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Safely Shooting a Quiet Woman: A Study of Patriarchy, Sexuality, Racism, and Putrefaction in John Webster's Plays

An Honors Thesis

Presented to
The Department of English
Bates College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science

By
Rebecca C. Dobbin
Lewiston, Maine
March 28th, 2016

Acknowledgments

It is with my most sincere gratitude that I dedicate this thesis to the following role models, advisors, and friends.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of sexuality in John Webster's three plays, *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case*. Himself a barrister, Webster writes in a mode clearly colored by his profession; Webster's perspective on law, during the same period as the illustrious Sir Edward Coke, leads one to investigate how judicial structures in his plays repress female sexuality. The dialogue and its implied social context for Webster's characters reveals the misogynistic and Machiavellian nature of sixteenth and seventeenth-century male-female dynamics and ultimately affords male characters a space to exert control over their female counterparts. When female characters, as a result, disrupt this relationship, Webster's gentlemen respond with force; incestuous desires, violent outbursts, and sometimes madness ensue. This thesis examines how court and familial dynamics interact with conflicting erotic urges, ultimately leading to brutality and murder. Though writing from London, Webster's plays all have an Italian setting; thus, the interaction between nationality and sexuality is investigated. This thesis seeks to examine the complicated role of sexuality contained within three of Webster's plays.

Introduction

> Among the upper classes for most of the Early Modern period, the 'double standard' of sexual behavior prevailed. According to this convention, the husband enjoyed full monopoly rights over the sexual services of his wife, who was expected to be a virgin on her wedding night…. On the other hand, the man was expected to have gained some sexual experience before marriage, and any infidelities after marriage were treated as venial sins which the sensible wife was advised to overlook. Thus, both fornication and adultery were exclusively male prerogatives at this social level, despite the fact that in current physiological theory and folk tradition women were regarded as more lustful in their appetites and more fickle in their attachments to men. (Stone 501-502)

As Lawrence Stone writes, in *The Family, Sex and Marriage: in England 1500-1800*, a "double standard" exists to distinguish between the "sexual behavior" of English men and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While husbands are able to enjoy "full monopoly rights over the sexual services of his wife" and are "expected to have gained some sexual experience before marriage," a woman is held to the expectation of virginity on "her wedding night." Moreover, male infidelity is treated "as venial sins which the sensible wife [is] advised to overlook," yet females are "regarded as more lustful in their appetites and more fickle in their attachments to men." Though husbands are capable of placating their erotic cravings through affairs, wives do not share that same sexual freedom. Clearly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are marked by the "double standard" that Stone elucidates.[1]

Also appearing during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, playwright John Webster's dialogues present references to these dual notions of male-female sexuality in *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case.* Two of his plays, *The White*

[1] In Italy during this time, women who were found to be "dishonored" were forced to "seek survival in another town where no one knew them" (Da Molin 522).

Devil and *The Duchess of Malfi*, are revenge tragedies. The Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) defines such plays as “drama based on a quest for vengeance; specifically a style of drama popular in England during the late 16th and early 17th centuries and typically featuring scenes of carnage and mutilation” (1997). Webster’s works aptly fit the *OED* definition above and also contain a threatening language that particularly marks his works as especially violent. This thesis will argue, that much of the action of both plays, as well as that of *The Devil’s Law-Case* revolves around the necessity for “vengeance.” In Webster’s plays, revenge most commonly occurs at instances where female sexuality is not under the control of male characters. Thus, sexuality in Webster’s presentation of social seventeenth-century England may be understood as exploiting how male control over the female functions through viciousness.

The idea that women might be regarded as solely carnal objects for men is in itself troubling. The main protagonists of Webster’s plays—specifically the female leads—fail to challenge or overcome the social hierarchy. The role of a woman, her ability to seize and retain power in this stratification, is intrinsically connected to her gender. Sexuality, as conduct and moral makeup, is integral in analyzing our perception of the nobility since, as witnessed in sixteenth and seventeenth institutions, Machiavellian beliefs and principles have begun to invade court and social rhetoric. For example, the eroticism of Webster’s female characters challenges the “fixed patriarchal values” (79), that Aspasia Velissariou uncovers in her work, “Class and Gender Destabilization in Webster’s *The Devil’s Law-Case*.” We witness this destabilization patently through Vittoria Corombona’s defiant character in the court scene in Act III of *The White Devil*. Cardinal Monticelso’s attack on Vittoria for her alleged illicit affair with the Duke of Bracciano is indicative of the dissolution of fixed social mores. His discomfort with Vittoria’s

defiance represents an inadequate ability to disassociate Vittoria's agency from her femininity, a behavior that will be investigated later in this thesis.

The gendering of Webster's characters connects with Machiavellian language that instructs and validates male control. In *The Prince,* Machiavelli remarks, "it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because Fortune is a woman, and if you want to keep her under it is necessary to beat her and force her down" (Machiavelli 87). Though the primary concern here may be with "fortune," clearly the violence associated with keeping "her under" is language reminiscent of coercion or rape: to "beat her and force her down" is both graphic and sexual. The role of "a woman" in submission to a male authority, according to political instruction, reflects ingrained, patriarchal notions of gender bias and abuse, and instances of this kind of speech will be examined in the context of Webster's three plays.

Subjugation of women may be tied to sociopolitical and cultural shifts towards both capitalistic and public spheres of discourse. Morton J. Horwitz in "The History of the Public/Private Distinction" speaks to the separation of conduct in public and private spheres of power:

> The emergence of the nation-state and theories of sovereignty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ideas of a distinctly public realm began to crystallize. On the other hand, in reaction to the claims of monarchs and, later, parliaments to the unrestrained power to make law, there developed a countervailing effort to stake out distinctively private spheres free from the encroaching power of the state. (Horwitz 1423)

During this time period, distinct demarcations of private and public spaces began to emerge as a reaction to the "claims of monarchs and… parliaments." Webster, as a barrister, perhaps was aware of such shifts in value and incorporates such changes in his plays. This movement concerning privacy appears most poignantly in the secret marriage between Antonio Bologna and the Duchess of Malfi. Her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, authoritative figures whose "unrestrained power" would otherwise not permit the union, hold, as it were, the power of the state. Hence, the lovers' desire to keep the elopement private represents a parable of the "countervailing effort" to limit the "encroaching power of the state." In their nuptial, as well as in the disguises worn by various characters across the plays, Webster both exposes and reinforces the fallacy surrounding the subjection of women.

In "Webster's The White Devil and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective," Larry S. Champion writes, "Webster's tragedy, in a word, is carefully structured to emphasize the pervasive corruption and bestiality in a society in which passion reigns" (Champion 462). One of Webster's primary concerns is the role of corruption in his three plays, itself intrinsically tied to a conception of a "society in which passion reigns." The dominance of "passion" indicates that sexuality plays a role in the effective functioning of society. Moreover, social structures themselves, most particularly those of the court, are the basis for the "corruption" that defines Webster's works. As this thesis will argue, much of the basis for this misconduct stems from the decline of the nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Webster's works themselves mirror said deterioration. Moreover, Machiavellian desires for control and male dominance contribute to this diminishment, thus implicating how interpersonal dynamics function between men and women that, in turn, determines how the nobility itself ceases to operate effectively and justly.

Chapter Two is concerned with how the role of family members, particularly brothers, especially colors Webster's writing. The coercive and sometimes sexual interests that brothers demonstrate towards their sisters impacts and influences how males and females relate and interact with each other, and may ultimately yield explosive, unexpected consequences. Most notable in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Ferdinand's craving for his twin—the Duchess of Malfi herself—may be read as an erotic attachment. Velissariou reminds us that *The Devil's Law-Case*, as well as Webster's other plays, "satirizes incest between brother and sister" (Velissariou 73). Like Webster's other plays, the confusing and discomforting relationship between the Duchess and Ferdinand culminates in a rejection of sexual advances; as the second chapter of this thesis argues, the negative responses of sisters result in violence, and sometimes madness.

Though the reactions that brothers demonstrate become public discourses displaying their sexual intentions, alternative means of disclosing such affections—especially through more private avenues—also represent Webster's efforts effectively to convey the intersection between power, disguise, and sexuality. The female leads Vittoria, the Duchess, and Jolenta signal that the moralization of their respective plots revolves around and is tenuously linked to how they display their sexuality as women. Drawing again on the relationship between the Duchess and Antonio, their marriage affords the viewer the dramatic moment where hidden affections are revealed, yet also centers around the Duchess' sexuality. Her seduction stems from both her private actions and its being linked to the "otherness" of her Italian characterization and setting. Moreover, race complicates the intersection between disguise, seclusion, and sexuality in the three plays. Ann Rosalind Jones writes, "Vittoria sums up the impossible paradox of Venice: luxurious delicacy and the claim to unassailable autonomy are intertwined, in the city as an emblem and in the dramatic heroine, and both are linked to scandalous impropriety" (Jones 112).

All of Webster's plays occur in Italy, thus advancing the need investigate how the otherness of this setting interacts with sexuality itself, particularly as it represents the context of an English audience viewing an Italianate drama.

Beyond the dynamic that exists between privacy and sexuality, Webster's "plot elements certainly present and further a view of Italy as steeped in religious, sexual, and criminal license, that is, as a world in which Catholicism, atheism, and 'nigromancy' seamlessly blend through their manifestation in homologous sexual and violent crimes" (Bovilsky 638). As prominently investigated in the final chapter of this thesis, the role of the Catholic church, itself a salient feature of Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—yet not of England—is a religious institution of much interest. The "homologous sexual and violent crimes" that Bovilsky elucidates are prominently demonstrated through the usage of death and putrefaction in Webster's plays. By commingling decay and spiritual sentiment, Webster produces eerily erotic and sadly sexual works that highlight the hypocritical and dual notions of religion during the time period. Ultimately, by drawing attention to the relationship between sexuality and religiosity, Webster underscores the hypocrisy of Catholic structures.

Sociocultural, political, religious, and racial paradigms in these three plays present the generalized cultural world of seventeenth-century England where aristocratic males demonstrate and augment control over their female counterparts. The interpersonal relationships of Webster's characters reflect the patriarchal structures of the Early Modern period, and the complexity of these social structures teach us how his audience perceived the sexual dynamics existing between men and women. As Flamineo remarks in his pandering for Bracciano in *The White Devil*, "a quiet woman / is a still water under a great bridge. / A man may shoot her safely" (4.2:176-178). Flamineo—together with many other male characters—contends that women are meant to be

"quiet," and "still" relative to the noise of their male counterparts, and thus show compliant, yielding, and docile behavior. Since females are reducible to tokens of exchange between male characters, they are mere "still water" where males may "shoot safely." This thesis argues that patriarchal, often misogynistic structures in these plays drive the sexual social mores in place in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I. *Acta exteriora indicant interiora secreta*: Court Dynamics, Social Malaise, and Sexuality

The illustrious Lord Coke, whose writings have shaped much of English (and American) common law, wrote on the importance of many law systems; his teachings form the basis of *habeas corpus* and judicial review, among other legal guidelines that still exist today. As Allen Dillard Boyer writes, "under Elizabeth and James, the central courts took an increasingly active role in the work of government" (Boyer 80). Thus, understanding how John Webster, a barrister himself, understood and interacted with Coke's contributions to English law greatly shapes our approach to his plays. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to introduce social and court structures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to argue that Webster's tragedies and tragicomedy mirror the decline of the nobility, shown through the Machiavellian decline in nonviolent interpersonal relationships between men and women of this period. In turn, this very mirroring emphasizes Webster's view that sexual behavior functions as a catalyst for said decline.

Gülşen Sayın Teker writes, "socially and economically, the England of the period witnessed a fundamental change from feudalism to the greater individualism of capitalism" (Teker 170). In keeping with these ideas, notions of personal growth and development sprung forth; Machiavellian archetypes began to emerge, and greater emphasis was placed on the "self" rather than the government controlling all lands. Moreover, as Teker continues, "this shift of prosperity and power disturbed the conventional hierarchical order of society and resulted in the topsy-turvy disruption of values" (Teker 170) which other historians have examined as well.

Social disintegration, as Lawrence Stone writes in "Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300-1980," was likely brought about through "a combination of socially unmanageable

demographic growth, a collapse of cultural norms and controls in the wake of the Reformation, the spread of a profit-oriented ideology, and a growing economic fissure between rich and poor" (Stone 32). This growing fissure, postulated Frederick Jack Fisher in "Commercial Trends and Policy in Sixteenth-Century England," partially stems from the lack of government involvement during the period. Fisher notes, "at no time during the first half of the century was strong and consistent pressure brought to bear on the government drastically to interfere in commercial affairs" (Fisher 102). Because there was minimal involvement in the trade and business ventures of British citizens in the sixteenth century, the divide between rich and poor was sustained. In this way, the decline of European society and social structures arises from a combination of capitalism and the growing wage gap. The shift in principles held by the working class, in addition to a growing awareness of personal potential for wealth, contributes to the unique social and political structure that characterizes the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

To understand the political composition of the time period, it is first important to see Niccoló Machiavelli's role in its formation; this ubiquitous man, as will be demonstrated through this thesis, contributed much to the writings of Webster's plays. Most importantly, Machiavelli himself writes in *The Prince*, different "humours" are found in "every body politic. They arise from the fact that people do not wish to be commanded or oppressed by the nobles, while the nobles do desire to command and oppress the people" (Machiavelli 35). He so succinctly explains, the conflict that arises between the nobles and the "people" stems from a desire for control. As this thesis argues, this impulse may be viewed as a sexual proclivity, designed to ultimately further one's personal agenda. The Machiavellian, therefore, is in direct contrast with the figure of one in power; as a believably moral and just individual, a judge, for example, therefore seeks to act in a way that preserves order, acting not (directly) towards his own ends.

As Allen Dillard Boyer, in "Understanding, Authority, and Will: Sir Edward Coke and the Elizabethan Origins of Judicial Review," writes, "the archetype of the learned judge stands in sharp contrast to another figure who casts a long shadow across the law: the worldly machiavel… the 'bad man' who cares only about what the court will do in fact. The bad man's part is a negative one. He does not care to comprehend the law; he seeks to evade it. He seeks to forecast or react to individual decisions; he does not care to integrate the action of the law with the life of the society. This means that he cannot shape the law as it evolves across a series of decisions" (Boyer 92-93). The machiavel, unlike a judge, is not capable of augmenting the law, but rather "seeks to forecast or react to individual decisions." In this way, the decisions that the *judge* makes become critically important; his role as a pillar of moral fortitude, despite the influence of power-hungry and self-serving individuals, becomes the reason the law exists the way it does.

As the political structure shifts towards capitalism, however, the role of the judge becomes more important; his freedom from corruption is essential for the maintenance of a "just" world and judicial system. However, if an individual in power is dissolute in their leadership, the entire system of law is poisoned by the (Machiavellian) corruption of its authorities. This balance is of particular interest to Webster; in the opening scene of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster, through the moral (and notably lower-class) Antonio, expresses his concern about the English judiciary, through analogy with his experience in the French courts:

> In seeking to reduce both state and people
>
> To a fixed order, their judicious king
>
> Begins at home: quits first his royal palace
>
> Of flattering sycophants, of dissolute

And infamous persons, which he sweetly terms
His Master's masterpiece, the work of heaven,
Considering duly that a prince's court
Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
Pure silver drops in general; but if't chance
Some cursed example poison't near the head,
Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.
And what is't that makes this blessed government,
But a most provident Council, who dare freely
Inform him the corruption of the times?
Though some o'th' court hold it presumption
To instruct princes what they ought to do,
It is a noble duty to inform them
What they ought to foresee.

The Duchess of Malfi 1.1:5-22

As Webster writes, the King of France, aware of the "flattering sycophants" and "dissolute and infamous persons" in the courts, seeks to eradicate their supposed guidance in an effort to limit the influence self-serving individuals have on *his* decision-making. This speech importantly highlights the multifaceted central conflict that Webster writes on: first, how the nobles are to eliminate and thus function free of flattery, and second, if the nobility are corrupt, how the courts and populace are to handle such treachery. The first point, as is evident in Webster's works, is clearly an impossibility. In both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* the nobility are marked by darkness and self-serving interests closely aligned with Machiavellian-inspired

actions.[2] The second, point, however is much more nuanced. As this thesis will later examine, instead of effectively functioning as cogs in the corrupt regime of various aristocrats, characters that battle against the system usually fail. Antonio, comments, "if't chance / some cursed example poison't near the head, / death, and diseases through the whole land spread." This warning, clearly foreshadowing the events that follow in *The Duchess of Malfi*, represents Webster's view that corruption inevitably leads to widespread decay resulting in amorality.[3]

This descent into social decay is clearly reflective in Machiavelli's own writings. In *The Prince,* he remarks, "because men delight so much in their own concerns, deceiving themselves in this way, that they find it difficult to protect themselves from this pestilence; while wishing to defend oneself from it brings the danger of being despised" (Machiavelli 80-81). Here, he warns of the danger of succumbing to the flattering opinions given of oneself; this "pestilence," though inherently meant to gain favor, also brings the danger of "being despised," and thus damaging the relationship between leadership and the populous. This, in turn, contributes to an impaired ability to lead effectively the people. Moreover, because the Machiavel "delight[s] so much in [his] own concerns," the issues that the people raise are also ignored, exacerbating the divide between power and overpowered. As Vittoria laments, "those are found weighty strokes which come from th'hand, / but those are killing strokes which come from th'head. / O the rare tricks of a Machiavellian!" (5.3:190-192). This complaint, uttered shortly before she is murdered, denotes the important influence of political strategy in the Machiavellian's plots. While powerful

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[2] This is in direct conflict with what Antonio deems a "noble duty." This phrase denotes an aristocratic foresight that is notably free from corruption, thus Antonio presents the central conflict of Webster's works: the struggle between what is right for the kingdom, and what is preferable for oneself.

[3] Interestingly, Benjamin Bertram notes, "Antonio, the one who opens the play with the metaphors of social order, is himself contributing to the collapse of a symbolic order that defines the public" (Bertram 183). Though Bertram is correct in noting that Antonio "contributes to the collapse of a symbolic order" through his marriage to the Duchess, this wedding is kept secret; no one is aware that it is a man of lower status, let alone Antonio himself, that is secretly wed and producing children with the Duchess of Malfi.

"strokes" come from the "hand," the self-serving individual will inflict "killing strokes" in calculated situations, ones that are most advantageous (or necessary) in furthering their own agendas; thus, these strokes "come from th'head."

These assaults, both physical and otherwise, reflect the need to exert control over those whose existence poses a threat to the Machiavel's authority or prohibit him from attaining his desires. As is the case in *The White Devil*, Bracciano's murders of Isabella and Camillo indicate a desire for personal power and Vittoria herself; his self-serving actions result in the death of his wife and the husband of his would-be lover. Beyond simply indicating Bracciano as a Machiavel, these breaches in the law are moments in which acts of interpersonal violence become the central focus of Webster's works.[4] Acts of this nature represent important instances in which the desires of the Machiavel are in direct conflict with the law; thus, the Machiavel is forced to act in a way that would traditionally be considered unlawful. However, as Webster exposes, the judicial system is itself rife with corruption and therefore does not prohibit or completely renounce the actions themselves.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Stone writes, homicide rates "were some five to ten times higher than those today," yet "homicide rates in thirteenth-century England were about twice as high" (Stone 25) as those in the later centuries. Stone examines how the explosion of litigation connects with the changing "definitions of manslaughter and murder" (Stone 23). Acts of interpersonal violence, such as murder, were common in both rural and urban life in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The bulk of the killings, Stone notes, "were by neighbours, friends or total strangers, often the result of drunken bar-room brawls or village quarrels" (Stone 27). By Stone's calculations, Elizabethan homicide rates was roughly 6.7 to 6.8 individuals per

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[4] Importantly, in *The White Devil* Bracciano murders Isabella and Camillo to be with Vittoria; she, however, is brought to court for their murders rather than Bracciano himself.

100,000 (Stone 25) though, as noted, the violent crime rate trend is downward. Stone attributes this decline to "the 'civilizing process' slowly seeping down from the upper classes to the violence-prone poor," which he attributes to the "stress on civility, politeness and propriety spread down from intellectual aristocratic salons to wider sectors of society" (Stone 29). In Stone's view, the aristocracy, through its emphasis on "civility" and honorability, contributes to a more genteel and nonviolent society.

Webster, however, makes quite a different argument; through his presentation of the nobility as the most corrupt individuals, his works propagate a view in contrast with Stone's analyses. Stone notes that the underlying motivations of crimes reflects a shift in values, from those "of feudal to those of bourgeois society," where "honour and status are the most prized attributes, and crimes are therefore directed against the person" in feudal systems. Bourgeois society, in contrast, values "money and market relationships form the basis of social organization, and crimes are therefore directed against property" (Stone 30). *The White Devil* flips Stone's conception of the "civilizing process." Early in the work, Bracciano, the wealthy Duke, commissions the murder of Isabella, his wife, and Camillo, Vittoria's husband. Through this act, Webster first draws attention to the evils present in the nobility; though Bracciano, in Stone's estimation, represents the honorable and moral upper class, he is capable of orchestrating a (Machiavellian) pair of murders to further his own agenda. In this way, the "civilizing process" seeping from the nobility downwards does not appear accurate.

The corruption of the upper class is further demonstrated through Francisco; through his thirst for revenge for Isabella's murder, he reinforces Webster's argument that the aristocracy is the pinnacle of corruption. Monticelso, the allegedly just cardinal, is in possession of a "black book… in it lurk / the names of many devils" (4.1:33-36), including a plethora of criminals,

ranging from murderers to bawds. Upon learning of the hirable murderers included in the book, Francisco remarks, “fold down the leaf, I pray. / Good my lord, let me borrow this strange doctrine” (4.1:63-64). His intentions, clearly, are to utilize a hired killer to be revenged on Bracciano and Vittoria. In this way, Webster’s play reverses Stone’s analyses; by paying another man (presumably of lower social status) to commit the murder, Francisco himself pollutes the morality of the lower classes, rather than functions as a means of purifying it by leading an exemplary life. In addition, the presumably willing individual commissioned to carry out the crime is possibly acting out of necessity: he may need the money that Francisco would provide. Later however, Francisco has changed his course of action, instead discussing the intended crime with the Italian count Lodovico: “Come, dear Lodovico, / you have ta’en the sacrament to prosecute / th’intended murder” (4.3:72-74). However, Lodovico is initially skeptical of the plot, instead admitting his intentions to Monticelso, newly elected to Pope Paul IV. Eventually, Francisco tricks Lodovico into partaking in the murderous plot by giving him money: “His Holiness hath sent you a thousand crowns, / and wills you, if you travel, to make him / your patron for intelligence” (4.3:137-139). This ploy, orchestrated by Francisco, fools Lodovico into believing that the Pope himself has commissioned the murder of Bracciano; in fact, Monticelso is in ignorance of the plot and Francisco himself devises its entirety. These Machiavellian manipulations, designed to utilize Lodovico to carry out a personal revenge, demark Francisco as an important foil for Stone’s analyses. Thus, his status and power reinforce Webster’s refusal of the presumably moral nobility.

Aristocratic fallibility, rather than aristocratic purity, is therefore a clear focus in Webster’s mind when developing his works. As George F. Sensbaugh, in “Tragic Effect in Webster's The White Devil,” notes, the plot of *The White Devil* appears to revolve around

"punitive revenge" (Sensbaugh 348) among the nobility, which becomes immediately clear in the opening scene of the play. The scene opens *in medias res*, with Count Lodovico "banished" (1.1:1). Indeed, this jarring opening indicates for the audience that one aspect of the play will revolve around Machiavellian intrigue, designed to maintain status and attain revenge for a perceived injustice. His resolve, to Antonelli and Gasparo, is to "make Italian cut-works" in Vittoria and Bracciano if given the opportunity (1.1:51). Because Lodovico seeks revenge against Bracciano, a fellow aristocrat, the play's opening almost serves as a commentary on Andrew Strycharski's recent notion of "status narcissism" (Strycharski 294) from his article, "Ethics, Individualism, and Class in John Webster's *The White Devil*." The wealthy, by knowing that they hold power, implement their resources towards Machiavellian ends.[5] This idea of aristocratic revenge deeply connects with concepts of social disintegration, especially those of decaying interpersonal relationships, as Stone has elucidated.

Webster, as a barrister, was keenly aware of the role of the law in the shift of cultural values; his writings therefore highlight social double standards (such as those involving aristocratic purity) and attribute them to a decline in morality. While Vittoria is charged with the murder of her husband, for example, Bracciano is not similarly charged for the murder of his wife. This duality in principles may be understood as a classist notion; because Bracciano is a wealthy Duke, his status shields him from blame. Vittoria, in contrast, is not aristocratic, and thus accountable for her husband's murder.[6] Strycharski claims that this elicits some "kind of

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[5] This is clear throughout *The White Devil*, most prominently demonstrated through interactions between Flamineo and Bracciano; the various instances in which Bracciano attempts to implement Flamineo (through payments and promises of status) as a means to attaining Vittoria for himself aptly reflect Bracciano's self-serving intentions.

