

WILLIAM W.E. SLIGHTS

My Heart upon my Sleeve: Early Modern Interiority, Anatomy and Villainy

THE YEAR BEFORE ELIZABETH I acceded to the throne of England, Lord Stourton employed five men to kidnap William Hartgill and his son John, beat them senseless, and slit their throats over a matter of property. William Farre, the man who actually did the throat cutting, reportedly recoiled from the deed immediately, saying,

Ah my Lorde! This is a pytious sight: hadde I thought that I now thincke, before the thing was doon, your hole land could not have woon me to consent to soch an acte," to which Stourton replied, "What, fainte harted knave! Ys yt anny more then the rydding of two knaves that lyving were troublesome both to Goddes lawe and man's?"¹

The accusations of faint heartedness and knavery are worth pausing over. The charge of knavery, entailing social as well as moral condescension, is complicated by being applied to both perpetrator and victim of the atrocities and is rendered thoroughly ironic in the mouth of the lord who authorized them. The charge of cowardice and irresolution, figured as a flaw located conventionally in the innermost recesses of Farre's being, in his heart, signals the need for further moral and legal probing of all involved in the murder as being themselves deeply "troublesome both to Goddes lawe and man's." In the event, both Stourton and his servants were convicted and hanged within months of the incident. The case presents an array of concepts that can be helpful in sorting out the ways that crime writers and those concerned with representing villainy on stage explored the interior make-up, especially the hearts, of those who transgress and, occasionally, rediscover "Goddes lawe."

¹ As reported from *The Wilshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine of 1864* by Martin Wiggins in *Journeyman in Murder: The Assassin in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 12.

Chief among those writing about the place of divine law in the heart of man in early modern England were divines and anatomists. In what follows, I will draw on their insights in order to reconstruct the cultural context in which stage villains were endowed with a degree of psychological complexity that rivals that of the heroes they are pitted against.

I will argue that playwrights of the period used the language of anatomical and spiritual interiority—specifically the language of the heart, figured as the seat of human identity, vulnerability, and corruption—to define a world that is anathema to their villains. Most stage villains insist that they have a vacuum where others have a conscience, a deep-seated sense of the divine, tender fellow-feelings, and a heart. They refuse to acknowledge their own interiority in order to exploit others'. Vicious characters of Iago's sort self-consciously set out to subvert a conception of interiority based on anatomical theories and spiritual beliefs that were being actively promulgated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even the most engaging of their fraternity fail in this, however, because the narratives and images of hidden interior lives that they seek to repudiate are precisely the ones they require to carry out their secret plots. They trade in the vulnerabilities of faith and the body.

An identifiable shift in conceptions of the villain's self took place between the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In pre-modern times, before the body, with its stipulated designation of outside and inside, came to stand for the subject, villains were defined by positionality rather than personality. As a result, they tended to be doubles of the heroes in medieval romances. In the case of *Sir Gowther*, for example, the titular hero himself moves seamlessly from demon to saint with no alteration of his personal style. Literally the spawn of the devil, the infant Gowther bites off the nipples of his mother and kills five wet nurses. Later, he incinerates a nunnery and all its inhabitants. His virulent misogyny continues until he confesses to the Pope and is assigned a rigorous penance that involves taking no food that hasn't been brought to him by a dog. In the saintly latter period of his life, he exercises exactly the same forms of violence he had before, but now his victims are the enemies of Christianity.² Like *Sir Gowther*, medieval villains generally lack the reflexive wit and psychological depth to disguise themselves in the way that an Archimago or an Iago does. As Elizabeth Hanson says in *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, moving into the sixteenth century takes us beyond the dominant medieval corporate sense of self into

² *Sir Gowther* in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1973) 148–68. I am indebted to my colleague Yin Liu for directing me to *Sir Gowther*.

a realm of experiential science and legally protected selves.³ These redefinitions of self are at the core of our fascination with villains in early modern plays.

Arguably the most mesmerizing stage villain of all is Iago. He sneers at what a dull, honest, transparent ass Othello is, and he mocks the very thought of showing anybody his *own* inner self.

