“SOMEONE, *ANY*ONE”:

CONTEMPORARY THEATRE’S EMPATHETIC VILLAIN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Over the course of theatre's history, villains had stereotypical traits: revenge, greed, and power. Contemporary villains, though, evoke more empathy and sympathy from audiences than classic villains. In an effort to understand the roots of villainous behavior in contemporary characters, this thesis surveys a few notable classic villains to help compare the classic to the contemporary. While holding on to qualities of the classic stereotypes, contemporary playwrights create frequent moments of sympathy and empathy for villains who appeal to audiences' desires to connect, justify, and understand the reasons for their villainies. This thesis investigates despicable yet empathetic villains in three plays: Tony Kushner's Angels in America, Martin McDonagh's The Beauty Queen of Leenane, and Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's Assassins. An analysis of the playwrights' manipulation of characters and traits, as well as audience expectations, provides a theory on the new villain type and the lessons that can be learned.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"Given the proper nurturing, we are all capable of anything."—Stuart Fischoff

Every evening news program reports criminal activity to the nation. And each evening, news watchers are just as concerned with the crime committed as they are the reasons for the crime. Reporters and talk show hosts are consumed with the criminal mind and constantly interview offenders to understand their motives; this media coverage compels audiences to learn more about the criminal. The audacity and bravery of lawbreakers can at first repulse viewing audiences, but it is difficult to turn away from their news stories because criminal behavior fascinates.

In "A Strange Liking": Our Admiration for Criminals, Martha Grace Duncan theorizes on the admiration and justification of true life villains, or criminals and the law. "Noncriminals often enjoy, love, even admire, criminals. They admire them not in spite of their criminality but because of it [. . .] or at least because of qualities that are inextricably linked to their criminality" (Duncan 1). The public attraction with criminals seen in contemporary media comes from people's interest with the criminal's ability to plot and deceive, and to execute and murder. Audiences ask: What will they do next? Duncan asserts that "a criminal is a dreamer of dreams, as one who aspires to immortality. . ." (13). Most news watchers are unable to imagine themselves committing crimes to gain infamy, but the non-criminal also yearns to understand the criminal's motives and desire for immortality. If spectators do not understand the criminal mind though, their admiration does not seem to wane. Rather, they admire the criminal's

daring. Perhaps the non-criminal continues to watch the news attempting to justify the criminal's deeds, or the news watcher wants to justify his/her moral decisions against those of the criminal.

The idea that non-criminals are drawn to the criminal mind is found not only in the news, but in the theatre as well. If we consider news coverage a form of entertainment, then news watchers become audiences. The villain in theatre entices audiences who are attracted to a character whose motives and actions are often unpredictable and who commits unspeakable crimes. As the desire to understand the criminal has been seen in society, and is the same with contemporary theatrical villains, the parallels between reality and theatre are closely related.

In contemporary theatre, more justifiable villains have emerged because audiences and society at large yearn to understand the reasons for humanity's actions. Today's theatre villain is not as transparent as the stereotypical villain. While holding on to qualities of the classic stereotypes, contemporary playwrights emphasize two characteristics which strongly connect the villain to audiences: sympathy and empathy. The frequency with which these moments occur in the plays allows audiences to understand and identify with the villain, but renders these characters more difficult to classify and harder to hate.

How to Prove a Contemporary Villain

The following chapters briefly investigate the possible reasons for understanding the villain through playwrights' manipulation of characters and play structure, as well as audience expectations and self-awareness. Three plays have been selected to analyze in regards to contemporary villainy. The first character, who strongly resembles the classic villain but possesses more moments for sympathy and empathy, is Roy Cohn from Tony Kushner's socially and politically conscious play Angels in America. Cohn, based on the infamous lawyer, struggles with keeping an official image while battling his personal demons and cruelly insulting those closest to him.

Martin McDonagh's The Beauty Queen of Leenane depicts antagonists who exemplify contemporary modern villainy, speaking to a society that longs for acceptance and understanding. The Beauty Queen of Leenane's Mag and her daughter Maureen battle for control in a small Irish household. Both characters' stories are depicted for audiences to decide whether either is a villain or a victim. The rapid succession of moments for empathy and sympathy are immersed with revengeful villainy.

This contemporary villain has also become prevalent in the musical. Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's Assassins holds outsiders as misunderstood villains. The musical tells the tale of villains from American history as they plot to kill presidents. In the musical, John Wilkes Booth manipulates an innocent Lee Harvey Oswald, the play's most empathetic and sympathetic character, into a villain. To watch Oswald's transformation on stage allows for sympathetic and empathetic connections.

The analysis of the characteristics, needs and actions of contemporary villains, the tactics used by playwrights to create villains in the structure of the play, and the desired effects of the characters' empathetic and sympathetic moments on the audience will serve as the framework and methodology for investigation of this topic. The following questions potentially provoke insightful conclusions about the contemporary villain: Why have villainous characters in the late 1980s to present-day theatre become more sympathetic/empathetic than in previous dramas? How do playwrights evoke sympathy and empathy for the villain? Are they drastically different than classic stereotypes? Can evil be understood? Have social issues inspired the playwright to create more empathetic villains? How are these characters justified? Who and what do these villains represent? What does the change in today's villains say about our theatre, audiences, plays, and society?

It is imperative to analyze specific villain stereotypes from past theatrical eras and learn those characteristics and gain a firm idea of the classic villain. Chapter II analyzes the villains in Seneca's Medea, Shakespeare's Richard III, Webster's Duchess of Malfi, and George L. Aiken's dramatization of Uncle Tom's Cabin. These villains have been chosen as representative of a vast time span of the villain character and are identified as classics. These villains are truly despicable, but each has always had an element of sympathy or empathy given to allow audiences a moment to connect. Although these villains can momentarily evoke sympathy or empathy from audiences, the sum of their actions in the play renders them villainous. Through structural analysis and theories from scholars, the traits of the villain can be surmised in an effort to compare the stereotype to

the contemporary villain who connects with audiences on more frequent and deeper levels. Chapter II also discusses the movements of realism and modern psychology which led to the change in playwrights' creation of a more empathetic and sympathetic villain.

Definitions and a Survey of Relevant Literature

Before presenting the case for the contemporary villain, defining terms to be used throughout this thesis is extremely important. It must be noted that many of these terms have significant grey-area which infers that little conclusive and decisive literature is found and the definitions often overlap.

Over the course of theatre's history, villains embodied historical figures and stereotypes. Words like greed, power, and revenge describe classic villains like Richard III or Simon Legree. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the villain as a low-born, base-minded person who is a mean-spirited, depraved scoundrel; one naturally disposed to criminal actions ("Villain"). Michael Booth, editor of Hiss the Villain, defines "the genuine villain [a]s heartless, unprincipled, hateful, and entirely evil" (10). Common association for the villain is a character from the melodrama that wears black clothing, has dark hair and a dark mustache, and possesses the unrelenting desire to tie others to railroad tracks. For this thesis, a villain is defined as a mean-spirited, unprincipled, hateful, and evil character who commits detrimental atrocities and violates the social mores and ideals of their time. Characteristically, the villain is fearless, audacious,

selfish, intelligent, and passionate, letting nothing stop him from achieving his ends. In Chapter II, a study of the various types of villain stereotypes will be further discussed.

Sympathy and Empathy

Sympathy and empathy are often synonymous with each other. Much confusion between the definitions leads to inconclusive descriptions and ambiguity. Some literature has attempted to clarify these terms, but the fact is that they are very similar.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sympathy as "a real or supposed affinity between certain things which are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another, or attract or tend towards each other" ("Sympathy"). Some theorists (i.e. Freud and Keen) note that sympathy alludes to the "ego" of a person who does not subject themselves to the open experience to truly understand another, thus "feeling for." In "The Distinction Between Sympathy and Empathy," Lauren Wispé concurs that "*sympathy* refers to the heightened awareness of the suffering of another person as something to be alleviated" (318). Sympathy consciously evokes passive pity for the other at a distance rather than a true personal connection.

The confusion between sympathy and empathy comes from the loose etymology of empathy. Even the many psychologists and philosophers who first used the term found conflict within its meaning. Empathy comes from the German term *Einfiihlung*, commonly used in aesthetics as a means to identify the source of aesthetic pleasures. The

later English translation of the word focused on psychological explorations of art appreciation (Gunkle 15). The Oxford English Dictionary states that empathy projects "one's personality into the object of contemplation" in a manner similar to transference (conveyance from one place, person, or thing to another) ("Empathy"; "Transference"). Empathy can be considered an impulsive or involuntary emotion (Freud's id) that evokes an overwhelming and deeper connection to the other. Suzanne Keen, author of "A Theory of Narrative Empathy," best describes empathy in comparison to sympathy:

> "In empathy, [. . .] we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others. [. . .] Empathy is distinguished in both psychology and [. . .] from sympathy, in which feelings for another occur. So, for instance, one may distinguish empathy from sympathy in this fashion:
>
> | Empathy: | Sympathy: |
> | --- | --- |
> | I feel what you feel. | I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings. |
> | I feel your pain. | I feel pity for your pain. |
>
> (Keen 208-9)

In this example, empathy is active, where sympathy is passive.

For this thesis, taking all of the definitions above, empathy is the metaphorical (vicarious) ability to put oneself in another person's place and emote with that person, and understand and justify the choices and actions made by the other. In contrast to sympathy where one is conscious of emotional effects as the play takes place, the realized effect of empathy on audiences comes after the play has ended.

An abundance of literature on empathy's definition and uses in psychology and medicine attempt to define the word in action. As the word progressed through time, its definition changed in Freud's psychology. Using one and two person identification, where at first the mind is analyzed as a sole object, and then an analyst's mind enters and attempts to appreciate the thoughts of the other, psychological empathy was created (Poland 90). As the analyst tried to understand the patient, "the analyst's very act of perceiving carries its own interactive effect" which created empathy (Poland 91).

In regards to villainy, understanding and connecting with a criminal or true-life villain brings interesting theories on the use of empathy in psychiatric practice for those who attempt to understand the criminal. Warren Poland points out that empathy has "frequently been seen as the crucial source of psychopathology [and] over and over, we have all heard the tendency to view the patient as innocent victim of insufficiently empathic mothering" (89). Psychology gave criminals the ability to be viewed as a victim of forces (in their mind) which they could not control and "the patient's conflicts, the patient's own aggression and sexuality, the patient's past and present organizing fantasies" were forgotten by analysts (89). Empathy for a misunderstood rogue made his actions justified, or "innocent". Criminals and villains learn to use empathy as a tactic against those who stand in their ways of achieving success. "The con man, the demagogue, the exploiter, and the sadist all function best when their empathic skills are sharp" and they know who, where, and when to strike (Poland 89). When the criminal sees any sign of empathy from an analyst or a victim, the criminal's intuition informs him/her how to manipulate the situation for their personal benefit.

The question as to how to measure and understand empathy remains unsolved. Keen even notes that "empathy['s] works in the bodies and brains of human beings can still only be answered with theoretical speculations . . ." (Keen 211). One possible reason suggests that it is hard to define empathy because the measurement of its internal effect is not as easy to understand or measure as that of the external effect. Empathy's subjectivity must be taken into consideration when the probability for empathy is mentioned.

Playwrights use empathy to bring ideas and characters closer to the audience, to humanize the characters from page to stage. Empathy helps today's villain become identifiable with audiences who crave to connect with characters and see something familiar with the play; playwrights attempt to find that common thread.

Empathy and sympathy's aesthetic pleasures for theatre audiences raise the question as to why audiences attend the theatre. Late nineteenth-century French theatre critic and writer Emile Faguet's "On the Nature of the Dramatic Emotion" focuses on the theatrical experience and the psychological and emotional reasons that audiences attend plays. Faguet theorizes that man delights in theatre because the "representation of the misfortune of others [. . .] is also a desire for truth" (276). Faguet concludes that audiences escape to the theatre to watch others suffer so they might escape their own sorrows, implying that audiences seek advice and truth within the play to help solve social problems. Faguet's work builds on that of Saint-Marc-Girardin, a noted French philosopher and author of a series of lectures on dramatic passions entitled "Cours de littérature dramatique: De l'usage des passions dans le drame," who asserts that "'The

base of the dramatic emotion is the sympathy of man for man.' We go to the theatre to be moved by the misfortunes of our fellowmen because we love them; we share their griefs, their pains, their sorrows and their despair" (qtd. in Faguet 271). Although Saint-Marc-Girardin's definition of dramatic emotion sounds similar to pity, the underlying theme is love, sympathy, and a caring for humanity. Faguet contests Saint-Marc-Girardin's idea: "To seek out [. . .] the spectacle of human suffering in order to be moved by it does not seem to me characteristic of an extremely sympathetic and eminently humane soul" (271). Though humanity does not naturally desire to hurt others, he asserts that audiences tend toward a darker side of watching tragedy, of watching others fall victim to villainous forces. "We like to contemplate misfortune so long as it does not affect us. In a word, we like to see suffering without suffering ourselves. And it seems to me that that is not the sympathy of man for man" (275).

There seems to be a sadistic side to all humanity, something which lets us enjoy another's hardships, and no matter audiences' feelings for a character, part of them says, "I am happy that that was not me." Theatre depicts truths which no one wishes to find in reality, but audiences can learn from theatre's characters and writers. The quest for truth and understanding is part of humanity, and finding something real in a villain is frighteningly cathartic. Audiences rejoice in the villain and his downfall. "A little cruelty or malice – a little love of truth – [. . .] that is what the spectator always brings to the drama, and that is what forces the drama as a whole [. . .] to be the picture of human ills" (279). Audiences delight in taboo, evil desires which the villains fulfill on stage. A man who truly enjoys the suffering of others can be viewed as a villain, malicious and

evil. But man "enjoys human suffering up to a certain point. [. . .] He is only partly savage" (275).

Contemporary audiences attempt to understand the villain, giving reasons and justifications for the villain's actions. Here, Faguet's notion of sympathy aligns with present-day audiences; the audience strives to find truth in character and theme. Although they might be incredibly despicable, villains are human like everyone else. If these notions are kept in mind when playwrights write a villain, it can be concluded that audience expectations have changed the villain.

Anti-heroes and Anti-villains

In attempts to understand theatrical characters, new characters are created. Most notably for this thesis, combined with sympathy and empathy, is the attempt to make villainous action justifiable. Here, the anti-hero and the anti-villain enter the stage, but the characteristics of the "anti-characters" overlap and their definitions remain ambiguous. It is important to define these characters though, as the villains examined in this thesis exemplify some of the "anti-character" qualities.

The relatively new label of anti-hero does not have a definitive definition or excessive literature. Susan Wloszczyna notes in her article "The Good, the Bad and the Anti-Hero" that the term anti-hero grows out of the "Vietnam era, when Hollywood moved away from the glamorous fantasy of musicals and ancient epics and toward the gritty reality of drama and intimate character studies" (2). The best definition pieces

together the characteristics of various anti-heroes who hold villainous characteristics and tactics, with respectable and understandable intentions. The anti-hero, often the play's prominent and flawed character, is villainous, heroic, and a victim who makes "a desperate, tragic mistake" (Gilroy qtd. in Wloszczyna 2). Anti-heroes seem to be concerned with self-preservation and justifying their existence, but in attempting to make their lives better the anti-hero makes a wrong choice, a villainous choice out of haste.

The anti-hero shares traits of the empathetic and sympathetic villain this thesis suggests, but it is the *choice* to act villainous versus the irrational emotion which consumes the character that separates the villain from the anti-hero, respectively. The villain purposely plans an act and the anti-hero is so consumed in the moment of making something right that he does not realize until later the irrationality of the action. Filmmaker Tony Gilroy states that "there has to be some moment of realization, where the bottom of their worldview drops out, and they say, 'Oh, my God, I know that is wrong'" (qtd. in Wloszczyna 2). This moment of realization parallels that of the classic stereotype who too has a moment of realization right before his or her fall.

The humanity of a villain and anti-hero raises social awareness in audiences as to the ability for villainy in anybody. Actor Javier Bardem asserts that anti-heroes are "a mirror to our own fears, and it's easier for us, as viewers, to put those fears out of ourselves. 'I'm not that. I can never be that.' But, at the same time, you are attracted to that because you know you have that in yourself" (Bardem qtd. in Wloszczyna 1). Resorting to immoral means to pursue an admirable goal pushes the boundaries of good and evil and becomes a moral issue with audiences who want to cheer on the anti-hero,

but are stalled because they are shocked by the means used in the heat of the moment to achieve the objective. What scares audiences about these characters is that the audience can find justification in the characters' actions and feel that their pursuit of justice is remarkably compelling.

In his study Heroes and Villains, Mike Alford's example of an anti-heroic character is Bruce Wayne as Batman:

> His heroic actions are not, primarily, the product of lofty ideals but issue out of passion and his own pain. [. . .] We know exactly how it feels to be hurt so much we want to lash out, to feel the sense of injustice at a personal loss so intensely that we would do almost anything to put it right. [. . .] Of course it would be simplistic to attribute all of Bruce Wayne's behaviour to empathy and fellow feeling—our emotions are rarely if ever that un-muddied. [. . .] the Batman is as much to do with vengeance as he is to do with justice. These two driving forces, often at odds with each other, further contributes to the Dark Knight's human appeal. (53-4)

Given these characteristics and circumstances, Bruce Wayne/Batman is an anti-hero.

With every hero, there must be a villain, thus with every anti-hero, there must be an anti-villain. The anti-hero and anti-villain remain blurred in definition and are often confused with one another. While an abundance of literature on anti-heroes in politics, theatre, and film can be found, scholarly literature on the anti-villain remains limited. In contrast to the anti-hero, the anti-villain "pursues undeniably villainous ends, but employs methods that are arguably noble in order to advance his interests" ("Anti-

villain"). Popular sources find the anti-villain in media and comic books. One example of the anti-villain comes from the television series The Shield and the character Detective Jon Kavanaugh. Kavanaugh's "goal is to bring down the show's anti-hero protagonist, Vic Mackey," a murderer of a fellow officer. Kavanaugh's methods are sometimes illegal but often viewed as noble, and Mackey, as an anti-hero, earns sympathy from audiences for "following his own code" ("Anti-villain").

It is the intentions of the character which help delineate between anti-heroes and anti-villains. "Because they pursue evil and/or selfish aims, anti-villains are considered to be on the side of the villains, despite the sympathetic qualities or good intentions that they possess" ("Anti-villain"). The fact remains that the anti-hero and anti-villain have not yet been studied enough together to bring clear delineations between characters, examples or literature on the subjects. The blurring of social and moral boundaries and audience's expectations for complex characters forces contemporary playwrights to create characters like the anti-hero and anti-villain, where motives and actions sometimes contradict one another.

Creating a Villain

As terms have been defined, looking at the creation of a villain in film furthers this thesis in its pursuit of understanding the modern theatrical villain. Little has been written on the contemporary theatre villain, but much of the literature about film villains sheds light on the creation of present-day villains and their relation to audiences.

Stuart Fischoff's "Villains in Film: Anemic Renderings" directs emerging screenwriters how to write villains by giving facts on reality's villains: "True-life villains *in situ* do not giggle and chortle, do not all dabble in drug dealing [. . .], they do not spring into action full blown, they had parents and a real life, they have down time, and villains have reasons for their actions; they rationalize like you and me" (46-7). Another approach to creating screen villains comes from Tom Matthews' article, "Building a Better Bad Guy: How Hannibal Lecter, Hans You a Better Writer." Matthews quotes David Ayer, screenwriter of *Training Day*, who finds "intelligence, a point of view, [and] wisdom" are keys to writing great villains. Villains must deviously manipulate and conceal their plans as they move, and being humorous, charismatic, loquacious, and likeable are vitally important to the villain's success in that manipulation (71, 74). The likable qualities convince audiences of villains' humanity; if they are similar to a real person, villains become memorable and enjoyable. Ayer concludes "the best villain is a spider who weaves a web, and by the time you're caught up in it, it's way too late" (71). Agility in villainy is an exciting characteristic which creates intense emotions in audience members.