[6] This duality is a possible indicator of a gender-based double standard; here, the notion is merely introduced as a means of understanding the differences that exist between aristocratic and non-aristocratic individuals in terms of the legal ramifications for criminal acts.

ethical engagement from audiences, one drawing on our experiences of self, community, and conflict" (Strycharski 295), which thus represent Webster's attempts to ironically force the audience to confront their own status and its advantages (or disadvantages). Moreover, viewers are further pushed to question the privileges granted to their own status near the close of *The White Devil*; Marcello, before being murdered by his brother Flamineo, remarks, "There are some sins which heaven doth duly punish / in a whole family. This it is to rise / by all dishonest means" (5.2:20-22). Having attempted to gain aristocratic status by pandering his sister to the wealthy Duke, Flamineo serves as the epitome of a Machiavel attempting to "rise / by all dishonest means."

The attempts to "rise" reflect a desire for aristocratic status; Webster not only exposes the Machiavellian nature of those aspiring for class, but he also reveals the corruption embedded in the social structures themselves. In "Webster's The White Devil and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective," Larry S. Champion notes, "Webster's tragedy, in a word, is carefully structured to emphasize the pervasive corruption and bestiality in a society in which passion reigns" (Champion 462). The cardinal Monticelso, for example is extremely passionate in his condemnation of Vittoria; his actions in the important trial scene reveal his savagery despite his aristocratic status. Upon dismissing the lawyer set to plead against Vittoria, Monticelso himself claims to "be plainer" with Vittoria (3.2:51), and as both her judge and accuser, sentences her to a house of coventries despite her strong resolve.[7] Champion continues, "Despite Vittoria's guilt, then, Webster forces the spectators to see Monticelso's actions, not as the ultimate endurance of moral values, but as the brute use of position and power to achieve familial vengeance"

[7] Champion, interestingly, contradicts himself later in his piece: "Vittoria's action, in other words, gives the impression that there is a progressive growth in the development of her character" (Champion 458). Though initially arguing that Vittoria presents an example of moral fortitude despite an onslaught of oppressors, Champion reverts back, remarking that Vittoria has not developed as a character.

(Champion 455). Because Monticelso is close acquaintances with Francisco de Medici, whose sister (Isabella) was murdered by Bracciano, his motives are clearly tied to condemning Vittoria. Webster, through this scene, forces the audience to confront the corruption contained within a legal system controlled by the aristocratic elite.

Understanding how a desire for power is conveyed through Webster's writing is, at its heart, an examination of the differential treatment of male versus female law suits. While men were able to both bring suits forth against wives and participate completely in the judicial system, women were excluded. In her work "Women, Law, and Dramatic Realism in Early Modern England," Subha Mukherji writes:

> Common law allowed women very limited legal capacities… Married women had no independent legal entity. They were *femmes covert*- covered by their husbands, unable to contract, sue, or be sued in their own person. Criminal law was partial too: murdering a husband was petty treason, but murdering a wife was a felony; adulterous wives lost their dower rights, guilty husbands were protected. (Mukherji 251)

As Mukherji writes, women lack the legal capacities that would allow for equal action under the law. Being a *femme covert* allows for protection from suits against their "own person," which itself is not of importance in Webster's *The White Devil*, as the very act of murder is contrived *against* Vittoria's husband himself. Mukherji attributes this to having the law accommodate women, though "from within a patriarchal position severely limiting their legal agency" (Mukherji 256). Though they are granted positions in the legal system, women are still treated

and viewed as lesser beings relative to their male counterparts. This limiting of female legal legitimacy is further demonstrated in the simple space in which female-centric law suits appear; as Mukherji remarks, "the most female-frequented courts were all ecclesiastical ('bawdy') courts, so called because if their prerogative on sexual litigation, often involving aspersions cast on sexual reputation" (Mukherji 257). Women are reducible to only belonging in courts insofar that their litigation revolves around sexual accusations.

Moreover, differences that arise from gendered treatments of criminal law are of particular importance; though she is supposedly charged with the "petty treason" of murdering her husband, Vittoria's court scene more closely resembles a hearing for the felony of "murdering a wife." As the scene opens, Monticelso comments to the lawyer who "pleads against [Vittoria]" (3.2:11) the formalities of a true court interaction. The scene itself includes a large assembly of viewers, including Francisco, six lieger Ambassadors, Bracciano, Flamineo, and Marcello, along with Vittoria, the Lawyer, and Monticelso dominating the discourse of the scene itself. Including the majority of the cast of the play in the moment is quite telling; including the variety of characters draws attention to the spectacle of the trial itself. The entire cast, as well as the audience, is forced to behold Monticelso's power and condemnation of Vittoria. The goal of the scene becomes more of a move towards embarrassment and humiliation of Vittoria, likely in an effort by Monticelso to diminish the power that she has displayed until that moment.

This strategy, however, proves ineffective; though women "had minimal legal agency and visibility in the period" (Mukherji 248), Vittoria demonstrates a complete disruption of the social structures that underlie the (legal) patriarchy. From the opening of the scene, Vittoria's first comment, "What's he?" (3.2:11), is indicative of her defiance of the oppression that the

Lawyer and Monticelso commit to. She argues against the usage of the customary Latin, instead requesting the "usual tongue" (3.2:12) because of the audience, "the half or more / may be ignorant in't" (3.2:16-17). Because she believes herself innocent, Vittoria instead hopes to reveal to the assembly, as well as the audience, the comical nature to her trial.[8] Her defiance, and rigorous belief of her innocence, again appear in her remark that "all of this assembly / shall hear what you can charge me with" (3.2:19-20). Interestingly, Vittoria herself understands Latin, yet would prefer every spectator of the trial, which includes many nobles, to comprehend the charges levelled against her.[9] In this moment, her role as a lower-class woman becomes negligible; Vittoria's grasp over language allows her access to aristocratic agency in the court room (though still only as a woman).

Understanding Vittoria as a threat to his own aristocratic identity, Monticelso's repeated referencing to Vittoria as a whore reflect his desire to delegitimize her presence in the court, beyond simply treating her as a lower-class individual. Kathryn R. Finin-Farber notes, in her work "Framing (the) Woman: *The White Devil* and the Development of Law," that Vittoria's function in this scene is to confront and fight the "gendered nature of legal discourse" (Finin-Farber 228) that problematizes the play, and the more general English court system. For Finin-Farber, Vittoria is a tool through which the nature of misogyny in English courts may be revealed. Though this reading is valid in part, Vittoria herself additionally functions as a means of combatting male-centric laws themselves; beyond addressing the "gendered nature of legal discourse," Vittoria herself participates in a complete refusal of its validity. Throughout the

[8] This moment is doubly comical when considering Webster's own invocation for the play. He refers to early viewers of the play—who received the work poorly—as "ignorant asses" as a means of justifying and defending his own work against those who did not understand the brilliance of it at its earlier presentation.
[9] This also highlights the interesting role of the *play's* audience in the trial scene; it functions almost as an invitation for viewers to judge Vittoria for themselves.

scene, Vittoria is referred to as a "debauched and diversivolent woman" (3.2:28) as a means of reinforcing her position as a whore. Moreover, Monticelso's emphasis on painting out her "follies in more natural red and white / than that upon" her cheek is again indicative of his desire to contain Vittoria in the stagnant role of whore (3.2:52-53).[10] The "natural red and white" that Monticelso mentions is another reference to whoredom, as prostitutes cover up blemishes by using various cosmetics. His various attacks, however, fail to leave Vittoria speechless; in response she remarks, "O you mistake, / you raise a blood as noble in this cheek / as ever was your mother's" (3.2:53-55). Beyond simply insulting Monticelso, this remark again highlights the complicated mutability between ancient nobility and Vittoria's role as the upstart.

This desire for control, as demonstrated by the various individuals of wealth, may be viewed as a means of protecting a sense of worth; the gentrification of the populous threatens the clearly separate identity of the aristocratic elite. Vittoria herself shifts this dynamic. Because she is of lower class and is wooed by Duke Bracciano, a (married) man of status, the defined lines demarking the social strata are threatened. For other aristocrats, Bracciano's seemingly radical act represents a moment in which their own identity is called into question: if a woman of lower class may wed an aristocrat and therefore become a noblewoman herself, how are other nobles to differentiate their bloodline and wealth from her newfound status and position? Webster, interestingly, opens the play with the instability of one's self-conceptualization; the aforementioned first scene, in which Lodovico discovers his banishment, revolves around his desire to protect his status by making "Italian cut-works" of Bracciano through his pandering of

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[10] Stone, in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* also notes, "It was generally assumed that young widows, suddenly deprived of regular sexual satisfaction by the loss of a husband, were likely to be driven by lust in their search for a replacement" (Stone 281). This belief may, in part, underlie Monticelso's aggression towards Vittoria: her unsatisfied sexual desires breach his traditionalist understanding of masculine authority over a wife's erotic activities.

Vittoria (1.1:51). Thus, through Vittoria's newfound position and Lodovico's loss of status, the dynamic between aristocratic and commoner shifts in such a way to complicate how the noblemen are to self-identify. As Strycharski explains, "when *The White Devil* shifts these relationships—the male aristocrat Bracciano reaches down, and the brother character (Francisco) seeks revenge on a status equal for his sister's death rather than a status inferior for polluting her—it emphasizes an individualism that is less about status contamination and more about zealously guarding an absolute sense of worth against other aristocrats" (Strycharski 294).

As the court scene demonstrates, Monticelso also engages in this form of self-protection; through the vehemence with which he charges Vittoria, Monticelso reveals his desire to preserve aristocratic distinctions between Vittoria and himself. Towards the middle of the scene, Monticelso sarcastically refers to Vittoria as a "gentlewoman" (3.2:102) and later a "mistress" (3.2:152). These simple remarks reflect his complete disdain, yet also highlights the humor with which the court scene supposedly progresses; both terms typically denote a respectful, peaceable dynamic, which itself clearly is lacking within the scene. Sarcastically implementing terms that traditionally denote a sense of class, Monticelso instead insults Vittoria's status. This is particularly clear in his sentencing of Vittoria:

> For you, Vittoria, your public fault,
> Joined to th'condition of the present time,
> Takes from you all the fruit of noble pity.
> Such a corrupted trial you have made
> Both of your life and beauty, and been styled
> No less in ominous fate than blazing stars
> To princes. Here's your sentence: you are confin'd

Unto a house of convertites.

The White Devil 3.2:257-264

Referring to her trial as a "public fault" immediately highlights the aforementioned spectacle of the trial; though she has not truly been found guilty of a "fault," Monticelso ascribes to their interaction at court an overdramatic importance, and (arguably unfounded) resolution through his sentencing. Moreover, calling their public discourse a "corrupted trial" reduces Vittoria's agency to an unlawful, seemingly fraudulent, aspect of her defense.[11] Finally, using terms such as "noble pity" and "princes" draws an important contrast between Vittoria's status and that of the upper echelon; referring to Vittoria's actions as a foil for "noble pity" distances her from their status. Ultimately, Vittoria is marked as "ominous" a fate as "blazing stars / to princes" because she represents a danger to the nobility's integrity and status.

Protecting aristocratic identity, beyond representing a need to preserve class distinction, clearly connects with iterations of aristocratic purity. As the Duchess demonstrates, the commingling of social stratifications presents a threat to the belief of the upper class as free from social decay and violence; Webster uses this motif as a means of revealing the aristocratic class as itself the *source* of much brutality. This is particularly seen in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Through her marriage to Antonio and the birth of their children, the Duchess shifts the dynamic that exists between the classes. Her actions, perceived as extreme to her brothers, represents a clear transgression beyond acceptable class behavior; upon learning of her pregnancy, the Cardinal remarks, "Shall our blood, / the royal blood of Aragon and Castile, / be thus attained?" (2.5:21-23). For the Cardinal, and to a lesser extent Ferdinand, the simple act of remarriage presents a

[11] This notion is especially important, considering how adequately Vittoria appears to defend herself throughout the scene itself, which will be expanded on in later chapters.

threat to the integrity of their "pure" blood.[12] Compounding her marriage with multiple pregnancies, therefore, clearly presents a very real, very powerful threat to their "royal blood." Later in the work, Ferdinand questions, "Dost thou know what reputation is?" (3.2:12) Moreover, he claims that the Duchess has "shook hands with Reputation, / and made him invisible" (3.2:135-136). For Ferdinand, the Duchess' transgressions have reduced their familial status and called their aristocratic identity into question.[13] Ironically, her marriage to Antonio itself serves as Webster's catalyst for revealing the fallibility of the upper class; the innocent desires of the Duchess for Antonio result in noble individuals (Ferdinand, for example) resorting to violence to eliminate a threat to aristocratic identity.

Preserving self-conceptualization, particularly aristocratic self-awareness, is complicated by the presence of flatterers in Italian courts; flattery functions as an avenue through which non-aristocrats may assimilate into the upper-class milieu. In some respects, their existence may be understood as separate, yet their very presence itself reinforces the mutability of class. As Flamineo explicates in *The White Devil*, "O justice! Where are their flatterers now? Flatterers are but the shadows of princes' bodies; the least thick cloud makes them invisible" (5.3:43-45). As "shadows of princes' bodies," flatterers become the closest connection between social classes; they exist as mirrors of the actions of the nobility, yet lack substance and have a darkened quality about them. The concept of a "prince" is also telling, as it references the close connection between the aristocracy and royalty.[14] The idea of a "least thick cloud" obscuring the flatterer's

[12] Interestingly Vittoria remarks, "O my greatest sin lay in my blood; / now my blood pays for't" (5.6:238-239). Because she is of the lower class, her "sin" lies in her mixing of noble and commoner blood; this line presents a fascinating reversal of the Cardinal's fear that mixing *his* blood is a sin.
[13] Furthermore, as will be greatly explored later, the Duchess' actions have further insulted his *own* feelings; Ferdinand's frustration with the Duchess also stems from an incestuous desire.
[14] The notion of royalty also evokes the divine right of kings; in their elevated status, royals enjoy an almost holy existence. Their spiritual role also connotes an association with purity, which Webster, as is argued, attempts to prove a fallacy.

object may be read as an allusion to hardship that may befall the "prince." Thus, in noting the decline in aristocratic status, the flatterer becomes "invisible" immediately because the hardship may eliminate the potential for personal gain to be found by associating with the "prince" himself. The irony of Flamineo's statement, however, lies in his *own* role as a flatterer; through his pandering of Vittoria to Bracciano, he hopes to gain personal favor from the (noble) Duke. Early in the play, Flamineo serves as the go-between for the Duke and Vittoria[15] in the hopes of advancing his personal status. Even in the face of Bracciano's displeasure, Flamineo recognizes his inferior position and desire for wealth: "You're a great duke, I your poor secretary" (4.2:59).

Like Flamineo, Romelio is aware of his relatively lower status; he, in turn, attempts to override the pervasive classicism in *The Devil's Law-Case* by delegitimizing the wealth of aristocrats through his use of language. Using such discourse conveys Romelio's deep-rooted hatred for and jealousy of the upper class. In the play's opening scene, Romelio refers to Signor Baptista, a wealthy Italian, as a "mere beggar: / [who] is worth some fifty thousand ducats" (1.1:16-17). He continues, "For a man to be melted to snow-water, / with toiling in the world from some three-and-twenty / till threescore, for poor fifty thousand ducats" (1.1:19-21). The clearly disparaging intonation Romelio invokes in this early interchange reveals his disdain for those of seemingly lesser wealth. As Gunby writes, "although he has powerful dynastic ambitions, Romelio also has the deep hatred of the aristocracy typical of the upstart" (Gunby 551). Romelio, having attained his wealth through shady trading overseas, is himself the "upstart;" his "powerful dynastic ambitions" in the play emerge through his desire to marry his

[15] Cornelia, ironically foreshadows Flamineo's pandering as inevitably deleterious: "My son the pander! Now I find our house / sinking to ruin" (1.2:206-207). Additionally, Lodovico refers to Flamineo as "Bracciano's pander" (3.3:50), reinforcing his role as flatterer to Bracciano.

sister to Ercole, an aristocrat himself.[16] This act is complicated, interestingly, by Romelio's later remark of the unimportance of gentry:

> What tell you me of gentry? 'Tis nought else
>
> But a superstitious relic of time past;
>
> And sift it to the true worth, it is nothing
>
> But ancient riches.
>
> *The Devil's Law-Case* 1.1:33-36

The remark that "gentry" is nothing but a "superstitious relic of time past" reinforces Romelio's disdain for the perception of the nobility as important. Considering status as "nothing" again highlights his belief that "ancient riches" are not an accurate measure of one's wealth, nor should such tokens be implemented as a measure of one's status. Interestingly, defining gentry as a "superstitious relic" points towards an almost supernatural, mystic quality; instead of simply negating the authority of the aristocracy, Romelio in this regard paradoxically pays homage to its importance. Through these lines, it becomes abundantly clear that Romelio himself grapples with both a desire for and repulsion from attaining aristocratic status. He is caught between a personal greed for power and wealth, and a knowledge that such social position is directly in conflict with the jealousy and hatred he feels.

Romelio's disdain stems in part from the frustrated dynamic that exists between himself and his mother, Leonora. Though Leonora's interjection into the court scene problematizes the gendered dynamics of English courts, her actions ultimately represent a movement towards preserving social stratification and order. Following Romelio's involvement in the purported murder of Contarino, Leonora vows to "make [him] chief mourner" (3.3:232) for his part of the

[16] Ercole's age is also a subject of interest; his role as the learned (aged) noble connects with Romelio's deep-seated need for status. His age itself mirrors his status as a moneyed and gentrified aristocrat.

plot; through her revelation in open court of Romelio's birth as a bastard, Leonora upsets the gendered discourse that characterizes English judiciary proceedings.[17] Crispiano, the elder judge with whom Leonora pretends to have an affair with, remarks:

> A most strange suit this. 'Tis beyond example,
> Either time past, or present, for a woman
> To publish her own dishonor voluntarily,
> Without being called in question, and her counsel
> To enlarge the offence with as much oratory
> As ever I did hear them in my life
> Defend a guilty woman.
>
> *The Devil's Law-Case* 4.2:232-239

As Crispiano states, having a woman "publish her own dishonor voluntarily" is "beyond example, / either time past, or present." Leonora asserts a female agency in the courtroom that transcends the misogynistic atmosphere clearly present in discourse surrounding English courts. The true purpose of her action, however, is cloaked by her gender; she desires to bring Romelio to justice for his mistreatment of both Ercole and Contarino. What's more, her defense, including testimony from her waiting-woman Winifred, "enlarge the offence" to reinforce her guilt. This reversal of traditional court-room decorum itself may be reflective of what occurs "When women go to law." In her article, "Class and Gender Destabilization in Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case*," Velissariou writes, "for a woman to perform an act unlicensed by a man and moreover use the law against the head of the family is an offense against the natural order that is grounded

[17] The motivations for this revelation derive from her *own* affections for Contarino; Leonora's passionate desire for revenge upon her son stems from her love for Contarino, which itself also motivates her open-court admittance.

in fixed patriarchal hierarchies" (Velissarou 79). This act, interestingly, is marked by a lack of clearly status-oriented desires; instead of accepting Romelio's plan to ultimately increase their familial wealth and status, Leonora's actions instead carry the weight of potentially *lowering* their position further. It may be argued, therefore, that Leonora implements her suit as an inadvertent means of maintaining the hierarchal social order. Though the case is itself an important mode through which female agency may be attained, it is complicated by a lack of clear desire for aristocratic identity.

Similar with Leonora, Vittoria does not present a clear desire for honorific status, yet assumes the role because of her connection to Bracciano. This association ultimately problematizes her position. Instead, she presents an important disturbance of the embodied social stratification itself; her very presence disrupts the binaries—between the aristocracy and those lacking such wealth—that exist for many of the other characters in *The White Devil*. For Cardinal Monticelso, Vittoria's trial represents an egregious moment an upstart seemingly corrupts the moral values of an aristocrat (Bracciano). As Stone writes, a key indicator of "social disintegration and anomy in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England" included a "high rate of suits for slander of all kinds by neighbours (mostly women)" (Stone 31). Monticelso, it appears, is invested in exposing Vittoria's "slander," or, as the *OED* defines it, her "false or malicious statement or utterance intended to injure, defame, or case detraction on the person about whom it is made" (1450). Though the "slander" does not directly rise from Vittoria herself, it indirectly implicates Bracciano in the murder of Camillo.[18] Thus, attacking Vittoria may be viewed as a means of isolating the aristocracy from others; highlighting the differences

[18] An important point is the role of Isabella's death in the play; unlike Vittoria, Bracciano is never brought to court for his supposed involvement in the death of his wife. This gendered approach to law enforcement connotes a double standard that highlights the role of sexuality in the courtroom.

between her and Bracciano allows the distinction of class to remain. Thus, viewing Monticelso's desire to expose Vittoria as root of the issue isolates the "social disintegration" to the lower class.

Monticelso, along with various other characters in *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case*, aptly demonstrate that Machiavellian notions of self-preservation, in the place of successful male-female interpersonal relationships, mar the perception of the "noble" nobility. Lee Bliss writes that the Machiavel is demarked by a "willingness to tell publicly outrageous and malicious lies in order to gain one's end," which itself ultimately "defeats the institutions intended to safeguard truth and fairness in the civil transactions among men" (Bliss 518). As Webster's characters demonstrate, the decline of the nobility, seen through the differential treatment of men and women, reflects the inability adequately to address "truth and fairness" of the judicial system. Thus, Webster's writing on sexuality becomes a reflection of the inadequacy and fallibility of the aristocracy.

II. *Homo homini lupus*: Incest and Perversity

Three prominent modes of discourse concerning marriage, pregnancy, and incest appear and reappear in Webster's prolific works, *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case* and provide the means to understand the complex, dynamic relationships existing between family members. This chapter explores how sexuality, particularly sexual innuendo, is conveyed within the modern-day understanding of the family. Importantly, in discussing the social structure of families, none of the aforementioned plays presents a father figure. The absence of the traditional leader of the household demarks the negative space in which a male family member, such as a brother, unofficially leads the family, thus filling in that vacant space. The brother then becomes both caretaker and protector for the females; this role, however, is complicated by his desire for control over his sisters, sometimes appearing as an amorous, incestuous desire in several of Webster's plays. As Lara Bovilsky, in "The Limits of Personhood in Early Modern England," observes, "poets and playwrights use various plot devices to both shock and titillate" (Bovilsky 627). In Webster's plays the suggestion of incest presents the audience with dramatic, and sometimes violent, instances where the sister and lover figure are changeable in the eyes of their male relatives; this shifting façade, however, exposes issues of propriety, that is how males, particularly brothers, scheme to present their erotic impulses in socially-acceptable ways. Once such desires are manifest, the issue turns on the response of the recipients, the sisters. This chapter argues that when the female relatives respond negatively, denying their brother's sexual advances, violence and sometimes lycanthropic madness result, permitting the weird and unstable moments of a Webster drama to ensue.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, normal courting behaviors centered mainly on family members choosing an appropriate suitor for a young, single woman. Loreen Giese writes in *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* that most social attention revolved around "parentage, age, family, and character" (Giese 52). The consideration of a lady's suitor depended greatly on how *her* family considered the intended match; the males in of a woman's family were heavily invested in how the suitor would contribute to the overall wealth and status of her kin. Moreover, Giese contends, "in evaluating the validity of a marriage, the courts considered a variety of evidence- mainly, the exchange of vows, hand holding, gift exchange, kissing, and pledging- when determining whether a marriage occurred and both parties consented to it" (Giese 113). Thus consent, measured by both materialistic and symbolic presents from male suitor to female recipient, is also an accurate measure of the suitability of a match. Again, the role of male family members is critical, since, though the intended lovers may be suited for each other, tokens of affection are meaningless in furthering or sustaining a relationship if the patriarchy objects to the match.