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In complement extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am. (*Othello* 1.1.61–65)⁴

When he says “native act,” he means what is proper specifically to himself. The “figure of my heart” is an emblematic representation of himself as he really is. While he lives, the world will never see his heart nor learn its secret intentions. During his moments of conspiracy and soliloquy we learn that Iago has fallen into what Francis Bacon calls the habit of dissimulation and, worse, simulation. In Bacon’s words, the dissimulator “let[s] fall Signs, and Arguments, that he is not, that he is,” and the simulator “pretends to be, that he is not.”⁵ Later, when Othello commands, “By heaven, I’ll know thy thoughts,” Iago turns him aside by distinguishing between shared knowledge and secret thoughts: “You cannot” know my thoughts, he answers, “if my heart were in your hand, / Nor shall not, whilst ‘tis in my custody” (3.3.161–63).⁶ Othello is groping in the dark when he looks to Iago for “close dilations, working from the heart” (3.3.123), not realizing that vil-

³ Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 11.

⁴ I quote from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

⁵ Francis Bacon, “Of Simulation and Dissimulation,” *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (1625), in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 20–23. Stephen Greenblatt’s analysis of Iago’s behaviour in terms of empathy with and displacement of the hero resembles Bacon’s description of simulating a virtue. See *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 222–57.

⁶ An engraving of the anatomy theatre at the Leiden University in 1609 depicts the anatomist Peter Pauw holding what may be the heart of his subject-cadaver in his left hand. One symbolic implication of such a possibility is that the anatomist has penetrated to the profoundest knowledge of his subject. Iago finds such a possibility anathema. He rejects the goals of natural philosophy (i.e., formulating and sharing knowledge) in order to pursue a rhetoric of innuendo and indeterminacy, what Madeleine Doran calls “Iago’s If.” See Doran’s essay, “Iago’s ‘if’: An Essay on the Syntax of *Othello*,” in *The Drama of the Renaissance: Essays for Leicester Bradner* (Providence: Brown UP, 1970) 53–78.

lains deny access to their interior selves for fear of becoming as susceptible to manipulation, humiliation, and punishment as their victims are. Iago concludes the speech from which I've drawn my title, "I am not what I am" (1.1.65), chillingly negating God's act of self-naming in Exodus 3:14, "I am that I am." This was also the mantra of the straight-forward comic book hero, Popeye the Sailor Man, who said it with a Brooklyn accent: "I yam whad I yam." But there appears to be no stable, unified self in Shakespeare's villain, no "I yam," only layers of mask and pretence and surfaces. Who is he, and what does he desire? There is evidence in the play, however contradictory, that Iago wants Othello's wife, Roderigo's money, Cassio's position, the Duke's respect, and Emilia's obedience. But these motives don't quite make the sum of Shakespeare's character. With Iago, we experience something like the disillusionment of the Renaissance anatomists attempting to cut to the truth under the skin of their subjects. Devon Hodges and Jonathan Sawday have argued that anatomists such as Modino, Fabricius, Columbo, Vesalius and John Bannister looked into the body for evidence of divine mystery at the most profound level of the soul but found instead only progressive layers of surface.⁷ They found no prime mover inside each of us, unless it be the heart.

The issue, as always in the study of staged interiority, is whether it is possible to draw anything authentic from within a dramatic character, especially one as defensively self-aware as Iago. My own view, based on studying a variety of villains in close conjunction with the anatomy textbooks that helped to shape early modern thinking about the structures and uses of the body's interior parts, is that the complex moralization of both drama and dissection allows far more information to be communicated than can be contained by even the most secretive villains. Truths—if not *the* truth—about an Iago or a Richard III bleed around the edges of the masks they create for popular consumption. Richard's vows to protect others—his brother, his wife, his cousins, his king—repeatedly reveal his urge to murder them. The impulse underlying everything that "honest" Iago does is to *dishonour* everyone around him. The special relationship that dramatists, like anatomists, develop with their audiences in the pursuit of disguised truth is deepened rather than obscured by their representations of those who seek to destroy the truth.

⁷ Devon L. Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1985) 15, and Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 11.