Fischoff continues that villains are similar to the normal person: "Without learning that screen villains are self-justifying humans, audiences leave the theater hating more and understanding less about the world in which they live" (51). There must be a sense of recognition and more importantly an understanding of a villain's humanity so that audiences can see the villain as a person and reflect upon what has been presented. In recognizing what makes a villain act out, audiences can understand and identify with

the character. Fischoff declares that "to understand others' villainy [. . .] we need only look into ourselves at our weakest, most enraged, or most desperate and vengeful moments" (47-8). If audiences understand the villain, they remember the villain. "Shakespeare understood the dramaturgical power of a complex villain. He rendered villains whom we understand and remember – even cherish – as surely as we remember our heroes. [. . .] Iago taught us the cancerous danger of jealousy, Richard III, the evil that springs from self-loathing" (52). Villains in classic theatre and media show the extremes of human foibles and emotion, but villains "proceed one tragic, one rationalizing and self-righteous step at a time" (52). Great or evil, villains exemplify those who suffer from their own cruelties and provoke audiences about dangers in the extravagant psyche and temperament of emotions.

As playwrights are challenged by audiences to create characters who portray reality, a dynamic and multi-layered villain must be produced. "In Hollywood, it became very good to be bad, with audiences showing again and again that [. . .] there is nothing quite as satisfying as sitting in the dark with a truly wicked bad guy and watching the havoc he wreaks on the innocent folks who cross his path" (Matthews 71). Film has capitalized on this new villainous character, and Matthews provides one theory on the new personality type of villainy: "that morality has become more complicated, while audiences have become somewhat desensitized to greater and greater displays of mayhem and cruelty, the challenge to today's screenwriter [is] to come up with something fresh . . ." (71). Contemporary audiences demand to be entertained, shocked, empathic, and fearsome, all in one villain, and it becomes the screenwriter's job to create a villain to

capture that audience. Audiences excitedly watch a villain and recognize familiar qualities, in turn recognizing their own afflictions.

To create an incredible villain in contemporary film or theatre remains difficult, and combining the structural and emotional characteristics of the character while connecting with audiences makes for an intriguing villain. Linda Salamon asserts that a contemporary villain that audiences connect with is very possible to create, but the character must have qualities of the stereotype. Salamon's article, "'Looking for Richard' in History: Postmodern Villainy in Richard III and Scarface," seeks villainy in the modern age through analyzing the historicized villain in film: Richard III played by Al Pacino and Ian McKellan, and Tony Montana played by Al Pacino in Scarface. Salamon investigates these villains' personae and why in particular they remain iconic in film portrayal. Salamon examines the director/actor attempts "to represent the embodiment of evil, to make villainy palpable, indeed all too human . . ." (59). Each aspect attracts audiences. By making the villain all too human, the villain comes all to close to the neighbor next door, a frightening idea that captures the essence of villainy in contemporary theatre.

Beginning in classic theatre, Salamon states that in earlier times, "values were clearer, ethical lines [were] more sharply drawn" (56). Considering good and evil morals were easily identified and defined culture, the villain was in a sense simpler—evil, ruthless and calculating, motivated by greed and status. Today's villains are also motivated by the need for love, understanding and shelter and will use many tactics to achieve inner fulfillment.

In contemporary theatre and film, degrees of evil, good, and morality intermix and "human evil is by definition pathological" (Salamon 56). With little clarity in defining good and bad, contemporary audiences of both movies and theatre ask actively engaged audiences to decide good and bad for themselves. Salamon's discussion of Richard III analyzes and suggests various approaches to villainy by modern filmmakers and screenwriters. She argues that "filmmakers who wish to depict evil in human conduct without either nudging the audience's ribs or gesturing toward imputed social causes do well to look to the past, specifically to the irrevocable act of murder represented in western culture . . .", stressing the importance of the classically defined villain (Salamon 56). According to Salamon, if we wish to have a villain in the purest form of the definition, the inspiration and characteristics must be found in classic villains and translated to modern situations and ideals. Although I argue that even the classic villain can "nudge the audience toward social causes," the memorably contemporary villain, Salamon suggests, most possibly can be traced to the classic villains.

According to Salamon, Al Pacino's Looking for Richard uses a "creative procedure to enact the conflicts—to stage the alienation of the audience and the anxieties of the actors—in witty undercutting among scenes from rehearsals, scenes from filming, from man-in-the-street interrogations of potential filmgoers, from pre-production discussion with world-renowned Shakespearean actors" (57). Audiences see the process and the table work, and watch the development and creation of the villainous Richard amid normal people. Insightful creation of the villain strengthens audience's abilities to relate to and understand the character and actor, an experience that Faguet suggests that

most audiences enjoy. Pacino achieves a sympathetic portrayal of both Richard and himself: “At the end, Pacino stands alone not in the well-deserved isolation that provides catharsis to a tragedy, but in pathos that closes in on self-pity. [. . .] He is perilously close to a victim for whom the audience is asked to make therapeutic allowance” (58). In filming the process of creating Richard III, Pacino seems to expect empathy from his audience, especially as he manipulates camera angles. Audiences see people like themselves talking with the villain and understand motives and the actions or questions raised by actors.

In the latter part of her article, Salamon compares Ian McKellan’s portrayal of *Richard III* with Brian DePalma’s *Scarface,* both of which “are ambitious near-loners, [and] sharp observers of the ideologically transformed territories in which they must live . . . It is their unquenchable desire [which] drives both anti-heroes as they claw their respective way to the top of their respective worlds [. . .]” (59). Similar in status and story, these villains speak to their modern audiences: McKellan’s Richard is set in the World War II era, while Tony Montana reaches to the 1970s drug wars, both of which are extreme social movements to which audiences are near enough to remember. Both characters murder to satisfy an appetite, kill close members of their entourage, are scarred physically which manifests anger, and suffer from aggravations by a female (Richard’s mother who does not love him, and Tony’s ladies whom he disregards when success rises) (59-62). The purpose of pointing out these parallel characteristics is to connect the fact that the classic villain and the 1970s villain are not too far apart in structure. Just as Salamon argues, the classic villain in modern association proves memorable. In both

films, they “reach the only possible end in the defiant villain’s self-knowing and suicidal last stand [. . .]. Without any doubt, no ‘healing’ is possible; these men are not heroic, they are not even pathetic – they are evil” (62). Salamon concludes that the only way to find this stereotypical villain is to create the character in a historicized manner, one which has been established and follows the same rules and patterns of the classic villain but are presented in modern situations and with modern ideology.

Fashioning contemporary villains from classic stereotypes and employing various techniques and legendary villainous traits in alliance with modern social ideals creates the contemporary villain. The structure of a classic villain must now be examined as to compare and clarify their unique traits with those of the empathetic and sympathetic villain in contemporary theatre to later be discussed.

CHAPTER II: LEGENDARY THEATRICAL VILLAINS

"And if I die, no soul shall pity me."—Richard III

In order to understand theatre's contemporary villain, the analysis of the classic stereotype helps inform the villains studied in the later chapters of this thesis. Classical theatre, from the Greeks to the melodrama, sets the standards for the villain. As stated in the previous chapter, the villain is defined as a mean-spirited, unprincipled, hateful, and evil character who commits detrimental atrocities and violates the social mores and ideals of their time. Characteristically, the villain is fearless, audacious, selfish, intelligent, and passionate, and their actions trigger drama in their world and often implement their own downfall. As this thesis asserts, empathy and sympathy are much stronger in today's villain than in those of the past, yet there has always been a brief dramaturgical moment for the classic villain to evoke sympathy or empathy from audiences. The overwhelming unscrupulous actions taken by the classic villains studied here, though, outweigh these brief moments and render them villains. This chapter focuses on the character of the classic theatrical villain, the different variations of the stereotype, the villain's empathetic and sympathetic moments and how they function in the play and connect with audiences.

Before analyzing the classic villains, identifying the traits of the classic characters gives contextual support for later comparison. Aristotle's Poetics defines the four elements of character which elicit a catharsis from audiences: characters should be (morally) good, appropriate, have a likeness to human nature, and be consistent (Else 43). Simply stated, Aristotle's tragic characters are predictable and follow structure. Aristotle

finds “morally depraved” characters appropriate only “when they are introduced in secondary roles” (Danziger 35). The villain possesses some of Aristotle’s characteristics, often in a skewed fashion. For the moral decision which a character must make in order to become either a hero or villain, villains choose the “bad” choice, although their actions coincide with their personal objectives. This is not how Aristotle wants the villain to justify morality though, his/her moral choice must be socially acceptable. For Aristotle, a character’s appropriateness comes from his ability to act within public order at all times. This is not a characteristic of the villain who murders and deceives others for personal gain. Villains do resemble human nature, and although this might fall far from desirable human nature according to Aristotle, as Faguet asserts, an evil side in humanity does exist and is reflected in the villain. Finally, the villain is consistent. Aristotle even concludes this idea and finds that inconsistency must be consistent with the character’s overall personality and function, thus the chameleonic qualities and actions of the villain remain consistent with the inconsistency in humans (Else 43).

Aristotle “considered wholly wicked figures unsuitable as tragic heroes, [and] he found them objectionable as a minor character only if [. . .] they are more wicked than the plot demands” (Danziger 35). The villain’s actions must propel the plot and consistently be either “necessary or probable” for the character’s purpose; the characters must act in the same manner they would think, and those actions must necessarily fit the character’s super objective to forward the play. Given these essentials, Aristotle’s tragic character can potentially be villainous after all and draw some empathy from audiences.

Clarence Boyer's The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy identifies, examines, and characterizes villain types: Senecan, Machiavellian, Revengeful, Malcontent, Tool, and the Elizabethan. Boyer's study establishes the classic villain's traits and assists in framing the stereotypes of theatrical villains and this chapter. Boyer, however, does not examine their empathetic or sympathetic moments in the play. Analyzing Seneca's revengeful Medea, Shakespeare's Machiavellian Richard III, and Webster's tool villain Bosola from The Duchess of Malfi, Boyer specifically focuses on character. In addition, I will extend Boyer's theory of the villain as hero with my own analysis of the melodramatic villain as personified by Simon Legree from Aiken's dramatization of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Taking character notes from Boyer, the villain's characteristics, moments of extreme villainy, and empathy and sympathy are explored.

Medea

Based on Euripides's play, Roman playwright Seneca's Medea focuses on the character as passionate, angry, irrational, jealous, and revengeful; a representation of the disorder in first-century Rome (Durham 55). According to Boyer, a Senecan villain such as Medea cruelly desires revenge out of faithlessness and takes pleasure in the violent suffering of her victims. The lonely Medea chooses "open hostility" which inflicts hatred and injury on others while reestablishing her pride (Seneca 371). The battle for love and revenge sparked from the faithless Jason, the man for whom she acts and of whom she

has “been made guilty,” plagues Medea and forwards each action in the play’s structure, proving her power as a female villain whose vengeance is deadly (375).

Medea opens the play on the wedding day of Jason and Creusa, the same day she is banished from Corinth. Medea swears to let Jason suffer and structurally forwards her revenge in her first speech: “But for the husband I have a worse gift to beg: Let him live. Let him wander through cities he knows not, a needy vagabond, a trembling alien, hated and homeless. [. . .] Born is my vengeance, already born; I have given birth” (Seneca 367). A motherly metaphor provides audiences, especially female members, a vulnerable moment to understand the pain and solitude from which she suffers. Medea’s own alienation and hated and lonely status deepens her desire to force Jason to endure a similar fate, a moment which arouses a small amount of sympathy for the famed murderess.

Creon’s entrance in scene two provides the inciting incident which determines Medea’s vengeance. The stasis breaks and Creon banishes Medea again from his kingdom, but using a common tool of the villain, Medea opens herself to Creon and the audience and confesses her crimes, allowing vulnerability to speak: “Proceed now and pile your indictments high; I shall confess all. [. . .] It is in your power to fix the reward I receive for all my transgressions. Condemn the defendant, if you like, but give me back the source of my sin. I am guilty, Creon, I confess it” (Seneca 373-4). Medea sympathetically begs for her love and her life, and upon his refusal of mercy (per her past treacheries) and a one-day pass to remain in the city, Medea sets herself to exact revenge

on those who victimized her by "overturn[ing] everything, [and] flatten[ing] everything to ruins" (378).

As the scorned Medea speaks with Jason for the first time in the play, Medea reveals herself: a woman who lost her country, father, brother, and chastity for Jason (380). Begging for Jason to return to her, Medea blames him for her crimes saying, "They are yours, they are yours, indeed! The one who profits by a crime is guilty of it" (380). The point of no return arrives as Jason confesses his love for his children, his "reason for living, the solace of a heart burned black with cares" (382). Medea realizes her upper hand and finds "the place to wound him" most, setting Medea to "attack where no one could fear"; a bold venture to prove "what Medea is capable of" (382-3). Her revenge outweighs the love of her children and this moment of recognition by audiences illustrates true vengeful villainy, something which most audiences could never fathom.

Bringing her objective into full action, Medea employs sorcery to poison Creon's daughter Creusa with a robe, presented by her (Medea's) two children, that produces a "creeping flame [that] shall burn her inmost marrow. [. . .] Let her limbs ooze and her bones smoke; [and] let her blazing hair outshine the new bride's wedding torches" (389). The murder of Creon and Creusa delights Medea, but as she battles between revengeful happiness and her love for Jason, a moment of clarity forms in Medea's crazed mind:

> Why, my soul, do you falter? Exploit your successful sally. How small a fraction of your revenge elates you! *You are still in love, madwoman, if you are satisfied with Jason celibate* (emphasis added). [. . .] Away with every scruple, out every trace of conscience! [. . .] Put forth your efforts

> to make them realize how trifling and of what common brand were the crimes I obliged him with. [. . .] Now I am Medea; my genius has matured with evils. (390-1)

Medea's excitement and thrill in action propels her scene of terror, an irreversible crime which terrifies audiences because there is no definite justification of her extreme reactions. Now unstoppable, proud of her past and current villainies, Medea informs audiences of her final plan while again combating her own motherly afflictions:

> Children once mine, you must pay the price for your father's wickedness. Horror has knocked at my heart, my limbs are numb with cold, my breast is a-tremble. [. . .] Shall I slaughter my own children, my own flesh and blood? Forfend it, mad passion! Far be a crime so unprecedented, an enormity so accursed, even for me! What sin have the children to atone? [. . .] They are not mine, let them die. Shall they indeed perish? They are mine. [. . .] Why, soul of mine, do you teeter? (391-2)

Medea's ultimate objective provides an ultimate obstacle: can she be so revengeful as to kill her children? Her motherly instinct lays open for all to witness and for audiences to sympathize with, but her anger overrules that love. In her unstable and emotional state Medea kills one son to save him from Jason (and fulfill her plans). But her revenge is unsatisfied without Jason's presence to witness the act – her power requires his eyes: "all that was missing was yonder man to be spectator. What I have done so far I count as nothing; any crime I committed without his seeing it is wasted" (393). Jason's presence once more causes Medea's soul to falter: "Why delay now, my soul? [. . .] I am sorry for

my deed, ashamed of it. [. . .] Though I am sorry, I did it; a delicious pleasure steals over me, without my will, and look, it is growing. . .” (393). This soul-faltering moment shows Medea’s human side, that she is not purely evil but scorned and hurting. Women, or anyone once betrayed, can empathetically understand her anger and frustration. It is the final act of murdering her second son in front of Jason which negates any heartfelt moments in Medea. Her evil actions consume her and even killing her two sons “is too petty for [her] passion” (394). The murder of her innocent sons remains unjustified. Medea’s plans are finished and she leaves him alone. Traveling toward the skies Medea frees herself from the man for whom she committed dastardly crimes.

As a female villain, her gender brings about questions of emotion and irrationality. Seneca’s Medea is on a “self search for radical, unpredicated independence” from the man who defined her (Gordon Braden qtd. in Waith 156). An enraged lover would simply leave his or her lover, but the children and other murders verifies that evil takes control. Medea represents “the destructiveness of women [who] seek to bring down the entire universe with her” (Durham 55-6). Seneca’s revengeful Medea shocks audiences by murdering her children, but evokes audience’s sympathy or empathy in brief moments. Most importantly to Seneca’s villain is the lack of a justified end, thus no cathartic moment or tragic pleasure as Aristotle desires of tragic characters. The end result, according to Aristotle’s characteristics, is disappointing, but Medea’s vengeance remains legendary as a Senecan villain.

Richard III

In the structure of Shakespeare's Richard III *(R3)*, this Machiavellian villain, as Boyer defines Richard in his The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy, serves a vital purpose in the overall plot: Richard's grand scheme and force perpetuate every event and character action. "We may admire [Richard's] cleverness, physical stamina, and sheer energy" (Waith 155). Richard's discontent with his surrounding world and his ability to trust in himself gives this character strong agility in the world of the play. Richard holds no moral or emotional values, is driven to pursue his kingdom, is eloquent, "subtle, false, and treacherous" and entirely audacious (*R3*.1.1.37). Characteristically, a Machiavellian villain is an admirer of treachery, intelligent, both the lion and fox, remorseless, nonchalant in torture and blood, and a confider in the audience who finally dies cursing; Richard embodies these traits.

In his discussion of plots laid, Richard sets up himself as a forward and justifies his coming behavior on his deformities in hopes of expelling audience sympathies:

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks [. . .]
> Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time [. . .]
> Have no delight to pass away the time [. . .]
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover [. . .]
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days [. . .] (*R3*.1.1.15-31)

In analyzing Shakespeare's text, the peace between the York and Lancaster houses breaks at the play's onset upon Richard's determination to become King and prove himself a villain. Richard sets the action into motion by disclosing to the audience that he has positioned King Edward and his brother Clarence against each other. Richard immediately amazes the audience with his acting abilities in wooing Lady Anne to secures his rise to the throne. Audaciously, Richard takes it upon himself to seduce Anne on the streets while men carry the bodies of her deceased father and husband, whom Richard has killed so she might have "a far truer love" (1.2. 218). He puts himself on the line and opens her eyes to his "good side," the side of an incredible actor who manipulates with precision and sexuality:

> If thy revengeful ear cannot forgive,
> Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword
> Which if though please to hide in this true breast,
> And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,
> I lay it naked to the deadly stoke,
> And humbly beg the death upon my knee. (1.2.199-204)

Richard's portrayal of a pitied man continues throughout the remainder of the play and fools characters who pose a threat to his power. Audiences are also wooed by Richard here and a brief moment of sympathy for the deformed man is evoked. The anonymous author of "An Essay upon the Present State of the Theatre in France, England and Italy" observes that "[Richard's] execrable and horrid crimes contract something sublime and

elevating, and all the exaggerations of [his] guilt contribute to raise [him] to a character of heroism" (qtd. in Danziger 38).

As the action builds, Richard's status as protectorate of Queen Elizabeth's son, Thomas Grey, situates his control over the kingdom. The Queen's recognition that Richard "loves not me, nor none of you" (referring to the rest of the nobles) but secures his position with the King makes audiences wonder what he might do, concerning the child, to attain his crown (*R3*.1.3.16). Here, Shakespeare foreshadows the scenes when the young princes Edward (Prince of Wales) and Richard (Duke of York) enter to be crowned King. Richard's goal to separate the young Prince of Wales from his mother and store both princes away in the Tower until after the coronation allows for swift movement and treacherous nonchalance in his every step and breath. By Richard's cunning, the young princes are missing and the female nobles are distressed. Richard's ultimate goal is achieved: he is crowned King.

Interestingly, Shakespeare structures the text so that Richard never kills anybody himself; he enlists others like Clarence's murderers and Tyrell to do the dirty work he orders. Richard speaks little of the murders and focuses on his plan's next step (as in act 3, scene 5). Uniquely, no killings take place on stage aside from Richard's. By dramatizing Richard's death, Shakespeare deemphasizes the other characters' deaths just as Richard has, while increasing sympathy for Richard who dies before an audience.

