

ENTER THE CARNIVAL:

CARNIVALESQUE SEMIOTICS IN EARLY TUDOR
MORAL INTERLUDES

SYLWIA BOROWSKA-SZERSZUN

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*For my Mum, who taught me to love books
and without whom I would never be who I am*

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Introduction

The story of the term “interlude,” or *interludium*, is a lengthy and confusing one. It starts with E.K. Chambers, who in his monumental *The Mediaeval Stage* identifies a “typical interlude” as a play that “deals with a short episode in about a thousand lines, and could be handled in an hour or so” (Chambers 1903: 188), often to provide a dramatic interval in the course of banquets or other entertainments. Developing in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, interludes are seen by Chambers as an intermediary form progressing from and eventually replacing medieval religious drama (especially morality plays) to be finally followed by “the magic stage of Shakespeare” (Chambers 1903: 181). According to Chambers, such a straightforward evolutionary movement happens at several levels: thematically the plays progress from religious to secular issues; spatially they migrate from churches to street markets, banqueting halls and, finally, professional theatres; and in terms of acting they move from the hands of the clergy to the citizens and then to professional actors. In short, in this narrative medieval religious drama had to die out to give way to a truly secular humanist theatre, and the interlude is just “a kind of missing link or genetic freak of literary history, of interest only because it explained the origins of a more highly valued form of literature” (Dunlop 2007: 3).

Contemporary theories tend to dismiss such a Darwinian perspective developed by Chambers and others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, favouring the view that various theatrical phenomena co-existed in the period. Yet this statement alone does not solve all the problems and the term remains muddy. Lawrence M. Clopper suggests the name interlude could denote a plethora of activities, many of them not related to drama at all, for example musical performances and various forms of entertainment or amusements. Moreover, he observes that as the sixteenth century continued, the phrase

“plays and interludes” was often used as a “catch-all expression for every kind of drama” (Clopper 2001: 17). The presence of the term in the full title of a given play is not particularly helpful in the discussion as on the one hand we have *Enterlude of Youth*, which on the basis of its subject matter can be classified as a morality play, and on the other hand *Enterlude of Godely Queene Hester*, which is based on biblical narrative but in fact more concerned with secular themes. The criterion of brevity of the plays is not particularly informative either as both short debates by John Heywood and lengthy (over 4500 lines) *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estatis* by Sir David Lindsay are commonly categorized as interludes.

Chambers’ definition is repeated by Glynne Wickham (1985), who nevertheless includes both religious and secular plays in his anthology, entitled *English Moral Interludes*. Greg Walker (2000) perceives the interludes as a ‘subgenre’ of the morality play, again differentiating between them on the basis of whether they deal with spiritual or lay matters. Other critics indicate performance circumstances as a more important factor for dividing the plays than the religious/secular distinction, and thus ‘stage plays’ acted out outdoors on a sort of scaffold are perceived to be different from ‘interludes’ performed indoors. This assumption is made by Katie Normington, who emphasizes that ‘interludes’ (including e.g. *Mankind* and Heywood’s *Play of Weather*) are more ‘private’ by nature, more selective in terms of the audience, requiring fewer actors and more ‘mobile’, i.e. easily adaptable to different conditions (Normington 2009: 113-115). In his reference guide, Darryll Grantley (2004) goes even further using the term ‘dramatic interlude’ to refer to any non-cycle drama in the period of 1300-1580 and encompassing within its scope the plays that are more traditionally designated as morality plays, saint plays, farces, early history plays, and neoclassical drama; yet apart from an attempt to present a wide range of dramaturgical, technical, historical, textual or thematic perspectives, which is indeed useful for anyone interested in the drama of the period, the reason for this decision

remains somewhat unclear. Liliana Sikorska, including in her study both moralities and interludes of 1350-1517, employs the term ‘moral play’ to refer to both religious and secular plays based on *psychomachia* and the pattern of man’s pilgrimage through life, and convincingly argues that all of them “reflect the dramatized penitential ethos, . . . provide models of conduct, ... [and] reflect social ideologies of the times” (Sikorska 2002: 21).

Even this brief, and by no means exhaustive, account proves that the problems with generic distinctions applied to medieval and Tudor drama are difficult – if not impossible – to fully resolve. Of the plays chosen for analysis in this book – *Mundus et Infans*, *Youth*, *Wit and Science* by John Redford, *Fulgens and Lucre*s by Henry Medwall, *A Play of Love* and *Johan Johan* by John Heywood, and *Interlude of Hester* – the first two have been sometimes classified as ‘late’ morality plays due to the motif of *psychomachia* and religious orientation. In terms of length and staging requirements these two dramas, however, bear more affinity to the remaining plays than to *The Castle of Perseverance*, while their structural pattern has been successfully adopted not only in *Wit and Science* that will be discussed here, but also in John Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*, John Rastell’s *Interlude of the Four Elements*, or Henry Medwall’s *Nature*.

My understanding of the interlude has been influenced in particular by Jean-Paul Debax (2007), who insists on performance circumstances in a broadly understood ‘Tudor Hall’ (court, noble household, university, town guild, etc.) as an essential factor that unites otherwise diverse (both thematically and structurally) plays. This approach stresses the importance of reception as, in Tudor Hall, the audience were not “isolated individuals, but constituted a group of interlinked participants,” who met in a limited space, which created a “feeling of proximity and intimacy” (Debax 2007:31); thus the interlude is “deeply rooted in a relationship of complicity” (Debax 2007: 32). The second characteristic feature of the interlude is for Debax the principle of hierarchy, permeating both secular and Church

organization, seen as the reflection of heavenly orders, and manifesting itself at all possible levels of society and governing interpersonal relationships – between rulers and their subjects, masters and servants, men and women, old and young (Debax 2007: 36). This hierarchical organization is revealed in the interludes that in this definition are seen as a sort of “contested territory”, to borrow Claire Sponsler’s (1997: 162-163) concept, in which “two opposed voices make themselves heard” (Debax 2007: 42).

The processes of making meaning in such a contested territory may be better understood in the context of Bakhtin’s theory of culture seen as a polyphonic arena, in which centrifugal and centripetal forces constantly clash. I would suggest that the texts discussed here, whether they are preoccupied with religious or secular matters and irrespective of their structural pattern, rely to a great extent on constant juxtapositions of ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’, ‘authoritarian’ and ‘flexible’, etc., reminiscent of Bakhtin’s binary opposition between carnival and Lent – without, however, making any *a priori* assumptions as to the liberating or transgressive power of carnivalesque laughter. My reading of the plays also relies on the assumption that they have been shaped both by medieval perception of the world and the emerging humanism connected with the Renaissance, yet I refuse to accept a sharp division into medieval and renaissance plays similarly to John D. Cox and David Scott Castan (1997), Liliana Sikorska (2002) or Fiona S. Dunlop (2007). Consequently, I have opted for the term ‘early Tudor’ in the title of this study to refer to the group of plays under consideration in order to avoid any preconceived associations with either the Middle Ages or Renaissance. Obviously, the terms ‘medieval’ and ‘renaissance’ or ‘humanist’ will appear throughout my discussion, but they are devoid of any evaluative meaning, such as ‘primitive’ and ‘underdeveloped’ versus ‘innovative’ and ‘complex’. Similarly, this is not to suggest that what we usually refer to as ‘the medieval’ is permeated by the spirit of carnivalesque juxtapositions to a greater or

to a lesser extent than what we traditionally associate with ‘the humanist’.

In **Chapter One** I delineate the main premises of the critical perspective adopted in this book and called ‘carnavalesque semiotics’. The term, however, is applied not so much to denote a very strictly defined theoretical position as to signify a certain approach, or interpretative practice, that is versatile enough to encompass all plays. This position goes in line with Daniel Chandler’s comment on the nature of semiotics:

Other than as ‘the study of signs’ there is relatively little agreement amongst semioticians themselves as to the scope and methodology of semiotics. Although Saussure had looked forward to the day when semiotics would become part of the social sciences, semiotics is still a relatively loosely defined critical practice rather than a unified, fully-fledged analytical method or theory. (Chandler 2002: 27)

Therefore, those who look for a clearly-delineated formal system, in which dramatic and theatrical signs will be meticulously categorized, might be left dissatisfied with this nomenclature. The decision to situate the present work within the conceptual framework of semiotics has been primarily motivated by the fact that a more traditional theory of the literary text, i.e. poetics, seems to be too narrow a field to describe dramatic texts, which, as I demonstrate, incorporate both verbal expression and its potential stage realizations.

Situating the analysis within the context of semiotics also allows us to perceive the interludes in a wider perspective of the semiosphere, as understood by Yuri Lotman, to which they inherently belong. The concepts of carnival, carnivalization, and dialogism, also examined in this chapter, allow us to see different manifestations of this semiosphere as organized by the same code, which relies on hierarchical oppositions and carnivalesque reversals of values. The code permeates the spirit of both the official and unofficial spheres of religious and social life, art, and literature of the Middle Ages and continues to inform the plays written in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth

century. To put it shortly, instead of following a purely structuralist line of semiotics that focuses on classifying or theorizing semiotic systems, I will try to trace how these systems operate to produce meaning, which is necessarily shaped by different ideologies – social, religious, political and gender ones – functioning in a particular historical time and relevant to particular communities.

Chapter Two examines the meanings created by the juxtaposition of old age and youth in three plays based on the allegorical pattern of *psychomachia*, i.e. *Mundus et Infans*, *Youth*, and *Wit and Science*. The first two belong to the corpus of late medieval religious plays, and as such feature an allegorical battle over the human soul between the personified virtues, associated with the dominant ideology of the church, and the vices, embodying the spirit of the carnival. Interestingly, in both of them the social dimension of the sins of the body is emphasized, the wrongdoing being perceived as the transgression committed by young protagonists not only against religious norms, but also against the standards of a healthy community. John Redford's *Wit and Science* is strictly secular and yet it embraces the concept of the fight between good and evil and the temptation-fall-restitution-to-grace paradigm to raise issues of self-development and education. In all plays, the opposition between the virtues and the vices can be read as the juxtaposition of Mikhail Bakhtin's centripetal (or official) forces, represented by the dominant and hierarchically organized authorities, and centrifugal (or unofficial) ones, linked with broad-mindedness, rebelliousness, novelty, and carnival freedom, represented here by "youth". In all cases, I will try to determine whether the dramatic and theatrical allure of the vices might contribute to the transgressive reading of the interludes and promote some carnivalesque freedom.

In **Chapter Three**, I focus on the ways the metaphor of courtship and marriage has been appropriated in *Wit and Science*, *Fulgens and Lucres*, and *A Play of Love*. Although all three plays have been in different degrees shaped by the discourse of

courtly love, they reshape and evaluate its conventions in different ways. Stress will be particularly placed on examining those moments of the interludes that carnivalesquely degrade the lofty ideals by presenting them in down-to-earth material terms. The values associated with the carnival seem to invade the plays in an attempt to challenge the dominant standpoint on courtship and marriage, implying that perhaps they might be perceived differently by male and female protagonists, which brings up issues related to gender differences. In *Wit and Science* the carnival spirit is mainly introduced by the vices; in *A Play of Love* by the character of No-Lover-nor-Loved; and in *Fulgens and Lucres* in the form of an elaborate comic subplot that mirrors the action of the main plot. The degree to which the values connected with the carnival affect our final reading of the interludes varies. Still, I believe, tracing these influences provides us with a fresher perspective on examining the plays.

Chapter Four continues to discuss the juxtaposition of two opposing elements: the masculine and the feminine. Here, however, the emphasis has been on accommodating the concept of household and analyzing how this particular category functions in *Johan Johan* and *Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester*. In the former play we encounter a particularly strongly carnivalized vision of the household, in which all gender roles have been actually reversed. In the latter the carnival spirit seems to manifest itself in a much subtler way, i.e. in the innovative treatment of the role of a woman as queen. Furthermore, the plays are seen as engaged in a “dialogue” on the nature of womanhood, and examined against a wide array of misogynist and “profeminine” writings of the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, as well as other theatrical and non-theatrical phenomena. Finally, I suggest that if the metaphor of the household incorporated the elements pertaining not only to the domestic sphere but also to the matters of the state (cf. Henderson 1997: 186), the interludes, with their carnivalesquely reversed systems of values, might have participated not only in the debate on womanhood,

but also, quite perversely, voiced their reservations and objections about the politics of the state ruled by Henry VIII.

When talking about the analytic perspective adopted in this book, it is impossible not to mention Michael Holquist's witty but weighty remark on the two types of scholars influenced by Bakhtin: intrinsic or, in Bakhtin's terminology, centripetal ones, concentrating on the figure of the Russian scholar himself, seeking to understand his life and work and to create a definitive canon of Bakhtin, and extrinsic, or centrifugal ones, interested less in Bakhtin himself and more in employing dialogism in their own research and applying it to genres Bakhtin himself did not consider (Holquist 2002: 185). Rather centrifugal in my approach, I will try to determine how the carnivalesque language invades official discourse, how carnivalesque rituals enter the stage, how the use of carnival inverts the hierarchy in the plays under consideration, and finally to what extent this carnivalesque code influences the interpretation of the plays. Does it challenge the official ideology imposed by the authorities, be they church, social, or political? Is it a tool for liberating oppressed marginal voices, or rather one employed to reinforce the voice of those in power? Is it an expression of rebelliousness and dissent or rather of control and oppression? Whatever the answer, the task of interpreting the dialogue between official seriousness and carnivalesque laughter is worthwhile and, hopefully, can provide one more dialogic dimension to the reading of early Tudor interludes, which like carnival and dialogue are not monolithic entities but lend themselves to examination from a variety of perspectives.

I

Carnavalesque semiotics

Drama, theatre, and semiotic signs

Drama' or 'theatre'? – Although the question appears elementary, it is still relevant to anyone concerned with the systematic study of issues investigated in this book and requires a brief comment. 'Theatre', closely associated with theatrical performances, refers to a range of phenomena involving the enactment of a fictional story by actors in front of an audience gathered for this particular occasion. 'Drama', on the other hand, refers to a specific literary text, or body of texts, which is usually designed for theatrical representation according to certain dramatic conventions. While drama can obviously be read, it has been most likely written to be seen. This, in turn, implies a certain duality of its nature, which needs to be acknowledged in any process of interpretation – drama is not only a type of literature but one construed with a view to its prospective stage realization¹.

This duality of functions of drama has been theorized by Andrzej Zgorzelski (1983: 228-229) in terms of a "supercode", i.e. an autonomous, unique literary text, and a theatrical "codex", i.e. a text generating a series of subsequent performances. In a similar vein, Fernando de Toro distinguishes between the textual and performative or stage aspects of a dramatic text,

¹ The term "stage realization" itself may be found misleading when used with reference to medieval or Tudor performances by implying a need for a special physical structure, i.e. a stage. In this study, however, it will be meant to refer to any type of theatrical performance in which any physical space may be transformed by means of given conventions into a specific "stage", including places as varied as theatre-in-the-round, pageants, churches, banquet halls, streets, marketplaces, etc.

perceiving the latter as a “stage practice”, i.e. “the potential the text has of being produced” (Toro 1995: 46). Although these two functions may appear distinct, they are in fact inseparably intertwined, hence “the interpretation of drama only from the perspective of a literary system would be a fragmentary one, just as its interpretation merely in terms of the record of theatrical conventions would falsify the reality of drama as a literary text” (Zgorzelski 1983: 229). The same has been observed by Elaine Aston and George Savona who strongly oppose removing drama from its theatrical contexts to analyze it solely in terms of its literary qualities because that might make one ignore “its fundamental function as blueprint for production” (Aston and Savona 1991: 3).

Recognizing this dualistic nature of dramatic texts allows us to gain insight into their two closely connected levels. On the one hand, we may pose questions about the ways in which a given text builds its own unique model of a fictitious world: presents fictional characters, their interaction and communication, and generates meaning through a system of allusions and associations with other literary and cultural texts. On the other hand, we may investigate “the matrices of representativity or theatricality” (Toro 1995: 46) present in dramatic texts either as actual stage directions or as information that can be inferred from the dialogues (Toro 1995: 43), which may hint at the relationship between actors and spectators, the meaning generated by the use of theatrical space, and the associations and connotations evoked by the use of time-specific theatrical conventions. Obviously, we cannot take as the object of our research specific, or actual, performances, as they belong to the sphere of theatre studies. What we can do, however, within the domain of literary studies, is to analyze and discuss possible, potential, or “virtual”² performances suggested by the dramatic text itself. This is precisely how the issue will be approached in this book.

² I use the term after Jean Alter, who distinguishes between “actual” and “virtual” performances, referring to a virtual performance as one “yielding an imaginary theatrical experience, however limited by the reader’s gift or habit of visualization” (1981: 116). In view of this distinction, any refer-

Bearing in mind the natural constraints imposed by the fact that we simply lack any real access to the actual performances of the plays enacted in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, we should still be aware of the key concepts pertaining not only to drama but also to theatre. While Zgorzelski notes a certain duality inherent in a dramatic text, Jerzy Limon, concerned with the study of theatre, observes another kind of duality in a theatrical performance, which he defines as

a communicative situation based on mutual agreement between spectators and performers, in which the past (or the future) of the spectators constitutes the present of the performers, who at the same time most frequently pretend to be somebody else than they really are and to occupy the space different from the one occupied by the spectators (Limon 2003: 5)³.

In consequence, the performers, and in fact everything else appearing on stage, from props to decorations, function as if in two different realities, i.e. they belong in their physical materiality to the real world of the spectators (here and now) but at the same time they apparently exist in the fictional world of the characters (there and then). In other words, whatever we see on stage belongs to two different spheres; it is simultaneously a “real” thing in our own world (e.g. a wooden apple) and a sign of another thing existing in the fictional world (e.g. the world of Eve tempted with an apple). This ontological duality of people (i.e. actors as actual people doing their job and as fictional characters) and objects taking part in a theatrical performance accounts for two models of perception of the reality created on stage: the perception of this reality by fictional characters and by the audience (Limon 2003: 18-22).

On top of this, Limon makes a distinction between two systems of communication in theatre – the internal and external

ence to “performance” within this study shall be understood as implying a “virtual performance”.

³ All translations from Polish texts appearing throughout this book are mine.

one (Limon 2003: 33-34, 2006: 18-19). By internal communication he means all acts of communication between the characters on stage, concerning the spectators only indirectly, while the term external communication denotes the kind of theatrical communication at spectators only, which remains inaccessible to the characters of the play. In relation to the above distinction, we may talk about two directions of transmission of the theatrical message: (1) direct transmission, i.e. the one that excludes the consciousness of the characters belonging to the theatrical world and is directed solely at the audience (e.g. the music which is not heard by the characters, the lights which are not seen by them, the narrator, the choir, etc.); and (2) indirect transmission, i.e. one that is signalled through the consciousness of the characters, includes the elements perceived by them as belonging to their fictional world, and is presented to the audience as if through this world, e.g. the dialogues between characters, which concern the spectators only indirectly, the emotions signalled by the actors, etc.

Combining elements of the theories developed by Zgorzelski and Limon, we may draw a conclusion that the system of internal theatrical communication derives from a dramatic text itself, while the system of external communication may only be alluded to in such text, but in fact is created each time in a particular performance. My argument will concentrate predominantly on the first type of communication. However, I will also try to utilize the findings of research on the late medieval and early Tudor theatre and other cultural and literary phenomena of the period to hypothesize about how the dramatic texts being the object of this analysis could function on stage. Such an approach, I hope, will not blur the borders between literary and theatrical texts, but will allow us to enrich our interpretation of the dramatic works in question by their deeper contextualisation in the cultural environment.

Furthermore, the distinction between theatre and drama bears an important impact on the perception of those elements of semiotic theory adopted for the purposes of this analysis.

Broadly understood, semiotics can be described as the investigation of the production of meaning, which is concerned with the processes of signification (generation of meaning) and communication (exchange of meaning).

To begin with, it needs to be clarified that we will centre predominantly on the first of the components of the discipline. Secondly, we need to acknowledge in our analysis the existence of two distinct, but mutually connected, categories of signs, belonging to two different media of expression: dramatic text, i.e. something “composed for the theatre”, and performance text, which is “produced in the theatre” (Elam 2002: 3-4), or in this case “virtual performance” text. The dramatic text, made up of words and involving linguistic, literary, and cultural codes, undergoes a certain “transcodification”, i.e. a process through which “the places of indetermination in the dramatic text” are “actualized” and “concretized” (Toro 1995: 47), into the performance text, which entails such varied stage-related phenomena as actors’ physical features, body language, make-up, costume, props, stage, etc., referred to as “staging signs” by Jean Alter (1981: 113) and subject to theatrical and cultural codes. However, just as it is more workable to discuss not actual but only potential realizations, the staging signs will be likewise perceived as potential or virtual ones, their interpretation being dependent on the interpreter’s knowledge of theatrical conventions and cultural context.

Finally, drama in its double-function totality will be perceived as deeply immersed in the semiosphere, a concept developed by Yuri Lotman to refer to “the sum total of semiotic systems” (Semenenko 2012: 112), “the greater system [...], outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist” (Lotman 2005: 208), founded on “the cultural and systemic norms of society at large, without which it would be incomprehensible” (Elam 2002: 47). Thus, whether we actually enter the theatre to see a specific performance or whether we study drama as both supercode and codex, we:

automatically apply those codes specific to the performance – which can be termed theatrical codes – that permit us to apprehend it in its own terms and not as, say, a spontaneous and accidental event or a piece of film. We similarly bring into play, where appropriate, our knowledge of the generic, structural, stylistic and other rules – i.e. dramatic codes – relating to the drama and its composition. At the same time, however, we cannot leave at home the whole framework of more general cultural, ideological, ethical and epistemological principles which we apply in our extra-theatrical activities. On the contrary, the performance will inevitably make continual appeal to our general understanding of the world. (Elam 2002: 46-47)

In this light, analysing dramatic texts is perceived as an intricate process, in which the mechanism of generating meaning involves not only the application of both relevant dramatic and theatrical codes but also a thorough understanding of the culture that produced them. Dramatic and theatrical conventions pertinent to the discussed plays do not exist in a social and cultural vacuum but are an integral part of a wider system, whose ideological and moral precepts are both reflected in the plays and disseminated or challenged by them. Our task is, therefore, two-fold: to examine what they tell about their culture but also to ponder on what the culture reveals about them.

Coming back to the notion of sign, we shall briefly explain how the term is employed in this study and discuss why it may come in handy in analyzing drama. A comprehensive comparative account of two approaches to theorizing the nature of sign in semiotics – the Saussurean dyadic model and the Peircean triadic one – has been provided by Chandler (2002: 17-54); therefore, here we shall briefly recount the key concepts connected with the latter model, pointing to the corresponding terms in other nomenclatures so as to avoid misinterpretation. In Peirce's theory of sign, a *representamen* ("signifier" in Saussure, "sign vehicle" in Nöth (1990: 89) according to Chandler), the "form of the sign" in other words, stands to somebody for a certain object ("referent" in Nöth 1990: 89), which may include physical objects as well as abstract concepts and fictional entities (Chandler 2002: 34). Furthermore, it must be observed

that there needs to be no visible or direct bond between a sign vehicle and its referent. A *representamen*, Peirce writes, “addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign,” (qtd. in Chandler 2002: 34), the latter term corresponding to Saussure’s “signified”, and Nöth’s “sense” (Chandler 2002: 34). As we see, it is the *interpretant* that is responsible for creating the otherwise lacking link between the remaining elements of the sign.

Whatever nomenclature and model is adopted, it should be born in mind that “the meaning of a sign is not contained within it, but arises in its interpretation” (Chandler 2002: 35); thus, it is an active process that requires somebody, some kind of an interpreter to engage in it. Thinking in terms of actor-spectator transaction taking place during a theatrical performance, we can assume that the *interpretant* should be shared, at least to some extent, by the creator of the supercode, the director, and the audience. If it were fixed, each sign of the performance would generate one and only one interpretation, a phenomenon virtually impossible in a situation where more than one person is involved. On the other hand, if the *interpretant* depended solely on the individual, a play would produce an unlimited range of meanings, a case equally unlikely as the previous one. Therefore, the most plausible stance seems to be as follows: a dramatic text may generate a number, though not an infinite one, of stage realizations, and, in turn, a theatrical performance may be read in a number of, again not limitless, ways. If this is the case, the *interpretant* in reference to a dramatic and theatrical sign seems to depend, to a certain degree, on our dramatic and theatrical competence, allowing us to encode and decode signs or whole systems of signs with the use of codes characterized as “an ensemble of correlational rules governing the formation of sign relationships” (Elam 2002: 49).

To illustrate the discussion so far, let us consider the process of generating meaning in the case of a convention-governed stage sign typical for the medieval or Renaissance stage, name-

ly, a boy actor cross-dressed as a woman. In performance, a boy actor, i.e. a sign vehicle, often stands for a woman, i.e. an object of the sign. Obviously, apart from another sign, i.e. a costume, there is no observable relationship between the two. The connection, therefore, must be formed by an *interpretant*, an idea or concept that a boy actor indicates a woman, which is shared by the director, performers, and audience. Even though the sign may bring in ambiguous connotations – i.e. if we perceive the sign vehicle literally, we might end up with homosexual or transsexual readings of plays – it could be assumed that for most audiences a boy actor stood simply for a woman, while an adult one for a man.

However, the interpretation of this particular relationship is still far from complete. On the paradigmatic level of connotation, the theatrical sign, or the relationship between the signs (here: boy and adult actors) acquires “secondary meanings for the audience, relating it to the social, moral and ideological values operative in the community of which performers and spectators are part” (Elam 2002: 8). The relationship between boy and adult actors may be seen as resulting from a set of oppositions that acquire and generate meaning on stage. In visual terms, the boy is clearly shorter and smaller than the adult player with whom he appears on stage, hence his less prominent stage presence. The opposition is further emphasised aurally: the boy’s childish voice is most probably less conspicuous than that of an adult performer. If so, the relationship between boy and adult player appears to be a hierarchical one, stressing the dominance of age over youth, for instance. Apart from that, as the actors are associated with the male and the female respectively, the relationship may point to the supremacy of the former gender aspect over the latter, this gender hierarchy being one of the cornerstones of the medieval semiosphere in which the performance was immersed.

Still, taking into account the continuous questioning of thus established hierarchy in the plays, we may observe that they rely heavily on the notion of anti-hierarchy. It is in fact the es-

tablishment, destruction, and re-establishment or negotiation of a certain order of things that the construction of the plays both in terms of dramatic and theatrical codes depends upon. Carefully construed at the syntagmatic level of the plays, the phenomenon of reversal of an established order constitutes the organizing principle of the plays, but, on top of that, it might be perceived as organizing a significantly wider system of cultural codes, i.e. the whole semiosphere. To make this claim more lucid, let us briefly examine a text belonging to a system different from a dramatic one: an illustration from *The Luttrell Psalter* (1325-1335), one of the most famous English illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, showing a familiar motif of a woman beating a man with her distaff (Fig. 1).

Looking at the picture, we shall try to determine how its structure and composition of constituent elements take part in generating meaning. First, in visual arts the position of an element in the picture, and its spatial relationship to other elements, may play an evaluative role. Generally speaking, spatial oppositions of “up” and “down”, “in front” and “behind”, “close” and “distant”, “centre” and “periphery”, are the carriers of meaning. In the case of this particular image, female dominance is expressed by her authoritarian and bossy body posture, bringing to mind a master-like figure inflicting punishment on a child or servant, while the husband’s subordination is saliently conveyed through his pleading look as well as the arrangement of his hands in a prayer-like gesture. His pose is a curious one. He is on his feet, but not standing upright, as if he were forced by the woman’s strong hand to remain in this half-sitting, half-squatting, uncomfortably insecure position.

At the spatial composition level, this female dominance is expressed by her occupying the upper plane of the illustration – “up” being associated with goodness, virtue, high status, control and power as contrasted with the male inferiority, pointed to by his being situated at a lower plane, with “down” bringing in the connotations with badness, depravity, low status, and being subject to control and power (Chandler 2002: 87). The



Fig. 1. "A woman beating man with a distaff," fragment of The Luttrell Psalter, Add. MS 42130, f. 60, The British Library.

attributes of the sexes, the distaff in the woman's hand and the knife in the man's pocket, have not been reversed but they are still used to question a traditional perception of gender roles. The distaff is simultaneously a tool traditionally related to the feminine activity of spinning and a weapon, which makes it a powerful symbol of the "appropriation of phallic power", whereas the knife is not "a protective sign of male strength but embarrassingly exhibits the priapic lust that subjugates him to the female" (Camille 1998: 313).

The image, with its startling body language and interesting spatial arrangement of the two characters, not only inspires evaluative interpretation but also invites us to compare the reality shown in the illustration with the outside non-fictional and non-artistic environment. As a result, we perceive this visual text as a sort of distorting mirror which depicts a topsy-turvy world and this distortion is achieved by representing male body language as the female one and by ascribing the upper part of the illustration, normally reserved for a man, to a woman, both tricks leading to the reversal of values associated with gender roles.

The choice of colours, cladding the woman in a red robe and the man in a blue one, plays with the viewer's connotations in a similar way. The reddish hair of the woman can bear only negative associations for a medieval observer: with Judas, with the Jews, "whose redhairedness was a direct reference to Jesus's blood, the stain of which they bore for having shed it" (Pleij 2004: 81); with Reynard, a notorious medieval fox; with adulterous women, whores, executioners, usurers, and money changers, to mention just a few. The red robe can stand for power and royal authority, but the issue becomes more ambiguous when it is observed that for centuries red, and not black, was perceived as an exact opposite of white; hence its frequent use in the depiction of devils. Blue is equally, if not more, ambiguous; as Pleij writes:

The colour blue has by far the greatest variety of negative connotations and the widest range of possible interpretations. This must

have something to do with the extremely positive connotations the color also carries. The more divine and timeless the associations with blue are, the sharper its contrast with its earthly counterparts will be. (Pleij 2004: 86)

Thus, the colour may be used to bring to mind the heavenly blue of the skies; the steadfast faith of the Virgin Mary, who is most often dressed in some shade of this colour; and faithfulness in love; or it can evoke connotations with the Blue Barge in the carnival world of the Mardi Gras celebrations, and the hooded cloak of blue which men who had been cuckolded by their wives were forced to wear (Pleij 2004: 86). Ambiguous as it is, the selection of colours emphasizes the reversal of roles featured in the illustration. Female power is discredited by the negative connotations with the red – the woman becomes a she-devil, whose sole purpose is to annihilate the world order created by God. Male weakness, on the other hand, is ridiculed – downgraded and physically inferior, the man is only a cuckold, a fool and a puppet in a world ruled by the demonic lady in red.

While hierarchical organisation of both the universe and human society was perceived as a guarantee of the cosmic and social order approved by God (cf. Sikorska 2002: 95), similar reversals of hierarchy seem to feature prominently in the repertoire of visual images employed by various artists, from the illuminators of manuscripts to painters, stained glass makers and sculptors, commissioned to produce decorations in churches and cathedrals. Although sacred art in the Middle Ages was meant to reflect symbolically the spirit of God, the mystical symbolism of the Christian temple was perpetually and consciously invaded by the images of everyday life. Irena Janicka (1962: 23-24) observes that the two styles, the 'sublime' and the 'low', coexist in gothic art although they evoke totally different feelings. The sublime style, aiming at ideal beauty, is used to represent the images of the Saints, the Virgin Mary, Christ, etc. and evokes the mood of seriousness, contemplation, and gravity. In contrast, the low style, found chiefly in drolleries and carvings on misericords, aims at deformity and imperfection and evokes a

comic mood. Surprising as this may initially appear, the paintings and sculptures encouraging piety coexist with the carvings of beasts with the heads of bishops and prelates, carved caricatures of women with devilish horns, countless images of animals or grotesque beasts performing human actions (e.g. a fox dressed as a monk and giving a sermon to hens, an ape pretending to be a doctor, etc.). Numerous representations of reversals of the natural order of things also include the following: a hare aiming at a hunter, a mouse chasing a cat, geese hanging a fox, a wife beating her husband, etc. In this topsy-turvy world, represented at the margins of pious religious manuscripts and at the periphery of the sacred space of the church, animals behave like men, usual victims take revenge on their enemies and all logical laws which govern the 'real' world are generally abandoned.

The phenomena described so far apparently belong to two different spheres, the theatrical and the visual, and seem to be only loosely connected. It is not the object of this book, however, to decide unquestionably whether the former had an impact on the latter or vice versa. The relationship between drama and art will not, therefore, be perceived here in causative terms but rather as a form of complex intertextuality, where the two forms of expression stand in semiotic rather than mimetic relation to each other. Such an approach is indebted to Martin Stevens's article, in which he elaborates on the relationship between Hans Memling's "Passion" and passion plays to challenge the idea that works of art and drama can be discussed in relation to each other only on condition that they share a geographical and social setting (Stevens 1991: 319). Such a critical position is viewed by him as far too limiting and, in consequence, deterring "the reader of dramatic texts from referring to the vast storehouse of late medieval Northern European art for the sake of a false sense of security in the narrow use of documentary evidence" (Stevens 1991: 322) while, in fact, medieval art, both in popular and aristocratic forms, reached an international status. Stevens not only proposes to enrich our repertoire of artis-

tic images available for discussion in relation to drama, but also claims that “the whole notion that one form of art is to be regarded as a “tool” by which to decode another is to misappropriate and denigrate it” (Stevens 1991: 321). Not to oversimplify the relationship between these forms, we should perceive them not in simple terms of “influence”, but as a complex response to a certain shared vision of the world, or as an interactive process of reinterpretation of a particular theme.

It is from this perspective that the examples drawn from art and theatre for the purpose of this discussion are seen. Apparently distant from one another in terms of historical time, they do suggest a similarity of perception and share certain characteristics that should not be overlooked. First, they strongly rely on the juxtaposition of opposites, the most prominent of them being: adult/young, male/female, wrongdoer/victim. Second, the oppositions are represented not as neutral ones, but as charged with certain axiological connotations, resulting, for instance, from the spatial relationships between the components of a visual composition, the use of a particular colour, or natural differences in the physical appearance of adult and boy actors. Third, the oppositions seem to be frequently employed to turn the world upside down and imply a specific (anti)vision of life.

Carnival as a dialogic semiotic code

The discussed examples go in line with Mikhail Bakhtin’s model of medieval culture, perceived by him as a constant struggle between the forces connected with Lent, associated with seriousness, authority, and officiality, and the carnival, linked with laughter, rebelliousness, and freedom. While the official, state or church, authorities asserted all that was stable and unchanging, emphasised the transitoriness of earthly life, and warned against the seven deadly sins, the carnival

celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical

rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete. (Bakhtin 1984b: 10)

In fact, Bakhtin's theory of carnival, elaborated mainly in *Rabelais and His World*, but also touched upon in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, transcends the limits of periodization and extends beyond the Middle Ages to offer a global model of culture on the whole, whose history might be examined as the history of ceaseless clashes between the official and unofficial spheres. For Bakhtin, there is indeed more to carnival than understanding it simply as a ritualistic feature of culture: it is "both a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the "high" culture" (Stallybras and White 1986: 7); it is a certain mode of perception and understanding of the world; it is, finally, a system with its own repertoire of signs and its own language and codes.

Admittedly, the concept of carnival, when seen only through the lens provided by Bakhtin, may appear as a somewhat utopian and idealistic formation that accumulates all concepts and values held by the scholar in high esteem, which makes it prone to being emotionally and ideologically charged. Some critics observe that all his works show the symptoms of a certain "carnival obsession", which drives the Russian scholar to look for the support of his theses in various spheres, not necessarily connected with the carnival in the strict sense of the word (Skubaczewska-Pniewska 2000a: 28). Bakhtin's works are also difficult to place within the boundaries of one discipline; rather they are situated on the borders of various branches of humanities: anthropology, ethics, sociology, philosophy, linguistics or literary theory to mention just a few. This "thematic extravagance," coupled with the ease with which the author moves from detailed analysis to historical generalizations, account for the appeal of Bakhtin's narrative to readers, but, simultaneously, the vast array of the methods, the liberty with the choice of examples, and his metaphorical, easily-flowing, and emotional

style may hinder an objective scholarly assessment of his works (Skubaczewska-Pniewska 2000a: 11-12).

Therefore, Bakhtin's discussion of Rabelais's work, erudite and influential as it indubitably is, raises a lot of questions about the nature of the phenomenon of carnival, dividing scholars into the ones that ardently support his points and those who consider his emphasis on carnival as a liberating force to be over-optimistic and too heavily marked by the personal and socio-political background of the author. In short, although since Bakhtin the carnival has been regarded as much more than just seasonal entertainment, the interpretations of its significance range from seeing it as "the voice of the oppressed majority" to "a means through which political control of that majority is cunningly exercised" (Humphrey 2001:2) As the arguments of both groups have been succinctly presented elsewhere (e.g. Stallybras and White 1986: 6-25, Humphrey 2001: 11-37), just a few examples of the possibly darker side of carnival need to be pointed out here. First of all, as carnival is a licensed festival, the one sanctioned by those in position of authority, it might serve their purposes by providing a sort of "safety vent" ensuring that the negative emotions, inevitably experienced in any existing social system, are expressed at a particular time in a particular place and in this way controlled. Second, carnival rituals may be used as a corrective tool of folk 'justice', as a means of inflicting punishment on various kinds of wrongdoers or simply transgressors of social norms, an example of which may be seen in the ritual of *charivari*⁴.

⁴ By the late Middle Ages, *charivari*, originally a noisy mock song for newly weds, had become a sort of rural carnivalesque ritual most often carried out by unmarried young men to "punish" by ridicule and humiliation some wrongdoers in the community. The following passage by E.K. Chambers (1925.1: 153-154) will provide a brief explanation on the application and possible forms of *charivari*: "The offences to which it is appropriate are various. A miser, a henpecked husband or a wife-beater, especially in May, and, on the other hand, a shrew or an unchaste woman, are liable to visitation, as are the parties to a second or third marriage, or to one perilously long delayed, or one linking May to December. The precise ceremonial varies considerably. Sometimes the victim has to ride on a pole, sometimes

The controversy built up around Bakhtin's theory of carnival, pertaining to whether the misrule associated with it is to be seen as a radical, oppositional and transformative force or merely a safety valve, does not undermine one of his most fertile claims – that in carnival, characterised by constant juxtapositions and confrontations of apparently incompatible elements of the high and the low, the upper class and the lower class, the spiritual and the material, the male and the female, we do find “a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the “inside out” (à l'envers), of the “turnabout,” of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, degradations, profanations, comic crownings and decrownings” (Bakhtin 1984 b: 10). While the interpretations of the effects produced by this carnivalesque logic of inversion might vary, its very presence in medieval culture, which to a large extent depended on oppositional thinking and yet combined apparently incompatible categories, is difficult to overlook. Noting the duality inherent to medieval life, Huizinga vividly compares it to the “motley”, which bears “the mixed smell of blood and roses”, and further observes that “[t]he men of that time always oscillate between the fear of hell and the most naive joy, between

on a hobby-horse, or on an ass with his face turned to the tail. Sometimes, again, he does not appear at all, but is represented by an effigy or guy, or, in France, by his next-door neighbour. [...] The din of kettles, bones, and cleavers, so frequent an element in rustic ceremonies, is found here also, and in one locality at least the attendants are accustomed to blacken their faces”. The use of charivari as a folk punishment and sexist satire is also exemplified by Jones (1990), who traces the records referring to charivari and provides a wide range of examples of the depiction of this ritual in art. Davis (1971), on the other hand, examines charivari in relation to the history of youth groups, concentrating particularly on French “*societes joyeuses*” or “fool-societies”. Both Jones and Davis acknowledge that charivari could be used not only to ridicule local offenders, but also against political or religious enemies. Finally, in “Le Jeu de la feuillée and the Poetics of Charivari” Vance (1985), who examines the relationship between charivari and a French play titled *Le Jeu de la feuillée*, sees the ritual as a sort of anxious reaction of the community to any change of an individual's status which has an impact on this community as a whole and stresses “the ordered representation of disorder” (824) as a constitutive feature of the phenomenon.

cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachments to the delights of this world, between hatred and goodness, always running to extremes” (Huizinga 1990: 25).

In Bakhtin’s construction of the carnivalesque aspect of culture, these extremes manifest themselves as united, just like life and death are connected in the figurines of pregnant hags from the Kerch terracotta collection, quoted by him as a prime example of the images of the grotesque body, ambivalently combining two bodies – the one giving birth and the one dying – to celebrate the never-ending life cycle. The grotesque body, never complete and always in the process of becoming, with its emphasis on those parts of the body through which “the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world” (Bakhtin 1984b: 26), i.e. the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose, etc, celebrates its own incompleteness and “the material body principle” (Bakhtin 1984b: 19) by presenting all that is bodily and corporeal as exaggerated, excessive and grandiose.

On the whole, grotesque images, frequently mingling vegetable, animal and human elements within one fantastic creature and repudiating the distinctions between the sexes by equipping the monsters with both male and female exaggerated reproductive organs, appear in medieval art so persistently that they can be regarded as something more than a peculiar aesthetic predilection of individual artists. For Bakhtin, they are an expression of grotesque realism, which “belongs to the borderline between life and art” (Bakhtin 1984b: 7) and thus can be perceived as an aesthetic principle deriving its power from the perception of the world different from contemporary one. Just as grotesque drawings and sculptures transgress and ignore our language-based categories (cf. Harpham 1982: 4-10), grotesque realism, an expression of the synthetic view of the world typical for folk culture, violates the borders between the notions which are normally and logically separated from one another – the human and the divine, the earthly and the heav-

enly, the sacred and the profane, the high and the low, the ideal and the material, life and death. It is governed by the same laws carnival is and relies primarily on degradation – “the lowering of all that is sublime, spiritual, ideal and abstract . . . to the sphere of earth and body in their unbreakable unity” (Bakhtin 1984b: 19) – not to be destroyed by laughter, but to become ‘reborn’ in the process.

While Bakhtin derives grotesque realism (and carnival itself) from the unofficial folk culture that is fundamentally opposed to the official one, Aron Gurevich, developing his predecessor’s ideas and drawing on an impressive number of examples from the didactic Latin literature of the Middle Ages, sees in it a certain “norm for viewing the world”, “an essential quality of the medieval world-view”, or finally, “a style of medieval man’s thinking in general” (Gurevich 1988: 208), permeating the entire culture from its unofficial folk and popular manifestations to the official church level. Consequently, in Bakhtin’s construction the official sphere is radically unilateral (rigid, serious, gloomy, full of fear, dogmatic, overwhelmed by piety and deep reverence) and separated from the unofficial one, whereas Gurevich proposes a slightly different view by suggesting that the two should not be understood as hostile to each other:

The dialogue of two principles of medieval culture can be understood only if we do not consider them divorced and antithetical. It should be conceived of not as a debate between two metaphysically opposed entities, not as a ‘dialogue of the deaf’, but as a presence of one culture in the thought and world of the other, and vice versa. (Gurevich 1988: 180)

This approach seems to modify Bakhtin’s radical claims, allowing one to perceive medieval culture as a system that depends on oppositions and yet unites them. It does not abolish the distinctions between the heavenly and earthly, the official and unofficial, seriousness and laughter, but celebrates their intense, endless, mutual interaction as the source of meanings, which are not predetermined but open to interpretation. And so, the carnival does not have to be categorically labelled as either a

subversive, liberating force or an oppressive tool of containment, but can be perceived as a zone of dialogic ambivalence, which is not restricted to the sphere of popular culture and extends far beyond its limits.

At the same time, it should be observed that the carnivalesque logic of inversion, inherent to grotesque realism, underlies not only the rituals related to carnival, such as the Feasts of Fools⁵, but might be employed to “carnivalize,” or in other words shape by “the carnival sense of the world” (Bakhtin 1984a: 107), art and literature. The previously discussed picture from the *Luttrell Psalter* may once again serve as an illustration to this premise: not only does it reverse the dominance of men over women, but also appears in the text which, on the whole, serves to promote the official point of view. Bakhtin himself explains the relationship between the carnival and carnivalization in the following way:

Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms – from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carni-

⁵ For more than a century Chambers’ (1925.1: 274-335) account was probably the most comprehensive collection of data on the Feast of Fools, consisting of the translated, paraphrased, or summarized material from the archives. His interpretation of the Feast as a debased folk custom of lower clergy, derived from pagan rituals, has been recently replaced by Max Harris (2011), who by careful analysis of the historical sources reconstructs the origins and development of the ritual in the 12th and 13th century as well as traces the reasons for its suppression in the 15th century. In this brilliant study, the Feast is perceived as resulting from a medieval rather than pagan worldview, and as a sanctified rather than sacrilegious activity, whose elaborate liturgy was developed as an alternative to the rowdy secular New Year’s celebrations.

val into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature.
(Bakhtin 1984a: 122)

The passage clearly indicates that Bakhtin proposes to compare two sign systems that are different in sensory terms but similar in terms of meaning, i.e. a carnival ritual and a literary work. The assumptions that these two different spheres of culture share the same language, that the signs of one system can be transposed onto another system, suggest that his theory shares a certain affinity with semiotics. Firstly, Bakhtin seems to describe a certain model of the world in a semiotic sense even if he does not adopt a strictly semiotic terminology in this description; and secondly, semiotics can be seen as an interpretative context for his works due to its “openness” and ability to assimilate various concepts for its use (Skubaczewska-Pniewska 2000b: 51-53). Finally, the language of carnival that can be transposed onto the language of literature is not an impromptu collection of elements selected at random and created out of nothing. Therefore, carnival is not a grab bag of images, activities, and practices, but rather a system governed by a set of its own rules and principles, or in other words, a system that has its own semiotic code.

The carnivalesque code manifests itself in various phenomena divided by Bakhtin (1984b: 5) into: (1) ritual spectacles, i.e. ceremonies of carnival character and various comic spectacles, including theatre; (2) comic verbal compositions, i.e. numerous parodies and travesties in both Latin and vernacular languages, and (3) the familiar speech of the marketplace (or billingsgate, abusive speech), i.e. a specific type of communication impossible in everyday life, involving curses, oaths, and abusive language, and different from the official language in its freedom from standards and etiquette. Elsewhere, this type of carnivalesque speech has been defined as “a reservoir in which various speech patterns excluded from official intercourse could freely accumulate” (Bakhtin 1984a: 17) and diametrically opposed to the “authoritative word” (Bakhtin 1981: 342), i.e. a ‘prior’ religious, ideological, or moral discourse, which is inti-

mately linked with the past and thus felt to be hierarchically higher and infusing its authority over the unofficial discourse.

All three expressions of the carnivalistic code depend on the same principle of transposing the high – be it behaviour, a verbal or visual text, or language itself – onto a lower plane. They are subject to what Barbara Babcock, unaware at the time of the publication of Bakhtin's study, calls a "symbolic inversion", by which she understands "any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political" (Babcock 1978: 14). What becomes self-evident in both Bakhtin and Babcock is the fact that such symbolic inversion cannot occur in isolation from the dominant codes; hence, carnivalesque practices do not have a life of their own, they can be perceived only in their relation to the dominant rituals, texts and language. To sum up, there is no *raison d'être* for carnival without pre-existent dominant culture and ideology, just as its language, both verbal and non-verbal, cannot be analysed without mention of the dominant discourse.

Interestingly, an analogous observation is made by Lotman and Uspensky, who establish that one of the primary functions of a semiotic mechanism of culture is its ability to produce "anticulture". They write:

... anticulture is constructed (...) isomorphically to culture, in its own image: it too is understood as a sign system having its own expression. One can say that anticulture is perceived as culture with a negative sign, as a mirror image of culture (where the ties are not broken but are replaced by their opposites). (Lotman and Uspensky 1978: 220)

Furthermore, anticulture does not need to be external to a given culture, it might be seen as a system within a wider system, with values opposite to those of the mainstream, e.g. organized/non-organized, correct/incorrect and, by extension, official/carnivalesque. Thus, in any system, there is a place for diversely organized structures, for "little islands of 'different' organiza-

tion in the general body of culture, whose aim was to increase the structural variety and to overcome the entropy of structural organization" (Lotman and Uspensky 1978: 227). Bakhtin's vertical hierarchy of high and low is also reflected in Lotman's spatial metaphor of the centre and the periphery, which division is for him a law governing the internal organization of the semiosphere.

Lotman further observes that the dominant semiotic systems are located at the core, while in the peripheral areas the structures are "slippery", and more flexible (Lotman 2005: 214). The two, like different civilisations, can be governed by distinct rules, but they are not numb – there is always a certain degree of communication between them, a dialogue, or a translation going on:

The semiosphere repeatedly traverses the internal borders, assigning a specialized role to its parts in a semiotic sense. The translation of information through these borders, a game between different structures and sub-structures, and the continuous semiotic "invasions" to one or other structure in the "other territory" gives birth to meaning, generating new information. (Lotman 2005: 214)

If culture is seen synchronically, we can analyze the tensions between its conflicting tendencies (e.g. Lent and carnival) and compromises that result from them. From a diachronic perspective, the binary and asymmetric nature of culture manifests itself, for instance, in the succession of dominant artistic and literary styles, which is always a dynamic process, reliant on the "translation of information" through borders that are fluid rather than fixed. In both cases, the multiplicity of discourses might be celebrated as continuously influencing one another rather than assigned evaluative markers, suggesting that the emergent elements are in some way better than the existing ones, or that the "medieval" is inferior to the "humanist" or "renaissance". In fact, the present study consciously refuses to draw a sharp division between medieval and renaissance plays, as Cox and Castan (1997) and Sikorska (2002) do, in the belief

that such a division would be unnecessarily reductive and limiting.

