Villains and Villainy Remote Seminar Abstracts

Allison Kellar, "Marketing Marital Bliss and Comedic Villains"

  A theatrical program is often recycled, discarded, or at best, treated as a keepsake. Yet programs provide access to the director's focus and how that focus shapes what the audience members are told about the characters before the play begins. The programs for productions at the Royal Shakespeare Company theatre and Shakespeare's Globe document how directors and production teams have navigated and sometimes circumvented *The Taming of the Shrew's* troubling narrative of a husband who succeeds in taming his wife. At times, productions seek to rescue the play and make it about two strong-willed characters who fall in love with each other while downplaying the incredibly inhumane lengths that Petruchio goes to in order to tame instead of woo his wife. Other times, productions' programs provide audience members with in-depth contextual information about the play in order to prime them for what they will see on stage, as if seeing the images of the scold's bridle and the cucking stool in the program will ameliorate or diminish how Petruchio deprives his wife of food and sleep until she submits to him. Other productions work, instead, to make their audiences uncomfortable with the narrative. Directors place the play in different time periods, produce it in the Elizabethan era, or in an alternate world altogether to appeal to twentieth and twenty-first century audiences. The programs, over the years, also reveal these choices. My essay provides a history of programs and reviews to argue that while our critical theories and ideas about *The Taming of the Shrew* have changed, some of the programs indicate that productions have not left taming shrewish behavior behind and that twentieth and twenty-first century audiences are still all too familiar with the narrative of making a sport of taming one's wife.

Michael Benitez, "Shakespeare's Self-Archiving Villains"

  My paper analyzes how soliloquies by various Shakespearean villains, such as Richard III and Macbeth in their eponymous plays along with Edmund in *King Lear*, co-opt the archive's preservationist inclinations and use temporally inflected rhetoric to ensure an afterlife. For instance, Macbeth's longs for a meaningful "Tomorrow" that forestalls death to the "hereafter" and that dismisses the present as a "tale … Signifying nothing" (5.5.20-31). Thus, he imagines an unpredictable future, one that, diegetically speaking, ignores the witches' equivocal prophecy of his death but also one that is foreclosed by the historical archives from which his character emerges. Similarly, Richard III's very first word, "Now" (1.1.1), ruminates on the need to change political history as it is being made, as well as the need to both adhere to and rewrite the villain role that history has ascribed to him: Richard initially boasts, "I am determinèd to prove a villain" (1.1.30), yet just before the fateful Battle of Bosworth he laments that "every tale condemns me for a villain" (5.2.207). Trading on the same reformist immediacy of Richard's "Now," Edmund's rally cry, "Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" (1.2.23), expresses a desire for a future in which legitimacy is not divinely sanctioned and bastardry, particularly one rooted in being born in the temporal "Lag of a brother" (1.2.6), is not prescriptive.

  These speeches have, despite their socially disruptive charge, curiously become sociable, well-archived set-pieces: they are continually showcased and reactivated in performance, production reviews, video recordings, advertisements, and academic writing and lectures. In theatrical terms, these soliloquizing characters rehearse ostensibly for an audience of one, yet they perform for everyone in an archive-ready manner. Their soliloquies, therefore, are a form of self-archiving: an act of self-preservation and self-characterization, a private contemplation that

is nonetheless public and remembered. Keeping these tensions in mind, I suggest that these speeches unleash a magnetic queer energy, carving out memorable synchronic units that are tailor-made for future performance and that challenge the diachronic cohesion of their respective plays. This proleptic self-archiving serves as an insidious, but not necessarily malevolent, approach of preemptively building one's own legacy well into the future. And if being momentous guarantees a place in the archive, then Shakespeare's villains can victoriously claim this archival status as their legacy. Given the enduring pull of these villainous soliloquies, my paper questions if Shakespearean villainy surreptitiously prioritizes ensuring an archival future over achieving success in the play's diegetic present.