Shakespeare contrasts Richard's malicious ways with other characters' righteousness, allowing audiences to see Richard's acting skills which gain him incredible leverage. In comparison to his own evil co-conspirator Buckingham, Richard

is entirely wicked and never questions his choices when faced with a moral decision; he does what he deems necessary to gain the crown, regardless of the task. Buckingham's brief moment of hesitation when Richard asks for his help in disposing of his two young nephews in act 4, scene 2 causes Richard to dispose of his faithful accomplice. Although Buckingham is concerned about his selfish welfare, in this moment Shakespeare pulls audiences in. If Richard disposes his own partner in crime, then Richard's malevolent capacity rises.

The ghostly appearance of Richard's murder victims in act 5, scene 3 allows audiences to sympathize for Richard. Broken down to his most vulnerable state, the audience experiences sympathy for Richard as he delivers this speech:

> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me! [. . .]
>
> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
>
> Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I. [. . .]
>
> For any good / That I myself have done unto myself?
>
> O no! Alas I rather hate myself
>
> For hating deeds committed by myself.
>
> I am a villain. [. . .]
>
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
>
> And if I die, no soul shall pity me. (5.3.206-28)

Although Richard battles himself, he realizes his own afflictions. He understands that his course of action has led him to this point, and audiences find themselves pitying Richard because no one wants to be unloved. Regardless of status, the notion of love is important

for all creatures, good or bad. This realization though does not stop Richard from continuing to defend his crown in the war against Richmond later.

In the end, audiences pity the death of Richard whose talents are wasted (Boyer 95). Lord Kames "suggests that it is possible to identify oneself so fully with a villainous conqueror that one scarcely notices his ruthlessness. 'The splendour and enthusiasm of the hero transfused into the readers, elevate their minds far above the rules of justice, and render them in a great measure insensible to the wrongs that are committed" (Danziger 43). Lost in Richard's weave of incredible talents and audaciousness, audiences momentarily forget the man as a villain, and focus on his movements to "produce a well ordered state" (over his brothers' reigns) and charisma which entrance all who come near him (Boyer 80). The villainous Richard embodies evil, ambition, and the fear of audiences who recognize a real person who similarly speaks as they do. As previously mentioned, Shakespeare does not allow Richard to keep sympathy for long– he always negates any feeling toward Richard with murder. Audiences ultimately end with a wealth of tragic emotion; Richard induces catharsis, inspires both fear and pity, and represents the pure evil villain, even with his recognition of his sins.

The Duchess of Malfi

Webster's The Duchess of Malfi provides Renaissance Theatre with three villains, but the most interesting is Bosola, as Boyer describes, the Tool villain who commits crimes for more powerful villain out of desperation for money or status. Bosola serves as

the executioner to the plans of the villainous brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, typical of the Tool villain. Bosola's ultimate objective is money and status. As a character who does not come from wealth or power, and his villainy raised from "horse-dung," Bosola enters into business with the brothers, who are more horrible villains than himself, to achieve his monetary dreams (326). In order to achieve his desires, Bosola looks to crime and assassination to fill this need of importance which he wishes, a similar characteristic which Boyer notes to the Malcontent villain, who believes that life is well spent if he executes villainy (157). Regardless of his good moments, Bosola does the deeds he is ordered; therefore he is a villain. He states the importance of money and status in his situation: "I would have you curse yourself now, that your bounty / (Which makes men truly noble) e'er should make me / A villain" and to be "create[d as] one of [the brother's] familiars" (328-9).

Bosola also evokes momentary sympathy from audiences as he serves as a statute of morality within the lower-class villain who commits dastardly sins yet second guesses himself and the brothers quite often: "Take your devils', / Which hell calls angels; these cursed gifts would make / You a corruptor, me an impudent traitor; / And should I take these, they'd take me to hell" (*DOM*.329). Bosola is a stereotypical Tool villain, but his moments of sympathy arguably do not provoke sympathy from the audience because, as Boyer says, "his moral struggle is not great enough"; thus he remains a villain because of his selfish reasons (162). Unfortunately, the only way Bosola knows to exact revenge against the brothers and avenge the deaths of the Duchess, Antonio, and their children is to murder the two people who ordered their deaths.

Given orders by Ferdinand, Bosola watches over their sister, the Duchess, to prevent her from remarrying. In filling these orders Bosola furthers the plot with his intelligent use of the apricocks on the Duchess who eats them and is forced into labor. Bosola is so consumed at this point with his goal that he disregards the harm this action could cause the woman and her child, forwarding his ruthless tactics in coming villainies. With his cunning, the brothers find out about their sister's pregnancy and order Bosola to do what is necessary to prevent her remarriage which brings about many deaths. At this point, Webster supplies audiences with a scene to remind them that these plans are the work of the brothers and that Bosola only finalizes the plans.

Bosola continues to "act" on behalf of the other characters, especially the Duchess, when he feigns adoration for The Duchess's beloved Antonio and suggests she send him away to prevent any further problems. With Antonio out of the way, Bosola continues his work to drive the Duchess mad. But Webster allows audiences to see Bosola speak to his conscience about the Duchess, where "moral judgment is weighed with sympathy, [. . .] before the dead man's hand" (Waith 155):

> She's sad as one long used to't, and she seems
> Rather to welcome the end of misery
> Than shun it; [. . .]
> You may discern the shape of loveliness
> More perfect in her tears than in her smiles. . . (*DOM*. 346)

Following this monologue, Ferdinand and Bosola deliver Antonio's fake hand to the Duchess and watch her suffer. The Duchess's reaction to seeing the false hand and wax

figures of a dead Antonio and children changes Bosola and the remainder of the play's action dramatically. Upon seeing her despair Bosola tells the Duchess that she must live, and attempts to raise her spirits, letting her know that none of it was real; he says, "I will save you" (347). Whether the moments immediately following are Bosola acting or really making a moral decision are unclear because in the next scene (4.2) he treats the Duchess in an abhorrent manner (whether this part is for show or true is decidedly up to the director and actor playing the role). An argument can be made that Bosola begins to let his conscience speak, as his later actions show that he suffers from guilt upon the Duchess's death; but it can also be argued that this moment is an act to stay on her good side and continue to extract information. Both are viable, but his concern for status takes precedence here, rendering him an actor, not a sympathetic human being.

Bosola begins to see the outcome of his villainous actions against the Duchess and Antonio but persists in murdering and tormenting the Duchess at the command of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, remembering that his bounty is most important. In relation to the villainous brothers, who feel that they are doing good to their family name and status, Bosola is a compliant servant. But Bosola questions his orders and at times tries not to fulfill them. Act 5, scene 1 shows Bosola's integrity in contrast to Ferdinand's unrelenting desire to bring his sister to despair.

BOSOLA: Must I see her again?

FERDINAND: Yes.

BOSOLA: Never.

FERDINAND: You must.

BOSOLA: Never in mine own shape . . . (*DOM* 347)

He continues in tormenting the Duchess upon Ferdinand's orders, calling her "a box of worm-seed" and coming to "make [her] tomb" (349). He invites in the mad men from the neighboring asylum to drive the Duchess mad and dresses up as an older man, hiding himself under clothing, to take her to her end. This final straw breaks both Ferdinand and Bosola; they are despaired by the death of the Duchess and unable to handle the pain. Johann Georg Sulzer "suggest[s] that a highly gifted villain may change and eventually perform deeds of extraordinary virtue, whereas the ordinary man, without the strength of mind and sensibility of such a villain, is likely to remain a moral nonentity" (qtd. in Danziger 41). Both blame themselves as well as others, but Ferdinand fails to recall that he ordered the death of his sister and that Bosola was only the tool to get to this end. At the end of their argument, Bosola inquires about his money which the brothers owe him for his work on the Duchess. Taken out of the gory world of the play and reminded that Bosola is only doing these deeds to live, audiences still deem Bosola a villain and unsympathetic. Without the function of Bosola as the executioner, neither Antonio, the Duchess, the children, Ferdinand, the Cardinal, nor Bosola would be dead.

What is challenging about Bosola's character is the lack of tragic emotion audiences feel as Bosola, who has realized the errors of his ways, dies, especially in comparison to the deaths of the brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Audiences elate in the brothers' death, but in Bosola's the line between good and evil has been blurred so much that this Tool villain unfortunately dies back where he started, begging for

recognition. The Tool villain battles his own morals and meets his justified ends, a struggle in the character's and audiences' emotional state.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

The melodrama brings about a different type of villain. When melodrama and villains intersect, audiences tend to think of the overly exaggerated Snidely Whiplash of The Adventures of Dudley Do-Right, a man of dark clothing and appearance who indicates his words, explains his plans to the audience through asides, and speaks with music that heightens his character. On the whole, melodrama exaggerates the likeness of life. The villain's character also fails to create complex behavior or motivation simply because of the middle-class audience intended. The common association with the villain is from the humorous melodrama with the overly exaggerated, comedic villain.

Michael Booth's discussion of villainy in the melodrama from his book Hiss the Villain lists traits in stereotypical melodramatic villains. This villain is simply defined by plot and clothing, transparent. Booth describes the stereotype:

> The genuine villain is heartless, unprincipled, hateful, and entirely evil. [While] some attempt may be made to give him a sympathetic motive for his actions, sympathy never attaches to his present behaviour. [He is] continually in pursuit of the property and life [. . .] and the body of the heroine [. . .] without humane feeling [. . .] the villain meets with a fate such conduct justly deserves. (Booth 10-11)

Unlike the comedic melodramatic villain, the most popular melodrama in American theatre, George L. Aiken's dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, provides a villain who desires power and sexual satisfaction, much like the other villains studied here, and momentarily evokes audiences' sympathies.

The villainous Simon Legree enters Uncle Tom's Cabin in Act 5, nearly the end of the play. His non-appearance would spark interest if other characters spoke of him prior, but they do not. Legree, one of the most noted characters of this play, powerfully presents the reality of masters and slaves in the 1800s compared to the play's other kindly slave owners. Legree's actions reveal him as base and single minded, out for his own power and control. As a villain Legree is a violently merciless man after his own fortunes. He embodies the slave master in the worst ways: vicious and maniacal. But Aiken provides Legree with a single moment where his character can potentially evoke audiences' sympathies.

In Act V Legree's entrance immediately breaks the current stasis as he greets the slave Adolf at an auction: "A nigger with his boots blacked – bah! (*Spits on them*.)" (Aiken 60). His action, in comparison to Adolf's previous owner St. Clare, degrades the slave and supplies violence in the play. Aiken uses a series of tableaux in scenes with Legree to dramatize tension in the plot, as well as provide audiences with an emotionally summative picture. Audiences "thrived on the sensationalism, and the extremes of pathos, nobility, virtue and vice that melodramas supplied," and the tableau upon first meeting Legree shows Tom and Emmeline kneeling before the powerful Legree (Booth 15). Legree's character is set by this prominent picture. A second tableau shows

Emmeline on the floor and Legree standing with a whip over Tom, again providing the audience with recognizable moments to contrast the good and evil in slavery.

The moment of no return, and the most sympathetic moment for Legree comes as the slave Sambo brings Legree a long curl of light hair taken from Tom as he was flogged. Legree changes into an emotionally suffering man and brings about the melodrama's ultimate ending. Contrary to Booth's assertions, Uncle Tom's Cabin presents Simon Legree as easily identifiable as a villain but filled with a past life which brings him to tears and allows audiences to see into his mind (unique of the typical melodramatic villain).

At first inspection of the hair Legree angrily breaks into a frenzy, "stamping and writhing," but as soon as the lock of hair disappears, Legree uncharacteristically breaks down, admitting that he "thought [he]'d forgotten that" and has "so long and vainly striven to forget" (Aiken 80). The question of what was forgotten draws audiences to the plot and Legree's character, forcing audiences to question his power, force, and sensitivity. The next scene allows audiences into Legree's emotional past (which Booth claims scarcely exists) and lets them understand his anger and hatred, a moment to connect with the villain's gentler side. As many psychologists have explored, Legree's moment of reality stems from his relented past, tyrannical father, and hopeful mother:

> I never came home but once after that; and then my mother [. . .] clung to me, and sought with passionate prayers and entreaties to win me from a life of sin. [. . .] And one night, when my mother, in the last agony of her despair, knelt at my feet, I spurned her from me, threw her

> senseless on the floor, and with brutal curses fled to my ship. [. . .] The next I heard of my mother was one night while I was carousing among drunken companions. A letter was put in my hands. I opened it, and a lock of long, curling hair fell from it, and twined about my fingers, even as that lock twined but now. The letter told me that my mother was dead, and that dying she blest and forgave me. (81)

Legree's emotional moment provides the hope that Legree could be a good-hearted person, especially since Legree recognizes his sinful ways and this moment brings about such agony and tears. This moment allows audiences to sympathize for Legree; it is understandable that if one represses pain long enough, anger results. Deciding that Tom knows his past and possibly has powers in witchcraft, Legree decides to leave Tom alone. Sympathy strongly brings the audience closer to Legree, although the desire to connect with him remains absent.

Although this moment shows Legree fearing Tom and letting him alone, at a later instant when Tom refuses to tell Legree where the two female slaves are, Legree uses the anger from the lock of hair to kill Tom. After Tom dies, Legree replies with remorseless villainy, "Well his mouth is shut up at last – that's one comfort" (Aiken 87). By avenging his own emotional state aroused by his hurtful past and Tom, Legree relinquishes his wrath and power on Tom to return to his own stability. Legree's "crime and violence and the utmost exertions of villainy can only produce poetic justice and a re-assertion of a benevolent moral order which, though in temporary upheaval, always rights

itself" (Booth 9-10). Ending in the most fashionable way for a villain, Legree receives what he deserves and dies by the execution of the lawyer Marks.

Melodrama represents the escape which nineteenth-century society desired. Legree represented the evil people and ways of life, and the redemptive ending in Uncle Tom's Cabin relieves audiences who suffered from the politics of the day. The melodrama "was built on moral absolutes; there was and could be no confusion between virtue and vice, between right and wrong, between the hero and the villain. This idealized world was simple and the rules were plain; one knew exactly where one stood" (39). Legree serves as the ruthless and merciless slave owner, a villain with which audiences easily identified and for which potentially sympathized, but did not care for. Legree's downfall brings about closure and allows good to triumph over evil.

Moving Toward the Contemporary Villain

But today's world is not simple; twentieth-century man does not know where he stands and has faith in neither absolutes nor ideals. The stereotypical villain changes in theatrical form and is not so easily identified in the play, but is more identifiable and understandable to audiences. The mid-nineteenth century artistic movement of realism, inaugurated by Ibsen and Strindberg, objectively looks at people and events as they truly are, prodding at life without exaggeration. By producing a close approximation to "reality" on stage, audience members' aesthetic distance diminishes and they soon find themselves emotionally invested in the characters and artistic piece. "Earlier ideology

emphasized constraints, because man felt his place within a binding order to be natural and consistent with the world system" (Lukács 153). Man stayed within his social and moral boundaries, but the new age of realism brought new questions and new problems found in society to stages. Plays in the beginnings of realism also began blurring the boundaries between comedy and tragedy, combating social issues previously dealt with through comedy. The beginnings of realism and "the study of so-called instinct gave rise to modern psychological drama, the study of background to modern social drama" (Gassner, "Realism" 3). Audiences are psychologically interested in probing human motives and the deepest recesses of the human mind, in interior rather than external action" (Booth 39). Breaking away from the presentational art of previous eras, playwrights challenged audiences to look into "reality" on stage which reflected reality outside.

The change in the audience which has given way to understandable contemporary villains and empathetic audiences dates to realism and the rise of the middle class in the early 1900s. George Lukács's "The Sociology of Modern Drama" theorizes that "drama has now taken on new social dimensions" out of necessity (147). With modern moral boundaries more difficult to draw, the individual is influenced often at the expense of outside forces and must weigh situations according to his/her own judgment. He attributes the rising bourgeois classes, who express their *individual* opinions and needs rather than socially constructed thoughts and emotions, as central to the changing personality of drama. Lukács states that individual valued judgment, the character's conflict between passion and ideology, and struggle for power and freedom inflict moral

problems on social classes. The conflict though, inflicted from the outside, from external forces where characters find no control, turns inward, and suddenly characters do not represent a social class anymore, but a sole individual who must "defend rather than attack" (150). When external forces affect one strongly, a new development in human behavior is shaped; it then, as realistic/modern drama suggests, becomes that man may not be responsible for what he or she does because the outside influence forces the individual to act in a particular way. Characters must weigh situations according to their own judgment. Where do the boundaries lie then for good versus evil?

> In our unstable age we observe, finally, as we might well have expected, much erosion of boundaries between the types of drama created in the past. [. . .] Since most people are neither comic nor tragic, neither heroes nor villains, they fall into intermediate classifications [. . .] that produce [. . .] drama of intermediate effect. So does the veracious playwriting that shows us [. . .] characters vitiated by their environment, destroyed by a pathological condition, or doomed to stalemate and disintegration. (Gassner, Introduction xv)

Modern plays, and now contemporary plays, challenge their audiences to individually decide for themselves the effect and purpose of the play and its characters. Modern drama focuses on individuals "derived on the whole from a single class"; man becomes separated from his environment, distinguished from his social class, and disassociated with the standards and expectations of his predictable life (Lukács 147). The older villains analyzed in this chapter greedily desire power but also desire to serve a greater

purpose or good (in their own minds). "But now these lines of division have blurred [. . .] that the concepts which distinguish man from his environment, flesh from spirit, free will from circumstance, hero from destiny, character from situation, are nearly deprived in the face of the complexity of constant interactions" (149). According to Lukács, modern dramatic man becomes separated from his will, that his actions are no longer his own, and reason and morality remain insignificant to the decisions he now makes; similar to Aristotle, the character can evoke no sympathy and is deemed "unjustifiable" and "irrational."

Today's villains push the stereotypical villain boundaries away and require audiences to take note, understand, empathize, critically think, and make a social change. "Where the tragedy was previously brought on by the particular *direction* taken by the will, the mere *act* of willing suffices to induce it in the new tragedy" (Lukács 154). But while the villains analyzed in this chapter remain stereotypical; they also evoke a moment of empathy and sympathy from audiences as they plead their cases. The other characters do and do not function as they are socially demanded, making their moral decisions based upon their free will and what they see fit in regards to their grand illusion. Lukács adds to this argument: "When the motivations are wholly based upon character, however, the wholly inward origin of this destiny will drive the character relentlessly to the limits of pathology" (168). The contemporary villain engages in a struggle, "something drives him into it which he can not resist; it is not his to decide whether he even wishes to resist," and thus the audience can not resist either; it becomes, as Lukács declares, an "illness" (151). The realization and depth of the self explored in modern plays holds the

character's mind and heart central to the playwright and audience's focus, which means that the psychology of the character is more developed as well. Only by understanding behavior do audiences connect with the character.

Modern audiences, too, though require deeper characters whose internal frustrations explain their angst and action. As a force in theatre, realism provides audiences more moments to connect with characters and the situations, find familiar qualities within, understand and learn from them, and apply those lessons to their own actuality. Characters from realism, like Nora from A Doll's House, become similar to Aristotle's "cathartic" requirement of a tragic character, and to audiences who "expel 'pity' and 'fear,'" equivalent to the character's emotional state but at a distance "broad enough to cover the most pathological or near-pathological elements" (Gassner, "Catharsis" 515). The rise in modern psychology and the analysis of human character notably points to the change in audience expectations and the need to understand and connect with characters.

A psychological study of contemporary villains is found in film and graphic novel theory and emphasizes psychoanalytic approaches to creating villainous characters and identifying the reasons why audiences watch them. William Indick's Movies and the Mind: Theories of the Great Psychoanalysts Applied to Film analyzes the structure of the movie villain and attempts to understand the psychological reasons for villainy, providing in-depth investigations of symbolism in film imagery and structure. According to Indick, "villains are typically immoral cads who satisfy their primal desires for their victims. The movie villain is the unconscious representations for the repressed id desires. Unlike

the hero, the villain is free to express his primal desires in any way he sees fit" (26). Indick's use of psychologist Sigmund Freud's analysis of the human psyche speaks particularly of the villainous character. According to Indick, Freud relates the unconscious and neurotic conflict of the self to Oedipal Themes (*Oedipus Rex*) which explains that "infantile sexuality, aggressive impulses, sexual drives and unconscious repression play key roles in the mind of the neurotic" (5).

