

Anna Chen, Head Librarian, Clark Library

Early Modern Bibliophilia: A Celebration of the Chrzanowski Collection

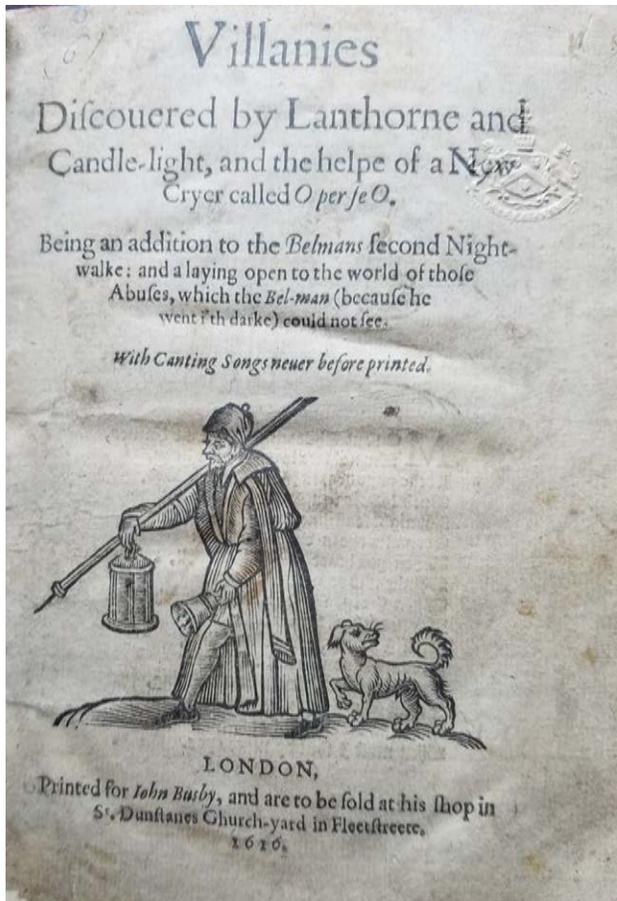
Thomas Dekker, *Villanies Discovered by Lantern and Candle-Light* (London: [by William Stansby] for John Busby, 1616)

When William Andrews Clark, Jr. first began collecting rare books in the early twentieth century, he set out to collect Shakespeare in part because so many other collectors were doing it. But collecting Shakespeare was so popular in the early twentieth century that Clark found himself a latecomer to the trend, and he was short on funds too, compared to other collectors like Morgan, Huntington, and Folger. So, encouraged by the advice of a bookseller, he turned to the much more affordable Dryden and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which became the foundation for one of the Clark Library's major collecting strengths today.

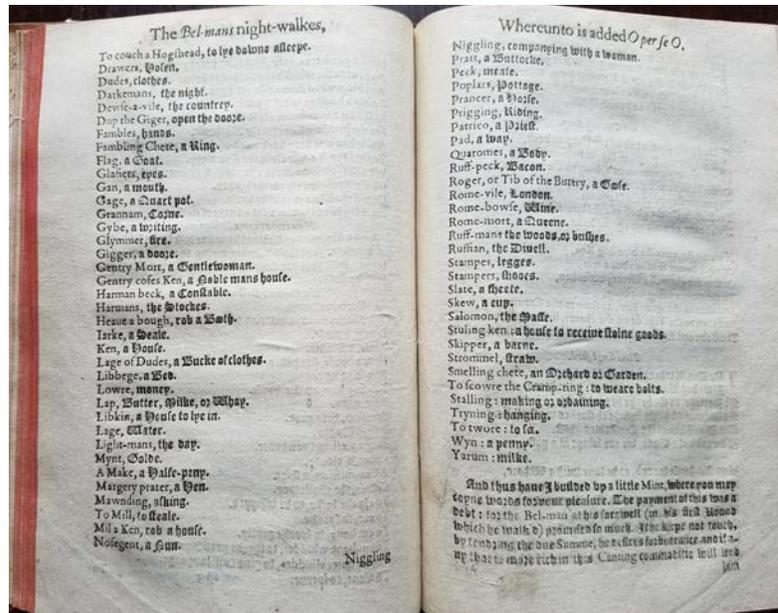
But Clark did start the core of a Shakespeare collection. He bought the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Folios, eighteen first-edition quartos of Shakespeare's plays, dozens of playbooks from the library of the eighteenth-century Shakespearean actor John Kemble, and a book containing Shakespeare's notes and signatures forged by William Henry Ireland. But the price of Shakespeareana was such that the library essentially did not add further to this core for 70 years.