The deep desire to expose those who only pretend to profess the truth is equally evident in the anatomy handbooks of the period. As Nancy Siraisi argues in her reading of the teleological common ground shared by the two most famous anatomists of the pre-modern and early modern period, Galen and Andreas Vesalius, this branch of natural philosophy was both negatively and positively moralized. On the negative side she lists the depiction of the skeleton as symbol of universal decay and dissection as the final act of exposure and punishment of criminals. To these I would add the implied critique of those wealthy and influential spectators attending anatomical dissections for idle curiosity or cheap thrills and also the popular fear that the anatomists were desecrating the temple of the Holy Spirit. These are the same negative morals embodied in *Iago*. He presents a cynical picture to Roderigo in the play's opening scene of the (nearly) universal corruption to which mankind is subject. In the final scene he refuses to take part in a public spectacle of confession and contrition, swearing "From this time forth I never will speak word" (5.2.304). His defiant vow of silence puts him in the way of another public, physical form of spectacle, torture ("Torture will ope his lips" [5.2.305]). The opening of his lips may well entail the drawing (disembowelment) and quartering of his criminal body. Gratiano and Lodovico can think of no grimmer threat for the secretive villain than having his innards exposed to the prying eyes of the Venetian populace.⁸ There may also be some solace for the victims of villainy in the act of dissection. Baffled by what makes such ungrateful characters tick, King Lear commands, "Then let them anatomise Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (*King Lear* 3.6.76–78). The enormous hope invested in the skill of the anatomist is futile, however. Answers to the question of evil are not forthcoming.

The counterpoise to this negative moralization of anatomy and tragedy is that those who produce both kinds of discourse are celebrating

⁸ In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) Michel Foucault famously puts the case for interpreting public execution and other forms of punishment as spectacular demonstrations of the power of the state mechanism at work. His evidence comes from a slightly later period, and scholars have found counter evidence suggesting contemporary rejection of this form of political moralizing. The careful regulation of public dissection in the early modern period, however, suggests some such ideological imperatives at work. Howard Marchitello proposes Vesalius's dissection of a "girl's uterus for the sake of the hymen" as a possible model for the spectacle of male domination and exploitation of the female body in *Othello*. See Marchitello's "Vesalius' *Fabrica* and Shakespeare's *Othello*: Anatomy, Gender and the Narrative Production of Meaning," *Criticism* 35 (1993): 529–58.

the divine splendour of the human mind and the human form, even at their most vulnerable. Here, for instance, is Vesalius on the achievement of the “*Opifex rerum*,” the Maker of all things, when it came to constructing a flexible cage to contain the vital organs:

One must admire the skill of the supreme Creator of the world in constructing the thorax, not entirely from bone nor entirely from flesh, but from muscle and bone alternately.... [I]f the thorax consisted wholly and solely of bones, the movements of the chest which we require mainly for breathing in would be completely abolished; and if, on the other hand, it was formed solely of muscles to produce these movements, the muscles, having nothing outside to control them, would collapse upon the lungs and heart.⁹

The parts of the human frame and the uses for which God designed them are the subject of Vesalius’s highly ambitious and influential book, and he is as critical of those who misconstrue that divine plan as the tragedian is of villains who twist the truth out of shape for their own ends. Vesalius is outraged, for example, that Galen misrepresents the masterful join between skull and spine:

What, if the truth be told, could be more disgraceful than to impute to Nature, who is much more precious to me than Galen is, extreme carelessness in what is actually the most brilliant joint in the whole body? Nature has done nothing to deserve such treatment! ... What joint, I ask you, is there in the whole body, in which the head of one bone moves in the socket of another in such a way that the head loses contact with the socket? None, of course, except, if we believe Galen, the joint between the head and the first vertebra. (*Fabric* 153)

The writer’s outrage that anyone, particularly the “prince of anatomists,” should so twist the truth and deprecate God’s purposeful design for human life is palpable in this passage. Such occlusion of God’s truth is nothing less than villainous, and the failing is not just technical but spiritual as well. The intimate link between the functions of the body’s parts and its spiritual vitality brings us back to the centrality of the heart in all this.¹⁰

⁹ Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1543) Book 1, trans. William Frank Richardson and John Burd Carman (San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1998) 209. Further citations from this work will appear parenthetically.

¹⁰ In his stimulating book *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), Michael C. Schoenfeldt argues that Galen’s theory of humours facilitated a material-psychological experience of the inward self, an experience that required discipline lest the body overrun its boundaries. This discipline, he insists, is profoundly moral. He draws literary evidence for his argument mainly from lyric and epic poetry, but it is equally borne out by early modern stage villainy.

As Vesalius puts it in Chapter 4 of the *Epitome* of his *Fabrica*, “Of the organs which are created for rekindling the natural heat within us and for the restoration and nourishment of our spirits, the heart is considered by far the most important part of the agitative faculty.”¹¹ Such sentiments likewise inform the most important breakthrough in seventeenth-century body science, William Harvey’s *De moto cordis* (1628), whose dedication to Charles I begins, “The heart of animals is the foundation of their life, the sovereign of everything within them, the sun of their microcosm, that upon which all growth depends, from which all power proceeds.”¹² The heart had been considered the center of nobility and the target of inward corruption since classical times, and early modern students of anatomy honoured that tradition.