Drew Daniel, "Slave, Soulless Villain, Dog! Villainy and Slavery in *Antony and Cleopatra*"
      Who counts as a villain in "Antony and Cleopatra", and how does the determination of villainy shift between moments of self-description and scenes of ascription and invective? My paper will focus on two moments in the play: first, Enobarbus' act of self-description ("I am alone the villain of the earth" (4.6.31)); secondly, Cleopatra's designation of Seleucus as "slave, soulless villain, dog!" (5.2.158) What does Enobarbus' self-sentencing tell us about the telluric grounding of villainy in the "foul" substance of the earth as an elemental base from which the base body of the villain is born and towards which his corpse is destined? How substantive are the relationships of adjacency- if not synonymy-- within Cleopatra's triple epithet? What might Cleopatra's triple overlay of slavery, animality and villainy reveal about the relationship between political economy and moral framing at work within early modern drama as a classed space? This paper will work to bring these two moments in the rhetorical construction of "baseness" together in order to sketch out a poetics of villainy that might be roughly described as "materialist." I want to use the opportunity for thinking afforded by this paper to wonder if Cleopatra and Enobarbus' distinct usages might both be regarded as incomplete moments in the dramatic exposition of political economy, moments that activate, however tentatively, the socio-economic status marker of "villeinage" as the incompletely buried subground of moral villainy. As such, they both indicate villainy as a status of socio-economic lowness to the ground that border upon the absolute zero of slavery as social death, a lowness that becomes moralized as the absence of a corresponding ethico-moral "nobility" that is also a status marking term. So, this paper hopes to examine the proximity of slavery to villainy, in a manner perhaps informed by Orlando Patterson's classic work *Slavery and Social Death*, a much debated but highly influential classic of slavery studies.

Jennifer Hardy, "determined to prove a villain": Villainy and Untimely Birth in *Richard III*'
      This paper examines the significance of untimely birth in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and suggests that issues of pace and temporality are crucial to understanding the play's engagement with the concept of villainy. Although the play's opening soliloquy has long been read by critics as central to the play's formulation of Richard's character, the significance of time in shaping Richard's 'rudely stamped' body, and thus his determination to 'prove a villain', has remained underexplored. Infamously characterising himself as 'deformed, unfinished, sent before my time', unable to abide the 'weak piping time of peace', Richard's self-identification as a villain is intrinsically linked with his untimely origins and his halting experience of time. Drawing upon early modern medical discourse, particularly the ambiguity surrounding the length of gestation, this paper argues that *Richard III* exploits the temporal confusion surrounding Richard's birth to question the supposedly inherent nature of Richard's villainy. Through a consideration of his opening soliloquy in *Richard III,* and references to his untimely origins in *Henry VI Part III,* this paper suggests that Richard's

villainous plot to seize the throne functions as means of reconstituting a sense of timeliness over his own narrative. Building upon work by Marjorie Garber, who argues that Richard's usurpation of the crown functions as a violent rebirth, I suggest that Richard's rewriting of his "birth" narrative works to reassert temporal and narrative power over the plot. Additionally, I consider Richard's indifference to his own dynastic legacy – a fruitlessness which again highlights his fragmented and distorted connection to "natural" time – and the implications of Shakespeare's exclusion of Richard's real-life children from the play. Overall, this paper argues that the inconsistent, overlapping and ambiguous temporalities within *Richard III* are crucial to exploring the issue of Richard's infamous character, as the consequences of Richard's untimely birth consistently inform the play's wider treatment of identity, succession, and family bonds.

Edward Rocklin, "The unyok'd humor of your idleness"

It is not usual to speak of Falstaff as a villain, and in this essay I will do so in a qualified manner. I will suggest that in creating Falstaff, Shakespeare -- who had contributed to the creation of the type of villain I have anatomized at length in *The Disabler*: *Formation and Transformation of a Stage Figure in Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (1985) -- did so in part, by modifying the three constitutive elements (honesty, irony, and levity) of the subset of the stage villains who are often defined (Barabas by the Prologue to *Jew of Malta*) or self-defined (Richard of Gloucester in his famous soliloquy in *3 Henry VI*, III.ii.191-195 [*Riverside Shakespeare*]*)* as Machiavels. (The term *disabler* comes from Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie,* and is his translation or "Englishing" of *meiosis.*)