Paternalistic structures that guide potential couples ultimately contribute to happy (or unhappy) marriages. As is clearly true of *The White Devil*, these relationships present yet another avenue by which male family members- in this case husbands- may exert their control over female relations. As Lawrence Stone notes in *The Family, Sex and Marriage: In England 1500-1800*, during the first half of the sixteenth century, "by marriage, the husband and wife became one person in law- and that person was the husband. He acquired absolute control of all his wife's personal property, which he could sell at will" (Stone 195). Male domination over their spouses helped establish and maintain rigid structures to severely limited female agency upon entering into the married state. He continues, and observes that "the ideal woman in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries was weak, submissive, charitable, virtuous and modest" (Stone 198). Thus, having wives that existed as passive and ultimately "submissive" persons to their husbands contributed to a strong sense of patriarchal values. In *The White Devil*, such values openly appear in Flamineo's early dialogue with Bracciano and Camillo, separately. To Bracciano, Flamineo instructs:

> FLAMINEO: Observed you not tonight, my honoured lord
>
> Which way soe'er you went she threw her eyes?
>
> I have dealt already with her chambermaid
>
> Zanche the Moor, and she is wondrous proud
>
> To be the agent for so high a spirit.
>
> BRACCIANO: We are happy above thought, because 'bove merit.
>
> FLAMINEO: 'Bove merit! We may now talk freely! 'Bove merit!
>
> What Is't your doubt? Her coyness? That's but the superficies of lust most women have. Yet why should ladies blush to hear that named, which they do not fear to handle? O they are politic; they know our desire is increased by the difficulty of enjoying, where a satiety is blunt, weary and drowsy passion. If the buttery-hatch at court stood continually open there would be nothing so passionate crowding, nor hot suit after the beverage.
>
> BRACCIANO: O but her jealous husband.
>
> FLAMINEO: Hang him, a gilder that hath his brains perished with quicksilver is not more cold in the liver. The great barriers

> moulted not more feathers than he hath shed hairs, by the confession of his doctor. An Irish gamester that will play himself naked, and then wage all downward at hazard, is not more venturous. So unable to please a woman that like a Dutch doublet all his back is shrunk into his breeches.
>
> *The White Devil* 1.2:11-32

Opening the quotation, Flamineo first comments on how Vittoria "threw her eyes" in every direction that Bracciano moved; even the mere suggestion that Vittoria's "eyes" were thrown connotes a sexual desire, as her body moves *with* her eyes. Upon Bracciano's doubt, Flamineo responds by attributing her "doubt" to the "superficies of lust most women have." In Flamineo's analysis, throwing Vittoria's eyes towards Bracciano is indicative of an acceptance towards his (suggested) sexual advances. Flamineo's next lines, addressing what ladies "do not fear to handle" is itself an innuendo; women, it appears, don a false "blush" as a means of masking their true, lustful desires.[19] Claiming that women "know our desire is increased by the difficulty of enjoying" connotes a form of sexual conquest, in which the woman herself is the prize. The following analogies for satiety as a "blunt, weary and drowsy passion" connote a sense of dullness, which itself evokes a cold, weak passion. The completion of sexual intercourse, it seems, leaves the male in the drowsy state that Flamineo describes.

Flamineo's later response as well draws upon the notions of a decaying lust; by describing Camillo as lacking sexual passion, Flamineo highlights Bracciano's ability to bring heat to Vittoria's "liver." Importantly, the liver was believed to be the seat of passion. In

[19] This same rhetoric is seen in *The Devil's Law-Case,* with Leonora remarking, "virgins must seem unwilling" (1.2:111). The expectation that a woman will protest, or "seem unwilling," speaks to the double standard placed on female sexuality; females are expected to be reserved in the face of a male suitor.

characterizing Camillo's liver as "cold," Flamineo overtly criticizes his ability to keep Vittoria sexually satisfied. The lack of passion, it seems, may stem from the difference in age between the married couple; while Vittoria is presented as youthful and passionate, Flamineo's characterization of Camillo is reflective of the disparity. Furthermore, alluding Camillo having "shed hairs" is indicative of a venereal disease. Not only does he appear as a passionless lover, but Camillo is also clearly unaware of Vittoria's discontent.

Though engineered as a means of pandering Vittoria to Bracciano, Flamineo's rhetoric towards Camillo reinforces his clear favor of Bracciano. His language marks his designed efforts to manipulate the moment in order to separate his sister from her clueless husband. He remarks, "might I advise you now your only course / were to lock up your wife" (1.2:74-75). Moreover, he continues, "bar her the sight of revels… let her not go to church, but like a hound / in lyam at your heels" (1.2:76-78). The idea that a man may "lock up [his] wife" and "bar her the sight of revels" when he so choses is itself paternalistic; it reflects the completely male-dominated world of Webster's seventeenth century. Moreover, the metaphor likening a wife to "a hound / in lyam"—a woman on a leash—dehumanizes and reinforces the complete control husbands had over their spouses.[20] Flamineo's commands exude the male-centric control that Stone presents as characteristic of marital relationships in the sixteenth century.

Additionally, alluding to husband-dominating relationships directly concerns the chastity of wives; that males converse about completely controlling their wives indicates a fear of being cuckolded. "The honour of a married man," Stone writes, "was also severely damaged if he got the reputation of being a cuckold, since this was a slur on both his virility and his capacity to rule

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[20] This same motif is later reinforced in Flamineo's comment: "women are like cursed dogs: civility keeps them tied all daytime, but they are let loose at midnight; then they do most good or most mischief" (1.2:187-189).

his own household" (Stone 503). In sixteenth-century England, ideas of virility and masculinity were tied to a man's ability to keep his wife controlled. Since the cheating woman damages the reputation of her husband by implying his inability to satisfy her sexually, his very ability to perform sexually is negated, and thus, through her infidelity, the wife reveals the fallibility of her husband's masculinity. What's more, female infidelity stems from an inability of a husband to "rule his own household." This idea itself implies that control is lost on the part of the man; losing grasp on one's wife reflects a form of impotence, which itself damages the "honour of a married man." Thus, the fear that surrounds losing control over one's wife clearly marks the insecurity of her faithfulness. In this way, men are instructed to keep a close watch over their wives, thus preventing any instances in which potential cuckoldry may occur.[21] Ironically, Flamineo uses the reverse of this rhetoric as the means of ensuring Camillo and Vittoria's separation: "Bar your wife of her entertainment. Women are more willingly and more gloriously chaste, when they are least restrained of their liberty" (1.2:85-87). Flamineo twists the notion around, suggesting that Vittoria will remain faithful if she is "least restrained of [her] liberty." Though the men in Stone's (and Webster's) sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England believe that limiting one's wife of her "entertainment" ensures her chastity, Flamineo's reversal is implemented as a means of facilitating the opposite situation; his desire, in contrast with ensuring Vittoria's chastity, is to sexually link her with Bracciano. Camillo, if not to follow Flamineo's advice (which he comically does), would need to resort to crude measures to ensure that Vittoria would not sexually stray from their marriage.[22]

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[21] This notion is seen in *The Devil's Law-Case* as well; Romelio states, "I do henceforth bar [Jolenta] / all visitants" (1.2:159-160) in an effort to control her sexuality. Though her brother rather than her husband, his interference speaks towards a necessity to control the sexual behavior of all women.
[22] Importantly, Vittoria is herself aware of this notion. Upon hearing her judicial sentence later in the play, she remarks, "do the noblemen of Rome / erect [a house of convertites] for their wives, that I am sent / to lodge there?" (3.2:267-269).

Beyond the concerns of the husband, social issues surrounding the role of male relatives are also an important consideration. In effect, determining the suitability and durability of a marriage concerns the male family member's *own* interest. That he, himself, presents the ideal match for his sister may preclude him from releasing his sister to the care of a (loving) husband. Edward Sagarin explains that "the term *incest* has come to include prohibited sexual relationships between people whether the proscription derives from a close genetic or marital tie" (Sagarin 126). "Close genetic tie" precludes a sexual relationship (other than an incestuous one) and clearly demarks what is considered incestuous for the purposes of this thesis. Understood in its modern sense, the *OED* defines incest as, "the crime of sexual intercourse or cohabitation between persons related within the degrees within marriage is prohibited; sexual commerce of or near kindred" (1616). Moreover, the *OED* cites this 1616 entry from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*: "Is't not kinde of Incest, to take life From thine owne sisters shame" (3.1.40). Certainly, the social conceptualization of incest features prominently in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays, and my argument thus focuses on how incestuous *desires* in Webster's plays inform action, how the role of both brother-sister sexuality and relationships reveal the perversity of the nobility, and when such expressed desires are frustrated, why violence and madness follow.

The desire to control female sexuality itself must be understood as an aspect of a more general conceptualization of the nature of sexual desires. To explore this, we need first to examine the social context in which sexuality was conceptualized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Stone posits that sexual desire revolves around a number of factors, most importantly the social class of the individuals, moral and theological interpositions, and the burgeoning medical advice that began to populate common understanding. In effect, the role of

gender itself dictates how sexuality was understood during the time period. As has been explored in the previous chapter, "the double standard of sexual behaviour for men and women has usually, but not always, been deeply embedded in customary morality and in legal codes" (Stone 484).[23] Men and women, as evidenced by social historical structures, have differential expectations placed on their involvement of sexuality based purely on their gender. This becomes abundantly clear in Stone's list of reasons why sexual behavior was not advised:

> In addition to this general advice about moderation, doctors advised total abstinence at the height of summer, since sex overheats the blood and 'infigidates and dries up the body, consumes the spirits'; during menstruation, since procreation at this time was thought likely to produce diseased children (there was no knowledge of the female ovarian cycle and that conception was impossible), during the latter stages of pregnancy, since there was a danger of crushing or aborting the foetus; and during the period of breast-feeding after birth, since sexual activity could spoil the mother's milk, and renewed pregnancy would cut off the milk supply altogether and so kill the infant child. We do not know how seriously any of these prohibitions were taken. (Stone 496)

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[23] Having "legal codes" that demark the importance of sexuality was the subject of the past chapter, whereas "customary morality" and its interaction with religious doctrines will be greatly expounded upon in a later chapter.

Since the role of the female body is critical in determining the appropriate instance in which sexual intercourse may occur, we see in the above passage, each of the prohibitions, save for the first, is contingent upon the condition of the *female*; hence, interestingly, female sexuality dictates an important aspect of male sexuality.

This reversal of assumed sexual dynamics figures into how male-female relations were to interact; thus, the role of the family itself becomes important to understand male efforts to control the sexual behavior of a female relation. As Lee Bliss observes of *The White Devil*, "the principal characters are bound to each other by a variety of ties of love and responsibility which they refuse to recognize" (Bliss 517). Though the familial bonds that exist for many of Webster's characters are present, they appear weak. Flamineo, Vittoria's brother, accurately sums up the important discomfort: "Trust a woman? Never, never" (5.6:160). Rather than placing "trust" in Vittoria's ability to give up sexual control to another man, Flamineo instead will "never, never" connect with Vittoria on a deeper level. In this way, the familial bond he shares with his sister is superseded by his role as a man.

Moreover, the relationship between Flamineo and Zanche, Vittoria's Blackmoor servant[24] and an alternative object of his affection, is objectified and not developed to be reflective of mutual love and trust. Prior to Zanche's murder, Flamineo remarks, "I do love her, just as a man holds a wolf by the ears. But for fear of turning upon me, and pulling out my throat, I would let her go to the devil" (5.1:148-150). Like a man holding a wolf, his aspiration to hold her close, in both a lover's embrace and a protective hug, and release her is complicated by the dangerous nature of revealing his affections. His impulse to "hold" her "by the ears" also connotes the

[24] The implications of presenting Zanche as a Moor, rather than an Italian, will be greatly investigated in a later chapter.

forcefulness of Flamineo's will; Zanche is metaphorically caught in his grip. Incidentally, Thomas Jefferson used the phrase "wolf by the ear" several times:

> But, as it is, we have the **wolf by the ear**, and we can neither hold him,
>
> Nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.

In this instance, Jefferson writes of slavery and the Missouri question to John Holmes (April 22, 1820). The notion of "justice" and "self-preservation" are placed in contrast. This same ambiguity surrounding repulsion and affection appears in *The Devil's Law-Case*, through the relationship between Romelio and Jolenta. Early in the work, Romelio asks, "have I any interest in you?" To which Jolenta replies, "you are my brother" (1.2:33). Though more ambiguous, the nature of Jolenta and Romelio's relationship mirrors that of Zanche and Flamineo; Romelio is caught between upholding his duty as a guardian and his incestuous desire or "interest" in his sister.[25] Finally, and most patently, Ferdinand and the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* demonstrate the weak familial bonds that define Webster's works; his ability to plot her murder stems due to his lust and anger at her sexual desire for another man. Moreover, following the murder of the Duchess' children, *his* nieces and nephews, Ferdinand distances himself from their deaths to comment, "the death of young wolves is never to be pitied" (4.2:250-251). Ultimately, the "love and responsibility" that the primary brother-sister pairings lack reflect the complicated feelings of sexual longing and incestuous impulses of the male figures.

The multidimensional desire of brothers interestingly manifests itself as pandering; the language used during Flamineo and Romelio's offering of their sisters to other men mirrors their own repressed sexual proclivities. As Elizabeth Brennan writes in "The Relationship between

[25] This divide in duty- to his own sexual urges and to using Jolenta's marriage to further their familial estate- is clearly seen in the court scene; the judge Ariosto remarks, "thus would they jest, were they fee'd to open / their sister's cases" (4.2:222-223). This quotation is a reference to judiciary proceedings, though the notion of "open[ing] / their sister's cases" is an innuendo for sexual involvement with one's sister.

Brother and Sister in the Plays of John Webster," the actions of the brothers as "go-betweens" for their sisters and other men reflects the "abnegation of brotherly consideration" which may then be understood as the "hints of or realization of incestuous feelings" (Brennan 488). By personally selecting an appropriate male, the brothers retain control over the sexual activities of their sisters, allowing their incestuous desires to be channeled through their pandering. Their erotic impulses, in effect, play out through proxy. While Bracciano and Vittoria flirt in *The White Devil*, Flamineo narrates his own inner dialogue: Bracciano remarks to Vittoria, "nay lower, you shall wear my jewel lower" (1.2:216) in a double entendre for both Vittoria's chastity, and his masculine virtue. During their sexually charged interchange, Flamineo comments in an aside, "That's better; she must wear his jewel lower" (1.2:217). Flamineo's strange utterance indicates his *own* sexual gratification with Vittoria; the aside provides the audience with a moment of realization that, through Bracciano, Flamineo exerts his brotherly voyeuristic control over his sister, but releases his incestuous feelings through a more socially acceptable avenue.[26]

The normative role of pandering as a presentation of incestuous inclinations is quite open in *The Devil's Law-Case*, as Romelio's pandering of Jolenta drives much of the action of the play. Though Jolenta desires Contarino, Romelio instead presents the elder Ercole as a suitable match, instructing Ercole to "kiss the doggedness out of her" (1.2:109) and pursue her with the hot passion that Romelio himself feels. The usage of another gentleman as a suitor is further telling; because Ercole is older, his ability to perform sexually is called into question. In this way, Romelio intend to ensure Jolenta's chastity (for, who knows if Ercole would be capable of

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[26] The notion of a "jewel" as a double entendre for virtue and sexual gratification is also demonstrated in *The Duchess of Malfi*; Ferdinand remarks "give him the jewel" (1.1.86) in regards to presenting Antonio with the Duchess' ring. Though in an altered context, the notion that both the Duchess and Vittoria are instructed by their brothers to give their "jewels" to other men reflects the brothers' masking of their own sexual desires through the usage of other men.

performing sexually) while married to *his* proposed husband. He remarks to Ercole, "you see, my lord, we are merry/at the contract; your sport is to come hereafter" (1.2:138-139). Directly drawing attention to the sexual nature of the marriage highlights Romelio's concern with which suitor will be intimately involved with Jolenta. Romelio's pandering, therefore, is his self-serving means to control his sister's sexuality.

Unlike the pandering of Flamineo and Romelio, Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* directly attempts to command the Duchess' sexuality. His actions underscore the dark incestuous desires that torment him. Early in the play, Ferdinand attempts by invoking their familial history to give the Duchess their father's poniard: "You are my sister, / this was my father's poniard: do you see? / I'd be loth to see't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his" (1.1:321-323). The poniard's phallic imagery connotes a familial honor, or power, that has been bestowed upon Ferdinand; in his role as the protective older brother, Ferdinand reveals by innuendo his desire to penetrate the Duchess.[27] The image is doubly ironic, considering both the nature of masculine authority and brother-sister incest. Revealing himself to the Duchess, Ferdinand draws attention to his own sexual desires. He refers to her as a "lusty widow" (1.1:331) to announce his perception of her as a highly sexualized being. To him, she exudes lust and temptation. When he discovers that the Duchess has had three children via an unknown man, Ferdinand first shows a glimmer of his future madness. He demands of his brother, the Cardinal, "talk to me somewhat, quickly, / or my imagination will carry me / to see her in the shameful act of sin" (2.5:39-41). The image of his beloved sister "in the act of sin" leads him to "not stir" until he "know[s] who leaps [his] sister"

[27] Later in the play, Ferdinand actually gives the Duchess the poniard (3.2:71), with the intention of her killing herself. This is an important act to consider since it may reflect his hope that through killing herself, the Duchess, by contrition, will have acknowledged and agreed to his incestuous desires. Moreover, the poniard, as Louis Giannetti writes, is "always associated with Ferdinand and the Duchess, never with any other character" (305). Thus, the phallic association is strictly confined to the relationship between brother and sister.

(2.5:80). Furthermore, upon learning that Antonio is the man, Ferdinand writes to the Duchess, "I want his head in a business" (3.5:28), and he would "rather have his heart than his money" (3.5:35-36).[28] The knowledge that his sister, the object of his affection, is engaging in a sexual relationship with another man complicates Ferdinand's desires, comingling anger and lust that will produce madness and violence by the play's end.

The lust, most clearly seen in the intimacy of the Duchess' bedchamber, implies Ferdinand's incestuous desires. In "A Contemporary View of *The Duchess of Malfi*," Louis Giannetti writes, "when Ferdinand enters, he sees only his sister, a picture of erotic allurement: her hair is loose and unbound; she is obviously preparing for bed" (Giannetti 305). Though I am in agreement with Giannetti's awareness of Ferdinand's sexual desire, his presentation of Ferdinand "seeing" his sister is incorrect; the lights are out when Ferdinand enters, thus precluding his actual visualizing the Duchess as a physical "picture of erotic allurement." But it is clear that the Duchess *does* appear in such a way, though perhaps only in Ferdinand's mind; darkness affords Ferdinand's imagination the chance to conjure up images of the Duchess as the erotic object of his desire. This notion is reinforced by his comment that she is "too much i'th'light" (4.1:42). As Giannetti writes, the remark may be read as "a complex pun suggesting not only her sexual behavior but also Ferdinand's surveillance and knowledge of it" (Giannetti 305). Hence, it could concern both Ferdinand's dissatisfaction with his sister's social decorum and his emphasis on how much is known to him, that his sister is both in the public eye and sexually licentious. Ferdinand's observation stems from his frustration that she does not behave in a way that validates his desires and that her actions reject his advances. Before departing the

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[28] Interestingly, Romelio demonstrates a very similar reaction when considering Contarino. "I did hate this man; each minute of his breath / was torture to me" (3.2:120-121). The "torture" that Contarino inflicted was through his reciprocal adoration of Jolenta.

chamber, he leaves a “ring with [the Duchess] for a love-token” (4.1:47). Ferdinand’s gift, if understood in the historical context of early modern gift exchange between spouses, can be interpreted as a courting gesture.[29] Thus, the intimacy of the bedchamber becomes the site where Ferdinand symbolically and incestuously proposes to his sister; the desires that he suppresses throughout the play culminate in this awkward and dark presentation of affection.

The unnatural nature of Ferdinand’s affection for his sister stirs the important debate over how to explain the intentionality of both brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Margaret Owens, in “John Webster, Tussaud Laureate: The Waxworks in *The Duchess of Malfi*,” explains, “for Ferdinand, and to a lesser extent, the Cardinal, the Duchess figures as an idealized portrait, or icon, of Aragonian dynastic identity” (Owens 867). The Duchess is not an overtly sexual being, but rather a means of continuing a bloodline; she is reducible to her feminine role as the carrier of a “dynastic identity” for Ferdinand. But understanding the Duchess through Owen’s analysis, however, ignores her important role as a sexual object. This critical value is clearly observed by Giannetti:

> The Cardinal, who is an emotionless, calculating intellectual, views the Duchess as a commodity. Unlike Ferdinand, the Cardinal is not opposed to the Duchess’ remarriage, only to her remarriage ‘without the addition, Honour’ – that is, wealth, power, and rank. Ferdinand’s ‘unnaturalness’ is primarily sexual. Incestuously in love with his sister, he is opposed to her remarriage on *any* terms. (Giannetti 304)

[29] Giannetti remarks that this gift represents Ferdinand’s ability to “express his love for his sister” (Giannetti 305).

As Giannetti pointedly observes, each brother views the Duchess through a different lens, the Cardinal appearing to completely repress any sexual feelings he has towards his sister (if any exist), and Ferdinand primarily driven by incestuous desires.

The covert desires Ferdinand, and to a lesser extent, Flamineo expose derive from their obsession with the bodies of their respective sisters; their very words intimate their incestuous cravings. When he learns of her remarriage, Ferdinand remarks, “would I could be one, / that I might toss her palace ‘bout her ears, / root up her goodly forests, blast her meads, / and lay her general territory to waste / as she hath done her honours” (2.5:17-21). The blending of honor (chastity), territory (forests and meads as the geographical body), and the Duchess’ body itself translates his amorous desires from their hidden state into the open. Ferdinand’s blending of space and physical harm represent his desire to ravage the Duchess’ body His hope to “toss her palace” and “root up her goodly forests” is simultaneously violent and erotic. Ultimately, “that body of hers” (4.1:121) tempts him to violence, as his fascination with her body reinforces his lust for her erotic frame.[30] Brennan writes, “as the Duchess lies strangled, she is to her brother Ferdinand the woman whose beauty dazzles him; his dearest friend” (Brennan 492). Likewise, in *The White Devil*, Flamineo focuses on Vittoria’s body: “see she comes; what reason have you to be jealous of this creature? What an ignorant ass or flattering knave might he be counted that should write sonnets to her eyes, or call her brow the snow of Ida, or ivory of Corinth, or compare her hair to the blackbird’s bill, when ‘tis liker the blackbird’s feather” (1.2:107-111). By listing Vittoria’s various flaws to Bracciano, Flamineo not only highlights his own detailed knowledge of his sister’s body but also presents her undesirability to a potential suitor. Like

[30] This fascination is also demonstrated later, upon her murder; Ferdinand’s “eyes dazzle” (4.2:256) upon looking at her corpse, only later to give him “cruel eye sores” (5.2:63). These “sores” may be vestiges of the sinful nature of incestuous desire he has succumbed to.

Ferdinand, Flamineo's presentation of Vittoria's physiognomy unwittingly reveals his own erotic attachment.

The focus Ferdinand particularly places on the figure of the Duchess connects to his eventual desire to commit bodily harm; the extreme violence in Ferdinand's revenge is both highly sexualized and lurid. Upon discovery of her remarriage, Ferdinand plots to "hew [the Duchess] to pieces" (2.5:31). His rage at her decision to wed (and maintain the accompanying sexual relationship) vents itself in his language to commit violence against her body. His desire to "hew" the body devises a morbid, personal, sadistic, means to silence his sister. The most graphic description appears later in the speech:

> I would have their bodies
> burnt in a coal-pit, with the ventage stopped,
> that their cursed smoke might not ascend to heaven,
> or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch or sulphur,
> Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;
> Or else boil their bastard to a cullis,
> And give't to his lecherous father, to renew
> The sin of his back.
>
> *The Duchess of Malfi,* 2.5:68-75

Overall, Ferdinand's craving for violence, his extreme efforts to imagine denying any pity stems from his anger that his sister does not share his incestuous feelings; the perversely sexualized anger that Ferdinand conveys to his brother reflects his unrequited lust. The Duchess herself clearly lacks the same form of emotional attachment to her brother, though she is bound by

blood. When Antonio first questions her of Ferdinand and the Cardinal's expected response to their marriage, the Duchess remarks,

> Do not think of them.
> All discord, without this circumference,
> Is only to be pitied, and not feared;
> Yet, should they know it, time will easily
> Scatter the tempest.
>
> *The Duchess of Malfi* 1.1:458-462

The Duchess believes that "time will easily / scatter the tempest" of the rage brothers are expected to demonstrate at her remarriage. Her lack of fear clearly demarks her feelings towards her brothers as merely that of siblings, without the incestuous feelings that Ferdinand exhibits. Similarly, as Paula Berggren writes, "*The White Devil* denies the possibility of a successful protective enclosure; closed spaces are always sinister, and frequently perversely sexual" (Berggren 292). Like the interactions between Flamineo and Vittoria, the dialogue between Ferdinand and the Duchess is marked by the same dark, sinister quality that Ferdinand aptly characterizes in his wish for her destruction.

We can further examine Ferdinand's vengeful speech through the lens of madness; the incestuous feelings that he, along with other characters demonstrate, may be understood as a lycanthropic sexual desire. As Brennan, notes, "medical treatises translated into English as well as Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* show that a corrupted mind, obsession with the image of one's mistress, and madness were accepted symptoms of love sickness" (Brennan 493). Understood in this light, the obsession of brothers with the bodies of their sisters prefigures a "symptom of love sickness." Moreover, the relatedness between madness and incestuous feelings

is hardly a coincidence. Ferdinand's combination of impulses (for murder, sex, violence) culminates in lycanthropic mania. Consider this working definition of lycanthropia drawn from the context of the fifth act of *The Duchess of Malfi*. The Doctor speaks:

> In those that are possessed with't there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour, they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves,
> Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up; as two nights since
> One bet the Duke, 'bout midnight in the lane
> Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
> Upon his shoulder; and he howled fearfully;
> Said he was a wolf, only the difference
> Was a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
> His on the inside; he bade them take their swords,
> Rip up his flesh, and try.
>
> *The Duchess of Malfi,* 5.2:8-19

Ferdinand, as the Doctor describes, descends into lycanthropic madness near the end of the play; his transformation into a werewolf may be understood, Owens notes, as "the dispersal of the self" (Owens 866). This "dispersal" is clearly demonstrated by Ferdinand following the Duchess' murder; after fooling Bosola, his exiting lines are quite problematic: "I'll go hunt the badger by owl-light: / 'tis a deed of darkness" (4.2:326-327). Though seemingly innocuous, the notion of hunting by "owl light," at night, signals that Ferdinand's grasp of reality begins to falter immediately after seeing the body of his sister. His madness follows his inability to comprehend

his own part in the murder of the Duchess, which is complicated by his repressed, incestuous desires. Thus, the only remaining recourse is the "dispersal" of his identity in favor of the "melancholy humour" the Doctor describes.[31] Brennan writes, "in his *Erotomania*, published in France in 1612, Jacques Ferrand wrote of lovers becoming wolf-mad. Thus Ferdinand's lycanthropia was undoubtedly intended by Webster as a final confirmation of his characterization as a jealous lover" (Brennan 494). Published shortly before *The Duchess of Malfi* (first performed in 1614), Ferrand's writings likely influenced Webster's characterizations of Ferdinand's malaise.