From the time of Plato to the Renaissance, the heart changed in its purported functions, but it never lost its premier position among the organs. In the Platonic scheme the heart was the source of the passions and of the heat that distinguished all living things. The vitality of the animal soul was, for Aristotle uniquely situated in the heart. Galen adhered to this tradition, though he assigned the rational and nutritive functions to the brain and the liver. The life blood of the humoral system, a system that persisted well into the eighteenth century, was thought to be created in the heart. Without its perpetual renewal, the body, and especially the male body, would cease to have its essential characteristic of heat. Exposing the heart to view through vivisection of snakes, frogs, dogs, pigs, and apes and through postmortem dissection of human bodies during what Andrew Cunningham calls the anatomical Renaissance¹³ demonstrated its rhythmic pulsation and helped to correct such erroneous assumptions as a permeability of the septum between the chambers of the heart and the existence of a bone in the heart. While such procedures should have acted to demystify the metaphorical heart, they did no such thing.

¹¹ *The Epitome of Andreas Vesalius* (1543), trans. L.R. Lind (New York: Macmillan, 1949) 57.

¹² William Harvey, *An Anatomical Disquisition of the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* [*De moto cordis*], trans. Robert Willis (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907) 3. Harvey’s microcosmic placing of the heart within the body is part of a continuous tradition of metaphors for the sovereign majesty of the organ. For example, in 1548 Thomas Vicary, enumerating the “partes that be inwardly,” speaks “fyrst of the Hart, because he is the principal of al other members, and the beginning of life: he is set in the middest of the brest seuerally by him selfe, as Lord and King of al members.” *The Anatomie of the Bodie of Man*, ed. F.J. Furnivall and Percy Furnivall (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford UP, 1888) 56.

¹³ See Cunningham’s important study, *The Anatomical Renaissance: The Resurrection of the Anatomical Projects of the Ancients* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997).

In 1639, with the impact of the anatomical Renaissance already well established, Edward May published *A most certaine and true relation of a strange monster or serpent found in the left ventricle of the heart of Iohn Pennant*, including an illustration of a monstrous heart worm that had to be subdued within a magic circle of garlic (Fig. 1). May traces the genesis of the evil “serpent” to Pennant’s state of spiritual despair. A similar narrative of despair marking the heart of its victim involved one of Queen Elizabeth’s maids of honour, Mistress Ratcliffe, who, grieving the death of her brother, “voluntarily [set] about to starve her selfe.” Upon her death, “her Maec^{ie} being [present] commaunded her body to be opened and founde it all well and sounde, saving certaine stringes striped all over her harte.”¹⁴ The results of these forensic autopsies attest to the moral dimension of early modern heart science. Something far more sinister than the word of God was thought to be inscribed in the hearts of sinners, and the practice of dissection was enlisted in its discovery.

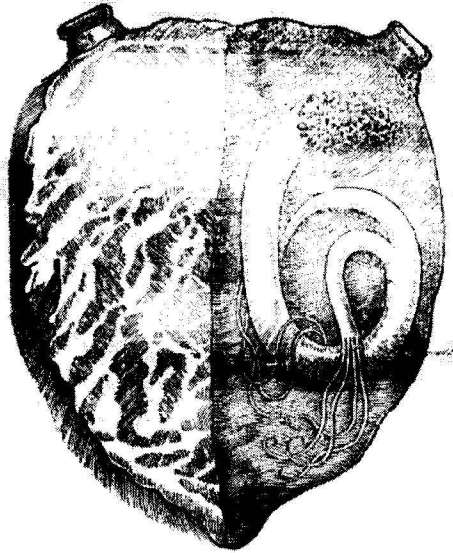


Figure 1. Heart worm. Edward May, *A most certaine and true relation of a strange monster or serpent found in the left ventricle of the heart of Iohn Pennant* (London: George Miller, 1639). Courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.

¹⁴ From *The Letters of Philip Gawdy*, quoted by Michael Neill, in “What Strange Riddle’s This?”: Deciphering ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” in *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 156.