This is a modification suggested when, in the soliloquy that ends this second scene of *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal speaks of "the unyok'd humor your idleness" (I.ii.196) in describing the East Cheap cohort he will enjoy playing with yet eventually discard for his own political purposes. For the first three acts of the play, Falstaff does indeed seem to be an unyoked version of the disabler, for while he does display the honesty, irony, and levity of such previous villains as Lorenzo, Barabas and Richard of Gloucester, he does not display the drive to rule nor the murderous methods used to achieve that objective employed by such figures.

But when Falstaff is given command of his troop of soldiers *and* begins the series of soliloquies by which he engages the audience in the last two acts (in IV.ii, V.i, V.iii, V.iv), he becomes a figure much closer to the disabler, especially in how he functions as one who is, in the illuminating words of Jonathan Bate, "at once the great deceiver and the great truth-teller" (Introduction to *1 Henry IV* in the *RSC Shakespeare* [2007, 2009]: xi). This resemblance culminates in the moment when, after stabbing the corpse of Hotspur and bearing him on his back, he encounters Prince Hal and Prince John, proclaims "I am not a double man," and proceeds to secure Prince Hal's support in claiming credit for killing the rebel leader who himself had been proclaimed "the king of honor" (IV.i.10) – thereby gaining his greatest honor by performing his most dishonorable act. This is a claim that, for example, wins him credit from the Lord Chief Justice in the opening scene of *2 Henry IV* (I.ii.147-151).

Joel Slotkin, "Broken Rib of Mankind": Women and Villainy in *Macbeth* and *The Changeling*

My previous work has explored the aesthetic appeal of villainy in early modern English literature, drama, and religious writings such as ballads and sermons. Currently, I am developing material for an article that deals with the intersection of villainy and gender. In recent SAA papers, I have discussed misogynist constructions of perverse female desire in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Changeling*. For this paper, I would like to discuss the connection between villainy and

two female characters: Lady Macbeth and *The Changeling*'s Beatrice-Joanna. I am interested in both their own potential classification as villains and the ways in which this villainy is intertwined with the primary male villains of their respective plays: Macbeth and De Flores. What is the significance of the different ways early modern playwrights (or modern critics) classify male and female wickedness? How does gender play into whether a character who commits evil actions is considered a villain? What kinds of agency do female villains or quasi-villains have in relation to male characters?

Although there is a long antifeminist tradition of seeing women as evil tempters, the Vice archetype seems to be distinctively masculine despite having a similar tempting function. Accordingly, when Lady Macbeth embraces villainy, she feels she must abandon her femininity, even though her actual plan — convince her husband to commit a mortal sin in order to advance himself — resembles antifeminist interpretations of Eve's behavior in Genesis. Beatrice-Joanna, on the other hand, consistently sees herself in terms of feminine archetypes, first the innocent damsel in distress (despite being guilty of machinations worthy of a Vice character), and finally in her very last moments seeing herself as a corrupted woman in line with misogynist characterizations of Eve.

Margo Kolenda-Mason, "Murderous Labor in *Arden of Faversham*"

In 1551, Alyce Ardern killed her husband Thomas with the assistance of a team of accomplices, including two hired murderers. Three decades later, an unknown playwright or playwrights, one of whom may have bene Shakespeare, dramatized the events of the murder. This dramatization, *Arden of Faversham,* focuses primarily on the process of murder, or, as I argue, the work of murder.

This paper contends that *Arden* explores the uncomfortable and unsettling possibility that the villainous activity of assassination functions as simply another form of work in the play. Rather than characterize murder as an activity that stems from idleness, or the lack of work, *Arden* and its assassins imagine their attempts to kill Thomas Arden as itself a kind of work. I trace how Black Will and Shakebag turn to the various elements of labor—the guild structure, the employer/employee relationship, monetary compensation, toil and effort —in order to justify their deadly schemes as labor. At the same time, though, the moral and ethical features of murder insist that it is *not* just another labor and resist the play's attempts to naturalize assassination as work. *Arden* simultaneously normalizes and estranges the notion of murder as labor, putting pressure on what makes certain activity qualify (or disqualify) as labor in the first place.