Ferdinand's incestuous aggression foreshadows his descent into lycanthropic insanity; following discovery of the Duchess' pregnancy, he utters lunar-centered remarks that signal his forthcoming madness.[32] To the Cardinal, Ferdinand remarks, "I am grown mad" (2.5:2) once he is aware of his sister's (metaphorical) infidelity. A new fascination with the moon emerges later in the tragedy; Ferdinand proclaims, "till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir… and fix her in a general eclipse" (2.5:80-82).[33] Interestingly, he himself appears aware of the importance of the moon in regards to insanity. He plans to drive the Duchess mad by using "the full o'th' moon" (4.1:130). His strategy is important to note, because the connection between "wolf-madness" and the moon figures prominently; werewolves traditionally emerged with the full moon, thus Ferdinand's fascination with changes in lunar condition bears import. Ultimately, comments

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[31] Another important point, the Doctor explains that Ferdinand, in his "wolf-mad" state, believes his hairy "wolf's skin" is on the inside; this distinction (and desire for the violent act of ripping "up his flesh") is of value because it connotes the violent desires that characterize Ferdinand's actions.

[32] This fascination is not only a latent observation, however; in the opening scene, Ferdinand warns the Duchess, "your darkest actions, nay, your privat'st thoughts, / will come to light" (1.1:306-307). The foreshadowing here involves the contrast presented between "darkest actions" that "come to light." For Ferdinand, this presents a moment in which the light/dark blending may be understood as a collapse of the divide in his psyche: his dark, lycanthropic desire for his sister is in opposition with his light, noble, role as an aristocrat.

[33] The same "eclipse" idea is repeated later in the work (3.2:73).

made regarding the moon underscore Ferdinand's impending madness, which itself results from his incestuous desire for the Duchess.

The state of the moon, closely tied with nighttime scenes, also appears in *The Devil's Law-Case*, though in a different capacity. The presentation of lunar-centric language reinforces the lycanthropic, incestuous, nature of Romelio's obsession with his sister. Like Ferdinand's concern that the Duchess has been "too much i'th' light" (4.1:42), Romelio remarks to Jolenta, "come, too much light / makes you moon-eyed" (1.2:41-42). This double entendre underscores both Romelio's fear of public scrutiny for Jolenta's actions, as well as a personal understanding of how his awareness of her proclivities may impact his own emotions. The phrase "moon-eyed" also suggests Webster's fascination with lycanthropic desire, which though more convoluted here, may be understood to be Romelio's *own* incestuous desire for Jolenta. His anxiety, therefore, stems from knowledge that becoming "moon-eyed" inevitably marks his own madness.

Curiously, the characters that possess lycanthropic desires *make* many of the passing wolf references. By making the brothers conscious of their own impulses,[34] Webster draws attention to an awareness of their guilt, both for sexualizing their sisters, and for committing violence against them. Part of this guilt, it must be noted, may stem from awareness that their feelings towards their sisters are not socially acceptable; the incestuous desires presented do not fall within publicly acceptable means of expressing sexuality. Ferdinand, for example, is especially aware of his involvement in the murder of the Duchess. When Bosola questions, "who shall dare / to reveal" her murder, Ferdinand responds, "O I'll tell thee: / the wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up; / not to devour the corpse, but to discover / the horrid murder" (4.2:299-303).

[34] This consciousness, however does not lead to an alteration of their behaviors.

Because he himself is the "wolf" that "shall find her grave," this utterance is a poignant admission of his own regret for his actions.[35] Moreover, this quotation draws attention to the duality in Ferdinand's character; he is both the Duchess' brutal executor (utilizing Bosola as proxy) and hopeful lover. *The White Devil* grants this same attention to Vittoria's mother, Cornelia. In her own madness, she sings to Flamineo, "and, when the gay tombs are robb'd, sustain no harm; / but keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men, / for with his nails he'll dig them up again" (5.4:98-100).[36] Cornelia's warning, that the wolf is "foe to men" importantly reminds Flamineo that his own desires will contribute to his undoing. His impulses as a wolf, incestuously for his sister, are in direct conflict with the social structures that prohibit such conduct. Mad Cornelia exposes and chides Flamineo for his fascination with Vittoria's sexuality, and, because the warning falls directly before Vittoria's murder, it foreshadows Flamineo's failure to escape prosecution for the intended action. Presenting both Flamineo and Ferdinand as aware of their lycanthropic impulses stirs a sense of consciousness about their incestuous desires; but the growing awareness, however, does not block later violence against Vittoria and the Duchess, the true objects of their fascination.

That the male characters themselves reference their madness supports the belief in their self-awareness but also points towards a cannibalistic element that appears in their speech. A sense of consumption, seen through a lascivious lens, underscores lycanthropic, incestuous, and sexual feelings. Ferdinand, the most violent and lustful of brothers, remarks to the Duchess, "Where are your cubs?" (4.1:33) shortly before instructing Bosola to execute her and her children. Later, the Duchess herself, aware of Ferdinand's plot, remarks to Bosola, "go tell my

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[35] Interestingly, the close of the work includes Ferdinand remarking, "I do account this world but a dog-kennel" (5.5:66). The notion that the society itself contains him (the "dog") in a "kennel" reinforces the notion that his desires are constrained by societal moors surrounding sexuality.
[36] T.S. Eliot references this line, interestingly, in *The Waste Land* (74-75).

brothers, when I am laid out, / they then may feed in quiet" (4.2:228-229). The Duchess' anguished knowledge that Ferdinand (and the Cardinal) will "feed" upon her corpse indicates an awareness of her own sexual identity to them. Additionally, the remark is an acknowledgement of Ferdinand's desire to consume her corporal body. This same desire is notably present in Antonio's speech; he comments that the Duchess is "an excellent / feeder of pedigrees" (3.1:5-6). His remark may be simply understood as the Duchess proving fertile (they produce three children together, after all), yet examining his usage of "feeder" may indicate that she produces sustenance for "pedigrees," which may imply her brothers and their elevated social status. Thus, both Antonio and the Duchess' speeches underscore the consumptive nature of Ferdinand's sexual desire.

Moreover, these lines that mark forthcoming madness link to notions of feeding in *The Devil's Law-Case*. Upon discovery of Romelio's murder of Contarino, Leonora remarks: "I'll no more tender him / than had a wolf stol'n to my teat i'th'night, / and robbed me of my milk" (3.3:258-260). Romelio, here again likened to a "wolf," steals to Leonora's "teat i'th'night" for sustenance. Incidentally, both Romelio and Leonora herself are likened to wolves in this instance; likening her breast to a "teat" implies an animalistic, wolf-like nature to Leonora's existence as well, associating her with the wolf mother who feeds Romulus and Remus. Ultimately, however, these references imply a twisted, somewhat cannibalistic, element to Romelio's actions, granting him the "consumer" role of both his sister and his mother.

All three males, Ferdinand, Romelio, and Flamineo, express twisted, erotic cravings for their female relations. Such erotic impulses impede other suitors, as Romelio aptly demonstrates in his attempted murder of Contarino, or result in the murderous desire for revenge, as Ferdinand's actions prove. In all cases, the brothers ultimately turn to violence to control their

sisters, and when female relatives do not respond to their brothers with equal affection, brutality and ferocity become the operative means by which to contain and entrap the sisters. Moreover, Webster often styles this violence, seen most clearly in Ferdinand's situation, as animal-like, a lycanthropic desire. Because the Duchess rejects him, Ferdinand commissions her murder, and ultimately goes "wolf-mad" in the process.

This type of insanity, however, is not always confined to Webster's males. Many of Webster's female characters lapse into madness as the only means through which she may retain an aspect of control over the turn of events. The necessity of this action speaks to the misogyny present in the plays because depending upon madness itself as a means of marking out control reduces female characters to a repressed role lacking real agency. As Maurice and Hanna Charney explain in "The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists," femininity can be conveyed or typified through madness, which itself is gendered as feminine. They argue that the madness Webster's female characters demonstrate functions as a vehicle to express emotionality. As Leonora demonstrates in *The Devil's Law Case,* casual references to instability demark her emotions at the time:

> O I shall run mad
>
> For, as we love our youngest children best,
>
> So the last fruit of our affection,
>
> Wherever we bestow it, is most strong,
>
> Most violent, most unresistible.
>
> *The Devil's Law-Case* 3.3:245-249

Upon learning of how Romelio, the youngest child she "love[s]… best" murdered the object of her affection, Leonora's change in tone reflects the complicated emotions she experiences.

Commingled with anger at "the last fruit of [her] affection" is a confusion that it is *he* that has caused her that pain. This struggle is typified later, when she remarks: "do not the bells ring? / I have a strange noise in my head" (3.3:263-264). Hearing a "strange noise" also signals her conflict, her inability to connect the actions of her beloved son with the actions of a murderer. This love she feels, as she notes, is "most, violent, most unresistible" and is able to catalyze other movements of the play, notably the law-suit she brings against her son. Consequently, her madness functions as a means of asserting some form of agency over the perceived wrongdoings of her son, Romelio.

Lycanthropic madness, along with the madness female characters demonstrate, stem from frustrated sexual dynamics. Romelio, Ferdinand, and Flamineo, brothers of the central female figure, demonstrate varying degrees of erotic desire for their sisters; their attachments, however, are incestuous cravings that themselves are socially unacceptable. The impropriety of affection, in turn, leads Flamineo and Romelio to pander their sisters to other, wealthy gentlemen in the hope of gaining some fiscal reward for their actions. In contrast, Ferdinand's desires manifest most clearly in violent rage; his rejected love for the Duchess draws forth a need to inflict physical harm against her body. In the three works, *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case*, Webster presents the nuclear family as dysfunctional and stymied by confused relationships between siblings. Ultimately, the works culminate in presenting an image of the stifled incestuous cravings of brother figures translating to violent outbursts and madness.

III. Learning "What Italian Means": Privacy, Disguise, and the Question of Race

Privacy, or a lack thereof, emerges in Webster's prolific works as both a stage device and the means to peer through the complex mechanism by which sexuality intersects with power and disguise. This chapter investigates how secrecy combined with intimacy contributes to our understanding of sexuality in Webster's three plays. Moreover, privacy and intimacy both heighten the eroticism of character interactions. *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Devil's Law-Case* furnish settings whose variability carries importance to our reading of each play. While Webster's audience was the same London milieu that also attended Shakespearean performance, the characters on stage are Italians, functioning in a markedly Italian space. Thus, by setting his works in Italy, Webster consciously draws on nationality as a form of race to influence and shape every sexualized moment that occurs. Though Paula Berggren, in "Spatial Imagery in Webster's Tragedies," argues that "Webster's art [is] romantic rather than satiric" (Berggren 288), in contrast I will argue the divide created between the Italian setting and the London audience produces an important social space where the role of privacy and disguise are implemented to produce a comical, almost farcical dynamic, greatly in contrast to the heavier, revenge-oriented main plots of the three works. Webster's plays introduce his audience to both the intense and dark aspects of humanity and also present aspects of satire; his plays are minimally romantic, but rather darkly comical. The argument follows that combining race, privacy, and disguise serve as the means to explore the sexuality of "otherness" in its Italian setting.

Unlike sixteenth-century England, Italy during that time period held differing customs regarding marriage and affairs; holding diverging marital values reflects a disparity existing between Webster's Italy—contained within his plays—and the true Italy of the time. Ultimately,

the difference itself indicates that the Italy presented in Webster's plays more closely resembles sixteenth-century England, rather than functioning as a window into the other country. As Lawrence Stone writes in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800:

> The main contrast, constantly noted by contemporaries, between [Britain's marital situation] and that abroad was with the Italian nobility, and to a lesser extent the French. There the double standard was rigidly applied before marriage; marriage itself was primarily a matter of mere business convenience, and thereafter each partner was relatively free to follow his or her own sexual inclinations. Italy was a society in which the noble wives were as free to indulge in extra-marital liaisons as their husbands, and after marriage the double standard did not exist. (Stone 544)

While in England marriage was a matter of love and companionship, the Italian nobility regarded marriage as "a matter of mere business convenience." Moreover, Italian women, as well as men, were "relatively free to follow his or her own sexual inclinations," thus indicating that adulterous actions were not condemned, as they were in England.[37] In the trial scene of Vittoria, for example, much attention is granted to her role as "a whore," though no *true* evidence of her infidelity exists. Had the scene truly occurred in Italy, where the play itself is claimed to be set, her trial would revolve around her hypothetical role in the murder of Camillo rather than the accusatory preoccupation with her faithfulness. This difference itself is rooted in English law

[37] Interestingly, this misunderstanding on Webster's part possibly points to a lack of clear comprehension of the differences in marital custom that existed abroad. It may also be indicative of a sense of ignorance, or quite possibly bias, that Webster possessed with regards to Italy.

doctrines, rather than the mere "business convenience" Stone articulates. The Italian space, therefore, functions as a means of probing English marital laws at the time. Because the foreignness of the locale affords Webster a space to explore English laws, his adherence to their codes is indicative of a fearful concern with the otherness the Italian space occupies.

Beyond simply generating a region between the true Italy and Webster's presentation of Italy, marital age differences exist, setting England apart from its foreign counterpart. That the two countries through marriage customs are separated marks the empty space generated by Webster's plays. The male age at first marriage is slightly lower than that of England in the sixteenth century, partly because England, in the fifteenth century, had raised the minimum age of eligibility for admittance as a Freeman of London (Stone 50). Augmenting this age bar impacts a man's ability to accrue a living, and effectively raises the minimum age of marriage. Many poor men were therefore "virtually [enslaved] for fourteen years and [delayed] any possibility of marriage" (Stone 51). Though seemingly unrelated to the role of Italian otherness, the implications for changing English marital customs leads to a greater divide from Italian-held beliefs. In Italy, in contrast, "the arranged marriage, of the most authoritarian patriarchal type, continued among the nobility right through the eighteenth century, with the concomitant phenomenon of promiscuous adultery by both sexes" (Stone 323). Though English society implicitly allows for non-arranged marriages in the sixteenth century,[38] Italian custom remains fixed in arranged marriage until the eighteenth century. Additionally, knowledge of "promiscuous adultery by both sexes" appears as an acceptable Italian habit in ways that English culture prohibits.

[38] This is not to say that *all* marriages are acceptable; as will be explained, the secrecy that surrounds the Duchess and Antonio's marriage is reflective of class biases that exist. In this way, it is clear that England itself held many strict rules surrounding marriage as well, though differing in their nature.

Presenting acts considered taboo or forbidden by English law in Webster's plays invades or violates that specifically "other" space. Bosola's non-physical entrance into the space of the Duchess and Antonio's secret marriage underscores the markedly Italian character of their secrecy, and their intimacy becomes sexualized. Importantly, the dramatic elements and purposely non-English dynamics of their hidden relationship drives the action of the play. The marriage between Antonio and the Duchess, furthermore, reverses traditional gender roles, as the Duchess expresses her desires with the hope of Antonio reciprocating said affections. She "puts her ring upon his finger" (1.1:*SD*) and continuously suggests hope for their being married before stating:

> Awake, awake, man.
> I do here put off all vain ceremony,
> And only do appear to you a young widow
> That claims you for her husband, and like a widow
> I use but half a blush in't.
>
> *The Duchess of Malfi* 1.1:445-449

Though seemingly innocuous, the very presentation of affections by a female, as the Duchess demonstrates above, runs counter to traditional English notions of marriage and courtship. The restricted space their marriage occupies, therefore, differs greatly from what Webster's audiences expected from a male-female interaction. The role of the "half a blush" that the Duchess displays is also quite important: by physically demarking her attachment, her affections are revealed to both the audience and Antonio himself. Itself intended as a revelation of said feelings, this (uncontrollable) display disrupts the secretive nature of their attachment. She puts "off all vain ceremony" in an effort to simply reveal her love; their secret marriage, initiated by the Duchess,

is both a private display of affection, and a renouncement of traditional gender roles. Moreover, as Bosola interrupts this space, particularly through the device of the apricots,[39] his interjection calls forth the deeply sexual reasons that underlie their privacy: the forthcoming birth of their secret children.

The privacy contained within the interactions occurring between the Duchess and Antonio somewhat mirror the rendezvous that take place between Vittoria and Bracciano in *The White Devil*; their illicit romance— though nothing explicitly occurs between them—appears intimate and private and revolves around sex. As previously mentioned, using the "jewel" as double entendre for both a token of affection and Vittoria's chastity, the two characters secretly engage in a form of foreplay. Bracciano first questions, "what value is this jewel?" (1.2:210) to enter a sexualized space that he and Vittoria occupy together, in secret to all but Flamineo and Cornelia's spying. The knowledge of their secret love itself presents a form of intimacy; their relationship, as is true of Antonio and the Duchess of Malfi, sets much of the play's action into motion. It is their (seemingly) secret relationship that, in part, causes Vittoria to be tried in court. Because she refuses to acknowledge an open relationship with Bracciano in court, Vittoria frustrates Monticelso, ultimately leading to her condemnation to a house of convertites. When questioned about an intended elopement, Vittoria calmly responds:

> Grant I was tempted,
>
> Temptation to lust proves not the act,
>
> *Casta est quam nemo rogavit.*
>
> You read his hot love for me, but you want

[39] The apricots themselves are offered by Bosola as a means to induce labor; as he cleverly surmises, the eating of the apricots confirm the Duchess' secret pregnancy. However, he is importantly unaware of the identity of the father at the time.

My frosty answer.

The White Devil 3.2:198-202

Knowing that Monticelso lacks the truly valuable information—the consummation of Vittoria and Bracciano's supposed lust for each other—she instead frustrates him by her stubbornness. Her refutations ultimately problematize his lack of knowledge. This form of secrecy, existing between the Duke and Vittoria, is arousingly sexual by virtue of its content; revolving around a supposed sexual interaction, the privacy that the supposed lovers display figures an erotic element in the play.

Flamineo, in *The White Devil*, conveys this sense of privacy to augment his role as the politic Machiavel; his secrecy in facilitating the sexual relationship between Bracciano and Vittoria—and his subsequent feigned ignorance of their attachment—is a markedly Italian characteristic. As previously mentioned, Flamineo's interest is to garner position and power by pandering Vittoria to the wealthy Duke. His actions are inherently self-serving and reflect his hopes of attaining an aristocratic position. Prior to the trial of Vittoria, he remarks in an aside, "I do put on this feignèd garb of mirth / to gull suspicion" (3.1:29-30). To maintain his secrecy and knowledge of Bracciano's plot to murder Camillo and Isabella, the Machiavellian Flamineo must pretend to find humor in every sexually-charged action that occurs; upon the entrance of the Savoy Ambassadors, he makes crude jokes at their expense. Of the French Ambassador in particular, he remarks, "A lame one in his lofty tricks, he sleeps o'horseback like / a poulter" (3.1:69-70). By mocking the Ambassador by likening him to a poulter who struggles to make a living for himself, Flamineo deflects attention from his knowledge of Vittoria and Bracciano's plot.[40] This same sense of maintaining private behavior returns later as well, with Flamineo

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[40] This action is again seen much later in the play: Flamineo questions of Bracciano, "what, me, my lord, am I your dog?" (4.2:49) as a means of masking his Machiavellian intentions, twisting who he is truly

pondering his appearances: "Because now I cannot counterfeit a whining passion for the death of my lady, I will feign a mad humour for the disgrace of my sister, and that will keep off idle questions" (3.2:303-306). To maintain the privacy for the development of his plot to rise to prominence, Flamineo dons "a mad humour." What's more, during each of the moments, it is clear that Flamineo's fixation on the sexuality of his sister serves as a means of preserving his *own* status. Importantly, late in the work Flamineo remarks, "O we curl-haired men / are still most kind to women" (4.2:191-192); this line itself reflects his acknowledged Italian characteristic, which Webster marks as divergent from those of an Englishman. Moreover, by claiming that he is "most kind to women," he engages the audience in a form of satire, with his Italian caricature clearly functioning within the play to further his *own* interests, and thus not truly "most kind" to Vittoria. Ultimately, the privacy that Flamineo operates within signals to the audience an Italianate character, driven by self-interest, and a Machiavellian drive for power.

The image that Flamineo, both purposefully and passively, paints of himself draws attention to his dynamic Italian identity in Webster's works; the racialism contained within his speech connotes differences that are contained with the Italian "other" of the plays. Lara Bovilsky writes, "early modern English figurations of the Italian draw on a tradition of English veneration for Italy, imagined as a culture which exports humanism, Petrarchism, courtiership, and literary sophistication; but alongside veneration, these figurations express English fascination and contempt" (Bovilsky 627). As Bovilsky explicates this idea, "English figuration of the Italian" revolves around the multiple dynamics of difference contained within the Italian space. As is argued, "English fascination and contempt" shine through at moments in the works,

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shielding himself from (Bracciano, rather than anyone uninvolved in his pandering). This line is doubly important, however, because it also highlights Flamineo's awareness of his actions; his cognizance of how his pandering plays out (Vittoria in a house of convertites) while feigning ignorance importantly marks him as an especially unfeeling Machiavel.

such as Flamineo's comment on being a "curl-haired" man and inform Bovilsky's argument. Though Webster offers the "tradition of English veneration for Italy" through the setting itself, the content contained within its references are markedly English, rather than Italian.[41] Furthermore, the argument here follows that this satiric element—the Italian on stage as somehow primitive relative to the English audience—is shaped by Webster's usage of sexuality. Anthony Ellis, in "The Machiavel and the Virago: The Uses of Italian Types in Webster's *The White Devil*," comments on how the "xenophobic demonization of Italy and the sexist domination of women" is explored in the "Italianate plays of the English Renaissance" (Ellis 51); Ellis argues that much of the plays are concerned with how sexuality and race intersect. Thus, the argument follows that English playwrights, including Webster, employ the Italian setting as a means of confronting and shaping discourse that surrounds English sexuality.

The Italian setting itself, however, is consistently complicated in the plays; the continuous references various characters make to specifically English locales reveals the playwright's desire to connect with the audience. While in the opening scene of *The White Devil* Gasparo comments about something occurring "here in Rome" (1.1:31), the play contains multiple signifiers that denote a critically English awareness. In the second scene, this notion is complicated further, with Webster making references to multiple international entities, including "Irish gamester[s]" (1.2:29), "Dutch doublet[s]" (1.2:31), and later Ida and Corinth (1.2:110). Taken together, these signify to the viewer Webster's awareness of a international spaces, which he may call upon to bolster his credibility as a learned writer.[42] Moreover, including various

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[41] The "veneration" Bovilsky mentions is a tradition many other English writers- beyond Webster- have participated in: examining the settings for various Shakespeare plays, for example, the Italian setting is likely implemented as a means of engaging in a similar discourse as Webster.

[42] Though a handful of these references are mentioned here, this is by no means an exhaustive list. Webster was incredibly gifted at weaving historical spaces throughout his plays, and there are many more moments in *The White Devil* that reference alternative locations.

references to specifically Roman places expresses his authority on the other locale. Importantly, however, Webster's inclusion of various English settings functions as an important reminder that his work was actually *viewed* in London; having Flamineo mention, "surely I wonder / why we should wish more rivers to the city" (5.3:181-182) evokes London's "New River" project, undertaken during the writing of *The White Devil*.[43] Moreover, Flamineo's later question, "Do you practise at the Artillery Yard?" (5.6:159-160) further calls forth the notably London setting, along with his reference to "the lions I'th'Tower on Candlemas day" (5.6:265).[44] Including the London references in his works functions as tactic through which Webster connects with his audience, mitigating the force of otherness exuding from the Italian setting itself.