Applying Freud's theories to villains, Indick finds these characters suffer from a lack of guilt because they lack respect for rules and authority. "In this way, the viewers experience a vicarious sense of freedom and guilty pleasure by identifying with the villain" (26). Freud's triarchic structure of the psyche, the id (basic drives toward sex and aggression), the ego (compromise of id and superego), and the superego (moral restraints of society) fill the human condition with various psychological effects. The underdeveloped superego of the villain as defined by Freud, combined with a well developed id, creates interesting characters. There is no balance in the typical villain regarding these Freudian concepts. But, Indick says, "since this wild man has no internal conscious, his id must be defeated and punished by an external moral conscience – the hero. The challenge of the guiltless character is to constrain his unbridled libido and develop a conscience" (30). Freud associates some villainy with suppressing sexual needs which date to parents who might have sexually molested them or not given enough love. With this notion in mind, the villain has become evil because of the people who raised him, thus it is not his own fault for his actions.

Mike Alsford's Heroes and Villains examines film villains through a broader approach in psychological and theological methods, identifying issues relating to the human condition and investigating what it means to be human. He establishes the appropriate modes of behavior for human beings, that "what we are and what it is that drives us represents a lifelong quest for both the individual human being and humanity as a whole" (Alsford x). Alsford's focus on humanity's form in relation to audience awareness connects to both film and theatre's villains. Defining the villain and hero helps audiences reflect upon their own ideals and transfers back to the onstage villain. This transference validates or condemns audience members' own actions, beliefs, and feelings concerning good and evil. Alsford believes that identifying these qualities "can provide us with a useful insight into the values we consider important in any definition of what it means to be human" (xi). It is important to recall that "humanity is one of very few species that preys on itself," and the question of whether humanity is "only ever as good as the laws and conventions that constrain [it]" must be raised (115). But are audiences just as close to becoming a villain once the laws are removed? The author implies so.

What happens when there is a potentially justifiable reason for villainy? Alsford notes Alan Moore's Batman: The Killing Joke which demonstrates that anybody can be a villain if punished enough. In Moore's graphic novel, the Joker has been the victim of a horrible day. The Joker, an unknown engineer, finds out his pregnant wife has been electrocuted. His despair and frustration causes him to commit crimes for which he is taken to an asylum. He escapes and is driven insane by the events of this bad day. At

this point in the novel, the Joker has escaped from Arkham Asylum and intends to drive Police Commissioner Gordon insane. "The villain would appear to lack empathy, the ability to feel for others, to see themselves as part of the larger whole," but the Joker evokes empathy and warns audiences of how close they can be to his state. Batman arrives to save the day, and the following monologue suggests that villainy is simply one bad day away.

> Joker: You see, it doesn't matter if you catch me and send me back to the asylum. . . Gordon's been driven mad, I've proven my point. I've demonstrated there's no difference between me and everyone else! All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy. That's how far the world is from where I am. Just one bad day. You had a bad day once, am I right? I know I am. I can tell. You had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up like a flying rat? You had a bad day, and it drove you as crazy as everyone else . . . only you won't admit it! You have to keep pretending that life makes sense, that there is some point to all this struggling! God, you make me want to puke. (Moore qtd. in Alsford 124)

The Joker presents a powerful point, and his revengeful punishment of Gordon seems unjustified and justified at the same time given the character's circumstances. Audiences are given the reasons for the Joker's insanity and now villainous actions. When villainy reaches the point of insane tyranny, Alsford notes that villains "simply do not care" (120-1).

In a more focused section of his text, Alsford looks at the villain as a character. A villain, Alsford defines, is a "person who operates according to their [*sic*] own rules, who refuses to conform to be limited by convention or taboo has a strength and presence that is hard to ignore and in some ways is hard not to admire" (95). The admiration for strength and talent in the villain aligns with audiences' fascinations with villains through theatre's history (109). "Today's film villains seek to be a law unto themselves and strive for control and some sense of world domination or godhood status [. . .] The villain seeks to simplify the world, to recast it in to a single image where the only law is the law of their own individual, autonomous will [. . .] to do all the reckless wickedness that civilization, society, religion and ethics are designed to keep submerged and suppressed" (96; 110). Although not always true of theatrical villains, who especially in the present day strive for dominance in their own world, this general concept remains relevant.

The connection these articles make between the audience and the villain unites many film theories.

> Filmmakers realized early on that audiences love to identify with villains. Part of the joy of cinema is the ability to enjoy vicarious pleasures through the characters on the screen. Viewers often enjoy seeing villains engage in sin and vice more than they enjoy seeing their heroes exhibit the boring virtues of morality and goodness. Sinners simply have much more fun. Hence, villains are often more popular than their hero counterparts. (Indick 27)

The bond created between audiences and villains remains rarely socially or personally recognized by audiences, but screenwriters know that villains continue to fascinate audiences.

Salamon asserts that “in postmodern entertainment culture, human evil is by definition pathological [or abnormal . . .],” thus the need for characters and playwrights to evoke sympathy and empathy which connect audiences to villains (56). It is the villain from the comedic melodramas which audiences commonly associate with the term villain, that the Snidely Whiplashes are the villains audiences readily identify. And these kinds of villains are those which drastically contrast the contemporary villains studied in this thesis.

Motivated by *understandable* and even empathetic factors, not only greed, money, or power, the villain acts on emotional and personal levels of desiring understanding, love, acceptance, and care. More so than before, audiences find themselves in the characters and their situations. By introducing characters with which audiences identify, playwrights create roles that make socially aware statements with the intention of affecting change in the world.

CHAPTER III: ROY COHN AND ANGELS IN AMERICA

"I'm not afraid of death. What can death bring that I haven't faced?"—Roy Cohn

As realism gave way to contemporary theatre, Tony Kushner's Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, with its fantastic elements, enlightens audiences and propagates change in light of the Reagan Administration through the play's vastly political characters. Angels' villain Roy Cohn functions as a representative of the wider social issues of homosexuals, AIDS, and power in the 1980s. Kushner designs Cohn to play with audience emotions and opinions, to alternately bring audiences to sympathize with him, and then dislike him, to empathize with him as a victim of society and then remember that he is a villain who caused much of the bigotry from which he finally suffers. The frequency of sympathy for Cohn is more so than the classic villains studied in Chapter II, who saw only one moment of sympathy from audiences during each play's course. The potential for audience sympathy for Cohn challenges audiences' view of the villain, for Kushner includes moments in both Millennium Approaches and Perestroika which allows audiences to see inside Cohn's heart and renders him vulnerable as well. By using these recurrent, although interim sympathetic moments followed by Cohn's prejudiced opinions, and drawing Cohn as a character who loses control of his own world and learns nothing from his life-long journey, Kushner creates the first of this thesis' new villains, the villain who is understood, pitied, and hated in rapid succession.

The journey of all of Kushner's characters throughout the play allows audiences into Angels' fantastic world filled with horrible realities like AIDS, abandonment, and prejudice. Kushner speaks of life's journey in scene one of Millennium Approaches through Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz: "You can never make that crossing that [Sarah Ironson] made, for such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist. But every day of your lives the miles that voyage between that place and this one you cross. Every day. You understand me? In you that journey is" (Kushner 17). The play's villain Roy Cohn most notably resembles, as New York Observer's John Heilpern notes, the "collapse of the moral universe during the Reagan years" and the journey of America to its new beginning. Cohn stands for the soon-ending old era to be succeeded by the new "great work" era symbolized by Prior. Stephen J. Bottoms, in his "Re-Staging Roy: Citizen Cohn and the Search for Xanadu," notes that Kushner's Angels "uses its representation of 'Roy' to raise important questions about the condition of America's multicultural, heterogeneous society, and particularly about the perpetuation [. . .] of certain dominant, narrowly homogenized views of social and sexual 'normality'" (158). Cohn is an interesting contemporary villain who remains true to the villainous stereotype and desires powerful recognition. What Cohn does not desire but evokes from audiences and others is understanding and sympathy (or pity as it may be termed).

During the 1980s President Ronald Reagan re-tooled America through Reaganomics and ending the Cold War. But for the gay community, Reagan's *laissez-faire* attitude toward AIDS posed a serious problem. Ross Posnock's article, "Roy Cohn in America," conveys the feeling of Reagan's time: "as Louis [from Angels] puts it, 'we

all know' what it is like to be 'Reagan's kids,' to be part of a family that isn't 'really a family . . . there aren't any connections there, no love,' and children and parents 'don't even speak to each other except through their agents'" (5). Louis's allegory connects to the first reported case of AIDS in 1981 America and the gay community that seems to have scarcely been part of Reagan's family. President Reagan's refusal to accept AIDS until 1988 resulted in severe losses of life and resentment found only in the bonds of father and son whose relationship falls apart by a father's high expectations and a son's disappointing actions (see the discussion later in this chapter regarding Cohn and Joe's relationship). The lack of conversation about the infectious disease enraged gay Americans; they and AIDS were ignored. David Savran observes that "America is defined entirely by its relationship to the 'political,'" and Kushner's Angels pursues a better and more communicative system between politics and people (30).

If, as Savran asserts, political associations make for identifying oneself within American society, then Roy Cohn embodies a political sect that refuses to accept its surrounding reality. As a postmodern dramatist who promotes ambiguity, Kushner makes it very difficult to label Cohn as a villain within the confines of the text. Cohn's past life can conclusively be labeled as villainous, and only his vulgarity and threats within Angels perpetuates this label. "Legendary at working all the angles, [the real Roy] Cohn possessed an insatiable appetite for the pleasures and perils of wheedling, welshing, cajoling, extorting. His was a life of sheer performativity, free of legal or moral qualms. Laws existed to transgress, boundaries to violate" (Posnock 1). Kushner's use of the real closeted, homosexual lawyer Cohn as a character dramaturgically speaks for the powerful

yet distant ideals of the 1950s and his reputation/past-life as Senator Joseph McCarthy's right-hand man in fighting communism. Providing strong views of the politically corrupt and purposely blind, "Kushner's depiction of Roy exposes what McCarthyism did; it is connected to a criticism against the Reagan Administration for having failed to take action soon enough against the AIDS epidemic" (Fujita 114). "One of the most remarkable aspects of *Angels* [. . .] is the way in which sympathetic moments emerge for even the most monstrous and transgressing characters" who represents the villainous political climate (Fisher 21). Cohn's disturbing political and social comments disrupt the society of Angels, and when he falls victim to AIDS which he cannot control and learns nothing from his journey, it is truly heartbreaking.

In regards to contemporary villainy and the purpose of this thesis, Roy Cohn combines classic villain stereotypes with contemporary traits. Cohn's power and need for infamy drive him as a modern Machiavel: ambitious, courageous, faithless, intelligent, energetic, vulgar, audacious, an actor, defiant of moral and judicial law, employing bribery or blackmail, lusting for power, and witty. Like other Machiavels, Cohn fears losing his place in history, so he forces his way in and proudly admits to gaining fame by any means possible.

> ROY: You ever hear of Ethel Rosenberg? Huh, Joe, huh? [. . .]
>
> If it wasn't for me, Joe, Ethel Rosenberg would be alive today, writing some personal-advice column for *Ms.* Magazine. She isn't. Because during the trial, Joe, I was on the phone every day, talking with the judge [. . .] Every day, doing what I do best, talking on the telephone,

> making sure that timid Yid nebbish on the bench did his duty to America, to history. [. . .] I pleaded till I wept to put her in the chair. Me. I did that. I would having fucking pulled the switch if they'd had let me. [. . .] Was it legal? Fuck legal. (Kushner 113-4)

Like classic villains, moral law and death do not daunt Cohn and he forwards each action in his life to step toward a place in history. He proudly admits to never killing anyone except Ethel who "*deserved*" it. Stepping over boundaries only propels him to the top and the challenge reinforces his lustful desires and energy.

As a contemporary villain though, Cohn angers audiences, arouses tumultuous opinions, and embodies a bigger theme: big political power in the old era that monopolize on "internalized oppression" and "the weightless age of Reagan" (Posnock 3). Cohn is now at the end of this era and the end of his villainies. In his past he has "helped make Presidents and unmake them and mayors and more goddam judges in NYC" than anyone (Kushner 112). Cohn's fearlessness propels him to reach new heights, and his 1950s McCarthy training forces him to ruthlessly fight for clout and position. He lives in a different era which makes complete sense to him and he simply transfers those lessons into the 1980s; he knows no different, thus his journey remains halted. It can be assumed that Cohn stands in a similar place as the God of Angels and a symbol for Reagan—fear of change, of discomfort, and progress keeps these characters pursuing only what they know. If progress shakes up heaven and sends God away from the Angels and Reagan from fighting AIDS, then Cohn too can be seen as someone who wants no change in the world.

Cohn's denied homosexuality plays a significant role in his character and villainies, but results in little, lasting sympathy for the prejudiced lawyer. As a man who battles with coming to terms with his sexual preference (which he never does), his denial raises awareness and emotion in the audience who sees a lost journey due to the standards set forth by both McCarthy and the Reagan's times. In an interview, actor Ron Leibman states that "for him to survive he had to deny. He had to be a tough guy" (qtd. in Stevens). Cohn lives in his own age where homosexuality is not an option, and at the risk of disappointing his father figure, McCarthy, Cohn focuses on success and pleasing others rather than promoting self acceptance. His battle against AIDS and his lack of personal growth makes him truly sympathetic. Cohn's loss of self-control and power potentially preys on audience sympathies.

Similar to classic villains, Cohn's super-objective to leave a lasting legacy on history propels him to reject anything that sets him up for failure (symbolic of Reagan's administration that refused to answer to AIDS). "So inflamed was [Cohn's] desire to be recognized that it burned through layers of civilizing insulation, exposing to view the raw literalness, the naked avidity, of his need" (Posnock 5). "Clout" is of most importance to Cohn, and he tests his influence each time he picks up the phone. Audiences see Cohn in the beginning handling multiple phone calls to mildly please others and ultimately achieve his ends: he arranges Broadway tickets for Judge Hollins, evades Mrs. Soffer from whom he borrowed money, and attempts to persuade Joe to head to Washington all with the touch of the "hold" button. Cohn's vigorously over-the-top persona startles an

unexpected spectator which potentially ignites audiences to set up barriers to prevent the fervent Cohn from getting too close.

He continues to show off his "clout" as he learns of his illness. This moment truly details Cohn as despicable and ruthless as he threatens his doctor, but reveals the pitiful side of Cohn who refuses to accept reality only to save his career.

> ROY: Say it.
>
> HENRY: Say what? [. . .]
>
> ROY: "You are a. . . ." Go on. Not "Roy Cohn you are a drug fiend."
>
> "Roy Marcus Cohn, you are a . . ." Go on, Henry, it starts with an "H."
>
> HENRY: Oh I'm not going to [. . .]
>
> ROY: No, say it. I mean it. Say: "Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual."
>
> (*Pause*)
>
> And I will proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State, Henry. Which you know I can do. (Kushner 50)

Cohn immediately puts up his defenses and resorts to threatening his doctor to prove he remains powerful regardless of health. In doing so, he retains his control, keeps his "disease" hidden from public eyes, and shows his "clout" to Henry and audiences. Audience's empathize with Cohn's denial of AIDS, but the way Cohn speaks about the people (homosexuals) who contract AIDS distances the audience from feeling sympathy for Cohn at all. But he describes his reason for not accepting AIDS into his life: "The worst thing about being sick in America [. . .] is you are booted out of the parade.

Americans have no use for the sick. It's just no country for the infirm" (192). At the risk of losing his "clout" Cohn denies his illness because it renders him ill-equipped and weak.

Cohn's most significant speech about labels defines himself as a villain:

> No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. Not who I fuck or who fucks me, but who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors. This is what a label refers to. [. . .] Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me, Henry? (51)

Immediately prior to this speech, audiences sympathize for the ill and materialistic Cohn whose outward appearance is more important than his inner personal health, but typical of his character he subsequently negates any sympathy here with a defensive attack that guards his vulnerabilities. Cohn's notions here even parallel the extreme Leftist Louis in Millennium who states that "ultimately what defines us isn't race, but politics" (Kushner 96). By lashing out at all who come close to him, Cohn maintains the distance he requires to remain strong.

Kushner interweaves two relationships with Cohn that exposes his vulnerabilities. In combining Cohn's ruthless power with Joe's affection and Belize's attitude, Cohn's villainous ideas are challenged respectively by love and reason. "Royboy" Joe Pitt finds admirable qualities in Cohn and brings out his likable qualities. "Joe draws out Roy's

paternal side" and allows Cohn to teach about respect and "clout" (Posnock 3). The relationship between these characters fosters larger themes of forgiveness and the father/son bond. In their first scene Cohn parades his clout in front of Joe and offers him a position in Washington, ulteriorly to dismiss the disbarment case. But through this Cohn teaches audiences of love while giving more insight into his past and beliefs:

> The most precious asset in life, I think, is the ability to be a good son to a father who pushes them farther than they would otherwise go. I've had many fathers, I owe my life to them, powerful, powerful men. Walter Winchell, Edgar Hoover. Joe McCarthy most of all. He valued me because I am a good lawyer, but he loved me because I was and am a good son. [. . .] The father-son relationship is central to life. [. . .] Sometimes a father's love has to be very, very hard, unfair even, cold to make his son grow strong in a world like this. (62)

This personal anecdote opens Cohn to audiences and provides him with the chance to begin a father/son relationship with Joe, to continue the tradition set by McCarthy. Cohn listens to Joe and guides him, but at Joe's dismissal of the Washington job (for ethical purposes which Cohn refuses to understand) Cohn's heart uncharacteristically breaks; he feels betrayed. Like a father, a disappointed Cohn stands by Joe's decision. The prodigal Joe goes after his own dreams, leading to Joe's acceptance of homosexuality and departure from Harper. What brings about a likeable quality in Cohn is his undying "fatherly" love for Joe: "It's OK that you hurt me because I love you, baby Joe. That's why I'm so rough on you. [. . .] I'll always be here, waiting for you . . ." (115). As

Kushner draws Cohn tenderly, empathetic moments and sympathy arise from audiences, furthering their personal journey to reflect on Cohn's treatment of others, AIDS, and his treatment by Kushner.

The most interesting aspect of Joe and Cohn's relationship is the unexpected teaching of forgiveness. "Cohn in life, and certainly on stage, never sought forgiveness. [. . .] Forgiveness likely seemed to Cohn as meaningless as believing one can escape the nightmare of politics and history" (Posnock 4). Cohn may never seek forgiveness nor thinks himself wrong, but he preaches forgiveness to Joe.

> ROY: Did you get a blessing from your father before he died?
>
> JOE: A blessing?
>
> ROY: Yeah.
>
> JOE: No.
>
> ROY: He should have done that. Life. That's what their supposed to bless. Life.
>
> *(Roy motions for Joe to come over, then for him to kneel. He puts his hand on Joe's forehead. Joe leans the weight of his head into Roy's hand. They both close their eyes and enjoy it for a moment.)* (Kushner 214)

Cohn has learned these lessons from the men of the 1950s, and even though he does not learn from his journey, he teaches Joe how to prosper in his journey. "Like a father to a son," Cohn embraces and scolds Joe. Through forgiveness, respect, and a life of examples, Cohn releases Joe into the wild: "Show me a little of what you've learned, baby Joe. Out in the world" (259). As Cohn kisses Joe in his goodbye, confusion peaks

as audiences suspect Cohn's relation to Joe really is more than it appeared. There is now bewilderment about the villain and his intentions, which touchingly provides hope for the future: "what you love will take you places you never dreamed you'd go" (259).

The black, gay nurse Belize provides an insightful mind and contrasting character to the villainous Cohn. Both strong in their opinions, Belize and Cohn do not back away from confrontation. Kushner wants Belize

> to be the ideological counterweight to Roy, [so] that there were two people in the play who were not lost and inert and swimming around deeply confused. [Kushner] wanted there to be two people, one of the Left and one of the Right, who had a very clear moral compass and knew exactly where they were in the universe at all times, and who were not in theoretical, ethical crises. (McLeod 80)

Belize and Cohn share a mutual hatred purely based on denied identification issues. Belize challenges Cohn and stands as an example of self-confidence. Similar to Cohn's biting wit, but without unadulterated hatred, Belize constantly reminds Cohn of his place in the universe. In his first scene in the hospital Cohn berates Belize and gives him little respect, but Kushner includes an unexpected moment: Belize informs Cohn about the dangers of radiation therapy. While Cohn's ruthlessness keeps him from connecting with others, Belize helps a stunned Cohn.

