iago."[154] But it is precisely Hal's more complicated nature that makes the banishment of Falstaff so disturbing to

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[154] Berger, "The Prince's Dog," 49.

audiences. Hal does not contain the malicious malignity of Iago. In fact, it is in his interactions with Falstaff that the prince seems most likeable and most relatable. But, as Tim Spiekerman, observes, "Hal was born to be king: politics is his fate."[155] I would amend this statement slightly to say that Hal was born to *play* king, and that he knows precisely how to play this part, a part which cannot possibly include the likes of Falstaff. While the audience may not be shocked at Falstaff's banishment, it certainly causes spectators to reevaluate their confidence in Hal as a king.

[155] Spiekerman, "The Education of Hal," 120.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Along with other interlude traditions, the Vice character disappears from the stage around the time that Falstaff and Prince Hal appear on it. Although the Vice, in its original form, was no longer needed by later Renaissance playwrights and instead became part of more complicated and complex characters, this transition should not be considered evidence that interludes were not as sophisticated as their later counterparts. Interlude drama is much more than a mixed bag of primitive tropes that playwrights like Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson pick from and elevate to dramatic excellence. As an integral part of a volatile social and political landscape, sixteenth-century drama necessitated that the audience be more engaged with ideas and concepts than individual characters. This dissertation has sought to examine one of the most sophisticated tropes interlude playwrights employ to engage with their audience and create meaning in their plays. The use of mirror figures did more than simply make the audience think hard about what they were seeing; it created a sophisticated dramaturgy that allowed playwrights to interrogate the very medium they were using and to invite the audience to participate in their interrogation. This makes these plays, in their entirety and not just in the moments I have discussed, exercises in metatheatricality of the kind Erika Lin describes.

These plays urge the audience to be cautious when considering the action of players on stage, not because these playwrights did not believe in the medium they were using but because they wanted an audience that participated in the meaning making. The very condition of the Tudor hall further encouraged this dramaturgy. In close and confined quarters, the actors and audience shared an intimate space. The lack of

separation between players and actors is apparent in plays like *Fulgens and Lucrece* when characters are out mingling among the audience. But we should keep in mind that until the second half of the sixteenth century no plays reference raised platforms, and because of the dearth of stage directions we cannot be certain that all plays after this moment would have used platforms.[156] It is likely that, for all of the interludes I have discussed, the actors and the audience were (literally) on the same level. The playwrights capitalized on this intimacy by creating discomfort in the audience as players, particularly the mirror figures, spoke to and moved amongst them.

The mirror figures that I examine all have a very close connection to players and playing. This is most obvious, perhaps, with Ambidexter and Falstaff who can be characterized primarily by their theatricality. But Wit talks about how he "plays" the fool for the audience and how he is decked "like a very ass," as indeed the boy playing Wit was playing a fool and was dressed like an ass. A and B, too, change characters with such frequency that it is hard to keep up, much the same way that actors—particularly traveling troupes with multiple plays in their repertoire—change parts. This emphasis on players does not necessarily condemn the profession. After all, playwrights can only condemn their own medium so much. Rather, it forces the audience to see themselves as players. The mirroring works both ways: the mirror figures function as spectators and thus the audience must see themselves as players.

The constant reminders that the characters are players also further the unreliability of the mirror figures. Actors are always deceiving; they are always pretending. Even the

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[156] See T.W. Craik, *The Interlude Stage: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1958), 10.

most trustworthy and reliable character on stage must be doubted to a certain extent. The specific emphasis on mirror figures as players does not, however, create a larger gap between audience and actor. Rather it draws the two closer as the mirror must work both ways. If certain players are mirrors for spectators, audience members must see themselves as players. As spectators consider themselves as players, they must consider the relationship between acting and authenticity in their own lives and in how they respond to or interact with the social and political questions these plays address.

While each of these plays does indeed tackle essential social and political questions, the mirror figures make these plays more about grappling with how to make meaning out of what we see than about any one particular topical issue. That is not to underplay the importance of these issues or to suggest that these playwrights were not concerned about them, but rather to suggest that these plays have much more at stake than delivering a single message on any single topic. By focusing on *how* plays present topics, playwrights urge spectators to consider the effect the medium of drama can have on the way they perceive these very issues. Playwrights ask the audience to work with them through this slippery and complex journey of live theater.

This sophisticated inquiry into the medium of performance requires the use of well-known tropes and stock characters. Although Shakespeare is known for his practically human characters, this same kind of attention to character in the interludes would take away from the emphasis on theatrical interrogation. By repeating and reusing familiar character types, playwrights can better call attention to the changes that they make. Ambidexter sticks out as unique among Vices precisely because the audience is so familiar with his character type. Furthermore, Preston can draw the audience's attention

to Ambidexter by surrounding him with more recognizable character types, much the same way Medwall surrounds A and B with stock Roman types. This use of characters focuses the audience on how drama works rather than on the psychology or personal history of an individual.

That Shakespeare reuses parts of the Vice and the mirror figure suggests how powerful this tradition was. Although Shakespeare makes more subtle use of the Vice characteristics within a much more complex character, Shakespeare's drama has a decidedly different purpose than his earlier counterparts. While Shakespeare's drama did work to address pertinent political and social issues, Shakespeare seems equally concerned with creating individual characters as he is with interrogating these issues. While the balance that Shakespeare creates may be more palatable for modern readers, the force of interludes in their own period should not be underestimated. As David Bevington has pointed out when discussing the tyrant plays, Elizabeth's ascension to the throne brought stability that was not as present with the previous Tudor monarchs.[157] The stability allowed for playwrights, like Shakespeare writing toward the end of Elizabeth's reign, the ability to balance major issues with individual character development. That interlude playwrights did not work to strike this same balance should not mark them as less sophisticated but should instead alert modern readers to the fact that the aims of interlude drama differed decidedly from the drama of the public theaters. And that interlude playwrights were able in their own sophisticated way to create a dramaturgy that grabbed their audiences and forced them into the world of the play.

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[157] David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 156.

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Virginia Murphy was born in Charlotte, North Carolina to John and Hunter Murphy and older sister, Elizabeth. She attended Myer Park High School, where she earned an International Baccalaureate diploma and discovered her love of English and History. She began her college career at Wake Forest University, but transferred to UNC-Chapel Hill sophomore year. She graduated from UNC with a Bachelor's of Arts in English (with honors) and History (with distinction). Heading further south immediately after graduating, Virginia began the Hudson Strode Program for Renaissance Studies at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL. It was at Alabama (and thanks to a wonderful advisor, Tricia McElroy) that Virginia discovered interludes, which became the center of her academic interests. After completing a thesis and graduating from UA, she began the Ph.D. program at the University of Tennessee. Virginia completed this degree, under the advisement of Heather Hirschfeld, in May 2014.