I argue that, among an ensemble of murderous villains, Black Will and Shakebag are set apart from the other co-conspirators in Arden's murder by their financial and occupational motivations. Black Will and Shakebag are also set apart in their ineptitude: they fail to kill Arden an astounding five times before finally achieving their goal. Building upon this insight, I consider the ways in which the conflation of social status and ethics that we find in terms like *villain* helps us to understand the ways in which ethical concerns obscure the social prejudices behind *Arden's* treatment of the assassins. The laborious treatment of murder, then, combines with *Arden of Faversham's* larger obsession with social status and social mobility to demonstrate the ways in which labor, and those who engage in it, could be dangerous, even deadly, to the social order.

Steve Urkowitz, "Shakespeare Revises Villains from the Outside In: Bad Guys, Conscience, and Audience Response to Villainy in the *2 & 3 Henry VI* Revisions."

From the lower class Jack Cade and the two murderers of Duke Humphrey, to the middle class gentleman-witness at the death of the Duke of Suffolk to the royal Richard of Gloucester throughout his role, textual variants radically reshape wicked dramatic characters and both their own and the audience's reactions to their actions. The alternative versions show consistent, purposeful and finely-grained patterns of authorial revision. These textual variants have been ignored or dismissed by the editorial community, but they offer insight into how Shakespeare controls our experience of his narrative. Until we recognize the clearly marked details of scripted stage action in these passages, we face the danger of skipping over evidence of Shakespeare's finest work now effectively lost in dust-clouds of bibliographic speculation about memorial reconstructions, statistically abstruce but narratively unlikely collaborative authorship, or draconian cutting to reduce playing time.

Jess McCall, "Maybe the Real Friends Were the Villains We Made Along the Way"
What makes a villain worthy of critical thought? Without question, soliloquies help—Iago, Richard III, The Joker, these are villains with iconic lines whose monologuing set the standard for a genre. But there must also be an element of verisimilitude, a perspective which reveals a truth equally as uncomfortable as the thought of denying it. In the X-Men comics it is Magneto's refusal to trust a world that commits genocide, and in *Paradise Lost* Satan's insistence that freedom cannot be found in kneeling certainly tempted this reader. And, perhaps most famously, there is Shylock's ringing exhortation, "if you prick us, do we not bleed?" For a villain to be fascinating—a character we love to hate whose world view demands critical consideration—they must have opportunity, complexity, and presentation[1]. Furthermore, does their defeat reassert social order and offer comforting containment or leave a hint of unwanted truth lingering in the air?

For our seminar, I will limit my exploration of these questions to *Titus'* fairly unsympathetic villain Tamora, who's decision to allow Lavinia's rape destroys any possibility of pathos and the equally unsympathetic Cersei from the television adaption of *Game of Thrones*. There are significant similarities between Tamora's scheming, sexuality, and use of rape as a tool for revenge with Cersei's character, and my hope is to consider where this pattern may lead. Why are women who allow rape *more* reprehensible then the men who rape? And how is the trope of rape used by male writers to undercut a female villain's complexity—marking her a tool and a victim of the patriarchy—as if that betrayal more than mass murder and torture is unforgiveable? I believe these characters offer a starting point for considering evil women from the standpoint of Nietzschean morality and theorizing a radical agency and my hope is to begin an exploration into what it would take for a woman, soliloquizing on death and destruction, to leave the audience murmuring, "well, she does have a point."

Bryan Nakawaki, "Usury on the Renaissance Stage: Robert Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* and *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London"*
Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1581) and its sequel, *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (1588), give us a unique glimpse at the evolution of vice characters in Renaissance Drama. In the former, Wilson makes no attempt to hide the influence of the medieval morality play genre, offering a comparatively straightforward story in which four allegorical vices (the personifications of Usury, Fraud, Simony, and Dissimulation) successfully

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[1] It is my fervent hope I am not the only seminar participant who is strategizing *Megamind* references.

corrupt the play's titular protagonists. When the same four vices return in Wilson's 1588 sequel, they are presented in considerably more complex fashion. Perhaps no one illustrates this better than the Jewish character Usury, who transforms from the lead villain of *Three Ladies* to, arguably, a patriotic and sympathetic figure in *Three Lords*.