Lotman's conceptualisation of communication between different tendencies within the semiosphere resonates with Bakhtin's notion of dialogism – a term frequently used to refer to the capacity of a literary work to incorporate a dazzling variety of voices, styles, and points of view, all of them participating in a constant interaction of meanings. Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue, which is elevated “from mere compositional or linguistic status to a sort of architectonics of the everyday” (Pechey 2007: 47), stems from his perception of the nature of language and the distinction between a sentence and an utterance, the latter, as opposed to the former, being utterly dialogic in itself and requiring a response, i.e. agreement or disagreement⁶. As Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson explain:

Every time we speak, we respond to something spoken before and we take a stand in relation to earlier utterances about the topic. The way we sense those earlier utterances – as hostile or sympathetic, authoritative or feeble, socially and temporally close or distant – shapes the content and style of what we say. (Emerson and Morson 1990: 137)

Transposing this definition onto a wider plane, we can see a literary or cultural text as a carrier of various voices and ideologies, which is also engaged in an ongoing dialogue with other works of literature and culture. Furthermore, this dialogue ap-

⁶ In Bakhtin's theory of language a sentence and an utterance are entities that are different in kind. He objects to the Saussurean division into *langue* and *parole*, one of his main reservations being that the model leads to a misconception of the utterance. While the sentence is a unit of language in the traditional sense, the utterance is a unit of “speech communication” (*rechevoe obshchenie*). Utterances may be as rapid as a shriek and as long as, let us say, *Ulysses*. The difference lies not in their length, but in the fact that the utterance involves extralinguistic elements in its composition – someone must actually say it, respond to something, and request a response. For a more detailed discussion, see Emerson and Morson's *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (1990: 123-127).

pears symmetrical, as a given text is understood to simultaneously inform and be informed by the previous works:

The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at this point of contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue. We emphasize that this contact is a dialogic contact between texts...Behind this contact is a contact of personalities and not of things. (Bakhtin 1986: 162)

Bearing this in mind, we cannot avoid noticing the two dimensions which such an approach opens to explore.

First, a literary or cultural text may be dialogic internally, within its structure as if, giving voice to two or more possibly contradictory viewpoints. Speaking of the *Luttrell Psalter*, the manuscript might be perceived as dialogic in this sense. Commissioned to promote piety, it abounds in the pictures presenting everyday life and features grotesque images, including the ones that feature transgressive behaviour (e.g. a woman beating a man). Similarly, a morality play, with its *psychomachia* enacted between the virtues and the vices is open to such interpretation. Even if the virtues finally win, the voice of the vices has been usually expressed in the most down-to-earth, abusive terms. Second, we can perceive a literary text as a sort of utterance, as a reaction towards or against something that has been articulated before, as being engaged in an ongoing dialogue with other texts and communicating with them. Thus, dialogism assumes that texts are connected on a vertical axis with other texts, not necessarily of the same type. To use the example of the illumination from the *Luttrell Psalter* once more, the image is vertically connected not only to other illustrations and sculptures of the same kind but also with literary (e.g. Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*) or dramatic (e.g. *The Play of Noah*) texts as well as with the social experience of the carnival, as all of them are shaped to a greater or lesser extent by the carnivalesque logic of the reversal of norms. Finally, text-utterances may engage in a dialogue with texts expressing opposite ideologies (take for

example the discussion on the issues connected with marriage in the “marriage group” of tales in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*).

Dialogism is related to Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, coined in 1969 in her introduction to Bakhtin’s work and since then used to refer to shaping the meaning of a text by another text. In “The Bounded Text”, Kristeva stresses that the creation of a literary work does not depend on the author’s originality but on compilation from pre-existent texts, which makes it not an individual isolated object but “a permutation of texts,” with intertextuality occupying precisely this space of a given text where “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 1980: 36). In both theories, the social aspect of literary texts is stressed, as “[t]exts are built from the past, . . . they rework, re-accentuate, re-shape other texts and culture as such and are in turn shaped by social structures and practices (Sikorska 2002: 62). Over the last decades, Kristeva’s concept, stressing the notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in literature and culture, has become useful, yet the unified fundamental definition proves difficult to be established and the term is still far from transparent, being used by different scholars to mean different things.

Graham Allen (2000) undertakes the task of tracing the development of the notion by examining its major theoretical contexts and examines the links as well as differences between different approaches. His comprehensible and readable account spans the history of intertextuality from its origins in Saussure, Bakhtin and Kristeva (Allen 2000: 8-60), through structuralist (Genette, Riffaterre) attempts to use it as a means of fixing literary meanings (Allen 2000: 95-132), countered by Barthes’ poststructuralist deployment of the term to celebrate the plurality of interpretations resulting from the absence of the author (Allen 2000: 61-94), to feminist and post-colonial applications of the term (Allen 2000: 133-173). For some critics, however, the concept of dialogism seems to be broader than that of intertextuality, as they associate the latter mainly with those

relations with other texts that have been intentionally provided for the reader at the structural or semantic level. Intertextual allusions, Głowiński (2000: 16) writes, are always intended, introduced consciously (even if the degrees of this consciousness may vary) and addressed to the reader, who should realise that for a certain reason the author uses the words of the other in a given passage.

A careful reading of Allen's survey demonstrates that Bakhtin's theories of language, dialogue, and literature have been crucial in the process of conceptualising intertextuality and continually reappear to inform various approaches. Bakhtinian dialogism and intertextuality in its different theoretical manifestations do seem to be dialogically related, mutually shaping their meanings and re-shaping our interpretative practices. Being aware of these relationships and not discrediting in any way the value of intertextual readings, I have decided to keep to the concept of dialogism in this study.

First of all, the employment of this term appears to be more consistent and coherent with other aspects of Bakhtin's theory, as the categories of carnival, dialogue, or polyphony (a diversity of different points of view or voices) reappear over and over again in a dynamic relationship to each other, all of them discrediting any monolithic, or monologic, view of the world which would extol one 'official' point-of-view or ideological position. Furthermore, dialogism appears to be a sufficient tool for explaining both internal and external relationships within and between various visual, literary, and cultural texts as well as to contextualize them in social practices. I believe that in this case adopting a re-conceptualised notion of intertextuality in line with other Bakhtinian notions is possible yet counterproductive: on the one hand it could reduce the scope of his thought, and on the other hand it would unnecessarily multiply theoretical perspectives, which might in turn obscure my reading of the plays. Finally, the metaphor of dialogue between competing ideologies, also used by Gurevich to describe the grotesque and by Lotman to refer to the processes of generating meaning in

the semiosphere, can be perceived as a conceptual framework that embraces all issues presented as crucial for my reading of the interludes.

The interpretative approach adopted here has been influenced by the premise, shared by both Lotman and Bakhtin, that the world is a cosmic amalgam of competing values and meanings. In this multifarious universe, or semiosphere, the dominant forces try to gain control over the marginal, dissenting ones. The unofficial forces, on the other hand, attempt to disorganize the authoritarian, centralized hierarchy, or at least make it more familiar and less rigid. Furthermore, this universe is internally divided into smaller chunks, whose borders are fluid and constantly shifting. The chunks are changing and mutating when the elements of one system are translated into another one. New meanings arise from invasion into foreign terrains. The observation and analysis of these transgressions of internal borders, the processes involved in “translation” of information through these boundaries, and invasion into alien territories is a fascinating task. It is, therefore, from this angle that the late medieval and early Tudor plays and interludes discussed in the subsequent chapters will be seen.

Carnivalesque theatre and its audiences

It should also be stressed that medieval theatre is perceived by the author of *Rabelais and His World* himself as sharing some characteristics with carnival festivities. Bakhtin notes, for instance, that carnival images resembled to a certain extent medieval spectacles, which spectacles, in turn, tended toward carnival folk culture and in a way became one of its components. Having observed the connection, he proceeds to explain that despite this resemblance the phenomena are not the same:

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would

destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. (Bakhtin 1984b: 7)

While it is indeed impossible to claim that the carnival and theatrical performance have equal status, we should bear in mind that medieval and early Tudor plays actually often blur the borders between actors and spectators and between the theatrical and private space. They do not know footlights in the modern sense of the word. The performers frequently address the audience directly, they run through the crowd gathered to watch the play, they might elbow their way or dig uncooperative members of the audience in their ribs, etc. What is more, they are not always professional actors, but often members of the same community – a town, village, or household – from which the spectators come. This proximity of players and spectators and the engagement of the latter in a performance is meaningful and will be given more attention in subsequent chapters.

Here, however, I would like to foreground one of the most important effects of this typically medieval theatrical phenomenon, using the example of *Mankind*, an anonymous fifteenth-century morality play, which, despite not being written to be performed as a part of carnival celebrations, employs the comic, vulgar, and “low” elements within its structure and relies heavily on blurring the borders between reality and fiction. In fact, *Mankind*, written to promote official church teaching, can be seen as a vivid example of carnivalization and introduces carnivalesque laughter together with seriousness as engaged in a dialogue characteristic for Bakhtin’s construction of grotesque realism⁷.

The main carriers of the carnivalesque spirit in all morality plays are always the vices that invariably mock the established

⁷ Elsewhere, I have provided a more detailed analysis of the comic and carnivalesque elements of *Mankind*, focusing on how the very plot follows the pattern of carnival delineated by Bakhtin, emphasizing different constructions of virtues and vices, and analyzing in more depth the scatological imagery permeating the play. See Borowska (2007: 35-43).

truths and authorities and praise the joys of earthly life, live the lives of villains and culprits, speak of the body and bodily functions, swear and curse. Unlike the virtues, who, even when addressing the spectators directly, remain in a preacher-congregation relationship with the audience, the vices will do everything to reduce the distance and create the impression that their world and the world of the spectators are actually the same. The tactics prove successful when the fictional wrongdoers manage to draw the audience into singing a Christmas song, which after the first line turns out to abound in filthy words and phrases⁸. The use of the names of the bottom parts of the body, scatological imagery, vulgar distortions of the word 'holy' (meaning 'hole-lick') degrade the sacred to the lowest material level, reminiscent of the medieval parodistic tradition. What seems to be of particular interest at this moment of the play, however, is the inter-relation between the vices and the spectators – the fact that the former initiate the dirty song but the latter eagerly co-operate in singing. Thus, the carnival spirit of freedom extends its scope from the fictional level of the performance to encompass the actual space and time of the audience.

The collaboration of the spectators in calling up Titivillus, a spectacular and popular devil, for whose presence in the play spectators willingly pay, has a similar effect. Interestingly, however, the audience are invited, or rather skilfully manipulated, to take part only in the carnival part of the play, which makes them co-responsible for the corruption of Mankind (singing the dirty song, paying for the appearance of the devil who causes his fall). Only later will they become aware that they are as guilty as the vices are and that the fall of the protagonist mirrors their own fall as Christians when they fail to follow

⁸ To illustrate the amount of abusive language and swear words, let me quote from the song:

Yt ys wretyn wyth a coll, yt ys wretyn wyth a cole
 He þat schytyth wyth his hoyll, he þat schytyth wyth his hoyll...
 But he wyppe hys arse clen, but he wyppe hys arse clen...
 On hys breche yt xall be sen, on hys breche yt xall be sen...
 Hoylyke, holyke, holyke! holyke, holyke, holyke! (*Mankind*, ll. 336-343)

the teaching of the virtues representing the Church. Thus, the act of blurring the borders between theatre and reality is far from being incidental; it is a device used consciously so that the audience could not only see the message of the play, but also experience it. Like the protagonist, they are first made to, quite literally, profane the sacred and in this way become excluded from the church community only to be included in this community again at the end of the play.

In fact, the problem of exclusion and inclusion features significantly in the studies of medieval theatre which turn away from examining the plays as literary texts and examine them instead as social phenomena, especially in the cases of urban drama, sponsored, performed and watched by urban dwellers. In "The Culture of the Spectator: Conformity and Resistance to Medieval Performances" Claire Sponsler (1992: 16-19) observes that these studies may be roughly divided into "utopian" and "dystopian" ones. Whereas the former stress that such performances provided mechanisms for cultivating a sense of "collective identity" and "communal feeling" among the townspeople, which allows for regarding medieval drama as "the expression of a collective experience", the second model proposes that "early urban performances worked as often as not as agents of exclusion rather than inclusion" (Sponsler 1992: 16). Such division of opinions pertains not only to the function of theatrical performances but also to other public spectacles that took place within urban space, like guild processions and ceremonies that have been interpreted as either promoting wholeness and unity or separation and division (McRee 1994 : 189), which seems to emphasise the ambiguous and multifaceted nature of medieval space, often blurring the borders between private and public, individual and communal, internal and external and inviting to explore meanings created by the use of space (e.g. essays in Hanawalt and Kobialka 2000).

One of the solutions to reconcile these conflicting perspectives is to accept the possibility of "unintended effect", which is to say that the performances aimed at inclusivity can for some

reason fail to achieve it and *vice versa*, thus “both inclusion and exclusion could be seen as unintended but possible outcomes of urban performances” (Sponsler 1992: 20). However, it seems that such a position does not really open any new dimension to the discussion and it appears to be more productive to focus on reception rather than intent (Sponsler 1992: 20-21) from the perspective of some twentieth-century studies on mass culture which focus on the phenomenon of divergent response, i.e. scrutinize what causes individuals to interpret the same material in different ways so as to resist the dominant ideology encoded in popular culture texts (e.g. Dick Hebdige, John Fiske, Tania Modleski, and Janice Radway).

Although Sponsler herself admits that such studies might be over-optimistic in their belief in the power of individual consumers to resist the dominant message, she considers the approach useful, if treated with caution, for determining audience response to urban drama. The urban audience can be seen as compounded of members of various groups of town citizens who represented different, sometimes shared but at other times conflicting, views and were entangled in a complicated pattern of urban life, which encompassed factors that promoted unity but also potential discord. When such a mixed audience gathered for a performance, the responses probably varied, as it probably could not have promoted the interests of all social groups at the same time. Sponsler writes:

medieval urban drama while certainly representing an attempt on the part of some groups to enact social cohesiveness did not necessarily succeed in so doing for all groups, nor can it be limited to having performed solely that function. Instead it might in many cases have resulted in a series of fragmentations of the various audiences and have ended up redefining those groups and drawing new cultural boundaries. In this setting of mutually powerful cohesion and division, where each individual in all likelihood formed alliances with several different groups simultaneously, performances must have meant different things to different spectators, and these differences might well have been irreconcilable. (Sponsler 1992: 27)

Similar effects of simultaneously experienced cohesion and division were created by household theatrical performances of the interludes, where spatial proximity between actors and spectators creates a situation of mutual intimacy which is not artificial or make-believe, but constitutes an underlying assumption of the conception and realization of the spectacle (Debax 2007: 31-36). Such theatre is truly carnivalesque in the sense that "[t]here is no fourth wall between the "scaffold" of the interludes and their audience" (Debax 2007: 32), or no "footlights" in Bakhtin's metaphorical nomenclature, which may produce the effect of complicity, exemplified above on the example of *Mankind*.

It seems then that focusing on possible audience responses, seen as oscillating between cohesion and division, exclusion and inclusion, can significantly enhance the reading of the plays. For example, moral religious plays, like the previously cited *Mankind*, surely aimed at presenting to Christian spectators the perils of a sinful life, but, quite involuntarily, they might have also encouraged certain forms of misconduct or promoted some sympathy towards the transgressors of norms. Socially and culturally marginalised groups, like the young and women, for instance, may have interpreted the plays in ways that promoted their ends despite the dominant message. Moreover, there is a possibility that the spectacles meant something different for those who sponsored them (the problem of intent) and those who simply watched them (the problem of reception). Finally, the interludes performed at the royal court or in the household of a particular nobleman could have acquired political meanings for those entangled in policy-making, while being nothing more than merry entertainments for others. Examining the plays from such a perspective, when done with caution and understanding of both the conventions that governed such performances and the culture in which they were enmeshed, may undoubtedly enrich our perception of late medieval and early Tudor drama. What is more, the divergent responses of the audience to theatrical performance appear to be a natural

consequence of staging dramatic texts that depend on the juxtapositions of official and unofficial discourses at their verbal and structural level, and as such will be a part of my considerations in the subsequent chapters.

II

Carnavalesque dramatizations of youth in *Mundus et Infans, Youth,* and *Wit and Science*

The morality play pattern

The interludes discussed in this chapter are related – in their structural pattern, presentation of characters, and manner of construing a moral message – to the morality play. Flourishing in England and on the Continent from roughly 1400 to around 1600, morality plays are basically dramatized versions of Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, in which personified vices and virtues fight for the soul of the protagonist, who represents all human kind¹. Sharing the paradigm of the battle over the human soul,

¹ Quite obviously, it is impossible to indicate just one source responsible for the origin of the morality play as the genre seems to have been influenced by many literary and non-literary phenomena. Prudentius's *Psychomachia* is one of them as in this fourth-century epic poem, like in moral plays, the fight between the forces of good and evil over the human soul is a crucial element. Paternoster Plays might have also contributed to the development of the genre as they were based on the assumption that within the Lord's prayer lie the 'remedies' to the seven deadly sins and proposed that all matters connected with the vices were to be scorned while the behaviour characteristic of the virtues should be imitated. The morality play might also be seen as a dramatic development of the sermon; in fact, many speeches of virtues constitute mini-sermons of their own. This dependence on the sermon tradition accounts for much criticism of the genre, but on the other hand, as Briscoe observes, the medieval audience did not necessarily have to consider the preaching elements as intrusive and sobering but, on the contrary, might have "regarded preaching, much like the drama, as popular entertainment" (Briscoe 1989: 154). To these we could add the mystery plays and other vernacular and folk forms of drama; the works exemplifying the

the plays could cover the whole span of human life (e.g. *The Castle of Perseverance*, c. 1382-1425; *Mundus et Infans*, c. 1500-22), a particular moment of life when the protagonist is susceptible to temptation (e.g. *Mankind* c. 1465-70; *Wisdom who is Christ*, c. 1460-70; *Youth*, c. 1513-14), or the time when he is preparing for the ultimate experience of death (e.g. *Everyman*, c. 1519). Furthermore, morality plays differed as far as performance requirements were concerned. Among the plays mentioned above, only *The Castle of Perseverance* requires elaborate place-and-scaffold staging, which clearly distinguishes between the sacred and the profane space and sharply separates the actors from the audience. The other moralities seem to fall within a broad category of moderately short plays that needed no formal settings, demanded few props and with the use of doubling could be enacted by a relatively small group of actors, and as such were easily adaptable to many places and occasions.

Interestingly, the formula of the battle over the human soul did not cease to attract the playwrights' attention with the advent of the Renaissance and was successfully used to convey not only religious (Catholic or Protestant) but also secular moral messages. Written and performed to convey a lesson to the audience, these plays do not escape, however, the intrusion of values, practices, and speech forms connected with the carnival, apparently going against the grain of instruction and as such being a part of medieval carnival culture, which, indeed,

seven deadly sins, religious lyrics on the brevity of life; the *dance macabre*, which was a motif eagerly represented in art and sometimes dramatised, and finally a plethora of works including *Bestiaries*, *Lapidaries*, *Physiologus*, *Roman de la Rose* and *Piers Plowman*, which popularised the allegorical mode and the use of personification. As Umberto Eco notes, allegory, conventionalised and institutionalised, was eagerly used by theologians and preachers to appeal to uneducated people and make them grasp more complex concepts of faith; in other words, for a medieval mind allegory was a natural way of perceiving the world, history and life (Eco 1986: 53-4). Finally, Sikorska points to the theatricalization of church rituals and performativity in medieval culture in general, emphasising that drama made it possible to visualize events and processes which were otherwise difficult to express verbally, and to "humanize" abstract notions (Sikorska 2002: 18-19).

becomes a crucial component of the plays' structure, presentation of characters, action, and dialogues.

The plot of typically medieval Catholic moral plays has been succinctly summarised as concerning "alienation from God and return to God, presented as the temptation, fall and restitution of the protagonist" (King 1994: 240). In all of them, Everyman's sins are presented as necessary, pleasurable, and unavoidable stages in human life. Even if we fall, the plays preach, our misdeeds can always be amended, and all extant moral plays suggest that it is never too late for repentance. Didactic as they are, moralities do not deprive their protagonists of the right to err, as erring is something foreseen by God, who "recognised human nature and carved out for it a path of salvation" (Potter 1984: 130). The greatest danger for mankind, according to the playwrights of moral plays, lies in despairing and losing faith in God's mercy. As Potter puts it:

The morality play is acted out on the stage of a world where man is born to rule, bound to sin, and destined to be saved. To its audiences, and to their consciences, the play reveals that the fall out of innocence into experience is unavoidable, theologically necessary, and solvable through the forgiveness of sins. (Potter 1989: 139)

Later, sixteenth century authors, who jumped at the opportunities created by the genre to raise secular rather than spiritual issues, eagerly adopted this optimistic, always-happy-ending attitude. Thus, whether the plays touch upon issues connected with humanistic self-development (e.g. *Nature*, c. 1496; *The Nature of Four Elements*, c. 1517-18), good government and princely attributes (e.g. John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, c. 1530; Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*, c. 1553), or education in general (e.g. John Redford's *Wit and Science*, c. 1539 and subsequent variations on the "wit" theme, such as *The Marriage of Wit and Science* c. 1569 and Merbury's *The Marriage of Wit and Wis-*

dom, c. 1571-9²), the protagonists' misdoings and mistakes precondition their restoration to virtue.

Having acknowledged the fact that the virtues finally win, we shall observe that their appeal to the spectators seems to be much weaker than that of the vices. While the former are usually soberly dressed, passive and sermonising, the latter are energetic, vivacious, and given the wittiest speeches as well as best opportunities for vaudeville comedy. In his famous *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), which ferociously attacks play going, Philip Stubbes suggests that by showing different forms of misbehaviour the plays encourage the spectators to act accordingly instead of providing them with good models of acceptable behaviour; in his own words: "To commit all kinde of sinne and mischief you need to goe to no other schoole, for all these good examples, may you see painted before your eyes in enterludes and playes" (qtd. in Sponsler 1997: 75). Similar attitudes and complaints are also expressed in the much earlier *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, written between 1380 and 1425³. Although

² Both plays seem to be based on Redford's interlude although some changes are introduced in terms of plot and character. *The Marriage of Wit and Science* relies on the earlier interlude and to a greater extent utilizes the pattern of a chivalric love quest as the metaphor for education, yet features less physical action. The interlude elaborates the role of Experience and adds the figure of Will, absent from Redford's interlude (Grantley 2004: 227-230). *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* also shows the importance of proper education for social advancement and demonstrates the obstacles one can face in the process of learning. Yet the play adds more realistic social-type characters, featuring Wantonness (a loose woman) and Snatch and Catch (a variation of the vices here presented as sailors from the Netherlands), introduced it seems mainly for comic relief (Grantley 2004: 230-233).

³ I do not mean to imply that these two texts refer to the same type of theatrical activity or that social and political perception of drama was the same in the late 14th and late 16th century. Obviously, Stubbes' pamphlet and *Tretise* were shaped by different realities and raised different concerns. Connected with the period when religious drama blossomed (both cycle and saint's plays), the *Tretise* consists of two parts, each composed by a different author, and expresses concerns that can be seen as either having Lollard or Wyclifite leanings or as keeping with Orthodox beliefs, but in both cases 'miraclis pleyinge' is construed as posing a challenge to the greater Chris-

Tretise contains a six-point defence of dramatic activity (Kelemen 2002: 2, Walker 2000: 196), which the author strives to refute one by one⁴, it also claims that participating in theatrical performances inspires the audience to commit all kinds of sins and transgress social norms:

And so myraclis pleying **reversib discipline**, for as seiþ Seynt Poul, ‘Eche forsoþe discipline in þe tyme þat is now is not a joye but a mournyng’. Also siþen it makib to se **veyne siztis of degyse**, array of men and wymmen by **yvil continuance** [‘evil continence’, i.e. lack of restraint], eyþer **stiyng oþere to leccherie and debatis**, as siche myrþe more **undisposib a man to paciencie and ablib to glotonye and to oþere viceis**, wherefore it suffriþ not a man to beholden enterly þe zerde of God over his heved, but makib to þenken on alle **siche þingis þat Crist by þe dedis of His Passion badde us to forzetten**. Wherefore siche **miraclis pleyinge**, boþe **in penaunce doyng, in verry discipline, and in paciencie reversyn Cristis hestis and dedis**. (in Davidson 1993: 116, emphasis mine)

tian community (Hill-Vasquez 2001: 53). *Anatomie of Abuses*, on the other hand, is linked with growing Puritan tendencies in Elizabethan England and, apart from theatre, attacks other improper activities (e.g. gambling, prostitution, drinking alcohol, usury, lawyers’ practices, fashion, etc). Socio-political circumstances are totally different here. Secular theatre is extremely popular, yet seen as potentially dangerous not so much by religious but lay authorities. The analogy between these texts has been made to indicate a certain similarity of rhetoric that construes drama as potentially disruptive and posing a threat to the well-being of not only an individual, but also the community.

⁴ The points made in this “defense” part have been succinctly summarized by Walker and include the following: “that they are an aid to worship, that they can convert their audiences from worldliness to true faith, that they inspire true compassion in those who view them and promote affective piety, that they offer a means to instruct those who would otherwise be beyond reach of the church’s teachings (either through lack of learning or sheer apathy), that they provide an acceptable form of entertainment for people who would otherwise find less virtuous ways to spend their time, and that they are an even more effective form of religious story-telling than the visual representations that are the only other ‘books’ accessible to the unlearned” (Walker 2000: 198).

It becomes evident from this quotation that performing miracle plays was not only seen as reversing discipline, leading to lechery, gluttony, and other vices, but was also regarded as forbidden by Christ's Passion and in this way 'reversed' or undermined his sacrifice. As Sponsler rightly observes, for both Stubbes and the author of the *Tretise*, "theatrical activity has at least the potential to act as a spur to misgovernance, reversing discipline and inciting improper behavior" (Sponsler 1997: 76). The question that arises is whether the "playes" and "enterludes" can indeed be seen as an infamous "schoole" that sinisterly encourages misconduct, especially among the young, who are the protagonists of *Youth*, *Mundus et Infans*, and *Wit and Science*.

Medieval constructions of youth

Sociologists and historians concerned with the medieval and/or Tudor period differ about the position and importance of adolescence and youth in those epochs. Paradoxically, scholars tend to disagree even on the pivotal point in the discussion about the transition from childhood to adulthood, namely on the age in which this transition or transitions took place. This lack of consensus becomes more comprehensible when viewed against medieval theory, or rather theories, concerning the life cycle. Maturing and ageing processes, perceived as going through three, four, six, or seven distinct stages, attracted the attention of many great minds of the Middle Ages, a number of them discussing various qualities and characteristics of particular periods of life without even mentioning the actual age.

Although the divisions into the stages of life were considered scientific and numerous attempts were made at systematising the knowledge and beliefs, on the whole there seems to have been much imprecision about the terminology, which led medieval authors and preachers to employ whatever nomencla-

ture and theory suited their aims⁵. The basic division into three life stages was based on the Aristotelian biology and could be broadly understood as pertaining to the periods of growth, stasis, and decay (Burrow 1988: 6-7). This approach corresponds to the model adopted in *On the Conservation of Human Life* (*De conservatione vitae humanae*) by Bernard de Gordon, a thirteenth-century physician, who connects particular phases to the following ages: *pueritia* – from birth to age 14, *iuventutis* – 14 to 35, *senectus* – 35 to the end of life (Shahar 1997: 15).

The four-stage divisions, which were derived from Aristotelian physiology and Galenic medicine, treated man as a ‘microcosm’ governed by the same rules as the larger macrocosmic order and linked the ages of man with the four elements, humours, and seasons of the year. In these schemes, known in England since the Venerable Bede’s *De Temporum Ratione* (c. 725), childhood was associated with air, blood and spring; youth – with fire, red bile and summer; adulthood – with earth, black bile and autumn; and old age – with water, phlegm and winter (Burrow 1988: 12). Even if this seems to be the most widely adopted ‘scientific’ model, it turns out that writers differed considerably in how they applied the theory to refer to particular age groups, which implies that their conceptualisation bore little relation to social or biological realities of the time and was of non-empirical character (Burrow 1988: 34-35).

To illustrate this diversity, let us consider how the specific stages are construed in Byrhtferth’s *Manual* from the early eleventh century (Burrow 1988: 18):

Puericia vel infantia – up to the age of 14,
Adolescentia – 14 – 28,
Iuventus – 28 – 48,
Senectus – 48 up to 70/80.

⁵ This brief outline is greatly indebted to an excellent and comprehensive discussion of the conceptualization of the ages of man, divided into three, four, six or seven stages, in the Middle Ages, provided by Burrow (1988). His study examines a great array of medieval material, referring not only to theoretical and theological works, but also pointing to literary and visual representations of all models.

In *Isagoge* of Johannitius, an introduction to the basic textbook of Galenic medicine translated into Latin in the late eleventh century (Burrow 1988: 23), the dividing lines are somehow different:

Adolescentia – up to the age of 25/30

Iuventus – 25/30 – 35/40,

Senectus – 35/40 – 55/60,

Senium – 55/60 until death.

Finally, in Dante's *Il Convivio* (Shahar 1997: 15) the division is as follows:

Adolescenza – from birth to age 25,

Gioventtite – 25 to 45,

Senetute – 45 to 70 (old age),

Senio (extreme old age) – 70 to death.

Although more examples could be cited, even these few indicate that the term *adolescentia* could be used to refer to the first or second period of life, whereas *iuventus* seems to indicate maturity rather than youth, which is particularly interesting in Johannitius and Dante, who seem to merge childhood and youth into *adolescentia* to denote a general period of growth and development; subdivide old age into two different stages – the period of gradual deterioration, and the one just before death; and view youth as the period between adolescence and old age.

The six-fold system of life, the most illustrative of Christian theology, is proposed by Augustine in *De Diversis Quaestionibus* and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. Corresponding to the six days of Creation, the scheme transposes six ages of human history onto the timeline of an individual:

The world . . . passes through six ages corresponding to those of the individual: an *infantia* from Adam to Noah, a *pueritia* from Noah to Abraham, an *adolescentia* from Abraham to David, a *juventus* from David until the Babylonian captivity, a *gravitas* from the captivity until the coming of the Lord, and the present *senectus* which will last until the end of time. (Burrow 1988: 80)

The scheme, though devoid of this theological depth, was popularised by Isidore of Seville (560-636) in his *Etymologiae*, where

the following stages correspond to the following ages (Shahar 1997: 17): *Infantia* – 0 to 7, *Pueritia* – 8 to 14, *Adolescentia* – 15 to 28, *Iuventus* – 29 to 49, *Gravitas* – 50 to 70, *Senectus* – period before death.

Finally, the life cycle could be divided into seven phases, as familiar from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Deriving from Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, translated into Latin in the twelfth century, this scheme soon equalled in popularity with the tradition of the four ages due to a revival of interest in astrology in the period (Burrow 1988: 40). In this model a human life progressed from the planet closest to the Earth (Moon) to the most distant one (Saturn), displaying successively and for a specific period of years the qualities attributed to each planet (Table 1). As Barbara Kowalik demonstrates in her article devoted to late medieval counter pestilence poems, in medieval culture this influence of stars, linked to both medical and moral discourses, was part of God's action, and thus not set against but in line with theology (Kowalik 2010: 215). The holistic view, which like the scheme of four ages of man connected microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions, continued to influence Tudor and Stuart writers. The treatise of Thomas of Cantimpré, *On the Nature of Things* (*De natura rerum*), written in the middle of the thirteenth century and using the same model, extends the period of *adolescentia* to the age of 35 and defines particular stages for a specific age group in the following way:

Infantia – from birth until the child begins to speak,

Pueritia – from the beginning of speech to age 14,

Adolescentia – 14 to 35,

Robor – 35 to 50,

Senectus (*old age*) – 50 to 70,

Etas decrepita (*decrepitude*) – 70 until death, and

Mors – death (Shahar 1997: 16).

Age	Planet	Qualities and Attributes
Infancy	Moon	chastity, purity, changeability, inability to express the state of one's soul
Childhood	Mercury	learning, eloquence, uncontrolled emotions
Adolescence / Youth	Venus	softness, sensuality, impulse towards love and sensual pleasure
Young Manhood / Adulthood	Sun	desire for power, substance, and position; ambition
Manhood / Maturity	Mars Jupiter	anger, ferocity, a desire to accomplish something of note before death
Old Age	Saturn	gravity, thoughtfulness, dignity; weakness of the body

Table 1. The model of the Seven Ages of Man.

The examples presented above are by no means exhaustive and instances from other works and authors could be multiplied. Hopefully, however, this selection has succeeded in demonstrating that the concepts of childhood, adolescence, and youth are hard to define in terms of specific age. Although the Middle Ages recognized these stages of life as different from adulthood, not all of the sources, for instance, distinguish between adolescence and youth, and the term *iuventus* could refer either to 'youth' or to 'maturity' depending on the context. On the whole, it seems that in most cases, and especially in literary depictions, the ages of man are used less to refer to the biological processes of growth and aging and more to the moral development of an individual over time (Dunlop 2007: 16).

The imprecision of terminology referring to the life cycle has caused much confusion and the picture does not become more lucid when one examines medieval legal discourses. Dunlop observes that the age of maturity varied among different codes, depended on gender and status, and the documents often distinguished between non-adulthood, i.e. 'infancy' or 'non-age', and adulthood, i.e. 'full age' (Dunlop 2007: 10-11). This may account for the fact that for years, a whole school of sociologists and

some historians, Philippe Ariès included, emphasised the short duration of adolescence and youth in the Middle Ages. Extreme as it may seem, Ariès hypothesised that before the nineteenth century the period of adolescence practically did not exist at all, claiming that “once he had passed the age of five or seven, the child was immediately absorbed into the world of adults” (Ariès 1962: 329).

On the other pole of the discussion there are scholars who propose a model which stresses the prolongation of adolescence and youth and who hold that in medieval and early modern English society “full participation in adult life was retarded, and legal, social and economic rights and obligations were accorded to the young only many years after they had reached puberty” (Ben-Amos 1994: 5)⁶. The hypothesis of this second group of scholars seems to find support in several fields of historical research: first, in historical demography and its findings about family structure and the age at marriage (which was indeed quite late); second, in studies concentrating on the history of family and its patriarchal structure, especially those which emphasize the authoritarian rule of the master of the house over not only his children but also over his older servants and apprentices; and third, in the works which emphasize the existence of ‘the culture of youth’, which had its own forms of expression and manifested itself in various spheres of social life: politics, religion, leisure, and relationships with peers.

Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos views the two positions as somewhat inadequate, even misguided, and her carefully researched and well supported analysis seems to prove that adolescence and youth was “a long and dynamic phase in the life cycle” involving “a series of mental, social, and economic processes”, which varied along gender and social lines (Ben-Amos 1994: 9). Consequently, maturation should not be perceived in terms of

⁶ A much more detailed discussion of both views is provided in Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos’s *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (1994: 1-10).

a specific time or event in life, but as a set of transformations, defined in social and cultural rather than biological terms.

If it was the society and culture that played a vital role in shaping the process of maturing, we should concentrate on the formative experiences that marked the transition to adulthood in the eyes of both youth and adults. Such widely acknowledged cornerstones on the path to maturity included: confirmation, leaving home to start apprenticeship or service in the lower strata of society or to receive education in the higher ones, becoming economically independent either through inheritance or by starting up one's own business, travelling to acquire broader experience or find better prospects for the future, and, finally, marriage and setting up an independent family unit. Generally, 'wild and wanton' youth, who lacked economic independence as well as social ties and obligations, had to undergo a gradual transformation into 'sad and wise' members of society, who enjoyed financial autonomy but, at the same time, were burdened with family duties, political or guild responsibilities, and other social constraints. The transformation, too important for the whole community to be left unaided, was guided by preaching, educating, and training exercised by religious, social, and family authorities.

In the boy bishop's sermon (*In die innocencium sermon pro episcopo puerorum*) that has survived from the Middle Ages, the preacher states that adolescence "hath two lynes, a right and crooked, sygnefyenge the dysposycion that he hath thenne to vyce and thenne to virtue" (Nichols and Rimbault 1875: 2), drawing our attention not only to alleged youthful changeability, but also to the fact that the congregation must have associated youth with both positive and negative qualities. Even if, as it has been indicated earlier, the medieval thinkers did not formulate a unified theory of youth, they succeeded in establishing a set of powerful, although at times contradictory, images about them. These ideas included: inclination to sin contrasted with piety and innocence; ignorance and idleness coupled with the quickness of mind and capacity to absorb knowledge; natural

beauty, health and strength compared with pride and vanity related to them; energy and vigour set against rashness and irritability, etc. This rich repertoire of paradoxically clashing traits could be then employed by different people for different purposes:

Some people's attitudes towards youth were first and foremost a matter of a rigid outlook on the social order, so the 'fire' of youth was interpreted as dangerous and threatening, and images of youth deriving from the natural world were interpreted as 'poisonous fruits' or seen as 'fruit growing wild'. For others, advancement in the world, the achievement of material wealth, health, and the future of their offspring were of the outmost concern, so youthful lives were seen as 'buds' and 'blossoming flower'. (Ben-Amos 1994: 34-35)

When juxtaposed with the decay of old age, youth appeared in a more positive light through the association with strength, beauty, and vigour, and yet the task of any preacher or educator, was to channel this positive energy towards desirable outcomes and teach young men to exercise control over their instincts.

The "rigid outlook" mentioned by Ben-Amos may be understood by analogy with Bakhtin's construction of culture, in terms of "centripetal" (or "official") forces, continuously seeking to impose order and hierarchy in the world. More often than not, those who held power saw the behaviour of youth as posing a danger to the wellbeing of the society. According to Bakhtin's theory then, the young can be perceived as "centrifugal" (or „un-official“) forces which bring chaos and disorder into the official world. If both kinds are natural constituents of any social and cultural system, for Bakhtin the centripetal forces appear to have negative connotations with the "rigid", "ossified", and "reactionary", while the centrifugal are positively associated with the "open-minded", "rebellious", and "innovative".⁷ Although,

⁷ Here, it might be quite tempting to juxtapose adult culture with youth culture; however we should bear in mind that, as Hanawalt observes, "No full-fledged youth subculture in which peers were the chief influence on an adolescent's life existed in the Middle Ages. While youth occasionally rioted, dressed in distinctive fashion, and had some holidays reserved for

as I have observed earlier, Bakhtin's binary oppositions may sometimes appear to be oversimplified or somewhat stretched to suit the ends of his argumentation, they are useful for the purposes of discussing the moral interludes aimed at the young for a few reasons. First, it is virtually impossible to perceive moral plays as written in purely abstract terms, and all of them construct their protagonists, vices, and virtues in social and cultural terms. Dealing with the community which predominantly associated youth with rebelliousness and instability and older age with authority and steadiness, it seems logical to adopt a system of analysis that will acknowledge this opposition. Secondly, taking into account the fact that all of the plays strongly emphasize the sins of the flesh, the Bakhtinian discussion of the carnival with its emphasis on bodily pleasure, feasting, and the corporeal nature of man seems to be justified and natural. Thirdly, by examining the code of the carnival, as it invades the plays aimed at instruction and, therefore, situated in the mainstream of the official ideology, we may perceive these plays as more dialogic and polyvalent than they initially appear.

Youth and pride in the interludes

If, as Foucault states, in every society the body is "in the grip of very strict powers, which impose on it its constraints, prohibitions, or obligations" (Foucault 1979: 137), it is not surprising that the moral plays discussed here are so preoccupied with the sins of the flesh. Usually perceived by religious discourse in opposition to the spiritual self, as if they were mere containers that should be disposed of to free the immortal soul, the bodies of the protagonists of the moral plays belong to the world of the carnival – they are strong, good-looking, well-dressed, overfed, drunk, visiting the taverns, dancing, gambling and fighting but

its own fun, these activities were neither organized nor pervasive cultural events as they became in the late-nineteenth-and- twentieth-century Europe and America" (Hanawalt 1995: 6).

what is more important, they are young. While the sinful body of a reckless youth can be a danger to itself, i.e. a reason for the spiritual fall in *Mundus* and *Youth*⁸ and an obstacle against education in *Wit and Science*, it can also be perceived as posing a certain threat to a greater body of the society. Consequently, the interludes examine the sins and vices that can be attributed to young age and by showing the ways in which the sinful young male could be reformed seek to neutralise the fears connected with his persona.

All three plays share an initial admiration for the physical beauty, strength and agility of the young body. In *Mundus*, the protagonist is rushed through his not-so-innocent childhood, filled with naughty games and pranks, including tormenting animals and stealing pears and plums from his neighbour's garden on his way to school, and at the age of fourteen receives the name of Lust and Liking, at which point he is described in the diction of courtly love lyrics as "fresh as flowers in May" (l. 132), and "seemly shapen in same" (l. 133), the former phrase being an almost direct borrowing from Chaucer's portrayal of the Squire in the General Prologue (ll. 90-93). Youth, the main character of the interlude of the same title, is much more outspoken about the admirable qualities of his nimble body and devotes seven lines (ll. 48-54) to his immodest self-presentation, focusing the audience's attention on his physical advantages, including "royal and bush thicked" hair (l.48), physical strength and agility, resulting in his overall predilection "to hop and dance and make merry" (l. 54). Finally, *Wit and Science* draws attention of the spectators to Wit's positive attributes both in terms of physical features and mental qualities.

At the very beginning, Reason praises his would-be son-in-law as "young, painful [painstaking], tractable and capax [capable]" (l. 19), concentrating on the properties indispensable to a good student. A few moments later, still before the protagonist

⁸ Preliminary observations concerning the image of youth in these two interludes have been included in my earlier article, see Borowska-Szerszun, 2008. Here I provide a much more-developed and considerably revised discussion.

appears on stage, the audience are faced with his portrait, “a goodly picture of Wit himself” (ll. 49-50), which is “as like him as can be in every point” (l. 52) and “lacketh but life” (l. 53). From the subsequent words of Confidence, Wit’s messenger, we may deduce that the picture depicts Wit in such a favourable light that it would surely make Lady Science fall in love him. However, it is through the very context of the play’s stage realisation that the positive qualities of youth receive most prominence in this interlude. Most probably performed in the second half of the reign of Henry VIII by the boys of St Paul’s choir school supervised by Redford, *Wit and Science* utilizes the resources easily available to the playwright, i.e. young and skilled actors and singers, whose “speeches allow them to demonstrate their skills at memorization and delivery; frequent songs and dances display the choristers’ musical “cunning” and physical agility” (Scherb 2005: 272). Promoting the choir boys themselves, the interlude, willingly or not, also promotes to an unprecedented extent the attributes of youth in general.

However, the affirmative discourse, linking youth with blossoming, liveliness and quickness of mind, is not allowed to run for too long and is controlled on the moralistic plane of the interludes by a powerful association with the sin of pride, defined by *The Book of Vices and Virtues* as the “bigynnyng of al eule” (11), “þe deules eldeste douȝter” (12), and the “kyng of alle vices” (12). In *Robert of Brunne’s Handlyng Synne*, it is similarly constructed as the “eldyst doghters of helle” (l. 2990-1) and established as the root of disobedience against parents (l. 3010), clergy (l. 3012), and social superiors (l. 3016). It is clear that all three plays appropriate the discourse developed in the medieval handbooks of sins and construct pride in accordance with the sermon tradition. The premise that this particular sin is actually “the beginning of all evil” is translated into the structure of the plays quite literally – all protagonists show its symptoms long before they actually face and fall under the influence of the vices. Among many manifestations of pride, *Handlyng Synne* mentions boasting about one’s physical strength (l. 3047) and

beauty (l. 3043), to which youth are particularly susceptible. Their very health, strength, and attractiveness are staged as “a potential ground of sinfulness” (Dunlop 2007: 25), giving them a deceptive sense of power and leading to a false belief that death and judgment are just a distant possibility.

In *Mundus* the protagonist’s boastfulness develops and reaches its peak when, at twenty-one, he receives the name of Manhood Mighty and at the same time is dubbed a knight. Although he is actually referred to as Manhood, his desire for power, substance, and position, exemplified by both his speech and stage costume, seems to situate him as the one under the influence of the Sun, hence my claim that it is possible to perceive him as a ‘young’ man. Being told of the World’s seven great kings, or as it turns out seven deadly sins, equipped with grace, beauty, “robes royal right of good hue” (l. 197), and “gold and silver great plenty” (l. 202), Manhood seems to be interested most of all in Pride and swears to serve him truly (l. 193). His vainglory, one of the seven branches of pride meticulously described in *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and referring to the situation “whan a man feelep in his herte a gladness of a þyng he is” (19), is displayed at two levels: it is concerned with the goods of nature (e.g. “I am lord both stalworthy and stout,” l. 239), but more importantly with the goods of fortune, i.e. “hizenesse, honoures, riches, delices, and prosperities” (*The Book...*: 20). Manhood describes himself as a bloody conqueror (ll. 254-266), a mighty emperor of countless places, both local and exotic ones (ll. 239-249), as the best-born baron (l. 241, l. 251), the most courageous soldier (l. 261) not hesitating when the need arises to spill the blood of his enemies. His arrogance is at its highest when he states that he is the best of all men in all respects: “To me no men is maked” (l. 264), “I am royalest, redely, that runeth in this crowd” (l. 272). Manhood’s bragging speech is a lengthy one; the protagonist repeats the same boasts over and over again, paraphrasing his previous statements and becomes a dramatic impersonation of a “cokkow, þat can no syng but of

himself" (*The Book...*: 17), the image of cuckoo being naturally associated with spring.

If in *Mundus* the pride of the central character is shown to the spectators predominantly by verbal means, i.e. by the extensive use of comparative and superlative phrases, in which Manhood always turns out to be the best, strongest, brightest, boldest, most powerful, etc., and by the length of his speech itself, the protagonist of *Youth* not only speaks a lot but virtually takes over the stage. His self-made presentation as a "goodly person" (l. 41), who has no equals ("Who may be likened unto me, / In my youth and jollity?", ll. 46-47), is reminiscent of Manhood, but the effect is strengthened by Youth's powerful, attention-grabbing entrance. With a disrespectful interruption of Charity's speech, with a call for room directed at both the virtue and the audience, he wins for himself the space in which to show off his body and succeeds in reversing the serious mood created by the virtue. We soon realise, however, that the protagonist perceives his "goodness" and virtue solely in terms of his good looks and vigour, which makes him as guilty of vainglory as Manhood is. When reprimanded by Charity for being narcissistic about his body, for taking too much sensual pleasure in displaying his agility and for speaking only about his physical appearance and vitality, Youth is unable to hide his genuine, though naïve, bewilderment: "Why should I not praise it, and it be goodely?" (l. 68), a question that, taking into account his unquestionable appeal in the performance, might have been lingering in the minds of the audience as well.

In *Wit and Science*, the protagonist's pride is contrasted with his inexperience. Entering the stage in the company of Diligence and Study, but without Instruction, Wit appears helplessly lost about the direction he should be following: "Which is the way now? / This way or that way?" (ll. 63-64). Even though Instruction comes on stage soon afterwards, he is unable to persuade the boy against his attempt to fight Giant Tediousness and convince him to take an easier path (ll. 74-76) until getting properly equipped with Hope and Comfort, the weapons

provided by Science (ll. 94-95). On hearing that Tediousness is within his reach, Wit, full of youthful enthusiasm and passion, wants to approach his enemy immediately, with no reflection on the potential consequences of his actions (ll. 81-86). His boyish overconfidence in his physical and mental abilities leads him to embark on a task he is clearly unprepared for and which is consequently doomed to failure, a fact that Instruction does not forget to observe:

When wits stand so in their own conceit,
Best let them go, till pride in his height
Turn and cast them down headlong again,
As you shall see proved by this Wit plain. (ll. 133-136)

From the last line of the passage, the spectators infer that the interlude will focus on the negative influence of pride, construed in terms of an obstacle on the path towards gaining knowledge that can only be avoided by following Instruction, without whom all positive qualities of youth cannot be successfully utilised.