> ROY: You hate me.
>
> BELIZE: Yes.
>
> ROY: Why are you telling me this?

BELIZE: I wish I knew. (Kushner 160)

But Belize, in his fashionable way (and just like Cohn), reminds Cohn that this favor is not because he likes him but is instead "solidarity. One faggot to another" (161). In provoking Cohn, Belize sets a clear example of identification; he knows who he is and accepts his place, something which Cohn refuses for fear of failure.

In scene two of Perestroika, Cohn lets audiences enjoy his company and the art of debate. As he jests and calls Belize crude names, to which Belize similarly responds, Cohn shows a lighter side of his character and proves that he respects principles despite ideological or social beliefs; a man who could possibly be kind and not purely evil.

ROY: Move your nigger cunt spade faggot lackey ass out of my room.

BELIZE: Shit-for-brains filthy-mouthed selfish motherfucking cowardly cocksucking cloven-hoofed pig.

ROY: Mongrel. Dinge. Slave. Ape.

BELIZE: Kike.

ROY: *Now* you're talking!

BELIZE: Greedy Kike.

ROY: Now you can have a bottle. But only one. (190-1)

As Cohn gives in to Belize's request for AZT, audiences see a likable character suited for bickering. Belize proves that if he can match Cohn's vulgarity, respect can be reached. If these two vastly different characters can learn to respect each other, representing both sides of the homosexual/political issue, then hope for America working together toward a unified goal is not far away.

The most unique factor of this villain is the amount of sympathy and empathy evoked from other characters and the audience who may understand his reasons for defensiveness but despises his tactics. In contrast to the majority of his conversations, once in the hospital room Cohn shocks the audience with his most sympathetic line: "Oh forchristsake. Whatta I gotta do? Beg? I don't want to be alone" (158). Understandably even the most vicious human requires attention at his state of vulnerability. Cohn's sympathetic connection with the audience comes not from his personality but his weakness as a victim.

From this point, Cohn's AIDS-related journey evokes sympathy from audiences in almost every scene. Focusing on the effects of AIDS, Kushner's depiction of Cohn's morphine high characterizes him as a victim, a man estranged from reality. Kushner's hatred of Cohn's symbolic image, though, is negated by Belize's reminder that "everything [he] want[s] is in the end of [Cohn]" (209). For Belize and the other gay characters, Cohn's death brings about the end of an era of decided ignorance. But not to be shown up by Belize, Cohn inquires as to the picture of Heaven. Belize proceeds to give an allegory to Cohn about Heaven as a dilapidated San Francisco with gender and race mixing. Cohn "*(happily shak[es] his head 'no' in agreement)*" and responds "And Heaven?" Belize replies that "that *was* Heaven Roy," and in Cohn's audacious fashion he replies "the fuck it was" (210). Refusing to lose any argument and have the final word, Cohn reminds the audience just how despicable and offensive he really is, even as he suffers from AIDS. Kushner always negates any sympathy for Cohn with the best known device: Cohn himself.

Sympathy for Cohn continues to come from the events out of his control. The play's most horrifying scene simultaneously arouses interests and sympathy as audiences are reminded that Cohn suffers from AIDS; his villainous disposition diminishes. After a visit from Joe, Cohn finally meets his breaking point:

> *(Roy sits up in his bed. He puts his legs over the side, away from where Joe is sitting.)*
>
> ROY: I gotta . . .
>
> JOE You . . . what, the . . . um, bathroom or . . .
>
> *(Roy stands, unsteadily. He starts to walk away from the bed. The IV tube in his arm extends to its full length and then pulls. Roy looks down at it, remembering it's there. In a calm, disinterested manner he pulls it out of his arm, which starts bleeding profusely.)*
>
> ROY: Ow. (218)

Although evil runs in Cohn's veins, no audience member wants to see him suffer so greatly. The rollercoaster of emotions which Cohn takes audiences on continues to twist and turn until only sickness is left. Cohn's body weakens, and now fully aware of his physical state Cohn is scared. He lashes out at his foster-son Joe to hide his ailment one last time.

> ROY: OUT! OUT! You already got my blessing—WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT FROM ME? *(He has a terrible wracking spasm.)*
>
> BELIZE *(To Joe)*: Get the fuck outta here.
>
> JOE: I. . . . Roy, please I . . .

ROY *(Exhausted)*: You what, you want to stay and watch *this*? Well fuck you too. (219-20)

Cohn's closest supporter is distanced from him for fear of ever being seen as weak. "With Roy Cohn [. . .] It was his fierceness, his reaction, in this lonely place that he was at. He took comfort in this ferocious place all by himself. He took refuge in being alone" (Pacino qtd. in Grobel 170). This entire scene stimulates audiences' awareness to the effects of AIDS. At this moment, Kushner provides a very socially aware message: everybody has the chance to become a victim; Cohn learns that nobody is safe, but this does not change his chosen course. Scared, alone, and hated Cohn disposes of the one person who truly liked and respected him. Kushner sympathizes for Cohn once again as he discloses that Cohn's life has not been simple, but an uphill battle: "Every goddam thing I ever wanted they have taken from me. Mocked and reviled, all my life" (Kushner 221). Cohn's anger comes from his fear of disappointment and rejection, from a place in his past and people who refused to accept him. Cohn's past experiences with McCarthy created a villain. The unacceptability of weakness drives Cohn to act viciously and alone in order to maintain the strength he desires.

The final scene which induces complete sympathy follows after the disbarment hearing as Cohn's haunting visitor Ethel Rosenberg conveys the final outcome.

ETHEL: I wanted the news should come from me. The panel ruled against you Roy. [. . .] The Executive was waiting, and they ruled, one two three. They accepted the panel's recommendation.

ROY: I'm . . .

ETHEL: One of the main guys on the Executive leaned over to his friend and said, "Finally. I've hated that little faggot for thirty-six years."

ROY: I'm. . . . They . . .

ETHEL: They won, Roy. You're not a lawyer anymore.

ROY: But am I dead?

ETHEL: No. They beat you. You lost. (Kushner 245)

Finally defeated, Cohn loses what meant most to him. With his lawyer skin taken away, Cohn now does not know who he is or where he belongs; he is lost. Earlier in Millennium Approaches, Cohn provides a glimpse of his past life which foretells the importance of being a lawyer: "I'm gonna be a lawyer, Joe, I'm gonna be a lawyer, Joe, I'm gonna be a goddam motherfucking legally licensed member of the bar lawyer, just like my daddy was, till my last bitter day on earth, Joseph, until the day I die" (75). Modeling himself after his father makes Cohn's pursuit of power potentially sympathetic for audiences as possible love shines through Cohn's thick skin (but in Cohn's character, bitterness, anger, or envy could also be read here). But a structural forward by Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov in the opening scene of Perestroika metaphorically hints to Cohn's loss before audiences even recognize the sentence's meaning: "if the snake sheds his skin before a new skin is ready, naked he will be in the world, prey to the forces of chaos. Without his skin he will be dismantled, lose coherence and die" (148). Kushner hints to Cohn's loss before audiences even identify the line's significance.

Ethel pushes Cohn one last time to insure his utter defeat: "I came to forgive but all I can do is take pleasure in your misery. Hoping I'd get to see you die more terrible

than I did. And you are, 'cause you're dying in shit, Roy, defeated. And you could kill me, but you couldn't ever defeat me. You never won. And when you die all anyone will say is: Better he had never lived at all" (245). His villainous ways gained Cohn enemies and in turn provided Cohn with his just but sympathetic ending. Characteristically, Cohn does not give up so easily. Distraught by the news, Cohn finds a way to end life on top. Donning a mask, Cohn puts on a pitiful and elaborate episode to triumph over Ethel Rosenberg one last time and regain the control he lost.

ROY: Ma? Muddy? Is it...? *(He sits up, looks at Ethel)* Ma?

ETHEL *(Uncertain, then)*: It's Ethel, Roy. [. . .]

ROY: It's cold in here, I'm up so late, past my time. Don't be mad Ma but I'm scared . . . ? A little. Don't be mad. [. . .] Sing to me.

ETHEL: I don't want to Roy, I'm not your . . .

ROY: Please, it's scary out here. *(He starts to cry) (He sinks back)* Oh God. Oh God, I'm so sorry . . .

ETHEL *(Singing, very soft)*: Shteit a bocher [. . .]

Turn Balalaike, shpil balalaike

(Pause) Roy . . . ? Are you . . . *(She crosses to the bed, looks at him. Goes back to her chair)* That's it.

(Belize enters, goes to the bed)

BELIZE: Wake up, it's time to . . . Oh. Oh, you're . . .

ROY *(Sitting up violently)*: No I'm NOT!

I fooled you Ethel, I knew who you were all along, I can't believe you

> fell for that ma stuff, I just wanted to see if I could finally, finally make Ethel Rosenberg sing! I WIN! [. . .] *(He dies.)* (246-7)

He is finally gone and has finished on his own terms.

Though gone from life, audiences can not escape Cohn in "Heaven, Hell or Purgatory." Proving his earlier statement to Ethel that he is "immortal. Ethel. [. . .] I ain't never gonna die," Cohn gains the most infamous trial ever and provokes audiences' hatred toward him one last time (118). The final defense is a case defending the King of the Universe against the abandonment suit brought by the Angels. Cohn's power rises and his charisma speaks as he curses in conversation with the Almighty and proves he did not learn anything from his journey on earth other than corruption:

> I'm an absolute fucking demon with Family Law. Just tell me who the judge is, and what kind of jewelry does he like? [. . .] Yes I will represent you, King of the Universe, yes I will sing and eviscerate, I will bully and seduce, I will win for you and make the plaintiffs, those traitors, wish they had never heard the name of . . .
>
> *(Huge thunder clap)*
>
> Is it a done deal, are we on? Good, then I gotta start by telling you you ain't got a case here, you're guilty as hell, no question, you have nothing to plead but not to worry, darling, I will make something up. (274)

Although he is dead he does not ask for sympathy because he knows he will prove himself even more in the hereafter and continue forcing his way into history.

Cohn stands for the end of an era, the Reagan years, and “a metaphor for the misuse of power” (Leibman qtd. in Stevens). As a man defined by his connections, Cohn exemplifies false government pretending to be for the people but truly satisfying the self. Cohn also represents the patriarchy of Reaganism seen earlier in his father/son relationship with Joe. Reminding audiences that “sometimes a father’s love has to be very, very hard, unfair even, cold to make his son grow strong in a world like this,” Cohn’s relationship with Joe is an allegory for the administration that sought to provide huge dreams with minimal assistance to achieve those dreams (Kushner 62). This patriarchal notion finds relevancies in Cohn’s father figure too: “The thing I found quite moving is that he and McCarthy—both consumed with the lust for power—died powerless. One died of alcoholism and the other died of AIDS. These were guys who were hooked into power, and the irony was they couldn't do anything” (Leibman qtd. in Stevens). Both men died under their own corruption and ideas. Both men learned how to manipulate others during their stay on earth and ignored, or rejected, the lessons on morality, forcing their way into history by making up rules as they saw necessary. David Savran notes that “Roy Cohn is constructed as the embodiment and guarantor of dystopia. Not only is he the paradigm of bourgeois individualism–and Reaganism–at its most murderous, hypocritical, and malignant, but he is the one with the most terrifying vision of the ‘universe’” (18). Kushner wants audiences to be repulsed by the government representative who denies a serious crisis (AIDS) and continues to hoard medical assistance in search of his own public image. A truly sad character is Cohn who becomes a slave to others’ opinions rather than his true self.

Once Cohn dies, the ideals of Reaganism die with him, making way for the new era, the "great work" ushered in by Prior and the Angel. He reminds audiences that drive and desire puts one ahead, but in sacrificing the self to the system and public image, a sad and lonely road awaits. "The savage irony of Roy Cohn's AIDS-related death was that, by the manner of his death, he fell victim to the atmosphere of anti-gay hatred he had helped to generate" (Bottoms 170). If Cohn knew that AIDS was something he would suffer from, perhaps his tactics and connections would have changed; perhaps he would use those connections to prevent others from suffering as well. Cohn stands blind to anyone but himself and just as Kushner implies, he takes only today from what he can gain in the future.

Combined, Cohn's personal denial of AIDS and need for power result in lost authority and status from something he can not control, with which audiences can empathize. "It is Roy's self-loathing that is most unsettling and it most vividly shows in his scathing denial of his own homosexuality," but this is also the most sympathetic trait in Cohn's character (Fisher 21). In regards to Cohn's personal journey, or lack thereof as he retains his immoral conduct and allows no reversal of views, Cohn fails to learn the lessons from his villainous life. Like most villains, Cohn does not change or learn anything to better himself, and as he approaches death, dies at the hands of his own prejudices and an uncontrollable disease. Longing for supremacy and notoriety, Cohn's sexual identification and illness prevent him from further empowering himself and coming to terms with reality. Kushner may dislike Cohn for the problems he created in Gay America, but as Atsushi Fujita notes, "Kushner's intention in using [Cohn] as one of

his main characters, and to depict that character dying of AIDS, is a detail which inevitably attracts sympathy of his audience. [. . .] [Kushner] focuses on aspects of Cohn beyond the stereotypes and questions the homophobic discourses that strengthen those stereotypes" (120). Kushner concentrates on Cohn's lack of moral journey and ultimate dependence on the gay Belize, a representative of the homosexuals Cohn condemns. Roy Cohn is a sympathetic and empathetic villain not because he denies his sexual identification, but because he loses control of his life and dies no more learned than he ever was.

A sympathetic and sometimes empathetic character, Cohn teaches audiences about forgiveness, for it is his death which enlightens his adversaries to forgive even though he helped bring oppression to their lives. Cohn is forgiven, but only when he is dead. Belize cares for Cohn as he dies, challenges him, and hates him, but Belize speaks reason and preaches Cohn's most prided lesson on forgiveness to Louis, who calls Cohn "the polestar of human evil" and "the worst human being who ever lived" (Kushner 227). With the help of Belize, Louis and Ethel, who have "hated [Roy] so terribly," find it in their hearts to forgive him. "He was a terrible person. He died a hard death. So maybe . . . A queen can forgive her vanquished foe. It isn't easy, it doesn't count if it's easy, it's the hardest thing. Forgiveness. Which is maybe where love and justice finally meet" (256). As Kushner provides sympathetic views of Cohn, audiences have no choice but to follow suit. Forgiveness is lacking in America, and perhaps the forgiveness of Cohn is a larger forgiveness by Kushner to the administration which ignored him for so long. Audiences take this lesson and understand that ruthless people, like Cohn, are human too,

and evil can result from bitterness and discriminatory opinions. When Cohn is weakest, he teaches life-learned lessons the most. But as Cohn would have liked, Kushner is sure to include Ethel's and Louis's one last biting and bitter comment which forces audiences to remember who Cohn really is: a "sonofabitch" (257).

Kushner's villainous Cohn begins to change the face of the villain in contemporary theatre. Although similar to the classic villain studied in this thesis, Cohn's potential for recurring sympathy from audience members raises his character to a new level, a level where the bully might be understood as a victim. With audiences possibly feeling sorry for Cohn by the end of Angels, and the amount of concern for even the villain, unlike classic villains, this new type desires acceptance, and in the end, an understanding is reached.

CHAPTER IV: MAG, MAUREEN AND THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE

But who'll look after me, so?"—Mag

An example of a contemporary playwright continuing to address audience requests for understanding characters in Martin McDonagh's The Beauty Queen of Leenane. The play's two women create the sympathetic and empathetic revenge villain rather than the stereotypical revenge villain. In Leenane, Connemara, a 40-year-old virginal Maureen is trapped in the small town caring for her ailing 70-year-old mother, Mag. When Ray Dooley, the younger brother of Pato Dooley (Maureen's love interest), invites Maureen to a party, Mag fears she will lose her servant-daughter Maureen and lies about the invitation. But Maureen attends the party and brings home Pato, who represents her chance at escaping Ireland. When Mag brings out the family secrets and exposes Maureen's mental instability the next morning, Maureen's anger rises. Pato later gives Ray a note for Maureen asking her to go with him to America, but impatiently Ray gives the note to Mag instead who reads the letter and promptly burns it. When Maureen learns of the letter, Mag denies knowing anything. Maureen changes into a trance-like state and tortures Mag with hot oil and finally murders her. Maureen never gets to America with Pato, and she subjects herself to being a victim in the house she so long tried to leave.

What truly sets these two villains apart from the classic stereotypes is that they both prevent themselves from happiness and become victims of their own villainy—that is, Mag meets her end by villainizing against Maureen, and Maureen meets her end by

preventing her mother from victimizing her. Mag and Maureen arouse definite sympathy as audiences explore the characters' ultimate desires in conjunction with witnessing their maddening living situation. While experiencing empathy for Mag and Maureen's disastrous bond and seemingly unachievable dreams, shocked audiences can not help but detest the villainous characters who prevent each other from happiness through selfish demands and *grand guignol*-like torture. By looking at the choices McDonagh makes in creating Mag and Maureen as victim-villains in Beauty Queen's dramatic structure, McDonagh tests the limits of blending villainy with understandable, empathetic traits without lessening the villain's power and challenges audiences to face the torture and decide between right and wrong, justified or not.

Before analyzing McDonagh's manipulation of Mag and Maureen and audiences' sympathies or hatred through the text, it must be noted that McDonagh creates the women and other Galway residents as people who find violence normal. "The text clearly demonstrate[s] that violence is a regular component of the characters' daily existence . . ." (Boles 128). The best example early in the play's development is Mag and Maureen's discussion of the Dublin murderer:

> MAG: The fella up and murdered the poor oul woman in Dublin and he didn't even know her. The news that story was on, did you hear of it? *(Pause.)* Strangled, and didn't even know her. That's a fella it would be better not to talk to. That's a fella it would be better to avoid outright.
>
> MAUREEN: Sure, that sounds exactly the type of fella I would *like* to

> meet, and then bring him home to meet you, if he likes murdering oul women. [. . .]
>
> MAG: Killing *you* I bet he first would be.
>
> MAUREEN: I could live with that so long as I was sure he'd be clobbering you soon after. If he clobbered you with a big axe or something and took your oul head off and spat in your neck, I wouldn't mind at all, going first. Oh no, I'd enjoy it, I would. (McDonagh 10-11)

As the villains speak so freely of violence, the act or thought of brutality lessens as it is so openly joked about; there is no feeling or fear of bloodshed as Mag, Maureen or Ray Dooley speaks of it. This tactic creates characters and dramatic tension which leaves audiences unsettled with this passive attitude toward violence. Ray's enthusiasm for the subject, just like Mag and Maureen's humorous banter over the Dublin murderer, "protects us from the raw engagement of more abrasive forces" (Waters 47). McDonagh sets audiences up to be warned of the violent acts, but disgusted in the characters' enthusiasm and nonchalance. Ray Dooley finds no awkwardness when speaking of crime and violence and brings it up freely and easily, especially during his conversation about the fascinating poker: "Good and heavy and long. A half a dozen coppers you could take out with this poker and barely notice and have not a scratch on it and then clobber them again just for the fun of seeing the blood running out of them" (McDonagh 55). McDonagh provides audiences with characters who, like some revengeful villains, elate

in the pleasure of violence and torture. There is no right or wrong here, and this is unsettling in itself and is part of their daily existence.

At the heart of Beauty Queen is the dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship between Mag and Maureen. Both women dislike each other, and both long for the other or someone to understand and care for them (Mag medically and Maureen emotionally).