A happier act of self-discovery is depicted in the *Anatomia del corpo humano* by the Spanish anatomist Juan Valverde de Hamusco (Fig. 2). In this illustration, the anatomist seems as pleased to retract his own sawed off sternum as that of the cadaver on which he is demonstrating. He is flanked by two views of the heart in this act of self-revelation, almost as though he wears his heart on his sleeve. There is a remarkable degree of self-consciousness in the early modern anatomical texts that Andrea Carlino has called books of paper bodies.¹⁵ This textualization of the body created a powerful iconography that was brought into play not only in the university training of medical practitioners but also in dramatic and religious works of the period.¹⁶ Further work on the early modern history and culture of interiority requires study in all of these areas.



Figure 2. Self-dissecting anatomist. Juan Valverde de Hamusco, *Anatomia del corpo humano* (Rome: A. Salamanca and A. Lafreri, 1560). Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

¹⁵ See Andrea Carlino, *Paper Bodies: A Catalogue of Anatomical Fugitive Sheets, 1538–1687*, trans. Noga Arikha (London: Wellcome Institute, 1999) and also his *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning* (1994), trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999).

¹⁶ Recent studies by William Worthen, Janet Dillon and Elizabeth Sauer have gone a great way in breaking down the unnecessary boundaries between performativity and textuality. See also William W.E. Slights, "Textualized Bodies and Bodies of Text in *Sejanus* and *Coriolanus*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1991): 181–93.

There was general agreement in the period that activities of the conscience were closely related to those of the heart. It was there that one made choices that were either consonant with or contrary to the law of God and there that he or she retained those choices for future inspection. According to the reformed churches of England, such inventories of the heart were carried out not by a priest in the confessional but by one's self in moments of meditation and prayer. The heart was also scrutinized by an all-seeing God. Like clergymen, early modern anatomists and dramatists were keenly aware of the scriptural tradition of regular heart inspections as they are recorded in both Old and New Testaments. King David's instructions to his son Solomon, for example, are very particular on this point:

And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

(1 Chron 28: 9)

Not only is the heart the object of moral scrutiny, it is also the organ that promotes (or ignores) spiritual health. Medical metaphors for spiritual well-being are a striking feature of the religious iconography of the early modern period. They are deeply implicated in the language and practice of curing diseased body parts, particularly the heart. An engraving by Hendrick Goltzius (Fig. 3) shows Christ the healer holding in his left hand a cross become caduceus (emblem of physicians) and in his right a heart-shaped glass container of animals from the anatomy laboratory, notably a pig and a frog. The healing blood from the crucified Christ's side-wound spurts into a cup held by a mortally ill woman. The anatomical and the moral work hand in hand in this reassuring picture. Into this scene, the authors of stage tragedy introduced the group of morally corrupt or, at best, ambiguous characters with whom I am primarily concerned here. So much of the language of moralized anatomy and medicalized theology had been absorbed into sixteenth-century culture that the most vehement denials by villains of an accessible interior life come across as a desperate defence against the inevitable. Their interior spaces will be probed and their motives discovered. The quest for interiority had become irresistible.

Interiority has been a lively topic of inquiry in early modern studies for some time now. The recent conference at St. Mary's University at which this paper was originally presented served to consolidate a great deal of valuable previous work. The case for the crucial importance of interiority to early modern literature was made by Anne Ferry two decades ago in her book *The "Inward" Language*. She pointed to the "separation between 'what



Figure 3. Christ holding up a glass heart filled with animals for dissection. H. Goltzius, 1578. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

must show' and what is in the heart."¹⁷ These ideas were further refined by Katharine Maus¹⁸ and highlighted the political bad faith of villains who divorce their outward appearances from the heart's truth. To this I would add that, while villains fall into widely varying categories, each one holds at arm's length a community from which he or she feels profoundly alienated.

¹⁷ Anne Ferry, *The "Inward" Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 28.

¹⁸ See *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995).