The racialization of the characters in Webster's works, however, is much more complicated than the simple otherness emanating from the Italian setting; contained within Webster's various dramatic roles is an underlying Italian racism conveyed through sexuality. Ann Rosalind Jones observes in "Italians and Others; Venice and the Irish in *Coryat's Crudities* and *The White Devil*," that "what Italy mainly signified in Renaissance England was another country, a country of others, constructed through a lens of voyeuristic curiosity through which writers and their audiences explored what was forbidden in their own culture" (Jones 101). Webster's audience itself embodies the "voyeuristic curiosity" Jones speaks of. The dynamic secrecy that plays out among various characters in the three plays critically relates to the audience's pleasure. Italian characters, with their Machiavellian intrigues and erotically-charged exchanges compose the "country of others" that engrosses the spectating audience of the sixteen-hundreds. The illicit nature of Bosola's spying in *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example, offers them

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[43] The project began in 1609, and was designed to bring fresh water into the city proper.

[44] Though perhaps an edit by the publisher, giving these references capitalization—as if they were truly places rather than metaphors—reinforces their role as actual London places Webster would include to instill a sense of familiarity in his audience.

the sexualized nature of what is “forbidden in [English] culture.” Continuing Jones’ analysis, Webster’s characters transgress this illicit space, made evocative by the imaginary, opening up to English audiences the realm of the seemingly impossible and improper.[45] Thus, the audience is drawn into the conjured space and granted the hypothetical position of imposing their *own* sense of ethic on the amoral and corrupt players in the drama. Bovilsky writes, “English metaphoric exchanges between moral and cosmetic darkness are continually explored, exploited, and urgently linked to questions of moral and cosmetic imposture” (Bovilsky 646). Contained within both the racial and moral identities of Webster’s characters is an imagined space where race is investigated as a means of connecting the Italianate with the English audience. Moreover, Bovilsky also argues that Italian identity and identification allows for “cross-racial figuration” (Bovilsky 624). Because the audience has the space to identify the characters as specifically Italian, it also allows them to empathize with them and ultimately imagine themselves in the “cross-racial” roles.[46] Thus, the internalization of the on-stage character as Italian conditions the audience to develop their own sense of morality and racism.

Introspection caused by the drama problematizes explanations of how the historical consciousness of English viewers understood the racial difference of the Italian during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their awareness of racial difference greatly affects the extent to which Webster’s plays draw from and interact with the sociocultural movements of the

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[45] As Isabella notes in *The White Devil*, “My jealousy? I am to learn what that Italian means” (2.1:160-161). As is clear from her speech, the role of the Italian, as both emotional and physical markers, is importantly distinct from Englishness known to the audience.

[46] Bovilsky also argues, “Italianate identification [is] as itself fundamentally English” (Bovilsky 629). For Webster’s audience, identifying the players on stage as “Italianate” ultimately reflects their own *English* understanding of the Italian; thus, their racism stems from a position of contrast in which the Italian identity is cast in contrast with their own English identification.

time. Understanding the role of Italians within the play is critical since their *own* racial distinctiveness from the audience augments how the texts are to be read. Bovilsky writes:

> Generally, the Italian settings of Jacobean tragedy and tragicomedy allow the English to depict disturbing tendencies toward immorality, religious errancy, and sexual license as the native province of national others. Still, as with the ambiguously foreign forms of Petrarchan poetry, adopted, naturalized, and celebrated by English poets, the presence of such depictions on English stages, in the persons of English actors, allows for substantial English identification with and pleasure in these representations. This persists even when stereotypes of Italian moral darkness combine with notions of Italian physical darkness and Italy's diverse populations to read national differences as constitutively racialized. (Bovilsky 637)

According to Bovilsky, various English playwrights and poets, through their use of the Italian setting, were able to "depict disturbing tendencies." All of these markers, importantly, are negative; Italian characteristics, including both visual appearances and customs, represent an "other" space distinctive from an English identity. Bovilsky remarks that though there is "substantial English identification and pleasure in these representations," the Italian characters presented in Webster's plays have notably an unfavorable tone. Even the opening scene of *The White Devil* presents Lodovico exclaiming, "I'll make Italian cut-works in their guts / if ever I return" (1.1:51-52). Lodovico's anger, upon learning of his banishment, sets the stage for the

violent revenge that will ensue. Threatening to commit specifically "Italian" brutality again fosters the idea of an "Italian moral darkness" which Bovilsky disputes. Clearly, however, notions of revenge and physical violence are linked to Italianness in Webster's writings and develop from English perceptions of the Italian during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Devil's Law-Case bombards the audience with a plethora of disguises; designed to mask the various characters, this strange and seemingly over-used dramatic technique emphasizes both the multiple layers of secrecy that the players strive to maintain as well as the otherness represented by each disguise itself. Bovilsky notes, "the representations of Italians in Italianate drama is nearly always bound up with representations of other groups, such as Jews, Moors, and Turks" (Bovilsky 636). All three of these groups in the play appear in disguise, and even more. The opening of Act II presents Crispiano, a civil lawyer from Seville, and his spendthrift son, Sanitonella. Crispiano, disguised as a merchant, spies on the activities of his son. The disguise prompts ideas of otherness, as the shift from lawyer to the lower status of a merchant augments the notion of class functioning through disguises themselves.

Romelio dons the habit of a Jew, in order to serve his role as poisoner and social outcast. The otherness of the costume is fixed by racial stereotypes, and Romelio's soliloquy builds on that otherness, revealing his idea of Jews as social outcasts who are essentially invisible to the English populous. William Searle Holdsworth in *A History of English Law*, observes that between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries that though Jews "were thus protected by the crown, they were hated by all classes of the community" (31). The crown protected them because wealth Jewish merchants financially supported the monarchy during war. But, despite this loyalty "the Jew was an alien both to church and state. He was regarded as a species of res nullius" (30). "Res nullius" translates as "nobody's property," and the term promotes a sense of

the Jew as invisible to the general population itself. Other scholars, such as Alan Rosen, in "The Rhetoric of Exclusion: Jew, Moor, and the Boundaries of Discourse in *The Merchant of Venice*," argues a more exotic existence for Jews, claiming that in "the 1590s, both Jew and Moor remained for English Christians exotic infidels, whose obstinate unbelief in cultural difference continued to challenge, boldly or surreptitiously, Christian hegemony in Europe" (67). That Jews here are imaged as "exotic infidels" suggests their existence was of minimal consequence to those around them. Romelio aptly summarizes this characterization, promoting the idea that invisibility is serviceable to the act of poisoning:

> Excellently well habited! Why, methinks
> That I could play with mine own shadow now,
> And be a rare Italianated Jew:
> To have as many several change of faces
> As I have seen carved upon one cherrystone;
> To wind about a man like rotten ivy,
> Eat into him like quicksilver, poison a friend
> With pulling but a loose hair from's beard, or give a drench,
> He should linger of't nine years, and ne'er complain
> But in the spring and fall, and so the cause
> Imputed to the disease natural. For slight villainies,
> As to coin money, corrupt ladies' honours,
> Betray a town to th'Turk, or make a bonfire
> O'th'Christian navy, I could settle to't,
> As if I had eat a politician,

And digested him to nothing but pure blood.

The Devil's Law-Case 3.2:1-16

To consider himself a "rare Italianated Jew" again emphasizes the infrequency of such persons existence; to be both Jew *and* Italian is itself a "rare" occurrence.[47] The analogy that he has "as many several change of faces / as I have seen carved upon one cherrystone" connotes duplicity of character and goes beyond a mere sense of mysteriousness. In effect, the true face of the Jew remains hidden, never shown. Moreover, the following lines that revolve around "poison[ing] a friend" are socially deeply troubling; Romelio's claim is that in his Jewish habit, allows him to move undetected in his dark deeds, with the resulting death by poisoning "imputed to the disease natural." The invisibility of the Jewish habit, the social indifference to it, allows Romelio without suspicion to murder Contarino. The "slight villainies" that he may undertake undetected are again indicative of the otherness hidden within the habit itself. Disguise provides the space for him to do as he pleases without the fear of retribution.

Thus, disguised representations in *The Devil's Law-Case* , of "Italians in Italianate drama," serve to construct the "other."[48] Bovilsky remarks that the fluidity of disguises here suggests "the degree to which English playwrights and their audiences associated Italy with an especially heterogeneous national and racial scene" (Bovilsky 639). The very array of costumes advances a heterogeneity and fluidity within the Italian sphere; Italy itself becomes a space in which true race and nationality ultimately melt away to yield a comical image of race. The

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[47] Ironically, in the final scene one of the surgeons charged with Contarino's care early in the work also appears as a Jew. His costume, however, does not function in the same capacity as Romelio's; while Romelio is interested in murdering Contarino (to thus ensure Jolenta heir to his fortunes), the surgeon's habit is a weird stage moment. Strangely, the play itself concludes without the disguise revealed.

[48] Ideas such as these bring up the important discussion of the separation--or connection--of the double representations, to both the audience and the other characters. Though not directly addressed here, the argument is that these two representatives each function differently, with characters directly interacting with one layer of the representation, forcing the audience mentally to address both.

Danish garb Contarino dons in the second scene of Act IV for example, marks the confusion of the moment. He is presumed dead, and much of the discussion revolves around how Jolenta is named heir to his fortunes. Each of Contarino's lines later in the scene is itself an aside; his role as the silent Dane imparts a passive, unimportant nature to his race. Additionally, Ercole is also disguised, though his camouflage is Italian. Moreover, the moment in which Ercole reveals himself leaves only Contarino hidden and may reflect the relative importance granted to Italians over Danes. Contarino's position as a Dane grants him little agency in the scene, whereas the return of the Italian Ercole, who is presumed dead, prompts much activity. Ultimately, adding and removing layers of disguise underscores the covertness each character strives to maintain.

The same covertness occurs in *The White Devil*, and lurks in the title itself. By describing the "devil" as white, Webster calls forth a paradoxical pairing of English whiteness rather than a dark Italianate identity. Bovilsky aptly notes,

> The racialization of English-Italian doubleness is staged, first of all, in the play's title, an oxymoron to the English, who by visual convention depicted devils as dark-skinned. Though the white devil names an Italian character or characteristic, the English pun specifies the nationality of the subject position from which the oxymoron can be read. (Bovilsky 367-8)

Entitling the work the "White Devil" problematizes how English viewers are to associate with what occurs on stage.[49] The nationality of the audience, specifically the English audience, is juxtaposed to the "white devil" of the title. Judith Weil, in "*The White Devil* and Old Wives'

[49] This may, in fact, be exactly Webster's intention; having the "white" devil appear to the English audience may be suggestive of a possibility that *any* English person may truly be the "devil" he refers to.

Tales," argues that the puzzling whiteness of *The White Devil* "apparently suggest[s] the hypocrisy of Rome and the glamour of Vittoria" (Weil 340). Her reading, unlike Bovilsky's, underscores the importance of the Roman setting for the play; for Weil, the "hypocrisy" of Roman corruption is partly reflected in the title. If the "glamour of Vittoria" is referenced by the title, it is because she exudes sexuality and "glamour." But this is a contested point, and Vittoria may be not the *only* "white devil" present in the work.[50] Ultimately, the title both marks the Italianate aspect of the play and problematizes how it is to be understood by an English audience.

Anthony Ellis, in "The Machiavel and the Virago: The Uses of Italian Types in Webster's The White Devil," remarks that Vittoria represents the "transgressive female and the exotic Italian" (Ellis 59). Vittoria's role as the female transgressor may to English audiences represent a form of exoticism. Her Italianate persona, combined with her brazen nature, instills a sense of sexual otherness to her body. This sense of awe is clearly marked in her trial scene. When the French Ambassador remarks, "she hath lived ill," the English Ambassador responds, "True, but the Cardinal's too bitter" (3.2:107-108). This same sympathy towards Vittoria occurs later, with the English Ambassador again noting that Vittoria "hath a brave spirit" (3.2:140). The French Ambassador, unlike the English Ambassador, expresses his contempt for Vittoria as a means to deflect her otherness; his focus rests on forming a judgment of her actions. In contrast, the English Ambassador expresses empathy, which itself speaks to an English fascination with Vittoria's "exotic" Italian allurement. Ellis continues, "Italian deceit takes on an unmistakable feminine seductiveness" (Ellis 54). The "deceits" that Vittoria is engaged in—though unmistakably biased against her—are rooted in the combination of her sexuality and her race. Jones comments further, "the allure of [Vittoria], like the homeland to which the play assigns

[50] The notion of who truly is the titular "white devil" will be greatly explored in a later chapter.

her, is paradoxically made more brilliant for the corruption implicit in both" (Jones 111). Like her home country of Italy, Vittoria is both enticing, and marked as sinful. Though the true "corruption" contained within her body is not as clear as Jones would suggest, the corruption "implicit" in Italy, viewed from the perspective of a London audience, appears likely. Perhaps Vittoria represents the paradoxical desire and repulsion of English male audience members in their view of the play.

Beyond a racialized understanding of Italians appearing in Webster's works, the presence of Blacks, such as Zanche or Francisco's Moorish disguise in *The White Devil*, also problematize the stage. To understand their differences within the social context of English society during this time period, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy in *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* writes:

> Black Africans probably first arrived in England in 1554. Long before those real black men reached English shores, however, black faces had been seen on English stages. The dramatic representation of black characters on the English stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries obviously reflected English attitudes toward blackness and English experiences with black men, both real and imagined. (Barthelemy 1)

Both dramatists and common Englishmen alike focus on Africans, dramatists and common. Webster's plays, arrived some sixty years following the arrival of "black Africans" to England; thus, their presence both on the stage (as they had been prior) and physically in the English milieu may be reflective in his works. These presentations, importantly, are also negative. As

Sujata Iyengar, in *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*, remarks, "[black individuals] participate in an emergent discourse of hybridity and pollution that threatens to taint the English even as it acknowledges their own kinship with them" (Iyengar 80). This fear of the "other," presented here as an African, poses a threat to the stability of English perceptions of race.

Beyond Vittoria, the most racially troubling character in *The White Devil* is Zanche; the Moorish servant to Vittoria functions within the play as both a highly sexual, and highly problematic character based on her race. The *OED* defines a blackamore, how Zanche is characterized, as "a black African; an Ethiopian; (also) any dark-skinned person" (1609). Interestingly, the second definition that the *OED* gives provides more insight, describing a blackamoor as "a devil" (1663). This pairing of complexion and "devil" importantly connotes the perception likely experienced by the English audience. Both her race and her gender demark her as lower status. Susan H. McLeod, in "Duality in The White Devil," expands on that pairing: "Zanche is the lascivious, fickle paramour. She is depicted as vicious, helping Flamineo to debauch Vittoria, and heartless, indifferent to the sufferings and madness of Cornelia" (McLeod 280-281). McLeod is right to note that Zanche is a "lascivious, fickle paramour," but her viciousness towards Flamineo is not entirely a just description; Flamineo himself remarks, "I'll tell thee, I do love that Moor, that witch, very constrainedly; she knows some of my villainy" (5.1:146-148). Zanche, on the other hand, perceives his love for her "rather cools than heats" (5.1:156), implying that his lust is of greater concern than her own affections. Furthermore, as the scene progresses Cornelia and Marcello both physically assault Zanche, providing an explanation for Zanche's coldness towards Cornelia. When Flamineo instructs Marcello to "be guardian to your hound" (5.1:190), thus reducing Zanche's gender and race to the baseness of an

animal, we see, from the family's perspective, her status as a moor reduces her to a lesser being as she is the taker of blame and sexually objectified.[51]

Zanche's sexual objectification, however does not eliminate her ability to utilize such labels for her own benefit. By functioning within the confines of her race, Zanche achieves some form of sexual agency. Sujata Iyengar importantly elucidates:

> Moorish Zanche delights in her dark complexion because she 'may boldly say without a blush / I love you' (*WD*, 5.1.214-15) to the man she assumes is the warlike Moor Mulinassar. Zanche believes her blushlessness allows her to escape not only the confines of gender (permitting her to be an aggressive wooer) but also of race, the conjunction of skin color and rank: she asserts that she will be 'washed white' with the wealth that she can bring her lover. She is, of course, mistaken; the supposed Mulinassar is Francisco, Duke of Florence, painted black in order to deceive Brachiano and achieve his revenge. (Iyengar 138-139)

The ability of the woman—one of color, no less—to confess her affections for a man without blushing is itself important; Zanche's race permits her to escape both the confines of gender and race, "the conjunction of skin color and rank." Because she is a moor, and therefore subject to different societal confines, she is able to transcend the stereotypical assumption of women as

[51] More may be examined in this vein, Ann Rosalind Jones, in "Italians and Others; Venice and the Irish in *Coryat's Crudities* and *The White Devil*," remarks that "by "adding class bias to available categories of ethnic contempt, Ludovico links Zanche's folly to her blackness in an aside that associates physical labor with filth… [he] places Zanche at the absolute bottom of interlocking cultural, racial, gender, and class hierarchies" (Jones 115). Her otherness" stems from her race and class.

non-aggressive and passive. Vittoria, in contrast, is not able to reveal her affections to Bracciano, and instead must pursue her “dream” of them together (1.2:220-229). With Francisco, Zanche is able to confess her affections because she lacks the appropriate color signifier. Tragically, Zanche still falls victim to Flamineo’s machinations; prior to her murder by Lodovico and Flamineo, she remarks, “I am proud / death cannot alter my complexion, / for I shall ne’er look pale” (5.6:228-230). This final utterance, her last lines of the play, is indicative of her steadfast pride, her utilization of her “complexion” as a means to gain her independence. Though she is considered Vittoria’s servant, she dies “ne’er look[ing] pale.” Her sexual agency remains, though she is murdered.

Ultimately, Webster’s works underscore the paradoxical private dynamics contained within intimate moments of his plays, which are held in contrast with the overtly racialized character presentations. Bosola’s figurative entrance into the secret marriage between the Duchess and Antonio, for example, highlights the sexual nature of their intimacy. Like Vittoria and Bracciano, some aspect of their romance is considered illicit. Thus, the secrecy contained within their private moments carries some sexually charged weight. Webster’s presentation of race mirrors the erotic nature of their privacy. Paradoxically, by presenting Italy as both similar and divergent from England, Webster conveys the sense of national confusion, which exhibits itself sexually. Offering the Italian space as an outlet, or stereotype, for deviant sexual and morally corruptible behavior may peer into the inner minds of the English audiences themselves. Thus, Italian space and characters provide English audiences the space to identify with yet distance themselves from the figures on stage.

IV. *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*: Religion, Putrefaction, and Death

The will of Heaven, as Francisco remarks in *The White Devil*, is supposedly conveyed through the actions of those in the court. Contained in the aforementioned work, as well as *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Devil's Law-Case*, Webster provides three modes through which religion, putrefaction, and death are examined and sexualized. The idea of permitting these concepts to overlap in their functions contrasts with the strict religious ideology of sixteenth and seventeenth-century London. That Webster's plays are situated within the Jacobean era calls forth the sweeping religious changes that occurred then; the radical shift from Papism to Anglicanism brings many attached difficulties, many of which revolve around how sexuality and the religious experience relate. The argument of this chapter is that the Catholicism of Webster's plays is presented with particularly negative connotations and usually connects with unscrupulous sexual acts. Moreover, the chapter posits that death and putrefaction as also particularly sexualized; Webster presents these dark and grotesque elements in conjunction with the erotic to convey the position that the religious structures introduced in Webster's plays are themselves hypocritical in nature.

One of the most important features necessary for understanding how religious undercurrents operate in these plays is to examine the religious differences that existed between England and Italy in the Jacobean era. Webster witnessed the shift in state-sanctioned religion from Papism to Anglicanism; with James I's ascension to the throne, English spiritual life continued its shift away from Catholicism, whose believers were socially ostracized and their religious views stifled. Thus, tensions increased between European Catholics loyal to the Pope, and Protestants loyal to James I. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605, for example, marks the extreme

strain between the two religious doctrines; a failed assassination attempt of James I by English Catholics represented the culmination of religious dissatisfaction and frustration. Concurrently in Italy, the Pope issued Catholic doctrine from the Vatican and directed the religious experience of Italian city-states. This being the case, English and Italian religious practices were therefore at contentious odds. Webster, writing during this time,[52] was keenly aware of this religious friction and of the production of works that address these religious concerns and differences. This issue of religious cultural separation becomes problematic when we consider, Christopher Marsh's claim in *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England,* that the "local church was a vital forum for the propagation and absorption of moral lessons. Through sermons, rituals and liturgical lessons, people learnt and re-learnt the rules of 'upright dealing,' and asked forgiveness for their shortcomings" (Marsh 27). Thus, the very centrality of the church structure itself complicates how religious differences between England and Italy are to be understood.

The divide existing between Protestant and Catholic experience also deeply connects with the role sexuality took during the period. As Stone writes in *The Family, Sex and Marriage: In England 1500-1800*:

> There is every reason to believe that the chief cause of the unusually high and rising standard of sexual morality in early seventeenth-century England was the external pressure of Puritan organization and Puritan preaching, which slowly affected attitudes of nearly all the propertied classes, whether Puritan, Anglican or Arminian. It became part of the

[52] *The White Devil* was first performed in 1612, and *The Duchess of Malfi* in 1614. The first performance date of *The Devil's Law-Case* is unknown, but is speculated to be shortly after 1616, with the first quarto printed in 1623.

> generally accepted pattern of internalized and enforced social discipline, and thus seeped downward through the social hierarchy to the plebs. (Stone 623)

As religious structures shifted towards a more Puritan understanding, social attitudes toward sex began to change to a more conservative, honorific conception. This pattern of upholding sexual standards, as Stone notes, was not reserved for only the upper classes; the “internalized and enforced social disciple” of note began to seep “downward through the social hierarchy to the plebs.” Importantly, having all classes of peoples exposed and subjected to Protestant doctrines reflects England’s religious composition at the time, as all individuals were subjected to James I’s enforcement of Protestantism as the monarchy’s religion. Stone also notes:

> The reason for the early seventeenth-century tightening of sexual attitudes must mainly be attributed to the work of Protestant, and especially Puritan, preachers. As Christianity slowly took hold, for the first time, as a result of dedicated missionary work by the newly educated clergy, the moral aspects of religion came increasingly into prominence. Protestant thought and theology laid great stress on the sanctity of marriage, which led preachers to denounce extra-marital relations and the double standard… For a time, the nobility were under great pressure to behave like the middle classes, while both the lay Justices of the Peace and the Ecclesiastical Courts made extraordinary efforts to control

> and regiment the sexual behaviour of villagers and urban workers. (Stone 523)

The new emphasis on the "moral aspects of religion" in Jacobean England is indicative of a renewed sense of conservative religiosity, as well as a need for James I to assert his autonomy as sovereign. Moreover, the renewed stress on "the sanctity of marriage" highlights the shifting attitudes towards a conservative approach to sexuality, itself not tied to Catholicism. As Stone earlier remarked, again the role of class seems to fall away; from villagers and urban workers to the nobility, the effort of denouncing affairs fell under the umbrella of religious authorities. Thus, controlling aspects of civilian sexuality was channeled through religious institutions.

Notions of religious and sexual doctrines play out critically when we consider Vittoria's conduct during the court scene of *The White Devil*. While the trial revolves around her supposed illicit affair with Bracciano, itself a form of sexual licentiousness, it occurs completely under the control of Cardinal Monticelso; his role as a Catholic authority sullies the secular aspects of a court. The trial, therefore, becomes both sexual and religious spectacle. Vittoria herself remarks, "honourable my lord, / it doth not suit a reverend Cardinal / to play the lawyer thus" (3.2:59-61). His role as "a reverend Cardinal" confuses and complicates his behavior as a "lawyer" pleading against Vittoria. The similarity between Monticelso's behavior and that of Stone's Puritan preachers may reflect a shared religious characteristic. In effect, Webster's portrayal of Italian-Catholic religious figures mirrors that of English Protestant reformists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[53] Moreover, the mutability between spiritual leader and Ecclesial judge in

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[53] Importantly, the role of the family in such religious transactions also must be considered; as Williamson notes, "elements of revenge tragedy consistently darken the relationship between family inheritance and religious objects in *The White Devil*" (Williamson 485). The connection between familial honor and inheritance and religious status and beliefs importantly calls back to the role of male-female interpersonal dynamics within the nuclear family.

the trial scene reinforces the connection drawn between religious experience and structures governing sexuality. Vittoria later in the scene remarks:

If you be my accuser

Pray cease to be my judge; come from the bench,

Give in your evidence 'gainst me, and let these

Be moderators.

The White Devil 3.2:225-228

The lack of separation between Monticelso's role as judge—itself a religious position—and as accuser are problematic when considering how the judicial system functions. Because church and state are not separated, Vittoria's deviance from the social "discipline" marks her as sinful, and thus punishable. But Vittoria (and perhaps Webster) would argue, unquestioningly abiding by such structures is itself problematic.

The underlying frustration in attempting to follow imposed religious principles patently appears in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The Pilgrim scene (3.4) aptly demonstrates this blockage and illustrates Webster's attention to the complex nature of "blind faith" and subjectivity within the context of religious and sexual customs. The scene opens at the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto, an important site of pilgrimage for Catholic worshipers because it is believed to the home of the Virgin Mary. Placing the interaction in this locale purposefully highlights the specifically Catholic nature of the play; by choosing the Virgin's locale, it calls forth distinctions that exist between differing religious beliefs, specifically placing the divergence on value of the idolatrous altar rather than the pulpit and preaching. Prior to the scene, the Duchess and Antonio have been banished, and are thus pariahs in the eyes of the religious and social structures of their homeland. The Pilgrims speak among themselves:

FIRST PILGRIM: Here's a strange turn of state: who would have thought

So great a lady would have matched herself

Unto so mean a person? Yet the Cardinal

Bears himself much too cruel.