Then in 2009, Paul Chrzanowski made a gift of more than 70 Shakespearean-era English books and manuscripts that transformed the Clark's profile. It strengthened our early modern holdings in a way that the rare book market now makes almost impossible, and it substantially expanded the kinds of classes and research that the Clark could support. Paul made a second gift in 2014, and now, most recently, a third gift of some two dozen books and manuscripts. Paul made these gifts because he wanted these books to be read, so I am grateful to you for being here today, and I encourage you to come back and read them.

Paul's most recent gift includes a little pamphlet with a big title: *Villanies discovered by lantern and candle-light, and the help of a new crier called O per se O: being an addition to the Bellman's second night-walk: and a laying open to the world of those Abuses, which the Bel-man (because he went i-th darke) could not see. With Canting Songs never before printed.*



This is what is known as a rogue pamphlet. Rogue literature was a genre of print spanning most of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, in which an honest man infiltrates the criminal underworld and is now exposing to the reader what he has learned about their tricks and scams, their secret language, their social structure and codes of conduct. The narrators of these pamphlets insist that they are documenting reality even though there are clearly fictional elements. But to maintain a veneer of authenticity, they include elements such as glossaries of cant, which was the language supposedly used by inhabitants of the criminal underworld.



These are also called cony-catching pamphlets because cony-catching is, essentially, the art of swindling. A cony was another word for a tame rabbit. So a cony-catcher was a thief or a confidence artist.

This rogue pamphlet was written by Thomas Dekker, who, unfortunately for him, might be best known as a second-rate playwright working during Shakespeare's time. Not much is known about his life. It is believed that he was born around 1572, and in another pamphlet he implies that he was born and grew up in London. There is no record of his education, so it is unlikely he attended university. He was imprisoned for debt at least three times, including for seven years between 1613 and 1620. It is believed that he died in 1632 and his widow disavowed his estate that year, perhaps because he had died in debt.

But he first emerges in the historical record as a playwright when, in 1598, the theater manager Philip Henslowe recorded in his diary that he paid Dekker twenty shillings for writing a play. Dekker wrote dozens of plays, most of them for Henslowe's theater, most of them collaboratively with other playwrights, including Shakespeare, and most of them now lost.

In 1603 he began writing pamphlets, probably because he was looking for another source of income after the theaters closed first to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth and then because of an outbreak of the plague. After the theaters reopened, however, his dramatic writing opportunities seem to have decreased, and writing pamphlets increasingly became his main

source of income. So although as a playwright he has struggled for recognition, he has turned out to be a dominant figure in the pamphleteering culture of the early seventeenth century.

I will talk about just a few things about this work that particularly interest me. First of all, it is a pamphlet. A pamphlet is basically a short little book made of paper that has been folded up and loosely stitched together. The stitching was an important feature of the pamphlet, because it was in contrast to binding, which a more substantial book would require and which was much more expensive to execute. In fact, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lexicographers often defined a pamphlet by the fact that it was stitched, and not bound.

Sometimes pamphlets had woodcut illustrations, usually on their title pages. The image of the Bellman, a kind of early modern watchman, on *Villanies*' title page may have been designed specifically for *Villanies*.