> The longing for rootedness constitutes a central theme in *BQ*. By rootedness, I mean to imply the sense of fixity, security, and constancy which results from being able to define oneself in relation to home, region, and nation. In *BQ*, the characters cannot establish or maintain a stable relationship with any of these sites, though they consistently return to them. (Diehl 108)

Neither character knows who they are without acknowledging their existence in relation to the other; they lack self awareness and do not know where they can go because they are trapped by themselves and each other. Mag and Maureen are each other's point of reference. Audiences potentially find their own similar needs in the characters as they watch Mag and Maureen fight for their objectives and the strong foundation which their relationship lacks. Similar to the traits of an anti-hero whose concern with self-preservation causes him or her to react in a series of wrong choices, the women's understandable needs can be pitied and empathized with; both women have evil actions, Maureen through torture and Mag through selfish misinformation. The action, or possible action, of one character causes the other to react defensively. The delineation between an anti-hero and villain must be drawn here. While Mag and Maureen exude

qualities of the anti-hero here, the conscious decision to take action against the other and specifically plan the action makes these characters villains rather than anti-heroes. Exposing all vulnerabilities, faults, hatred and malice, McDonagh provides a full picture of Mag and Maureen's world to help audiences understand the characters. The amount of sympathy felt for the villain successively with un-denied disgust confuses audiences who like to decide (if one can decide) between a character's villainy or desperation. In Beauty Queen, McDonagh provides both women with ample stage time to plead their cases as a victim as well as self-condemn their villainies against one another. Both women are created by McDonagh as each other's counter-character.

As a character, Mag, the first of the play's victim-villains, desires more than anything to have her daughter or anybody care for her and provide for her. Vindictive, greedy, and selfishly out for her own good, typical traits of villainy, Mag seeks and uses pity from others to attain what she wants. Subsequently, this need for attention propels her to execute villainies against Maureen. McDonagh does not allow audiences to judge her immediately as he sympathetically introduces Mag to audiences, informing them that she is ailing, has a "bad back," "bad hand," and a "urine infection" (McDonagh 5). Like Richard III's physical deformity, Mag's sickness evokes sympathy from audiences who do not suspect her cruel ways. In the first scene, Mag's need to be cared for immediately comes through as she asks Maureen about making her Complan and turning on the radio. McDonagh creates Mag as harmless right away and makes her old, feeble, and unable to take care of herself. He also provides audiences with a hint of Mag's continual manipulation as Maureen discovers that Mag can accomplish the tasks she constantly

asks Maureen to do for her. Here, Mag exhibits stereotypical villainous qualities where acting and deception get her what she most desires. Realizing her error, Mag declares that she did it wrong and complains that Maureen needs to do it for her instead. In "Macabre Merriment in McDonagh's Melodrama: *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*," Rebecca Wilson points out that "Mag is obsessed with being fed. Food is a recognized signifier of need and comfort, the primary demand of the infant for its survival, the centre of its world, and of Mag's" (31). At the foundation of Mag, and any audience member, food is necessary for life. McDonagh creates these infantile needs like food and attention in Mag to make Mag more sympathetic and more a victim-villain. No stereotypical villain studied here has played up their ailing health as much as Mag. Even Richard III only mentions his disfigurement to expel sympathy from audiences; he does not use it directly to get the crown. By placing this moment early in the play, McDonagh enforces a villainous view of Mag on audiences and sways pity toward Maureen as a victim of her mother. Mag's manipulative techniques stand strong by the end of her introduction. Her need for care and control psychologically convinces her to burn letters, forget information, and expose familial secrets to prevent Maureen from happiness and leaving the house. Knowing Mag's unhealthy disposition and weak state, audiences can understand her reasons in keeping Maureen as a care-giver, but can also despise her questionable villainous tactics used to attain her goal.

The sexually repressed, virginal, and isolated Maureen is the other of Beauty Queen's victim-villains. Like some stereotypical villains, Maureen exhibits a love of torture; she enjoys the suffering of Mag and is potentially sexually aroused by it. But

McDonagh makes Maureen largely sympathetic too. She becomes easy to identify with and can be pitied for her unhappy living situation. "Audience sympathy [. . .] is all directed towards the situation of Maureen, frustrated, entrapped in her role as domestic carer, above all denied the chance of escaping from the incestuous awfulness of Leenane" (Grene 301). Maureen dreams "of anything" other than Ireland or her mother, to live free, date men, and finally have control over her life (McDonagh 23). McDonagh renders Maureen sympathetic in act 1, scene 1 as she reveals she is "not appreciated" and "expected to do everything" by her mother (6). Immediately McDonagh creates Maureen as a victim of Mag's needy demands and creates Maureen as the character audiences want to root for, a trait common in the anti-hero. Maureen's villainies are a direct and purposeful reaction toward the outside force (Mag) which oppresses what she most desires (freedom). Seen as a victim, Maureen's inability to take control of her life allows Mag to tyrannize her. Maureen frees herself from entrapment only through becoming a villain. Considering that Mag's vindictiveness is the reason why Maureen becomes a villain, it can be suggested that this vindictive quality runs psychologically in the family. By repressing anger for so long, Maureen takes out her aggression methodically, satisfying her sexual and trapped oppression. But atypically of the villain's story, Maureen ends up like her oppressor, Mag, intends, by personal choice. Even though she is free of her oppression, Maureen chooses to remain in the place which trapped her for so long and becomes a victim of herself; audiences feel her entrapment and sympathize for her situation.

In the play's structure, McDonagh constantly flips the victim with the villain so that Mag and Maureen are never one or the other for long. This tactic allows audiences to understand both characters and weigh the choices against personal morals and the justification given by the characters for their action. In introducing Maureen immediately as a sympathetic victim to her mother's orders, McDonagh pushes audiences to empathize with Maureen as a victim and view her journey and story-line as the play's central focus. Audiences feel for her as a character first and desire to connect with her. Maureen becomes the "point of identification on stage," meaning that "McDonagh not only asks readers/spectators to identify with Maureen, but, in so doing, he also establishes her as the voice of reason, truth, and morality in the play" (Diehl 101-2). But, McDonagh does not let Maureen's victimization take the audience's sympathy for long and he proceeds to show Mag as sympathetic too while hinting at Maureen's possible darker side: "And the hot water too I do be scared of. Scared I may scould meself. I *do* be scared, Maureen" (McDonagh 5). The first moment which renders Maureen a possible villain, is her discussion with Mag about the Dublin murderer (see above scene) and her willingness to bring him home, even if he kills Mag and herself. The playful, angry banter between the women seems common for them, but the scene's undertones hint at Maureen's discontent with Mag and her current life and foreshadow violence. McDonagh allows audiences to acquaint themselves with the characters and situation and weigh the circumstances before the violence erupts.

The forgetful, infantile Mag desperately seeks care and nurturing from Maureen or anyone who enters the lonely house. Similar to classic villains, Mag puts on an act

around everyone for her personal gain, appealing to their sympathies. As Mag explains her urine infection to the young Ray Dooley, McDonagh persuades audiences to understand her absolute necessity for assistance and portrays her as a victim of illness, like Richard III in his final dreams before the battle. Before letting audiences rest with Mag as a victim, the absentminded Mag orders a cup of tea from "Pato. Em, Ray"(17). Typical of a villain, Mag uses whoever is nearby at her disposal. She does not commit villainies against Ray, but her villainous tactics and characteristics translate in her conversation. Upon the invitation to the going away party for Ray and Pato's uncle, Mag turns villain and purposely burns Maureen's invitation. In doing so, McDonagh poses a question to audiences: is Mag truly ailing and needs help, or is she only acting to keep Maureen to herself? Audiences potentially hope for Maureen's victory and Mag's fall at this inciting incident. McDonagh builds the rising action as Maureen inquires to the day's visitors (which she knows have been around) to catch her mother in a lie:

> MAUREEN: Nobody rang while I was out, I suppose? Ah no.
>
> MAG: Ah no, Maureen. Nobody did ring. [. .]
>
> MAUREEN: Nobody, I suppose. Ah no.
>
> MAG *glances at* MAUREEN *a second, then back at the TV. Pause.*
>
> MAUREEN *gets up, ambles over to the TV, lazily switches it off with the toe of her shoe, ambles back to the kitchen, staring at* MAG *as she passes, turns on the kettle, and leans against the cupboards, looking back in* MAG*'s direction.*
>
> MAG *(nervously)*: Em, apart from wee Ray Dooley who passed. (19-20)

Here McDonagh builds dramatic tension as audiences wonder what change in their relationships scares Mag so much that she must confess. In the stage directions, Maureen's silent actions scare Mag into telling the truth, foreshadowing that Maureen's silent process might forewarn something worse. The unspoken action versus spoken words creates a much more unsettling feeling in audiences. For a moment though, Maureen and Mag are simultaneously potential victim-villains. McDonagh does not allow, though, for audiences to label either. Immediately following this scene, Maureen villainously forces Mag to drink her Complan while she berates her:

> There's no little spoons for liars in this house. [. . .] Drink ahead, I said! You had room enough to be spouting your lies about Ray Dooley had no message! [. . .] The lies of you. The whole of that Complan you'll drink. [. . .] and whatever's left you haven't drank, it is over your head I will be emptying it, and you know well enough I mean it! (21-2)

For the first time audiences hear a truly terrifying Maureen, but they understand that her anger comes in retaliation; she has been wronged.

But McDonagh depicts Mag as a strong force in her old age as Maureen says, "I suppose now you'll never be dying. You'll be hanging on forever, just to spite me," to which Mag replies "I *will* be hanging on forever!" (24). The determination to control Maureen's life as long as possible hints at Maureen's future of never-ending domination by Mag and raises the question as to whether Maureen will ever be free. McDonagh purposely creates retaliatory actions between the women to play to audience's sympathies for both women's seemingly understandable objectives.

Liberated from her mother's torture, Maureen excuses herself from victimization and leaves for the party. Why does McDonagh give Maureen this strength to leave? It shows that she has some control in her life, but that she subjects herself to the torture from her mother on her own free will. Maureen does not allow herself to be free. Much to Mag's dismay Maureen returns with Pato in the morning and leaves the sluttish black dress for Mag to see (which she arguably deserves). McDonagh draws a vulnerable Mag in scene four as she pours her "potty of urine" down the kitchen sink. In this gesture, audiences are reminded that this villain remains a victim at the same time. McDonagh attempts to humanize her in this single action. Upon Mag noticing Maureen's black dress on the floor she throws it in the corner, representative of her disgruntled-ness with Maureen's freedom. Maureen parades about in front of Mag to torture her and takes attention from Mag's burnt hand. Refusing to lose control, Mag pleas her victim-status and screams for help, accusing Maureen: "*She's* the one that scoulded me hand! I'll tell you that, now! Let alone sitting on stray men! Held it down on the range she did! Poured chip-pan fat o'er it! Aye, and told the doctor it was me!" (40). Angered by Maureen's neglect, Mag tries to assert her control and stop the abuse, an understandable objective and anti-heroic quality, but finds another, unwelcome avenue to exact her aggression toward Maureen. She exposes Maureen's mentally instable past to Pato by childishly screaming "Dillford Hall! Dillford Hall! Dillford Hall!" as many times as she can. Now Maureen becomes the victim. At the close of the first act, McDonagh presents both women as victims and villains to each other; suffering and making the other suffer in support of their own needs. Aware of the villains' desires, circumstances, and

potential actions, McDonagh creates both characters as forwards of their own action and ends act one by showing both the victim and villain in each. McDonagh provides audiences an opportunity to side with either character if they so choose, depending on personal experience.

Act two brings about the most violent, literally and emotionally, scenes in the play for the characters and audience. Here McDonagh fully develops Mag and Maureen as victim-villains whose oppression and neglect spurn them to the coming moments. Again, unlike classic stereotypes studied in Chapter II, these contemporary villains act out because of an outside force which subjects them to something they feel they can not control. Pato's letter accelerates the plot's rising action leading to the play's "crisis." McDonagh provides audiences with a lighter side of Mag for a moment to humanize her character, as she and Ray converse. Using Ray to do tasks for her, Mag's kindness (underscored with suspicion of the letter) makes her personable, giving audiences the chance to see her from another perspective, but simply manipulating Ray to achieve her own ends. Again, Ray leaves Mag to deliver Pato's letter, a device used by McDonagh to give audiences a growing concern as to whether the letter will be delivered or not, and to what she intends to do with it given the last letter's fate.

> RAY: Were I to leave this letter here with you, Missus, it would be straight to that one you would be giving it, isn't that right?
>
> MAG: It is. Oh, straight to Maureen I'd be giving it.
>
> RAY *(pause)*: And it isn't opening it you would be?
>
> MAG: It is not. Sure, a letter is a private thing. If it isn't my name on it,

what business would it be of mine?

RAY: And may God strike you dead if you do open it?

MAG: And my God strike me dead if I do open it, only He'll have no need to strike me dead because I won't be opening it. (58)

At this point audiences potentially hope that Mag will do as she says, but McDonagh has created a much more vindictive character than audiences could hope for and they can clearly see her plan. God may not strike Mag dead for opening the letter, but Maureen does later. The tension of the letter breaks as Mag commits her most devious act yet and commences the play's turning point: "MAG *listens to his footsteps fading away, then gets up, picks up the envelope and opens it, goes back to the range and lifts off the lid so that the flames are visible, and stands there reading the letter. She drops the first short page in to the flames as she finishes it, then starts reading the second. Slow fade out*" (59). Mag unjustifiably and consciously makes the decision to prevent Maureen from leaving her at all. Again, Mag resembles an anti-hero, making the wrong choice in pursuit of understandable goals, but it is the act of purposely burning the letter to harm Maureen's emotional and physical state which renders Mag a villain. In this simple act, Mag has Maureen all to herself, Maureen loses the chance to leave Ireland and her mother, and Mag is now not a victim, but truly seen as a malicious villain.

Typical of a villain, Mag brings about her own downfall once she reaches her pinnacle of power. In scene seven, as Mag and Maureen talk with each other, Mag's achievement gets the best of her and puts her in a "funny oul mood" (62). Gleaming with pride, Mag's overconfidence incriminates her as she lets an intimate detail from the letter

slip; Mag must suffer the consequences of her actions. Maureen reacts in a most vicious and strange way, but similar to her earlier reaction to Mag's lie about Ray's visit. Shocked and angry, Maureen transforms into a trance-like state, arguably McDonagh's most fearsome character trait in Maureen and plot device, and is now given the chance to fully rise to a villain, ready to make her final statement and threat to her mother.

> MAUREEN *stares at her in dumb shock and hate, then walks to the kitchen, dazed, puts a chip-pan on the stove, turns it on high and pours a half-bottle of cooking oil into it, takes down the rubber gloves that are hanging on the back wall and puts them on.* [. . .] MAUREEN *shoves a foot against* [MAG's] *stomach and groin, ushering her back.* MAG *leans back into the chair, frightened, staring at* MAUREEN, *who sits at the table, waiting for the oil to boil.* [. . .] MAUREEN *slowly and deliberately takes her mother's shriveled hand, holds it down on the burning range, and starts slowly pouring some of the hot oil over it, as* MAG *screams in pain and terror.* (65)

As a virginal and pent up woman, Maureen has no outlet of freedom; Maureen relieves her sexual frustration and trapped soul through this torture, like some classic villains. This trancelike and methodical process supplements Maureen's oppressed carnal desires due to Mag's over-needy demeanor. "Given Maureen's sexual repression, [. . .] it can only be assumed that, along with the hatred fanned by vengeance, that last splurge of hot oil is a sadistic act charged with sadism's inherent sexuality" (Wilson 37). The parallel between the burning of the letter and the burning of Mag's hand brings about an

interesting note. McDonagh shows both villains using the same device to terrorize the other but in different fashions. Perhaps their relationship does have commonalities. It seems that Maureen vindicates herself in this action.

Burning and scoulded, McDonagh does not hesitate to allow Mag to characteristically muster up her strength, disavow her victim-status, and insult her daughter, again reminding audiences that she is a villain: "On your face it *was* written, Maureen. [. . .] You still do have the look of a virgin about you you always have had. *(Without malice.)* You always will" (McDonagh 66). Mag most notably resembles the classic villain here, who on her last stand continues to berate and villainize against the other who is defeating her. But Maureen is not listening to this; she has begun her process and refuses to cease until causing full damage. Characteristically of a villain, Mag audaciously and selfishly pleads her case to Maureen, exposing her true reasons for her actions and the play's most heart-wrenching moment: "But how could you go with him? You do still have me to look after. [. . .] But what about me, Maureen? [. . .] But who'll look after me, so?" (67-9). Stereotypical villains often have moments of realization and pity where they realize that they have been wrong and they plea for their own salvation with themselves, but Mag is only pitied through the action taken against her. The moment of pity and realization for Mag is exactly like Richard III's final moments before the battle when he understands his wrongs but continues to villainize until his goal is achieved. Mag does not find anything wrong with her action and evokes no pity for her deeds, only for what is deeded upon her. The audacity of the character to attempt to elicit sympathy after her actions provokes audiences to characterize Mag as the

villain. "So even though Mag tells the truth, she becomes the villain, whereas Maureen [. . .] becomes the sympathetic victim" (Boles 130). All along Mag refuses to admit that she is acting a villain and views herself as a victim, someone needing love, understanding, and shelter, and audiences empathize with these basic emotional needs of life.

Why does McDonagh give Mag this line? Why does he give audiences the option of pity for Mag one last time? What McDonagh shows here is the vulnerability that inspires fear and villainy in Mag—that any person for any personal reason can become a villain out of desperation and fear, and villainy is the only way which a resolution or hopeful happy ending can be found. Audiences can find it in themselves to understand Mag's needs, but her tactics remain unforgivable. Mag has gone too far and Maureen refuses to listen any longer.

> *In a single and almost lazy motion, throws the considerable remainder of the oil into* MAG*'s midriff, some of it splashing up into her face.* MAG *doubles-up, screaming, falls to the floor, trying to pat the oil off her, and lies there convulsing, screaming and whimpering.* MAUREEN *steps out of her way to avoid her fall, still in a daze, barely noticing her.* (McDonagh 65-8)

Now sexually released, the oil and torture of her mother takes the place of Maureen's carnal repression and relieves her inner strife; she takes ultimate control. As noted earlier in this study, William Indick's Movies and the Mind: Theories of the Great Psychoanalysts Applied to Film asserts that Freud's Oedipal Complex, the "infantile

sexuality, aggressive impulses, sexual drives and unconscious repression play key roles in the mind of the neurotic" (5). At this point, both Mag and Maureen resemble anti-heroes who resort to immoral means for a good reason, and audiences remain shocked but continue to hope for Maureen's freedom. Here, audiences can likely empathize with Maureen's liberation, but again, may disagree with her tactics. McDonagh provides no correct choice on which character to root for.

Maureen's villainy peaks at scene eight as she finally kills her mother. As "*the rocking chair has stopped its motions.* MAG *starts to slowly lean forward at the waist until she finally topples over and falls heavily to the floor, dead. A red chunk of skull hangs from a string of skin at the side of her head"* (72). Mag is dead but McDonagh does not let audiences see the murder, only the aftermath and terror of the shocking fall. It is important to McDonagh for audiences to listen to Maureen's monologue and connect with her happy story about Pato. Confronted with the moral decision of herself or her mother's happiness, Maureen finally chooses herself. In murdering her mother, Maureen unchains herself from the oppressive force which held her back for so long. Now she is able to leave Ireland and live with Pato. Audiences may celebrate Mag's death and Maureen's freedom, but are still disgusted and shocked by the action's vulgarity. After being a victim for so long, Maureen now has her freedom. But is Mag's death justified or revengeful? As McDonagh provides both sides of the argument and allows both characters villainous and sympathetic opportunities, potential sway to Maureen's point of view holds nearly all the weight as audiences have connected with her most since the

play's beginning. Audiences end up, as William C. Boles's points out, "sympathizing with the parent abuser and murderer [Maureen] while hating the victim [Mag]" (126).

McDonagh does not allow the play to end so easily though. Mag is continually portrayed sympathetically as we hear of her funeral which had only six attendees. At first the lack of attendees seems deserved, but at the same time, Mag was victim of torture and hatred. McDonagh continues to give Mag moments to plea her victimization even when she is no longer on stage, and her pitiable story continues to weigh on audience's decisions about the morality of the characters.