SECOND PILGRIM: They are banished.

FIRST PILGRIM: But I would ask what power hath this state

Of Ancona to determine of a free prince?

SECOND PILGRIM: They are a free state, sir, and her brother showed

How that the Pope, forehearing of her looseness,

Hath seized into th'protection of the church

The dukedom which she held as dowager.

FIRST PILGRIM: But by what justice?

SECOND PILGRIM: Sure I think by none

Only her brother's instigation.

The Duchess of Malfi 3.4:24-35

First, referring to Antonio as "so mean a person" denotes the deeply engrained classicism that separates out nobility from the demeaning state of the steward Antonio. The Duchess' decision to wed her lower-class steward is viewed by the pilgrims as a "strange turn of state,"[54] a

[54] Moreover, their role as "pilgrims" is not explored further in the scene; their *own* status is left ambiguous, suggesting that their class is irrelevant. Thus, their role is freed from presumed socioeconomic standards and their comments are presented purposefully without class biases.

questionable action by an aristocratic woman. The question regarding the "power" of Ancona in determining the worthiness of Antonio is also telling; it emphasizes the role of religious figures in determining the laws and customs of the state. The intervention of the Pope, when hearing of "her looseness," suggests how sexuality was monitored and strictly governed by religious structures. Though the Duchess holds a duchy "as dowager," that ownership is clearly contingent on a presupposed standard of sexual propriety. Thus, the First Pilgrim's question, "by what justice?" pointedly highlights the lack of clear "justice," or equanimity extended towards the Duchess. The religious law itself needs only "her brother's instigation" to revoke her property and status. Ultimately, the Duchess' sexual freedom is constrained by the religious structures that intercede in her personal life.

Other scenes in *The Duchess of Malfi* also present tangible manifestations of faith. These religious objects function to draw attention to the idolatry associated with Catholic worship. Webster's false, wax idols are Ferdinand's most poignant weapons against the Duchess. Learning of her marriage to Antonio, Ferdinand assembles a strange, dark, wax shrine of their dead counterfeit bodies. His hope, strangely, is to present them so she "may wisely cease to grieve / for that which cannot be recovered" (4.1:59-60), not seeking to turn her away from remorse, but rather to frighten her into submission to his will. But their false bodies, however, evoke a sacred altar where she might pray and worship, as was customary of the votive tradition of the Catholic faith. Margaret E. Owens, in "John Webster, Tussaud Laureate: The Waxworks in The Duchess of Malfi," comments:

> Although devotional traditions involving votive figures had disappeared in England with the Reformation, Webster may have been aware of this practice as a distinctively Catholic,

> especially Italian, custom and thus appropriate to the setting of his play. If Ferdinand's wax figures evoke the votive tradition, then this device may be linked to the play's thematic preoccupation with the abuse and perversion of Christian ritual, or 'jesting with religion,' as Cariola puts it. (Owens 863-864)

Since Webster's religious awareness, in Owen's analysis, critically figures into how the scene is to be comprehended by the audience, she connects the "thematic preoccupation with the abuse and perversion of Christian ritual." Importantly, immediately following the revelation of the wax figures, Bosola remarks: "O fie! Despair? Remember / you are a Christian," to which the Duchess replies, "The church enjoins fasting: / I'll starve myself to death" (4.1:74-76). Upon learning of the death of her family, the Duchess prepares to commit suicide (itself a sin), ironically at the behest of the church because it "enjoins fasting."[55] This darkly satiric jab, itself "jesting with religion," clearly highlights Webster's fascination with darker elements of spiritual belief intermixed with his implicit disdain for such practices.

The physical representations of religiosity seen in homes of believers also appear in Webster's plays; included are various devotional figures, such as the crucifix, and highlight the tension between Protestant and Catholic beliefs. Elizabeth Williamson, in "The Domestication of Religious Objects in The White Devil," argues that Catholic objects, following the Reformation, survived because they were transformed into new "contexts" (Williamson 474), with the crucifix

[55] This same connection between the Duchess and death is clearly seen in her actual murder. Owens notes, "as she confronts her death, the Duchess is represented in terms unmistakably reminiscent of Christian martyrdom" (Owens 870). This final moment is itself particularly poignant in its finality; the mode of the Duchess' murder, in defiance to Bosola's executioners, cements the satire associated with the Catholic faith.

acting as "stage property… to address the public theater's response to the shifting status of these highly charged objects" (Williamson 474). In this analysis, the crucifix is reducible to "stage property," and thus its religious significance falls away in favor of a more clearly theatrical device. Though the objects themselves do indeed signal how sociocultural values shifted during the Protestant Reformation, this status as "highly charged" is importantly tied to their religiosity, and thus may not be as easily reducible to mere artifacts of the stage.

The crucifix in *The White Devil* is linked to violence as its role as a religious object is tenuously tied to Marcello's murder. In Act V Marcello, Flamineo and Vittoria's younger brother, converses with his mother Cornelia. During their interchange, Cornelia questions the purpose of Marcello's impending duel with Flamineo. She notes that he "never look[ed] thus pale / but when [he is] most angry" (5.2:5-6). When Cornelia expresses her concerns, Marcello redirects the question and asks, "was not this crucifix my father's?" (5.2:10). This deferral serves to draw attention away from Cornelia's stress, but ultimately it leads to Marcello mentioning Flamineo. Marcello continues, "I have heard you say, giving my brother suck, / he took the crucifix between his hands, / and broke a limb off" (5.2:11-13). Though breaking the cross may not be a sin, the recollection here of Flamineo breaking Christ's limb at the moment of being suckled forebodes his lack of religious allegiance and corruption from birth.[56] The casual incident uncovered by recollection marks Flamineo as tainted by evil as a baby in Marcello and Cornelia's eyes. Moreover, this very idea becomes actuality since during Marcello's speech, Flamineo enters and immediately "runs Marcello through" (5.2:*SD3*) with Marcello's own

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[56] Williamson notes, "the play not only shifts the crucifix into a new sphere- the aristocratic household- but it also creates a new kind of iconoclasm, for it is not the figure of Christ but the arm of the cross that has been broken, and the threat of further disruption comes not from outside the family but from within it" (Williamson 474-475). In this moment, the disruption of the Catholic object's role in the play clearly connects with fratricide and a fear of an unstable familial dynamic.

weapon (5.2:13). Compounding the connection, Marcello's dying lines, "O mother, now remember what I told / of breaking off the crucifix" (5.2:18-19), warn that violence, memory, and maligned religious experience are here intertwined with Catholic faith, as embodied in the crucifix itself.

Vittoria's trial presents both physical and hierarchical manifestations of faith, both of which are juxtaposed with her seeming amorality. The red robe adorning Cardinal Monticelso, religious authority of the spectacle itself, is made conspicuous by Vittoria's lament, "O poor charity, / thou art seldom found in scarlet" (3.2:70-71). Monticelso's lack of "charity," indeed, exposes any lack of empathy and compassion that might be expected of the clergy. Monticelso's very forcefulness and sarcasm problematizes his Catholic sartorial exterior. Later, as well, Bracciano remarks to the same purpose:

> Cowardly dogs bark loudest. Sirrah priest,
>
> I'll talk with you hereafter. Do you hear?
>
> The sword you frame of such an excellent temper,
>
> I'll sheathe in your own bowels.
>
> There are a number of thy coat resemble
>
> Your common post-boys.
>
> *The White Devil* 3.2:164-169

The reference here to Monticelso, a Cardinal destined to become Pope Paul IV, as a mere "priest" for his treatment of Vittoria is disdainful in itself.[57] But the further sting in the reduction of a cardinal's red garb to the coat of servants working as horse carriers is steeped in contempt. The power of the "sword" Monticelso wields, his emblem of justice, Bracciano violently

[57] His emotional response may be due, in part, to his emotional attachment to the woman, though likely does not completely account for his frustration at the spectacle.

threatens to “sheathe in [Monticelso’s] own bowels.” Through Bracciano’s scorn, Webster contrasts the elevation of Catholic clergy to Vittoria’s presupposed impropriety.

Though not containing nearly the same number of disguises as the *The Devil’s Law-Case*, *The White Devil* has moments of intrigue where donned religious disguises are sometimes meant as a means of torture.[58] Ultimately, these disguises critique the Catholic faith. Bracciano, eventually murdered by Francisco, encounters both Lodovico and Gasparo in the habits of Franciscan monks preceding his death:

> GASPARO: Bracciano.
>
> LODOVICO: Devil Bracciano. Thou art damned.
>
> …
>
> GASPARO: This is Count Lodovico.
>
> LODOVICO: This is Gasparo.
>
> And thou shalt die like a poor rogue.
>
> GASPARO: And stink
>
> Like a dead fly-brown dog.
>
> LODOVICO: And be forgotten
>
> Before thy funeral sermon.
>
> *The White Devil* 5.3:147-164

Their shared speech,[59] immediately following on Lodovico and Gasparo’s ruse, speaks to Webster’s disdain for the Franciscan Order. Sometimes called the Seraphic Order, the two

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[58] This is not to claim that every torture in the play is committed by a man in disguise.

[59] James R. Hurt, in “Inverted Rituals in Webster’s *The White Devil*,” remarks that this passage “is an excellent illustration of a favorite device of Webster’s, that of dividing a speech that would be ordinarily spoken by one person between two people, giving each alternate lines. Thus stylized dialogue lends rapidity and interest to what would otherwise be lengthy speeches” (Hurt 44). Linguistically, sharing the

represent a Catholic religious sect, and their alternating language attempts to degrade, disorient, and dehumanize the Duke, its imagery reflecting the savagery of such religious moments. Lodovico's and Gasparo's graphic language associates such speech with Catholic practice. Thus, for Webster religious disguise may be an indictment of faith itself. Interestingly, Williamson notes, "the hypocritical actions of the revengers, who dress as holy men and pretend to comfort their enemy, also echo standard Protestant rhetoric used to critique the false trappings of the priesthood" (Williamson 478). Hence, a Protestant critique may subtly find voice by the Franciscan disguises that Lodovico and Gasparo put on. To demonstrate a connection between religiosity and cruelty, the disguises, the "false trappings of the priesthood" proffered by Catholicism, align themselves with the violence of Bracciano's impending death.

Religious references play out dynamically in *The White Devil*. The violence associated with characters' deaths often ties religious practices to sexual activities. On his deathbed, Bracciano calls out, "Vittoria? / Vittoria!" (5.3:164-165), desiring the woman he loves. In the face of death, Bracciano's desire for Vittoria represents both lust and his sexual connection to her. Lodovico and Gasparo, in the aforementioned disguises, hear his utterance—a threat to their disguises—as an indicator that their murderous designs are not yet completed. Gasparo remarks, "strangle him in private" (5.3:168) and then Lodovico, while throttling Bracciano, "this is a true-love knot / sent from the Duke of Florence" (5.3:172-173). The phrase, "a true-love knot" signs both violence and sexuality. Of course what compounds this savage moment is that they murder him as Franciscan monks, weirdly intertwining religiosity, sexuality, and death.

As with Bracciano's dying words above, we see that Webster places importance on the act of dying. Stone observes the ever-present idea of death in this period:

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lines accelerates the pace of the scene. Moreover, this quickening lends itself to the notion of fervent religiosity, which will be explored later.

> The most striking feature which distinguished the Early Modern family from that of today does not concern either marriage or birth; it was the constant presence of death. Death was at the centre of life, as the cemetery was at the centre of the village… Death was a normal occurrence in persons of all ages, and was not something that happened mainly to the old. (Stone 66)

Though death was a common occurrence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for "persons of all ages," connecting community church at the "centre of the village," with the cemetery, the normality of death, its commonality, is surpassed or made provocative by the variety of murder in the plays, and especially that sex and death arrive hand-in-hand.

The dramatic murders convey atypical modes of death; the secretive nature of Isabella's poisoning speaks to the darker elements of *The White Devil* in much the same vein as the strangling of Bracciano. Moreover, her death itself is facilitated by employing Bracciano's portrait and her well-understood bedtime ritual. The "dumb show" that the Conjurer reveals to Bracciano aptly demonstrates that Isabella's murder and its tie with seemingly religious practices:

> Enter suspiciously Julio and Christophero. They draw a curtain where Bracciano's picture is. They put on spectacles of glass, which cover their eyes and noses, and then burn perfumes afore the picture, and wash the lips of the picture. That done, quenching the fire and putting off their spectacles, they depart laughing.

> Enter Isabella in her nightgown as to bedward, with lights; after her, Count Lodovico, Giovanni, Guid-Antonio, and others waiting on her. She kneels down as to prayers, then draws the curtain of the picture, does three reverences to it, and kisses it thrice. She faints and will not suffer them to come near it; dies.
>
> *The White Devil* 2.2:*DS*

Julio and Christophero enter and "burn perfumes afore the picture." The act, coupled with "wash[ing]" elements of the visage, denotes a cleansing ritual, perhaps of Catholic descent. Moreover, that the "quenched" fire posits a satiety, possibly again invoking Catholic ritual and the sense of spiritual fulfillment. But the dumb takes a dark turn when the poisoners depart "laughing," evocative of a Satanic plot. Isabella's first action, importantly, is to kneel down "as to prayers;" her evening ritual clearly involves her spirituality. This idea is compounded by the "three reverences" she performs towards her husband's picture, suggesting a religious element in her "worship" of Bracciano.[60] Isabella's actions convey not only her spiritual reverence towards her husband, but also present an element of sexuality, conveyed through the intimacy associated with her bedchamber. Space itself here connotes privacy. In effect, Isabella's murder compounds both sexuality and religiosity through a tragic demise.[61]

Beyond merely presentations of death, fixed within the religious and sexual imagery of *The White Devil* is the dark and gross element of putrefaction. Webster includes these references

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[60] Isabella's worship towards her husband may itself connote the supposed sexual relationship between the two; the show, occurring in her bedchamber, has an intimacy to it not unlike the scene in *The Duchess of Malfi* where Ferdinand and the Duchess interact.

[61] Interestingly, both Isabella and Bracciano appear as ghosts later in the work (Isabella in 4.1, Bracciano in 5.4), possibly intending to convey the unfinished nature of their lives; their deaths, both arriving at the (poisoning) hands of others, present examples of lives cut short for sexual and retaliatory reasons.

to visualize to his listeners how death works on the corporal body. When Monticelso rants upon Vittoria's actions as strumpet, he remarks,

> [Whores] are worse,
>
> Worse than dead bodies, which are begged at gallows
>
> And wrought upon by surgeons to teach man
>
> Wherein he is imperfect.
>
> *The White Devil* 3.2:95-98

Monticelso, the spiritual authority of the scene, vehemently exposes Vittoria's supposed sexual impropriety. His lines, therefore, are doubly important because they are the words of a religious leader; as Cardinal, and later Pope, his speech institutionally conveys messages and teachings arising from the Catholic Church, and in this instance, are bent on defiling the meaning of "whore." The notion that whores are worse than "dead bodies" that are "begged at gallows" intermixes spiritual notions of man's perfection, and the macabre investigation into convict bodies whose insides anatomically will disclose imperfections, errors against God. Moreover, having the bodies themselves "wrought upon" brings attention to how the corporal figure is disfigured after death. Because this exchange also occurs as a means to answer the question, "what are whores?" (3.2:82), the moment itself is entangled in sexuality: here the erotic is twisted by religious structures and putrefies to yield a terrifying outcome.

Bosola's speech in *The Duchess of Malfi* remarks on this same commixture of decomposition, sexuality, and religious structures as it conveys disdain for the corruption of the nobility. The monologue presents Bosola's—and likely Webster's—opinions regarding mortality and the aristocracy.

> What this is in this outward form of man

To be beloved? We account it ominous
If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,
A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling
A man; and fly from't as a prodigy.
Man stands amazed to see his deformity
In any other creature but himself.
But in our flesh, though we bear diseases
Which have their true names only ta'en from beasts,
As the most ulcerous wolf, and swinish measle;
Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,
And though continually we bear about us
A rotten and dead body, we delight
To hide it in rich tissue.

The Duchess of Malfi 2.1:41-54

The question opening his monologue, "what this is in this outward form of man / to be beloved?" presents the complicated nature of understanding how aspects of human nature allow for love and affection; thus, the following lines attempt to comprehend man's propensity to be "amazed to see his deformity / in any other creature but himself." As Bosola laments, when man is exposed to "diseases / which have their true names only ta'en from beasts," his reaction is that of disgust. However, his confusion stems from why, when humans are "eaten up of lice and worms," they instead "delight / to hide it in rich tissue." From Bosola's perspective, the irony of man lies in his ability to neglect his *own* deformities and then find those same problems in others repulsive. This diatribe, interestingly, is spoken before the elder Castruccio and an Old Lady.

Their ages, and relative proximity to death and the putrefaction of *their* corporal bodies importantly colors Bosola's speech. The especially vulgar boast of Bosola's comment, "though continually we bear about us / a rotten and dead body," focuses on the impending decay of the human body, notably without religious structures present.

The presence (and absence) of spiritual mores draws attention to the role of religion in Webster's works. Because his writings were greatly shaped, and therefore influenced, by religious values that were in flux, his writings offer an important window into how the English understood Protestantism, especially in contrast with Catholicism. Webster's plays demonstrate, the newfound tensions between the two as sexualized; his attention to eroticism and male-female dynamics affords the lens through which attitudes divine perspectives could be satirized. To probe religiosity, Webster exaggerates the presence of death in mundane experience, and to a lesser extent, places spiritual stances before the inevitability of the putrefied body. Paula S. Berggren, in "Spatial Imagery in Webster's Tragedies," warns that "dismemberment foils ambition in *The White Devil*: those who set out to tear themselves free from the constraints of convention are eventually torn apart in the whirlwind which they have helped create, and flung into the space they thought to control" (Berggren 289). The human body is literally dismembered in its attempt to adequately place itself in the "space [it] thought to control." Berggren's "space," then, may represent the chasm Webster opens between moral sexuality and religious understanding in both England and Italy of the early modern period.

Conclusion

> If woman do breed man,
> She ought to teach him manhood. Fare thee well,
> Know many glorious women that are famed
> For masculine virtue, have been vicious:
> Only a happier state did betide them.
> She hath no faults, who hath the art to hide them.
> Flamineo, *The White Devil* 5.6:241-246

Webster presents an important window into the role of female sexuality in relation to masculine perception and the portrayal of femininity in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Flamineo's dying words about Vittoria sharpen the misogynistic and paternalistic structures at work in the three plays. The morality of Webster's three plots revolves around the actions of Vittoria, the Duchess, and Jolenta, respectively, and tenuously links itself to feminine displays of sexuality. Flamineo's words above instruct the men present regarding the possible artful behavior of women. Implicit in the lines is his presupposition that men and women are, indeed, different and are thus treated differently. The distinction between "woman" and "man" itself highlights how gender is to be perceived, though Flamineo's comments assume such assessments are confined to other males themselves.[62] The task of teaching "manhood" links the female to an understanding of male virility; Flamineo here distorts the gendered tradition of men teaching men in favor of female instruction. Beyond exhibiting femininity, tension arises from the presupposed role of women as necessarily demonstrating "masculine virtue" in successful male-female encounters. Only in assuming a male identity, thus effectively hiding her "faults," may a woman like Vittoria truly attain some semblance of autonomy in the patriarchal world.

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[62] Moreover, the usage of "breeding" here is also telling, both in its connection with bestial elements, and its further association with the aforementioned role of incest and werewolves in Webster's works.

Examining how Webster—and the historical documentation by scholars of the period, such as Lawrence Stone—link sexuality to male-female relationships in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through familial dynamics, race, and religious sentiment yields many salient results, especially relating to how men control women by linguistic and socially repressive means. In this thesis I turned my attention to contemporary historical scholarship, which I considered primary rather than the critical and poetic responses of an earlier commentator like T.S. Eliot. My desire was to move toward an investigation of how more recent scholarship attempts to interpret Webster's views on sexuality. Still, there is some insight to be gained by revisiting Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality." There he writes,

> Webster was much possessed by death
> And saw the skull beneath the skin;
> And breastless creatures under ground
> Leaned backward with a lipless grin.
>
> "Whispers of Immortality" Eliot 1-4

Though these lines clearly mark Eliot's admiration and respect for Webster, his focus here resides on Webster's fascination with death. Eliot believes that Webster "saw the skull beneath the skin," indicating that Eliot perceives Webster's craft itself as revolving around the decay of the body. George Williamson, in *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot: A Poem-by-poem Analysis*, comments on this passage, noting that Eliot employs "images which amplify the amorous aspect of possession" (Williamson 96). "Possession" greatly captures the analysis of this thesis that argues that male social dominance is the means through which lust and eroticism are channeled. The organization of the poem is additionally quite telling, as it is broken into two sections: the first concerns with Webster and Donne, and the second addresses the Russian "Grishkin." Craig

Raine claims in *T.S. Eliot (Lives and Legacies Series)* that Eliot understands the distinction between Webster and Donne: Webster uses “bodily corruption for sexual arousal” while Donne’s sex is “devoid of tenderness, even the merest inflection” (Raine 13). Through Grishkin, Eliot sharpens the difference between the two poets. First introduced on line 17, she is a female capable of conveying sexuality. Her existence in the poem is quite relevant to the work of this thesis; Eliot’s writing that “uncorseted, her friendly bust / gives promise of pneumatic bliss” (19-20) is suggestive of her erotic allure. The *OED* defines “pneumatic” as “of, relating to, or characteristic of a woman with a well-rounded figure, esp. a large bosom; (of a woman) having a well-rounded figure” (1919). This definition, first arising from this moment in Eliot’s poem, proclaims the erotic. “Uncorseted,” her “friendly bust” allows for the “promise” of sexual gratification, here the “pneumatic bliss” that follows. However, as more lines of sexual allurement advance, Eliot’s narrator closes the poem by remarking, “but our lot crawls between dry ribs / to keep our metaphysics warm” (31-32). Placing “our lot” within “dry ribs” connects the fascination with death and decay that Eliot references earlier in the poem to the prior subject of sexuality. The “metaphysics” of the last line may serve as a final reference to Donne’s metaphysical poetry, of which Webster may be considered a distant dabbler. This ending, however, limits how the reader is to understand the way in which Eliot means to convey sexuality. Though Grishkin is a highly erotic being earlier in the work, returning to the “dry ribs” that provide warmth for the narrator’s “metaphysics” denotes a lifeless, sexless quality in the poem. Even describing the “breastless creature under ground” images a more stagnant, death-oriented view of the carnal than any idea of sexual bliss. That Eliot ultimately disregards the bizarre eroticism that Webster’s works present may reflect the poetic decade in which Eliot wrote, yet it limits the role his writings might play as interpretively relevant to this thesis. A

prolonged analysis of Eliot, rather than working with modern scholars who study Webster, would shift my analysis away from the male-female dynamics that underlie sexuality.

Instead, inquiry into the contemporary texts of Machiavelli and Coke, and the twentieth-century historical reflections of Lawrence Stone, offer an opportunity to examine the judicial and social contexts in which Webster himself writes, as well as the early modern situations of his characters. Lord Coke shaped much of the most important law practices in England, many of which are still in place in Britain today. Thus, investigating the actual legal policies that govern sexuality provides an approximation of how Webster, a barrister himself, understood and implemented legal doctrines and their social implications into his writing. Machiavelli, in turn, presents a critical mode of analysis because, prior to Coke's influence on English court doctrines, Machiavelli's writing, emerging in England during Webster's period, actively promotes the disregard of morality in favor of the capitalistic pursuit of personal gain. Moreover, his writings greatly influence the ways in which this thesis examines male-female dynamics; as a means of retaining control and power female characters, the males in Webster's plays resort to Machiavellian tactics and deceptions. Thus, drawing on Machiavelli clarifies the motives that underlie many of Webster's male characters. Finally, and most critically, Stone's analysis of interpersonal relationships abundantly elucidates the social mores and historical contexts for Webster's writing. His works, however, were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s, suggesting possibly that his analysis is itself affected by his time period. To avoid this limitation or restriction to Stone's interpretation, I have attempted to focus instead on the factual aspects presented in his book, thus mitigating the influence of the sociocultural world of his works on this thesis.