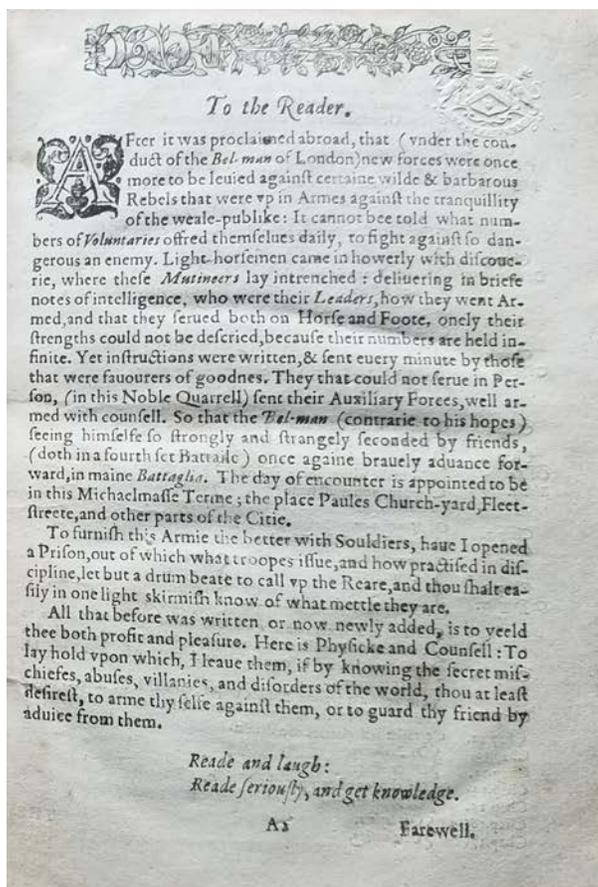
But even more interesting than these definitions of a pamphlet's physical attributes were other ways in which pamphlets were understood. From the beginning, their small size, low production values, and embrace of commercial enterprise made pamphlets a target of derision. An obsolete, early sixteenth-century meaning of "pamphlet" was a prostitute. Even in the late sixteenth century, the word "pamphlet" was often used as an insult. Thomas Bodley, who founded Oxford's Bodleian Library in 1598, famously said that pamphlets were "not worth the custody in such a librarie" as the Bodleian. They were insubstantial, cheaply printed, disposable, error-laden, and disruptive.

Moreover, they were, essentially, written for money. Pamphlets were meant to be ephemeral. Because they were usually topical, they became outdated quickly, so they were produced cheaply. But even when they became outdated, they were often reprinted, which was an easy way to keep making money off of them. Often the text was updated as well to maintain currency.

Dekker was very good at this kind of recycling and reuse. Most of the material in *Villanies* is lifted from previous rogue pamphlet writers. Dekker also republished sections of his own work under new titles, like *Villanies*, which had been called *The Bellman of London*, and then *Lantern and Candle-Light*, in previous editions. He also updated his pamphlets over time. In this fourth edition, he added seven new chapters on prisons, which was almost certainly informed by his own experience in prison, as it was published in 1616, in the middle of his seven-year sentence for debt. Meanwhile, other writers updated *their* rogue pamphlets with a Bellman

character to capitalize on the popularity of Dekker's pamphlets, which prompted Dekker to complain about so-called "Word Pirates" in one of *his* pamphlets, in which he asked the muses, among other things, to doom Word Pirates to live among dunces forever. This kind of belligerent posturing was also another way to sustain audience interest, which would sell more pamphlets. In these ways, pamphleteers like Dekker were very self-aware about the ephemeral and fluid nature of their work, and the instability of their authorship, all of which, although a cause for contemporary criticism about pamphlets, was an important aspect of their success.

Dekker was not a gentleman scholar. He was a professional writer, which was a new kind of identity in this period. But Dekker embraced the dynamics of the open market, and the opportunities that it offered to create different kinds of relationships between authors and readers. He often hid his identity, as he did here in *Villanies*, where his name does not appear on the title page or the dedicatory epistle. Similarly, he was aiming to write not for aristocratic patrons but rather a much more diverse and anonymous readership. One of his other pamphlets was dedicated to "Nobody," and its dedicatory epistle is signed "Some-body." In this edition of *Villanies*, he has dedicated it to the Reader and did not sign it with a name at all.