In all three plays the main characters are much more than merely generalised, universal embodiments of "humankind". In *Mundus* all references to the protagonist's life, first as a child and a page at court, then as a knight who through bloody conquests wants to acquire both fame and public status, and finally as a mighty lord, situate him within the socially well-defined context of a young, affluent male. In *The Interlude of Youth*, Youth's social and material position is also clearly defined, as he is the only heir to his father's lands, provided with plenty of money to spend. In fact, he is much more of a social type than Manhood is. Lacking a father, or an older brother, and dismissing Charity's advice, he is "the epitome of healthy, vigorous, unfettered, and well-financed masculine youth" (Sponsler 1997: 91), whose behaviour was often seen as antisocial and unruly. In *Wit and Science*, Wit is not only a young boy but, more specifically, a student utterly lost in his pursuit of knowledge. As the play is enacted by schoolboys, who were also most probably present among the spectators, it seems viable to claim that

it is precisely this confused choirboy, who stands for the other boys of St Paul's school, at whom Redford, a schoolmaster after all, directs the message that he "must proceed at a measured pace, letting more difficult matters wait until he has mastered preliminary materials so that they have become easy for him" (Schell 1976:180).

All three plays, with their emphasis on pride, disobedience, and the insubordination of youth, utilize the theme of the biblical parable of the prodigal son, based on St Luke and frequently exploited in medieval sermons. Like the parable, moral interludes play with the idea that committing sins and straying away from the right path constitute a natural stage in human life and a crucial precondition of forgiveness, understood as salvation in religious terms and as full acceptance into the structures of a given society in secular terminology. The paradigm remains equally powerful whether the riotous and reckless existence of the protagonists is perceived metaphorically as alienation from God, a rebellion against the socially approved patriarchal values of the community, or a disregard for the rules established by pedagogues for the benefit of their in-charges. Indeed, the uneven, hierarchical construction of a father-son relationship provides a useful model informing many other patriarchal relationships, e.g. between the ultimate paternal figure of God and humankind; representatives of the church and Christian community; kings and their subjects; civic authorities and townspeople; householders and their family and servants; masters and apprentices, schoolmasters and students, etc. In all cases, the father, understood literally or metaphorically, is a guarantor of his family's well-being, religious order, and social or political stability. Standing against the father meant undermining his authority, which in consequence led to destabilizing the order established by God.

Rebellion against paternal virtues

Irrespective of the final message of the plays, be it concerned with spiritual or more mundane matters, the virtues in *Mundus*, *Youth*, and *Wit and Wisdom* are shown as paternal figures, both morally and socially superior to the young protagonists of the plays, which is usually emphasized by their clothes, speech, and grave behaviour. The tension between the voice of seriousness and the voice of the carnival relies mainly on juxtaposing the authority of the virtues, built through paradigmatic associations external to the sphere of theatre, with the comic appeal of the vices, but also depends on the fact that the prodigal-son-like journey of Manhood, Youth, and Wit is structured as a diversion from the righteous path delineated by the paternal figures, whose superiority the protagonists simply fail to recognize. This failure, resonating with social overtones, is carefully construed not only through verbal, but also spatial and theatrical means that could be observed by the audience.

In *Mundus* the issue of paternal authority is complicated as, at least at first glance, there appear to be two paternal figures in the play: Conscience, the chief virtue, and Mundus, the World. The latter character strongly emphasizes his superiority over the protagonist by referring to him as a “chylde” (six times) and “a sonne” (once), and by presenting himself as a “kynge” and “prynce” ruling over all human kind. To visualize his dominance in spatial terms, he is seated on a throne, like a lord presiding over the first stages of the protagonist’s life and demanding respect and obedience. The use of the throne as stage prop could evoke connotations with the depiction of God as the kingly ruler; for example, in *The Castle of Perseverance* God occupies a throne on a scaffold, and in the Last Judgement scenes in cycle plays the enthroned God invites the elect to sit with him in his heavenly kingdom (Debax 2002a: 19-21). At one point, Mundus’ boastful speech indicates he indeed sees himself as a god-like figure, above all other earthly emperors and kings, who kneel to his knee (l. 221), whereas his realm is described as limitless:

“Yet all is at my handwork, both by down and by dale, / Both the sea and the land, and fowls that fly” (ll.224-5). Here, by presenting himself as the ruler of the sea, land and air, the World slips into blasphemy and usurps the position of God himself. His throne is not the seat of God, we realize, but the attribute of Herod, the most popular bombastic and bragging tyrant of medieval stages, whose majesty and glory are fake. Through both verbal exposition and employment of the throne as stage prop the authority of Mundus is questioned and destroyed, which is obvious to the audience but not to the protagonist.

The entrance of Conscience, in contrast, is apparently unspectacular. The virtue appears for the first time when Manhood’s pride is at its highest, when the protagonist has become an impersonation of Mundus, not only imitating his extravagant discourse, abundant in superlatives, immodest epithets and syntactic structures introduced by the pronoun “I”, but also physically occupying his throne as the lord ruling over the Seven Kings named Pride, Lechery, Wrath, Covetise, Gluttony, Sloth, and Envy (ll. 275-285). Conscience’s arrival on stage is quiet, polite and respectful; his speech and behaviour make him the quintessence of pride’s antithesis – humility. Introducing himself as “a teacher of spirituality” (l. 334), in the opening lines of his monologue he discredits the authority of both Mundus and Manhood by mentioning the real crowned king, Christ, and his sacrifice:

Christ, as he is crowned king,
Save all this comely company,
And grant you all his dear blessing,
That bonerly bought you on the rood-tree!
Now pray you prestly, on every side,
To God omnipotent,
To set our enemy sharply on side,
That is the devil and his convent. (ll. 288-295)

Conscience’s devout tone of speech, in which he asks for Christ’s protection and blessing, his appeals to the spectators to pray together, as well as the habit he was most likely wearing, bring in

connotations of holy service, sermon and prayer. In this context the virtue addressing the spectators in terms of “comely company” metaphorically transforms the audience into a religious congregation and the profane theatrical space into a morally superior sacred space, in which Conscience will subsequently undertake to convert the sinful protagonist.

If the spectators are aware of this transformation, Manhood is clearly not. Unable to observe the spiritual overtones of Conscience’s speech, he not only resorts to the abusive language of the carnival and labels the virtue as a “harlot” (l. 320), a “bitched brothel” (l. 322) and a “false flattering friar” (l. 401), but also physically assaults him. Distressed by the virtue’s reasonable line of thought and argumentation, by means of which the true nature of all his vassals (i.e. the seven deadly sins) is gradually unveiled, Manhood reacts furiously and curses Conscience: “The devil mote set thou on fire / That I ever with thee met!” (ll. 403-404), “The devil break thy neck!” (l. 408). The threats and curses, i.e. the familiar speech of the marketplace predominating in the realm of the carnival and used by the protagonist in this scene in a futile attempt to get rid of the virtue, stand in vivid contrast with the powerful discourse of the church.

Conscience’s speech, with its calm conviction of his infallibility and resonant with the tradition of the pulpit and moralistic literature, can be perceived in Bakhtin’s nomenclature as the “authoritative word”, defined as the word of fathers and teachers, “located in a distanced zone, organically connected to the past that is felt to be hierarchically higher” (Bakhtin 1981: 342), a word that demands unconditional acknowledgment from its recipients and cannot be debated. The spiritual lesson offered by the virtue reveals social overtones as Manhood is expected to learn “to maintain manner” (l. 330) appropriate to his status. The protagonist is not invited to renounce his earthly position altogether, but to reinvent himself as a Christian knight⁹ and act accordingly – to serve God as the only true king (ll. 359-60),

⁹ For a discussion on a Christian conception of knighthood and the Church’s ambiguous relationship with chivalry, see Saul (2011: 197-214)

to observe the ten commandments (ll. 425-440), to attend matins and mass (ll. 443-444), and to use his power to protect the Church (ll. 445-446). The authoritative voice of the interlude can be seen as a blend of religious message and a lesson on behaviour befitting a young nobleman, who is encouraged to live 'in the world' without becoming too 'worldly' – the principle of moderation being the key in the process. That Manhood finally accepts this teaching is reflected in the verbal layer of the scene, when he finally abandons the chaotic, though ornate, style of Mundus he previously imitated and adopts the diction of the virtue, which is much more organized in terms of both meter and rhyming patterns.

To establish himself as a paternal authority and a source of wisdom, Charity in *Youth* employs parallel methods. Already the first three lines of the play evoke the image of Christ's sacrifice and contain a plea for the audience to be saved from all perils. The virtue then proceeds to introduce himself as the one who has "come from God aboue / To occupie his lawes to your behoue" (ll. 5-6), stresses his own superiority over other virtues, and situates himself at the very top of their hierarchy:

For he that Charitie doth refuse
Other virtues though he do vse
Withouth Charitie it wyll not be. (ll. 10-12)

Interestingly, to underline this point he does not simply refer to, or barely paraphrase in the vernacular, but actually quotes the Holy Scriptures in Latin – first in line 14 "*Qui manet in charitate, in Deo manet*" (cf. I John 4: 16) and then in line 25 "*Deus charitas est*" (cf. I John 4: 8 and 16). The use of Latin within a vernacular text, not uncommon and successfully employed in other moral plays (e.g. *Mankind*, *Wisdom*), serves to trigger the association between the virtue and clergy, as well as between his speech and the authoritative voice of the church, or, in Charity's own words, the works "wryten by noble clerkes" (l. 106). Exploring the interrelation between a *Middle English Sermon on the Prodigal Son* and *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*,

Kelemen observes an interesting phenomenon occurring when a priest embeds an eight-line poem within the structure of an exemplum used in his sermon. "When the preacher switches into verse he also switches into drama and theatre" (Kelemen 2002: 9). Here, it appears, the phenomenon is reversed. When the actor, playing the part of the virtue, switches into Latin, he also switches into sermon, thus allowing "another's voice to inhabit" his own (Kelemen 2002:10). Once the direct quotation from the Bible has been adopted, the virtue/preacher is perceived by the audience as speaking not with his own voice, but with the voice of God. The connection being made, it will be difficult, if not unworkable, to deny the paternal authority of Charity in the play.

Still, the mood of sermon-like seriousness is utterly destroyed when Youth, with much clamour and commotion, enters through the audience and wins the stage for himself to display his youthful vigour and pride. His first dialogue with Charity is carefully built so as to emphasize the protagonist's ignorance and the virtue's unquestionable wisdom. Charity, in the manner of a patient tutor, continuously overlooks the boy's rudeness, abusive language and physical threats and attempts to channel his energy towards proper use. Thus, when Youth evokes the image of spring and compares himself to a flourishing "vyne tre" (l. 44), the virtue is quick to destroy the picture of blossoming nature associated with youth, juxtaposing it with an image of decay and the fires of hell:

Ye maye be lykend to a tre
 In youth floryshyng with royallte
 And in age it is cut downe
 And to the fyre is throwne. (ll. 74-77)

Similarly, Youth's self-assurance and satisfaction with his newly gained social importance ("I am the heyre of my fathers lande / And it is come into my hande / I care for no more" ll. 56-58), make no impression on Charity. Instead of preaching on the evanescent nature of earthly riches and power, the virtue simply

contrasts the phrase “heyre of my fathers lande” from Youth’s lines with “herytoure of blysse” (l. 91), in this way establishing heaven as the only ‘land’ worth aspiring for.

Still again, Youth, unlike the audience, misses the lesson, taking Charity’s words literally and observing that he would need a ladder to climb to the sky and that the risk of breaking his neck prevents him from attempting to do so (ll. 96-103). At this point, Youth not only carnivalesquely degrades the words of the virtue onto the most down-to-earth plane and parodies the Christian belief that people are God’s children and heirs, but his ignorance becomes a source of comedy and laughter for the audience. While he is trying to ridicule the teaching of the virtues, his attempts prove counter-productive. It is Youth, inferior to the spectators in terms of knowledge and understanding of the nature of the whole situation¹⁰, who becomes the laughing stock in the eyes of those who watch the play, not the paternal figures that are apparently being mocked. Whereas Charity skilfully presents his arguments in an internally organized and coherent discourse, Youth has at his disposal a whole repertoire of billingsgate and turns to insults and invectives, calling Charity a “horson” (l. 80), a “caytife” (ll. 81, 139) and a “foole” (l. 150) and dubbing his speech “clerkish gibberish” (ll. 112-113). When this proves insufficient, he resorts to physical threats of beating the virtue up and slaying him with a dagger (ll. 84-5).

¹⁰ In fact, the comic degradation of the protagonist is frequently employed in other moral plays as well. In such cases it depends on the theories of comic degradation (e.g. Hobbes, Bain), which assume that the object of the comic (i.e. the one who is laughable) possesses some negative characteristic quality (in this case the protagonist’s inability to perceive the connection between the virtues and the church), which gives the subject of the comic (i.e. the one that laughs) the feeling of superiority. The point is emphasised by Hobbes, who writes: “The passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity in others” (qtd. in Janicka 1962: 15). Laughter is perceived here as a certain, often involuntary, reaction of man to degradation, be it of a person, behaviour or values. It is in this sense that the degradation is repeatedly used in morality plays to evoke the comic mood.

Youth's carnivalesque language and offensive violent behaviour directed at Charity stem from his pride and contrast sharply with the manner in which a young man of his status should act. The protagonist's lack of knowledge pertaining to religious issues is matched by his ignorance of the proper code of behaviour and lack of civility, implying that Youth is familiar with neither his catechism nor his courtesy books. Late medieval courtesy literature, punctiliously prescribing proper behaviour in very specific situations of social significance, can be seen as a genre meant to civilize young men by teaching them proper manners and gestures. In medieval thought, gesture is understood in terms of Augustinian 'given signs' that are intentionally (*voluntas significandi*) used to communicate something and classified according to the senses at which they are directed, i.e. mostly to the ears and eyes, and sometimes to other senses (Burrow 2002: 1-3). Improper manners, gestures, postures and speech were also seen as manifestations of one's true nature. Yet, in the case of the young they resulted from their sinfulness (e.g. pride in Trevisa's translation of *De regimine principum*) and/or lack of self-discipline typical for this stage of life (e.g. in Russel's *Boke of Nurture*), and as such could be amended by proper instruction. Among other values that can be identified as important for young men, they promote restraining one's exuberant behaviour and wild speech, communicating effectively, and, above all, showing deference to one's superiors to avoid the appearance of presumption (Dunlop 2007: 36-39).

In *Youth* the protagonist is comically unaware that he lacks all of the above qualities, which becomes even more apparent when contrasted with Charity's wisdom. At one point in yet another attempt to undermine the virtue's authority, he asks a senseless question: "Whi do me eate musterd with saltfishe?" (l. 119). Charity's dismissal of the question as just a "vanitie" (l. 122) is taken by the protagonist as a sign of inadequate learning ("I se your conninge is little or noughte", l. 126). However, Charity is right not to enter the game on Youth's terms. If he engaged in a verbal, nonsensical contest, he would degrade

himself to the level of the protagonist; if he answered the question, he might win Youth at this stage but his morals would be compromised. Thus, this apparent defeat becomes a victory¹¹.

In *Wit and Wisdom* Reason, the father of Lady Science, who also extends his paternal authority over Wit by referring to him as son, gives his consent to the marriage of the young couple and sets some guidelines for the protagonist, but is *de facto* absent for most of the play. In his absence, the task of guiding Wit, accompanied by Study and Diligence, is delegated to Instruction. Such construction of paternal figures actually mirrors the situation of schoolboys, who at school were supervised by the teacher in the absence of their father. The authority of Instruction is not as strong as in the case of the previous plays, as his words cannot be linked with the discourse of the Church, which is derived from God. Therefore, Instruction offers advice rather than sermon and accepts the fact that his student must learn from his own mistakes. Consequently, the protagonist is allowed to follow the path of his choice and attack his enemy Giant Tediousness virtually unprepared.

¹¹ Elsewhere, I have claimed that a parallel phenomenon may be observed in *Mankind*, the play in which verbal expression of both the virtue and the vices is treated very carefully. In the scene when Newguise, one of the vices, accuses Mercy of the inability to use his language, i.e. Latin, in an ordinary, everyday conversation, challenging the virtue to turn a couple of indecent, marketplace speech lines into Latin. (I have etun a dyschfull of curdys, / Ande I have schetun yowr mowth full of turdys, / Now, opyn yowr sachell wyth Laten wordys / Ande sey me þis in clerycall manere! (ll. 131-134). Mercy, refusing to 'translate' the couplets, in a way loses this battle of 'eloquence' with the vices. However, Mercy's silence is ambiguous. On the one hand, he appears to be helpless in the eye of the trick devised by the vices, being incapable of using the words that would prove Newguise wrong. Still, Mercy proves his moral superiority, as no virtuous man would dare to use such obscene language. The situation reminds one of the temptation of Christ in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4). Mercy, like Christ, chooses not to prove his power and by doing so wins spiritually over the vices, just like Christ won with Satan. The silence might be also linked with the silence of Jesus when he was questioned by the Pharisees. See: Borowska (2007: 40).

The narrative developed in *Wit and Science* leaves the ending apparently open, giving the teacher and the audience an opportunity to check whether the student succeeds or not. This again bears some resemblance to the circumstances of the school, where boys' destiny is not determined from the outset. The Articles of Admission to St. Pauls's School actually made some provisions for the possibility of students' failure: "If your childe after reasonable season proued be founde here vnapte & vnable to lernynge, then ye warned therof shal take hym awaye, that he occupye not here rowme in vayne" (qtd. in Scherb 2005: 274). The protagonist of Redford's interlude is not to be converted by preaching but is led to actively reflect on his actions. If he finally conforms to Instruction, he will win a chance of achieving success; if he does not, he will lose his place at school. Therefore, to paraphrase the Articles, Wit's final objective is to prove that he is a student "apte & able to lernynge", the one worth occupying his place at school.

Merry-making with carnivalesque vices

Whereas the virtues in both *Mundus et Infans* and *Youth* are depicted as paternal figures morally and socially superior to Youth and Manhood, the vices are construed as the protagonists' fun-loving and roguish peers. Thanks to this strategy, they can be perceived as companions exercising detrimental influence upon the main characters rather than sinister abstractions capable of subverting God's will.

In *Mundus* Folly acts in the manner of a carefree, foul-mouthed brawler, running onto the stage with a call for room and attention and provoking recently converted Manhood into a fight. The onstage brawl proves to be the first stage of the protagonist's fall and shows how shallow his dedication to Conscience's teaching truly was. Although Manhood tries to imitate the discourse used by the virtue in the previous scene and to act as a counsellor to Folly: "Fellow, though thou have cunning, /

I counsel thee leave thy boasting” (ll. 545-546), he is unable to remain indifferent to provocation and grabs his sword, which Conscience, despite being teased, refused to do. The scene carnivalesquely mirrors the painstaking work done by Conscience in the previous scene. While the virtue arduously laboured on directing Manhood onto the right path, cutting his bond with the seven sins one by one with carefully chosen arguments, Folly manages to win the protagonist by child-like teasing, boasting about his fencing skill, and allowing the main character to hit him in the scuffle.

Adult, yet still immature, Manhood appears to be so fascinated by his new acquaintance – a corrupt student of law (l. 575) brought up in Holborn (l. 571), familiar with Eastcheap and Westminster (all districts notorious for their alehouses, taverns and brothels), acquainted with the courtiers (l. 572), well received in abbeys and nunneries (l. 604), and crowned king by friars (l. 600) – that he asks for his name nearly a hundred lines after their lively dialogue commenced. When he learns the true name of his companion, i.e. Folly and Shame, he remembers Conscience’s teaching and asks the vice to leave him. The request is repeated three times; still, the vice once more manages to win by performing a single trick – he removes his cloak and assures that without the garment his proper name is just Folly. Manhood, unable to see through the trick, eagerly accepts the vice as his servant. Once again the play relies on the sharp juxtaposition of the devices used by Conscience and Folly to win the fight over the protagonist’s soul. While the former offers salvation as a reward for fulfilling the demands of religion, the latter needs only to remove his cloak to attract the protagonist. The reversal of order has been swiftly accomplished – the childishly uncomplicated visual trick has won against intellectual theology; the carnivalesque play with costumes and identity has triumphed over the sacrosanct, authoritative word of the church.

The vices in the *Interlude of Youth* do not even have to fight for the soul of the protagonist as at least one of them, Riot, is

his friend from the very beginning. Their closeness and familiarity are stressed by the terms “company” (l. 205), “brother” (l. 206), and “compere” (l. 215), used by both Youth and Riot to refer to their relationship, which could be represented on a horizontal rather than a vertical line. As the very manner of their addressing each other suggests, their friendship is based upon age and social equality rather than hierarchy. Riot and Youth are shown as “full of iolitie” (l. 210), light-hearted young people, who enjoy their youth and want to use it to the full.

Although *Youth* makes it explicitly clear that the vices are social wrongdoers, crime is perceived by the protagonist and the vices in terms of a mischievous game against the authorities, a childish hide-and-seek with the virtue, fooling around with no serious repercussions. For instance, Riot, a runaway from Newgate prison, where he was detained for theft, speaks of his criminal deeds as if they were a blind man’s bluff, not a serious transgression against social values; he takes pride in the fact that he has “learned a pollicie that wyll lose [him] lyghtlie and soone let [him] go” (ll. 241-243). Having escaped the gallows, the vice continues his wicked game and robs a passing courtier of twenty nobles. Paradoxically, the vice’s criminal recidivism is mistaken by Youth for constancy, persistence, and steadfastness of purpose:

I loue well thy discesion
For thou arte all of one condicyon
Thou arte stable and steadfast of mynde
And not chaungable as the wynde (ll. 243-246),

which once again draws our attention to the carnivalesque reversal of order that dominates the stage during the meeting with the vice.

Youth, whose behaviour already shows symptoms of pride and who is looking for a servant to emphasise his recently gained position as a landowner, is then introduced to the vice-servant bearing the same name. By accepting him immediately, he disregards the advice provided in courtesy literature

to test a servant's honesty over a long period of time, to avoid unnecessary familiarity, to entrust his private matters only to those who have proved reliable. As Dunlop observes, "[t]hese prescriptions are designed to help the noble preserve the right balance of power between himself and his servants, to ensure that status distinctions are observed and that no servant gains an undue influence over him" (Dunlop 2007: 49). In *Youth* the balance is totally distorted, the master-servant relationship subverted. It is the servant, Pride, who dictates what his master, Youth, should do.

This reversal of roles significantly adds to the carnivalesque overtones of the scene. The protagonist, who in the beginning refers to Pride as a "noble swain" (l. 319) and patronizingly calls him a "good fellowe" (l. 325), to whom he "shall geue the golde and fee" (l. 328) in return for his services, on hearing that the vice can actually bring him to "hye degree" (l. 335) eagerly accepts to be ruled by his underling (l. 337) to achieve this purpose. The advice offered is a total reversal of the lesson given by Charity and sounds like a travesty of the sacred discourse:

Aboue all men exalte thy minde
Put downe the poore and set nought by them
Be in company with gentel men
Lette vp and downe in the waye
And your clothes loke they be gaye
The pretye wenches wyll saie than
Yonder goeth a gentelmen
And euery pore felowe that goeth you bye
Will do of his cap and make you curtesie (ll. 342-350)

The reversal of religious message matches the reversal of order in the protagonist's household, in which the master is ruled by his servant. Unable to absorb the spiritual lesson offered by the Church, Youth is also incapable of independent and successful performance of his social role, which leads to even more undesirable practices, suggested by Pride. Exalting oneself over others, ignoring the poor, spending money to assert one's social standing and impress women, forcing others to show undue re-

spect – all these may be seen as both offences against religious norms and transgression against the values of the community.

Unlike the enemies of Youth and Manhood, Wit's mortal foe, Tediousness, neither wears the guise of his friend nor tries to establish a bond between himself and the protagonist. While the visor worn over his head enforces connotations with both a giant from courtly romances and a rival knight in a tournament fight, his language and behaviour are indebted to the portrayal of vices in traditional moral plays. With his entry the more or less regular decasyllabic verse used by morally superior characters switches into a more abrupt metrical pattern formed of five-syllable, alternately rhyming lines. The shift in itself draws attention to the carnivalesque lowering of the tone of the play, the differentiation of stanza pattern serving to emphasise the differences between the characters on the verbal level. As Tediousness's lines get shorter, he is provided with an opportunity to show off his physical agility, run on stage with his sword and to dominate the theatrical space. Like other vices, he demands room from the audience (l. 175), commands them to stand back (l. 171), brandishes his sword and mockingly attacks the spectators. Also in a vice-like manner, he throws insults at the participants of the play, calling Wit a "villain" (l. 149) and a "wretch" (l. 150), referring to Science in terms of a "drab" (l. 155) and a "whore" (l. 156), but also directs the very same invectives at the audience – in this way cutting the distance between those who play in the interlude and those who watch it, the fiction and the reality, the theatre and life.

Yet, Giant Tediousness is not construed as an unwanted social companion but as mortal enemy, burning with hatred and desire to exterminate Wit as soon as possible and to prevent his prospective marriage with Science:

The knave's head shall ache.
These bones, this mall
Shall beat him to dust. (ll. 160-162)

...

Thou art but dead!
 Off goeth thy head
 At the first blow! (ll. 188-191)

Interestingly, this eagerness to kill the protagonist mirrors Wit's own feelings towards his mortal enemy expressed earlier in the interlude when the main character learns about Tediousness's whereabouts (ll. 81-84). Furthermore, the abusive language used by Tediousness to talk about Science reverses the courtly love discourse of Wit. When the protagonist speaks of his "dear heart", his adversary downgrades his terminology by using the words "drab" and "whore". Finally, Wit's well-noted hesitation as to which way to choose, prominent in the scene before the encounter with the giant, when he feverishly paces around the stage, is also mirrored in Tediousness's rapid, chaotic speech, and most probably actions:

Make room, I say!
 Round every way –
This way, that way!
What care I what way?
 Before me, behind me,
 Round about wind me! (ll. 175-180, emphasis mine)

There seems to be more to this doubling than sheer coincidence. By drawing parallels between Wit and the giant, Redford manages to present the latter one as the inner, rather than, external enemy of the protagonist. Unlike the vices from the religious plays, Tediousness attempts neither to diminish the position of Reason nor to verbally or physically attack Instruction. The discourse and behaviour that are carnivalesquely mirrored by the giant do not belong to the patriarchal figures of virtues either. In consequence, the carnivalesque spirit in *Wit and Science* does not try to extend its reach over the sphere belonging to Reason and Instruction.

What the carnival encompasses for its purposes in this interlude is the language and actions belonging solely to the protagonist. In effect, the struggle is not between the external voices

of Lent, associated with the authorities, and the carnival, understood as rebellion against these authorities; it is not only the battle between a rigorous educator and a disobedient student. Rather, it is a combat between the internal forces within Wit's own mind: his diligence in the pursuit of knowledge, shown on stage as the protagonist's companions, Study and Diligence, and Tediousness, a natural obstacle to learning, as their opponent.

If Study and Diligence are but manifestations of the capacities of Wit's mind, Tediousness also seems to be an obstruction generated in the process of learning by the mind itself and not some external hurdle placed in the way of the protagonist by someone else. Thus, the giant, carnivalesquely degrading Wit's language, behaviour, and motives, becomes a kind of alter-ego of the protagonist. In the on-stage combat the adversaries mirror not only each other's words (e.g. Tediousness: "Then have at thee!" l. 209 ; Wit: "Have at thee, again!" l. 210) but also physical movements (they are most probably circling each other and clashing their swords in a regular rhythm, cf. Scherb 2005: 271) until the protagonist "falleth down and dieth" (stage directions, l. 210). This can be metaphorically seen as the fight between Wit, the diligent student, and Wit, the exhausted student. At the end of this ridiculously short clash, the audience see his "dead" body lying motionless on stage, being provided with a powerful "theatrical image of the mind deadened to the pursuit of knowledge because of its difficulty" (Schell 1976: 181). Simultaneously, they may well realise that the battle itself reflects the mental process involved in learning, in which eagerness to acquire knowledge is juxtaposed with tiredness and difficulty. In such reading, Wit – a boy ignorant of the means to overcome these problems and left unguided in his study – commits a sort of mental suicide and becomes the most dangerous enemy to himself.

Such an outcome of the fight has been obviously predicted by all-knowing Reason, who sent Honest Recreation, accompanied

by Comfort, Quickness and Strength¹², to revive fatigued Wit. When she does, the father figure appears once more to advise Wit to dismiss his companions as they have completed their mission and are not needed any more. Already at this point it is suggested that measure is treasure, but Wit, who seems to have learnt nothing from his own experience, carelessly dismisses the advice, flirts with his new companion, and goes on to dance with her. To enjoy the galliard, a vigorous dance popular in the sixteenth century all over Europe, he is convinced by Honest Recreation to remove his “garment cumbering” (l. 323), or “cum-brous array / [which] would make Wit slumbering” (ll. 325-326). The device used by Redford to represent visually the protagonist’s diversion from Science is simple, yet powerful: the robe of the scholar lies discarded on the floor while Wit, now in courtier’s clothes, jumps and hops around the stage with his new female friend until he is so knackered that he “falleth down in Idleness’s lap” (stage directions, l. 333). Here, it seems, Redford consciously repeats the image already familiar to the audience from the previous scene. Wit is once again stretched out on the floor, this time, however, surrounded by Idleness and beautiful “damsels” (l. 337). He remains in this position, while the two women have a row over his head, until he is, finally, lulled into sleep (l. 434).

This second “death” of Wit serves to emphasise how treacherous an apparently innocent entertainment might be. While not disparaging recreation for good, after all it has been invited on stage by Reason, Redford seems to be asking how much is too much:

When does Honest Recreation drift into Idleness? . . . While on one level Honest Recreation and Idleness are opposed qualities, on another they are surprisingly the same. In fuzzing these boundaries,

¹² The scene, with its courtly song and dance, contributes a great deal to the courtly romance level of the interlude as well as to the development of the love motif. However, at this stage I will concentrate only on its contribution to the moral thesis developed by Redford while other issues will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.

the play makes a point about how a virtue can become a vice before one knows it. (Cartwright 1999: 66)

As we have seen, the action of the interlude complicates the apparently straightforward distinction between Honest Recreation and Idleness, inviting the audience to ponder upon the issues related to proper and improper leisure activities. In doing so, however, the play relies to a great extent on contextualising its didactic message to make it more relevant to the experience of the spectators, rather than on employing purely abstract concepts and notions.

Carnavalesque spaces, carnivalesque clothes

If Wit's educational failure is shown in terms of his second metaphorical death, with Idleness blackening his face to emphasise her triumph over his body as well as mind, the protagonists of the two other plays fall lower and lower down the ladder of being. To make their moral and social degeneration more convincing and at the same time present it in terms of the reversal of communal norms, both Manhood and Youth are led to the tavern, an ambiguous social space associated with rest on the one hand, and illicit entertainment and brothel on the other (Sikorska 2003:159). The tavern, described in these terms, becomes a powerful metaphor of the place appropriate neither for an exemplary Christian nor for a law-abiding citizen – a handy representation of the moral pit. As such it was adopted for stage all throughout the period, for instance in *Mankind* (c. 1465-70), the Digby *Mary Magdalen* (late 15th/early 16th century), Medwall's *Nature* (c. 1496), Rastell's *The Four Elements* (c. 1517-18), Bale's *Three Laws* (c. 1538). Linked with excessive eating, alcoholic intoxication, promiscuity, prostitution, and violence, the tavern is referred to in *The Book of Vices and Virtues* as “þe welle of synne” and “þe deules scole house” and “his own chapel”, where men and women praise and serve him, where he

performs his “miracles” (53), and where the only thing you can learn is “a lessoun of al foulnesse” (54)¹³.

In this construct, the tavern becomes a carnivalesque antithesis of both the sacred space of the church and of the controlled public space. The alehouse, like carnival, is ruled by laws which celebrate “the temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” and mark “the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984b: 77). No wonder then that both Youth and Manhood with their companions seek refuge from the virtues there – it is the only place totally exempted from the influence and jurisdiction of the honourable characters. The tavern, a carnivalesque temple of the sins of the body, is antisocial in two ways: firstly because its regular customers, intoxicated with alcohol, lose their wits, reason, and the sense of what is accepted, which brings about the violation of social rules of conduct, and secondly because they spend an unreasonable amount of gold there, which is an offence against the principle of moderation, held in high esteem by every healthy community (Sikorska 2003: 154).

¹³ The tavern is also familiar to most readers from Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale*, the story with a strong morally-oriented message, in which the so-called tavern sins are illustrated and discussed and which features young men as protagonists. In this story, three depraved young men set out from the pub with a mission of finding and killing death. On their way they meet an old man, who tells them they can come across Death at the foot of the tree, where they actually find a large amount of gold coins. Forgetting about their quest, they draw straws to decide which of them should bring wine and food from the tavern while the other two wait under the tree. Having drawn the shortest straw, the youngest sets out, while the other two secretly plot to kill him. When he returns, the plotters slay him; however, it turns out that the youngest man is not innocent either as he has poisoned the wine. The two murderers drink the poisoned wine – also dying as a result. Even the shortest summary of the story seems to illustrate the points similar to the ones made in the moral plays discussed in this chapter. The things associated with the carnival, like food and drink, strongly linked with avarice, the tavern shown as the hotbed of immorality, the gold coins representing the sin of greed, are depicted as leading not only to the moral ruin of the protagonists, who become incapable of differentiating between good and evil, but also in the case of Chaucer’s tale, quite literally, to their death.

In *Mundus*, Manhood is well aware that going to the stews, where in Folly's words "there is nothing but revel-rout" (l. 656), means crossing the line separating the respectable from the disrespectable, and this is why the protagonist seems initially hesitant about the whole trip. At first, he is struck and uncomfortable with the idea that Conscience might spot him there (l. 661). Then he tries to make sure that he will not be recognised during the disreputable visit: "Peace, Folly! There is no man that knoweth me there?" (l. 664) and worries about the distance he would have to walk (l. 668). Finally, still afraid that he might bump into and be recognised by Conscience, Manhood comes up with an idea to change his name and identity (ll. 678-679), to which Folly eagerly responds and calls him Shame. The vice is mockingly serious when he uses the formula "I clepe you Shame" (l. 682) previously employed by Mundus.

The repetition draws our attention to the fact that this mock baptism ritual performed by the vice mirrors the previously enacted scenes, in which every seven years the protagonist was given a new name by Mundus. Still, the 'christenings' exercised by the World, when each new name signified a new phase of life, reflected the natural order of things, the protagonist's gradual growing up from the moment he was born to early adulthood, at which point he was 'converted' by Conscience only to fall under the negative influence of his peer, Folly. At this point, however, the change of name is all but reflection of this natural process as it is Manhood himself that demands it. Unlike in the earlier scenes, it is a conscious act driven by free will and, in result, bearing much more sinister implications. Apparellled in the very same cloak Folly discarded in the beginning of the temptation scene, the protagonist is shown as committing his life to sin by choice rather than out of ignorance.

As a result, Folly's outfit is at the same time similar to and different from the garments given to the protagonist by Mundus. It is analogous because it emphasises the mental state and qualities of the protagonist at a given stage of his life: the first garment signified being born into the world with the stigma of

the original sin, the second one – the protagonist’s pride and gaiety in his teenage years (l. 134), which then develop into the inflated confidence in his power, slipping into blasphemy and requiring a new royal costume of “purpur”, “bice”, and gold (ll. 369, 370). Finally, the acceptance of Folly’s cloak at this stage marks the protagonist’s absolute surrender to the vice. What makes this particular change of costume different from the previous ones is that Folly’s cloak is actually a prop that played an active role in the whole enterprise of turning the protagonist against Conscience’s teaching. Lying on the floor throughout the whole scene, it is a visual reminder of the carnivalesque trick that Folly performed minutes before to become friends with the protagonist. While originally it constituted a part of the vice’s costume and was his property, it is now taken as his own by Manhood. When the protagonist finally puts the cloak on, Folly symbolically regains his true identity and accommodates Manhood within his real two-word name. Ironically, while the vice restores himself as a complete unity referred to as Folly and Shame, the protagonist’s individuality merges within this greater self and is in the end utterly lost. When Conscience comes in again to advise the protagonist, he appears too late, which is explicitly shown by Manhood/Shame’s reaction:

Why, friar, what the devil hast thou to do
Whether I go or abide? (ll. 711-712)

.....

I will none of thy counsel, so have I rest;
I will whither I wist,
For though canst nought else but chide. (ll. 714-716)

In *Youth* the tavern, due to its powerful association with the place where illicit sexual contacts are easy to find, is strongly linked with the sin of Lechery. While in *Mundus* sex is alluded to on a verbal plane, and the sin of lust merely described in Aquinas’s terms as the king of all vices, common among all men, clerical and lay, irrespective of their social status, *Youth* devotes much more attention to the issue, and the female embodiment of the sin, Lady Lechery, is brought on stage. Pride’s

idea that marriage would emphasise Youth's social position (ll. 359-360) is quickly dismissed by Riot expressing his stance in a typically misogynist discourse: "The devil said he had liever burn all his life / Than once for to take a wife" (ll. 365-366). However, according to Riot, refraining from marriage does not have to exclude marital joys (ll. 368-373). The whole idea of taking a lover, who is "afresh and faire of hue / And very proper of body" (ll. 384-385), meets with more than Youth's approval, his heart actually "burneth" to meet his prospective mistress as soon as possible. Although the metaphor of burning for love is a clichéd borrowing from the courtly love discourse, the audience soon realise that the protagonist's quest for love is not going to be long and that what really "burneth" is not as much his heart as his body. The first verbal exchange between Youth and Lechery proves that the couple have immediately taken a fancy to each other and that they are not going to wait long to consummate their relationship:

Youthe: Come hither to me my herte so dere
 Ye be welcome to me as the hert in my body
 Lecheri: Sir I thanke you ad at your pleasure I am
 Ye be the same unto me (ll. 391-394)

Having assured for himself the possibility of carnal fulfilment, the protagonist invites the whole company to the tavern and they set off to "fill the cup and make good cheer" (l. 435).

The mood of the scene is light-hearted, jolly, and flirtatious but this carnivalesque atmosphere, far from being appropriate for the young characters in the play, bears more disturbing implications. This becomes especially apparent when Riot and Pride chain Charity so that he cannot prevent their trip to the tavern (ll. 498-504), linking the vices strongly with the persecutors of the church and of the truth. This particular moment of the play, with the virtue immobilised, imprisoned and left alone to rant over the frailness and changeability of youth (ll. 539-553), embodies the carnivalesque premise of suspension of all norms and values. Hence, the carefree love affair is not as in-

nocent as it might appear and the relationship of Youth and his mistress falls into the category of lechery between two unbound (unmarried) persons according to *The Book of the Vices and Virtues*, and as such should be avoided. Illicit sex between unmarried men and women, branded by Aquinas the lust of “simple fornication” (Dever 1996: 41), has serious political and social consequences. Firstly, it is opposed to the institution of matrimony perceived as the only natural and socially acceptable union between two persons of opposite sexes. Secondly, it stands against proper social order by reducing male responsibility for the upbringing and care of prospective offspring, which is most necessary for the common good (Dever 1996: 43).

By transforming the theatrical space into the ambiguous space of the stews, both *Mundus et Infans* and *Interlude of Youth* stage social concerns over young men that are physically and sexually mature, no longer have to live under the authority of their parents, and yet remain unmarried. Occupying the liminal stage between childhood and fully realized adulthood, the young man of the interludes epitomizes “a threatening and dangerous masculinity, because his body both represents and produces social and political disorder, and that threat becomes multiplied when the young man is placed in a position of social and political authority” (Dunlop 2007: 53). Out-of-wedlock sexual contacts, probably connected with the relatively late age of contracting marriages in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were clearly seen as concerning not only the morals of those involved in them. Although depicting the perils to the souls of those individuals who like Youth preferred to enjoy less formal relationships was an important aim of pulpit literature, there was more to it than the risk of individual damnation. Lechery, related to prostitution, was seen as a danger to the community on the whole, undercutting the very foundations of the social make-up¹⁴. Sexual licence and promiscuity, associated in the

¹⁴ English towns that attempted to outlaw prostitution during the later Middle Ages adopted one or both of two tactics: outlawing and banishing brothels, or punishing whores (including those practising on a casual basis or non-commercially). Towns did not punish men for visiting prostitutes. It

plays with the sphere of the carnival and staged as the tavern/brothel, whose clientele consisted predominantly of young unmarried men (Karras 1998:33), were perceived as more dangerous than a disease that could eat up the body of the individual. They could infect the body of the entire community and as such had to be branded and eradicated. Lacking the obligations of marriage and family commitments, potentially hazardous youth could easily fall prey to undesirable peers, and required all possible effort and attention to be curbed and directed onto the right path.

While the tavern in the two religious plays is delineated as the sphere of carnival and simultaneously becomes the epitome of a moral pit, Redford comes up with a carnivalesque school, supervised by an unsuitable principal who is unable to teach anything to anybody. With Wit physically, though not mentally (he is asleep), present on stage, Idleness, a carnivalesque school mistress, urges Ignorance to “say his lesson” (l. 453), this very phrase being suggestive of the condition and quality of schooling in the sixteenth century, summarised succinctly below:

The scarcity of books and the high cost of paper meant that most students were taught by the lecture method. . . . Good masters were expected to show the meaning of everything, but not all did. . . . Without proper definitions and virtually devoid of context, academic subjects such as grammar could become a set of abstract rules without any discernible application to life, both irrelevant and boring. (Scherb 2005: 278)

These circumstances throw more light on the scene in which Idleness undertakes the task of teaching Ignorance his own name and getting rid of his Southern accent (ll. 444-600). She

was the presence of whores that was held to disrupt the social order, even though it was men who created the demand and who committed most of the crimes with which the authorities tended to associate prostitution. Other towns, however, tried to regulate prostitution rather than outlaw it. Thus, prostitutes were allowed, but prescribed what to wear and where to live. These regulations aimed at making clear-cut distinctions between decent and indecent women (Karras 1998: 20).

does so by splitting the name into separate syllables, which are then to be repeated by the reluctant boy one by one. The lesson becomes a hilarious parody of employing mnemonic techniques: IG – is to be remembered through the association with the first syllable of Ignorance’s place of birth, i.e. INGland, NO – with the answer to the teacher’s question “Shall I not beat thy arse now?” (l. 468 and 470) to which a supposed answer should be “no”, but the pupil is capable only of an indecisive “Ummm”, RAN – should be memorised through the connotation with a dog that ran, and CE – with the onomatopoeic imitation of a hissing sound made by a goose, i.e. his-s-s-s. The pupil is clearly unable to encompass the metaphors and the whole lesson is reduced to Ignorance repeating the separate syllables “ING”-“NO”-“RAN”-“SSS” after his more and more irritated teacher, who does not refrain from abusive language and threats of corporal punishment.

The idea to aid memorising through association is not that bad in itself as it is, in fact, more than the “lecture method,” and Idleness tries to “show the meaning”, or at least make memorising the lesson easier. It is the manner of its application that raises doubts here. Scherb’s remark on Idleness’s lesson, that she is “teaching him the syllables and words, but without any reference to signification – words are just air formed a certain way, sounds virtually independent of meaning” (Scherb 2005: 278), is only partially true. The associations are actually provided, the problem is that they are teacher-produced and have no real meaning or relevance to the student and his own understanding of the world. Redford is quite provocative in his presentation of the vice of Idleness in this scene. On the one hand, he makes it an underlying cause of Wit’s educational failure, the protagonist’s presence on stage combined with his absolute inaction at this point of the performance symbolising the perilous influence of the vice in the pursuit of knowledge. On the other hand, Redford claims, idleness is not a problem relevant solely to pupils; it might concern teachers as well. Idleness, as opposed to Instruction, becomes a carnivalesque parody of the

teacher, who was too lazy to gain a deeper understanding of the new teaching methods and mnemonic techniques. An idle teacher, Redford quite unexpectedly suggests, poses a danger in the pursuit of knowledge equal to the one posed by an idle student himself.

Incapable of remembering his own name, Ignorance becomes a carnivalesque symbol of Wit's problems with self-knowledge and his failure to learn from others. To emphasise this affinity the protagonist has to undergo a humiliating transformation of his body and appearance: first his face becomes blackened and then his scholarly gown and cap are exchanged for the costume of Ignorance and his fool's cap with long ears ("Here is a coat as fit for this elf / As it had been made even for this body", ll. 577-8). Ignorance's garment fits the protagonist perfectly well, as if Redford wanted to emphasise that anyone, even a student, can actually become a fool. At the end of the scene Ignorance observes: "He is I now" (l. 591), drawing attention to the fact that Wit's downgrading transformation has been complete, that he has practically turned himself into an idiot boy, and that it is virtually impossible to tell one from another. The degradation is similarly stressed by Wit's black face, a direct borrowing from the folk tradition where it was traditionally linked with the devil, but also a characteristic feature associated with St. George's pagan enemy, the Turkish Knight or the Moroccan Prince, in folk drama (Norland 1995: 166). Blackening Wit's face to link him with these familiar wrongdoers seems to serve a similar function as the techniques used earlier to establish Tediousness as an obstacle generated by Wit himself. Here, we are explicitly shown it is also Wit, not some external force, who through his idleness brings himself to become a debilitated version of his former self.

As we have seen, all three plays exploit the stage costume as an important device signifying the state of mind of the protagonists as well as defining them in socially oriented terms. Convenient as it is in theatrical terms, the significance of clothes derives from phenomena external to the sphere of theatre and

is deeply rooted in medieval and early modern culture, which established garments as powerful signs. In any culture, in fact, clothes, apart from being commodities of utility and having a determined economic value, constitute an effective means of expressing oneself as well as positioning the self in relation to others. Clothes can be used to generate a variety of symbolic meanings – to show the power of rulers, to reflect political alliances (e.g. changing fashions at Henry VIII's court, switching from Spanish to French influence depending on the status of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn), to include or exclude from a particular social group, to display wealth, to disguise oneself in a courtly mask or in carnival revels, to mention just a few. Clothes enjoyed a rich discursive life, providing fertile grounds for sermons, conduct books, and various regulations specifying what is acceptable and what is not, and attempting to define one's social rank as precisely as possible. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* advises: "kepe measure in clopynge and in precious robes, where men and women boþe often passen mesure and don many outragees" (85). To regulate clothing, to state what is suitable for specific social classes, means to create a society in which the signs of status could be controlled and instantly recognised, or to put it bluntly, to be able to say who is who immediately on spotting the person.

Although in medieval homiletic literature clothing is not treated as evil in itself, the distinction had to be made between what is proper and what is not. Thus, "simple clothes worn out of need to cover the shamefully naked body are permissible, but anything worn beyond necessity is not" (Sponsler 1997: 8). While in *Mundus* the first garment given by World to the newly born baby at the onset of the play appears quite innocent, at the latter stages of his life the protagonist is unhealthily preoccupied with his apparel. In *The Interlude of Youth*, Pride encourages Youth to invest in his clothes in order to be held in high esteem, making the link between social status and garments quite obvious. The problem is that neither Manhood nor Youth truly deserve the rich clothes they are wearing, while their pre-

occupation with fashion is strongly linked with pride and immoderate consumption, reflected by their excessive, inordinate dress. Their clothes also link them with the figure of the gallant, who is seen in the *Caxton Book of Courtesy* as representing “a crude, fake and distorted image of gentility” (Dunlop 2007: 41)

As Sponsler observes, the regulatory discourse focused much attention on the amounts of money spent on clothes by women and young men while the words “excessive” and “inordinate” were frequently associated with “undisciplined”, “unruly” and “rebellious” (Sponsler 1997: 16); hence, the words used to describe clothes blend with the ones used to refer to offenders. It is exactly in the same fashion that the moral plays link the excess of dress with pride and, consequently, with the rebelliousness and unruliness springing from this original sin. The use of theatrical costume to enforce the message of the plays in visual terms is so powerful precisely because this meaning has been defined elsewhere and is perceived by the audience against the background of regulations and moralistic literature, with which they were surrounded in their everyday life and from which they learned that:

Clothing was seen as excessive and inordinate in at least three senses: in the economic sense that it was a sign of conspicuous consumption, in the moral sense that it represented the sin of pride, and in the social sense that it often seemed to cross the bounds of moderation and seemliness. (Sponsler 1997: 15)

The concerns of the statutory laws to stabilise the differences in social status by prescribing appropriate clothes for particular social groups and the legal preoccupation with the dangers of blurring these distinctions seem to be reflected in the moral plays. In short, the hazard was that those who did not dress in conformity with these regulations, could hide or mask their true identity and in this way usurp, quite disturbingly, a position which was not their own.

Although concealing the real self was accepted in the ephemeral, irrational space and time of the carnival or courtly

disguise, in real life it was perceived as disastrous, which is stressed in both *Mundus et Infans* and *Wit and Science*. Thus, the fall of Manhood commences when Folly, the master of disguise, convinces him that together with the removal of his garment, he loses the status of being the protagonist's greatest enemy. Manhood himself, believing that the change of clothes would make him unrecognisable to Conscience, decides to put on a new garment when he sets out on his trip round respectable districts of London. In *Wit and Science* the treacherous substitution of Wit's own clothes with those belonging to Ignorance, combined with the blackening of the protagonist's face, constitute the most downgrading and shameful transformation, resulting in Science's failure to recognise her would-be husband.