Moreover, though many critics adequately address how sexuality intersects with Webster's plays, their analyses focus on alternative elements to his work, depending greatly upon the time period in which they write. Published recently, Lara Bovilsky's work, "Black Beauties, White Devils: The English Italian in Milton and Webster," presents an analysis into the role of the Italian and the Italian space in Webster's works, with her examination centering around racialism and nationalism. Emerging at the turn of the twenty-first century, her investigation represents a bold fascination with the role of race in understanding and interacting with foreign ideas and individuals. Bovilsky argues that Vittoria's beauty "leads directly to fatal acts of murder, adultery, and (in this case) jealousy" (Bovilsky 641), positing that Vittoria's aesthetic form is what drives the plot of *The White Devil*. She continues by noting that her beauty, in turn, leads Bracciano to "[reclassify] Vittoria's beauty as a sinister pairing of the disingenuous and culturally alien" (Bovilsky 642). Though compelling, Bovilsky's reading mitigates and underplays Vittoria's role as a sexual being, instead attributing her intrigue to her race.[63] This same focus of analysis appears in Anthony Ellis's "The Machiavel and the Virago: The Uses of Italian Types in Webster's The White Devil." Published in 2006, his article revolves around the connection between the "xenophobic demonization of Italy" and the "sexist domination of women" (Ellis 51). Again, though this more recent work is excellent in its investigation into race, yet his analysis of Vittoria's ability to transcend gender boundaries is quite indecisive. Ellis's later investigation into "gender indeterminacy" (Ellis 51) that Flamineo supposedly demonstrates is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine, but it does mark an effort to understand how the fluidity of sexual banter and innuendo glides through Webster's works.

[63] In contrast, Ann Rosalind Jones writes, "Vittoria sums up the impossible paradox of Venice: luxurious delicacy and the claim to unassailable autonomy are intertwined, in the city as an emblem and in the dramatic heroine, and both are linked to scandalous impropriety" (Jones 112). Her writing here more closely parallels the intended subject: the connection between race and (sexual) "scandalous impropriety."

Other scholars also highlight the important question as to who the titular, singular white devil is; *The White Devil* itself presents various characters that demonstrate hedonistic tendencies, yet interestingly little scholarly debate revolves around how Vittoria may—or may not—be Webster's singular "white devil." B.J. Layman, in "The Equilibrium of Opposites in the White Devil: A Reinterpretation," notes that much scholarly debate rests upon an understanding of "the paradox of Vittoria's greatness" (Layman 337). Though his analysis is more focused on her relationship with Flamineo, he does, remark, however, that Vittoria is "that impossible thing, a *white* devil, or in Brachiano's words 'the devil is christall'" (Layman 338). For Layman, Vittoria's characterization is that of a whore. She embodies the "white devil" of the play because of her ability to manipulate and control the men around her. This reading seems simplistic; Vittoria's sexuality cannot simply be a means of control. H. Bruce Franklin, in "The Trial Scene of Webster's *The White Devil* Examined in Terms of Renaissance Rhetoric," accurately, I believe, observes:

> Judging Vittoria herself is more complicated. Webster has created in Vittoria a rhetorician and a woman about whom it is not easy to make a simple absolute judgment… she is sufficiently eloquent to demonstrate that she is not the only devil, and that perhaps she is not the worst of the four devils on trial. (Franklin 51)

In his analysis, Vittoria eludes an easily graspable description and instead presents a paradoxical, complicated "rhetorician" capable of using her eloquent and compelling voice effectively in her defense. Stylistically analyzing the trial scene makes evident Vittoria's control of language and her sexuality allow her to counter Monticelso's attacks. Though she is admittedly a "devil," I am

more inclined to believe that "she is not the only devil" of the play, and, as Franklin notes, "not the worst of the four devils on trial."

My reading Webster's plays in this way attempts to bring to light the complicated nature of sexuality within the plays themselves. As Webster is analyzed in the future, other important elements in his writing may sharpen and come into focus, such as the of role homosexuality in the plays; this thesis exclusively presents the heterosexual eroticism of Webster's writing, yet there is evidence that homosexuality was a mode of sexuality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[64] However, minimal scholarly inquiry to date has focused on Webster's presentation of homosexuality itself. While Shakespeare writes of Antonio's potential homoeroticism in *The Merchant of Venice*, or Marlow of Edward II's favorite in *Edward II*, minimal attention has been paid to how these relationships might function in Webster's writing. Thus, further analysis into this potentially important topic is warranted. In this thesis, however, the argument ultimately is that sexuality in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England appears in John Webster's three plays as the patriarchal and male-dominating authority that positions itself over female bodies.

[64] Lawrence Stone writes that though "homosexual instincts among men have usually been strongly condemned by the masses, [they] were often tolerated by the elite" (Stone 484), with England avoiding the most vehement attacks on homosexuality during the sixteenth century.

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Appendix A: *The White Devil* Synopsis

To the Reader

The introduction to the work is Webster's chance to address critics of his writing. His defense draws heavily from Martial, along with other classical Elizabethan writers, as a means of legitimizing his literary authority. Moreover, calling *The White Devil* a "tragedy" various times reinforces his self-consciousness and authorial presence in the work. Thus, Webster's own voice and those of his characters are closely tied; their disdain for the judicial system may be examined through the lens of his own *personal* disgust, based on his very real experiences.

Act I

Similar to *The Duchess of Malfi*, the in medias res opening of *The White Devil* sets the background in which Lodovico is banished. 1.1 is thus concerned primarily with the relationship between Lodovico and two of the main characters: Bracciano and Vittoria. This first scene itself contains many of the images that will be carried through the play, most poignantly seen in Antonelli's speech: "We see that trees bear no such pleasant fruit / there where they grew first, as where they are new set" (1.1:45-6). This line may be a metaphor for the chastity of marriage; any union is most "pleasant," or best, "where they grew first" while later marriages (or sexual relationships) are not and cannot be as pure and better than that first union. In this way, the first scene sets the stage as to how Bracciano and Vittoria's romantic attachment cannot function with the same purity as each of their respective first marriages. Moreover, Lodovico's attachment to Isabella (Bracciano's first wife) jades his rhetoric and also connotes the violence that will be carried through the play; he uses phrases such as threatening to "make cut-works in their guts"

(1.1:51), which mark to the audience that this is not a lighthearted play. Lodovico's rhetoric, interestingly, is also tied to a disdain for the (Italian) judicial and legislative systems. "Courtly reward, / and punishment!" (1.1: 3-4) in the opening scene also draws attention to role of crime and punishment in the Italian court.

The second scene introduces the audience to the target of Lodovico's disdain, Bracciano, and Vittoria herself. The scene is littered with references to female sexuality and the act of getting Vittoria into bed with Bracciano. Flamineo, her brother, remarks that she "threw her eyes" (1.2:12) to introduce the notion of her looseness and disregard for the traditional notion of a married woman as chaste and avoidant of temptation. Camillo, Vittoria's husband, is also presented as a cuckold; Flamineo warns him to "lock up [his] wife" (1.2:75) to avoid such public ridicule. The scene is mainly concerned with ideas of female chastity and honor, and how the developing relationship between Vittoria and Bracciano fits into an understanding of that. Interestingly, Bracciano remarks, "I'll seat you above law and above scandal, / give to your thoughts the invention of delight / and the fruition; nor shall government / divide me from you" (1.2: 252-4). This claim that his power transcends "law" and "scandal" is thus begging to be put to the test later in the work.

Act II

This act opens with Francisco de Medici and Isabella speaking, though quickly Bracciano becomes the focus of the scene. His illicit relationship with Vittoria is condemned by Francisco and Monticelso, who remark that she is his "strumpet" (2.1:57). They continue on, claiming that he will get syphilis ("change perfumes for plasters" 2.1:74 and then again at 2.1:88-9 and 2.1:91) in remarks made prior to Bracciano's son Giovanni entering. Interestingly, Monticelso's speech

(2.1:94-104) marks a shift away from the discussion of Vittoria's prostitution to a moralizing tale of why "those of princely blood" (2.1:101) must be trained "by examples [rather] than by precepts" (2.1:102). This aspect of the scene is quite interesting; Giovanni acts as the reconciliatory force between Francisco and Bracciano, mainly because his presence underscores the importance of leading by example; in this way, both (important) men of the play agree to the importance of that notion. Webster may have included this short quip to serve alternative motives; presenting the audience with a tangible necessity of leading by example, it calls into question the practices of London's leaders at the time for their corruption. Moreover, it functions as a reminder of the traditional role of the father, as a leader for sons; it may be argued, then, that those men without competent fathers are unable to lead by example. The latter part of the scene is concerned primarily with the relationships between Camillo and Vittoria, Isabella and Bracciano. For Isabella and Bracciano, their dialogue is rife with Bracciano's disdain for Isabella, whereas her language speaks to a lack of agency; she refers to Vittoria as a "whore" (2.1:238), and continues on, "O that I were a man, or that I had power / to execute my apprehended wishes, / I would whip some with scorpions" (2.1:242-4). Her sense of helplessness draws the audience to her plight; her husband's known infidelity has resulted in her thus responding with hopeful violence (lines 245-50). The scene closes with Flamineo, Bracciano and Doctor Julius plotting to murder Camillo and Isabella, whereas Monticelso secretly hopes that Bracciano will continue his affair with Vittoria so that his end will be "in such cursed dotage to repair his name, / only the deep sense of some deathless shame" (2.1: 383-4). His hope, therefore, is to "let him cleave to her and both rot together" (2.1:393). Overall, this scene marks a large shift in the narrative of the play; it introduces the murderous plots of at least two characters while insinuating a third (Monticelso's plot to ensnare Bracciano). Moreover, the moment in

which Bracciano claims to divorce Isabella is different from her announcement to her brother; the divergence in who is actually in control (who divorces whom) is interesting to consider.

The short second scene of this act presents the actual deaths of Isabella and Camillo; in this way, Bracciano and Vittoria have no marital obligations and may theoretically be together. The Conjurer, once Bracciano has exited, remarks "both flowers and weeds spring when the sun is warm, / and great men do great good, or else great harm" (2.2:56-7). This couplet foreshadows the problematic nature of these murders, which will unfold later.

Act III

Following the murder of Camillo, the trial of Vittoria commences. The first scene, primarily dialogue between Francisco, Monticelso, Flamineo and a lawyer, revolves around how to tarnish Vittoria's name. Monticelso refers to her "black lust" (3.1: 7) as a means of making her infamous; the usage of the color black is fascinating in contrast with the name of the work. *The* White *Devil* (emphasis added) reinforces the dichotomy that exists between what is perceived as white (good) and black (evil). Interestingly, Flamineo partakes in this conversation in order to "gull suspicion" (3.1: 29) away from his involvement in the murders of Camillo and Isabella. However, he plays his part quite well, and muddles everyone's perception of where his true attachment lies: to his sister, or to the court.

The second scene in this act, arguably one of the most important of the play, revolves around the actual arraignment of Vittoria at court. The scene opens with Vittoria asking for the lawyers to speak in "his usual tongue" (3.2:12), rather than the customary Latin; she "will not have [her] accusation clouded / in a strange tongue. All this assembly / shall hear what you can charge [her] with" (3.2:18-20). Because there is no physical evidence against her, Vittoria wants

the court to be unfazed by the changing language when deliberating her case. Moreover, she calls out Monticelso by claiming, "it doth not suit a reverend Cardinal / to play the lawyer thus" (3.2:60-1); his role as an impartial judge is clouded by his own personal desire for her punishment, and his actions throughout the scene reinforce the notion that he cannot effectively serve as such. In this way, Vittoria calls out the injustice of the entire system; her guilt was predetermined by Monticelso before the trial began, and his role was simply to confirm what he (and others) had already believed. In contrast, Monticelso evokes powerful images of her as the sinful Eve (see lines 69-70, more of the devil imagery on 108-109), and refers to her as a whore continuously (lines 56, 29, and throughout his diatribe in lines 78-101). She is met by the judges as having "lived ill" (3.2:107), though she effectively levels Monticelso's verbal assaults. She remarks that her "defence of force, like Perseus, / must personate masculine virtue" (3.2:135-6); as a woman, she is vulnerable to objections about her sexuality, so to be an effective communicator in the "court of man: she must exude masculinity. As the scene progresses, Monticelso grows more vehement in his attacks of Vittoria, yet she responds with poise and effectively nullifies most of what he says. Interestingly, Vittoria remarks, "If you be my accuser / pray cease to be my judge; come from the bench, / give in your evidence 'gainst me, and let these / be moderators" (3.2:225-8). This claim may be reflective of the injustice that plagued London courts during Webster's time and thus the blurred line between impartial judge and lawyer may be Webster's point. In addition, the actual discovery of justice in a courtroom is of consequence to Webster, and the audience. The scene ends with Giovanni and Francisco discussing what happens to the dead, both mourning over Isabella's death.

The third short scene of the act revolves around Flamineo; he first interacts with the Ambassadors and Monticelso when pretending to be "distracted" (3.3*SD*) as was planned in the

preceding scene. In his speech Flamineo remarks, “A Cardinal! I would he would hear me: there’s nothing so holy but money will corrupt and purify it, like victual under the line” (3.3:22-4). In addition, Flamineo and Lodovico size each other up, exchanging insults before the scene closes. As this occurs, Lodovico finds out that the dying Pope has pardoned him.

Act IV

The beginning of the act is quite interesting. While Francisco remarks, “far be it from my thoughts / to seek revenge” (4.1:3-4), Monticelso produces a book of all the criminals of the city, clearly with the intention of having Francisco hire one to exact revenge on Bracciano. Once Monticelso departs, Francisco notes that it is likely that the book is not as innocent as Monticelso claims; “my lord winks at them with easy will, / his man grows rich, the knaves are the knaves still” (4.1:83-4). These lines denote Monticelso’s possible corruption, yet also may double as an insult. By claiming that the “knaves are the knave still,” Francisco may be remarking on how Monticelso has always been the knave, and will continue to be one despite his authority. The close of the scene involves Isabella’s ghost appearing: the ghost, however, doesn’t add anything to Francisco’s understanding, and he instead closes the scene by claiming, “Flectere si nequeo supero, Acheronta movebo” (4.1:136), translated as “if I cannot change the will of Heaven, I shall release Hell.”

The second scene opens in the house of convertites, with Flamineo and Bracciano reading the ruse letter Francisco sends, as if from Vittoria to another lover. Bracciano refers to her as a “whore” (4.2:43), to which Flamineo responds with a threat against revealing his involvement in the murder of Camillo. Flamineo remarks, “As in this world there are degrees of evils, / so in this world there are degrees of devils” (4.2:57-8). Throughout the scene, Flamineo is referred to as a

"pander" (lines 48, 61, 134); as Vittoria and Bracciano argue, Flamineo brings the two back together, and ultimately helps strengthen their bond to each other. He remarks, "women are caught as you take tortoises, / she must be turned on her back" (4.2:148-9); this line may be read as a double entendre in which women must be turned around, and also wooed sexually (turned on her back as in, lain down). In addition, Flamineo's aside comments prove problematic when attempting to understand his relationship to his sister; he laments, "will any mercer take another's ware / when once 'tis toused and sullied?" (4.2:153-4). Later in the scene, the intersection of sensuality (demonstrated earlier) and violence overlap. Flamineo remarks, "A quiet woman / is a still water under a great bridge. / a man may shoot her safely" (4.2: 176-8). Though meant as a metaphor, the role of violence in romantic scenes draws an interesting line between love and violence; one stems from the other in the work as calmly as the "still water" lies "under a great bridge." The scene closes with Flamineo remarking that his behavior, as a "knave and madman" (4.2:237), is in order to "grow great" (4.2:240).

The third scene of the act opens with the election of Monticelso as the new Pope (Paul IV), and the announcement that Vittoria and Bracciano have fled the city for Padua. Interestingly, it is Francisco that sent Bracciano a letter with instructions on what to do; he remarks to the audience, "Thy fame, fond duke, / I first have poison'd; directed thee the way / to marry a whore" (4.3:55-7). Beyond simply insulting Vittoria, these lines are important because they draw attention to the weight and importance placed on reputation. Francisco remarks that he has "poison'd" the "fame" of Bracciano, implying that a man is made, in part, by his reputation among others. The "others," moreover, include his peers, his subjects, and possibly even the audience. Though Francisco is himself set on seeking revenge for Isabella's murder, Webster plays with the idea that Monticelso is aware of the plotting; he claims that it will please "the

divine power" (4.3:66) if Francisco is to "sequester [Vittoria and Bracciano] from the holy church" (4.3:67), suggesting their exile. It must be said, however, that once Lodovico explains the plot to murder Bracciano, Monticelso remarks that "'tis damnable" (4.3:118) and strongly urges him to reconsider. Later, however, Francisco has one thousand ducats delivered to Lodovico, under the guise of "the Pope [having] sent them" (4.3:134). Not only does he give Francisco the black book, but he also funds the acts themselves. Webster, as an indictment of the Catholic Church, uses this critical moment; by involving the (historically accurate) new Pope in the darkness of revenge, Webster draws forth the hypocrisy of those in authority. This duality is paralleled in Lodovico's speech; he likens the outward façade of Monticelso to that of "brides at wedding dinners" (4.3:145) who are "sick of the modesty, when their thoughts are loose, / even acting of those hot and lustful sports / are to ensue about midnight" (4.3:147-8).

Act V

The opening of this Act is marked by a change of scenery and appearance for many; taking place in Padua, Bracciano and Vittoria are wed while Francisco, Lodovico, Antonelli, and Farnese are disguised in order to enact their revenge. Interestingly, the disguise that Francisco adopts is one of a blackamoor; this alteration is particularly fascinating when considering how appearance and action are starkly in conflict throughout the work. Lodovico, however, speaks one of the most interesting lines of the scene; his remark emphasizes the role of Vittoria as the devil. "'Tis not so great a cunning as men think / to raise the devil, for here's one up already; / the greatest cunning were to lay him down" (5.1:86-8). Zanche then becomes the focus of the scene; her role as a woman is the foreground of the discussion. Using metaphors for various creatures (witch, wolf, devil, dog, gypsy), Webster draws forth the misogyny of the time.

Marcello, brother to Flamineo and Vittoria, converses with their mother Cornelia on-stage during the second scene. However, he is quickly murdered by Flamineo. His dying lines, however, prove extremely telling in the context of his family: “There are some sins which heaven doth duly punish / in a whole family. This it is to rise / by all dishonest means” (5.2:20-2). In this way, Webster draws attention to the fallibility of those in authority. The iteration of rising “by all dishonest means” also evokes the idea of acting as a flatterer. Moreover, throughout the work Flamineo is considered of lower class (verbally and physically assaulted by Francisco and Bracciano), suggesting a self-awareness on Marcello’s part of their status as inferior. Finally, the scene closes with Lodovico poisoning Bracciano’s beaver; ironically, this is the same method of Isabella’s murder earlier in the work. This repetition of the same technique is indicative of Webster’s revenge motif.

The third scene opens with Bracciano and Vittoria’s wedding celebrations; however, Bracciano quickly realizes that he has been poisoned and is dying. Bracciano remarks, “how miserable a thing it is to die / ‘mongst women howling” (5.3:35-6): this lamentation is indicative of the belief that women were susceptible to hysterics. Moreover, the setting of Bracciano’s death is particularly interesting; the games that celebrate his wedding are colored by ideas of chivalry, yet are in contrast with the plotting that connects so clearly with Machiavellian aims. Flamineo, once everyone has exited the stage, laments, “O justice! Where are their flatterers now? Flatterers are but the shadows of princes’ bodies; the least thick cloud makes them invisible” (5.3:43-5). Though Flamineo is not sympathetic of Bracciano’s death (see lines 59-62), his remark here relates to perceptions of the court and the means through which the nobility interacts with the people. Bracciano, on his deathbed, claims that Vittoria is responsible for his misery; he refers to her as a “quail” (5.3:89), and a “dog-killer” (5.3:92), along with his comment

that “her hair is sprinkled with orris powder… mak[ing] her look as if she had sinned in the pastry” (5.3:115-6). He continues on, berating Flamineo and referring to him as the devil (see line 100 and later) before he is strangled by Lodovico. In his dying struggle, the usage of both “slave” and “devil” (lines 148-166) occur; Lodovico and Gasparo refer to Bracciano by both terms continuously, suggesting that his lower-class existence likens him to the devil. As the scene progresses, Zanche reveals to Francisco that she and Vittoria plan to escape that evening. At the close of the scene, Francisco remarks, “purge the disease with laurel: for the fame / shall crown the enterprise and quit the shame” (5.3:268-9); effectively, the glory that Francisco and Lodovico hope to attain will “quit the shame” of the murders they are involved with. This again reiterates Webster’s idea that the ends justify the means, especially with revenge.

The fourth scene revolves around Cornelia burying Marcello, though she is clearly mentally unstable. She notes, “Here’s a white hand: / can blood so soon be washed out?” (5.4:78-9). This line is suggestive because it again draws forward the notion of white/blackness associated with good/evil; in this scenario, the whiteness (goodness) of an individual cannot coexist with the stain of blood, implying that it can’t “be washed out” as easily as it appears to be, for some characters, throughout the play. The scene closes with Flamineo’s soliloquy, in which he encounters Bracciano’s ghost; though the ghost does not speak, the corruption that Flamineo has encountered and experienced at court are the highlight of the monologue. In this way, Webster again draws attention to the fallibility of those at court.

In the short fifth scene, it is revealed to Hortensio (hiding) that Francisco and Lodovico have been conspiring together. Francisco notes, “if thou dost perish in this glorious act, / I’ll rear unto thy memory that fame / shall in the ashes keep alive thy name” (5.5:9-11). Referring to the act as “glorious” suggests that the violence they are involved with are positive and good, even

though it represents one of the greatest sins. In addition, the notion that "fame" is of value is fascinating because it brings up questions surrounding the role of the power and the court in relation with an understanding of what "fame" itself is.

The final scene of the play begins with Flamineo ensnaring Vittoria (and Zanche) for her murder. He notes that she "hast a devil in thee; I will try / if I can scare him from thee" (5.6:18-9). The notion that Vittoria is the titular devil raises interesting questions about her role in the play (as the "white devil" or as merely a bad woman). This motif is later repeated, with Vittoria herself noting, "the world, to sink to that was made for devils, / eternal darkness" (5.6:63-4). Flamineo calls attention to her status as a woman; she is emotional and not reasonable by his estimation (lines 67-72), reinforcing the subjugation of women in the play (later also seen once Flamineo "dies" and rises from lines 154-165). This abuse is later revealing when considering how both Zanche and Vittoria affront their murderers; Vittoria responds to Lodovico, "I am too true a woman: / conceit can never kill me. I'll tell thee what: / I will not in my death shed one base tear, / or if look pale, for want of blood, not fear" (5.6:222-5). This particular moment is rife with discussion of the role of women, particularly seen in Flamineo's speech (lines 240-245). Additionally, consider Flamineo's reference to "lions i'thi' Tower" (5.6:265), which is a clear reference, for the English audience, to the Tower of London. Webster's inclusion of this marker may be indicative of a desire to connect the audience with the play, rather than keep the Italian drama isolated from the seventeenth-century English audience. The ending of the play results in the death of Flamineo, Zanche and Vittoria, with Lodovico under arrest for the murders. In this way, the play concludes, ultimately, with revenge and tragedy.

Appendix B: *The Duchess of Malfi* Synopsis

Act I

The play opens with two primary characters, Antonio and Delio, discussing Antonio's recent return from France. Interestingly, Antonio notes his admiration for France's "judicious king" (1.1:6) who has effectively rid his court of "flattering sycophants, of dissolute / and infamous persons" (1.1:8-9). From the beginning of the play, Antonio emerges as an honest and moral figure. This interaction, though brief, is important when considering the turn of the play. Many of the individuals in power prove to be corrupt to some degree, and capable of committing violent sins, such as murder. Bosola then enters; his character proves to be one of the most enigmatic of the play because, as the viewer sees, he vehemently abhors vices. Yet, as Antonio remarks, he "rails at those things which he wants" (1.1:25). Bosola's social status precludes his action (thus raising interesting comments ideas about the role of social status/power and its connection with "allowed" corruption). Antonio's speech is especially provocative considering the Cardinal's immediate entrance; Bosola and the Cardinal discuss the supposed fee the Cardinal owes Bosola for "a notorious murder" (1.1:66), thus reinforcing the supposition that those in authority represent the most corrupt individuals of the play.

Ferdinand enters the scene, interrupting Antonio and Delio's discussion of the Cardinal's dark and sinful actions. His entrance marks a shift in the dialogue; the language turns towards Castruccio's wife (Julia) in a number of innuendos referring to her affair with the Cardinal himself. Ferdinand, knowing of her indiscretion, mocks Castruccio mercilessly. This short taunt draws forth the theme of interior and exterior knowledge in the play; this foreshadows the suspicious nature of many of the characters (Ferdinand, Antonio, the Cardinal, Bosola, etc.) that

consistently resurfaces throughout the work. The interaction between Ferdinand and Castruccio is eclipsed by Antonio and Delio's discussion of the Cardinal and Ferdinand; they are "twins… / in quality" (1.1:163), and, as Delio then remarks, "the law to [them] / is like a foul black cobweb to a spider; / [they make] it [their] dwelling, and a prison / to entangle those shall feed [them]" (1.1:168-171). The two then draw the contrast between the brothers and their "right noble Duchess" (1.1:188), the Duchess of Malfi herself. Delio and Antonio soon after exit, with Antonio heading to see the Duchess herself (to ultimately be wed).