Many critics have described Dekker as a hack, willing to write anything for pay. But it is interesting that Dekker recognized that commerce was inseparable from the pamphlet's identity, and that it is reflected in his writing. This brings me to the final feature of this pamphlet that I want to talk about. This pamphlet is about rogues: gull-groppers, rabbit-suckers, jinglers, tumblers, moon-men, all terms that appear in the table of contents.

A Table of all the matters that are contained in this Booke.

	1. What matters were tryed at a Terme that was in Hell.	
	2. The proceedings of that Court.	
	3. A Counsell held in Hell about the Bel-man.	
	4. A messenger sent from thence with instructions.	
	How Gentlemen are cheated at Ordinaries,	
Chap. 1.	To furnish which feast, these Guests are bidden, viz.	The Leaders.
Chap. 2.		The Follorne Kiope.
Of Gull-groppers.		The Eagle.
		The Wood-pecker.
		The Gull.
	The Gul-groper.	
	How Gentlemen are vndone by taking vp commodities.	
Chap. 3.	Which Tragedie hath these five Acts, viz.	A Tumbler.
Of Ferretting.		Furfsnets.
		A Ferret.
		Rabbit-suckers.
		A Warren.
	How to catch Birds by the Booke.	
Chap. 4.	Which is done w. th these five Nets, viz.	A Falconer.
Of Hawking.		A Lure.
		A Terrell-Gentle.
		A Bird.
		A Mongrel.
Chap. 5.	Of Tackets of the Clock-house.	
Chap. 6.	How Inne-keepers and Hackney-men are saddled.	
Of Ranke-Riders.	To make whom goe a round pace, you must haue	A Colt.
		A Snaffle.
		A Ring.
	Prouander.	
Chap. 7.	Of Moone-men.	
Chap. 8.	The infect ion of the Suburbs.	
	The villanic of Horse-couriers.	
Chap. 9.	Who consists of _____	Jinglers.
Of Jynglers.		Drovers.
		Goades.
		Skip-tacks.
Chap. 10.	Of Tack in a Boxe, or a new kinde of cheating, teaching how to change gold into siluer: vnto which is added a Map, by which a man may learne to trauell all ouer England, and haue his charges borne.	
Chap. 11.	The Bel-mans second Nights walke, in which he meetes with a number of Monsters that lue in darknesse.	
Chap. 12.	Certaine Discoueries of a Prison.	
Chap. 13.	Of Prisoners.	
Chap. 14.	Of Creditors.	
Chap. 15.	Of choyce of company in a Prison.	
Chap. 16.	Of Visitants.	
Chap. 17.	Of Taylors.	
	Of Gaming.	

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These were names for people who were struggling with and adapting to poverty and social changes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The word “rogue” was coined in the mid-sixteenth century, possibly by a writer of rogue pamphlets, to describe a range of socially, geographically, and economically marginalized individuals. In this pamphlet, Dekker describes “counterfeit soldiers” who falsify sores on their bodies to make themselves look more pathetic, beggars who pretend that their tongues have been cut out, and confidence artists working together to concoct elaborate schemes for cheating at dice.

The stories in these rogue pamphlets are basically fictional. But in another way, the rogues and their scams reflect on the nature of the pamphlets and their writers. Like these fictional rogues, pamphlet writers were coy about their identities. They sought ways to make quick cash, often by spinning compelling but ultimately false narratives, while following their community's particular code of conduct in the ways they worked for and against each other, repackaging, borrowing, and responding to each other and their audiences. Like rogues, pamphlets were mobile. They swarmed through the city and beyond, interacting with and some might say infecting a wide audience, and in the process becoming an indispensable part of England's cultural landscape.

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