Carnavalesque degradation and rebirth

All three plays discussed here gradually orchestrate the fall of the protagonist from what seems to be quite a childlike boastfulness to the most severe moral and social degradation construed in carnivalesque terms of bringing everything down to the material sphere of the body and sins of flesh. In line with the prodigal son parable, the interludes also take the protagonist to the point of painful self-recognition, remorse, and contrition. If the parable constructs the sin as a necessary, and even amusing, stage of life, it also heavily relies on the prodigal son's acknowledgment of his mistake. In fact, the whole prodigal son's journey to foreign lands, leading to his moral fall figured as poverty and starvation, and crowned with his final return home, is not something that happens automatically, but requires a conscious analysis of the situation and can be seen as an autobiographical re-interpretation of the self. As Kelemen writes, "the parable shows that the convert's identificatory process involves an interpretation of his situation that is also self-interpretation carried out as the narrative in progress, an

autobiography in which a sinner not only moralises his past but also prepares himself a future” (Kelemen 2002: 11). All interludes discussed here feature such an element of self-interpretation of the protagonist and rely on the symbolic movement from the ‘former self’ to the ‘new self’. Although the protagonists do not have to travel to far-off lands in literal terms, they actually do so metaphorically.

In *Mundus et Infans* and *Interlude of Youth* this movement is figured as distancing the protagonists from the values of the society construed as their trip to the tavern and the stews. In *Wit and Science* the journey is guised as the quest, a mission to accomplish, which even if it was impossible to be shown in physical terms on stage, brings to mind a knight errant having to travel from one obstacle to another and trying to overcome them one by one. In all three plays it is also a steady figural movement down the moral, social, or educational path, while reaching the bottom is shown as a necessary stage to start moving upwards. The way up, however, is not a way back, but a new way more or less consciously chosen by the protagonists, who adopt new patterns of behaviour and are ‘re-born’ in the process. This rebirth or renewal is made possible by the regenerative function of the carnival, which is consciously employed within the structure of the narratives developed in the interludes. Lachmann writes:

The temporary immersion of official culture in folk culture leads to a process of regeneration that sets in motion and dynamically energizes the notions of value and hierarchy inverted by the parodistic counter-norms of the carnival. In this way the culture of laughter revives and regenerates the petrified remains of official institutions and, as it were, hands them back to official culture (Lachmann 1988-1989: 132).

It is in this way that the protagonists of all plays are ‘revived’ and ‘handed back’ into the official system, i.e. incorporated into the religious and social structures they have for a time discarded.

In *Mundus et Infans* this significant moment is featured towards the end of the protagonist's life, when we see Manhood, now referred to as Old Age, absolutely ruined as he laments over the loss of his body and soul. The play links his moral decline with physiological deterioration of the body (Old Age coughs and belches, staggers on stage and groans horribly – ll. 796-799) to show the former through the latter in the same manner that medieval theories of physiognomy believed that the physical features of the face could reflect the qualities of character, and that it was possible to calculate “the invisible” through analysing “the visible” and see “the inner” through “the outer” (Sponsler 1997: 2). On top of this, the sinister consequences of the protagonist's wicked life are once again depicted in social terms:

In London many a day
At the passage I would play;
I thought to borrow and never pay.
Then was I sought and set in stocks;
In New gate I lay under locks;
If I said I caught many knocks. (ll. 787-793)

Here, his life in disreputable districts of London, associated with the tavern, promiscuity, gambling, and failing to repay debts – the typical socio-economic transgressions in a word – lead Manhood to Newgate prison, making him the symbol of all vice. Realising that his life has been wasted, the protagonist surrenders to the most destructive sin of Christianity, the one of despair or wanhope:

Alas, Death, why lettest thou me live so long?
I wander as a wight in woe
And care,
For I have done ill;
how wend I will,
Myself to spill,
I care not whither nor where. (ll. 800 –806)

Old Age's tormented state of mind is reflected in his discontinuous, disruptive speech. The lines are broken, exceptionally short, creating the impression that this lack of words mimics his lack of hope. Finally having understood he has done "ill", the protagonist now "wills" to "spill" his life. Kelemen observes that "will" and "spill" was a rhyming pair frequently employed in verse and drama of the Middle Ages, ranging from Chaucer to cycle dramas. He also notes that it was used in both Chester and Northampton *Abraham and Isaac* plays at the moments of high dramatic tension preceding the moment when the son's life is put in the hands of his father, who has the power to either save or 'spill' him (Kelemen 2002: 5-6). Here, combined with the disrupted lines, the rhyming device emphasises the torment and drama experienced by the protagonist and at the same time by association with the *Abraham and Isaac* plays prefigures the last moment intervention of the virtue that mirrors the divine intervention in the cycle plays.

It is Perseverance, Conscience's brother and Manhood's last spiritual teacher, addressing the audience in the same manner Conscience previously did, who establishes himself as the second paternal figure connected with the church and in the last scenes of the performance repeats what World has done at the outset – he gives the protagonist a new name, Repentance (l. 851), and instructs him in the steps indispensable for salvation:

For, and you here repent your sin,
Ye are possible heaven to win;
But with great contrition ye must begin,
And take you to abstinence. (ll. 851-856)

He then proceeds to explain the parable of the lost sheep and enforces its points by mentioning numerous saints, including Mary Magdalene, who were once condemnable sinners but still managed to win heaven. The Mercy of God is emphasised as the key element of contrition – it is his "will" not to "spill" the protagonist, but it is also made explicitly clear that it is through

the Church and its ministers that God's mercy is executed on earth by means of confession, penance and absolution.

The process of introducing man to sin, performed by Mundus and Folly, is finally reversed at the end of the play by the representative of the Church, in whose hands lie the keys to salvation of an individual. The protagonist's part in the whole process is seriously diminished. While the virtue preaches the Twelve Articles of Faith, or Apostles' Creed, the protagonist remains silent and inactive, only occasionally daring to ask a question. The scene stands in contrast to the one when Conscience tried to enforce his message on Manhood in the first part of the play, when the protagonist argued with him and abused him. Now, having been nearly lost, Manhood/Repentance accepts the authoritative word of Perseverance without any reservation and becomes a suitable role model for a Christian audience. This ideologically orthodox epilogue, present in one form or another in all moral plays, allows the audience to internalize the moral teaching of the play that confession is actually the first step to atone for one's sins and achieve redemption (Sikorska 2002: 150-151).

In *The Interlude of Youth*, the spiritual message is blended with a lesson on the proper use of wealth. At first Youth totally rejects Charity, Humility, and virtuous life on the whole. Although immoderate spending is unambiguously linked with the sins of pride and of the body, the play, unlike *Mundus et Infans*, does not show their devastating effects on the protagonist. The first stage of the prodigal son's pattern of self-recognition is figured as breaking Youth's unwanted companionship with the vices, which is inspired by virtues but requires some action or, at least, involvement in the process on the part of the protagonist. The weakening of the bond is carried out through a longish sequence of Charity's appeals to Youth to do by the virtue's "counsel" and "rede" (l. 598), "aske mercie for [his] misdede" (l. 599) and amend his sins, juxtaposed with ridiculing comments and threats directed at him by the vices. These exchanges are supplemented with Charity's exhortations to the protag-

onist to forsake the vices, followed by Youth's and the vices' hearty responses that they will never forsake one another. The "forsaking" of the vices is structured as a painful process of getting rid of the companions Youth really cherishes and is, in fact, unique in presenting the protagonist's final resolution to break up with them in surprisingly emotional terms. As Sponsler admits, "the protests by Riot and Pride, who sound more like real young men than abstract vices, that Youth is forsaking them conjure up the image not just of pernicious vices that refuse to be shaken off, but also of friends who are hurt by his rejection of them" (Sponsler 1997: 93). The feeling of being hurt resonates strongly in Riot's final words:

Once a promise thou dyd me make
That thou wolde me never forsake
But nowe I se it is harde
For to truste the wretched worlde. (ll.748-9)

The surprisingly sudden conversion of Youth has been described by Peter Happé, one of the editors of the play, as its "greatest dramatic weakness, since there is no reason why his conversion occurs when it does" (qtd. in Kowalczyk 2003: 74). However, this is not truly so. Drawing on Lancashire's interpretation of the issues relevant to conversion in this particular play, Kowalczyk manages to, quite convincingly, situate it within the context of a logical debate and miracle. Let me quote his conclusion:

Youth's conversion is to a degree intellectually motivated, and his salvation by virtue of God's grace – predictable. However, from a medieval standpoint, the play does exemplify the power of the divine, which here shows through religious discourse. Without the underlying action of God within the model of the play's world, Charity's argumentation would probably have been rejected since logically it is hardly novel. (Kowalczyk 2003: 86)

While it is not my intention to challenge Kowalczyk's interpretation, as indeed "the power of the divine", visualised by Char-

ity's and Humility's joined intervention, is strongly bound with the religious, or authoritative, discourse and the play indeed figures "the miracle of change", I would like to add that this miraculous transformation, apart from being carried out on the religious level, is also structured as a social one. In the interlude, by virtue of both his words and actions, Charity is a dramatic incarnation of God's unlimited loving-kindness, the greatest theological virtue, which is necessary for salvation. At the same time, the play, which emphasises the social repercussions of the sin of pride and structures immoderate spending as a peril to both soul and society, draws attention to the other meaning of the word charity, i.e. to the act of benevolent giving.

When *Mundus et Infans* prepares its protagonist for death, *Youth* prepares him for life, suggesting that the earlier one comes back on the right path, the better. Hence, the play combines its religious message with an attempt to provide a young, well-born, affluent male with a model of alternative behaviour, namely the one of a good consumer. When Charity tries to convert Youth, he uses a frequently adopted metaphor of buying, paying, and repaying debts. Christ "bought" humankind salvation "on the roode" (l. 717) while the currency in the divine transaction was "his precious bloude" (l. 716); the repayment of the debt means to "amende" what Youth "hast mys wrought" (l. 788). The message seems quite straightforward – a pious life is the only way in which the protagonist can repay his debt to Christ, who bought him on the cross¹⁵. Still, Youth is utterly incapable of grasping the metaphor and takes it quite literally, downgrading the message in a typically carnivalesque manner by his down-to-earth material language:

Iwis he bought not my cap
Nor yet my ioylie hat
I wot not what he hath bought for me

¹⁵ The idea of Christian penance is construed in medieval theology in terms of payment, or what Sikorska refers to as "a kind of economic exchange according to which every sin had its price and the price had to be paid by the penitent" (Sikorska 2002: 154).

And he bought any thinge of myne
 I wyll geue hym a quarte of wyne
 The nexte tyme I hym meete. (ll. 695-700)

Still, even if he carnivalesquely downgrades Charity's message, Youth seems to understand the principle of repaying a debt in social terms. Presenting the moral message in socio-economic terms and providing Youth with a new set of props, a humbler costume, and a rosary (l. 770,) serves to show the channel into which one should direct one's money in order to be considered both a good Christian and a good subject or citizen. The excessive consumption is transformed into benevolent charity.

However, it is in *Wit and Science* that the paradigm of the prodigal son's self-recognition receives the most attention. Lacking the possibility to rely on the power of authoritative words and inconvertible truth, which successfully does the trick in religious moral plays, Redford needs to employ something that would make the moment of his protagonist's 'conversion' much more convincing in a dramatic sense. Having transformed Wit into Ignorance in front of the audience, the playwright is now faced with the challenging task of bringing the hero back to his original self. What becomes vital in the process of the protagonist's self-recognition is a stage prop, the Mirror of Reason, given to the boy at the outset of the play. It is through this prop used in a theatrical performance for the first time and afterwards becoming an important device for humanist drama (Cartwright 1999: 61)¹⁶, that Wit manages to grasp the truth about his condition: "What have we here, a devil? / This glass,

¹⁶ Although a mirror was used as a stage prop for the first time in Redford's interlude, the motif of mirror had had a long tradition in folklore, and many folk superstitions were associated with it. Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* mentions numerous examples of mirrors with magic properties. For instance, mirrors could be equipped with clairvoyant abilities, as is the case in Chaucer's unfinished *The Squire's Tale*, where the king is given, among other magic gifts, a mirror which can foretell danger. Mirrors could also serve as a portal between worlds through which demons could enter, or they could project a reflection of the soul. This last property of the mirror could have been among Redford's inspirations – as in the play,

I see well, hath been kept evil. / Gog's soul! A fool! A fool by the mass!" (ll. 815-817). On seeing his own blackened face and suspecting that the glass is "shamefully spotted" (l. 819), he holds the mirror up to the audience to check its reliability. Upon the recognition that everyone else is actually "fair and clear" (l. 824), Wit has no other choice but to understand the reality of his situation:

Ignorancy's coat, hood, ears – yea, by the mass,
 Cockscorn and all. I lack but a bauble!
 And for this face, [it] is abominable,
 As black as the devil. God for his passion!
Where have I been rayed after this fashion?
 This same is Idleness – a shame take her!
 This same is her work – the devil in hell rake her!
 The whore hath shamed me forever, **I trow** [think].
I trow? Nay verily, **I know**.
 Now it is so – the stark fool I play
 Before all people. Now see it may.
 Every man I see laugh me to scorn.
 Alas, alas, that ever I was born! (ll. 826-838, emphasis mine)

This longish passage seems to illustrate how different the moment of Wit's self-knowledge is from the scenes featured in *Mundus et Infans* and *Interlude of Youth*. Rather than being preached at, and more or less successfully 'convinced' by the preacher, Wit is actually engaged in the process of thinking. The vision of his blackened face sparks associations with the devil, which in turn provokes a question about how he has been brought to this state, to which the protagonist finds the answer himself. In the process, the supposition ("I trow") changes into absolute certainty ("I know") and Wit himself uncovers the social consequences of his fall, i.e. deserving Hatred, Beggary and Open Shame instead of winning Favor, Riches, Worship and Fame (ll. 851-852). Examined through Wit's speech, the Glass of Reason serves as a symbolic representation of the pro-

the mirror is clearly used to visualise the process of revealing Wit's moral decline.

tagonist's inner capacity of self-reflection and self-assessment, which is seen as an element crucial for his subsequent return onto the right path.

If self-recognition is a process dependent upon an individual, Redford does not perceive it as a totally private one and the protagonist of his play is subjected to public shaming¹⁷. The punishment is ordered by Reason and executed by Shame who whips Wit in public, the boy being on his knees¹⁸ to emphasise his acceptance of the punishment. According to Burrow's readings of medieval narratives, kneeling could be a sign of submission (2002: 20-21) but also of "petitionary intention" meant to win pardon for some offence (2002: 23), and expression of gratitude (2002: 24). The flogging is accompanied by Reason's litany of Wit's offences and transgressions including: broken promises, falling into idleness, making a fool of himself, and losing his name. Interestingly, swearing great oaths (l. 866) is treated as a transgression against both other men and God. This reference to God seems to be a conventional device, which does not have much influence on the reading of the play. It might, however, point to the fact that the pursuit of knowledge is seen as the right path for humankind, carved out by God himself, and as such does not oppose him in any way. It is also important

¹⁷ If we examine the scene against medieval literature on confession, contrition, and penance, we may see that it consists of two stages. The first represents private penance aimed at examining one's soul, the second can be seen as public penance that had a clearly disciplinary function. As Sikorska observes, "In the early church penance was public, frequently stressed through the saying that better to repent in public than to be damned in secret. Patristic literature stresses the public nature of the procedure in which the humiliated sinner seeks forgiveness among his brothers" (Sikorska 2002: 151). Late medieval courtesy books in turn depict shame and embarrassment as means of encouraging proper behaviour – "the fear of social embarrassment is paradoxically the stimulus to the sort of behaviour which will gain respect" (Dunlop 2007: 40).

¹⁸ Stage directions do not specifically state whether Wit kneels on both knees or just on one. However according to Burrow (2002) although *Dives and Pauper* reserves kneeling on both knees for God, on one knee in front of his superior, medieval texts reveal that kneeling on both knees was more common and not confined to religious content (19).

that a link is formed between the punished, humiliated body of the protagonist and his metamorphosis. It is through whipping that the unruly body of Wit is finally brought under control of his educators and himself and ceases to be an obstruction in the pursuit of knowledge. Having control over his own body, which will not overindulge in earthly pleasures and indecent entertainment any more, the protagonist will set out to complete his quest, win the battle with Tediousness and gain the hand of Lady Science.

* * * * *

While the *Interlude of Youth* is a model example of a youth morality, *Mundus et Infans* follows the pattern of a full-scale morality, and *Wit and Science* exemplifies a pedagogical interlude. In all of them the moral decline of the protagonist springs from youthful pride, gullibility, and naivety, which make him vulnerable to the influence of undesirable acquaintances. Disregarding the advice provided by their elders, the young men of the interludes are initiated into illicit forms of entertainment, unlawful out-of-wedlock love, and the pleasures of immoderate spending in the case of Youth and Manhood. Moreover, their immersion in the carnivalesque world of the body and excess inevitably leading to moral collapse is presented in social terms, which emphasises how strictly the abstract idea of sin was linked with the notion of transgression against the community.

The patterns of behaviour characteristic of young males, as shown in these moral plays, would have been found distressing and unwanted in a well-organised social body. Even though *Mundus et Infans* and *Youth* stress the role of the church in the conversion of the protagonists and *Wit and Science* features the thinking process as the key element of self-knowledge, all three plays, following the pattern of the prodigal son's return, eventually succeed in their attempt to force the rebellious young male to surrender to the constraints of the society. Finally, all three

interludes rely on addressing the audience directly and drawing them into the action. Through blurring the borders between the spectators and the performers, the plot is as if extended onto everybody present in order to universalize the message of the plays. However, unlike religious plays, which resort to the unquestionable word of God as the final authority, *Wit and Science* seeks to increase the emotional involvement of the audience by other means, which will be given more prominence in the next chapter.

In her reading of the *Interlude of Youth*, Sponsler emphasizes “the perhaps unwitting sympathy it shows toward the desire for illicit forms of sociability” (Sponsler 1997: 92), and the fact that “the play’s representations of misbehaviour remain enticing, evading satisfactory recuperation into social norms” (Sponsler 1997: 94) – observations that could possibly be extended to *Mundus et Infans* and *Wit and Science*. Still, one should be careful in drawing such conclusions. Although the riotous stages of the lives of all three protagonists indeed present themselves as much more exciting than the pious or obedient ones in the dramatic sense – the vices appear much more attractive, their language is more lively, their onstage behaviour more entertaining – it does not necessarily mean that these carnivalesque invasions seriously shift the boundaries of permissible behaviour. If some carnivalesque resistance to the officially appropriate system of values and codes of conduct is indeed present in the plays, it is by no means glorified and encouraged.

The negative attributes of being young, such as changeability, pride, lack of measure in eating and drinking, gambling and immoderate spending, overindulgent entertainment and promiscuous sexual behaviour, plus disregard for social norms and rebellion against them, are meticulously depicted as the causes of moral and social ruin of all the protagonists. In the religious plays these socio-economic consequences could have served as a warning stronger and more obvious to audiences than the sermon-inherited visions of the sufferings in hell. Although the virtues in both plays do their best to instruct spectators

in the articles of Christian faith and explain the importance of Christ's passion, the message is probably best understood when given in simple material terms. In *Wit and Science*, Redford also pays attention to presenting education as a way of social advancement while straying from the path of knowledge has not only moral but also social repercussions and brings about Hatred, Beggary, and Open Shame.

Even if juxtaposing the power of youth with the power of authority resulted in identification of some part of the audience with the young protagonists of the plays and could evoke the feelings of sympathy towards them, all plays appear to be successful in their attempts to neutralize the fears connected with the potentially disruptive force embodied in the protagonists and convert the dangerously rebellious youth into safely familiar members of society. The conflict between the self-indulgence of youth and the self-sacrifice of adulthood in the plays can be seen as the clash of carnival and Lent: the former given its ephemeral freedom and opportunity for rebellious self-expression, the latter always winning in the long run. What this conflict brings, however, is the moral and social rebirth of the protagonists, who refashion their manners and behaviours and mature not in physical and age-related, but in social, terms.

III

Carnavalesque appropriations of courtly love in *A Play of Love, Wit and Science*, and *Fulgens and Lucrez*

Courtly spectacles

The year 1501 witnessed unprecedented ceremonies for the entry of Catherine of Aragon into London and her marriage with Prince Arthur. The costly spectacle prepared by London dwellers – consisting of six pageants, which the would-be queen passed on her way through the city – allegorically touched upon the personalities of the bride and the groom, expressed favourable forecasts for the future of the couple and the hope that their virtues would lead them to the throne of Honour, alluded to the sacred character of their marriage made “ffor love, wyth vertu and Reverence, / For procreacion of chyldyr, afftyr Goddys precept”(Anglo 1997: 70), and praised the alliance between England and Spain. The pageants were lavishly expensive and equally rich in meaning: the images employed had double or even threefold connotations, depended on classical, biblical, and Arthurian allusions, and used thematic material fundamental to medieval cosmological thought¹.

The wedding itself was celebrated with a spectacular, carefully-devised, seven-day tournament, four banquets accompanied by disguisings and dances with fanciful pageant cars used

¹ Catherine of Aragon's entry into London is described and analysed in much detail in Chapter III of Sydney Anglo's excellent study *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (1997), pp. 58-97. Another account is provided by Gordon Kipling in *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (1998), pp. 209-221.

for the entry of disguised lords, and tableaux using the themes of love and matrimony. On 19 November, the disguising featured not only singing and dancing but also a dialogue, which added a dramatic element to this form of entertainment. First, a four-tower pageant-castle, carrying eight ladies in disguise and singing children, was pulled into the hall by four beasts. Then, a ship filled with men, who in their “countenauns, spechis, and demeanour usid and behavyd them self after the maner and guyse of marynours”, “sailed in” and anchored near the castle. A debate followed in which Hope and Despair, the ambassadors of the knights of the Mount of Love, got down from the ship and tried to gain favour for their lords from the ladies in the castle. When the emissaries were refused, the knights themselves entered on the third pageant, attacked the ladies’ castle “with moch malés and curvagyous myend”, and forced the ladies to give in. Finally, the defeated damsels joined them in “dyvers and many goodly daunces” (Anglo 1997: 98-103).

Such entertainments at the court of Henry VII foreshadowed the amusements typical for the reign, especially in the earlier years, of his younger son. Let me quote here the example of the 1512 “Fortresse Dangerus” at Greenwich which was

built like a castle with towers and bulwarks, fortified with ordnance ‘as govns hagbochys kanvns kortawes chynes of iern werke and sech lyke’. The dungeon was lit by two cressets, illuminating a banner with a sheaf of arrows beaten thereon; and its walls were adorned with a ‘rosyer reed and whyght of sarsenet, well and kunnyngly kut and wrowght, kround with a kroun of golld’. Six ladies held this stronghold against the ‘lustie and coragious’ assault of the King and five lords, before being compelled to ‘solace’ with them, yield the castle, and accompany them in the dance. (Anglo 1997: 117)

Although the courtiers-actors changed, both pageants shared the chivalric theme of a ‘fight’ between young noblemen and noblewomen, resulting in the final surrender of the pretty damsels to the ‘attacking’ knights. What is the most significant difference is not the modification of the setting, i.e. the ship being

substituted with the castle, but the participation of Henry VIII, who – unlike his father – was eager to join in the revels. During his reign, entertainments were not necessarily limited to official ceremonies and public space at court. In fact, the private and the public frequently overlapped. Holinshed, for instance, mentions occasion when the king and his nobles, disguised as Robin Hood and his men, unexpectedly came into the chamber of the queen accompanied by her ladies, all of them “greatly amazed, as well for the strange sight as at their sudden appearance” (qtd. in Weir 2000: 90). In such circumstances, when the private lives and behaviours of the king, the queen, and the courtiers become a spectacle that is constantly being watched, apparently personal actions and gestures could take on political meanings. Entertainments, in turn, including dramatic and semi-dramatic forms, tended to do more than simply amuse their participants or audience; they were occasions to “consolidate affections” of the prominent members of the realm and express “shared ideals and common loyalty” (Parry 1997: 195).

The first two examples of entertainments typical for the early Tudor period imply that the ideas associated with chivalry and courtly love, which since *Roman de la Rose* had formed an important part of chivalric tradition, provided the threads for weaving a rich and varied fabric of courtly spectacles well into the sixteenth century. In fact, the allegory of courtly love “enjoyed something like an Indian summer of its own in the early decades of the Tudor era” (Ferguson 1960: 7). At the same time, the ‘mummings’ or ‘disguisings’, as they are practically interchangeably referred to in the period under consideration, show some affinity with earlier folk tradition, when the term “mumming” was used to mean a processional visitation of disguised persons with masked faces to a private house, to which the maskers were supposed to bring prosperity and good luck. The earliest full description of a mumming comes from John Stow’s *Survey of London* (1598) which relates how 130 “disguisedly aparailed” citizens, their faces covered with vizards “well and handsomely made,” rode through the streets of London

“with great noyse of minstralyse, trumpets, cornets, and shawmes and great number of torches lighted” to visit Richard II at Kennington in 1377. Upon their arrival, they played dice with the young king. The dice were specifically designed, so as to ensure that the prince would win the prize of three jewels. The entertainment was rounded off with a banquet followed by music and dancing (Chambers 1925.1: 394). Due to the opportunities for disorder inherent in the mumblings, which led the authorities to ban them, the practice lost its spontaneity, and became appropriated by the higher strata of the social order and, in consequence, formalised and falling under control of the Master of Revels². The Robin Hood theme seems to have been appropriated from folk games, plays, and ballads by the court of Henry VIII in a similar fashion.

The term “appropriate,” rather than “borrow” or “influence,” has been used quite consciously in the title of this chapter, and as such requires a brief explanation³. Breaking away from the

² A sample of the rules governing courtly disguisings comes from the *Booke of all manner of Orders concerning an Earle's house*: “A disguising is to be introduced by torch-bearers and accompanied by minstrels. If there are women disguised, they are to dance first, and then the men. Then is to come the morris, ‘if any be ordeynid’. Finally men and women are to dance together and depart in the ‘towre, or thin devised for them.’ The whole performance is to be under the control of a ‘maister of the disguisinges’ or ‘revills’” (Chambers 1925.1: 399).

³ The adoption of the term “appropriation” for the purposes of the present study has been influenced by a series of articles devoted to the processes of cultural appropriation, published in a special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.1 (2002). The term itself has been long used in cultural studies – not in relation to medieval culture, though. The essays included in the volume show appropriation as a two-way process, in which exchange and creative response may occur, which immediately brings to mind Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogism. Appropriation also evokes associations with ‘translation’ of information across various parts of a semiotic system, through which new meanings are generated in Lotman’s theory. The phenomena and texts discussed by the authors in the aforementioned *Journal* cover a wide range of medieval and early modern material, e.g. Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s *Chronicle*, Books of Hours, religious wall paintings, establishing the order of the Avignose Repenties, to mention just

traditional approach to studying medieval texts, which concentrates on discovering their generic and thematic “origin,” Kathleen Ashley and Véronique Plesch emphasize the importance of a more active and conscious “act of taking” which is inherent in the act of appropriation:

The fundamentally active nature of appropriation is manifest in its etymology, from the Latin verb *appropriare*, “to make one’s own,” a combination of *ad*, meaning ‘to,’ with the notion of ‘rendering to,’ and *proprius*, ‘own or personal.’ Beyond the simple acknowledgment of borrowing or influence, what the concept of appropriation stresses is, above all, the motivation for the appropriation: to gain power over. (Ashley and Plesch 2002: 2-3)

They proceed to explain that while initially the process of appropriation was seen as a model in which only the ‘dominant culture’ (those who acted) appropriated the ‘weaker culture’ (those who were acted upon), which had no control whatsoever over its representation, more recent studies tend to stress the ability of the repressed culture to “resist” or “subvert” the imposed agenda. Appropriation is thus to be seen not as “one-way transmission,” imposed by power, but as “complex processes” by which cultural objects, texts, and phenomena are brought to represent something different from their original purposes (Ashley and Plesch 2002: 3-6).

When approached from this perspective, Henry’s playing with the Robin Hood motif becomes something more than joyful and carefree leisure activity. Sponsler observes that such play-acting may have allowed the king to “envision himself as a transgressive hero, one who boldly breaches the barricades not just of the queen’s bedroom but also of norms of royal behavior by adopting the pose of criminality, however transient and artificial” (Sponsler 2002: 33). By adopting the pose of an outlaw, Henry appropriates this popular-culture transgressive hero for his own ends to create an image of himself as a ruler who can go

a few, and provide a fascinating read for anyone interested in medieval and early modern culture.

beyond the norms of accepted behaviour – the apparently trifling incident becoming a potent metaphor for his reign.

Courtly love theorized

So far in this book the label ‘courtly love’ has been used without any explanation, but as a concept crucial for the discussion in this chapter it requires some clarification. *Amour courtois*, as a term, does not feature at all in the twelfth century, the period it is usually linked with, when it was usually rendered “honest love” (Latin: *amour honestus*) or “refined love” (Langue d’Oc: *fin amour*). It was, in fact, six hundred years later, in 1833 to be precise, when Gaston Paris⁴ used the term for the first time to explain the love relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere on the basis of a single tale by Chrétien de Troyes, titled *Lancelot ou le chevalier de la charrete* (*Lancelot or the Knight of the Cart*, ca. 1178-80). Referring to this text only, Paris delineated his influential definition of courtly love, seen as an illegitimate, furtive and extramarital relationship, characterised by a reversed hierarchy of gender roles.

In this concept an inferior and insecure male lover is to serve a superior and capricious lady and undergo numerous tests to prove both his valour and commitment to her. Such love, like chivalry, is highly codified and requires an elaborate system of proper behaviour (Moore 1979: 622-3, Burns 2001: 28-29). In literature, the paradigm of *amour courtois* was explored by most prominent authors of the period – Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, Dante, Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, Gottfried von Strassburg and Thomas Malory – and indeed informs a variety of works, the most obvious being troubadour love songs

⁴ Lacking access to the original article, I have decided to follow Moore (1979) and Burns (2001), both of whom frequently refer to this text and provide a strikingly similar account of Paris’s ideas.

(canso), courtly romances and Andreas Capellanus' treatise *De Amore (De arte honeste amandi)*⁵.

One problem with Paris's model that arises on reading those medieval literary works is his assumption that there was only one universal concept of courtly love developed by all authors in all possible genres, whereas as W.T.H. Jackson observes:

The mood of love in the *canzon* is quite different from that in the *alba* and the love of Parzival for Condwiramurs has no resemblance to that of Tristan for Isolde. Married love is important and indeed sacred in *Erec*, as it is in *Parzival* and *Willehalm*. No one conception of love will cover all the relations between the sexes in medieval lyric and epic, and it is unprofitable to seek for such a definition, especially if we regard this love as a spiritual or even an intellectual phenomenon. (Jackson 1985:4)

Another difficulty concerns the origins of the phenomenon and the question whether it reflected any significant social change in the relationships between men and women. Depending on how the authors construe their narrative of the emergence and development of courtly love, they might take it to mean practically anything, which has produced a long list of contradictory labels, e.g. "infantile, sophisticated, narcissistic, chivalrous, playful, genuine, fictional, carnal, spiritual, Ovidian, Arabist, Catharist, "Fontevraultian," blasphemous, natural, unnatural, adulterous, and chaste" (Tinkle 1996: 10). As for the status of women in the discourse of courtly love, some see their elevation

⁵ For years, Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore (De arte honeste amandi)* was seen as a sort of serious "code book", exalting courtly love and offering practical tips to lovers; yet such reading is challenged by Book III of the treatise which contains a sharp attack on such love and berates women. Another possible reading was to see the text as defending the church and condemning courtly love, Books I and II being in fact ironic in their praise of the convention. The third interpretation assumes that Andreas's text is a comic mock treatise on love and parodying literary models of his time, a kind of humorous clerical exercise in medieval argumentation. For a more detailed overview of critical opinions, see Anderson-Wyman's *Andreas Capellanus on Love?: Desire, Seduction and Subversion in a Twelfth-Century Latin Text* (2007), pp.18-25.

to the position of feudal lord as resulting from socio-historical circumstances related to the crusades – in the absence of their husbands, noble ladies were put in charge of aristocratic households. Others connect their elevation to the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Yet another group of scholars claim that a woman “disappears” from the texts as a subject and becomes merely an object of male competition for social advancement and domination. More recently, feminist readings have examined the voice of *troibaritz* (female troubadours) and the heroines of *chansons de toile* (‘sewing songs’), who frequently “forge successful love scenarios that feature mutual and shared pleasure” (Burns 2001: 47).

While the interpretative problems related to the concept of *amour courtois* will have to remain unresolved, I will use the term ‘courtly love’ to conveniently designate a set of attitudes, behaviours, and conventions, used to describe the art of love in medieval literature which displays the following principles:

[1] a putatively reversed gender hierarchy in which the supplicant male lover claims or appears to suffer physically from lovesickness, wounding, or other corporeal dysfunction, all of which lead to more generalized helplessness; [2] an allied claim that the fetishized, desired, and beautiful body of the lady alone holds the power to fulfill the lover’s wish and heal his ailments; ... [3] and, finally, a refined art of courting, expressed through rhetorical persuasion by the poet/lover and through physical prowess by the knight, which develops according to highly codified and highly gendered rules of proper conduct. (Burns 2001: 32-3)

The plays discussed in this chapter touch upon the issues connected with chivalry and courtly love. None of them, however, simply presents a romantic story on stage; rather they seem to appropriate the patterns and ideology underlying the construction of the concept to produce their own message or messages. Both Henry Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucre* (c. 1497) and Redford’s *Wit and Science* (c. 1539) take courtship as an organizing principle of their structure; still, neither of them deals solely with courtship. In Medwall’s interlude the theme

of love and the question of true nobility are so carefully intertwined that, in fact, they appear inseparable. In Redford's play, written for the benefit of choir boys, chivalric motifs and the author's preoccupation with presenting a didactic message are entangled to produce a striking, yet coherent, meaning. Heywood's *A Play of Love* (early 1530s), on the other hand, brings to mind a scholarly debate on the nature of love, with characters who respond to one another's arguments in a polite and reasonable fashion. Interestingly, all these plays also draw on the rich tradition of folk or popular culture and introduce comic elements or carnivalesque degradations, which adds yet another dimension to the act of their interpretation. My aim here will be two-fold: to examine how the ideas associated with chivalry and courtly love are used in the plays under consideration and to trace how the very same texts appropriate elements of other discourses, in particular those belonging to folklore and popular culture.

A Play of Love: courtly love debated

In the opening paragraph to his article on absolutism and debate in John Heywood's plays, Candace Lines observes that the playwright's plays belong to the body of "noncanonical literature" and as such are "critically neglected and largely unread", while the only reason for literary critics to read such texts is that they are "useful as a way into the canon" (Lines 2000: 401). Having proposed that reading of such noncanonical texts can challenge an oversimplified view of literature as remaining in the service of power "by suggesting suppressed historical contingencies, even suppressed resistance" (2000: 402), he proceeds to examine *The Pardoner and the Frere*, *The Foure PPs*, and *The Play of the Weather* (all printed by Rastell in 1533) as plays participating in the political and religious debate of the 1530s. It seems that *A Play of Love* can also be perceived as falling within the category of such noncanonical literature, as

the play often receives just a mention, if any, usually in relation with the fact that it is the first interlude to use the term Vice as a name for a stock character featuring in the play.

Heywood's interlude is composed as a double debate between four characters. The first couple, Lover-not-Loved and Loved-not-Loving, call for a judgment as to which of them is more miserable and suffers a greater pain, while the other two, Lover-Loved and No-Lover-nor-Loved, argue about which of them is happier. Given ample time to present their cases and respond to their opponents' arguments, the characters address each other politely and respectfully. In short, they tend to adhere to the standards of not only courtly etiquette but also scholarly dispute. The 'happy lovers' are appointed by 'unhappy lovers' to act as umpires in their case and give an impartial verdict and vice versa. At the end of the play, however, all these kinds of love are pronounced inferior to "the loue of that louyng lorde" (l. 1585), i.e. Divine love.

Even the most concise summary of the plot reveals that the interlude requires no elaborate staging, costumes or props. For a play of nearly 1600 lines there is also not much dramatic action, as the characters do little more than deliver longish monologues. But to see the play solely in this light is to overlook the fact that *A Play of Love*, like many other Henrician and Elizabethan plays, is structured "according to the humanist rhetorical practice of arguing *in utramque partem*, on both sides of the question" (Cartwright 1999: 11), which is emphasised by the very names of the characters, who represent all possible aspects of love – wanted versus not wanted and requited versus unrequited.

The interlude begins in accordance with the audience's expectations with the entry of Lover-Not-Loved, a love-struck young man of courtly literature, who paces around the stage restlessly and purposelessly, which visualizes his verbal pronouncement that he does not know where he is, where he comes from, and where he is going. Having lost the sense of reality, he depends solely on the object of his love: "As one person to me is

euerychone / So every place to me but as one / And for that one persone euery place seke I", ll. 22-24 (cf. Andreas Capellanus's 'Rule' XXX presenting a true lover as constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved). The beloved lady is conventionally idealized – "without comparison / Concernyng the gyftys gyuyn by nature" (ll. 29-30). In the next couple of lines the impossibility of describing the perfection of the lady is extended to the impossibility of expressing the feeling itself:

And as it is thyng inestimable
To make reporte of her bewty fully
So is my loue towarde her vnable
To be reportyd as who seyth rightly. (ll. 36-39)

This inability to express oneself in words on the subject of the dispute appears somewhat odd in a play which is construed as a debate, depending mainly on the power and consistency of verbal argumentation. Taking into account the possibility that due to its consistent use of legal terminology the play could have been staged at the Inns of Court revels for lawyers (as proposed by Axton and Happé in their edition of the play, 46-7), we may assume that the problems with defining the object of debate may have been easily noticed by the target audience.

While both the lady and love itself remain beyond description, Lover-not-Loved appears much more articulate about his sufferings, which are the pangs of "dyspayre" (l. 185) and of "desyre" (l. 185), and the pain caused by "one worde of her mouth" (l. 186) or even "one dyspleasaunt loke of her eye" (l. 186). In the narratives of courtly love, looks, gazes, and glances are powerful signs that communicate meaning. First, they can be easily exchanged by lovers in secrecy and are safer than words that may be overheard and lead to unnecessary gossip. Second, a look or withholding a look is also a serious signal, frequently used by a lady to reprove her lover. For instance, in *Chevalier de la Charette* Chrétien de Troyes focuses on how Guinevere punishes Lancelot by not looking at him; in *Vita Nuova* Dante grieves

when Beatrice refuses him her look; in Guillaume de Machaut's *Remede de Fortune* the lover nearly 'dies' when the lady turns away her eyes. Third, the first look cast by a knight at his lady is often enough for him to fall in love instantly – this happens, for example, in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* when Gareth sees Lyones for the first time (Burrow 2002: 92-96).

Heywood appropriates both the power of a "dyspleasaunt loke" to cause misery and the motif of love at first sight in the construction of the character of Lover-not-Loved:

Desyre is the fyrst vpon my fyrst syght
And despayre the nexte vpon my fyrst sewt (ll. 218-219)

At the same time, courtly love is delineated as a paradox – the presence of the lady in the character's life is simultaneously a "relefe" (l. 212), "torment" (l. 213), "malydy" (l. 215), and even a certain form of enslavement ("And syns I sawe her I neuer was fre", l. 216). It is also clear that the lover, "hopeless and helpless in flames of desyre" (l. 223), equals love with "desyre" (l. 218) and "despayre" (l. 219) rather than with a spiritual relationship that ennobles him. The consistent use of the courtly love repertoire of terminology and images, associated with physical pain, burning, fire, mental turmoil, and dependence verging on slavery, makes Lover-not-Loved a theatrical representation of Andreas Capellanus's courtly lover, who "tends to grow pale when his partner looks at him, who finds it difficult to sleep and eat, and whose heart beats fast at the sudden sight of his beloved" (Burns 2001: 33). The connection between the character and fire/flames/burning can be read as serving to undermine his credibility as the participant in the debate through the connection with the theory of natural temperaments, derived from the nature of the four elements. Fire, associated with the qualities of hot and dry, red choler, and summer, dominates over the period of youth, which is perceived as tending towards amorousness, wildness, and folly while clearly lacking maturity and good judgement (Burrow 1988: 170).

The character's restless on-stage behaviour and frenzied emotional speech contrasts sharply with the composure of Loved-not-Loving, the only female character in the play, who appears on stage the moment Lover-not-Loved concludes that his condition is "of all paynes the moste incomparable payne" (l. 63). From the very beginning, it is clear that she will resort to logic and rational argumentation to counter his position. For instance, when her opponent argues that his suffering is greater than hers, as there is nothing painful and distressing in being adored, she refutes the validity of the claim by questioning its logic – no comparison can be made between "payne & no payne" (l. 94). Bringing him to admit that her situation can be upsetting as well opens up the possibility of presenting her own "pains". Initially at least they fail to match the sufferings of Lover-not-Loved in intensity. Loved-not-Loving compares her unwanted suitor with his incessant and undesirable love-talk to a mouse that would "harpe on a crust of bred" (l. 109) – something not particularly dangerous in itself yet painfully annoying. The unwelcome words of her suitor metaphorically materialize into spears that through her ears go directly to her heart and wound her (ll. 121-123), while the tears she sheds are likened to blood spilling out of her wounded heart (ll. 125-126). The bloody metaphor is not complete at this point but acquires an even more sinister note, as the lover demanding her love is compared to an executioner with an axe in his hand, who:

Shold offer me seruyce most humbly
 wyth an axe in hys hande, contynually
 Besechyng me gentlylly that thys myght be sped
 To graunte hym my good wyll to stryke of my hed. (ll. 134-137)

While Lover-not-Loved puts forward quite stereotypical arguments and unswervingly poses as the one serving his lady and being at her mercy, Loved-not-Loving questions the idea of such service altogether. The imagery of courtly love is completely reversed. The wound of love and her aversion to the lover are not

caused by Cupid's lead arrow, but deliberately inflicted by the man who claims to love her, her executioner⁶.

The underlying principle of the courtly love discourse, i.e. situating the lady in a position of power, whose whims must be satisfied by a supplicant suitor, is discarded as bearing little resemblance to reality. Loved-not-Loving has one wish only – to be left alone by the man she finds repulsive – and this wish is never to be granted. Not a feudal lord but a victim, the lady is shown as being tyrannized by a man, whose only purpose is to talk her into rewarding his services with 'sweet recompense'. She is expected to consent in the end, as suggested by Lover-not-Loved ("Syns loue gyuyn to hyme gyueth your selfe ease, than / Except ye loue payne, why loue ye not this man", ll. 962-963). Heywood's use of violent imagery in this scene constitutes an unnerving intrusion, shifting the perception of courtly love discourse from the masculine perspective to the feminine point of view. When seen from this angle, the reversed gender hierarchy brings no benefit to the lady and can be seen as one more way of forcing her to comply with men's expectations.

While the debate remains formally unsettled in the course of the play, the construction of Lover-not-Loved is most likely meant to put him at a disadvantage. Full of contradictions and incapable of taking control of his intense emotions, he appears irrational, disoriented and lost. Portrayed in a clichéd manner, the male lover obsessively focuses on his suffering and appears more concentrated on himself than on anything else. Simulta-

⁶ The link between love and death – interestingly, not a natural death but the one at the hands of an executioner – is further developed when Lover-not-Loved and Loved-not-Loving deliberate on which of them could be compared to a hangman and which to the hanged one. Seeing himself as the chief sufferer (the hanged), he portrays her as worse than a hangman as hanging "is done agaynst the hangmans wyll / And ye of delyghtfull wyll, your louer kyll" (ll. 898-900). Once again Loved-not-Loving turns his argument against him, pointing to its logical inconsistency. If the issue of "will" is taken into account, he is the one that has picked the object of his affection wilfully, while she has been deprived of any choice. If he wanted then, he could forsake his love, become his "owne phesicion" (l. 916) and cure his malady – the pain would cease.

neously, his tormented body externalizes the state of his mind, physical suffering becoming a natural consequence of his refusal to rely on his mental abilities in matters pertaining to love. Not able to rely on his mind, with the senses that also fail him, the lover cannot reconcile the “contraryetees” (l. 1017) that haunt him “lyke swarmes of bees” (l. 1016), which in turn affects his bodily functions:

All tymes in all places of this body
By this dystemperaunce thus dystempored am I
Sheueryng in colde and yet in hete I dye
Drowned in moysture parched parchment drye. (ll. 1020-1023)

Lover-not-Loved’s state is clearly depicted as physical sickness resulting from the imbalance of humours in his body, which is simultaneously shivering from cold and dying of heat, drowning in moisture and dry as parchment. Still, this imbalance of humours clearly affects his mind too. Despite accusing his female opponent in a misogynist fashion of a “weyke braine” (l. 839), it is Lover-not-Loved who actually gives the impression of being out of his mind. When he is chaotic, she is rational. When his arguments are mainly emotional, her reasoning is strikingly coherent – even if she proposes a view of the courtly love model that is far from orthodox.

While it is true that Heywood decided “to make his only woman in the play not the killer of her lover – who suffers desperately from unrequited love – but a person free to refuse this lover’s love, without being necessarily judged his cruel destroyer” (Mullini 2006: 29), it might be argued that he did more than just that. What Loved-not-Loving does in the play, most probably directed primarily at a male audience, is to refrain from playing the part ascribed to ladies in Henrician courtly revels, with which spectators were probably familiar. She refuses to be conquered in verbal and physical terms, calling into question the very model which pretends to elevate women only to pressure them into giving in to male wishes and desires.

Towards the end of the debate with Lover-not-Loved, Loved-not-Loving asks him to imagine and compare two cases: his own, when a fine-looking lady he loves ignores him (ll. 1044-1049), and one where he is cherished by an unattractive and repulsive woman he abhors (ll. 1050-1055). When the male character pictures himself as having to deal with the latter situation, he finally contends that it is equally difficult. Interestingly, the acknowledgement is made only after the genders have been mentally “swapped”, i.e. when a man, rather than a woman, has to cope with the issue of unwanted love. Only then is the situation openly recognized as uncomfortable and strenuous (“In good soth to tell treuth of -these cases twayne / which case is the wurst is to me vncertayne,” ll. 1063-4). Even an earlier misogynist comment made by No-Lover-nor-Loved, alluding to the female predilection for sex (“Men be not lyke women alway redy,” l. 1063), does not manage to justify or explain this uneven treatment of men and women in texts promoting the ideals of courtly love.

In the described scene Heywood not only carnivalesquely plays with the idea of reversing gender roles but also probes the potential of a different theatrical representation of women, by challenging the division of women into two broadly understood categories of virgins and shrews. The virgins, modelled on the Virgin Mary and saints, can be seen as displaying traditional female virtues of chastity, silence, and obedience; the shrews, typical for farcical tradition, are characterised by sharp tongues, rebelliousness, promiscuity, and scheming. Loved-not-Loving seems to situate herself somewhere in between. She is verbose, but not rebellious; independent, but not insubordinate. Instead of presenting a stereotypical and popular image of a shrew from the farce or fabliaux, Heywood employs much subtler and unanticipated means to examine the effects of gender reversal. His female character speaks with her own voice and, what is more, she speaks in a strikingly sensible and consistent way, with no hint of aggression in her argumentation. With no allusions to her transgressive behaviour being made, she can-

not be ridiculed and mocked as a woman taking control over men. Removed from the farcical context, she does not make any attempts at usurping the position of man and exercising control over him.

As a result, Heywood succeeds in creating Loved-not-Loving as a female character who wants to have control over her own choices and who is prepared to defend her stance with logical reasoning not physical power, with eloquence not garrulousness. Even if the debate is not formally closed with one character winning over the other, it is difficult for the audience to shake off the impression that Loved-not-Loving appears superior to Lover-not-Loved. She dominates not because of the deceptive, in fact utterly fake, feudal-like position of women over their lovers in courtly love narratives, but because of her mental abilities and logical skills. If she is the beauty of this interlude, she is also the brains, and this is the aspect of Heywood's message that seems to be the least expected.

Still, a bigger portion of carnivalesque attack on courtly love discourse is introduced by another character, No-Lover-nor-Loved, who brings into the play all the tricks displayed by the vices. Although in *A Play of Love* there is no strictly defined hierarchy of characters, who remain equal partners in the debate, from his very first utterance No-Lover-nor-Loved is responsible for lowering the tone of the play on both the verbal and non-verbal level. His manner of speech and communication is clearly appropriated from the tradition of the vices of the morality plays. When Lover-Loved, after a longish monologue, asserts in a voice that brooks no argument that "the hyest pleasure that man may obtayne / Is to be a louer beloued agayne" (ll. 300-1), No-Lover-nor-Loved changes the serious tone of the scene by calling him "mayster woodcock" (l. 302). The term is not particularly abusive in itself, especially when compared with the morality play vices' preference for words like "whoreson", "caitiff", "wretch" and such like, yet it is unusual and unexpected in the context of *A Play of Love*, in which the characters generally display exquisite manners. This carnivalesque effect is even

strengthened when within a couple lines a “woodcock” becomes the equivalent of a “fool” (l. 323, l. 332).