Working from a brief taxonomy of stage villainy, we can gauge the degree to which these characters are aware of, and fiercely protective of, an inner self. Consider four distinct types of villains: the tool-villain, the demon-villain, the ambi-villain, and the hero-villain.¹⁹ The first group includes assassins for hire, frequently men with low social status and little understanding of the moral complexity of the actions into which they have been thrust. Sometimes they are named simply by their plot function: 3rd murderer. The assassin for hire has little to hide by way of inner secrets. The demon-villains, such as Iago, Richard III, and Flamineo in John Webster's *The White Devil*, are preternatural spoilers who are constitutionally unable to permit anyone around them to experience contentment. They are endowed with enormous rhetorical skills with which they deflect the attempts of other characters to discover their goals and motives. What I have called the ambi-villains are characterized by an initial commitment to evil, a subsequent change of heart, and an eventual crisis of self-recrimination. Like the real-life villain William Farre with whom I began, these villains are profoundly ambivalent about the morality of their actions. Their moments of inner enlightenment and reversal occur too late to save their victims but in time to engage the moral faculties of an audience that watches in horror as the consequences of troubling "Goddess law and man's" play themselves out on stage. Finally, the hero-villains articulate their motives and ambitions in agonizing detail. Their overreaching and underachieving find expression in their intense acts of self-analysis. Even as they pursue their goals with heroic energy, they are carrying out acts of self-dissection that lay bare the colossal imperfections of their hearts.

Readers will have noticed that the four categories of villainy I have just outlined not only overlap, they also leave out a great many stage knaves. Where, for instance, might Marlowe's Barabas or Shakespeare Edmund of Gloucester fit into this taxonomy? But by considering exemplars from each group, we can usefully identify several stages of interiority and the cultural assumptions they represent. Consider first the tool-villain named Black Will from *Arden of Feversham*. Will is a villain-for-hire and a notorious oath breaker. He wears the bloody badge of violence on his face, and he is eager to disembowel Arden, for a price:

¹⁹ Eugene M. Waith uses the term "tool-villain" in his eminently sensible essay, "Concern for Villains," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 24 (1993): 155–70, though he uses it in a somewhat looser way than I do. I will explain "ambi-villain" in due course.

Tush, I have broken five hundred oaths!
 But wouldst thou charm me to effect this deed [i.e. murdering Arden],
 Tell me of gold, my resolution's fee;
 ...
 Seest thou this gore that cleaveth to my face?
 From hence ne'er will I wash this bloody stain
 Till Arden's heart be panting in my hand.²⁰

The rool-villain's motives are purely external: gold alone confirms his resolution to be a villain. For Black Will the heart holds no secrets. It is simply a piece of meat which, when ripped from Arden's body, will serve as economic exchange for his gold. Indicative of his ignorance of the body is the verb "panting," which conflates the pulsations of the heart with the rhythms of respiration, a common error of early anatomies that Vesalius had been at pains to correct. Black Will simply equates the bleeding heart of his victim with the "bloody stain" on his own forehead. The equation reminds us that we are dealing here with a bumbling, comic villain, a veritable Cloten. His head gets bloodied while he lurks near a shop, waiting to assassinate Arden. The shopkeeper, closing up for the day, lowers his shutters and accidentally clonks Will on the head, allowing Arden to escape once again in the ensuing confusion. At this stage, action trumps interiority. Much the same can be said in the case of what I have called the demon-villains; however, their careless rejection of the heart as the seat of conscience serves, as we shall see, to heighten the suffering of their victims.

Shakespeare's Aaron from *Titus Andronicus* offers a parody of the grave-robbing anatomist. He forces others to look into their hearts and confront painful emotions that they have tried, for their own self-preservation, to forget.

Oft have I digg'd up dead men from their graves,
 And set them upright at their dear friends' door,
 Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
 And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
 Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
 "Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead." (5.1.135-40)

Rather than a confession, this is a taunt. Unlike an anatomist labelling an illustration of a cadaver for the benefit of his students, Aaron has inscribed the grim message of *memento mori* directly onto the flesh itself for his own sadistic pleasure. Lust for the conquered Queen Tamora and an Iago-like

²⁰ *Arden of Faversham*, ed. Martin White, New Mermaid Series (New York: Norton, 1982) 3.82-99.

resentment of the conquering hero Titus are simply the proximate causes of his life-long, heart-felt bitterness. John Webster's demon-villain Flamineo rivals Aaron in the extent of domestic grief he causes. He pimps for his sister, Vittoria; he stabs his brother to death in front of their mother; he poisons a duke; he seduces, then beats up the black slave Zanche. Then he arranges an elaborate deception to expose the viciousness of his sister and his lover. He proposes a triple suicide, giving Vittoria the pistol to take her turn first. Instead, she shoots him, and the two women viciously attack his prostrate body.