Maureen's last scene finds both sympathetic and villainous moments once again for Maureen, even with Mag gone. As Ray Dooley tells Maureen that Pato was upset about not seeing her before he left, audiences wonder whether Maureen did see Pato at all. McDonagh never provides audiences with a clear answer to the question and depicts Maureen as a victim of mental instability, and audiences sympathize for Maureen here because they know what drove her to this state. All that is known is that Pato is now engaged to another woman and Maureen still loses out on happiness even though the death of Mag should have freed and alleviated her of any victimization.

> RAY: Eh? Oh, also he said he was sorry he didn't get to see you the night he left, there, he would've liked to've said goodbye. But if that was the way you wanted it, so be it. Although rude, too, I thought that was.
>
> MAUREEN *(standing, confused)*: I did see him the night he left. At the station, there.
>
> RAY: What station? Be taxicab Pato left. What are you thinking of?

MAUREEN *(sitting)*: I don't know now. (78)

The possibility for becoming senile and forgetful foreshadows Maureen's final years, as she begins taking traits of her mother, hints at her own tortuous ending. Pitiful is an apt term to describe Maureen who is now losing her mind. But as Ray tells Maureen of Pato's departure, McDonagh makes Maureen villainous again as her dreams (or in this case her reality) is oppressed. As a result, filled with vengeance and unfulfilled wishes, Maureen almost kills Ray with the same poker that killed her mother and is the object of Ray's fascination. "MAUREEN *quietly picks up the poker from beside the range and, holding it low at her side, slowly approaches him from behind*" (81). Deductively, audiences might think that Maureen suffers from severe psychological disorders and that villainy has taken control of her, and through these characteristics McDonagh creates a potentially threatening scene for audiences' emotional safety. No longer fighting for what she thought was achieved and now brought to reality by Ray (much like her mother oppressed her from moments of happiness), Maureen sees no other alternative but to rid herself of yet another menace who she believes wants to take her happiness away. But McDonagh again does not allow Maureen to be a villain too long and she returns to being a victim of her surroundings. Snapping out of her trance and realizing the problem before it begins and psychologically realizes that this action is wrong and stops herself: "MAUREEN *stops in her tracks.* [. . .] *lets the poker fall to the floor with a clatter and sits in the rocking-chair, dazed"* (81-2).

Should audiences feel sorry for Maureen and dislike her for attempting to murder the innocent Ray? There is no solid answer, but pity is found for the victim-villain who

has in a way reformed herself and taken steps toward mental health. Characteristically, McDonagh gives audiences a few personable moments with Maureen (now back to the victim) as Ray tries to buy the poker which has "sentimental value" to Maureen (83). The humor and violence together create a comfort in Maureen's joke. Maureen also realizes her possible future as she now knows that she and Pato were never meant to be, and audiences feel sorry for her as she conveys her final words to Pato and becomes a victim of her world which she might never control: "Just say . . . Just say, [. . .] *Goodbye*. Goodbye. 'The beauty queen of Leenane says *goodbye'*" (83). Why does McDonagh give the villain a moment of humanity? In humanizing Maureen just like he did with Mag, McDonagh gives the character one last moment to connect with audiences.

McDonagh leaves audiences with one last haunting image. As Ray leaves and Maureen asks him "turn the radio up a biteen" before he leaves (identical to Mag's request of Maureen in scene one), Maureen assumes the position of her mother in the rocking chair, forgetting Ray's name and making orders. McDonagh almost forces audiences to view Maureen ultimately as a victim as she becomes her mother, the person from whom she tried so hard to be free. Maureen is no longer a villain and McDonagh wants audiences to make up their own mind about whether justification holds in either case. Pitiful and alone, exactly not what Maureen planned, Maureen is left on stage a murderer and victim, resembling Mag more than ever.

> MAUREEN *gently rocks in the chair until about the middle of the fourth verse, when she quietly gets up, picks up the dusty suitcase, caresses it slightly, moves slowly to the hall door and looks back at the empty*

> *rocking-chair a while. It is still rocking gently. Slight pause, then* MAUREEN *exits into the hall, closing its door behind her as she goes. We listen to the song on the radio to the end, as the chair gradually stops rocking and the lights, very slowly fade to black.* (84)

And as the rocking chair swings back and forth after Maureen exits, McDonagh leaves audiences questioning its significance. One solution suggests Mag's presence will never leave the house and will haunt Maureen in days to come. Maureen will suffer from her mother's presence and become what her mother wanted. Audiences can not help but sympathize for the Maureen who was psychologically driven to this state by her mother. On a larger scale, Mag and Maureen's tumultuous relationship could imply that violence does not solve the problems of the past, but only furthers the past's recurrence of unsolved problems in the future.

Because Maureen has been so prominent in the play and audiences empathize with her need to escape her dutiful life, the murder renders Maureen free, and audiences are happy for that, but also conflicted because she has now killed her mother in a sadistic manner. Stereotypical villains rarely have endings like this one, where the morality and justification of the villain is back and forth and there is no real resolution; neither character can purely be labeled a villain or victim. John Gassner notes that "enlightenment and catharsis "cannot occur so long as we are left in a state of tension. No matter how well the action or the main character's destiny is resolved and concluded, the anarchic forces, 'the pity and fear,' evoked by the tragedy cannot establish a suitable inner equilibrium" ("Catharsis" 516). Mag's death and Maureen triumph over her

freedom, the cathartic moment of Beauty Queen, provides tragic emotion and conflict. The answer and emotional state of the audience is unclear, and although there is definite emotional response to the action on stage, there is no closure, and unlike the fall or resolution of classic villains, audiences do not know how to react.

Mag and Maureen, characters who have no sympathy for one another, symbolize Ireland's isolation and fragmentation from the English Isles, causing great angst, frustration and provoking revenge for displaced dreams. McDonagh places these characters in his play to "demythologize" Ireland: "readers/spectators can deduce that the intergenerational, intrafamilial struggle between codependence and independence has nearly reached a violent intensity," and Mag and Maureen are the poster-girls for "relationships characterized by isolation, betrayal, and brutality" in collapsed, "traditional spaces" (Diehl 99, 111). Irish audiences watching Beauty Queen recognize this culturally significant piece, speaking to young and old generations, both affected by the displacement and racism by English peoples. The Irish truly understand the culture and themes in McDonagh's play, and they empathize with Mag and Maureen's discomfort in west-Ireland. But non-Irish audiences, but may not able to empathize with the characters or situation on a cultural level, can sympathize for the characters and learn from the larger themes which McDonagh provides. In an attempt to "demythologize" Ireland away from the fairies, religion, and myths, McDonagh hints at Mag and Maureen's longing for a true mother/daughter bond as they converse in the morally and socially stagnant small town of Galway, similar to "mother Ireland and her children['s]" longing for a strong unified nation (Grene 301, 306). Ireland's disgruntled past is allegorically

explored by McDonagh through Beauty Queen as Mag represents the old generation and Maureen the new. Both long for a unified state of existence, but the old takes an entirely different approach than the new; both result in pitiful ends.

Mag and Maureen are stuck, unnoticed and unfulfilled. Their current hatred and dissatisfaction with their surrounding town displaces the dream of freedom and unification which consumes their lives. They can not look forward to forming a stronger relationship and constantly look to the past filled with resentment and insecurity. In a larger context, since Mag and Maureen's remoteness symbolizes Ireland's isolation, McDonagh provides Beauty Queen as an allegory for the Irish people to make a change in their life, to break away from the outer discrimination and work toward a unified nation. Considering that this play speaks to both Irish and non-Irish audiences, but on separate levels, Beauty Queen forces audiences to look at villains differently, where outside forces could be a factor rather than utter evil.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane presents powerful examples of the new villain. Mag and Maureen evoke sympathy from audiences through their needs and desires. But at the same time, this new villain makes wrong turns and repulses audiences. McDonagh changes the face of the villain slightly from the stereotype by ending the play leaving audiences sympathizing with the villains but still questioning that choice. Maureen's murder of Mag can be justified if the reasons are taken into account. But ambivalence about Mag's execution remains somewhat unjustified, for Mag is also pursuing her needs and suffers from Maureen's torture. McDonagh creates victim-villains who suffer just as greatly as they villainously act.

The inclusion of vulnerable moments in contrast to their villainies allows audiences to connect with Mag and Maureen at different times on different levels. McDonagh creates incredibly sympathetic villains who desire to be understood more than anything else. John Waters's "The Irish Mummy: The Plays and Purpose of Martin McDonagh" concludes this idea:

> And [McDonagh] *does* engage with something real and terrifying – the emotional palsy of a people trapped in their own unrealized dreams, marooned in a cultural wasteland from which the essence of normality has been extracted, unable to jump-start a manner of self-description which will sound plausible to themselves. They seek gratification, release, relief, in a fashion which their own way of describing already tells them is a doomed errand. They chase the dream not to attain it but in order to remind themselves of the correctness of their won fatalism. (51)

These villains, dissimilar to classic villains, lack the most basic human needs: love, acceptance, control, and self-actualization. They are victims of their circumstances and their needs are not being met. As a victim-villain, can one ever win or gain full control? The answer seems to suggest that a limbo is the only place where victim-villains go—they neither win nor lose.

CHAPTER V: LEE HARVEY OSWALD AND ASSASSINS

"Everybody's got the right to their dreams"—the Assassins

The contemporary villain in the musical has also changed and taken steps toward audiences' sympathies and social awareness. In Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's Assassins, the creators introduce, or re-introduce, audiences to America's great presidential assassins, or would-be assassins, and provide each character with the opportunity to explain his or her case and reasons for assassinating the Presidents. The Assassins stage gives the historic villains an opportunity to be seen as sympathetic and potentially justified. As the creators transfer historical figures to the stage, antipathetic emotions about the Assassins' villains make it difficult for audiences to formulate a moral decision about the characters as the play develops. The known assassins like John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald potentially provoke fear, anger, and disgust, for they committed heinous American crimes, but Sondheim and Weidman provide the assassins with a stage to explain themselves. Using truthful influences from the real life villains, Sondheim and Weidman additionally fictionalize moments and characteristics to gain the most sympathy from audiences, to make audiences care for the characters and identify with them.

This chapter focuses on the characters Booth and Oswald. Sondheim and Weidman manipulate both characters, one who becomes a true theatrical villain and the other who is created into a villain on stage, to arouse sympathy and empathy as well to suggest that audiences rethink the true life villains presented on stage. Sondheim and

Weidman create Booth as a provocateur and leader of the assassins in the musical's structure, and his characteristics resemble the classic villain remarkably. It is Booth's manipulation of Oswald, and Oswald's transformation into a villain with which this chapter is most interested. Watching Oswald's onstage transformation allows audiences to see Booth's process to change Oswald from an innocent to a villain, potentially letting audiences empathize with Oswald as he is pressured by Booth and the others. This chapter also examines the manipulation of Booth by Sondheim and Weidman to function as the play's prominent villain and provide the underlying linear structure. Oswald functions to expose Booth as the true villain of the play. Because of Assassins' episodic rather than fully linear structure, the function of both villains is not fully realized until the final scenes with Oswald. The lack of a prominent linear plot structure makes Booth's progression similarly non-linear, and it is Oswald which Sondheim and Weidman use to unite the assassins, convey the show's message, and expose Booth as a villain.

Telling the assassins' crimes from their point of view provides reasons for their actions, and audiences understand the character's need for acceptance, attention, and a family. The passionate desire to leave a mark on society and improve their lives creates sympathetic characters marked by villainous crimes. André Bishop, artistic director of Playwright's Horizon, states in Assassins' preface, that Sondheim and Weidman "humanize these assassins in a series of vignettes, sketches, set pieces and ballads, and thereby to allow us to get into their minds. Their individual stories, part fiction and mostly fact, were presented on stage for us to see, and seeing America through the stories of its villains, instead of its heroes, was an unsettling and unusual experience" (xi). By

attempting to portray the characters as victims, but uniting them together to pursue the American dream, audiences potentially sympathize for the villains.

Assassins tells the tale of nine Presidential assassins: John Wilkes Booth (assan. Pres. Lincoln), Charles Guiteau (assan. Pres. Garfield), Leon Czolgosz (assan. Pres. McKinley), Giuseppe Zangara (attempted assan. of Pres. Franklin Roosevelt), Samuel Byck (attempted assan. of Pres. Nixon), Lynette Fromme (attempted assan. of Pres. Gerald Ford), Sara Jane Moore (attempted assan. of Pres. Gerald Ford), John Hinckley (attempted assan. of Pres. Reagan), and Lee Harvey Oswald (assan. President Kennedy). In a vaudeville-like setting, audiences meet the American villains and learn of each crime, reasons for the crime, and each personal justification.

> The first scene does what most first scenes do in a good musical—it introduces the characters and sets up the tone and themes of the show [. . .] as the assassins sing of their (and everyone's) right to be happy and have their dreams [. . .]. Any kid can grow up to be President; any kid can grow up to be his killer. (Bishop vii-viii)

These men and women are American villains, but Sondheim and Weidman give each character theatrically villainous moments and characteristics as they assassinate the Presidents on stage to rectify their lives. John Wilkes Booth interestingly leads the assassins in the musical and provokes them to kill a president. Taken on each journey, audiences hear exposition which might justify the reasons for the assassinations. Passionate about living in America and its promise and pursuit of freedom with which audiences identify, the assassins sing "Everybody's Got the Right":

> Everybody's / Got the right / To be happy. / [. . .]
>
> If you keep your / Goal in sight, / You can climb to / Any height. / [. . .]
>
> Aim for what you / Want a lot— / Everybody/ Gets a shot. / [. . .]
>
> Everybody's / Free to fail, / No one can be put in jail / For his dreams. / [. . .]
>
> Rich man, poor man, / Black or white, / Pick your apple, / Take a bite, / Everybody / Just hold tight / To your dreams. /
>
> Everybody's / Got the right / To their dreams . . . (Sondheim and Weidman 7-13)

With the loss of their dreams, the villains act out against the free country and expose the "gap between American ideals and American realities" (Shewey 64). What is difficult about the structure of Assassins is that little of the characters' lives, other than the assassinations, are depicted onstage, only through songs by the Balladeer. As audiences never see the formulation of the assassin and only the choices made after they decide to assassinate the president, audiences find it difficult to sympathize with their cases. Booth's greatest villainy is in uniting all the characters to convince Lee Harvey Oswald to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. This scene allows audiences to see Booth's creation of a villain, thus rendering Oswald the most sympathetic victim-villain of Assassins' characters. Oswald's assassination of Kennedy brings Booth and the other forgotten assassins back to American consciousness so that they can once again be remembered and their reasons made clear.

Assassins' villains passionately pursue the promised opportunity to improve their lives only to be knocked down by the country that promises it.

> These murderers and would-be murderers are generally dismissed as maniacs and misfits who have little in common with each other, and nothing in common with the rest of us. *Assassins* suggests otherwise. *Assassins* suggests that while these individuals are, to say the least, peculiar—taken as a group they are peculiarly *American*. And that behind the variety of motives, which they articulated for their murderous outbursts, they share a common purpose: a desperate desire to reconcile intolerable feelings of impotence with an inflamed and malignant sense of entitlement. (Bishop x)

This is the most interesting facet of Sondheim and Weidman's characters, they become characters which audiences can relate to, people that audiences know; this characteristic entices audiences to listen to each tale. In creating characters who audiences understand but fear and despise at the same time, Assassins creates empathetic villains. Each assassin has his or her own tale, a story which exposes betrayal, hurt, and a need to heal, but Sondheim and Weidman choose not to depict every story and concentrate most on Oswald's evolution into an assassin.

The first of Assassins' villains is most famous in American history for his assassination of President Lincoln in 1865: John Wilkes Booth. In Assassins, Sondheim and Weidman create Booth as the "pioneer" of the assassination profession and as a man who fights for his principles and stands up for his American dream (Sondheim and

Weidman 11). Introducing Booth to audiences in "Everybody's Got the Right" as a strong, awed figure by the others sets Booth apart as the ringleader, the man in charge. As a revered figure in scene one, Sondheim and Weidman foreshadow that Booth's purpose in the musical will lead the other assassins to commit their crimes for the "free country" which they so badly desire and pinpoints him as the most villainous. As the first assassin to speak to the others, Booth stimulates the assassins and inspires them to get "some sunshine" (13). Sondheim and Weidman foreshadow Booth's integral purpose in the show's structure through his introduction into the musical.

Sondheim and Weidman attempt to sway some audience sympathy for Booth and give him a chance to tell his story and connect with the audience, but Booth negates any kind feelings toward him through his racist comments. At the root of Booth's character is, as the Balladeer describes in the exposition of "The Ballad of Booth," a "handsome" actor who "lived with a grace and glitter" and "had everything" he could ever need, but he always received "bad reviews" (16). Audiences see Booth immediately after the assassination of "the bloody tyrant," President Lincoln, who Booth claims "ruthlessly provoke[d] a war between the States which cost some six hundred thousand of [his] countrymen their lives [. . .] [and] That [Lincoln] did silence [his] critics in the North by hurling them into prison without benefit of charge or trial" (17-18). Immediately Booth shows his patriotic side to defend his decision and actions as he makes a case for the victims of America who fought in the war. "Booth feels betrayed by history and by the violence of the Civil War. Abandoned by destiny, he becomes it; he kills in order to heal" (Lahr). In "The Ballad of Booth," Sondheim and Weidman provide audiences his

political and moral justification: “What I did was kill the man who killed my country / Now the Southland will mend, / Now this bloody war can end, / Because someone slew the tyrant” (Sondheim and Weidman 19-20). For these reasons, Booth’s assassination of Lincoln could be justified, and his “ardor is so impassioned that he almost sways [audiences] to his cause” (Citron 349). But Sondheim and Weidman remind audiences that Booth is a villain as he professes his hatred toward Lincoln, “that vulgar, / High and mighty, / Niggerlover” (21). The racial comment at the end proposes that Booth killed Lincoln for larger issues, and does not convince audiences that Booth deserves sympathy. As Booth, in his final sympathetic action and self-righteous words, states that he “did it for [his] country” and raises the gun to his head, Booth hopes to die a martyr and legend, inspiring others to “change the world.” His suicide brings sympathy from audiences who watch a man die for his country, but because he killed a President and racially slurs against others, it becomes difficult to fully invest oneself in Booth’s cause. As of this scene, Booth is only a villain through the historical assassination, and in the musical his reasons are partially understood, but not pitied. It is not until the end that the true theatrical villain emerges in the plot line of the musical.

Sondheim and Weidman use Booth throughout the play to create other assassins. He reaches out and convinces the others to commit the crimes and take a villainous action to cure personal ailments. With Zangara, Booth simply recommends an action which creates a villain.

> BOOTH: You know, you really ought to do something about that stomach.
>
> ZANGARA: I do everything about this stomach!

BOOTH: Oh, yes?

ZANGARA: I give up wine! No good! I give up smokes! No good! I quit my work! No good! I move Miami! No Good! I take appendix out! No good! Nothing, no good! *Nothing*! *Nothing*! *Nothing*!

BOOTH: Have you considered shooting Franklin Roosevelt?

ZANGARA: You think that help?

BOOTH: It couldn't hurt. (25-6)

Here, Booth proves himself a provocative villain that is out to use others to accomplish his own means. Booth realizes in the world of the play that his ultimate desire to be noticed and revered is not fulfilled, and perhaps another assassination would bring him and his cause back to focus.

Although in scene one the audience hears Booth assassinate President Lincoln, marking him a villain, until this point in the structure, Booth only holds qualities of the Machiavellian and Revengeful villain: he is fearless in pursuit, letting nothing stop him from achieving what he feels was lost, out to attain his own ends, dies cursing, intelligent, ambitious, and slightly humanized. If audiences look at Booth's justification for the assassination, they might re-think the rationale and understand how Booth saw himself a hero, a reformer. This assassination, to Booth, moves the nation forward. Booth later states his self-convinced responsibility and revenge in scene fifteen: "I did it to bring down the government of Abraham Lincoln and to avenge the ravaged South [. . .] so they'd suffer in the North the way we'd suffered in the South" (79-80). In wanting others to suffer out of revenge, a stereotypical trait, there is little sympathy for Booth. It is the

scene between Booth and Oswald which truly shows the theatrical villain in Booth, as well as the villain in the other assassins.