If the female character voices her rational objections against the paradigm of courtly love, No-Lover-nor-Loved distorts it to the point of ridiculing the whole model. To start with, he mocks the convention of idealizing and presenting the courtly lady as one having no equals by stating that he is “at one poynt with women all” (l. 350) and listing thirty-six adjectives, all in superlative forms, to describe women (ll. 351-362). Referring to both physical appearance and personality traits, the adjectives include positive as well as negative attributes and are enumerated in no particular order. The organizing principle of this catalogue is motivated not by logic but by alliteration, i.e. every three adjectives in each line alliterate. Women, Heywood implies, may be true, trim and tall, or wise, wily, and wild, or coy, cursed, and cold – they can be anything in fact. Senseless as it may initially appear, the list offers a more realistic view of women than delineating them either as farcical shrews or idealised objects of romance, which in a way parallels the construction of the character of Loving-not-Loved.

Apparently a mishmash of attributes and qualities, No-Lover-nor-Loved’s catalogue emphasizes the emptiness of the convention of courtly love that requires a lover to exalt his beloved over other women. On top of being an expert on the nature of women, the character declares himself to be well acquainted with “louers laws” (l. 459) in a manner reminiscent of Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, construed in the General Prologue as the one who “kould of that art the olde daunce” (l. 476) and knew “the remedies of love” (l. 475). Through associations with the tradition of the morality play vices on the one hand and the Wife of Bath (an expert on love, or rather sexual experience, juxtaposed against the “auctoritees”) on the other, No-Lover-nor-Loved becomes a carnivalesque spirit of the interlude, aiming to degrade and mock the lofty ideals and conventions of the paradigm of courtly love with a story about his own love experience, or rather a love-game he took part in.

The story, which takes up a large portion of the whole play, begins with a head-to-toe, mockingly detailed description of the lady (ll. 431-472), in which apart from conventional images of “smoth skyn”, and “golden heare”, No-Lover-nor-Loved mentions quite unexpectedly “clene finger typs”, “the tygh the kne as they sholde be”, and “the syght of the fote,” which “ryft hartes to the rote”. The shift of mood is emphasised by the change of stanza pattern – the lines get considerably shorter than in the debate proper and the description is carried out through four-syllable rhyming couplets. More importantly, the references to the parts of the body that normally remain concealed (i.e. thigh, knee, foot) under clothes introduce a certain sense of corporeality, implying perhaps that the comic story will uncover what is hidden.

In a study on the role and use of clothes in courtly love narratives, Burns (2002) examines the connections between the notions of courtly love and material opulence and excess of dress, seeing clothes as fundamental to the representation of gender and status and pointing to the ways in which clothing characterizes the courtly body and even affects the paradigm of courtly love. She observes that the authors of courtly romance “tend to fetishize their heroines either by describing clothed body parts as if they were naked or more commonly by burying female corporeality beneath extravagant layers of luxurious dress as a hallmark of refined court life (Burns 2002: 70). Conversely, by referring to the unclothed body, Heywood probably wants to ‘unfetishize’ his mistress, to remove the veil of conventionalized ideology and gain access to reality, and to ‘undress’ courtly love in order to examine it in its ‘nakedness’. This undressing proceeds in the spirit of carnivalesque degradation and laughter as the story appropriates the elements of farce into the structure of the interlude.

The nature of No-Lover-nor-Loved’s relationship with the lady is stated explicitly as motivated not by love but “pleasure to approue [his] wyt” (l. 486). Unlike Lover-not-Loved or Gareth, the character has not been struck by the beauty of the

lady at first sight and enters the courtly love game with a practical aim in mind – to test and improve his wit:

wherin I thought that if I tryed her
I shulde therby lyke my wyt the better
And if she chaunsed to tryp or tryse me
It sholde to learne wyt a good lesson be. (ll. 491-4)

He presents courtly love as a sport, in which he will always win, as whether he tricks or is tricked by the lady, he will earn a good lesson all the same. Keeping level-headed, he juxtaposes himself with Lover-not-Loved, whose serious treatment of the business of courtly love has led him to lose his mind. Still, even if the liaison is a game, the sceptical character observes all the rules a perfect lover should follow – he spends plenty of time with his beloved but does not deprive himself of sleep (“I alowe no loue where slepe is not alowde”, l. 510); he dresses cleanly, yet not very showily; he acts out sudden changes of mood as an external sign of experiencing extreme and conflicting emotions (happiness/despair). All the time, however, he remains distanced, which allows him to feel no remorse and even secretly enjoy the moments when he deceives his lover or causes her to fall “in wepyng as her harte shulde haue broken” (l. 535).

This parody of a lovers’ tearful squabble is soon followed by a parody of their joyful reconciliation, during which the terms derived from the verb “to love” are repeatedly used in all possible combinations:

Anone there was I loue you and I loue you
Louely we louers loue eche other
I loue you and I for loue loue you
My louely louyng loued brother
Loue me, loue the, loue we, loue he, loue she,
Depper loue apparent in no twayne can be. (ll. 583-588)

The accumulation of all possible forms of the *love* lexeme draws the audience’s attention to the emptiness of the terminology related to feelings in courtly love discourse. The words are used

abundantly and without much thought, but appear to signify nothing. Do the people who pronounce them really care about their meaning? Is there much more to them than a mindless adherence to the convention that is a bit worn out in itself? Is there any content behind these hackneyed platitudes? The finale provides an obvious answer. After a month, the sceptic finds the lady jealous and possessive and decides “to brynge to ende this ydell dysgysyng”, the phrase “ydell dysgysyng” once more pointing to the theatrical, performative aspect of his amorous adventure. Having left the lady alone for half a day, he comes back to find her with another man:

I sawe her naked a bed with an other
And with her bedfelowe laught me to scorne
As meryly as euer she laught beforne. (ll. 630-2)

The farcical conclusion of the story clashes strongly with the otherwise formal structure of the debate. Through the mouth of No-Lover-nor-Loved, Heywood introduces the bawdiness and coarse humour of the carnival, brings the element of popular entertainment into a play devised for a refined audience, who are equally well accustomed to the allegorical and idealized presentation of courtly love and farce.

As a result, the Vices's story, a text within the wider text of *A Play of Love*, serves to bring down all the lofty ideas associated with courtly love. Here, the lady is joyfully knocked down from her pedestal of being most beautiful, adorable, and ennobling, to be presented instead as a ‘common woman’⁷. Still, it is not only women that are mocked, as men get an equal share of Heywood's satire. Male lovers, worshipping their beloved ladies and full of courtly rhetoric, turn out to be cuckolded fools in

⁷ Discussing various contexts in which the term was used in the Middle Ages, Karras observes that the terms “common woman” / “whore” did not have to involve an economic transaction, i.e. payment for sex; it was enough to have extramarital sex, to be found guilty of adultery or to have many sexual partners – in brief, to behave differently than the norm prescribed (Karras 1998: 25-30).

the end. Through his bawdy story, Heywood ridicules the idealized vision of courtly love, degrades its elaborate codes, and brings everything down to the material sphere of the body and sex⁸. The figure of No-Lover-nor-Loved is also responsible for blurring the borders between the theatrical and real space of the performance and establishing rapport with the audience in a manner characteristic for the morality play vices (e.g. "And syns my parte nowe doth thus well appere / Be ye my parteners now all of good chere", ll. 689-690). Although the interlude practically lacks specific stage directions, mentioning mainly entries and exits of the characters, the shorter lines of the Vice's part, especially in the story, give the actor more chance of acting out a slapstick comedy.

In fact, No-Lover-nor-Loved is much better at comedy than debating. His chief strategy is simply reversing associations established by his opponent. When Lover-Loved refers to love in terms of "feader" (l.176), "lorde", "leader" (l. 177), "the Christs crosse that must be [his] spede" (l. 178), clearly linking the notions of marriage, family, social hierarchy and religion within the concept, No-Lover-nor-Loved presents it "as yll as is the deuyll" (l.183), or even "the more yll" (l. 1212), Lucifer incarnate indeed (l. 1214), something that, whether required or not can affect the lover negatively either through pain or joy. No-Lover-nor-Loved also tries to argue, rather perversely, that what his opponent calls pleasure is, in actual fact, a torment. Making no distinction between mutual and one-sided feeling, he strives to

⁸ It is also in this vein of transposing the courtly love discourse onto the plane of the body that No-Lover-nor Loved ridicules Lover-not-Loved's description of how his body is affected by extreme emotions, an issue discussed earlier in the present chapter, namely at the moment when the lover states that he is "Sheueryng in colde and yet in hete I dye / Drowned in moysture parched perchment drye" (ll. 1022-3). Here, No-Lover-nor -Loved takes the discourse of love-sickness literally and checks if the symptoms are true, finding that the unfortunate lover's "ars be warme" and "nose colde", "dry lyps" and "moyst hys". Through these physical tests the lovelorn man is once more ridiculed, especially when it is revealed that his "breath smelleth of lycker" (ll. 1030-1037). His behaviour is thus compared to the state of alcoholic intoxication and in this way once more degraded.

prove that all love is wicked, results in pain and brings the body to self-destruction by depriving it of food, drink, and sleep.

As the exchange of arguments between the two characters remains unsettled, No-Lover-nor-Loved decides to play his final carnivalesque trick. Having left the stage for a while under the pretext of having forgotten a book, he comes back running wildly among the audience, with “a hye copyn tank on his hed full of squybs fyred”, shouting feverishly “water” and “fyre”, until the squibs burn themselves out (stage directions, after line 1311). The scene materializes the metaphors of burning for love employed by Lover-not-Loved, but also tricks Lover-Loved to leave the debate and run to save his beloved from a burning house. In both cases, it seems, love is something that impairs clear judgment and rushes one into hasty actions without undertaking a calm analysis of the situation. Again, the outcome of the debate is not formally resolved; yet one is left with the sense that both “not loving” characters have been presented in a much more innovative, less clichéd way.

Whether the merry trick helps to turn the scales in No-Lover-nor-Loved’s favour or not, it allows Heywood to enliven the atmosphere among the audience. Cartwright perceives the Vice’s re-entry as one of the “moments that surprise formal expectations”, which contribute the lowest humour to the interludes⁹. “The switch from high Roman philosophy to low humour high-jinks,” Cartwright writes, “gives no Lover nor Loved a newly compelling stage presence” (Cartwright 1999: 40). While it is difficult to argue against the appeal of the Vice, I have some reservations concerning seeing his presence in the interlude as “newly compelling”.

⁹ Such carnivalesque moments feature in other Heywood’s plays and include a scene in *The Four PP* when an apparently innocent comment by the Palmer (“I never sawe not knewe, to my consyens, / Any out woman out of paciens,” ll. 1002-1003) triumphs over much more elaborate misogynist stories proposed by other characters, or the scenes dominated by Mery Reporte in *The Play of the Weather*, also referred to as the Vice, who plays the role of a royal servant, controls the access of suitors to Jupiter and simultaneously brings bawdy comedy into the play.

In fact, for the construction of No-Lover-nor-Loved Heywood appropriates all the tricks performed by the medieval vices and devils of the morality plays, making the character as compelling as his religious cousins. Like them, Heywood's Vice is the main showman in the play aware of his own theatricality – the only one in the interlude who not only transgresses the generic limits of a debate by introducing a fabliau-like story but also brings in spectacular acting. Like Lucifer from *Wisdom who is Christ*¹⁰, he is capable of logical argumentation that challenges widely-held ideas. Like Titivillus from *Mankind*¹¹, he tries to

¹⁰ In *Wisdom who is Christ*, dating back to the second half of the fifteenth century, Lucifer is construed as a gallant, able to use Latin and easily quote the Bible. He is an experienced debater, voicing arguments against *vita contemplativa* which, according to him, can lead the mind astray. He also suggests that little things are enough for salvation, that there is nothing wrong with food, drink, fine clothes and chivalric deeds, and indeed his questions, e.g. "What synne is in mete, in ale, in wyn? / What synne in riches, in clothynge fynne?" (*Wisdom*, ll. 472-473), can be difficult, even for a learned theologian, to answer. Motivated by pride and envy, the devil is clever and articulate enough "to beguile humankind, showing sin as perfection and virtue as wickedness" (Cox 2000: 74). And yet, Lucifer also brings in low comedy in the scenes in the beginning of the play, when he appears and roars on stage in "dewyllys aray" (l. 325), or later, when he is accompanied by a 'shrewd boy' (l. 550), seized from the audience and dragged away from the stage most probably on the devil's own back.

¹¹ Titivillus, is the vices' last resort in their attempts to seduce Mankind, but the one awaited by the audience. Equipped with a net for catching souls and the mantle of invisibility, most probably wearing a false head, all these attributes familiar from the cycle plays, the devil roars on stage, runs through the audience, and, finally, manages to corrupt Mankind. And yet, despite his carnivalesque allure, the figure of Titivillus is a key factor in the process of enforcing the moral message of the play, emphasising that the language and the behaviour of the vices are dangerous forms of temptation to both the protagonist and audience. This particular devil figure, which functioned in medieval popular culture as the one dealing specifically with the sin of using idle language in church and was often endowed with a bag into which he was meant to collect idle words to present them during the Last Judgement as a visible proof of one's sins, turned out to be peculiarly useful for a play that relies on the use of billingsgate to an unprecedented extent. The devil's appearance on stage visually reinforces the point that the audience, reacting so eagerly to the practical and verbal jokes performed by

round off the debate by means of a simple, comic trick when he runs amongst the spectators with the squibs on his head. Like all vices, he downgrades high discourse (be it religious or courtly) into the most materialistic terms. The difference seems to lie in the ending. While the vices and devils of moral plays, despite their carnivalesque appeal, always reinforce the moral message in the end, Heywood's Vice seems to draw attention to the absurdity of the whole debate on courtly love, whose definite conclusions are unattainable – as anything can be proved provided that the debater is a skilful and articulate one.

The debate's conclusion does not grant victory to any of the debaters, discards all arguments about supremacy, and strongly stresses that reason should take precedence over "vnbridled affection" (l. 1553), which will guarantee the fairness of judgement. Towards the end any earthly forms of love are also juxtaposed with spiritual love for God, the latter being presented as the only source of true happiness:

Let vs seke the loue of that louyng lorde
 who to suffer passion for loue was content
 wherby his louers that loue for loue assent
 Shall haue in fyne aboue contentacyon
 The felyng pleasure of eternall saluacyon. (ll. 1583-1589)

Elsewhere, Lines has successfully argued that the playwright's *Witty and Witless*, *The Four PP* and *The Play of the Weather*, based on similar principles of arguing both sides of the argument and leaving the debate apparently non-resolved, problematise the very issue of judgement itself and "locate themselves in opposition to the absolutist tendencies, both religious and political, of the reign of Henry VIII" (Lines 2000: 402). The plays do participate in the controversies of the times, but Lines

the vices, laughing at their attempts to ridicule virtuous Mercy, joining in the obscene Christmas song, and virtually paying for the arrival of the devil, are not better than the vices themselves. Therefore, the spectators, wilfully and joyfully lending themselves to the spirit of carnival and engaging themselves in the comic plot, become guilty of the sin of sloth and need absolution as much as Mankind does.

writes, “it would be an oversimplification to claim that the plays «resist power»” (Lines 2000: 430). What they do instead is voice the “scepticism of absolute interpretative authority”, be it Protestant or royal one, and resist “the increasing centralization of both political and religious power in the king’s hands” (Lines 2000: 431). The structure and the ending of *A Play of Love* situate it within the same interpretative context: the judgement is refused while the characters agree to differ in their individual approaches to courtly love.

If the other plays, as discussed by Candace Lines, question the centralization of power and the right of the royal authority to interpret and settle religious matters, *A Play of Love* seems to voice doubts about love at two levels at least. First, the play strips courtly love of its false veneer, presenting it as an artificial idealized construct that in fact masks lechery and promiscuity. To make this point, the play stages a carnivalesque vision of the Henrician court that unites contradictions, as noted by Thomas Betteridge in a comment on Heywood’s love poems but equally applicable here: “At one level the court of these poems is a highly conventional and mannered place where lovers exchange longing looks across marbled halls, while at another it is a place awash with rampant sexual desire in which all women are ultimately nothing more than whores on the lookout for the next man to beguile” (Betteridge 2009: 173). Second, love in general is construed as a treacherous passion that affects reason (as shown especially in *Lover-not-Loved*). Taking into account the final prayer, which implies that “contentation” shall be sought in “the loue of that louyng lorde,” Heywood’s interlude stresses that the model of courtly love, physical or sexual rather than traditional Christian spiritual, when set against principles of religion cannot bring contentment.

The conclusion could be taken as purely theoretical, but Heywood is an experienced and active courtier, and love, religion and politics are never divorced in Henrician court. In this light, the interlude, apparently devoid of political meanings, may also be read as a thinly-veiled commentary upon not only the court

in general, but on the policy of Henry VIII, which entangled love, sex, and religion, divided the courtiers and the preachers, and generated neverending debates, whose peaceful solution was practically impossible, and sooner or later someone was bound to resort to 'fire' and violence as a means of resolving all these 'contrarities'.

Wit and Science: courtly love enacted

Another example of the use of the courtly love paradigm is provided in Redford's *Wit and Science*¹², where the motifs of chivalric quest, courtly love, and marriage are successfully intertwined with elements derived from the morality tradition, and finally spiced up with a few songs and dances. Far from being chaotic, the combination of all these components proves to be used consciously to orchestrate a message pertaining to education. What is particularly interesting about the play is the manner in which Redford appropriates the metaphors of love, courtship and marriage, with their erotic implications, to build up and augment his moral message.

From the very beginning, Redford strives to make the audience notice that his title characters are more than generalized abstractions. Being not only an abstract capacity of the mind, Wit is more than a schoolboy who has to overcome some obstacles to learning. He is also delineated as a young man in love with a lady he has never met, who will marry him only if he successfully completes his heroic quest. Likewise, Lady Science is not merely *scientia* but rather a young woman in love, full of both expectations and doubts concerning her suitor and would-be marriage. Furthermore, the lovers are declared to be suited for the match by Reason, who assures the spectators that Wit possesses all the "gifts of graces" (l. 17) that are held in high esteem by Lady Science, who in turn is so attractive that "as soon

¹² This discussion elaborates the points sketched in my previous article, see Borowska-Szerszun (2014).

as Wit sees her, / For all the world he would not then lese her” (ll. 21-22). It is also emphasised that both parties are inclined towards this marriage, their mutual consent becoming an indispensable prerequisite for their relationship:

Where parties together be inclined
By gifts of graces to love each other,
There let them join the one with the other. (ll. 14-16)

The vision of marriage proposed here is based on the notion of equality of the partners, perceived quite unorthodoxly in terms of “gifts of graces” rather than social or financial status. Wit and Science are not to rush into a relationship, but the prospective marriage, despite being desired by both lovers and approved by the fatherly figure of Reason, must be preceded by a period of courtship. The wooing stage is depicted with a degree of realism and evokes associations with real-life noble practices. Wit wears the colours of his beloved, the Garments of Science (l. 89), and sends her a favourable portrait of himself through his courtly messenger, Confidence, which – if the play had been written towards the end of Redford’s life – could have resonated dialogically with Henry VIII’s rejection of Anne of Cleves. Expected to be passively waiting to see whether Wit proves worthy of her or not, Lady Science provides him with the Sword of Comfort, a token of love, and, as it turns out, an efficient weapon against Giant Tediousness.

Interestingly, the lack of the sword, combined with his youthful pride and inexperience, becomes the chief reason for Wit’s defeat in an encounter with Tediousness, which has been foreseen by his tutor, Instruction:

Wit, hear me! Till I see Confidence
Have brought some token from Lady Science
That I may feel she favoreth you,
Ye pass not this way, I tell you true. (ll. 101-104)

Redford’s pedagogic message that a student – insufficiently prepared for too difficult educational challenges – may be over-

come with fatigue is thus conceptualised at the romantic level of the play. Wit is not only an impatient schoolboy but also too hasty a lover, one who undertakes his mission before he has actually won the lady's formal consent. In these circumstances, his motivation to approach Tediousness as quickly as possible, coloured with his desire to impress Science with his courage (ll. 107-109), marks him out as immature and unprepared for the act of marriage, which symbolically represents the final stage of his transition to adult life. However, being too impulsive and reckless is not Wit's only transgression against the rules of love. Like the unfortunate and unstable lover from *A Play of Love*, he claims to be prepared to suffer for his devotion to his lady, exclaiming "And for my love, myself shall take pain" (l. 206). On his humiliating defeat by the giant, he quickly forgets about Lady Science, when other ladies, Honest Recreation with Comfort, Quickness and Strength as her companions, enter dancing and singing.

The theatrical space of the play is immediately transformed into a great chamber, which takes Wit from his educational battle to the sphere of courtly entertainments. The scene of his revival is staged carefully with the ladies first reaching Wit through his ears, next appealing to his eyes, and then to his hand and feet to finally restore him to his previous state. Scherb (2005: 276-277) notes that Redford uses this particular sequence of 'reviving' actions to advocate the benefits of a musical education and present visually how music can lead to the harmony of the human mind and body. Revival by these means proves indeed successful, but Wit is in no hurry to resume his journey towards Lady Science. "I shall to your daughter all at leisure" (l. 279), he informs enraged Reason, which shows that the boy starts to confuse his 'duty' with 'leisure', treating courtly amusements as his main occupation at this point. From now on Lady Science has a rival; her position has been taken over by a competitor who is available with no effort and more easily accessible. Wit easily succumbs to the charms of Honest Recre-

ation, attempts to kiss her (l.291), and renounces not only the promise of marriage, but all his feelings for Science altogether:

WIT: Shall I tell you truth?

I never loved her.

HONEST RECREATION: The common voice goeth

That marriage ye moved her.

WIT: Promise hath she none.

If we shall be one,

Without more words grant! (ll. 300-6)

This verbal denial is emphasized visually again – the protagonist discards the clothes in the colours of Lady Science, “the garment cumbering” (l. 323), and dances a galliard with his new beloved, Honest Recreation, and the ladies accompanying her.

The scene emphasises that Wit’s disloyalty to his beloved corresponds to his failure as student. His hasty denial of love casts doubt not only on his affection, but also on his very ability to see the ‘truth’. And, being unable to distinguish between what is true and what is not, can he deserve to climb Mount Parnassus and achieve success as a scholar? The parallel between an immature lover and an inadequate student affects our perception of the play considerably. In this light, the galliard, with its energetic jumps, hops and leaps, becomes not only a means of displaying the youthful agility of student-actors and the success of Redford himself as a schoolmaster, but is a consciously used device serving to stress that the gravitation of Wit’s Platonic feelings towards a more carnal love seriously undermines his cognitive skill and chances as scholar.

The next scene shows more and more women swarming around Wit, which he does not seem to mind at all. The fleeting glances and apparently innocent touches he has exchanged with the ladies during the dance lead him to a more bodily and sensual contact with Idleness, on whose lap he ends up, having been exhausted with dancing (stage directions, l. 333). This physical closeness between Wit and Idleness, with its erotic implications, signifies the protagonist’s continuous drift towards not only sloth but also lechery, the latter a consequence of the

former. The action practically blurs the distinction between decent entertainment and debauchery, leisure and sloth, when the two women engage in a parody of a courtly flyting, hurl abuse at each other, and call each other “harlot” (l. 340), “drab”, and “calat”. (l. 358). At this moment it becomes practically impossible to distinguish between honest women and harlots, and the line between proper and improper entertainment is equally thin. If this is the case, a virtue can quite disturbingly turn into a vice before one knows it, too (cf. Cartwright 1999: 66). Despite their allure, courtly love games are shown as less innocent than they initially appear when Wit, soundly asleep and unaware of what is going on around him, becomes the prize in a verbal fight between Honest Recreation and Idleness.

The image of a young man surrounded by harlots is two-fold. In romantic terms, the wenches delay, if not prevent completely, his marriage. Simultaneously, the image reinforces the didactic message proposed by Redford – a young man distracted by harlots from his true love is also a young man distracted by them from his pursuit of knowledge, the latter idea familiar from the biblical Proverbs (Norland 1995: 161). The scene relies on carnivalesque degradation and reversal to a considerable extent. Through the lowering of courtly polite register, and blurring the distinction between respectable and disrespectable women, the whole ideal of courtly love is brought to the ground as Science is simply forgotten and discarded. When the transformation of Wit is contextualised through the carnivalesque code of reversal, we realize that it depends on the reversal of gender roles – Wit is not an active knight-errant any more but a passive boy, who has control neither over women fighting for him nor his own life.

A sharp dramatic contrast is provided in the scene when Lady Science enters the stage for the first time, changing the mood of the play completely. Presenting herself as a “lone woman” (l. 673), she declares that as such she has no use for Fame, Favor, Riches and Worship, the implications of this fact having been successfully discussed elsewhere (Schell 1976: 185-188).

Here, I would like to point to one more metamorphosis of the theatrical space, as the stage becomes transformed into a domestic sphere of the lady's chamber. This allows Redford to show a more private conversation between Lady Science and Experience, who is construed in the interlude as a doting mother, asking her daughter to confess what she feels: "What is the matter, daughter, that ye / be so sad? Open your mind to me" (ll. 686-7). What follows is Science's brief account of the story of courtship from her perspective, with the emphasis on her inability to comprehend what has happened ("marvel", l. 675) and true distress ("griefe", l. 676), which reinforces the image of the play's heroine as a woman in love. The confessional tone is further emphasised by the fact that Experience does not interrupt her daughter to the very end, encouraging her to speak with conversational phrases like "umm" and "so?", her words at the end of the speech providing a pertinent comment on Wit's behaviour:

"Hasty love is soon hot and soon cold."
Take heed, daughter, how you put your trust
To light lovers too hot at the first.
For had this love of Wit been grounded,
And of sure foundation founded,
Little void time would have been between ye
But that this Wit would have sent or seen ye. (ll. 711-717)

By introducing this personal exchange between the mother and the daughter, Redford manages to put his message across quite clearly, at the same time avoiding the effect of ostentatious sermonizing.

Even if Experience's tone can be read as somewhat moralistic, the use of familiar terms, like "my daughter", creates the impression that the moralising is directed solely at the young heroine, not at the spectators. Consequently, the whole scene appeals more to the emotions of the audience than to their intellect. The effect is strengthened by Science's resigned silence and sadness, which could have been visualised through gestures related to sorrow, including for instance a sad facial expres-

sion, hanging her head, wringing her hands, etc., and probably evoked sympathy from the audience. The spectators, who might have been initially amused by Wit's adventures with women in the play, are now faced with a markedly different vision of femininity. Removed from the sphere of courtly debauchery and placed in the context of family and domesticity, Lady Science is distanced from "harlots". While Mills (2007: 177) suggests that in comparison with *Honest Recreation* and *Idleness*, Science may lack dramatic presence as a passive object of quest, I believe that in this scene her apparent passivity, contrasted with the carnivalesque reversal of roles in the previous scenes, becomes her strength – she epitomizes a woman who is pure and innocent enough to refuse to participate in the courtly intrigues, one who gets hurt without any fault on her part whatsoever, and one who has to suffer not for her own but for her lover's mistakes.

In this context, Wit's blunt demand of a kiss from Lady Science, "his own darling" (l. 754), who does not recognise him as in the meantime his face has been blackened by Ignorance in the carnivalesque school, proves even more inappropriate and comic. In fact, the first encounter of the lovers gravitates towards parody. Wit, mistakenly believing that his behaviour is actually an act of "courtesy" (l. 754), is constantly trying to force himself on Lady Science, whereas she is struggling to get away from him and repeatedly calls him a fool. It is not Science, however, who becomes laughable as the one who is incapable of recognising Wit's true self. On the contrary, the comic in the scene depends solely on the protagonist's ignorance of his moral decline reflected by the change in his appearance (black face, Ignorance's cloak). Wit's perception of himself is thus pitilessly contrasted with how Lady Science and the audience see him, which becomes particularly apparent when Wit demands to compare his looks with the picture. "This [the image on the painting] is fair, pleasant and goodly," the lady says plainly, "and ye are foul, displeasing and ugly" (ll. 788-9). On top of emphasising the unbridgeable gap between Wit's illusions about

himself and the reality, this straightforward comment might also bring to mind the aristocratic habit of presenting prospective brides and grooms with favourable pictures of their would-be partners, which often bore little resemblance to real life, a practice that is at least sniggered at sympathetically, if not ridiculed completely, by Redford.

Still, the most laughter-provoking aspect of the scene is the protagonist's total misconception of the conduct appropriate to a lover. Redford makes it absolutely obvious that the frivolous behaviour that worked so well with *Honest Recreation* and *Idleness* is totally out of place in the presence of Lady Science. By misunderstanding what he should do, Wit carnivalesquely degrades himself not only in the sphere of education but also in the terrain of courtly love. By attempting to touch and kiss his beloved, he breaks one of the most important codes, proving again to be an arrogant fool not only incompetent in his pursuit of knowledge, but also unable to live up to the chivalric ideal.

Gendering knowledge as feminine has, however, even more interesting implications. On top of being equipped with too many individualised qualities to be treated as a purely abstract concept, Science is also depicted as independent. She escapes the patriarchal authority of her father, Reason, who expresses his opinion about her prospective marriage to Wit in the beginning of the play, but mentions mutual consent, i.e. also her consent, as a factor crucial to finalise the match. Clearly, she is not to be forced to do anything or to be steered in any particular direction; and yet, unlike *Honest Recreation* or *Idleness*, she is not to be had without a considerable effort. Kent Cartwright writes:

As women and knowledge converge, as humanist education and chivalric romance intersect, two attributes arise: enigmaticalness and desirability. Knowledge acquires a certain elusiveness as a chivalric lady; that unpredictability is captured in the doubts of the romance heroine, Lady Science, with surprising effect. Reason can negotiate with Science, but he cannot dominate or manipulate her. Once knowledge is feminized and granted doubt, humanism, at least in this play, registers a limit to patriarchal authority. Lady

Science's doubt, furthermore, suggests a mysteriousness, even an impossibility in the quest for knowledge. (Cartwright 1999: 73)

Such construction of a female character dialogically situates her beyond the more traditional depictions of femininity, which in turn influences our perception of the play's message. Like a typical woman, Science is elusive yet attractive, incomprehensible yet desired, and like a typical woman, she tries to escape the control of a male-dominated society, trying to make a room for herself. By contrasting Science with Honest Recreation and Idleness, Redford somewhat unorthodoxly proposes that it is knowledge that makes a man, not courtly games, and it is knowledge that, despite its mysteriousness, even impossibility, is worth struggling for. Science, like a woman equipped with a dowry, may eventually bring tangible profits, i.e. Fame, Favor, Riches and Worship, even to those who were not well-born. The impression here is that Redford actually seems to equate the merits of birth with the merits of education, inviting the audience to reconsider their values. Even if the play cannot be considered as strictly subversive in its humanist idealisation of knowledge, it still promotes a certain dialogic relativization of the well-established views and truths.

Finally, we may turn to the metaphor of marriage as the peak of Wit's development. According to Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos (1994: 208), the act of marriage itself was considered the culmination of a series of transformations rather than a sudden transition to adult life, which seems to be reflected in *Wit and Science*, where a sort of wedding ceremony, accompanied by a love song and exchange of vows between the lovers takes place at the end. This marriage is presented as the final stage for which Wit has been preparing through the whole play, his mission to accomplish. And yet, when the moment finally comes, Lady Science voices some serious reservations, suggesting it might be a burden:

Ye have won me forever, doubtless,
Although you have won a clog [encumbrance] withal.
(ll. 1044 – 1045)

...

For I, Science, am in this degree
As all, or most part, of women be:
If you use me well, in a good sort,
Then shall I be your joy and comfort;
But if ye use me not well, then doubt me,
For, sure, ye were better without me. (ll. 1057-1062)

Once again the female gender of Science is emphasized and her words about “using” her “in good sort” or “not well” acquire a new, more physical and sexual dimension and resonate with the fabliaux and farcical tradition. Using knowledge, Redford suggests, is like “using” a wife. If done properly, it will bring joy and comfort; if not, it may make a hell out of your life. Wit who, like the spectators, seems to grasp the idea that satisfying his newly-wed wife would also increase his own happiness, professes to take responsibility for their marital well being:

... I am certain that to abuse her
I bread my own sorrow, and well to use her
I increase my joy... (ll. 1195-1197)

Such a change in the approach to the relationship between the characters, which so far has been quite lofty and contrasted with the negative consequences of carnal love, might seem somewhat surprising. But, while Wit’s drift towards carnal love with Honest Recreation and Idleness was premature, it is acceptable and socially sanctioned in marriage, in which Wit can finally fulfil his sexual dreams. Growing up to understand the true value of knowledge is depicted as growing up to sex, and it would be difficult, if not impossible altogether, to present the process of education in more carnivalesque terms. By establishing the sex of his protagonists as masculine and feminine, Red-

ford manages to present the two as complementing each other, the sexual connotations involved in the marriage metaphor serving to strengthen the idea that one cannot exist without the other. As Schell succinctly puts it: "Only when he possesses Science can Wit be Wit, and only when she is possessed by Wit can Science be Science" (1976: 187).

The metaphor of courtly love and marriage is indeed so carefully intertwined with the moral message of the play that it is practically impossible to dismiss it as a cheap trick aimed at making the didactic layer more attractive, just as the appeal of the vices in morality plays is not merely a sugar-coating that makes the spiritual lesson more palpable. Redford seems to be well aware that as allegory, inherited from religious moral plays, his interlude would be simply ineffective. The lack of possibility to allude to the unquestionable, authoritative word of God, which validates the message expressed by the virtues in religious plays, would in consequence reduce the appeal of the vices and negatively affect the pattern of *psychomachia*. Being aware of this, Redford simply had to resort to other means.

Wit and Science seeks to increase the emotional involvement of the audience; hence the plot, despite following the basic structural pattern of the morality play, requires more depth, and as Cartwright rightly observes, it "endeavors to enact a metaphor rather than an allegory" (1999: 55). In fact, the playwright succeeds in presenting not one but a whole set of metaphors and genres that pertain to education: learning can be like morality play salvation, or like a return of the prodigal son, or like a chivalric quest (Cartwright 1999: 55), or like achieving sexual fulfillment in marriage. By appropriating different structural elements for the purposes of his play Redford manages to present in a truly Bakhtinian manner the "view of the world in which all important value resides in openness and incompleteness" (Emerson and Morson 1990: 443), in which science and knowledge can mean more than birth and lineage.

Moreover, this carnivalesque openness informs the structure of the play. Playing with various literary and dramatic

conventions, probably somewhat ossified and worn out by the sixteenth century, Redford weaves them together into a new form, an amalgam of old narratives appropriated by him to create a new one. At the same time, the playwright does not ostensibly brand the old conventions as obsolete but suggests their new uses and applications. There is nothing wrong with the morality play or chivalric romance heritage as long as these forms are consciously appropriated for dealing with new values and meanings. Consequently, there is no need to break away from the literary and dramatic traditions of the previous generations as they too can be used creatively to render more contemporary and humanist meanings. In both dramatic and ideological terms, Redford promotes introducing new elements into the old structures.

In effect, Redford's interlude quite successfully avoids adopting an authoritarian, sermon-like, preaching tone, but at the same times presents its didactic message in attractive and convincing terms. Being not a priest but a teacher, still one well-acquainted with the dramatic and theatrical heritage of the Middle Ages, he succeeds in adapting the conventions of different genres to suit his ends. The final effect seems playful and appropriate for the performance by his young students, and yet the play quite seriously extolls the value of education and makes it absolutely clear that the only thing that is not to be tolerated is idleness and the reluctance to exert oneself in the pursuit of knowledge. As for the final question of how one can actually achieve maturity, the answer remains open, as Redford seems to promote diversity and abstain from offering authoritarian solutions. Maturity can be signified by graduation from a school or university, acceptance at court, marriage, or by some combination of these elements (cf. Scherb 2005: 288). Nevertheless, mature adulthood, with its obligations and pleasures, is depicted in the play as an attractive stage of life, which is particularly emphasised by careful orchestration of the connotations between science and sexual fulfilment.

Fulgens and Lucres: courtly love carnivalized

Chronologically the earliest of the discussed interludes, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, most probably written and performed in the last decade of the fifteenth century, printed c. 1512, is usually noted for being the earliest surviving drama in English that is purely secular (Cartwright 2009: 37)¹³. The "godely interlude" is divided into "two partys to be played at two tymes," while the references within the piece suggest that it was intended to be performed in the large hall of a noble household during the winter season in connection with some sort of festivities, such as Christmas revels or a diplomatic event. The play begins with a lively dialogue between two servants/actors, struggling for the audience's attention:

A: A, for Goddis will,
What meane ye, syrs, to stond so still?
Have not ye etyn and your fill
And payd no thinge therefore? (ll. 1-4)

...

A: But I pray you, tell me that agayn:
Shall here be a play?
B: Ye[a], for certayn. (ll. 36-38)

What follows this energetic exchange is a short summary of the play, also put in the mouths of the same characters, which turns out to be a dramatized debate on the controversial issue of the nature of true nobility – whether it lies in aristocratic birth and lineage or depends on personal virtue.

Although the theme as well as the plot are drawn from earlier sources (John Tiptoft's *Declamacion of Noblesse*, printed by Caxton c. 1481, translated from *De Vera Nobilite* (1428) by Buonaccorso da Montemagno), Medwall's reliance on them is

¹³ Some points pertaining to the depiction of women, yet in a more sketchy form, have been included in my earlier article (Borowska: 2005).

not slavishly imitative. In the original story the answer to the problematic question about the nature of nobility is left to the Roman Senate that withholds the decision, whereas in the interlude Lucres dismisses the blue-blooded but self-indulgent Publius Cornelius in favour of the humble but honourable Gaius Flaminius. What is of particular interest about this work is that a serious abstract debate is structured as a tale of courtship with two men competing for the hand of beautiful and virtuous Lucres, who is responsible for the final choice. What is more, the twists and turns of the courtship of the aristocrats are mirrored in a truly carnivalesque manner on the lower plane of the interlude by the amorous adventures of their servants.

Already the first four lines of the interlude quoted above hint at other interesting features of the play, however. The opening and the whole frame within which the action proper is incorporated have the effect of blurring the borders between ancient Rome and contemporary England, fiction and reality, the space and time of the performance and the actual space and time of a courtly banquet, and finally between the actors and the audience, both of whom belong to the aristocratic household. Even the briefest account of the plot also implies that Medwall's interlude allows women to be in a position of power and to take their own decisions. It is, after all, Lucres who is allowed to decide about her life and choose her preferred candidate instead of being manipulated into a marriage she does not desire. Interestingly, the very same choice and decision is given to the female character in the comic subplot, which offers a comment upon Lucres's choice. Both plots, therefore, feature a reversal of gender roles, and the popular subplot additionally seems to carnivalesquely degrade the courtly plot by transferring it to the sphere of domestic servants.

The carnivalesque potential of popular culture, although not labelled with the Bakhtinian term, is observed by Diane E. Henderson who writes: "Like its cousin popular culture, domestic culture both relied on theoretical hierarchies (husband-wife, parent-child, master-servant) and subverted those theories in

practice” (Henderson 1997: 174). It seems that from the perspective of the carnival-oriented reading of the play interesting points may arise from examining the means of constructing these two female characters – a courtly lady and a plebeian girl. The employment of the notions of love, courtship, and marriage at both a courtly and popular level seems to problematize the play’s interpretations further by directing our attention towards the effects of bringing together the issues of domesticity and politics. Finally, the subplot itself can be seen through what Cartwright has recently called “episodic” or “interconnective” theories of drama, which he argues are offered by the interlude itself:

In the episodic theory, A and B’s comic routines have no necessary bearing on the main action, and the play can evoke different responses at different moments according to its shifting topical interests. In the interconnective theory, all the varying parts advance or complicate the play’s themes, with character types collectively defining a world, and with comic material bearing upon serious themes. (Cartwright 2009: 38)

Observing that most critics focus on the serious message of *Fulgens and Lucres* and see the subplot as episodic, giving it at best a function of diffusing any potential outrage on the part of the ‘old’ aristocracy at the heroine’s choice, he emphasizes something that caught my attention on first reading the play as well – the fact that the subplot takes about seventy per cent of the lines of the interlude (Cartwright 2009: 39)¹⁴. Following Cartwright’s nomenclature, I am inclined to see the two levels of the play as strongly interconnected, the comic plot being much more than an amusing diversion added to satisfy the less sophisticated tastes of the audience and deriving its power from carnivalesque reversals and degradations.

¹⁴ Taking into account these proportions, it would be probably more accurate to speak of the comic main plot with a serious subplot. To avoid confusion, however, I have decided to keep to the customary nomenclature, used by most critics. It is worth noting though that in this discussion both plots are treated as equally important for the play.

Starting with the portrayal of women, it seems that the images and language employed to depict them are quite predictable and rather conventionalized, even if the conventions themselves differ considerably, depending on the social status of the characters. As expected then, the aristocratic heroine is referred to as “fayre” (l. 74), and “swete” (l. 578), and her beauty outshines the looks of other ladies, as one of the lower characters observes:

All be it there was not one allmost
Thoroughoute all the cyte, yong ne olde,
That of her beaute did not boste. (ll. 82-84)

On top of being outstandingly attractive, Lucres is “discrete and sad [serious] in all demeanyng” (l. 273), “full of honest and verteous counsell” (l. 274), equipped with “clere understanding” (l. 262), and indeed lacking nothing “to a nobill woman that was accordyng” (ll. 87-88). Over and over again, Lucres is referred to as a beautiful, virtuous, spotless creature, whose attributes, as her father soberly notes, are “not oft sene in so yong a damesell” (l. 272). All these make the female protagonist appear an admirable version of femininity – an ideal to be worshipped but practically unattainable to ordinary women. The depiction of Lucres is influenced by the conventions of the discourse of courtly love to a great extent. Cornelius, for instance, speaks of his love for her in terms of fire, pain, fever, mental or physical sickness, and intense suffering: “I am so brent in loves fyre / That no thing may my payne aslake” (ll. 331-332). It seems, however, that Lucres, like the heroine of *A Play of Love*, can derive little power or authority from this status. Burns sees the role of women as revered subjects to be no more than “a courtly myth”, while in fact they were constructed by cultural forces that “fix and limit her as an object used to promote the amorous desires, literary aspirations, moral improvement, marital superiority, social mobility, or psychic fantasy of men” (Burns 2001: 35). Hence, despite the fact that she has been given some illusory freedom to decide about her life, beautiful and virtuous

Lucres is what the patriarchal, hierarchic society wanted her to be. She is a submissive and docile product of her upbringing, modelled upon manuals of conduct, incapable of transgressing social and moral norms, and as such safely situated within the walls of the household, an enclosed domestic space in which she does not pose a threat.

What becomes apparent in the course of events depicted on stage is that Lucres's looks and virtue, so unusual when compared with the attributes of other women, make her a highly valuable possession. Her father calls her his "chief jewell and riches" (l. 281), which is soon followed by an observation that she is "of gode and ripe age / To be a mannes fere by wey of marriage" (ll. 283-4). Beautiful, honest and revered as she is, Lucres becomes a jewel that might be attained through marriage, and despite the fact that Fulgens puts the choice into the hands of his daughter, it is a marriage that would involve her "promocyon" (l. 279) that he really has in mind. Her virtue is then a material asset that can be profitably capitalized upon. Her first suitor, Cornelius, also perceives their future match in overtly economic terms:

I wyll spare no cost or expence
Nor yet refuse ony laboure and payne
The love of fayre Lucres to attayne. (ll. 351-353)

The choice of trade-related words, like "cost", "expence", "attayne", combined with his earlier promise to her father "to honour and advaunce" (l. 303) Lucres, emphasises the idea shared by both men that marriage is a serious business, enabling the transmission of wealth and political alliance. Later in the play, Cornelius asserts that he will guarantee his would-be wife a pleasant life of wealth and leisure:

... riches shall ye have at your will ever more,
Without care or study of laboriouse besyness,
And spend all your dayes in ease and pleasant idlnesse.
(ll. 1977-1979)

His idea of a perfect marital life also includes providing for his wife's costly clothes and entertainments, such as hunting, dancing, and listening to music played by minstrels. The way Cornelius attempts to combat his competitor for Lucre's hand is also revealing: he suggests that what Flaminius is able to offer is much below what Lucre can get: "... it were not accordyng / For your grete beate wyth hym to dwell" (ll. 2002-2003). For Cornelius, marriage is evidently a deal, in which he has greater buying power.

From the point of view of his servant, however, there is more at stake than only Lucre's looks and spotless personality. Pointing to his master's lavish dress, discussed in more detail by Dunlop (2007: 58-59), and extravagant spending, he ambiguously observes that "All is done for Lucre sake / To wedde her he doth hys rekenynge make" (ll. 769-770). On the one hand, he might be referring to the fact that Cornelius is a love-stricken aristocrat, who does not care about the costs as far as his affection is concerned. On the other hand, Cornelius's expenditure might be seen as a kind of investment – he runs up his account having in mind the prospective dowry brought in by Lucre. While Fulgens's decision to give his daughter freedom of choice is crucial for the construction of the play, in reality, as reflected also in the interlude, girls were "the objects of a sustained cultural scrutiny that focused on the critical passage from the authority of the father or guardian to the authority of the husband. This transition was of the highest structural significance, entailing complex transactions of love, power, and material substance" (Greenblatt 1990: 84).

The issue of corporeality in the depiction of women is further explored on the comic level of *Fulgens and Lucre*. Just as the main plot set in ancient Rome focuses on Lucre and her marital dilemma, the sub-plot, which blurs the border between fiction and reality, centres on Joan the Maid (Ancilla), who refuses to decide on marrying any of her suitors but manages to humiliate them physically and intellectually. Although both women come out on top, they are separated by an invisible

barrier of birth and class, which has found expression in the choice of language appropriated for their presentation. While Lucres is an idealised icon of courtly conventions, her servant is referred to in much more down-to-earth, material, and overtly misogynistic terms. Joan is “a lyttyl praty moucet” (l. 839) and a “flower of the frying pane” (l. 1145) with a face that is “some what brown and yellow” (l. 842) rather than fair, and whose voice is “as doucet (sweet) as a resty porke” (l. 841). When servant B compares her to “a little pretty mouse”, we are forced to associate her with a small, helpless animal that is always on the run, always in danger of being trapped or devoured by a fat, powerful cat. The phrases related to cooking locate Joan within the realm of the kitchen, which is a domestic zone reserved for women, but they simultaneously bring to mind grotesque Rabelaisian food imagery, thus transforming the kitchen into a carnivalesque sphere, where all norms are questioned and distorted¹⁵. Not surprisingly then, the conditions established by Joan in the contest for her body are different than the requirements of Lucres, who forbade “all manner of violence” (l. 1802), “brallynge” (brawling) or other “ongodely condycyon” (bad behaviour) (l. 1804). Not being interested in words, Joan requires action, saying:

¹⁵ The construction of Joan depends not only on juxtaposing her with socially superior Lucres, but also on subverting the codes of behaviour appropriate for lower-born women. This becomes observable when the maid's behaviour is set against instructive literature for women, e.g. “How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter” – a poem dating back to the early fifteenth century and aimed primarily at adolescent girls living away from home that lacked the advice of their mothers. Among advice related to practically all spheres of female life, from religious devotion to household duties and raising children, the text specifically insists on showing respect to any suitors (“If any man pays court to you, and would marry you, / Look that you scorn him not, whoever he is”), appropriate manner of speech (“Fair of speech you shall be”; “Have you not too many words, to swear be you not too inclined”). The text can be found in P.J.P. Goldberg's anthology of documents shedding light on the life and position of medieval women, *Women in England, c. 1275-1525: Documentary sources*, 1995, pp. 97-103.

And he that can do most maystry,
Be it in cokery or in pastry,
In fettis of warre or dedys of chevalry,
Wyth hym wyll I go. (ll. 1091-1094)

In the maid's Rabeleisian imagery, there is no difference between mastery in cooking, war victories, or chivalric deeds – anything would be valued more than lengthy verbal exposition, rhetoric being of no use in real life. In a way, Joan's juxtaposition of action and words informs the whole structure of the interlude, which gives much more opportunity for displaying acting skills in the subplot, whereas the serious plot relies mainly on speeches. In the finale of the scene, when Joan's suitors finally decide to do what she wishes and settle on a song contest, accompanied by much bawdy acting and employing truly scatological humour, the girl refuses to choose any of them, saying that she has been actually "taken up" by another man. If we refer the maid's preference for action to the conclusion of the whole interlude, we can see it as providing a comment on Lucre's choice of aristocratic husband, who achieved his status by his own deeds. Yet transposed onto the structure of the play, Joan's choice of neither of her suitors might be seen as implying that none of the levels of the play should be favoured as the more important.