Vittoria.	[T]hy sins
Do run before thee to fetch fire from hell	
To light thee thither.	
Flamineo.	O I smell soot,
Most stinking soot, the chimney is a-fire—	
My liver's parboiled like Scotch holy-bread;	
There's a plumber laying pipes in my guts, it scalds;	
Wilt thou outlive me?	
Zanche.	Yes, and drive a stake
Through thy body; for we'll give it out	
Thou didst this violence upon thyself. ²¹	

Vittoria happily ushers her brother's spirit to hell, and the superstitious Zanche believes the only way to kill this devil is to drive a stake through his heart. Flamineo, overacting the part of the dying man, turns his gaze inward and discovers not a contrite heart but a boiler plate of liver and an incompetent surgeon fumbling with his internal plumbing. But he is not dying: "the pistols held no bullets" (5.6.148), and he has tricked the women into acting out their own murderous intentions.

The ambi-villain retains a strong sense of an inner self by combining intensely private antisocial motives with sympathy for his victims and moments of self-loathing. One of the most fascinating of these villains is the vicious and repentant Bosola in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Before displaying the inner turmoil of a man with a wounded conscience, he torments the Duchess with wax figures of her husband and children, apparently murdered, and casually tosses the wax husband's severed hand into her lap, laughing ghoulishly at her terrified response. Then, like Lord Stourton (or Browning's Duke of Ferrara), he gives commands and watches as the lovely young duchess is strangled to death by his henchmen. Like William Farre,

²¹ John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Christina Luckyj, New Mermaid Series, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1996) 5.6.137–45. Further quotations of the edition are cited parenthetically.

acknowledges at the start of his famous speech about falling into the sear, the yellow leaf, "I am sick at heart" (5.3.19). In what follows, he converts his confession of illness into a moving plea for sympathy:

That which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not. (5.3.24–28)

His has become a "poor" heart, one lacking the courage to reject flattery and to defy opposition. In this moment he, like Lady Macbeth, garners the sympathy of the audience. What allows Shakespeare to meld villain and hero is his precise anatomy of the heart, which reveals an enormously vulnerable interior place in his ambitious villains. Our view of the heart in agony provokes a desire, not to emulate or to condemn, but somehow simultaneously to sympathise with and to distance ourselves from the infected organ. This double response reflects the ambivalence with which our society as well as Shakespeare's regards the heart as a symbol of interiority. It is the seat of health and of disease, the tablet on which God inscribes His word but also the secretive place where that word is defied.

For years I have noticed that my students are eager to find explanations for the evils of Richard III, Aaron, Iago, Jachimo—for the whole gallery of Shakespeare's villains. In this age of the socially constructed self, they are likely to maintain that villains are villainous because they are physically challenged (hunch-backed) or Jews trapped in a Christian world or blacks in a white one or someone unfairly passed over for promotion. These sympathetic outpourings for Shakespeare's creepiest characters are sometimes oversimplified, but they have a certain validity. The impulse to search out motives reveals something about how we like our villains. Samuel Taylor Coleridge notwithstanding, we don't like watching them because they are "motiveless malignit[ies]" that lack a complex inner self, but because they seem to have hugely mixed-up motives and selves, what Cynthia Marshall calls "shattered selves."²³ By working toward the radical incoherence of all

²³ See Coleridge's *Shakesperean Criticism*, ed. T.M. Raysor (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959) 49. Sylvan Barnet explains that Coleridge is at pains to define Iago's inner corruption as anything but an element of his humanity, because otherwise the beloved Bard would have had to experience the human emotions himself that he depicts in his villain. See Barnet's "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains," *PMLA* 7 (1956): 10–20. On the prominence of the discontinuous self see Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002).

but the simplest of the stage villains, my students are often able to locate forms of interiority that professional critics have imagined could not have existed before the age of late modernity.

I began by positing as a kind of baseline for interiority God's clear and simple assertion, "I am that I am." But this is not an invitation to explore the inner make-up of God. It is a stonewalling tautology. Further questioning appears to be foreclosed, as it is when Iago declares, "Demand me nothing; what you know, you know: / From this time forth I never will speak word" (5.2.303–04). But I believe we can know a great deal about Iago, and the Bible brims with *injunctions* to learn to know God. In each case, there is far more to understand than a simple sailor man's good heart and the injunction to eat our spinach.²⁴

²⁴ I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting my research on the early modern heart and to those scholars who responded generously with villainous instances after hearing preliminary versions of this paper in the University of Saskatchewan's Department of English Works-in-Progress Seminar and the St. Mary's University conference on early modern interiority.

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