To appeal to audience's sympathies, and bring a linear structure to the musical, before letting the assassins become dramatically villainous and introducing the show's most sympathetic character, Sondheim and Weidman provide audiences with a turning point in the play where the assassins take control of their destinies to force change and require recognition. This scene functions to enhance the rising action of the play and show that the assassins will use their new found power together to advance upon others, and potentially Oswald. In "Another National Anthem," the assassins plead their cases, ultimately wanting their "prize" and somebody to listen. But the assassins do not receive the notoriety they feel they deserve and the Balladeer reminds them of this:

> And it didn't mean a nickel, / You just shed a little blood, / And a lot of people shed a lot of tears. / [. . .] / But it didn't fix the stomach / And you've drunk your final Bud, / And it didn't help the workers / And it didn't heal the country / And it didn't make them listen / And they never said, 'We're sorry'—. (81)

And at the audiences' emotional height of sympathy for these characters whose crushed dreams have been stomped on, the assassins turn ravenously on the Balladeer, the one person who did not really judge them but simply told their tale, reminding audiences that these are villainous murderers. He reminds them that they have not achieved their dream and America has forgotten them. Not to provoke or condemn the assassins' attempts at fame, the Balladeer informs them that many other people have made it big in America

through sheer luck. Finding the need to rid themselves of someone who oppresses their dreams and makes fun of their failure, the assassins dispose of the Balladeer. In "Stephen Sondheim and the Musical of the Outsider," Lovensheimer asserts that “the narrators cannot and do not survive in the midst of outsiders. The elimination of the narrator enhances the power of the outsiders” (188-9). They take control of their lives and do not let others tell their tale any longer, creating their own “dystopian vision of the American dream” (Fulk and Howard 107). The assassins devise the plan to use America’s quietest villain to try once more to “get a prize” and “get [their] dream” (Sondheim and Weidman 89). This scene reminds audiences of the character’s internal struggles but also the means which they express their frustrations. The assassins come together to create the supporting family they need and declare “Another National Anthem” “For those who never win, / For the suckers, for the pikers, / For the ones who might have been” and find the means to prey on one last person who could possibly provide them the chance to prove themselves (Sondheim and Weidman 85). Now with a clear vision of Assassins’ purpose, audiences see the linear structure evolve. By uniting together to overcome oppression by the Balladeer, and devise their plan against Oswald (foreshadowed here), the rising action of the play dictates that these character are villainous and plan to use any means necessary to attain their dreams.

Assassins’ Lee Harvey Oswald is drastically different than classic villains. Unlike the stereotypes, Oswald is created as meek, self-destructive, and private. Oswald does not disclose his ideas to others and takes convincing to commit his crimes. His actions, other than the assassination, are of no detriment to anyone else until he is created

into an infamous Tool villain by Booth. Oswald is not created a villain by Sondheim and Weidman and is introduced in the final stages of suicide. Presenting Oswald in a suicidal state does not stop audiences from presupposing the villainous persona on Oswald. Little is known about the real Oswald and his reasons for assassinating John F. Kennedy, but Sondheim and Weidman paint an interesting picture of the assassination day. This scene depicts the other assassins as bullies who victimize and push Oswald to become the assassin they wish to have been, to be the man who brings assassination to new heights. By showing the struggle which Oswald suffers in becoming a villain by Booth's manipulation, Oswald embodies the new empathetic villain whose needs are understandable by audiences.

Audiences meet a lonely Oswald, desperate for his life and the love of his wife. Alone in the Texas School Book Depository, Oswald seems to pity himself for his self-proclaimed victim-status. As Booth enters the scene, the stage dynamic changes and Booth emits a new radiance in this scene and inspires fear as his presence looms on stage. Typical of the villain, Booth plans to use Oswald as a tool to achieve selfish desires. Booth taunts Oswald by reading the letter to his wife: "Dearest Marina. Today I end my life so that your life can begin. Last night you said that I oppressed you, that—," making Oswald feel increasingly uncomfortable and violated (Sondheim and Weidman 91). Booth provokes Oswald again, calling him "Alik," the nickname given to him by his Russian wife. Booth's presence intrigues audiences and Oswald as to the purpose of his visit. This violation of Oswald's personal life draws audiences into Oswald's story and

keeps them at a distance from Booth who oppresses the meek Oswald. Booth continues to play games with Oswald:

> BOOTH: And this morning, depressed over your estrangement from a wife who views you as a dismal and pathetic failure, you rose before dawn, kissed your sleeping children, put your last hundred dollars and you wedding ring into a demitasse cup which Marina's mother gave you for a wedding present, and came here to kill yourself . . .
>
> OSWALD: Who are you?
>
> BOOTH; I'm your friend, Lee.
>
> OSWALD: I don't have any friends.
>
> BOOTH: Yes, you do. You just haven't met them yet. (92)

Forwarding the action to come, the other assassins show up to force Oswald into assassination by telling him that he does have friends and a family that loves him. Booth continues to taunt Oswald and show him that the desperation he feels must be manifested somehow to release him from his miserable life.

In the next section, Booth torments Oswald even more. "It's just so sad . . . I mean, its all you ever wanted, isn't it? Someone who won't leave you alone. Someone who wants to hear about your day. Someone, *any*one—" (93). Booth's pressure brings the most sympathy from audiences to Oswald's character, but Sondheim and Weidman want audiences to connect with Oswald on the most basic need of human life: love. And as Booth tortures him and corners him as a victim, Oswald feels even worse about his life. Booth's character is the most villainous as he purposely hurts Oswald in order to get

his innermost desire: recognition and justification. But Booth's lines prove the most important passage in the script as it reveals his and every other assassin's true dream, plus the empathetic desires of audiences who connect with his needs: "Attention must be paid. [. . .] You want what everybody wants. To be appreciated. To be valued. To be in people's thoughts. For them to think of you and smile . . . You want someone to love you, Lee. Right?" (93). As Booth continues to push Oswald to the brink of frustration, Oswald breaks, allowing Booth to propose his ultimate idea:

> OSWALD: *Shut the fuck up!*
>
> BOOTH: I'm sorry, Lee. It's just so *childish*. It's so *dumb*—
>
> OSWALD: You think it's *dumb*?! If I shouldn't kill myself what *should* I do?! Beg her to take me back?! Plead with her?! Beat her up?!
>
> BOOTH: You tried all that. It doesn't work.
>
> OSWALF: I know it doesn't work! So tell me what I *should* do!
>
> BOOTH: You should kill the President of the United States. (94)

Just like Zangara's scene, Booth merely suggests the notion of assassination. He does no more than recommend it and begins showing true signs of the Machiavellian: nonchalance in the suggestion of blood and violence, the subtle arousal of fear in other characters and audiences, the fearless pursuit of desires, the lack of moral feeling toward the crimes, and a fascinating manner of speaking. Booth appeals to the common man now and points out the flaws in Oswald as "a victim of both his family and the country" and society which have made him this way (Fulk and Howard 113). Sympathy from audiences strongly fills the scene for Oswald.

> OSWALD: I didn't come here to shoot the President.
>
> BOOTH: He didn't come here to get shot . . . All your life you've been a victim, Lee. A victim of indifference and neglect. Of your mother's scorn your wife's contempt, of Soviet stupidity, American injustice. You've finally had enough, so how are you planning to get even? By becoming your own victim. (94-5)

In Booth's attempt to force Oswald to feel pitiful, he stands over him, making him feel little.

In the next section, Booth exhibits his and the theatrical villain's intellect through speech. He suavely convinces Oswald of the magnitude of killing a President and the importance of this act, and finds a way to appeal to Oswald's inner demon by playing the positive in his negotiations, similar to Richard III's ability to persuade others through gentle caressing of words. "Lee, when you kill a President, it isn't murder. Murder is a tawdry little crime; it's born of greed, or lust, or liquor. Adulterers and shopkeepers get murdered. But when a President gets killed, when Julius Caesar got killed . . . he was assassinated" (95). At this point assassination feels more powerful and important in the larger scheme and adds to the play's coming climax. Booth condemns Oswald yet reaches out to him at the same time, making him feel necessary. The true villain in Booth comes about and now the man whom audiences momentarily understood in the play's opening is disliked for his selfish behavior and smoothly overpowering words. He is almost kind while convincing Oswald to assassinate Kennedy, and Booth's theatricality

continues to reign supreme in the scene, suggesting to audiences that this villain may not be as justified as previously thought.

But what of Oswald? Oswald does not want this pressure or to assassinate a president. Now Oswald becomes a victim in audience's eyes as Booth coerces him and promises to make Oswald's wishes come true. Booth magically makes a gun appear from curtain rods and functions as the provocateur again:

> BOOTH: The package that you brought to work. What's in it?
>
> OSWALD: Curtain rods.
>
> BOOTH: *(Picking up the package)* You sure?
>
> *(Booth tosses the package to Oswald; Oswald catches it, looks surprised. He folds back the blanket, revealing a high powered rifle)*
>
> BOOTH: That's a Mannlicher-Carcano. 6.5 millimeter. Stopping range, nine hundred yards. The sight's already been adjusted. (95)

Creating the purpose and the weapon for Oswald, Booth now creates his tool to gain fame. As the creator of the gun, Booth's true villainy becomes clear and his villainies toward Oswald render him the play's biggest stage villain, the character who sets up the play's climactic end. The true villain of Assassins is found in Booth who convinces Oswald to become a villain and forces him to commit this act in order to selfishly bring Booth and the others back to American eyes so they too can gain recognition.

Booth summons the other of the assassins to finish out the idea which adds a new dynamic to the scene. "The members of this [assassin] 'family' exert pressure on one another, support and even share one another's motives and lives across history. They

represent a group that disrupts the patriotic fervor surrounding past presidents and presents a potentially subversive challenge to the conventional American historical narrative" (Fulk and Howard 107). The essence of family, as Sondheim's musicals notably convey, becomes the driving device in the play's development as all of the assassins come on stage to convince Oswald of his higher calling. Not only does Oswald feel loved and supported, but the other assassins who also lack those feelings do too. Oswald "is the culmination of all the assassins and all the songs that have gone before him" (Lovensheimer 195). The assassins applaud the bewildered Oswald and tell him, "You're going to bring us back, [. . .] And make us possible, [. . .] We're in your debt, old boy," and he is the future (Sondheim and Weidman 96, 99). Sondheim and Weidman create the assassins family who depend on Oswald to serve their own needs. Booth uses Oswald to gain power and functions as the counter to the other assassins, a character to show their villainous sides, especially that of Booth who becomes the play's most stereotypical villain.

But Oswald rejects the family and assassination at first and Booth and the others become uneasy with his less than vigorous approach to the situation. In the best way known, Booth appeals to the longing for recognition, which all the assassins long for, and makes audiences aware of the desperate importance of love. Booth's persuasion begins to sound convincing to audiences who understand the villains' desires and watch as they persuade Oswald to his final end. "They'll hate you with a passion, Lee. Imagine people having passionate feelings about Lee Harvey Oswald" (99). It is Oswald's constant rejection of the threatening ideas of the other assassins which persuade sympathy for

Oswald from the audience as they see a character struggling with his identity, his self-image, and his ability or inability to commit this crime. The force and bombardment by the other assassins renders Oswald a victim to bullying and torment which he did not intend on suffering. Sondheim and Weidman depict the other assassins as villains now, adding to the rising actions and who are forcing an innocent man to commit a crime for their personal benefit. In their villainous way, the assassins appeal to Oswald one last time to fulfill his destiny and bring them back: "We are the hopeless ones. The lost ones [. . .] But through you and your act, [. . .] we are revived and given meaning" (100). Here audiences see that this plea serves each individual self. Still striving for their fame and infamy, the assassins villainize against Oswald and use him as their tool to achieve their means, only to persuade him through family and fame. For once Oswald is needed and the others provide peer pressure to ensure his end: "I envy you . . . We're your family . . . I admire you . . . I respect you . . . Make us proud of you" (102). With this last bit of convincing and the family Oswald has so long desired finally supporting him, Booth opens the window and holds the gun out for Oswald. Booth gives Oswald the tools needed for success and the direction needed and provides the direct action to the play's climax. Oswald becomes the American villain and shoots Kennedy, but also a "victim of assassination" and the other assassins' victimization (Lovensheimer 195).

By creating Oswald on the stage, audiences' emotions heighten as real-life emotions return from the assassination day. But as Sondheim and Weidman try to justify his case and help audiences understand the troubled Oswald, audiences see Oswald as a man not in control of his own life. Oswald transforms into a villain, but he is a tool

villain. Like Bosola of the Duchess of Malfi, Oswald's crime is partially forced upon him (but it is he who makes the ultimate decision to pull the trigger), he suffers from moral indecision while in the throes of the assassination, he is surrounded by evil, and audiences may sympathize for him. What sets Bosola and Oswald apart as Tool villains, is that Oswald does not act out of greed, money, or social power and he does not avenge himself over those who forced him to this end. Oswald dies a tool as audiences potentially sympathize for his fall. Because he remains a victim of the other assassins, Sondheim and Weidman create a character with which audiences can sympathize and empathize, a victim of pressure, ineptitude, and misery. Putting one of the most notorious assassins on stage forces audiences to re-think the villain and look at him more as a distressed person who transfers his anger and frustrations to outside influences. Oswald's passion for being needed and wanted, and Booth's manipulation, drives Oswald to pursue heinous and outlandish means of reaching that goal. Nothing changes as Oswald brings back the other assassins, but he does remind audiences of the power of a dream and what it can cause. Anybody can change and anybody can become a villain; that is what Oswald teaches audiences. Used as a tool by Sondheim and Weidman, Oswald unites the assassins' and the musical's purpose, to convey a message about understanding and caring for one another.

Booth's total function shows the power of the outside force which can coerce others in powerful ways; Booth can make others become a villain. Booth has shown himself villainous by manipulating the other, disposable assassins and Oswald for his self-righteous plans and gain fame. Although Booth is partially justified in his opening

scenes by the Balladeer's expository song, Booth's actions against Oswald show that a stereotypical villain can exist in contemporary theatre.

The characters analyzed here fit the classic and contemporary theatre villain model. What is interesting in Assassins is the ability to create partially sympathetic characters out of some of the most despised figures in American history, and to depict them as understandable, troubled, strong in will, and even sympathetic. In presenting these characters acting against a lost American opportunity for self improvement, Sondheim and Weidman reveal true humans through these characters (although fictionalized settings and events are made) and provoke audiences to think about the villain as a person. Everybody wants to be understood and "everybody's got the right to be happy" (Sondheim and Weidman 104). But the assassins seem to always fail, and they remind audiences of the villain's ultimate finale.

Assassins provides an idea for the future where people understand and talk about things before acting on them and unite to make the world better. Perhaps Samuel Byck, would-be assassin of President Richard Nixon, sums up Sondheim and Weidman's final statement best in his recorded letter to Leonard Bernstein: "*Love songs*. They're what we need! [. . .] Tender melodies to cherish for a lifetime! Timeless strains which linger in the memory and the heart! Love Lenny! What the world needs now is love sweet love!" (Sondheim and Weidman 55).

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The new villain type has proven different than the classic stereotype while still holding onto the classic traits of the villain. Scarcely before have audiences swayed back and forth in their feelings about a character like they do for contemporary villains. As earlier stated, today's modern characters plead their cases and ultimate desires while villainously acting. Audiences' emotions connect with those of the character and potentially justify the villain's actions. The contemporary villain engages in a frequent personal struggle, "something drives him into it which he can not resist; it is not his to decide whether he even wishes to resist," and thus the audience can not resist either; it becomes, as Lukács declares, an "illness" (Lukács 151). By showing both sides of the villains' stories and the circumstances surrounding each, playwrights evoke sympathy and empathy for the villain while still rendering them despicable. They are acted upon and must, in self-preservation from victimization, act in retaliation. Yes, their vindictive qualities and tactics remain similar to the stereotype, and their fascination with what will happen next remains strong, but it is the ability for audiences to see themselves within the characters and then begin justifying the villain's motives which truly creates a new type of villain. Rarely before have audiences connected and understood the villain as they might now. This connection and audiences' justification of the characters makes the villains harder to label, harder to fully like or dislike, and incredibly fascinating.

Contemporary theatre's villain, as this thesis suggests, appeals to the audience's growing desire to understand and learn. This thesis has shown that villainy is present in

today's theatre, but the face of it has changed. The rise in psychology in the past century produced more therapists and patients, who in turn became psychoanalysts of their own world, trying to help others overcome personal obstacles. The fascination with analytical approaches to understanding human behavior translates into theatre's audiences who attempt to analyze the character as well, even if that character is fictional.

> The quest for meaning is equally significant to our existence, the sheer fact of a thing is seldom sufficient for us. That a thing is is rarely as important as why a thing is. [. . .] Aristotle famously maintained at the start of his *Metaphysics* that 'All men by nature desire to know'. He goes on to argue that the highest manifestation of knowledge is wisdom, that is to say, the quest for knowledge concerning the cause of all things, what lies behind our immediate sense experience of the world. (Alsford 5)

Playwrights have found a need to connect with audiences and stir up emotions. By letting audiences make up their own minds about a theatrical villain's actions, audiences are better able to define personal lines and choose between their own conceptions of good and bad.

Each character analyzed in this thesis also represents a larger societal theme which the playwright suggests needs changing. Roy Cohn teaches that in creating hell, one must suffer in it too. But Kushner forgives those who have wronged him through Angels' characters and teaches audiences that forgiveness and acceptance of the self and others only makes one stronger and more "fabulous" (Kushner 280). Mag, Maureen and The Beauty Queen of Leenane teach that understanding the needs of one another is vitally

important to any relationship. Lack of love creates bitter hatred and an inability to progress. McDonagh creates two villains who teach audiences that perhaps the one thing which unites them, the need for love and understanding, is the one thing which forces them to villainously act and drive the other away. By realizing their commonality, the two could create the environment and relationship they so desire. Lee Harvey Oswald forces audiences to reexamine the deeds of villains and attempt to understand the rationale of misunderstood outsiders. He reinforces the idea that anybody can be made into a villain through a manipulative, oppressive influence. Oswald desires unity and a connection, just like the other villains in Assassins and those examined in this thesis. And Sondheim and Weidman wish audiences to learn from the villains of the past and to take the time to notice those who may be reaching out for a family and for an open ear.

Playwrights write these interesting and multi-layered characters in hopes of changing something. Whether it is forgiveness, justification of life, or a re-thinking, contemporary playwrights do not let the villain rest on evil ideas alone, for they too are just as human as the audience watching. They speak like us, they speak to us, and they speak about us. The fourth wall may be up on stage, but the barrier between character and audience is nowhere to be found. In each audience member there is a villain and in each villain there is an audience member. Both are more similar than one likes to imagine.

Contemporary villains, empathetically and sympathetically victims of some outside force, desires more than anything to be understood, to have someone listen to their tale, and to have someone love them for who they are. The needs of any audience

member can be reflected in the characters on stage. It is this connection which can propel playwrights to create the new villain who functions in reshaping society's thoughts and ways. Creating humanized villains whose actions are potentially justified does not mean that audiences should release the villain due to empathetic identification, but instead take the emotional connection explored by dramatists and characters and reexamine themselves and others in attempts to help society care for one another. "One of America's earliest pioneers in modern drama, Arthur Hopkins, once expressed a conviction that the theatre can 'ultimately reach a place where it helps mankind to a better human understanding, to a deeper social pity, and to a wider tolerance of all that is life'" (Gassner, Introduction xi). Perhaps if people try to understand others, then the "villainous" might really be victims instead. Again, the villain's actions are not right, but the insight given into the human psyche can inspire a better understanding of humanity.

Can a villain be understood? Contemporary playwrights and this thesis say yes. Audiences must open their minds and prepare to be terrified by the truths of larger themes and the self which result from these characters. Forcing, or coercing, audiences to decide between right and wrong, and then leaving audiences talking about and questioning the play upon its end, allows playwrights to affect change. The hope for a loving place could be near in the future thanks to the new villain. It merely takes an open ear to connect with another and prevent a villain.

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