Being no longer available on the marital market, Joan seems to take up her role as the object of a farcical courtship for the sheer fun of it, deriving pleasure from the carnivalesque empowerment this role allows her. While Lucre ponders issues of nobility, Joan is openly interested in the financial aspect of the transaction. Like a real saleswoman she bargains and wants to get the most of the deal for herself: "Chepe or ever you buy! (bargain before you buy) / We must first on the prize agre" (ll. 919-920). She knows her price and refuses to sell herself cheaply: "For who some ever shall have me, / (...) He shall me fyrst assure / Of twenty pound londe in joyncture", i.e. twenty pound worth of land legally owned in her name as well as her spouse's (ll. 931-932). Joan's down-to-earth, materialistic logic brings to

earth the abstract notions that preoccupy Lucrez and yet presents the situation of women more realistically. Joan is shown as actively engaged in negotiating her dower, i.e. the husband's contribution to the marriage that would secure her future after his death¹⁶; it is not clear, however, if her dowry would include anything but herself. For B, who eagerly engages in these carnivalesque negotiations, but wonders why she is so "costely" (l. 925), there is little if any difference between love and sex, marriage and prostitution. Finally, he concludes that he can "hire" a woman as pretty as Joan for as long as he wishes for a much better fee.

The confusion about the nature of relationships between men and women, so vividly expressed here, may have stemmed from the fact that throughout the Middle Ages and later on, marriage, especially lower down the social scale, could be entered without a public ceremony on the basis of a mutual private contract between the spouses ("I take you to be my wife or husband"), followed by sexual intercourse. Even though the church struggled to impose its model of publicly-solemnized ceremony, clandestine marriages were popular until being finally banned under the Clandestine Marriage Act of 1753. This lack of formality, however, combined with the fact that both marriage and prostitution relied on some form of exchange, might have caused considerable misunderstanding as to whether a woman should be treated as respectable or as a whore. Karras explains, "[t]he fact that marriage in the Middle Ages could be entered into without a public ceremony did mean that the nature of the financial arrangements involved could be confusing, and on occasion the line between the prostitute and the wife was a fine one" (Karras 1998: 86).

Although Joan, whose virginity is constantly debated, manages to defend herself, it is paradoxically her sharp tongue that associates her with being a sexual transgressor (cf. Henderson

¹⁶ The dower, considered a necessary condition of marriage among people with any property, was expected to be more or less equal to the dowry and would come to the wife if she outlived her husband. For a discussion of dowers in London, see Hanawalt (2007), pp. 61-68.

1997: 178). At the same time, in contrast to Lucres, the maid becomes a potent symbol of unruliness, living in a world ruled by carnivalesquely reversed laws. The “little pretty mouse” of the interlude takes revenge on her oppressors, first humiliating them verbally, then forcing them into a parody of a singing contest solely for the purpose of her entertainment, and finally beating them until they ask her to stop. She challenges the idea of female subordination, being the antithesis not so much of Lucres as of Griselda, the ideal wife of Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale*, whose main traits of character are never-ending patience, obedience, and submission bordering on masochism. Joan’s victory is unquestionable here. A and B’s misogynist remarks do not manage to undermine her importance in the construction of the play, and instead of being finally subordinated, she leaves the stage triumphantly.

Coming back to Lucres’s dilemma, the reasons behind her choice of Flaminius should be examined more carefully. Indubitably, Flaminius is a man possessing numerous humanist virtues held in high esteem by Lucres, such as devotion to God, charitable affection to neighbours, love and faithfulness to friends, asceticism, decent education, spectacular military victories – but, most importantly, all that he has achieved he has achieved by himself. Unlike Cornelius, he does not speak of love in terms of courtly rhetoric. For him love is neither a fire nor a pain. Instead, he promises to do his best to satisfy Lucres’s needs. “I am the man”, he says, “that wolde you please in all that I may” (ll. 512-513). In his final speech, Flaminius promises Lucres “moderate riches” (l. 2126) that would suffice them both and emphasizes that she “shall have also a man accordynge / to her owne condicions in every thing” (ll. 2128-2129). Nothing in the play suggests that he takes into account her dowry; no social rise is guaranteed either. What is stressed instead is the fact that Flaminius, unlike Cornelius, never attempts to buy Lucres’s favours:

And to say that I will follow the gise
Of wanton lovers now aday

Which doth many flattering wordis devise
 With gyftis of ringis and broches gay
 Theyr lemmans hartis for to betray,
 Ye must have me therin excusid
 For it is the thing that I never usid. (ll. 519-525)

The quoted passage powerfully discredits the courtly ideals. The tokens of love are nothing but a form of bribery here, whereas ornate rhetoric is no more than empty, flattering words. Speaking of Lucre as of his equal, Flaminius seems to show a higher regard for the stable institution of marriage than for the illusory code of courtly love. Consequently, marriage is not so overtly transactional here. Even if it is a sort of exchange, it is based more on equality in both social status and virtue than would ever be the case of a marital union between Lucre and Cornelius.

On the other hand, Cornelius, who together with his lineage and goods inherits the conventions of the courtly love code, cannot dispense with the enticing idea of an exchange of gifts, which serve to emphasise the existence of a mutual bond between lovers¹⁷. In *Fulgens and Lucre*, the love token is not a material object, but takes the form of a story shared by Lucre and Cornelius. While they were walking in the garden together, they saw a bird; he took her musk-ball and threw it at the bird

¹⁷ The gift-exchanging and gift-giving is not only typical for lovers but characteristic of court culture in general, where it was employed to gain favour, but also to create bonds between the giver and the receiver and to give shape and material form to abstract social relations. The worth of the gift lies not only in its material value, but in its power to visually emphasize political alliances, etc. Steven Gunn writes: "The quest for influence and assistance was the context for the courtly round of gift-giving. Those outside the court gave gifts in kind to their friends at court when they did not make cash payment. ... Meanwhile those inside the court gave more lasting and sophisticated gifts in exchanges linking the court's visual to its political culture" (Gunn 2006: 135). The display of the gift received by the ruler clearly showed his favour to the giver, while careless treatment of a gift could be an ominous sign as was the case with the ring given to young Henry VIII by Edmund Dudley and lost by the Prince. Dudley himself was arrested within days of Henry's ascension and executed sixteen months later.

in an attempt to stir it, but the ball missed the bird and landed inside a hole in the tree. Cornelius recounts:

I kyst [the musk-ball] as strayght as any pole,
So that it lyghtyde evyn in the hole
Of the hollow ashe. (ll. 1632-1634)

The story, as a gift, is to be “presented” to Lucre as a proof of Cornelius’s identity by B, who assumes the role of a messenger. Still, the episode, and the whole concept of a love token, is comically distorted by a somewhat ignorant servant:

... And than ye delyveryd hym your muskball
For to throw at the byrd with all,
And than as he sayd, ye did no wors
But evyn kyst hym on the noke of the ars.
... Trough, it was **on the hole of thars** I shulde say – -
I wyst well it was one of the too,
The noke or the hole. (ll. 1710-1717, emphasis mine)

The comic in the scene relies entirely on punning on the words “ashe” / “arse” and “cast” / “kyst” and evokes openly sexual connotations, totally unexpected in the context of the higher plot. In this simple way the courtly ideals are once more mercilessly brought to the ground, courtly culture is turned upside-down, and Cornelius himself ridiculed. Interestingly, the content of the story also symbolically reflects Cornelius’s courtship of Lucre – like the musk-ball he throws misses the bird, the arguments he puts forward do not convince the girl to marry him. Additionally, the ‘story token’ cannot become a successful means of creating the mutual bond between the lovers, as empty eloquence seems to be held in high esteem neither by Lucre nor by the playwright himself. All throughout his interlude Medwall emphasizes repeatedly and consistently the superiority of actions over words, be it verbally (e.g. when Lucre says “So greate dyssemblynge (deceit) now a daye / There is convayed under wordes gaye”, or when Joan requires deeds not words from A and B), or structurally, when Lucre finally

chooses verbally-economic Flaminius over articulate, if full of empty words, Cornelius.

Even though the play explores the issues of domesticity, separating matters of the household from matters of the crown is easier said than done. First, the staging, which required no clear-cut spatial division into the stage and the area for the audience “created a fluid movement eliding domestic and public action and promoted the habit of thinking analogically about the health of the local home and the emergent nation-state” (Henderson 1997: 186). The effect was further enhanced by the fact that there could have been little or no difference between the costumes of the players and those of the audience, especially in the case of A and B. The play itself draws attention to the phenomenon of mistaken identities when A says:

A: For I thought verely by your apparell
That you had bene a player
B: Nay, never a dell.
A: Than I cry you mercy:
I was to blame. Lo, therfor, I say
Ther is so myche nyce array
Amonges these galandis now aday
That a man shall not lightly
Know a player from a nother man. (ll. 43-56)

The passage clearly emphasises that misunderstanding arises due to the clothes. But if the actors play servants, why do their clothes resemble those of the noble spectators? Dunlop (2007: 58-59) suggests that B’s clothes show that he is more richly dressed than his status allows him, which might also provide a berating comment on the lavish apparel of the lower-born spectators. Apart from that, however, the exchange may hint at a graver problem – of how to distinguish “a player from a nother man”; how to separate honest men from deceitful players; how to differentiate between real actions and ones acted out with a particular benefit in mind. Is such a distinction possible at all if the court is a stage, where everything that happens has

a highly performative quality?¹⁸ Finally, the parallel appears even stronger when we take into account the existence of two interrelated but distinct plots: the higher one appears to take place in ancient Rome, but the illusion is destroyed the moment A and B, most probably members of the household, turn up on stage. These two, together with Joan the Maid, seem to be able to cross the boundaries between the fictitious world of the performance and the real world quite freely. Although it must be acknowledged that such a phenomenon is, in fact, a typical feature of many a play in the Middle Ages, Medwall's interlude is unique in the emphasis it places on blurring these borders, thus inviting spectators to perceive the play in its entirety as the two different plots unfold and interact with each other.

Not attempting to create the illusion of reality, *Fulgens and Lucres* relies heavily on its self-conscious theatricality. From the very moment A and B enter, they "pretend" to belong to the audience and address them directly, draw attention to the conditions of staging and performance, and even, as Cartwright rightly notes, frequently "misspeak" or "forget" their words, these acting "errors" being "interwoven into the texture of the play" (Cartwright 2009: 47). It is also easy to imagine that the spectators could actually have been required to "participate" in the performance, for instance, open the doors, make way for the actors, or respond to what has been said to them (cf. Jones 1971: 134). And yet, even if the plebeian characters situate themselves within the context of the spectators, they never really belong to this sphere. Their dialogues, even when informal, never appear natural enough to be mistaken for actual conversations between members of the audience, the verbal level of the performance at no point imitating or even approaching real-life speech. Whenever they attempt to draw the audience into the action, the practice is clearly inscribed into the dramatic text

¹⁸ For a brilliant exposition of the metaphor of the court as stage, see Gunn and Janse's Introduction to *The Court as Stage: England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages* (2006), pp. 1-12.

itself. Whenever the spectators do respond, their response has been 'predicted' before the actual performance.

It becomes apparent that Medwall's interlude consciously plays with what Limon has referred to as the "rule of accessibility" (Limon 2006: 41)¹⁹. A and B obviously belong to the world of the theatre, but they are portrayed in a way that creates the impression of their having access to both worlds. Consequently, as the action unfolds, the spectators are invited to follow not only the main plot but also the subplot, the latter constantly referring to the former. At times, they are tricked into seeing the play through the eyes of A and B, or made to confront their own understanding of the subject matter of the interlude with that of the comic characters, who, posing as the members of the audience, comment on the developments of the plot and "pretend" to express the spectators' opinions.

As David Bevington (1968) has demonstrated, Medwall's play can be read as a mark of respect for Henry VII's policy of surrounding himself with 'the new men,' such as the playwright's patron, Cardinal Morton, rather than nobles. A and B, whose familiar Englishness is constantly highlighted and contrasted with the Roman identity of the characters of the higher plot, or who, as Robert C. Jones has put it, "maintain their English identity while in «Rome»" (Jones 1971: 134), create the link between fictional Rome and real England. This connection being established, Lucres's choice of husband can be read as political and hinting at a new recipe for political success in which the majority of government men are appointed on the basis of merit rather than bloodline. Such a formula clearly emerged with the new Tudor monarchy. "Tudor society was not egalitarian," Elton writes, "though it offered its chance to talent, of however humble an origin. Men who made a career aspired to dignity and the profits of nobility, and the Tudors were soon to surround themselves with many men of title. But the title

¹⁹ In Polish *reguła dostępności*, according to which the world created on stage is accessible to the spectators while the spectators' world is not perceived by the actors

was recent and conferred by the pre-eminent kin, and men promoted at the king's pleasure knew where their loyalties must lie" (Elton 1991: 44). In this light Lucres's decision reflects the decisions taken by the monarch himself – her wisdom can be compared to the unquestionable wisdom of the king.

On the lower, popular level of the interlude, such an approach does not meet with due understanding, as A assures the audience that he would prefer the play to have ended differently – "this matter shulde have procede / To som other conclusion" (ll. 2308-2310). Still, the choice seems to be misinterpreted only at the lower plane of the interlude, the level to be laughed at and not to be taken seriously. The world of the lower characters becomes a satirical representation of contemporary 'imperfect' England, while the world of Fulgens, Lucres and her suitors stands for 'ideal' England that values virtue over money and lineage. The audience are thus invited to 'choose' the England they prefer.

When we consider, though, how much effort has been put into the integration of the two subplots, we can grant the play's conclusion some more openness. While *Fulgens and Lucres* does not undermine the Henrician preference for the 'new men', as the message is misunderstood only by the comic characters that are supposed to be the object of laughter, it seems to mockingly doubt the very idea of virtue itself. "Vertue? What the Devyll is that?" (l. 2073), the comic servant asks the audience, bringing vice and virtue together in a truly carnivalesque marriage. The unprecedented interconnection of both plots, treating the serious and the comic within the interlude with equal attention, the surprising metatheatricality of the play allowing the comic characters to blur the borders between the theatrical and real space – all these draw our attention to the duality of Medwall's interlude that manifests itself in terms of carefully constructed language, characters, action, and structure.

This duality is construed in a truly carnivalesque spirit of transposing all that is high and sublime into the material bodily sphere, but if we perceive the play as a whole, not as two

separated parts, we are led to see it as celebrating unity rather than oppositions. Femininity is represented by neither Lucrez nor Joan, but by the two of them jointly. Aristocracy is depicted as neither Flaminius nor Cornelius but as the combination of both of them. Humanity, in more general terms, consists of both nobles and plebeians, serious men and jesters, thinkers and fools. Neither of them can be connected solely with virtue or with vice, as virtue and vice are strictly separated only at the very abstract level. In life, the play seems to be saying through its very interconnectivity, men are both spiritual and carnal, pure and lecherous, logical and irrational, moral and corrupt. If this is true, *Fulgens and Lucrez* can be seen as a prominent example of carnivalized literature, which dethrones the authority of one point of view and salutes carnivalesque incongruities and *heteroglossia* as the underlying principles of not only theatre but life itself.

Carnivalesque re-accentuations

Despite generic differences and the actual reasons why the theme of love was appropriated, all three plays discussed in this chapter share certain characteristics. First of all, they present the courtly conventions in a distorting mirror. The love-struck male lovers (i.e. Lover-not-Loved, Cornelius, and Wit in the initial stage of the interlude), tormented by extreme passions conceptualized in terms of pain and fire, are not meant to gain sympathy by any of the playwrights. The lovers' inability to control their feelings and actions is, therefore, unanimously portrayed as laughable and pathetic rather than admirable and worth emulating. Secondly, it is the women who, despite being treated by male characters as the objects of their desire and referred to in clichéd terms, manage to escape, at least partially, the role assigned to them by the discourse of courtly love. Thus, the "fair ladies" of the interludes stubbornly refuse to allow the

audience to see them solely as beautiful yet inconsequential adornments to the plot.

On the contrary, they seem to know what they want; they are surprisingly rational when they speak; their on-stage presence is crucial for the development of the plays. In truth, whenever they are given a chance to express themselves or act on their own account, the female characters voice objections against the worn-out conventions of courtly love or take more active steps to debunk the dominant beliefs. This can be seen in *Loved-not-Loving's* carefully structured arguments directed at her opponent in the debate, in the presentation of Lady Science, who stands above the courtly intrigues, in *Lucres's* choice of husband and, finally, in *Joan the Maid* mercilessly making a laughing stock of her suitors. At the same time, however, this carnivalesque reversal of roles does not fully liberate women. The heroine of Heywood's interlude does not formally win the debate. Redford's Science is to be "possessed" by Wit at the very moment he is ready for her. And for Medwall's *Lucres*, although she is allowed to choose her husband, the only choice is still to get married. Even the most carnivalesque *Joan*, who refuses to wed any of her suitors, is expected to marry someone else after all, her wedding being temporarily postponed but not abandoned altogether, which situates the girl within the sphere she is prescribed to occupy.

At first glance the interludes appear somewhat schizophrenic in their presentation of women – they put them in a position of authority only to refuse them any real power. Still, the trick is purposeful. Although never fully liberated from social constraints, the female characters are depicted with certain sympathy and introduce a fresher perspective on issues related to courtly ideals, the practices of courtship, and marriage. Such an approach never actually threatens the whole system but invites spectators to reconsider the values it promotes. It does not encourage rebellion against the official standpoint and yet acknowledges points of view that normally might have been suppressed. If the plays resort to the most base misogyny of the

farce, they do so at the level that is carnivalized to the greatest extent. In *A Play of Love* misogynist comments are expressed by No-Lover-nor-Loved; in *Fulgens and Lucre* by A and B. These characters, like the vices from the moral plays, are not to be taken seriously. And yet their views have been expressed and left lingering in the air.

If we remember that all three interludes do more than stage the twists and turns of the characters' love lives, we may see that such a portrayal of female characters makes sense in the context of the plays that appropriate the metaphors of *amour courtois* for their own purposes. In fact, all three playwrights, by shifting the boundaries of the perception of courtly love, draw attention to other issues. Leaving the debated question open to the audience, but undermining its merits with the threat of a violent solution and stressing the dangers of allowing emotions to win over rationality, Heywood's play calls for peaceful co-existence and resists absolutist tendencies. Redford, interweaving the metaphor of love and chivalric quest into the morality play pattern, not only manages to present *scientia* as desirable and alluring, but is also successful in exalting the pursuit of knowledge itself and equating a diligent student with a courageous knight, in this way delineating the path for success to those of both genteel and not so genteel birth. Finally, Medwall manages to draw his audience into a playful game of following two plots which comment on each other, and invites the spectators to decode the message through considering their interrelation.

Apart from appropriating the theme of courtly love, the playwrights also appropriate other literary and theatrical conventions. Consequently, it would be rather difficult to classify these plays as belonging definitely to only one generic type. *A Play of Love* is staged as a serious, and at moments tedious, debate requiring only four actors, but the formula is enlivened by the incorporation of a farcical, fabliau-like story of a bawdy love affair and sexual infidelity. *Wit and Science*, as we have seen, is even more eclectic. Here we observe an accumulation of elements and patterns that is really surprising: the morality play,

the prodigal son's narrative, chivalric quest, romance, courtly songs and dances, a staged parody of a lesson, to mention the dominant ones. *Fulgens and Lucrez* does not stand apart in its mixing of political issues relevant to the state with those related to the domestic sphere, combining the serious message of the high plot with the comic parody of the subplot. Certain characters of all three plays are also heavily indebted to the presentation of devils and vices of the morality plays and, just like their predecessors, these characters use abusive language, try to blur the distinctions between the fiction and reality, address the audience directly, and cross the spatio-temporal borders of the performance. The playwrights boldly mix conventions as they appropriate various elements of medieval theatrical tradition for their own ends. Yet, the act of such appropriation is active not static, and so the old tricks are used in a new context. Consequently, Medwall, Redford and Heywood are neither slavish followers of medieval conventions nor full-hearted rebels against them. Just as they advocate openness to new values and concepts, they promote flexibility in theatrical terms, the result of their approach bringing in a fresh, if often overlooked, perspective.

As a result, the discussed interludes can be branded as carnivalized in two senses. Firstly, as I have shown, they introduce the elements of the carnival into their skeleton and appropriate the aspects of popular and folk culture at the same time degrading the concepts characteristic of the high culture of the court, the top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top logic constituting an organizing principle of the plays to a greater or lesser extent. Secondly, the plays can be seen as carnivalesque in their attempt to offer "unfinished" and "open" implications, resulting from the playwrights' avoidance of adopting an authoritarian, sermon-like, preaching tone. This openness, when combined with eclecticism in dramatic and theatrical terms, accounts for the fact that *A Play of Love, Wit and Wisdom* and *Fulgens and Lucrez* all elude "canonization" that would "facilitate a naïve, single-voiced reading" (Bakhtin 1981: 425) and are subject to

the process of re-accentuation as understood in the following way:

Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, (...) their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself. Likewise, their influence on subsequent creative works inevitably includes re-accentuation. New images in literature are very often created through a re-accentuating of old images, by translating them from one accentual register to another. (Bakhtin 1981: 420-421)

Bakhtin's concept of re-accentuation is in fact coherent with his theory of grotesque realism in which the carnival and carnivalesque laughter play a hugely significant role. It is worth noting that carnival, so strongly linked with degradation, degrades not in order to bury but to regenerate. As Bakhtin claims, to degrade something "does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place" (Bakhtin 1984b: 21). If so, the degradation of the metaphor of courtly love does not annihilate it, but revitalizes the concept and extends its life span by proposing some new dimensions in which it might be employed. As for theatrical conventions, the same seems to hold true – there is no need to dismiss or discard them if they just need to be refreshed to suit the ends of the playwrights.

Thus, even if the discussed interludes might at times appear as a chaotic mishmash of views, opinions, and conventions, the impression of chaos disappears on closer examination. Sooner, they can be seen as reflecting the reality in which they were embedded, as a product of the times, in which the old ideals were being questioned, reformulated, and extended to appropriate newly emerging values. The novelty of these plays lies not so much in breaking away from the past but with re-accentuation of this past, manifesting itself, among other things,

in expanding tried and tested theatrical conventions, opening them up to render secular meanings, or playing with the serious in the comic in a way reminiscent of the medieval tradition yet contextualised differently. If seen this way, *A Play of Love, Wit and Science*, and *Fulgens and Lucrez* cannot be regarded “as prelude, epilogue, or inferior counterpart to important literature” (Lines 2006: 401), but should be read and analysed for their own value, as equally “important” literature. Challenging our expectations and escaping easy classifications into neatly labelled categories, their merit seems to lie precisely in the fact they do not perfectly fit in. As such, they belong to the body of literature that is not yet ‘finished’, ‘completed’ or ‘canonized’, but caught in the exciting process of carnivalesque becoming.

IV

Women and households: carnivalesque dialogue in *Johan Johan* and *Godly Queene Hester*

Even a brief look at the plays written and performed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century leaves the reader thinking about apparently contradictory views on the issues of femininity. In the previous chapter I hinted at certain paradoxes inherent in the presentation of women in the courtly love tradition; still the subject of gender is far from being exhausted. It seems that the depiction of women in the period under consideration gravitates towards the extremities, which is most conveniently exemplified by Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, where the two featured women are so utterly different from each other that the spectators might be left wondering whether they indeed belong to the same species. Within the context of this particular play, we encounter well-educated, outspoken, virtuous, and rational Lucres, capable of arriving at wise decisions which are good not only for her but also, if we take into account the politically oriented reading of the play, for the state. Simultaneously, however, we come upon sharp-tongued, impulsive, quarrelling, and physically violent Joan, referred to in openly sexual terms and posing a threat to the established system of social norms. If these two provide clear examples of how different the ideas on womanhood were, they are by no means unique. In fact, when we look at other plays, we are faced with a whole procession of women situated on opposite poles. In Heywood's *A Play of Love* Loved-not-Loving is contrasted with a physically absent yet vividly described unfaithful lady from the Vice's tale, while in Redford's *Wit and Science*, Lady Science is strongly juxtaposed against Honest Recreation and Idleness.

In this chapter we will meet two more equally different female characters: Tyb from John Heywood's *Johan Johan* and Hester from the anonymous *Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester*. The question that arises at this point is how we can reconcile anti-feminist preconceptions built upon belief in the inborn inferiority of female nature with the portrayal of powerful and self-governing women. Although it would be quite tempting to see these contradictions in terms of a battle between old (i.e. the medieval) and new (i.e. the renaissance), in reality there seems to be no clear (r)evolution in terms of the portrayal of femininity in the plays as time progresses.

Neither literary works nor theatrical performances exist in an ideological void; hence the decision to examine the interludes dialogically, i.e. against the background of other popular genres, as well as in the context of the serious treatises, philosophical works, and instructional literature that raise the issues of womanhood and range from the writings of the Church Fathers on the one hand, to the works of humanist educators on the other one. The earlier of these texts, going back to the Middle Ages, are seen not only as formative, but also as extending their conceptual reach beyond the period in which they were written, as they remained frequently quoted and rephrased later.

Just like it has not been my aim to categorize the plays as either 'medieval' or 'humanist' but perceive them as the sphere of carnivalesque interconnectivity of various elements, my intention here is not to label this or that playwright as misogynistic or anti-misogynistic. Rather I perceive the adoption of a certain attitude in the depiction of women as one available means of orchestrating the plays' meaning(s). The author is seen here not as one expressing his own personal beliefs, but appropriating a set of existing concepts, stereotypes and ideologies for the purpose of a given play, which when combined with personal or political allusions contributes to the overall reading of the interludes. Moreover, I believe that providing any such labels at the outset would kill the act of interpreting the interludes, as what seems to be utterly anti-feminist at first glance may turn

out to have more positive overtones on careful examination – and vice versa.

Household and drama

Both John Heywood's *Johan Johan* (c. 1520-1533) and the anonymous *Godly Queene Hester* (c. 1525-9), which will be the main, though not the only, points of reference in this chapter, are shaped by notions associated with the idea of household in the late medieval and early Tudor period, when the household was not so much an architectural as a social structure. Thus, a noble household was not just a private building where a particular family lived, but a whole assembly of people centered around a male householder, including his closest family, relatives and kin, various officials, numerous servants, artists and entertainers, in other words a socio-political network of individuals linked by financial dependence to the lord and gathered together to ensure the preservation of his power.

As David Starkey's discussion shows, at each social level the household and the family were the main units of economic activity and the principal channels for transmission of wealth. Higher up the scale they additionally provided the grounds for political alliances as well as patronage and sponsorship of artistic, dramatic, and literary activity (Starkey 1981: 225). Understood this way, the household was always a combination of the private and the public with no strict demarcation between these two spheres or, as Susanne R. Westfall observes, it was "a static/active, private/public, and domestic/commercial institution" (Westfall 1997: 41). This dualistic nature of an aristocratic household is mirrored by the dualistic nature of all kinds of entertainments taking place within its walls. All the ceremonies, disguisings, masques, musical and theatrical performances not only provided occasion to spend leisure time in a pleasurable way, but played a considerable role in displaying a household

owner's wealth and power, promoted his interests, and aimed at impressing his supporters as well as opponents.

The interrelation of these two functions is even more visible when we take into account the importance of patronage: a patron was never simply the one who provided financial means to sponsor the revels. Similarly, he was not merely a spectator entertained for the sake of entertainment only. The patron often took part in the festivities himself, as was the case with Henry VIII, but even if he did not actively participate, his centrality was usually emphasised, for instance by seating arrangements. It has been suggested (Westfall 1997: 49-51) that the patron's quintessential presence, his always being there in the centre of attention, served as an effective reminder that it was his power, wealth, opinions, and artistic preferences that the revels he had paid for were to celebrate.

Although we tend to perceive patrons as men, it should be acknowledged here that the institution of patronage also allowed women to gain some theatrical presence and, in reality, many noblewomen participated in the production of performances. Furthermore, in a noble household women formed a substantial part of the audience, whose tastes had to be recognised and satisfied too. Aristocratic women could be addressed directly by the plays, as it happens in *Fulgens and Lucrez*, where the comic servants ask "gode womyn" (l. 848) to confirm the heroine's choice of husband. If this was the case, household performances might have differed from the plays prepared for popular audiences. As Westfall speculates, "while the public stage may indeed have been exclusively male-gendered, ... household revels certainly felt the influence and occasionally reflected the interests of women" (1997: 50). Whether they did or not is in fact one of the questions this chapter will attempt to answer.

Interpretation of the plays chosen for this analysis is not straightforward for one more reason – both *Johan Johan* and *Godly Queene Hester* can be seen as having certain political implications relevant to the period in which they were written and performed even though neither of them openly admits to incor-

porating any such meanings. It seems interesting that both interludes most probably originated in the late twenties or early thirties of the sixteenth century, the time when Tudor England witnessed, among other things, the king's consequential love affair leading to divorce with his lawful wife and subsequent re-marriage, the break with Rome, the dissolution of monasteries, the fall from and rise to power of many a man.

The Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester, actually printed as late as 1561 by William Pickering and Thomas Hacket¹, strives to make it clear that the play was "newly made and imprinted", thus trying to camouflage the link it might have had with events taking place about three decades earlier. Nevertheless, it seems that as an interlude examining the issues of effective government and princely power, the play is much more likely to be a legitimate subject of a politically-oriented reading than John Heywood's *A Mery Play between Johan Johan, the Husband, Tyb his Wife, and Sir Johan the Priest* (in print by 1533), whose very title suggests a fabliau-like, farcical intrigue, which can be enacted by three characters: a hen-pecked husband, his shrewish wife and a parish priest. Can a farce presenting a carnivalesque household be in fact something more than just a farce? Even if the positive answer seems absurd at first, I will try to suggest that certain features of Heywood's interlude may actually hint at the controversial issues related to Henry's court, extending the household metaphor to include issues related to the state. It seems to me that both plays, concerned as they are with domestic order, family struggle, and the role of women within the changing society, also provide their audiences with references, allusions, and hints, carefully selected and ingeniously arranged by the playwrights, that make a dialogic reading concerned with contemporary political issues possible, if not inevitable. At the same time, such an implicit rather than overt method of stating the case might have served one more

¹ For a bibliographical overview, see Greg Walker's introduction to his edition of the interlude in *Medieval Drama. An Anthology* (2000: 408-9).

end – it could have quite literally saved the plays if not the authors themselves.

The thing that comes to the fore, however, is that both interludes centre around female characters and their role within the household as construed in each play. It is logical then to start the discussion from this point, examining to what extent the female characters could have been influenced by the views about women expressed elsewhere. Although *Johan Johan* and *Godly Queene Hester* differ considerably in the ways they construe their female protagonists, both texts put women in a position of power. And yet, in doing so they seem to be shaped by different sets of ideas on the nature of womanhood and permeated with distinct ideologies. Slavoj Žižek has once observed that:

one of the fundamental stratagems of ideology is the reference to some self-evidence – ‘Look, you can see for yourself how things are!’ ‘Let the facts speak for themselves’ is perhaps the arch-statement of ideology – the point being, precisely, that facts never ‘speak for themselves’, but are always made to speak by a network of discursive devices. (Žižek 1999: 64-65)

Paraphrasing the passage, we may say that the interludes discussed here, by offering their own visions of households in which women have gained control, are ‘made to’ speak by distinct networks of discursive devices. Yet both of them seem to be saying: ‘Look how things could be if women had power! Would you like to be living in a world like that?’ Before we go on to settle this issue, however, it is worth examining the views and beliefs that lay behind the interludes, starting with misogynist preconceptions and moving on to more positive views, labelled here as “profeminine”², bearing in mind that

² I use the term after Alcuin Blamires (1998) to refer to the body of texts that construe a more positive view of femininity. Such texts, Blamires argues, can be seen as the “case for women”, which he understands to be “a mode of discourse which aims to build a positive representation of women in response to either specified or implicit accusations” (Blamires 1998: 10). The term ‘feminist’ appears inadequate to refer to such ‘defenses’ as it involves contemporary connotations that cannot be really transposed onto

contemporary readers may hear antifeminist undertones even in the latter ones³.

Misoginist and profeminine dialogue on women

The story of medieval and early modern anti-woman attacks is a lengthy one. Discussing various manifestations and conventions of misogyny, visible across a broad spectrum of poetic, religious and social practices, Katherine M. Rogers links it strongly with the Oedipal paradigm. In this view misogyny is motivated specifically by the fear of the maternal influence on children and, as she writes, “the original apparent omnipotence of the mother probably accounts for the fear of female dominance which has haunted men, even in strongly patriarchal societies” (Rogers 1968: xi). Misogyny can also stem from a man’s individual bad

medieval or humanist thought on women. Consequently, what the ‘profeminine’ defenders pointed to as female virtues could be perceived as harmfully stereotyped perceptions of women by contemporary feminists. The term “profeminist” was earlier proposed by Pamela Joseph Benson (1992) who explains her preference for this word over ‘feminist’ by the fact that although the thinkers examined in her study do offer a new vision of womanhood, they also show “reluctance to initiate political reform” (Benson 1992: 2) that would assure the equality of noble born men and women. Yet, as observed by Blamires (1998: 13), the pre-modern texts he examines develop a positive construction of women “according to the cultural ideology of their period”, hence “profeminine” is a more logical term.

³ For the source of reference to both misogynous and profeminine medieval texts, I have chosen Blamires’s superb anthology *Woman Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (1992), which includes a wide selection of material ranging from the ancient roots of the anti-woman tradition through the writings of religious authorities and satirical vernacular literature to various responses to antifeminism. Although such an anthology necessarily limits its scope to extracts from a presented text, it provides a useful compass for readers, who might be inspired to delve deeper into the subject. The scope of Blamires’s work also indicates that both misogynist and more positive outlooks on women coexisted (though not from the very beginning) in a dialogical relationship that his approach uncovers.

experiences with women, which are then generalized and projected on all womanhood, involving the projection of one's own failings (e.g. greed, jealousy, lust, unfaithfulness, anger) onto an innocent other. However, the reasons Rogers mentions seem to be too feeble to account for all the misogynistic preconceptions about the female. All throughout the Middle Ages, and far beyond this period, in much of the philosophical, religious and secular writing women are shown as contentious, irritable, swollen with pride, demanding, complaining, and irrational; they are allegedly unmanageable, unstable, insatiable, and lustful. Being so widespread, such beliefs cannot be seen as individualized instances of hatred of women typical only for particular writers, but must be perceived as a "cultural constant" (Bloch 1989: 1) that informs ecclesiastical writing, letters, sermons, theological tracts, discussions and compilations of canon law, scientific works concerning biological, gynaecological, and medical knowledge, philosophy, poetry and drama.

Admitting that it is impossible to offer a full picture of medieval and later misogyny within the scope of this book, I have decided to highlight certain aspects that shed light on the anti-woman ideology of the dramatic works discussed in this chapter. Misogynistic attacks habitually start with the interpretation of the biblical story of the origins of man and woman. The first account of creation (Genesis 1:27) suggests that on the sixth day God created a man and a woman in his own image, blessed them both, and commanded them to multiply and subdue the earth, giving them dominion over other living creatures. In this narrative man and woman act as necessary complements to each other, enjoying equal status and evenly participating in God's divinity. However, this account is usually dismissed in favour of the second version, in which Eve comes into being after Adam as an afterthought. In this narrative woman was made from man's rib as a derivation of and a "help mate" for him and as such she does not exist in her own right (Genesis 2: 18-22). Being created not in the image of God, but merely in that of man, she is further removed from God than

man is, and consequently more than him prone to folly and vice (cf. Rogers 1968: 3-5).

Aristotle's physiology, exerting a considerable impact on medieval thinkers from the late twelfth century, distinguishes between the male principle (soul, form) and the female principle (body, matter) and construes woman as a 'deformed' or 'defective' male, the imperfection of her body being linked to menstruation (Blamires 1992:2). Galen's physiological explanation of the female inferiority in *De Usu Partium* (*On the Usefulness Parts of the Body*) is grounded in the different degree of the qualities of 'hot' and 'cold' within the body – "the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he" (in Blamires 1992: 41) – this tendency towards humidity or wetness being understood as an imbalance of humours that results in woman's 'softness' or 'weakness' (Blamires 1998: 127-128). In this manner important links are formulated between physiology, medicine, and theology: the female body is regarded as inferior to the male body in physiological terms, which is also reflected in the inferiority of the body in its relationship to the soul; ultimately, this connection of women with corporeality accounts for their predilection to sin and man's fall.

For these reasons misogyny permeates much of medieval and later thought on marriage as well. Although the notions of companionship and love between the spouses, resembling the ties between Christ and Church (Shahar 2003: 63-69), are mentioned in St Paul's writings (cf. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself", Ephesians 5:28), the idea of male superiority is expressed here as well: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:22-3). Eugene Vance observes that Augustinian doctrine establishes this subservient position of women in marriage through the fact that since Creation woman is further removed from God: "Adam (as man) is made in God's image but Eve (as woman) is not; for that reason,

woman's role is to serve the husband from whom her substance derives" (Vance 1986: 197). Although St Jerome sees marriage as inferior to virginity and celibacy (in Blamires 1992: 64-76), sexual relationships, understood in terms of mutual obligations of spouses, were accepted in married life if they aimed at procreation not pleasure (Shahar 2003: 70-72). Marriage was also seen as a way of controlling lust and curbing not only moral but also social misconduct, the order of things being assured by the wife's subordination to her husband. In social terms, for both the medieval and Tudor general public, the husband was officially the head of the household, given nearly absolute control over his spouse and their children, while the wife frequently failed to enjoy a status higher than that of one of the householder's commodities.

While interpreting the scene of the Biblical creation as the foundation of misogynist preconceptions, R. Howard Bloch demonstrates that Adam's chronological and ontological priority indicates that for medieval philosophers man has substance, i.e. he "possesses Being, Existence", while Eve exists only partially: as "the by-product of a part of the essential" she partakes from the very outset "of the body in which (she) inheres" (Bloch 1989: 10). Furthermore, Bloch's reading of misogyny strongly links the creation of woman with the imposition of names. Just as the names are supplements of things, so is Eve an additive to Adam; just as words or signs can only aspire to the unity and existence of substance, so can she only hope for the wholeness of Adam's body and soul. Hence, the creation of woman becomes synonymous with the creation of metaphor, as Eve's relation to Adam is the relation of the proper to the figural, the figural being always perceived as secondary, derivative, and automatically associated with artifice and decoration (Bloch 1989: 10-12). Bloch's discussion of the phenomenon of misogyny eventually leads him to conclude that the status of woman is comparable to that of literature, that the distrust of woman is the distrust of writing itself (Bloch 1987: 19-20).

Applying Bakhtin's theory of discourse to this reading, we may perceive Adam – who names, categorizes, characterizes and evaluates the world – as one who does not engage in dialogue but rather represents an “authoritative word”, or “prior discourse”, as defined in the preceding chapters and strongly connected with the Church. In other words, he stands for all that Bakhtin identifies with highly authoritarian, hieratic and monologic language. Consequently, if Eve stands for metaphor, literature and writing, she can be seen in terms of “internally dialogized discourse” (Bakhtin 1981: 324), i.e. the one in which a dialogue is potentially embedded. As opposed to the male, the female may denote language which is “no longer conceived as a sacrosanct and solitary embodiment of meaning and truth ... [but] ...one of many possible ways to hypothesise meaning” (Bakhtin 1981: 370).

Bloch's observations hint at another powerfully expressive parallel – that between woman and carnival. When he writes that “man enjoys existence (substance), being, unity, form and soul” while “woman is associated with accident, becoming (temporality), difference, body and matter” (Bloch 1989: 11), a Bakhtin-inspired critic clearly recognizes here the opposition between the notions of Lent (with its emphasis on completeness, stability, and seriousness) and carnival (incorporating disorder, reversal of order, temporality, and excess). The proposition that woman is a “false logic” (Bloch 1989: 17), embodies “the spirit of contradiction” (Bloch 1989: 18) and is defined as “verbal transgression” (Bloch 1989: 19), seems to mirror Bakhtin's theory of carnival with its own peculiar logic of “inside out”, “top to bottom”, or “front to rear,” and its billingsgate that transgresses the standards of official communication. Unlike Adam, Eve is created of the flesh, belongs to the carnivalesque world of carnal excess; consequently, all the sins of the body, ranging from pride through lust to the sins of the tongue, are naturally associated with her.

Becoming in Tertullian's famous words “the gateway of the devil” (in Blamires 1992: 51), woman is seen as particularly con-

nected with lust, more lecherous than man by her very nature. Such foundations, once established, spread to the sphere of popular imagination of the period and found expression in religious manuals, sermons, exempla, fabliaux, farcical and satirical tradition, art, literature and theatre. For instance, in medieval art the sin of lust is usually personified as woman (Karras 1998: 107, Shahar 2003: 298); in fabliaux the marriage is habitually depicted as man's burden, a substantial part of which is satisfying the wife's exaggerated sexual needs, because otherwise she will resort to adultery (cf. Alisoun of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*).

In the Latin satirical tradition of the Middle Ages, descriptions of lustful women blossom as well. In *Against Marrying* (*De Coniuge Non Decenda*, c. 1222-50), a poem that is extant in fifty-five manuscripts – which points to its wide circulation – the connection of female lust, adultery and man's enslavement is emphasised over and over again (cf. "A woman will receive all male: / No prick against her lust prevails", qtd. in Blamires 1992: 127). Although the text, like most Latin satirical texts, was probably written for clerics, similar tales spread through the mouths of priests to the general audience. "The particular attribution of lust to women" Karras (1998: 108) notes "was in part an effort to displace onto them the responsibility for the sins of men who could not control their own temptations". Such is clearly the case in Jehan le Fevre's *The Lamentations of the Matheolus* (c. 1371-2), to which Christine de Pizan probably refers in the beginning of the *City of Ladies*. The former text vilifies women as manipulating men into what they want to accomplish through sex, torturing them with their nagging and disobedience, becoming the cause of the fall of the greatest men in history, and arguing that "if the greatest men are deceived, then the lesser naturally fall" (qtd. in Blamires 1992: 194). Far from being exhaustive, these examples purposefully refer to various traditions and genres to indicate the sheer scope of anti-woman rhetoric and the fact that everywhere it was construed in a similar vein.

In reality, however, despite all these anti-feminine accusations, one could hardly imagine the process of production and commerce without women, who played quite an important role in both the rural and urban economy⁴. Their occupations ranged from everyday agricultural chores of providing help in the harvest or seeing to domestic animals; through the production of clothes and jewellery, usually under the auspices of a male guildsman or husband; through merchandising and the paid services of all kinds of household chambermaids, servants, cooks, kitchen porters, cleaners, scullery maids, etc.; to even more independent positions of ale-house owners, brewsters, or tapsters. The last three categories, connected with the traditionally female role of providing accommodation and food, gave many women considerable financial independence or even situated them on top of the household hierarchy. Such inversion of the time-honoured order, even if unavoidable at times, raised doubts and sparked off certain uneasiness. Inevitably, ale houses became synonymous with brothels, while their female owners had to face accusations of prostitution or pimping (cf. Martin 2001: 58-78).

Even if women could not partake in the elections or be elected as members of town authorities, their continuous presence in the economy could not go unnoticed. The continuous growth of the number of middle-class women, who had more time for leisure activities, increased their opportunities for education as well. In noble households, women were not only becoming better and better educated⁵, but also frequently acted as patrons

⁴ For a more detailed and informative discussion of the role of women in towns and rural communities, see Shahar's *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (2003), especially the chapters devoted to townswomen and women in peasantry.

⁵ One needs to mention here the examples of Thomas More's own and adopted daughters, Margaret More Roper – a humanist and a classical scholar, referred to as the “ornament of Britain” by Erasmus – and Margaret Giggs Clement, also fluent in both Latin and Greek. Vives in *Instruction of a Christian woman* mentions that men and women can be equally capable or incapable of learning: “Of maids some be but little meet for learning, like-

for numerous poets, playwrights, minstrels, and providers of entertainment in general. For instance, Catherine of Aragon had eight books dedicated to her, a number incomparably smaller to the number of books dedicated to Elisabeth I, but by no means insignificant. As Hull (2002: 21) observes, these dedications to Catherine appeared well before dedications themselves had become a common practice. As patrons, women required to be adored and exalted, or at least not scorned, and the writers provided them with the glorifying works that were demanded. This is not to say that anti-women rhetoric began to disappear, or even fall in volume, but apart from the works that promoted the ideology of the innate wickedness of all womanhood, some texts emerged that were preoccupied with elaborating on their inborn goodness.

And so, there is also another side of the coin in writing on women – a long standing tradition in the defence of women, which Blamires labels “the case for women” and explains as “a mode of discourse which aims to build a positive representation of women in response to either specified or implicit accusations” (Blamires 1998: 9-10). Having situated the paradigm for the medieval case for women in the Old Testament apocryphal Book of Edras (Blamires 1998: 51-59), he demonstrates throughout his book the procedure of defending women as relying on formal refutation of misogynist attacks by proving the inappropriateness of generalizations about women and presenting the cases of exemplary women to validate the point. It must be remembered, however, that the texts that affirm femininity do so on grounds that can presently be perceived as enforcing stereotypes and forcing women into the roles the official patriarchal ideology wanted them to perform⁶.

wise as some men be unapt; again some be born unto it, or at least not unfit for it” (in Aughterson 1995: 164).

⁶ Such a ‘positive’ image of women, centring, for instance, around the absolute submission and unquestioning obedience of a perfect wife, exemplified by the figure of patient Griselda, is as unrealistic and clichéd as the negative stereotypes themselves, and as such does not help to construct an acceptable model of femininity.

By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, this dialogue on womanhood had already had a long history. Christine de Pizan du Castel, an active participant in this dialogue, played the role of fierce defender of her own sex in the beginning of the fifteenth century. In her *Le Livre de la Cite des Dames* (ca. 1404, translated into English and printed in 1521) the method used to prove the value of femininity was that of citing as many examples of women of great virtue as possible, a tactic that was frequently followed in later books concerned with supporting femininity. Pizan's metaphorical construction of the city of ladies allows her, however, to present feminine virtues as having a significant contribution to history: she praises their power to benefit humanity and provides examples that refute misogynous allegations (Blamires 1998: 219-224). She also tries to counter misogynous rhetoric, pointing to the burdens women have to face in marriages, which is compared to slavery:

How many women are there actually, dear friend – and you yourself know – who because of their husbands' harshness spend their weary lives in the bond of marriage in greater suffering than if they were slaves among the Saracens? My God! How many harsh beatings – without cause and without reason – how many injuries, how many cruelties, insults, humiliations, and outrages have so many upright women suffered, none of whom cried out for help? (from *City of Ladies*, in Blamires 1992: 297)

To quote another, much earlier example, Giovanni Boccaccio, paradoxically also the author of an anti-feminine satire, produced the *De mulieribus claris*, a collection of biographies of over one hundred famous secular women, which was referred to by Pizan. As Pamela Joseph Benson observes the compilation differed from any other work in his opus, as it “praised many women for acting with strength, valor, fortitude, and intelligence, that is, for exercising ‘manly’ virtues in traditionally male fields” (Benson 1992: 1)⁷. As long as the English literary

⁷ This and other Italian and English works have been recently carefully examined by Benson (1992) and a reader interested in the nuances of these works should be satisfied with the plethora of examples and lucid line

tradition is concerned, we should not overlook the works by Geoffrey Chaucer, which precede the *Cite des Dames*, yet add an influential voice to the discussion on the nature of womanhood. In *The Legend of Good Women*, for instance, the poet's aim is to recount ten stories of virtuous women, including Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis and Hypermnestra. Interestingly, the reasons for writing the tales that present these heroines in a favourable, even flattering light, is explained in the Prologue, where the poet-narrator is reproached by the God of Love and his queen for his previous works, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the translation of *The Romance of the Rose* in particular, in which he showed women's inconsistency in love. The offence is to be amended by providing positive examples of female lovers and accentuating their innocence with the simultaneous condemnation of the behaviour of men. Yet, as some critics observe, while the Prologue to *The Legend* promises to offer a more profeminine perspective, *The Legend* can be seen as failing to fully achieve its aims, as its tone is ambivalent, making it difficult to unambiguously decide if the poet is serious about defending women or is making fun of them (Blamires 1998: 220).

Carnavalesque women in medieval theatre

In Chapter Two, I have already pointed to the construct of Lechery as a feminine character in religious morality plays. Yet discussion of the popular theatrical representation of women, playing with the misogynist ideas expressed elsewhere, would be incomplete without *The Noah's Play* from the Chester Cycle, one of the earliest dramatizations of a marital conflict featuring a stubborn wife who refuses to comply with her husband's authority. Since Noah's wife becomes a well-sketched, vivacious

of argumentation found in this influential study. Here in due time, we will consider only some points made in the writings by Juan Luis Vives, Thomas More, and Thomas Elyot.

and loud-mouthed model for all unruly women in theatre (Henderson 1997: 176), it is worth examining certain manifestations of her rebelliousness as characteristic of the whole group.

One aspect of Mrs Noah's behaviour labelled as disorderly is her eagerness to drink with her female companions, whom she in fact values so highly that she prefers to lose her life in the flood rather than leave them. Female drinking, associated with frequenting ale houses without the company of men, was seen as a serious form of transgression against social norms. As A. Lynn Martin (2001: 11) observes, the consumption of alcoholic beverages by women was widely believed to threaten their chastity, their subordination to men, and the family on the whole. Equally disturbing seems to be the fact that women, in this case Noah's wife and her gossips, are capable of forming meaningful relationships with the members of the same sex. The thought becomes even more unsettling when we observe that by some women such friendships might have been valued higher than their relations with husbands and children.