My goal for this paper is to delve into the possible reasons for such a stark shift in Usury's presentation from one play to the next. Part of the answer undoubtedly lies in the timing of *Three Lords'* authorship. Late 1588 was a highly festive period in England after the failure of the Spanish Armada in its plan to invade London during the summer months; Wilson likely recognized that writing and performing a sequel as pessimistic as his original *Three Ladies* during this time of celebration would not be wise. Some modification of tone and characters would be necessary. Yet this alone is not satisfying. Ultimately, I hope to use this paper as a means to interrogate other plausible reasons for Usury's dramatic evolution.

Doug Eskew, "Edmund and the Limits of Villainy"

In his recent *Poor Tom: Living King Lear*, Simon Palfrey attempts to rescue the character Edgar from centuries of critical libel. Whereas Edgar had once received billing on the quarto's title page, he is nowadays mostly ignored or thought of as a moralizing prude. By contrast, the villainous brother Edmund, we are told, has the reputation of being "charismatic" and "handsome"; evil and sexy. At one point, Palfrey goes so far as to imagine Edgar prefiguring the victims of the Holocaust and Edmund standing for the perpetrators. Whereas Edgar is a warning, Edmund is the energizing force of catastrophe. Edmund, Palfrey says, is "happy to be handsome and allowing *anything*"--an *anything* that includes genocide.

Edmund is an arch-villain who, over the course of *King Lear*, uses his sexual and homicidal prowess to make his way to the top. I do not, however, imagine him as an accessory to genocide. Indeed, I do not imagine his ethic as "allowing anything." In my essay, I will consider what it means that Edmund's actions are bound in by a desire for mutual recognition; far from a free-for-all, Edmund's desire is to be recognized on a personal, institutional, a social level. He desires an identity beyond negation. I wish also to account for the happy ending Edmund experiences at play's end: the transcendent, polyamorous marriage of he, Regan and Goneril--"all three... marry in an instant." While critics tend to see the marriage as ridiculous or befitting evil characters, I will suggest Edmund's marriage provides a response to the violent deaths of the legitimate. Rather than allowing anything, Edmund's desire is bound-in by the antinomies of genre. Tragic villain becomes comedic hero.

Lauren Cantos, "'Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny': Tamora and unsuitable motherhood in *Titus Andronicus*"

This paper will focus on Tamora's motherhood in *Titus Andronicus*. I argue that her role exercises fears about malevolent mothers and their ability to shape their children in their likeness. Tamora's 'villainy' is not only depicted through her crimes but in particular through her maternal role. This is underscored as she is the only mother we meet throughout the course of *Titus*. Scholarship has shown that the play's tomb and pit represent alternative 'wombs', but 'wombs' ultimatley associated with death and decay. These other 'wombs' can be read as a pejorative displacement of the reproductive body, perhaps with Tamora's body. But Tamora's influence is mediated in other ways too, particularly through her children absorbing her influence and qualities through her breast milk. This is based on the early modern belief that the nursing

woman passed on traits to children through breast milk. Because of this contemporary midwifery guides and domestic manuals generally advised mothers to breastfeed their own children. However, this expectation posed a conundrum if the mother was not considered traditionally nurturing or in Tamora's case, acts as the epitome of female 'wickedness'. I would suggest Tamora's problematic influence has analogues with worries about the bonds created through breastfeeding.

I will consider the origin of Tamora's villainy and the extent to which it is gendered and maternal in nature. Is Tamora's villainy because of her transgressive female dominance or because she is an unsuitable mother? More specifically, my paper will ask if her maternal role poses more of a unique threat precisely because of her ability to influence the men around her, and especially her sons.