The fear of alternative mini-communities of women, to which men had no access, is the butt of many popular drinking songs that derived from the Middle Ages. In one such song the gossips, Elinore, Joan, Margery, Margaret, Alice, and Cecily, secretly go together to a tavern, where they can buy the best wine and strong ale, drink, eat, and complain about men. The feeling of being together, outside the territory of male dominance, seems to give them a sense of freedom and courage, as they express a deep indifference to what men may think and say of them: "Whatsoever any man thynk, / We com for nawght but for good drynk" (qtd. in Hanawalt 1998: 109). The whole song clearly illustrates Martin's premise that from the medieval to the Jacobean period, both in England and on the continent, female friendship tended to be perceived as dangerous. All-female gatherings, associated with gossiping, complaining about husbands, sharing secrets, and plotting intrigues, created a sort of alternative space, in which male presence was perceived as undesirable and from which it was virtually excluded.

It is precisely this unorthodox female-only zone that Mrs Noah refuses to leave. After a struggle with her husband and with the help of her sons, she is finally forced into the ark while her gossips sing a drinking song, being engulfed by the waters of the flood. Brutally removed from the sphere the independence of which she valued so high, Mrs. Noah is saved against her will in the ark, which becomes a projection of male-governed domestic space; she is allowed to live but only if she complies with the rules drawn by her husband and sons.

Another prototypical female character is featured in the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play* (written c. 1425), which combines the traditional Nativity motif with a carnivalesque, farcical story of a sheep-theft and an attempt to disguise the stolen sheep as the child of a villainous yet comic couple – Mak and his wife, Gyll. Elsewhere, it has been pointed out that the discovery of the sheep-child is a travesty of the subsequent discovery of the Christ Child (Manly 1963: 151, Marshall 1972: 720), inspired by St. John's Revelations and the apocryphal legends of the Antichrist (Marshall 1972: 734). Here, however, my aim is to consider issues related neither to the sacral parody in the Towneley *Secunda Pastorum*, nor to the unity between the two plots, but rather to the stage presence of the play's female character.

Before we actually meet Gyll, we hear Mak complaining to the shepherds about her laziness and avarice, another of the sins of the flesh. She seems to do nothing useful but “drynkys well” (l. 237), “etys as fast as she can” (l. 240), and bears children: “And ilk yere that commys to man / She brynges furth a lakan [baby] / And some yeres two” (ll. 241-3). Furthermore, her eating, drinking, and reproductive qualities are presented by the husband as ones leading to his financial ruin (ll. 244-5), which makes him feel so desperate that he wishes for his partner's death (ll. 249-252). Mak's misogynist and misogamous rhetoric flourishes here. The association of women with carnivalesque excess is demonstrated as the wife's insatiable appetite for food, drink, and also sex, which are depicted in terms of the deteri-

oration of their social position in manner similar to the presentation of a moral fall in later morality plays (e.g. *Mundus et Infans*). And yet, it is Gyll's ingenuity that saves Mak's skin in the short term, as it is the wife who comes up with the idea that they could pretend that the sheep is her child:

Here shall we hym hyde to thay be gone;
In my credyll abyde. Lett me alone,
And I shall lyg beside in chylbed, and grone. (ll. 333-335)

It is in fact hard to imagine the presentation of the Nativity in more down-to-earth and carnivalesque terms than through the image of a groaning woman who pretends to have delivered a child and acts so realistically that she manages to convince the shepherds during their first visit. Nevertheless, Gyll, in spite of her importance for the comic plot is scorned as one even more wicked than Mak, her actions "confirming stereotypes about women's deceitfulness and treachery, endorsed by the Church Fathers' interpretations of her biblical precedent, Eve" (Henderson 1997: 177).

There seems to be only one moment in the whole play where the female voice is given some attention. When Mak accuses her of doing nothing all days (ll. 413-414), Gyll reacts with determination to defend herself:

Why, who wanders, who wakys? Who camys, who gose?
Who brewys, who bakys? What makys me thus hose?
And than,
It is rewthe to beholde,
Now in hote, now in colde,
Full woeful is the householde
That wantys a woman. (ll. 415-421)

The questions posed in the first two lines of the quoted passage clearly draw our attention to the distribution of roles within the household. Mak is the one given freedom of movement around the streets and fields; he comes and goes whenever he feels like it; he represents the couples' affairs 'outside'. In contrast, Gyll

is clearly confined within the domestic sphere of their house and responsible for the household chores. It is through this speech that she tries to appeal to the audience to show some respect, or at least appreciation, for the female tasks. Sad is the household that is left without a female hand, she claims. Still, her call seems to be lost, her voice ignored. She is shown as out-doing her husband in villainy; even her ability to bear children is discredited. What strikes us initially is the fact that despite her central role in the deception, she is not punished for playing an active role in it while her husband gets all the blame. But upon consideration, we might conclude that this seems to be in line with the idea that a male householder is fully responsible for his household. From this perspective, Mak is guilty not only of the theft but also of the lack of order in his family. This is why he is the one to be disciplined for failing to control his wife, however shrewish and villainous she might be.

The misogynist presentations of women on stage seem to be the simplest, trouble-free, and persistently employed device to appeal to popular tastes and evoke the audiences' laughter. The convention does not cease to lose its powerful appeal as time progresses, and continues to feature significantly well into the sixteenth century and beyond. The Cupar Banns, written by Sir David Lindsay to offer a taste of his *Ane Satyre on the Thrie Estaitis* before the performance in his home town of Cupar in Fyfe on 7 June 1552 (Walker 2000: 535), is founded on the same stock of anti-woman stereotypes as the much earlier *Play of Noah* and *Secunda Pastorum*.

One of the couples depicted in the *Proclamatioun* is the Cotter, who like Mak complains about the vexations of married life ("We men that hes sick wickist wyvis / In grit languor we leid our lyvis", ll. 37-8) and his wife, who not only escapes his control but dominates him and takes matters in her own hands. She is shown as physically transgressing the sphere reserved for men, the tavern, which is made apparent by her husband's remark that she smells of liquor (ll. 75-6). Later on she orders her husband around and sends him off to their house to milk

the cow (ll. 82-3), threatens to beat him up if he does not listen to her commands (ll. 87-9), and, finally, hits and kicks him while he is begging for mercy (stage directions after line 94). Another couple featured in the Banns is equally stereotypical. Auld Man and Bessy, his pretty, young wife, are equally unsuited for each other we realize from the very moment they enter. The old man, anxious about his wife's fidelity immediately locks her up in a chastity belt, places the key under his head, and dozes off. While he is asleep, other men present on stage flirt with the young woman in more or less openly sexual terms, praise her beauty and make advances. In response, Bessy complains about the belt and suggests that the key to it can be stolen. When this is done, she and the thief, Fule, are ordered by stage directions to "go to sum quyet place" (after line 175). Having woken up from his nap, anxious Aulde Husband looks for Bessy, who comes back shortly and attracts her husband's attention so that her lover can sneak the key back. The scene is rounded off with the cuckolded husband admitting that he has been unjustly suspecting his wife of marital infidelity, whereas the lovers are left unpunished.

The theatrical treatment of the female characters in *Noah's Play*, *Secunda Pastorum*, and *Cupar Banns* depends on the same principle of a carnivalesque reversal of gender roles within the household, but each heroine represents a slightly different aspect of female folly and vice. Mrs Noah is mainly a sharp-tongued gossip; Cotter's wife is a domineering wife who exerts physical violence over her husband; Gill and Bessy exemplify female lustfulness within and out of the limits of marriage. Their carnality connects them with the sins of the body – idle speech, avarice, and lust. Whether the women escape punishment for their various transgressions or not, they are shown as a burden to their husbands and become personifications of the tenets of misogynist theories on womanhood in a manner accessible to the popular audience and also familiar to them from other sources:

In most satires the married woman is pictured as domineering, deliberately disobeying her husband, quarrelsome, demanding, interested in other men, straying, jealous, making scenes if her husband looks at or greets another woman, lazy, neglecting her home and allowing her servants to be slovenly. ... The married woman is frivolous, capricious, deceitful, sanctimonious, pretending to play the unfortunate victim in order to extract what she wants from her husband. In every argument she is the victor and she leads her husband by the nose. (Shahar 2003: 77)

Medieval satirical tradition can be, therefore, seen as a vast reservoir of widespread, mostly negative stereotypes pertaining to women in general, and wives more specifically. A dramatist who wanted to include a figure of a shrewish wife among his characters did not need to be particularly inventive or original, as the recurrence of the motif seems to have guaranteed it would be easily recognised and accepted by the audience.

The carnivalesque household in John Heywood's *Johan Johan*

John Heywood's *A Mery Play between Johan Johan, the Husband, Tyb, his Wife, and Sir Johan, the Priest* makes use of the same stock images in the construction of its carnivalesque world ruled by Tyb, the heroine of the interlude⁸. A master of appropriating elements from popular imagery, Heywood delineates a female character who is a combination of the dramatic representations of women discussed above. To Mrs Noah, Tyb is indebted for her predilection to drink and enjoy spending time with her female friends, to Gyll – for her ingenuity and taking control of the action on stage, to Cotter's wife – for her physical violence, and to Bessy – for her sexual appetites that can only

⁸ A preliminary and much reduced version of the discussion of this interlude appeared in my earlier article, see Borowska-Szerszun (2007).

be satisfied out of wedlock⁹. From the very beginning the spectators are invited to follow the action that centres on the marital problems in a household which cannot be seen as exemplary.

The interlude begins with Johan's lengthy rant over his wife's misdeeds and with threats of wife-whipping, in which the word "beat" is used over twenty times. In strikingly vivid terms, the protagonist provides the audience with a painfully detailed description of what he is going to do with his wife when he finally gets hold of her, for instance: "I shall bete her and thwak her I trow / That she shall beshyte the house for very wo" (ll. 31 – 32); "I ought bete her tyll she be starke dede" (l. 56). What he clearly desires is to imprint the punishment all over Tyb's body – "on the tone side and on the other / before and behynde" (ll. 61-62), "from the top of the heed / to the sole of the fote" (ll. 63-64), "her toppe and tayle / Heed/shulders/ armes /legges/ and all / (ll. 81-82). Johan's aim seems to be to make it visible and obvious to everybody ("tyll she be black and blewe", l. 84), as if "writing" the penalty onto her flesh were the only way of asserting his supremacy and power over the unruly wife. The violence is presented as natural for an honest man, gaining support from the neighbours as an act of permissible behaviour (ll. 53 – 54). Angela Jane Weisl notes that violence against women was accepted and "women were at the mercy of laws which permitted them to be battered, the most notable of which was widely enough known to become a proverbial expression, the "rule of thumb" being the width of stick a man was permitted to use to beat his wife" (Weisl 1998: 115). Both in real life and in the fictional household presented on stage by Heywood, therefore, inflicting punishment on women – be they

⁹ This is not to say, obviously, that these were the only sources of inspiration as they could be multiplied easily; suffice it to mention Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* and her tale, as an example of proposing an unorthodox vision of gender roles within marriage, or the *Miller's Tale* and the *Merchant's Tale*, both presenting a world in which young wives, Alison and May respectively, find their own means of escaping their older husbands' supervision and enjoying extra-marital liaisons.

wives, sisters, daughters, cousins or servants – was perceived as a natural right of the householder.

Seething with anger and anti-woman rhetoric in the absence of his wife, Johan, the bragging tyrant, hushes up immediately on Tyb's entry and is manipulated into assuming the role of a female servant. His role of a householder is carnivalesquely degraded, as the audience see him performing the actions of kindling the fire, laying the table, washing the cups, bringing the stool, and checking if there is enough of bread and ale for the supper. From the very beginning of the play it is indicated that the husband has little, if any, influence upon his spouse, the futility of his potential beating or her being obvious to the audience ("Thynke ye that she wyll amende yet? / Nay by our lady the devyl spede whyt", ll. 23-24). In fact, her behaviour could possibly become even worse as a result of punishment ("The more I bete her the worse is she / And wors and wors make her I shall", ll. 42-43). Throughout the play, Johan's ability to exert supremacy over his wife as a householder is questioned by showing him as the weaker and more passive party. The figures of the husband performing typically female chores and of the wife assuming the position of power point to an inherently carnivalesque reversal of gender roles within the interlude's household.

As the narrative unfolds, the impression that Johan is ruled by Tyb is reinforced. Being in control of not only the domestic sphere of the play but also of its plot, she manages to manipulate Johan into bringing her own lover into their house. Paradoxically then, her rendezvous with Sir Johan, the priest, is to take place in the space that formally belongs to Johan and with an assent given by her own husband. The intrigue is even more cunning. Tyb deliberately makes a hole in the pail so that it becomes impossible for Johan to bring water in it, which serves her as an ingenious pretext for sending the husband off to sit by the fire and chaff the wax to stop the leak. In an article on the issue of male competition in the play, Cameron Louis (2002: 135) argues that the play depicts the fight of two male charac-

ters in which possession of the female body is the prize, which is indeed the case. He fails to observe, however, that the situation is more complex – *Johan Johan* does feature a contest, but the contest itself is devised, organized and executed by Tyb, with the competitors playing according to the rules laid down by the female master of the game.

Constructed accordingly to the conventions of farcical tradition, *Johan Johan* abounds in sexual allusions, which are carefully inserted all throughout the play and linked strongly with Johan's overall inability to act. This connection becomes most symbolically potent in the scene in which the lovers eat their supper. Johan, deprived of his share and removed from the table, complains of the smoke blinding him and bitterly confesses to being unable to see anything. The central part of the theatrical space used for the performance is thus occupied by the lovers who are eating the pie, with Johan delegated to its periphery, which once more emphasises his marginalization in the development of the action. His 'blindness' becomes a source of comedy not only for Tyb and Sir Johan but also for the spectators, whose attention is specifically directed at the husband:

Loke how the kokold chafyth the wax that is hard
And for his lyfe/daryth not loke hitherward (ll. 524-525)

This verbal comment on the onstage action, with the verb "look" in its imperative form, encourages the audience to focus on the murmuring, but passively obedient, husband. Obviously, it serves to draw our attention to the husband's refusal to take action, and together with other references makes his passivity one of the central motifs of the play. It also playfully diverts the spectators' attention from the central action, which creates a space for the less innocent, more sexually open, gestures of the actors, 'pretending' nobody sees what they are actually doing. Finally, Tyb's role of managing and directing her show on stage becomes externalized to enclose the sphere of the audience, who, like both Johans, allow themselves to be manipulated into doing what she demands.

The issue of Tyb's promiscuity is explored from the opening speech when Johan, the husband, voices a suspicion that Tyb and Sir Johan are having an illicit affair – a thought he pretends to dismiss, which allows him not to act and try to keep up appearances. Later on, the phrase “a clyfte large and wyde” (l. 462), used to denote the hole in the pail, constitutes a crude reference to Tyb's private parts and her excessive sexual needs symbolically rendered as ‘leaking’. Consequently, Johan's difficulties with clogging the hole are suggestive of his inability to satisfy Tyb's insatiable female lust. In this context, the image of Johan, sitting with the candle, an unmistakably phallic object, between his legs and trying to warm it with his hands, becomes a symbolic representation of masturbation, while Tyb's derisive remark that “It is pyte to helpe hym or do hym good” (l. 470) further enhances the impression of a sexually impotent husband, unable to pay off his marital debt, and therefore, useless.

Reading Tyb's infidelity and Johan's uselessness through the concept of marital debt helps to explain the preoccupation of the play with who actually paid for the pie. “Like a monetary debt,” Hornsby (1998: 101) expounds, “the marriage debt was something that was owed by one person to another” and obliged husband and wife “to perform sexually at each other's request” while “neither spouse had the right to withhold its payment.” If the scene of consuming the pie is interpreted as a symbolic consummation of the illicit love affair between Tyb and the priest, the husband is not guiltless. It turns out it is the priest who has covered the costs of making the pie and thus holds the right to have it, whereas Tyb's body becomes the currency of repaying the debt. In this metaphor paying for the pie becomes the equivalent of sexual potency and vigour that matches Tyb's carnal needs.

In fact, the interlude emphasises the youthful sexuality of Johan, the priest, at more levels. Paradoxically, in the farcical and satirical tradition directed against the clergy, even the priest's occupation evoked connotations of lust. Representatives of the Church were frequently perceived as ones who had countless

opportunities for meeting and seducing women, as they could easily approach them while other men were absent (Hanawalt 1998: 8). Furthermore, priests, monks and friars were surprisingly frequent customers of brothels (Karras 1998: 74-78), often engaged in ongoing relationships with women who practically could be considered their wives (Karras 1998: 30, 78)¹⁰. The priest's sexual energy and potency are further enhanced in the play with three anecdotes he tells of "miraculous" conceptions, in which he had an active part to play. All three stories will be briefly recounted here, as they contribute significantly to my final reading of the play.

His first tale is about a woman whose husband left her shortly after the wedding for seven years. When the man comes back, he finds his wife with seven children (ll. 565-566), the credit for a few of them going to Sir Johan: "Yet had she not had so many by thre," he observes, "Yf she had not the help of me" (ll. 567-568). The second 'miracle' is about a woman who despite having been married for many years had no child; only after a pilgrimage in which the priest also participated, did she give birth to one: "Within a moneth after ryght shortly / She was delyuered of a chylde as moche as I" (ll. 585-586). The last story concerns a woman, also well acquainted with the priest, who had a child only five months after her wedding, which miraculously 'saves' the time of pregnancy (ll. 595-603). All three stories carnivalesquely degrade the religious dogma of the immaculate conception of Virgin Mary, reminding us once more that the household belongs to the sphere of the carnival, where everything can be mocked and laughed at. Furthermore, all

¹⁰ The reputation of the clergy as lustful found its way to numerous literary representations. Already Chaucer in the General Prologue satirizes his friar, who "knew the tavernes wel in al the toun / And everich hostiler and tappestere" (ll. 240-1), the lines suggesting the character's carnal familiarity with women of questionable morals. In the much later Cupar Bannes, a comic interlude which precedes Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre on the Thrie Estaitis*, the Cotter, another henpecked husband, is jealous of the position priests enjoy in relation to women: "Ye preistis hes grit prerogatyvis / That may depairt ay fra your wyvis, / And cheiss thame that ye pleiss (ll. 40-42).

three of them openly suggest that, unlike the husband, the priest has actually proved himself as a man and is capable of begetting a child.

If the context of sexual equality motivates Tyb's choice to seek bodily pleasure outside her marriage, it also conforms with the negative stereotypes of womanhood which derived from medical and gynaecological knowledge¹¹ and linked female physiology and sexuality with disorderly behaviour on the grounds that the possession of wombs made women prone to suffer from hysteria (Trillat 1993: 14-15). These views perpetuated well into the early modern period. Ludovic Mercatus in his "On the common conditions of women" (1597) writes:

Womb hysteria, whose nature belongs partly to the natural appetite of the womb which has been damaged by upsetting its equilibrium, and in part to the brain, which the womb draws also into partnership. Womb hysteria (as I shall call it from the beginning: for in calling it thus the other conditions which are similar to it will easily be noted) is therefore an immoderate and unbridled desire to copulate, so strong and unquenchable that the woman appears mad and delirious as a result of this excessive and insatiable appetite. (in: Aughterson 1995: 51)

As if these pseudo-scientific explanations of female instability were not enough, they went hand in hand with medieval theology with its cherished belief that of all the seven deadly sins, lust was predominantly associated with women, who, like Eve, were to be blamed for seducing men. If such a view excused men from

¹¹ Chedzgoy (1993), for instance, writes that "the womb was imaged almost as a creature with an independent existence; if it became dissatisfied with its normal location (e.g. because of insufficiently frequent sexual intercourse, or retention of menstrual fluids), it would wander its owner's body in search of satisfaction, overpowering her speech, senses, and mental faculties". Dixon (1995: 22) further observes that Christianity added to this popular image of woman as victim of *furor uterinus* the idea of her being attacked and possessed by demons and in the grip of evil supernatural forces. Even Paracelsus, who opposed the notion of supernatural intervention, held the position that physical and mental illness were linked, and classified uterine disorders among the diseases that caused irrational behaviour in women.

exercising control over their sex-drive, it also indicated a certain fear of women, especially adulterous ones, an anxiety that “they would disrupt the established order of things by leading men astray, by causing bastards to inherit, by destroying clerical celibacy, by polluting the nunnery” (Karras 1998: 108). Such male phobias are not only present in the play but they are driven to extremes. Tyb symbolizes the man’s worst nightmare: she is the shrew, the harlot, and the gossip – all in one. Harassing her husband verbally and physically, she governs his behaviour, destroys the harmony of the household, and transgresses all there is to be transgressed. To learn a lesson, she should be shown her place. Like Noah’s wife, forcibly dragged by her husband and sons to the Ark, a projection of the “idealised domestic space in which all the women are wives absolutely enclosed and controlled” (Henderson 1997: 176), she should be punished, reformed, or at least forced to comply with the rules. She should be saved from her own unruliness; however, quite disturbingly, she is not.

The interlude’s central scene of consuming the pie concludes with the efforts undertaken by the lovers to talk Johan into admitting that he has had his share of the pie. When the husband bitterly complains about having to go to bed without “mete nor brede” (l. 633), Tyb asks: “Why, were ye not served there as ye are / Chafyng the waxe / standing by the fyre? (ll. 635-636). The same question is repeated twice more, but towards the end of the narrative Johan, the husband, finally starts to show the first signs of resistance and stubbornly refuses to accept their version of the story. Tyb’s reaction to her husband’s protest is a violent one:

A horson knaue hast thou brok my payll
 Thou shalt repent/by kokes lylly nail
 Rech me my distaff/or my clyppyng sherys
 I shall make the blod ronne about his erys.(ll. 675-678)

Having grabbed her distaff, perhaps the most widely recognized symbol of the carnivalesque empowerment of women, Tyb

attempts to force her husband into submission, actually acting out what he was threatening to do in the beginning of the play. Having chosen not to harbour the illusions of a happy household any longer, Johan manages to drive the lovers out of the house. Realizing that the problem has not been solved, he decides to chase Tyb and Sir Johan in an attempt to inflict proper punishment on them. Unfortunately for him, the action is belated. Instead of re-establishing order within his household, the husband drives the domestic crisis out of its walls, transposing the private troubles of the couple onto a wider social plane. In this context, Johan's endeavours to demonstrate power prove nothing but his inability to supervise his own household, the harmony of which is not only a symbol but also a condition of social harmony in general. Such a conclusion is strikingly atypical: what we have to face is a misogynist farce with a disturbing finale which is suggestive of even more chaos and confusion, an ending that does not look like an ending at all.

It seems that despite Tyb's centrality to the plot of *Johan Johan*, her carnivalesque empowerment fails to challenge the official ideology of the patriarchal society. Tyb, the most disturbing of all the female characters mentioned so far, escapes the authority of her husband but at the same time pays the highest price. Running away with her lover and leaving the boundaries of her household, she destroys any illusion of her respectability and exchanges the identity of an "honest woman" for the downgrading label of a "priest's whore". Although Heywood's male protagonists, a henpecked husband and a lecherous priest, are not actually presented in a truly positive light, anti-women stereotypes are much stronger. Discussing Heywood's *Johan Johan* and *The Four PP*, Louis argues that:

... the particularisation of the male characters who are made fun of makes them not the objects of mockery because they are men, but because of who they are as individuals. On the other hand, in both plays, women as women are clearly the objects of both humour and hatred. ... The male audience is distanced from being identified with the individual male characters by the specific characteristics they are given, while it is much more difficult for the female mem-

bers of the audience to distance themselves from the female body that is loathed in the texts. (Louis 2002: 138)

Bearing in mind Louis's comment, we might still pose a question whether it was possible for the women gathered to watch the performance of Heywood's interlude to obtain any satisfaction or reassurance from the carnivalesque empowerment of Tyb.

Even if we admit that the heroine has been liberated from the controls of men, this is a very restricted liberty, posing no real threat to the values cherished by the male half of the society. Instead of challenging misogynistic beliefs, the interlude delivers them so powerfully that a positive perception of femininity becomes virtually impossible while Tyb herself is presented as the target of merciless, rather than liberating, laughter. If she climbs to the top of the household hierarchy, she does not manage to remain there, her fall being shown as a natural consequence of an attempt to assume a role that has not been prescribed for her, and as such ridiculed. Although the harmony and, what follows, the natural order of things are not restored in Heywood's play, *Johan Johan* stages the stock anti-woman stereotypes and tries to present them as a source of laughter. Comedy is indeed what one would expect from a "merry" interlude, but the question that lingers on after examining the play is whether misogyny can ever be considered as comic?

It is also this lack of the resolution of conflict and the absence of the restoration of order that leave the reader, or the spectator, with the feeling that the message, or a part of it at least, has not been yet arrived at. In search of the meaning, we might pose a hypothesis that it is linked with Tudor politics. It is striking that a great deal of criticism on sixteenth-century drama has been made in this light, although not much has been written on Heywood's *Johan Johan* in particular.¹² One

¹² On the whole, sixteenth-century interludes have been successfully interpreted as explorations of political and social issues by Bevington (1968), as investigating religious controversies by Walker (1998), as expressing themes of noble interest and noble ideologies by Westfall (1990). The

of the biggest problems we face is that the play's exact origins are difficult to trace and, in fact, have attracted little attention from critics. Chambers (1925.2: 455), for instance, without any explanation whatsoever situates the interlude in the markedly broad time span of 1521-31. Most often references are simply made to its first printed edition by Rastell in 1533.

Furthermore, the play is not Heywood's original invention, but a reworking of a French farce, a link usually observed but not really examined. Debax (2002b: 72), for instance, omits the play altogether from his discussion of the farcical tradition in Tudor interludes on the grounds that it is not truly English. I believe, however, that the choice of French farcical tradition is significant when we take into account Henry VIII's desire to match in elegance and splendour the court of Paris and Anne Boleyn's long stay at Burgundian and French courts (1514-1521). As one French courtier wrote, "no one would ever have taken her to be English by her manners, but a native born Frenchwoman" (qtd. in Lindsey 1995: 51). If my hypothesis that the link with French literature was deliberately made to direct the audience attention to the issues preoccupying English courtiers at the time, *Iohan Iohan* can be read as a carnivalesque metaphor for the most important household of the country, the Henrician court itself.

Following the pattern of *De Pernet qui va au vin*, Heywood departs from the original story line to emphasize certain aspects of his play (Young 1904: 5-10). While in the French farce the male lover is just sketched, in the English version Sir Johan is transformed into a symbol of male sexuality and potency, a virile young man superior to the husband in two respects. First,

little interest that *Johan Johan* itself has aroused has been mainly directed at the anti-clerical aspects of the play, its purely farcical expression, and, most recently, at establishing male identity and ideology as dominant among the members of the audience (Louis 2002: 135-139). More often than not, *Johan Johan* receives just a mention. Even Mullini (1999) in an article devoted to the carnivalesque features in Heywood's plays refers to it very briefly despite the fact that the play embodies the spirit of carnival to the greatest extent.

unlike Tyb's spouse, Sir Johan manages to satisfy her sexually, which is presented as the underlying reason for her infidelity. Second, contrary to Johan, the lover is able to make a woman pregnant, about which he boasts throughout the meal. Significantly, his ribald tales of "miraculous conception" (ll. 557-572, 577-587, 595-602), recounted earlier in this chapter, take up a considerable portion of his speeches. Having no counterpart in the French play at all, they strongly pinpoint the problem of childlessness in Heywood's play. Another important divergence lies in the motivation the respective husbands are given for the futile task of chaffing the wax. In *Pernet* the activity is quite absurd and treated in the most mechanical fashion; in *Johan Johan*, however, the incident is charged with sexual connotations, once again suggesting an inability to pay the marital debt and emphasising the absence of children in the household. Finally, the endings differ considerably. The French source reinforces the carnivalesque vision of the world through the final submission of the husband while the English one results in ultimate chaos and disorder.

If we ignore the gender of our fictional characters for a time, the topical allusions to the political situation become surprisingly relevant. Firstly, Johan and Tyb's childlessness may correspond to the lack of a male successor to the English throne, which by 1525, with Catherine turning forty and having already suffered from a series of miscarriages and still-births, had become a fact rather than an ominous possibility. Thus, the fear of illegitimate children, expressed by Johan in farcical terms in the play, might relate to a much more solemn anxiety over the problems of succession. It is also in 1525 that the king promoted his out-of-wedlock son, Henry Fitzroy, to the position of duke of Richmond – a step that could end up putting a bastard on the English throne. The period between 1525 and 1527 also began Henry's passionate affair with nineteen-year-old Anne Boleyn and was when divorce proceedings commenced¹³. The publicly

¹³ In 1526, after a passionate although generally disapproved of love affair with Percy, Anne Boleyn was summoned back to court as a maiden

known romance between the King and Catherine's maid of honour resembles the nature of the fictional relationship Tyb and Sir Johan enjoyed under the nose of the temporarily blinded husband. Similarly, Johan's inability to act, and his uselessness in the farcical household might symbolically stress Catherine's diminishing position at court, her passivity, and failure to prevent Henry's extramarital adventures. Finally, the husband's stubborn refusal to confirm the false assertion that he has had his share of the pie and Tyb's insistence on forcing him to do so might be read as corresponding to Henry's obsessive tactics of trying to make the queen admit that her previous marriage with Arthur had been consummated – a stance that the queen, like Johan, stubbornly refused.

Having assumed that the divergences from the French plot are a deliberate choice and disregarding the gender aspect of the characters, we end up with an interpretation that hints at the political concerns of the Tudor court and narrows the span of the play's origins to the years of 1525-1530 – the time when the

of honour to Catherine of Aragon and it was not long before she attracted the attention of Henry, already tired of his relationship with Catherine and involved in an affair with Anne's own sister Mary, which had also started to bore him. Henry's courting of Anne is documented by the seventeen love letters he wrote to her. By this time Henry had already resolved to get rid of Catherine and the negotiations aiming at annulment of the first marriage with the papal consent were in progress. With time, Anne's importance grew steadily: in September 1532 she was conferred the title of Marchioness of Pembroke, "a title in her own right and not simply by virtue of being the wife of a marquis" as Karen Lindsey (1995: 88) notes; shortly after, Catherine was forced to give up the crown jewels to Anne. The same year, Henry met with Francis I, King of France, apparently to sign an alliance against the Turks, but Henry's divorce was the most important issue on the agenda. The most striking feature of the gathering was that Anne's position was carefully and strongly emphasized by a series of apparently unimportant facts. Sydney Anglo observes that in the mask led by Anne surrounded by her ladies, "these ladies danced with members of the audience, Francis himself being chosen by Anne as her partner – again an expression of her supremacy at court, and her regal position. The occasion was, in reality, nothing more than a statement by Henry VIII, through the medium of public spectacle, that as far as he was concerned Anne Boleyn was already his Queen" (Anglo 1997: 246).

King's "Private Matter" was an open secret, but when the outcome of the events had not been yet decided. Still, this reading, inferred from topical rather than verbal references, is possible only if we acknowledge the specific nature of the actor-spectator transaction taking place in the noble household theatre:

Spectators at household revels, like those at schools and unlike those at church dramas, civic pageants, and public theatres, were a very specific audience. Besides living and working together, they shared particular cultural paradigms, they gathered in a private space for specific reasons, and they understood personal, topical and local allusions. Consequently, a performance could assume a particular audience reception and predict a response, could tailor its contents to a social or religious occasion, like the progress of the monarch or a local saint's day, and could refer specifically to those present. (Westfall 1997: 52)

In household theatre, the message of the play is not something given and static but actively and dialogically negotiated between the actors and the audience. Such meaning is in fact inseparable from the circumstances of a particular performance. More probably than not, extra-textual features of characterization, such as the tone of voice, facial expression, particular gesture, characteristic gait, or catchphrase, could all point to certain individuals known to a particular group of spectators and give the play a new performance-specific meaning. For Thomas More's faction of the opponents of Henry's divorce, to whom *Johan Johan* was probably addressed, the play could have had a level going beneath its farcical plane. Heywood's vision of the carnivalesque household, deprived of the rules necessary for social stability and order, might have served as a metaphor for a state whose ruler does not respect these values.

This message becomes more vivid if we assume that the interlude plays not only with the concept of gender roles but with the gender identities themselves. If this hypothesis is right, if the male stands for the female, and the female for the male, we may conclude that the figure of Johan, the husband, is a carnivalesque reference to Catherine of Aragon, that the character

of sexually attractive and potent Sir Johan is used to bring in the association with Anne Boleyn, and, finally, that ingenious Tyb stands for Henry VIII himself. In such a reading, the carnivalesque household, in which two men compete for the body of a woman, is transformed into a carnivalesque court, where two women try to win the favour of the king, a court with two queens, one of them having the obvious advantage of youth and sex appeal over the other. Bearing in mind priests' infamous reputation for lechery, the comparison of Boleyn to a representative of the clergy can evoke only negative connotations. Similarly, Tyb's sexual appetite, her dominance in the play, and her role as onstage director, make her, or the king for whom she stands, the source of all problems. Catherine's position is a complex one, but no optimistic interpretation seems to be possible. Neither blindness to truth nor an attempt to prove her case have any chance of success. The queen, like Johan, either becomes the object of derision, or she is left alone to chase the run-away lovers without any hope of victory. Interestingly, both male characters are given exactly the same name – an unprecedented choice, which does not seem to be incidental at all. Making the references to Catharine and Anne quite obvious, Heywood christens them both Johan to emphasize their instrumental function in the play of the royal divorce carefully staged by the ruler himself.

The interlude seems to be constantly playing with the binary oppositions of male/female, private/public, and domestic/political. On its first literal level, *Johan Johan* is simply a farce with no positive characters at all. The stereotype of a shrewish wife can have no positive connotations for the audience; the clichéd treatment of the figure of the priest bears no better associations; finally, the cuckolded husband is too passive and concerned with appearances to gain a spectator's sympathy. The play is packed with slapstick comedy, crude remarks, billingsgate, and misogynist attacks. It makes excessive use of the carnival mode and, in fact, all the cherished values associated with the household are reversed. A piece of anti-woman entertainment on the

first level, this “merry play” does not have a “merry ending”. It concludes with a chaotic commotion extending beyond the walls of the fictional abode, a commotion that is bound to happen if the king’s marital problems are not resolved within the walls of the royal unruly household.

If the text, as I suggest, can be read as having political implications as well, the farce, on top of its entertaining function, becomes a weighty play that shows the most influential affair in English history in a distorting mirror – and voices, quite insightfully, the uneasiness, lingering doubts, painful uncertainty, and outright fear about the future to come. On this second public level, the play’s longish title, featuring two identical male names, might have been transformed by a skilful and politically-oriented spectator into a much more disturbing one: “A Merry Play between Catherine, the Wife, Henry her Husband, and Lady Anne, the Whore”. If so, it is a surprisingly apt title for the fabliau-like intrigue being enacted by three publicly known figures in front of the whole nation, and with no happy end in store.

The profeminine household in *Godly Queen Hester*

A totally different image of femininity is proposed by the anonymous *Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester*, a play bearing political implications as well. From the initial lines, the interlude addresses women specifically and situates itself within the context of conduct books for those interested in pursuing virtue:

Come nere vertuous matrons and women kind
Here may ye lerne of Hesters duty;
In all comelines of virtue you shal finde
How to behave your selves in humilitie. (ll. 1-4)

The popularity of the figure of Esther as a role model for medieval and early modern aristocratic women demonstrates that

despite misogynist readings of Genesis, the Bible could still inspire less anti-feminist views and encourage women to exercise power. It is in this tradition that Christine de Pizan, renowned for her counter-mysoginist defenses of women, cites Esther as a worthy exemplum for aristocratic women in the *City of Ladies* and in her letter of 1405 to the queen of France, Isabel of Bavaria, in which she appeals to Isabel to save her people as Esther saved the Jews (Cherewatuk and Wiethaus 1993: 163). Having mentioned the naturally female virtues of pity, charity, clemency, and kindness often displayed by women in the private sphere, she goes on to state that these assets should also make women natural peacemakers in the public context. Together with Mary Queen of Heaven and Mother of God; Judith; the Queen of Sheba; the Christian empress Helena, who found the true cross; Galla Placidia and Pulheria, who fought heresy; and Queen Clothild, who converted her husband and his people; Esther belongs to a group of female heroines whose behaviour and virtue were worth emulating, and like them she can be portrayed as a role model for a woman in power to identify with. In *Godly Queene Hester* the heroine can be paradoxically associated with two extraordinary women of the play's historical time: Catherine of Aragon and Elisabeth I. While references to the first wife of Henry VIII will be discussed later in this chapter, allusions to Queen Elizabeth are beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that the connotations with the latter queen might have accounted for the decision to publish the play at all.

The interlude follows the biblical narrative although some elements have been altered or excluded altogether. The story of Esther is employed not only as "a setting for a debate on the humanist topic of kingly responsibility" (Roston 1968: 72), but also, as is asserted by some critics (Roston 1968: 73, Walker 1991: 102), as a polemic against the politics of Henry VIII under the influence of Cardinal Wolsey. These references are not difficult to trace as the anonymous writer does not really exert himself to create the impression that the story is set in biblical

Persia rather than – contemporary England (Walker 1991: 102-3). In agreement with the play's unmasked preoccupation with the theme of royal duty, Assuerus is introduced as engaged in the debate on the issue of effective governing and the qualities required for its success in contrast to King Ahasuerus from the Old Testament Book of Esther, whom we meet at a hedonist feast. Thus, together with Assuerus, the spectators learn that virtue should come before wealth, power, and noble birth (ll. 25-28) and that justice is a vital characteristic of an ideal ruler¹⁴.

Another diversion from the biblical narrative is the absence of Vasthi, Ahaseurus's first wife, who angered him with her refusal to attend the banquet, which in turn motivated the Persian king to look for another partner. On the one hand, such an exclusion may be easily accounted for by the unwillingness on the part of the dramatist to include the character of an unruly woman, whose deed "shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported" (Book of Esther, 1: 17), in a work meant as a source of moral inspiration for female spectators. On the other hand, the tactics can be seen as providing the author with an easy way out of trouble. To be on the safe side, the playwright simply removes from his version of the narrative the female character whose presence might have produced associations between Ahaseurus's harem and Henry VIII's court, the connotations better to be avoided in the reign of a king who was not only generally known for picking his favourites from among the ladies-in-waiting, but who also intended to marry one of them. Consequently, Assuerus's motivation to find a wife presents him in a flattering light as a responsible ruler who understands well enough that apart from bringing him happiness, his marriage is also expected to fulfil his royal obligations:

¹⁴ The message seems to be internalized by Assuerus, who at the end of the play punishes Aman, a haughty, greedy, plotting, overambitious and flattering Wolsey-like figure and elevates fair and good Mardocheus to a higher rank.

We are comfortles for lacke of a Queene,
 Which shoulde be our joye, and chefe solace.
 And, to say truth, it hath not been oft seene
 But the prince with a princes matched hath beene
 Leaste defaulte of issue shoulde be, which God defende!

(ll. 117-121)

The passage makes it clear that the real object of marriage is not only “joye” and “solace”, although they would be a desirable addition, but providing the king and his nation with a legitimate heir.

What seems to be particularly significant for the discussion of the role of women as seen in *Godely Queene Hester* is the reason that lies behind choosing Hester for the royal spouse from among other ladies. On the one hand, it is quite conventionally observed that she is a “fayre damsel of the highest stature” (l. 230), the fairest of all candidates in fact (l. 232), which, combined with her good lineage and “most ripe age” (l. 231) for bearing him a successor, makes her suitable for royal marriage. Good looks, appropriate birth, and advertising-like praise put in the mouth of Mardoheus (ll. 254-261) may make Hester stand out from the crowd, but she is still to answer a question of crucial importance: “Howe saye you, Hester, have you ought rede or seene / Of virtues that be best and fittest for a queene?” (ll. 267-268). Thus, the beauty contest of the original narrative is replaced with a contest of wit in the interlude. If the Old Testament Esther becomes the queen of Persia because of her exceptionally good looks, charm, and sexual allure, Tudor Hester wins because on top of all these qualities she can also take pride in her education, erudition, and courage. Already at this point the audience are made aware that the heroine of the interlude will be presented as a woman truly worthy of being the king’s wife, one who genuinely deserves a place at his side. The idea behind the contest of wit is that good looks, a conventional quality of a courtly lady, do not necessarily make her the best spouse, capable of taking on responsibilities demanded by this solemn role. Thus, the spectators realize, Hester is supposed to

provide authentic help and advice rather than be a shiny, yet useless, ornament, or even worse, a burden to the ruler.

Such a thesis, if logical by our standards, was not automatically predominantly depicted on stage. In Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre on the Thrie Estaitis*, of which three known performances are recorded (1540, 1552, 1554), Scotland in its early years of religious reformation is depicted as a country in decline with "its secular rulers wedded to Sensuality, its clergy to self-interest and financial and spiritual corruption, and its common people ground-down by over-taxation and neglect" (Walker 2000: 536). Here, the young and inexperienced king, Rex Humanitas, is convinced by the vices of the play, Wantonness, Placebo, and Solace, to accept the female figure of Sensualitie, referred to in terms of a "lustie concubein / to play yow withal" (ll. 245-6). On seeing the lady, Rex immediately falls into the courtly fever so familiar to us from the examples discussed in the previous chapter:

My bodi trembles, fait and hands,
And quhiles is hait as fyre.
I trow Cupido, with his dart,
Hes woundit me out-throw the hart;
My spreit will fram my bodie part
Get I nocht my desyre. (ll. 371-6)

As his passion is purely sexual, the fact emphasised with the word "spreit" denoting both "spirit" and "semen" (Walker 2000: 552), it can lead to nothing good and Rex's infatuation with the mistress constitutes the first step of his moral decline. Personal degeneration of the king, in turn, plunges the country into chaos and anarchy. In Lindsay's play Scotland becomes a carnivalesque world turned upside down, where the vices get into power while the virtues are either banned from the realm or imprisoned. The play, advocating the reform not only of the state but also of the religious orders, is deeply inspired by the old morality play paradigm, one instance of such influence being the emphasis placed on the fact that the fall of the youthful king actually commences with the sin of lechery. Unlike *Godly*

Queene Hester, therefore, Lindsay's *Thrie Estaitis* proposes a more conventional view on the nature of women, who are seen here, quite misogynistically, as the source of all evil and made responsible for the corruption of the king.

Hester's powerful and expressive answer to the question posed in the contest of wit not only wins her success, but also makes her a heroine construed in terms of profeminine defence of womanhood. First, Hester declares that "No quene there is but by marriage of a prince" (l. 273), by which she accepts her subordinate position as a woman and wife to the authority of the king. At the same time she sees the role of a queen as that of an advisor ("Albeit, sometime more for love than for awe, / The king is content to be counselled by the queene", l. 277-278), and even more than that, as in the king's absence his wife actually has to assume his duties and "to rewle the common weale" (l. 286). To fulfil such heavy public responsibility, Hester argues, a queen should be equipped with virtues identical to those of the king:

Wherefore, as many virtues be there muste,
Even in the quene as in the prynce,
For feare lest, in warre, sume treason unjust
The realme shoulde subdewe, and falsely convince.
The quene must savegarde all the hole province.
And so, as muche goodness aye must be seene,
As in the kynge to be in the quene. (ll. 287-293)

In the whole twenty-four-line-long speech, Hester appears to be a bold woman not easily intimidated by the ruler and his surroundings. Her courage, however, has nothing to do with an attempt to challenge the king's authority. The fact that they need the same virtues to rule justly and effectively, the argument goes, does not make them equal. Acknowledging that "the jurisdiction of the whole province / To the kynge pertaineth" (ll. 275-276), Hester makes no claim for the power to govern as long as the male ruler is available; she is only to be called upon to assume this obligation in the case of the king's absence. At no point, in fact, does the heroine resemble Tyb. Hester's

goal is neither to gain dominance over her husband nor over the kingdom. "The woman is not reckoned the more worshipful among men," writes Juan Luis Vives in *Instruction of a Christian woman*, "that presumeth to have mastery above her husband: but the more foolish and the more worthy to be mocked" (in Aughterson 1995: 136). And so Hester is not to be mocked, as she does not advocate the carnivalesque reversal of the sanctioned order. On the contrary, she sees her role as contained within the category of a "helper," which goes in line with the traditionally accepted vision of femininity.

And yet, there is something unnerving about the onstage behaviour of Hester, or to be more precise, about her speech. What strikes one is how adept the would-be queen is in developing her arguments, how clear and well-constructed her reasoning is, how logically her conclusion follows the course of thought. Her rationalism and verbosity immediately bring to mind Loved-not-Loving from *A Play of Love*, who displays similar qualities. Here, however, the effect seems to be much stronger. Whereas Heywood's heroine is also capable of reasonable and well-structured argumentation, the issues of *amour courtois* are of much less gravity than what is at stake in *Godely Queene Hester*. Considering the thought that women could be perceived more as subjects than objects of courtly discourse, and in this way subverting certain conventions associated with this particular discourse is one thing; stating that a woman could be equipped with the same virtues as a man and, consequently, qualify to perform his job equally well is another. If the former thesis relates predominantly to somewhat unimportant issues of love affairs and courtship, constituting a customary sphere of interest for women, the latter one bears much more controversial and, indeed, unsettling implications.

Although Hester claims that she will stand back, her erudite speech demonstrates what Thomas More perhaps wanted to validate not only with his writing but also with providing his daughters with exceptionally thorough education – that both men and women are equally capable of acquiring knowledge:

“They both have the name of human being whose nature reason differentiates from that of beasts; both, I say, are equally suited for the knowledge of learning by which reason is cultivated” (More’s Letter to William Gonell, qtd. in Benson 1992: 163). In this light Hester can be seen as a female figure that is an exemplary product of More’s ideas on the education of women, while her rational and well-organized monologue undermines the misogynist connection between female speech and ‘idle talk’. Lacking this link, Hester’s manner of expression cannot be really linked with transgression or rebelliousness¹⁵.

Going back to the plot of *Godely Queene Hester*, it comes as no surprise that Assuerus, impressed with his queen’s verbal skills and intellect, perceives their marriage to be a perfect union which will enable them to “quenche all vice and deformitie” (l. 300). To these words Hester reacts immediately, seizing the opportunity to offer advice on the issue of welfare of the poor and once again construing her argument effectively and convincingly. First, she states that it is the wealth of all their subjects, both great and small, that will enable them to repel the attacks of all their enemies, in this way linking prosperity of the people with the issues of the security of the country. Having ascertained that she is genuinely concerned with the well-being of her citizens, Hester goes on to criticize the condition when wealth is concentrated in the hands of few people, “in places two or three” (l. 313) to use her own wording, while “the most part in generall, / Neither have meate or money, nor strength substantial / fytted to doe you service, when ye have need” (ll. 314-316). It is interesting that her line of reasoning does not

¹⁵ Once more it is impossible not to emphasise More’s contribution, exemplified by his Latin epigram, dated 1516, on choosing a wife. Writing about this epigram Benson observes that it challenges the traditional view that woman’s speech in marriage must be a negative phenomenon. On the contrary, it is the silence, not the words, that may suggest the wife’s foolishness and rebelliousness as it may be in More’s words “*rusticum silentium*”, i.e. “a silence of ill-grace and ignorance, not obedience, that may even indicate that rebellion is fomenting under the silence and that woman as traditionally defined does not respect her husband’s authority whether she openly violates it or secretly fumes” (after Benson 1992: 158).

simply involve sympathy towards the poor, which could naturally be linked with female compassion and charity – the matriarchal principle of “hospitalitie” that balances the patriarchal system of justice (Cartwright 1999: 144). Impoverished subjects will not be able to serve the king properly and defend the kingdom, her argument goes, showing once more that the queen is rational and practical in her approach. Finally, she proves that she is realistic about financial issues. Not interested in extravagant spending, she acknowledges the need to perform charitable deeds or reward loyal subjects for services performed to the benefit of the royal couple, yet advocates the principle of moderation:

Let God alwaye, therefore, have hys parte,
And the poore fedde by hospitalitie;
Eche man his measure, by it pynte or quarte,
And no man to muche, for that is great jeoberdie,
A meane to lose all, as I doe feare me. (ll. 318-322)

Already at this point, the heroine’s verbosity and common sense situate her in the centre of the spectacle. The impression is further enhanced when, on learning about Aman’s plot to exterminate the Jews, Hester, begged by Mardocheus, proceeds to appeal to the king on their behalf. At the banquet, to which both Assuerus and Aman have been invited, she reveals her Jewish origins (ll. 908-909) and presents Aman as sole initiator of the scheme against the Jews. She indicates his “cruell envy” (l. 917) and greed as underlying causes of his plan but also explains why his power-craving fantasies can have perilous consequences for the king. If the insatiable advisor gets all the property, he will next desire to rule everything (l. 920), a threat too serious to the welfare of the state to go unnoticed. Apart from that, Hester states that Aman’s wealth actually exceeds the king’s (l. 924), a charge grave on its own, and more importantly, that the taxes the minister imposes for his personal gains are commonly attributed to Assuerus himself: “The commons he extorteth tyll they bee lame / He takes the profit and ye beare the

name" (ll. 927-928). Finally, she reveals to the king that Aman "putteth other in blame", these "other" being obviously the Jews (l. 931), for everything that he himself should "suufer payne" (l. 933). Assuerus seems genuinely surprised by these revelations and justifies himself by saying that he was actually misled by Aman – "He signified unto me that the Jews did / Not feede the poore by hospitalitie" (ll. 936-937) – but used their possessions "amonge them selves lyvyng voloptuouslye" (l. 939). Ironically, it was upon this false claim that the whole action against the Jews was taken.

I have recounted this longish dialogue, as it seems to be based on the carnivalesque principle of reversal, which is, however, construed in a much more subtle manner than in *Johan Johan*. The conversation reveals that it is the female protagonist who sees through the doings of Aman not the king himself. Consequently it is the queen who is depicted as more insightful, better politically oriented, and offering a sound and just judgement. The order of things is slightly challenged here. The queen, meant to be just an advisor, turns out to be better skilled in terms of doing politics than Assuerus, who turns out naïve, inexperienced and easily manipulated. Without resorting to verbal abuse and grabbing her distaff, Hester achieves what other female characters, ranging from Mrs Noah to Tyb, wanted to get – she peacefully and effortlessly steps into the world of men, the world where real power is to be had.

Hester's defense of her people is delivered boldly and wholeheartedly. However, it sounds somewhat surprising as long as the Jews from the interlude are seen as just Jews. She claims, for instance, that from the very beginning her nation has always adhered to their tradition of dispensing charity to the poor (ll. 949-956), or that they pray and perform ceremonies (ll. 1096-1102), or that they go on pilgrimages (l. 790). All these references make it clear that the anonymous interlude is not so much preoccupied with the problems of the biblical Jews as with the troubles of the religious orders in the late 1520s (cf. Walker 1991: 102). It is indeed difficult to overlook these quite

overt references to the suppression of English monasteries under Wolsey's politics¹⁶ in Hester's speeches:

Sinse God, therefore, hath begunne theyre housholde,
 And ay hath **preserved theyre hospytallite**,
 I advise no man to be so bolde.
 The same to **dissolve**, what so ever he be.
 (ll. 957-9630, emphasis mine)

The bold phrases unmistakably link Hester's oration with the issue of monasteries, not only by asserting that they never violated the principle of providing charity and hospitality, but also by stressing that what God himself ordained should not be challenged by man. Moreover, only in this context can the use of the word "dissolve" actually make sense – if "Jews" in *Godly Queene Hester* signified only the biblical nation of Jews, the choice of verbs like "kill", "execute", "exterminate", "murder", "expel", "drive out" or "banish" would appear much more appropriate.

When Assuerus is finally convinced by Hester's arguments and resolves to put Aman to death so as to teach others by this example not to attempt to delude their prince (ll. 969-970), the wicked minister, sensing his fate, implores the queen to save his life. However, his appeal is coldly and proudly dismissed when Hester responds to his words in a truly queenly manner: "Aman, this matter so heinous is, in dede, / that of our honour we wyll nother speake nor speede" (ll. 985-986). It is here that Hester most openly steps out of her role of mediator and go-between. By refusing forgiveness in this case, she not only breaks

¹⁶ The association of the Jews with monastic orders serves as the strongest link between the figure of Aman and Cardinal Wolsey, who in the second half of the 1520s dissolved several English monasteries in order to obtain money to fund Cardinal's College at Oxford University. For more on Wolsey's church policy, see e.g. G.R. Elton's *England under the Tudors* (1991), pp. 84-88. Wolsey's politics and its presence in *Godly Queene Hester* is also discussed in detail in Chapter IV of Walker's *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (1991), pp. 102-132. Not to repeat the points expressed by him earlier, therefore, in this study I am dealing with only these issues that seem relevant to the way in which the figure of Hester is construed.

the stereotype of a weak, kind-hearted female, but proves to be as politically wise as any ruler should be. Hester knows all too well that sparing the life of her enemy would not be a sign of compassion but of political short-sightedness. She refuses to behave in a typically feminine way as at this grave moment all that has been achieved could be lost.

Making her cold-blooded decision, Hester transgresses the boundaries of her role as an advisor to the king and defender of her people and becomes both a pitiless executor of her enemy and a just judge, displaying the quality attributed to ideal princes in the beginning of the play. Having chosen justice over mercy, she situates herself as a true leader of the country. Having ascertained that justice has been done and the wrong-doer hanged, Hester takes another political step and makes sure "her man" will be promoted to the position of power. From now on, Mardocheus, a Jewish leader, equipped with the king's ring and seal, will carry out "judgemente and correction" (l. 1072) in the king's name. Thus, order is restored and the power is given back to the king, who delegates it to another, this time more respectable, man. The impression that lingers, however, is that all this happened because of the queen: she has saved the Jews and executed her chief opponent; she has been responsible for the appointment of the new minister. Having organized everything, she meekly steps back, but only after she has achieved all that she wanted. The men are given their rings and seals, but do they really get power back?

In his discussion of the interlude, Cartwright observes that Hester "possesses a political gravity reciprocal with her theatrical presence and voice" (1999: 144-145), seeing her principle of mercy and care for the poor as complementary to the political principle of justice, most appropriate for the king himself. Yet, he fails to notice that by refusing to show mercy to Aman and by promoting Mardocheus, her future loyal supporter, Hester goes beyond the limits of her role of an advisor. It is at this point that the audience realizes that the queen cannot be seen only as Asuerus's passive comforter, or merely his counsellor, or simply a

mediator. In the course of the interlude the female protagonist has gradually become an active mistress of her own fate. First, she has won the ‘wit contest’ and become the wife of the king. Second, she has made use of her position to suggest improvements to the way in which the kingdom is ruled by Assuerus. Finally, she has become capable of turning a potentially disastrous plot against the Jews and herself to her own advantage.

Towards the end of the interlude, after the successful resolution of the Aman-Mardocheus matter, Hester is given one more oration, in which she implores the king to revoke the persecution of the Jews on the grounds that they have been chosen by God to serve his will. She begs the king to forgive any offences the Jews may have been guilty of and to give them a chance to correct their ways. The scene appears conventional enough with the queen on her knees asking for the king’s pardon, her submissive body language emphasising that the hierarchy within the kingly household is still preserved and male dominance unchallenged. What is striking, however, is that when Assuerus consents to her humble requests and asks her to stand up, Hester has something up her sleeve – the “epistle” which “is made to the sealing readye” (l. 1109). This edict, drawn up by Hester and eagerly signed by Assuerus, condemns Aman “not of our nacion” (l. 1120), and therefore a traitor, who wanted to destroy the queen and the king himself, and proclaims the Jews absolutely “innocente, and without blame” (ll. 1131-1132). The chief intent of this document is stated in the following way:

This is our purpose and veri intente:
 The Jewes to theyre lawes them selfe shoulde prepare,
 Duely to kepe them and not from them square;
 And no man to hurt them, see ye remember,
 As it was mente .xiii of December,
 Dated at Susis, this is certayne,
 The .iiii. day of December the .iii. yeare of our raine.”

(ll. 1140-1144)

The fact that the edict – written in legal terms and containing all the elements it should – is prepared beforehand by Hes-

ter is of foremost importance for a few reasons. First, it becomes apparent that her learning and eloquence are sufficient to draw up documents of substantial political importance. Secondly, her insight into the matters of the kingdom seems to be deeper than that of the king himself. Thirdly, her actions, rather than being supplementary to the king's, seem to have replaced them, as it is Hester who has prepared the statute, which only then is signed by Assuerus. In this light, we cease seeing Hester's actions as being merely complementary to the politics of the king and begin to perceive them as superior and more effective than his. Hester is not merely the wife of the king any more, she is the queen herself, actively participating in the process of ruling the country. Interestingly, she does not achieve this position by open resistance or aggressive behaviour. On the contrary, when she is expected to kneel down in front of the king and beg, she does so; when she is required to keep up appearances, she does not rebel against them. And yet, unlike openly resistant female transgressors, such as Tyb, she has got real, not illusory power. Even though Tyb's importance for the development of action in *Johan Johan* cannot be underestimated, she would still have a lot to learn from Hester. Refusing to play the part of a shrew and to overtly challenge the hierarchical order within her marriage, the heroine of *Godly Queene Hester* manages to manipulate the king to get what she wants and what seems to be the best for the state as well. The question that lurks behind such an interpretation is a perverse one: if we have such a judicious and efficient queen, do we still need a gullible and easily deceivable king at all?

While Cartwright suggests that *Godly Queene Hester* can be read as a "defense of women" in the context of the sixteenth-century dialogue on womanhood, when "humanist writers such as More, Vives, Ascham and Mulcaster advocated and participated in women's education challenging doubts about distaff mental capacity" (Cartwright 1999:144), the interlude clearly defends one woman in particular – Catherine of Aragon. Although the association between Hester and the first wife of Henry VIII

is generally supported by the critics, a brief discussion of the most important allusions within the interlude is indispensable to explain the workings of the metaphor of household as state. In fact, *Godly Queene Hester*, unlike *Johan Johan*, deals with kingly and queenly politics even at the basic level of its structure, drawing attention to contemporary matters quite explicitly. Hence, the link between the fictional figure of Hester and the real queen is much less a question of speculation than it was in the previously discussed interlude. Here, it seems, the playwright intended his spectators to see the allusions.

One such topical reference that invites us to see the unveiled comparison is when Hester speaks of the duty of the queen to defend the kingdom and her people in the absence of the king. This obligation cannot be perceived in abstract terms as it constitutes a practically unmasked reference to Catherine's role as regent in the events of 1513, when before leaving the country for France, Henry entrusted her "with more power than a female regent had ever before been given in England" (Lindsey 1995: 31). Catherine's role at this time was by no means passive and the country she was to administer was far from peaceful, as King James IV of Scotland, France's ally, invaded the kingdom from the North. On September 7 at Flodden Edge the English army led by the earl of Surrey triumphed over the Scots, winning battle in which over 10,000 enemies were killed, the Scottish king himself among them. The credit for this most remarkable victory in the war with France belonged not to Henry but to his wife, the regent. Proud with this success, Catherine did not hesitate to report the matter to Henry and sent him a piece of the dead king's coat as proof of her triumph. Without pricks of conscience and quite calmly she wrote that she would have preferred to send James's body instead, "but our Englishmen would not suffer it" (Lindsey 1995: 32), proving that she could be as calm and as cruel to her enemies as any male ruler ought to be, a fact clearly emphasised by Hester's treatment of Aman in the anonymous interlude.

Similarly, the principle of charity, advocated by Hester in the interlude but having no counterpart in the biblical Book of Esther, introduces connotations of Queen Catherine's interest in the needs of the destitute¹⁷. Apart from that, Hester's defence of the Jews, who, as we have seen, have more to do with religious orders than with their Old Testament predecessors, combined with Catherine's unveiled Orthodox faith, makes the queen appear as a powerful guardian of Catholicism in the turbulent 1520s. Hester, and consequently, Catherine of Aragon, is seen as one who could prevent the suppression and dissolution of the monasteries by means of her authority. Staging Aman/Wolsey as a caricature of the minister, equipped with all possible vices¹⁸ and the only person to blame for the anti-Catholic rhetoric, or rather anti-monastic policy, the play exaggerates the political role of Hester/Catherine in its suggestion that the fall of the Cardinal will be inevitably followed by an increase in Catherine's influence on King Henry, a premise which would

¹⁷ In his *Catherine of Aragon*, Mattingly (1941) observes, for instance, that the queen was a lay member of the order of St Francis and actively practised charity: "... she always had inquiries made into the needs of the poor in whatever neighborhood she was living; and used, herself, to spend much time in visiting them unostentatiously, garbed perhaps simply as a lay sister of her order. Hundreds of poor families were to remember that they owed to her money and clothes and food" (178-179).

¹⁸ This is actually shown literally in the play as the three Vices, i.e. Pryde, Ambition, and Adulation, have actually been usurped by Aman, who takes over all their vicious qualities from them. Quite comically, the vices wander on stage with nothing really to do and grumble about Aman, who deprived them of their "jobs," but have no influence on the development of the action. In the introduction to the interlude, Walker writes: "Their role in the play is thus, like ageing comedians on the chat-show circuit, to complain that they can no longer perform their proper functions as the younger usurper has taken all the plum perks" (1991: 409). The use of the trick obviously degrades Aman in the eyes of the audience and is permeated with the spirit of carnival. Here, the vices, the ones who customarily reverse the natural order of things, are in fact victims of such reversal. If they traditionally belong to the carnival bottom, Aman descends even deeper down the scale, and metaphorically falls to the absolute bottom of all bottoms. He is the most villainous of all villains, and his villainy is not modified in any way by the comic appeal or entertaining qualities typical of the morality play vices.

soon prove to be a mere wishful thinking, taking into account that her position at the time of the interlude was far from secure. As Walker observes:

If the association of Katherine with Hester was intended simply as a flattering comparison and an indication of the author's support for her cause, then the strategy is explicable. But if a more specific reference to her championing the cause of the religious was intended then its significance is lost. (Walker 1991:130)

That humanist thinkers, such as Thomas More, Juan Luis Vives, and Thomas Elyot, held Catherine of Aragon in exceptionally high esteem is beyond question. Travitsky (1997: 165) observes that her influence on Sir Thomas More and his circle was indeed deemed so intense that as early as 1912 Watson referred to the years 1523-1538 as the "Age of Catherine of Aragon". In his epigram (No. 19) on the coronation of Henry VIII, for instance, More himself expresses his high opinion of Catherine when he makes a comparison between the Queen and Cornelia (the mother of the two Gracchi, who used her persuasive speech to advocate the education of her sons), saying: "*Eloquio facunda cui Cornelia cedat*" - "the well-spoken Cornelia would yield to her in eloquence" (qtd. in Benson 1992: 160). In his Latin epigram on choosing a wife More asserts once more that his age produced only one woman worth as much as, if not more than, ancient ideals: "Borne high upon the soaring wings of fame, she now gives warning even to remotest Britain, the one and only boast and glory of the whole world, not merely the Cassandra of her own country"¹⁹. Although Benson (1992:

¹⁹ The relevant part of the epigram in the original Latin version is quoted and translated in Benson (1992: 161-2): *Utcunque ruticum, / unam tamen tenet / Nostrumque uirginem, / Tenet, sed unicam, / At sic ut unicam / Plerisque praeferat, Cuique conferat / Ex hijs, fuisse, quae / Narrantur omnibus / Tot retro seculis, / Quae nunc et ultimam / Monet Britanniam / Perlata pennulis / Famae uolucris, / Laus atque gloria / Orbis puellula / Totius unica, / Ac modo suae Cassandra patriae* (ll. 182-200).

[After all our age, however rude it may be, does have one maiden, though it has only one, whom it may set above almost all others and compare with any

162) herself suggests that the woman so elevated by More is his daughter, Margaret, the comparison between Cassandra, a wise woman who spoke the truth but was generally ignored, and Catherine, a fierce supporter of Catholicism and an ardent opponent of Protestant ideas, also seems to be valid.

The unavoidable link between the anonymous interlude and the political circumstances of the late 1520s on the one hand, and between the figure of Hester and Catherine of Aragon on the other, may well be seen as the reason for hiding the name of the playwright just as it might have been in the case of *Johan Johan*, which also appeared anonymously at first. This would correspond with the influential theory of Michel Foucault, who links the emergence of the author figure with a judicial responsibility for the written word such an author might have faced: “texts, books and discourses really began to have authors ... to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive” (Foucault 1984: 103). It is for similar reasons that dedications to Catherine of Aragon were altered or removed altogether in many works dedicated to her. The changes to the text of Vives’s *Instruction of a Christen Woman*²⁰, carefully traced and analysed

of those women whose stories come down to us from ages past. Borne high upon the soaring wings of fame, she now gives warning even to remotest Britain, the one and only boast and glory of the whole world, not merely the Cassandra of her own country.]

²⁰ Some critics quote Vives together with More as being against certain traditional concepts of womanhood. (e.g. Robert P. Adams 1962: 226). However, Vives’s views are not as liberal as More’s; and therefore, there is no way to equate the two thinkers. While More believes in and advocates women’s learning capacities, claiming that education opens up a spiritual world for women, Vives aims at establishing a programme for female education which is conservative and entirely prescriptive. Unlike More, he believes in female intellectual inferiority which for him is a consequence of the Fall. His defense is based solely on the argument that learning will teach women what is right and wrong and help protect them against their own vicious characters. For an exhaustive discussion of the differences between the views of More and Vives, see Chapter VI in Benson (1992).

elsewhere by Betty S. Travitsky (1997)²¹, for instance, seem to mirror the misfortunes of the Queen, who by 1531 had been deserted by Henry, removed from the court to Hertfordshire and separated from her daughter, Mary, while her marriage was declared invalid. To make matters worse not only for the Queen and her supporters, but also for the works that elevated her, three years later a statute was passed which made it “high treason «maliciously» to deny or attack the second marriage «in writing, print, deed, or act»” (Elton 1991: 135). “High treason”, as defined in this statute, would undoubtedly include any references to Catherine as Henry’s wife or ones presenting her in a favourable light. The fear of being accused of treason, in turn, might not only account for the changes introduced to Vives’s work, but also lie behind a thirty-year long dilatoriness on the part of the printers to have *Godly Queene Hester*, so easily linked with the ill-fated queen, printed in their shops.

²¹ Travitsky’s article “Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon” (1997: 163-174) provides us with a fascinating account of how the work of Vives reflects the political controversies of the times. Here, I will briefly repeat the most important points of her paper. Vives’s Latin *Instruction of a Christen Woman* was composed in 1523 and dedicated to Catherine, portrayed as an ideal woman when she still was “the admired queen of Henry VIII of England, a learned, pious ornament in her husband’s dazzling court and a skillful, powerful, and popular political figure” (165). The book was so well received and widely accepted that it was printed and reprinted in English nine times in the course of the sixteenth century: in 1529, 1531, 1541, 1547, 1557, and 1567 from the shop of the Erasmian printer, Thomas Berthelet, in 1585 by Robert Waldegrave, and in 1592, by John Danter. The changes introduced in different editions of the tract (as well as in the Introduction, written by Richard Hyrde, a translator of Vives’s work and friend of More), Travitsky argues, reflect the changes in Catherine’s position as well as shifts in Tudor courtly politics. To mention just a few such shifts: while Vives’s preface to the 1529 edition was dedicated to “the moste gracious princes Katharine quene of Englande”, the preface to the 1541 edition of the tract is addressed merely to “the most gracious princesse Katharine of Englande”. Similarly, Hyrde’s preface, which appears in the editions of 1529 and 1531 and describes Catherine as “the moste excellent prynces quene Catharine, the moste gracious Wyfe unto the moste noble and myghty prince kynge Henry the viii”, is omitted entirely in later editions of the tract.

One more work, partaking in the dialogue on the role of women, and thus relevant to the figure of Hester and the person of Catherine, needs to be mentioned in the present work, namely: Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*²², published in 1540 and dedicated to Anne of Cleves. However, the work, which is bold enough to maintain that because there is only one proper system of virtues for both sexes, educated women are as well equipped to govern as learned men are, can also be seen as a tribute to Catherine of Aragon. Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, Elyot's ideal woman, is as rational as a man can be, and argues that "there is no difference between governing the household and the nation" (Benson 1992: 199), an implication bold in itself and particularly relevant to the present thesis that presents the interludes dealing with household matters as extending their conceptual framework beyond the domestic sphere. More importantly, however, Zenobia, like Catherine of Aragon, was, but no longer is, a queen: this shift of fate is presented as the result of a misfortune, an unlucky course of events, rather than caused by some flaw of her character or inadequacy. As Benson rightly observes, Elyot in his *Defence* "demonstrates that women can safely be called on to perform male roles if they are needed," (Benson 1992: 203) an assertion also put forward by the playwright who penned *Godly Queene Hester*. On the whole, Hester illustrates the philosophical premises held by Elyot to such an extent that it can be concluded that *The Defence of Good Women* "reads like a humanist philosophical gloss on *Godly Queene Hester*" (Cartwright 1999: 144)²³.

Having observed numerous parallels between the heroine of the philosophical treatise and of the interlude, Cartwright seems oblivious to the similar political implications of these works, when both characters are associated with Catherine of Aragon. Constance Jordan (1983: 198-200) has speculated that

²² For a detailed discussion of Elyot's ideas, see Chapter VII in Benson (1992).

²³ For a well supported comparison of Hester and Zenobia, see Chapter V of Cartwright's *Theatre and Humanism. English Drama in the Sixteenth Century*, especially pages 143-146.

Elyot's *Defence* might be read as a sort of political allegory with practical political goal of convincing Catherine to be ready for assuming the role of regent in case of an uprising against Henry VIII. The time was ripe for such an outcome of events in the early 1530s, with many supporting their beloved Queen and enraged with Henry's treatment of Catherine and the coronation of Anne Boleyn, while Chapuys plotted against Henry and tried to convince the King of Spain to intervene on behalf of his aunt. The plans came to nothing as Catherine herself refused to participate in the Chapuys conspiracy by either instigating a war or fleeing from England, as, in her own words, it "would be a sin against the law and against my lawful husband" (qtd. in Lindsey 1995: 96). Still, the possibility of an uprising was real, though not certain, and must have met with a certain approval. If Jordan is right in her claims about Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence*, the interlude of Queen Hester may have had a similar goal and can be read as serving an identical function, the image of Hester powerfully reinforcing the concept of a powerful female ruler, more powerful than Assuerus in truth. In this light it comes as no surprise whatsoever that the anonymous writer who penned a play that could be used to encourage Catherine to take her own and her daughter's fates in her own hands chose to remain anonymous after all.

It has been demonstrated that the connection between the interlude and sixteenth-century humanist writing on women, on the one hand, and the link between Hester and Catherine of Aragon, on the other, do not contradict but engage in a dialogue and supplement each other. The authors of these defences of women did not write them in a political vacuum, but they also did not seem to attempt to convince their readers of the virtues and political capacities of womanhood in general. It is unlikely that they aimed at creating a new society, in which social and political structures ought to be modified so as to accommodate all women and give them more space and independence. Rather, they wrote about and often for the contemporaneous prominent women of substantial political power and usually claimed

that these “famous women were miraculously endowed with the qualities that enabled them to succeed, and, thus, cannot be models for ordinary women” (Benson 1992: 1). In other words, what could be characteristic and even admirable in certain noble ladies did not necessarily have to be typical of womankind as a rule. This clear-cut distinction creates two worlds inhabited by two distinct species of women, “ordinary” and “prominent” ones, the worlds governed by principally different rules indeed.

* * * * *

Both plays discussed here originate in the period of considerable social and political unrest and in both of them female characters are given the most importance, irrespective of whether the predominant outlook on womanhood expressed in the interlude is misogynistic or profeminine. Both heroines, Tyb and Hester, are provided with a certain freedom of choice and take their fate in their own hands. Tyb selects the lover that suits her best and mercilessly ridicules her husband while Hester achieves her ruler-like position at the end of the play through her learning, wisdom, and ability to practice, rather than observe, politics. Moreover, both interludes present on stage their own images of a household, and in both of them the issue of children, as the ultimate aim of the marital union, is raised, a fact that draws attention to how strongly the plays are connected with Tudor politics. Finally, both plays are to a greater or lesser extent influenced by concepts associated with the carnival and offer their own visions of the world where women have gained positions of power. It is time now, therefore, to refer to the beginning of the present chapter, where the question was asked whether the audience would have actually liked to live in a world like the one presented on stage.

The question, when considered literally, seems not to be difficult to answer. Tyb’s household is so powerfully and obviously permeated with the carnivalesque values of reversal that it

stands against all standards characteristic of a healthy community, while Hester's is actually the model one, in which justice and rationality win over the malicious plots and intrigues designed by the vicious character of Aman. If however, as I have proposed, both interludes are equally deeply immersed in contemporary political matters, then saying 'yes' gravitates to what was perceived as treason in those unsettled times. This political preoccupation of the interludes, speculative as it is, especially in the case of *Johan Johan*, is probably better understood when we observe that both the court and the theatre actually have a lot in common:

On stages people play roles, as men and women at court, played social, political and governmental roles; they act out dramas, as courts were the scenes of dramatic events, political, religious and cultural; they perform actions commonplace, significant and symbolic, as princes and their courtiers did; they represent greater realities and convey complex ideas as courts tried to do; they use props and scenery and tread stages reminiscent of the material culture of the court. (Gunn and Janse 2006: 2)

It is through this parallel that, as Steven Gunn and Antheun Janse propose, we can comprehend the performative aspect of medieval and early modern courts, where everything could bear symbolical meaning. But the metaphor of court as stage, a useful tool for a historian, can also be fruitful in the interpretation of drama and theatre as Henrician household drama also relies on these parallels. If court life is theatrical, any performance, spectacle, or festivity performed at court is political in the sense that it might rely on topical and personal allusions, obvious to members of the court and lost to us, who can only refer to black and white pages of printed text.

In this chapter I have also argued that the concept of dialogue, in numerous manifestations of the concept, is crucial for the interpretation of the plays. As has been demonstrated, *Godly Queene Hester* and *Johan Johan* both participate in a dialogue on the nature of womanhood – whether this nature is perceived as inherently good or bad. However, this discussion

of women draws our attention to the notion of discussion (or dialogue) itself and invites us to look for other debates that go on underneath the surface level of the plays. Both plays shake, if not dispose of, the notion of absolute submission of women. Even in *Johan Johan*, which as a farce has a greater potential for showing where Tyb's place really is, such submission does not happen. What the play suggests instead is that a woman is capable of trespassing the boundaries which are supposed not to be crossed by her and getting away with it. In contrast to Noah's wife, who is finally confined within the safe hell of the Ark, Tyb escapes with her lover while her stupefied husband has no means to stop her. Hester, in turn, manages to get control while keeping appearances of wifely submission, a disturbing possibility for many a husband. Interestingly, the plays themselves, like the women they depict, extend their meaning beyond safe territories and acceptable limits. On the political plane, *Johan Johan* speaks harshly of Henry's infatuation with Anne Boleyn, which, like the ending of the play, will only bring chaos and turmoil, even if the King manages to get away with his actions. *Godly Queene Hester* quite perversely suggests that Catherine might have been a better ruler than the king himself, a supposition that could have cost the playwright his head.

Like the heroines they depict, the plays manage to escape absolute submission to a politically correct point of view. Although the interludes possess no real power to shape the policy of the ruler, they do at least try to challenge its authoritative and absolutist rightness. This effect can only be achieved if we allow the concept of dialogue to inform our interpretation of the plays in one more sense, if we try to reconstruct the dialogue that might have been going on between the speaker and the listener, the playwright and the spectator. In this dialogue the meanings are not overtly stated but hinted at and alluded to. As such they may be easily lost, especially on reading the texts without the helpful intermediary role of an actor. When they are lost, we are left with just a fabliau-like farce and an exemplum for virtuous women. It is up to us, the readers, to decide

whether it is worth trying to participate in the dialogue or to stay away from it. I hope that the interpretation of the plays proposed here, speculative at times and dialogic in itself, has proved that the former approach is a worthwhile task.

Conclusion

Early Tudor interludes, whether religious or secular, are surprisingly absorbent dramatic forms, playfully blurring distinctions between generic categories. For too long they have been seen as an 'epilogue' to the old medieval tradition or a 'prologue' to the emerging renaissance theatre, their value being perceived mainly as a drift towards a new, humanist perception of the world. In fact, a huge portion of their appeal lies in their openness, manifesting itself in both structural, thematic and theatrical terms.

This book celebrates this openness, suggesting that it may be better understood and explained through applying Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and dialogism. Carnival allows us to perceive the supposedly incompatible elements of high and low, religious and secular, serious and comic, old and new as oppositions that have been purposefully adopted to generate meaning(s). Dialogism helps to trace how dramatic texts and theatrical experiences influenced and were in turn influenced by other literary and non-literary phenomena. The main tenet of this book is that transposing the paradigms of carnival onto the sphere of literary analysis of the interludes allows us to perceive the processes of semiosis in these texts as much more dynamic than initially expected. Although most of the texts do remain moralistic, didactic, or instructive, rather than subversive, such an approach enables us to trace voices suppressed from the official ideology and to investigate how these voices contribute to generating meaning. Additionally, late medieval and early Tudor drama is seen as deeply grounded in its social and historical context and engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the ideologies expressed at that time, not only commenting upon them but also being commented upon.

Similarly to early Tudor drama, Bakhtin's theory of the carnival all too often has been considered as either excessively optimistic (when too much emphasis is placed on its liberating

power) or utterly pessimistic (when carnival is perceived as a specific social vent and thus used to suppress the dissenting voice of these texts). But if we accept the point that carnival allows different voices to coexist and participate in a playful dialogue, we may set to examine this dialogue without necessarily limiting ourselves to prove any pre-established assumptions. Any attempt to succinctly sum up the key concepts developed by Bakhtin and freely adopted for the purposes of this book is not an easy task. It seems to be even more difficult to provide the concepts with precise labels, as in fact they are so intertwined with one another that it is often hard to decide where exactly one category finishes and another starts. I would even hazard a guess that Bakhtin's global system of describing culture is carnivalesque in itself, i.e. it is open for adopting new phenomena and notions within its loosely defined structure, and at the same time always ready to be transposed onto other, unforeseen by the Russian scholar, cultural and literary theories. This openness might be, in fact, one of the reasons why the approach has as many supporters as adversaries.

One of the most notable features of the carnival for Bakhtin is its emphasis on **materiality** and **corporeality**, which are, generally speaking, set against spirituality and asceticism. Opposing the views that the body is only a disposable container to the soul, Bakhtin celebrates "the material bodily principle" (1984b: 19) as fundamental to grotesque realism, a category of perception and peculiar aesthetic concept characteristic of folk culture and lying at the root of all cultural phenomena associated with the carnival. In grotesque realism, Bakhtin states, materiality and corporeality are not simply acknowledged but glorified – "all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (Bakhtin 1984b :19) – the body and bodily functions not only exist, but exist in **excess**. Such an approach to the body is also characteristic of most of the plays discussed in the previous chapters or, to be more precise, of those parts of the texts that are dominated by the vices, deal with women

and their sexuality, or introduce the elements of folk or popular culture within their structure.

In the religious moral interludes, for instance, this carnivalesque excess of corporeality is staged as the protagonists' inflated confidence in their youthful bodies, physical strength and agility, the extravagance of their clothes, overindulgence in food and drink as well as sexual licentiousness. Redford's play seems to follow suit as Wit's progress on the path of knowledge is hindered first by a physical brawl with Giant Tediousness and then by the protagonist's immersion in courtly entertainments, staged as an exhausting procession of dances with alluring, never-tiring damsels, both episodes resulting in the protagonist's symbolical death. Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*, in turn, quite literally takes us to the realm of the kitchen in its comic subplot, where culinary references in descriptions of Joan's physical appearance, her presentation as the object of sexual desire, and the contest of her suitors in terms of mastery in cooking or baking make sense and are incorporated in the process of generating meaning.

Speaking of Heywood's interludes, we must conclude that although they vary as far as their structure is concerned and range from more or less serious debates to pure farce, they do share a carnivalesque approach to the sphere of the body. *A Play of Love* features a bawdy story of a love affair, told by the Vice and full of bodily and sexual allusions, such allusions being characteristic of all his texts. It is in *Johan Johan*, however, that the whole plot is built around the husband's inability to satisfy his wife's excessive erotic needs. Here the sexual intercourse of Tyb and a young priest, actually epitomised by their consummation of food, the feast metaphorically connected with love-making, constitutes a climactic moment of the whole interlude. *Godely Queene Hester*, proposing a vision of femininity strikingly different from the one in Heywood's farce, does not dispense with the notion of bodily excess either. Here, however, the playwright chooses to link excess not with the female protagonist but with the figure of Aman, whose usurpation of the

attributes of the vices from traditional moral plays seems to be deprived of their carnivalesque gaiety and, due to this lack, rather ominous.

This carnivalesque excess can also manifest itself less literally, namely, as the accumulation of apparently incompatible ideologies, concepts and ideas. In fact, when we view the discussed “plays” and “enterludes” as indebted to the carnivalistic system of folk culture, we become less surprised with the fact that they seem to appropriate so many elements from so divergent spheres of culture. Such a process of amalgamation, i.e. accumulating and placing “heterogeneous forms at the service of laughing folk culture”, is in fact inherent to the processes of carnivalization of literature (Lachmann 1988-1989: 140).

Formulating the genre characteristics of the Menippea, Bakhtin establishes such free and unlimited accumulation of diverse material as one of the four characteristic features of not only the Menippea but of all carnivalized literature. Like a grotesque image of a monster, which can combine vegetable, animal, and human elements, as well as the features of both the male and the female, within one bizarre organism, carnivalized literature is characterised by “**carnivalistic *mésalliances***”, i.e. mixing of everything with everything else. Bakhtin describes this category in the following way:

A free and familiar attitude spreads over everything: over all values, thoughts, phenomena, and things. All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. (Bakhtin 1984a: 123)

Defying our traditional classificatory systems, the image of a grotesque monster, with its startling accumulation of wings, hooves, scales, feathers, hands, legs, heads etc., can be seen as a metaphor for the dramatic texts discussed in the preceding chapters. The nature of the processes of semiosis relies on

grasping the meaning not of individual elements but of their accumulation. In the interludes, the borrowings, appropriations, and juxtapositions of values can be seen as incongruous and incompatible as long as we apply traditional categories of description. And so a different sort of logic is needed to grasp and explain them. Only after we have modified the system of both descriptive and logical categories to incorporate the notions of carnivalistic *mésalliances* and other carnival-related concepts can we fully appreciate the complexities and dynamism of the plays and interludes in question.

It seems, therefore, that even the 'most traditional' religious moral plays, whose structure is determined by the conventions of the genre to the greatest degree, accumulate ideas and concepts other than the ones pertaining solely to their religious meaning. Obviously, even the battle between the vices and virtues over the soul of the protagonist is carefully staged as such a carnivalistic *mésalliance* and informed by constant juxtapositions of virtuous and condemnable behaviour, proper and improper speech, the comic and the serious, etc. Yet, the moral plays go deeper and can be viewed as mental constructs that propose more than just one message. On top of their Christian meaning preoccupied with salvation, therefore, they lend themselves to a more socially-oriented interpretation: the battle is not only between the sacred and the profane, but also between the old and the young, the father and the son, the dominant and the repressed. In fact, the sacred and the profane are mixed to such an extent that the economic terms of buying and debt used in *Youth* to refer to Jesus's sacrifice for humankind cease to sound unusual even in the mouth of the virtue. Similarly, the shattered condition of the protagonist in *Mundus et Infans*, where he is shown as both physically and financially ruined, also appears natural enough when seen from the perspective of the carnival.

In the secular plays, such amalgamation of apparently random elements features even more importantly and exceeds our expectations. Redford's *Wit and Science*, as we have seen, is

a highly complex and internally dynamic dramatic structure, in which all startlingly unexpected elements are interwoven with one another to produce a coherent and convincing message. Medwall succeeds in creating two distinct levels of his interlude that are, in fact, inseparable and complement each other. Heywood seems to enjoy mixing the dramatic and theatrical conventions to draw extensively on the use of low comedy and carnivalesque inversion in all his plays. Finally, the author of *Goodly Queene Hester* does not hesitate to mix a biblical narrative with contemporary political issues, or to present his heroine as one capable of mastering the complexities of legal discourse and suitable to rule the country, not refraining at the same time from praising her more typically female attributes of youth, beauty, and fertility.

Interestingly, the carnivalesque materiality and excess are always brought to the plays by the vices, women, or comic characters, all of whom serve as carriers of meaning driven out from the official ideology, and usually at those moments of the plays that are meant to evoke laughter. In doing so, the texts rely on two other categories of the carnivalized literature propounded by Bakhtin: “**the eccentric**,” which permits “the latent sides of the human nature to reveal and express themselves” and publicly exposes all that is repressed and concealed, and “**the familiar contact**,” which describes the contact occurring at the horizontal level in the carnival and substituting the vertical hierarchy typical of the official culture, being also responsible for “free carnival gesticulation, and for the outspoken carnivalesque word” (Bakhtin 1984a: 123). This familiar contact is not only characteristic of the internal communication going on between the characters of the plays and their use of billingsgate, but also reveals itself in the actors’ boisterous attempts to blur the borders between fiction and reality, aimed at drawing the audience into the action that is performed on stage. Although Bakhtin himself did not concentrate specifically on the issues related to medieval drama and theatre, it might be claimed that in dramatic texts and theatrical performances typical of the

late medieval and early Tudor period, especially in those parts dominated by their lower characters, whether religious or secular ones, the process of carnivalization acquires a new dimension, as the plays externalize, so to say, the action to encompass everybody present, often addressing the spectators directly and drawing them into the carnivalesque game.

Furthermore, the comic scenes are construed according to another paradigm derived from the carnival – the pattern of **inversion** or **reversal** of the natural order of things resulting from the suspension of all norms and exchange of value positions (up/down, high/low, centre/periphery, master/servant, etc). As we have seen in the previous chapters, all plays rely on such inversions, or **profanations** (the fourth characteristic feature of carnivalized literature as defined by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*) to a greater or lesser extent. The vices attack the virtues on both a physical and verbal level; youth turn against their elders to enjoy illicit entertainments; women are put in positions of power over their husbands and rule their households, or even resort to violence and assault men physically. As a result of these reversals, the tenets of the dominant culture are temporarily suspended. The comic expression of the vices wins over the sermonizing tone of the virtues associated with the church; slapstick comedy and bawdy fabliau-like stories triumph over the lofty discourse of courtly love; the domestic power of women is elevated and questions the patriarchal order. In the space and time defined by theatrical performances, the stage seems to become a sign of the world operating according to carnivalesque principles, where all hierarchy is inverted and carnivalesque laughter encompasses the characters of the plays, actors, and spectators, liberating them from the oppression and limitations imposed in real life by official seriousness.

It is difficult not to notice the comic potential of these parts of the moral plays and interludes that rely on the juxtapositions of the high and the low, irrespective of whether these plays bear a religious or secular message. What seems to be less certain,

however, is whether the comic as construed in these texts can be really seen as the expression of **carnavalesque laughter**, whose main traits, according to Bakhtin, include: universalism, freedom, and victory over fear, and which, above all, carry “positive, regenerating, creative meaning” (Bakhtin 1984b: 71). Obviously, laughter construed in such terms could not be typical of everyday existence, but still managed to find its way to the life of medieval people:

This freedom of laughter was, of course, relative; its sphere was at times wider and at times narrower, but it was never entirely suspended. As we have seen, free laughter was related to feasts and was to a certain extent limited by the time allotted to feast days. It coincided with the permission for meat, fat, and sexual intercourse. This festive liberation of laughter and body was in sharp contrast with the stringencies of Lent which had preceded or were to follow. (Bakhtin 1984b: 89)

So perceived laughter triumphs over the terror by bringing everything that is fearsome into the sphere of the material, by transforming the terrifying into grotesque. Thanks to this, it is capable of overcoming the fear of God, forces of nature, earthly authorities, and also of dealing with guilt associated with all that was forbidden. For Bakhtin, laughter not only resists all power, hierarchy, and censorship but also makes it possible to envision the world without them. What becomes apparent is that for a writer, or a playwright, carnivalesque laughter can become a sort of instrument that may enable them not only to introduce the suppressed voices into the structure of a literary or dramatic text but also to promote a different vision of the world, one in which relativity and ambivalence prevail.

If we treat this liberating power of laughter literally, i.e. as a tool for freeing men from the constraints imposed on them by religious, political, or social authorities, and endeavour to examine whether the plays discussed have the potential for a subversive interpretation, we will most probably conclude they do not. This can be seen particularly vividly in the religious moral plays, where the didactic message, strengthened by the

associations of the virtues with the church, always dominates in the end and, in fact, there is not even a possibility for a different ending. The ephemeral freedom introduced by the vices is constrained by the very structure of the plays – the beginning and the conclusion invariably belong to the virtues. The elements of the comic and carnivalesque inversions are permitted into these plays, like the periods of feasting and carnival are allowed into the calendar of a liturgical year. Similarly, the speech of the marketplace in the mouths of the vices, aimed to profane the sacred word, does not undermine the validity of the discourse of the church, just like the parodies of liturgy inherent to the Feast of Fools never manage to challenge the official cult. In fact, the bodily element in both *Mundus et Infans* and *Youth* is too strongly connected with the sins of the flesh – with pride, avarice, gluttony, alcoholic intoxication, and debauchery – to be seriously considered an alternative way of life.

And yet, we should not all too quickly dismiss the (re)generative function of carnivalesque laughter resulting from its ability to reconcile and make sense of the most unusual oppositions. For Bakhtin, it is through bringing everything that is high and sublime to the most material sphere of the body that the regeneration is achieved. Carnavalesque degradations, profanations, and parodies work through knocking down the ‘serious’ semiotic codes and discourses into the sphere of the comic, yet the process is not aimed at destruction but at rebirth. Carnival, as a worldview and system derived from the folk culture of laughter, celebrates this never-ending life cycle; it laughs at the old and the dying only to rejoice at the succession of (re)births that follow their decay. I believe that this carnivalesque **rebirth**, **regeneration**, or **renewal** is a key function of the carnival lying at the root of the plays discussed in the previous chapters.

The concept of rebirth seems to be crucial in the context of the religious moral plays, in most of which the action is divided into three consecutive stages: (1) innocence/grace, (2) temptation and fall, (3) restitution to grace – the paradigm of the prodigal son’s narrative being an important variation of this

more universal Christian pattern. In both *Mundus et Infans* and *Youth*, but also in other moral plays, the moral fall of the protagonists, their spiritual death, so to say, is a necessary prerequisite for their return to God and salvation. Interestingly, in some plays the spiritual fall is linked with the near-death state of the protagonists (*Everyman*, *Castle of Perseverance*, *Mundus et Infans*) or being close to committing suicide (e.g. *Mundus et Infans*, *Mankind*), the moral decline becoming as if externalised in the corporeal aspects of their lives. What is more, *Youth*, which clearly lacks emphasis on the proximity of death, is often lambasted for not being convincing in its “sudden” conversion of the protagonist, staged here as breaking away from undesirable companions. It also appears that such a symbolic death, reminiscent of religious plays, is an important feature of Redford’s secular didactic interlude, in which Wit actually “dies” twice: first, he is defeated in combat by the giant, and the second time from physical exhaustion resulting from unsupervised and excessive participation in courtly entertainments. If in the religious plays the metaphor of spiritual death and consecutive rebirth of the protagonists can be easily linked with and derive its meaning from a powerful association with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a paradigm for individual salvation, the “death” in *Wit and Science* cannot claim any semiotic kinship of the same kind. And yet, Redford chooses to employ the very same device not once but twice, which seems to prove the appeal of the metaphor for the audience of his secular interlude.

At the core of this moral rebirth of both Manhood and Wit seems to lie the idea that neither of them returns to his life as exactly the same person. This fact may be additionally emphasized in the plays by, for instance, a change of costumes, but it seems that the concept of carnivalesque renewal itself is sufficient to grasp the nature of this psychological transformation. It shall be emphasized here that the return of Manhood to God or of Wit to education is never simply the return to the state preceding their fall – the state of innocence. Both protagonists

are 'reborn' as a result of the process of their moral and spiritual decline – they do come back to the original path but richer in experience and, what is more important, out of their own free will. Upon this transformation, they no longer follow the right-ful path just because they have been told to do so by somebody else, but consciously choose it as something they desire to do. Thanks to this, the principles preached by the paternal figures of the virtues in the beginning of the plays become somehow revitalized, and acquire a new life of their own in the redefined system of values chosen by the protagonists rather than enforced upon them. In the same way, the process of conversion, be it concerned with religious or educational issues, can be seen as more dynamic and universal.

In the moral plays the motif of death and rebirth seems to be depicted quite literally, but the regenerative powers of laughter and carnival play an important role for the analysis of other plays as well. First of all, all the interludes, apart from Heywood's *Johan Johan*, employ the three-fold pattern established in the religious moral plays, and adopt it into a secularly oriented paradigm of order – disorder – restoration of order. Although the interest of these plays is shifted to the issues of love and the domestic or political sphere, the carnivalesque degradations and the comic elements seem to have here the same purpose of revitalising more traditional concepts and ideas.

As I have discussed this regenerative function of carnivalesque appropriations of the discourse and conventions of courtly love in much more detail in Chapter Three, here let us only reiterate the most important points. First, in all three plays discussed in that chapter, the less orthodox point of view is introduced by female characters, i.e. a voice normally suppressed. Second, the treatment of conventions of *amour courtois* by particular playwrights diverges from the traditionally perceived courtly tradition and is used to suit the ends of individual interludes in a creative and unorthodox fashion. Third, Medwall, Heywood, and Redford manage to revitalize tried and tested theatrical forms and conventions and propose how they

can be employed to convey humanist and/or political messages. All these elements, when combined together, create the impression of dynamism and energy and account for the possibility to read the plays as polyvalent constructs in terms of the ideologies expressed in them as well as hybrid dramatic works characterised by the syncretism of dramatic and theatrical forms.

The concepts associated with the carnival play an equally important role in the plays discussed in Chapter Four. In *Johan Johan*, the reversal of the natural order of things resulting from the carnivalesque empowerment of Tyb does not culminate in the restoration of order, which is probably the most disturbing and original feature of Heywood's text. And yet, extra-textual allusions, introduced into the analysis in accordance with Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, make it possible to revitalize the process of semiosis in this play with political implications that are far from supporting the official ideology of the Tudor court. *Godly Queene Hester*, evidently influenced by profeminine writings on the nature of womanhood, offers a vision of a female ruler that is positive and convincing, thus shifting the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not for a woman. It is in this interlude and in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucre*s that the empowerment of women is presented in most affirmative terms as something that may have positive consequences not only for the fictional characters but for the spectators as well.

Bakhtin's theory is not without its weaknesses. It seems, for instance, over-optimistic in its belief in the liberating power of festive laughter, and consequently slightly utopian. Furthermore, it might be criticized for not being consistent enough in terms of the methodology adopted, for mixing concepts and notions derived from different spheres – anthropology, culture, literature, to mention just a few. Like the carnival Bakhtin describes, his approach is characterized by an excessive amalgamation of ideas, juxtapositions, and shifts typical of carnivalistic misalliances. However, I hope it may be finally concluded that the application of the categories of carnival and carnivalization has broadened the interpretation of the plays by helping

us examine and account for the constant proximity of the serious and the comic, the sacred and the profane, the word of the church or other authoritative discourses, and the speech of the marketplace. To admit that these juxtapositions make sense and actively participate in the process of semiosis, that there is more to them than the function of an artificially imposed sugar-coating that makes the bitterness of the serious and didactic content of the plays more digestible to the audience, seems to be a step towards revitalizing and (re)generating their meaning.

Even if we cannot see the plays as effectively shifting the boundaries of oppression imposed by the dominant culture and hierarchically organized society in real life, we can liberate ourselves from the all-too-often-expressed conviction that early Tudor drama is just a curtain-raiser to the body of 'important' literature, and that it is probably not exactly the most exciting task to examine those plays for their own value. Instead, we can acknowledge their carnivalesque energy as something that organizes the way in which they are structured; we can trace meaningful relationships between apparently incompatible ideologies and discourses; we can, finally, grasp the unexpected complexity of the plays' construction. In consequence, the boundaries of the dominant literary canon can be shifted and forced to accommodate the voices of those texts that are somewhat 'eccentric' in Bakhtin's sense of the word, voices that are often forgotten and excluded from many narratives dealing with the history of literature.

Finally, at the close of this discussion a few possibilities for further research might be proposed. It could be interesting, for instance, to examine plays participating in the religious controversy of the sixteenth century from the proposed perspective. Do Protestant interludes employ similar carnivalesque techniques to generate meaning? Are the vices in these plays constructed in a comparable fashion so as to present their theatrical allure to the spectators? Or, to the contrary, are they possibly deprived of these entertaining functions and shown in more gloomy and vicious terms to emphasize the necessity of eradicating not only

the remnants of Catholic ideology but also the inadequacies of the theatrical conventions that permeated the religious plays associated with this ideology? Another, equally tempting, possibility would be to analyze the interludes of the later part of the sixteenth century that deal with issues pertaining to the domestic sphere. Are the households featured in these plays still shown in the distorting mirror affected by the carnivalesque perception of the world? Are the female characters still depicted predominantly in misogynistic terms as shrews threatening the natural order of things, or do we encounter more heroines whose construction seems to be influenced by the profeminine defences of women? Are the female characters still used to promote less orthodox values and views in a fashion reminiscent of *Lucres*, *Lady Science*, *Loved-not-Loving*, or *Hester*? Last but not least, it might be fascinating to trace what aspects of popular and folk culture have been appropriated for the purposes of courtly entertainments at the court of Elisabeth I and whether these elements could be successfully utilized to build the identity of the Queen who herself escaped the controls of a patriarchal culture.

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