The Cardinal and Ferdinand's dialogue is again brought to the foreground, with Bosola entering (and the Cardinal exiting, to avoid "suspicion" of their collusion) for a commission from Ferdinand. He is told to spy on the Duchess, in the hope of her remaining chaste in her widowed status. Almost immediately into their conversation, Bosola asks, "whose throat must I cut?" (1.1:240). This remark fascinates; his role as a hired mercenary is starkly in contrast with the supposedly moral role that Ferdinand (should) assume (which, interestingly, Antonio has personified of yet). His placement in the struggle between the brothers and Antonio is introduced as shaky; his ethics don't fit perfectly in the binary of the two competing factions. In addition, Bosola's repetitive mention of "devils" (1.1:254, 1.1:264, 1.1:282) reinforces the connection between his actions for Ferdinand (and the Cardinal) and sinful, inappropriate action for members of high society. This reference to classicism is also a theme to consider later in the work, both in understanding Bosola's character and that of Antonio as well (originally the steward to the Duchess). Their dialogue closes with the Duchess and the Cardinal entering and Bosola exiting. Interestingly, this part of the scene presents the brothers "guiding" the Duchess towards a widower life, never to remarry. The brothers, however, both remark that her honor and status preclude her from engaging in another marriage. The rhetoric they use is full of sexist

language, but also foreshadows Antonio and the Duchess's private marriage "under the eaves of night" (1.1:309). Moreover, Ferdinand then continues, "such weddings may be more properly said / to be executed, than celebrated" (1.1:312-14). The Cardinal also adds, "the marriage night / is the entrance into some prison" (1.1:315-16). The brothers inflict each aforementioned punishment on their sister for her indiscretion as the play progresses.

This lengthy scene closes with the secret marriage of Antonio and the Duchess, which itself is hastily followed by the Duchess's remarks of her impending pregnancy. Both her refusal of social constructs and interaction with her brothers forces Cariola (her woman-in-waiting, another interesting source of commentary on classicism) to conclude the scene by questioning, "whether the spirit of greatness or of woman / reign most in her, I know not, but it shows / a fearful madness; I owe her much pity" (1.1:494-496).

Act II

The opening of Act II introduces Bosola and Castruccio, and later an Old Lady, as figures in which Bosola himself can mock and criticize. In Castruccio, Bosola mocks his attempts to be "an eminent courtier" (2.1:1). In contrast, Bosola antagonizes the Old Lady for wearing makeup to cover her age. In both characters, Bosola wonders why they "do not loathe [themselves]" (2.1:39-40). Shortly after his long speech, the Old Lady and Castruccio exit, leaving Bosola to ponder the possibility that the Duchess is pregnant. He brings her apricots, thought to induce labor; his suspicions are immediately confirmed by the Duchess rushing off to her chambers, fearing that she is "undone" (2.1:152). The short scene closes with Delio recommending that Antonio claim that Bosola poisoned the Duchess with the apricots, rather than she entered labor.

The second scene opens with Bosola again on stage musing on the Duchess's "apparent signs of breeding" (2.2:2). The Old Lady enters, which sparks a second rant against her by Bosola, and women in general. He remarks, "the devil takes delight to hang at a woman's girdle" (2.2:22), again reinforcing the sexual subjugation of women and their supposed association with the devil (via their indiscretion). Their interaction is sidelined with the entrance of Antonio, Delio, Roderigo, Grisolan, and various officers; Antonio and Delio outwardly claim that there has been a robbery of the Duchess's jewels whilst they inwardly cover up for her labor by insisting that no one exits their chambers.

Scene three opens with Bosola stalking about the outside of the Duchess's chambers with a lantern in the hopes of discovering her truly in labor. His suspicions, however are not confirmed until the end of the scene; before he can reasonably conclude anything, Antonio orders him back to his chambers. Sadly, he drops an initialed handkerchief, detailing the horoscope of an infant just born (the Duchess and Antonio's son). The prophecy notes, "the lord of the first house, being combust in the ascendant, signifies short life; and Mars being in a human sign, joined to the tail of the Dragon, in the eighth house, doth threaten a violent death" (2.3:61-64). This finding is especially interesting considering the nature of the prophecy; the horoscope, which is used primarily to signify the hope and promise of life, is instead the primary piece of evidence that leads to the child's demise. In another vein, it is also fascinating to see that Bosola, though he confirms the existence of a child, does not immediately suspect Antonio to be the father. This may be read as a classist supposition that the Duchess wouldn't ever consider a liaison with her steward, and thus a reference again to the dichotomy that exists between Antonio's position and that of his new wife.

The darkness of the previous scene is in stark contrast with the fourth scene in Act II; focusing on the relationship between Julia and the Cardinal, it presents Julia's concern over the Cardinal's "constancy, because [she has] approved / those giddy and wild turnings in [herself]" (2.4:11-12). In other words, the Cardinal believes her concern stems from her own guilt over their affair. His language in the scene lacks a discernible concern for her fears, and instead he exits after insisting that she "still [is] to thank [him]" (2.4:36). In this way, Webster explores the power and gender dynamics prevalent during the period. The latter portion of the scene, however, presents Julia's other suitor (Delio) hoping for her good favor. The power dynamic is thrown in reverse from the Cardinal-Julia relationship, suggesting a malleable nature to sexual politics and desire.

The final scene of the act details the interaction between Ferdinand and the Cardinal upon discovering the Duchess is pregnant. The language that Ferdinand uses foreshadows the violent death he will order upon his sister and further reflects his dark and lustful character. The Cardinal claims that Ferdinand "fl[ies] beyond [his] reason" (2.5:46), suggesting the "palsy" (2.5:54) that Ferdinand will ultimately succumb to at the close of the play. The end of this act presents the primary problem of the play; Ferdinand will not rest until he revenges himself upon her sister's lover (husband) and ultimately her as well. In addition, the violence that Ferdinand hopes to inflict contrasts with the expression of frustration displayed by his brother. While Ferdinand focuses on harming the Duchess' corporal body, the Cardinal instead is concerned with "the royal blood of Aragon and Castille" (2.5:22). This motif again connects with not only the revenge tragedy trope of the play but also the classicism that connects itself with sin.

Act III

The third act occurs some immeasurable time later, only clear because the Duchess "hath had two children more, a son and daughter" (3.1:7). The scene opens with Delio's return from Rome; Antonio explains that common people view the Duchess as "a strumpet" (3.1:26), though the brothers are unaware still of her attachment to Antonio (or that she is married at all). Prior to the entrance of Ferdinand and the Duchess, Antonio speaks in a form reminiscent of Machiavellian discourse in his description of the brothers' desire for power (see lines 30-37). Ferdinand enters with the Duchess and immediately suggests Count Malateste as a future husband; however the Duchess insists on hearing the rumors spread through the court about her honor. Their brief dialogue is marked with an interesting irony; Ferdinand remarks, "how is't, worthy Antonio" (3.1:45), without realizing the connection that already exists between his sister and the gentleman. In this way, calling him "worthy" not only points to his value as a steward, but also the possibility that he may be the "worthy" suitor for his sister. Once everyone exits the stage except for Ferdinand, Bosola enters and informs the brother that the Duchess has produced three children (bastards, as he calls them), yet has no idea who the father may be. He "suspect[s] there hath been some sorcery / used on the Duchess" (3.1:63-64). Ferdinand, however, argues that neither "herbs or charms / can force the will" (3.1:72-73), and instead, the "witchcraft lies in her rank blood" (3.1:78). This is particularly fascinating because he is her twin brother; his blood and being are inherently and complexly tied to her existence. The scene closes with Bosola giving Ferdinand a key to the Duchess's bedchamber, though he refuses to reveal what he intends to do. Instead, he remarks, "he that can compass me, and know my drifts, / may say he hath put a girdle 'bout the world / and sounded all her quicksands" (3.1:84-86). Finally, Bosola notes that Ferdinand thinks too highly of himself, to which the final lines run in a similar vein to

Antonio's opening remarks. Ferdinand happily accepts Bosola's honest opinion in favor of the "flatterers" (3.1:90) who would otherwise agree to Ferdinand's own (bombastic) self-diagnosis.

The second scene of the act opens with playful flirting between Antonio and the Duchess, likely in her bedchamber. Their brief interaction is full of sexual innuendo and hints of prostitution and female temptation, particularly in the Duchess's line, "alas, what pleasure can two lovers find in sleep?" (3.2:10). Antonio teases Cariola about her single status, remarking on the nature of the relationship between ladies and their waiting-women; the power dynamics that Antonio hints at suggest a female hierarchy within the male-oriented patriarchy (see lines 45-47). Soon, Antonio and Cariola exit the bedroom, and Ferdinand enters, giving the Duchess the poniard (knife) with which he tells her to kill herself. He commands, "die then, quickly. / Virtue, where art thou hid? What hideous thing / is that doth eclipse thee?" (3.2:71-73). This line forces the viewer to question what notions of virtue represent. Moreover, the usage of "eclipse" foreshadows Ferdinand's descent into madness. This dramatic element is carried over later, with Ferdinand mentioning the "howling of a wolf" (3.2:88), again foreshadowing of Ferdinand's own end. Their dialogue concludes with Ferdinand discussing the loss of the Duchess's reputation; because she has "shook hands with reputation, / and made him invisible" (3.2:135-136), Ferdinand will never see her again. This part of the scene is fascinating because it raises questions about how the role of reputation and social status interact with sexuality (and sexual liberty). Once Ferdinand exits, Antonio and Cariola return, only to have Antonio soon disappear upon the entrance of Bosola. The Duchess quickly invents a story that Antonio has "dealt so falsely… in's accounts" (3.2:168), as a strategy that would allow him to disappear without suspicion (to Ancona, she later discusses with Antonio, where they will meet again). Once Officers, Bosola, the Duchess and Antonio are on stage, the Duchess (in what appears to the

viewer as a moment of comedy), confiscates all that Antonio has; in response, Antonio remarks, "I am all yours, and 'tis very fit / all mine should be so" (3.2:207-208). This moment of ironic comedy serves as Webster's means of reigning in the audience through his clever usage of the divide between interior and exterior knowledge. Following his departure, the Officers speak poorly of Antonio. Bosola, however, sings Antonio's praises. Moved by his speeches, the Duchess reveals that he is her husband; Bosola expresses his surprise and finally concludes by remarking that he is impressed by the Duchess's love for a man "merely for worth, without these shadows / of wealth, and painted honours" (3.2:280-281). Sadly, this scene concludes with Bosola lamenting on the "base quality / of intelligencer" (3.2:329-330) himself, though he is "certain to be raised" (3.2:332) in status, wealth, et cetera for his knowledge, and later action.

The third scene in Act III opens in the Cardinal's palace in Rome, with the Cardinal, and Malateste together while Ferdinand, Delio, Silvio and Pescara enter, apart. The group of four discuss how Malateste as a soldier avoids battles and takes great care of "his mistress' scarf" (3.3:24). This reference to Malateste's character hints at an effeminized nature, though he is a minor character with minimal development beyond this scene. Bosola soon enters and pulls the Cardinal and Ferdinand aside to reveal the Duchess's plan to travel to Ancona on a supposed pilgrimage. The scene closes with Ferdinand referring to Antonio as "a slave, that only smelled of ink and counter, / and ne'er in's life looked like a gentleman, / but in the audit-time" (3.3:70-72). This interesting and pointed classism is in sharp contrast with how Bosola and the Duchess perceive status.

The brief fourth scene presents the banishment of the Duchess, Antonio and their children from Ancona following the Cardinal's intervention with the Pope. In the background, various churchmen sing a sad, solemn hymnal that parallels the circumstances of the scene; part of the

hymn reads, “I alone will sing thy praises, / whom to honour virtue raises; / and thy study that divine is, / bent to martial discipline is. / Lay aside all those robes lie by thee, / crown thy arts with arms, they’ll beautify thee” (3.4:12-17). Much to be said on the nature and content of this hymn, much of which revolves around accurately characterizing virtue and truth. The ending of the scene, with two pilgrims discussing the events, presents a further layer of analysis; their view that “justice” (3.4:34) may not have been accurately or adequately served is reflected in their dialogue. Moreover, their concluding remarks, that “fortune makes this conclusion general; / all things do help th’unhappy man to fall” (3.4:43-44), insinuate that something dark will occur shortly. Living up to the expectation of the revenge tragedy genre, the closing of this scene certainly suggests something dark and terrible will occur shortly thereafter.

Scene five, the final of the act, occurs nearby to Ancona with the Duchess, Antonio, Cariola and their children lamenting over their banishment. Bosola soon enters with a letter from Ferdinand, asking for Antonio’s presence; his letter, however, is riddled with mortal threats, such as wanting “his head in a business” (3.5:28) and desiring “his heart than his money” (3.4:35-36). The Duchess easily sees her brother’s attempt to draw Antonio away, and “suspect[s] some ambush” (3.5:56). Bosola, on his departure, remarks that the refusing to attend to Ferdinand “proclaims [his] breeding” (3.5:52), another reference to the classism that has been suggested in earlier parts of the play. This particular moment, however, is extremely forceful because the accuser is Bosola; he is of lower social class himself, so the meaning behind his remark is augmented. Antonio and their oldest son abscond for Rome, narrowly avoiding the soldiers and Bosola who apprehend the Duchess and family. Bosola’s closing lines, upon capturing the Duchess, revolves around how actions over position determine a man’s worth through the usage of metaphor (a salmon and dogfish).

Act IV

Back in the Duchess's palace in Malfi, Bosola and Ferdinand discuss the Duchess's imprisonment. In a manner very similar to Vittoria's behavior in *The White Devil*, the Duchess exhibits "behavior so noble / as gives a majesty to adversity" (4.1:5-6). Upon hearing of her resilience, Ferdinand instructs Bosola to darken the room, so he may speak with her without breaking his vow to never see her again. In their interaction, Ferdinand accuses the Duchess of being "too much i'th'light" (4.1:42), prior to presenting the grieving Duchess with wax figures of her husband and children (made to appear dead). Ironically, the Duchess mentions that "it wastes me more / than were't my picture, fashioned out of wax" (4.1:63), which the figures are, though she is unaware. Following her exit, Ferdinand reenters; though Bosola pleads that he would "end here" (4.1:117) the torture, Ferdinand is determined to drive her to madness. The final interaction is rife with various thematic points of discussion: Bosola's appearance of a conscience (lines 134-137), the foreshadowing of madness in Ferdinand (line 130), and the role and function of madness itself in the work.

The lengthy, violent, and dramatic second scene of the act follows the first. It opens with Cariola and the Duchess discussing the madmen that Ferdinand as placed around her prison. The Duchess remarks, "I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow. / Th'heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass, / the earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad" (4.2:24-26). Her resiliency in the face of utter despair (her belief, at this point, is that her children and husband are dead) reflects an inner strength that appears to withstand even the torture her brothers inflict. Moreover, this strength is especially notable when considering that Ferdinand himself is driven to madness later in the work. A servant enters, and elucidates that Ferdinand desires to offer "some sport" (4.2:38) to the Duchess in the form of the various madmen. The various madmen

behave the part but are soon bade leave by the servant upon Bosola's entrance (disguised as an old man). He informs her that he is "come to make thy tomb" (4.2:112), though the Duchess counters that she is "the Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2:134). Bosola disregards her comment, and executioners enter with a coffin, cords, and a bell. Bosola remarks, "here is a present from your princely brothers" (4.2:157); this line is meaningful because it draws attention to the role of *both* brothers in the execution of their sister. Not only that, but the usage of "princely" is doubly satiric because it connotes nobility and virtue, both of which the brothers have seldom demonstrated themselves. When asked if she fears death, the Duchess responds, "who would be afraid on't, / knowing to meet such excellent company / in th'other world?" (4.2:202-204). Her belief is that her husband and children are dead and will therefore greet her in the afterlife; this knowledge doubles the potential empathy/empathic response because the audience is aware that her family is alive. The Duchess is strangled, and soon after Cariola is brought to the same fate. She cries out against the injustice in any way she can, by claiming that she is engaged, hasn't been to confession in two years, and she is also pregnant. However, these efforts prove fruitless. The implication here is massive; her possible reasons for salvation are disregarded completely, suggesting both an abuse of power and a lack of concern for traditionally important social norms. The children are also strangled, which itself appears to be overkill and dramatically shifts the viewer's perspective to a more sympathetic reading of the Duchess. Ferdinand, however, is unmoved by their murders, claiming, "the death / of young wolves is never to be pitied" (4.2:250-251). This line is ironic because of his transformation, in the coming scenes, into a madman who is likened to a werewolf. The notion that the children are "wolves" draws this concept to the front of the audience's minds. Later in the scene as well, another reference to wolves is made by Ferdinand, possibly about himself (line 301). Ferdinand reveals that he would

have preferred if Bosola had simply removed the Duchess (alive), though shows no remorse at the murders of Cariola and the children. Once Bosola asks for his reward, Ferdinand instead claims that he will "give thee a pardon / for this murder" (4.2:287-288) and commands him to "never look up [Ferdinand] more" (4.2:309). During his exit, Ferdinand claims that he will "go hunt the badger by owl-light" (4.2:326), a possible indicator of his coming madness. Following his exodus, Bosola confesses, "O sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps / on turtles' feathers, whilst a guilty conscience / is a black register" (4.2:347-349). The usage of color here is reminiscent of its role in *The White Devil*, and also reflects the blackness present in the souls of the brothers (see lines 314-315 for a great example, spoken by Bosola). Finally, the Act closes with Bosola expressing remorse (referring to Ferdinand as the "cruel tyrant" in line 364), and resolves to figure out a way to "speedily enact worth my dejection" (4.2:366-367), or gain revenge.

Act V

The Act opens with Antonio and Delio conversing on the possible reconcilement between Antonio and the brothers, though Delio warns that their kind gestures are merely "nets to entrap you" (5.1:5). Soon after, the Marquis of Pescara enters, prompting Antonio to hide and Delio to request a piece of Antonio's seized land. However, Pescara refuses Delio, only to immediately after grant Julia the same land. When confronted, Pescara replies, "it were not fit / I should bestow so main a piece of wrong / upon my friend; 'tis a gratification / only due to a strumpet, for it is injustice" (5.1:43-46). In this way, Pescara makes a pointed reference to how Antonio's land was unjustly taken from him; giving the unjustly-seized the land to Delio would therefore tarnish his reputation. The "gratification," Pescara argues, is only "due to a strumpet," meaning

Julia (as the strumpet) is lowly enough to garner the land. This itself draws an interesting point about social status, openly stating that as a whore, Julia is the lowliest of creatures. The scene closes with Pescara revealing that Ferdinand is "sick… of apoplexy; / but some say 'tis a frenzy" (5.1:58-59), effectively referencing the madness that is foreshadowing in prior acts. Finally, Antonio's resolve is to visit the Cardinal that evening and face whatever may come.

Scene two opens with Pescara conversing with Ferdinand's doctor about his condition; it appears that he suffers from lycanthropia, or as the doctor remarks, "in those that are possessed with't there o'erflows / such melancholy humour, they imagine / themselves to be transformed into wolves, / steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night, / and dig dead bodies up" (5.2:8-12). Ferdinand, Malateste and the Cardinal enter, with Bosola also entering separately. The doctor attempts to placate the solitary Ferdinand, but to no avail. Ferdinand, though clearly mad, remarks: "what I have done, I have done; I'll confess nothing" (5.2:52-53). This comment is quite vague, however it may point to the subconscious guilt Ferdinand feels in ordering his twin's execution. After he and the doctor exit, Pescara implores the Cardinal about the possible source of his madness, to which the Cardinal notes in an aside, "I must feign somewhat" (5.2:86), and continues on to characterize Ferdinand's malady as the result of an "apparition" (5.2:96) of their murdered sister. This concealment is indicative of his own role in the murder, further indicting the Cardinal to the audience. All other characters exit, save for Bosola and the Cardinal; the Cardinal, in another aside, remarks, "this fellow must not know / by any means I had intelligence / in our Duchess' death; for, though I counseled it, / the full of all th'engagement seemed to grow / from Ferdinand" (5.2:102-106). In short, the Cardinal then feigns ignorance of the Duchess's murder and instead offers Bosola any sum for the murder of Antonio (see lines 120-124). Bosola, however, upon the Cardinal's exit, notes that the he "breed basilisks in's eyes.

/ he's nothing else but murder" (5.2:142-143). Julia immediately enters with a pistol, demanding why he supposedly added "love-powder" to her drink (5.2:152). Bosola, after playing with Julia a bit, requests her to discern what troubles the Cardinal. Their interactions, however, revolve around sexist remarks; Julia makes the analogy of herself as a thief of a stone, one who ultimately receives the blame (see lines 186-194). Once Bosola hides, the Cardinal and servants enter. In an aside (interesting again how the audience knows more than few of the players), he reveals that she is his "lingering consumption: / I am weary of her, and by any means / would be quit of" (5.2:224-226). Julia questions what troubles the Cardinal, who at first is reluctant to reveal is part in the death of is sister, though he soon admits, "by my appointment the great Duchess of Malfi, / and two of her young children, four nights since, / were strangled" (5.2:264-266). After admitting as much, the Cardinal forces Julia to kiss a bible, though he has poisoned it; this is particularly fascinating to consider in relation with how religion, sin, and truth are intimately tied in the play. Performing what is supposedly a spiritual and purifying act is twisted by the Cardinal to ultimately yield murder and death. Bosola immediately enters, and confusedly remarks, "O foolish woman, / couldst not thou have poisoned him" (5.2:282-283), which itself is odd because Julia (the "foolish woman") is who was poisoned, rather than the Cardinal himself. Moreover, the Cardinal admits that Bosola "now knows [him] for [Bosola's] fellow murderer" (5.2:292). Bosola demands the bounty he "earned" for murdering the Duchess, though the Cardinal promises "honours" (5.2:300) upon the murder of Antonio as well. Once the Cardinal exits, Bosola's soliloquy revolves around his plan to save Antonio from "these most cruel biters, that have got / some of [his] blood already" (5.2:336-337).

The brief third scene opens with Antonio and Delio near the Cardinal's palace. The stage directions mention an "echo from the Duchess' grave" (5.3:*SD*). Antonio's resolve may be

summed in these dark lines referencing decay: “But all things have their end: / churches and cities, which have diseases like to men, / must have like death that we have” (5.3:17-19). The echo, interestingly, appears in this scene; her repetitions of Antonio’s words appear to carry meaning and prophetic power. Moreover, Antonio resolves to enter the Cardinal’s chamber and face what may befall him.

Scene four opens with the Cardinal, Pescara, Malateste, Roderigo, and Grisolan entering. The Cardinal insists that the four should not bother Ferdinand that evening, and convinces the other nobles to agree not to enter, not matter the sounds that emanate from his chamber. As the Cardinal speaks in another aside, he remarks, “About this hour I appointed Bosola / to fetch the body. When he hath served my turn, / he dies” (5.4:28-30), which Bosola overhears. Ferdinand enters and mumbles somewhat incoherently about strangling; Bosola, already paranoid, assumes that his “death is plotted” (5.4:38). Unfortunately, Antonio soon after enters (unbeknownst to Bosola) and is immediately and unintentionally stabbed. As Antonio dies, Bosola reveals the murders of the Duchess and his family, to which Antonio responds, “I would not now / wish my wounds balmed, nor healed, for I have no use / to put my life to” (5.4:61-63). The scene closes with Bosola instructing a servant to move Antonio’s body to Julia’s room.

The final scene of the act opens with the Cardinal pondering the nature of hell. One of his remarks, “how tedious is a guilty conscience!” (5.5:4) speaks to his pliant sense of morality and fickleness of character. In this way, his behavior may be read as sociopathic. Bosola soon enters, and announces his intention to murder the Cardinal. Naturally, the Cardinal cries out for help; however, his cries go unanswered by Pescara, Malateste, Roderigo and Grisolan because they presume the calls to be in regards to Ferdinand, and thus *should* be ignored. As the nobles debate whether to go see the situation, Bosola murders the servant, and stabs the Cardinal repeatedly.

Ferdinand enters, confused, and further stabs the Cardinal before dealing Bosola his "death wound "(5.5:*SD*). Bosola quickly kills Ferdinand, and his death-lines are: "My sister! O my sister! There's the cause on't: / whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust" (5.5:70-72). The nobles re-enter, and are shocked by the scene. Moreover, Bosola's speeches (lines 74-78 and especially 80-86) are particularly fascinating. In the Cardinal's dying breath, he also blames Ferdinand for his sister's death, along with the wounds that both he and Bosola have sustained. Though possibly noble to not "out" Bosola as the instigator of the scuffle, the Cardinal retains selfishness by throwing the blame on Ferdinand, rather than admitting to his own part in the violence. Bosola remarks that Antonio's death occurred "in a mist: I know not how; / such a mistake as I have often seen / in a play" (5.5:93-95). This line, coupled with Bosola's earlier remark about himself as "an actor" (5.5:84), are poignant references to a self-consciousness that the play appears to occupy. The play closes with the eldest son of the Duchess's marriage to Antonio entering, and the various nobles pledging to bestow him with honor "in's mother's right" (5.5:112).

Appendix C: *The Devil's Law-Case* Synopsis

Act I

The play opens with Romelio and Prospero mid-conversation, discussing Romelio's exploits at sea. This first scene is important, as we quickly see through the opening lines, for establishing the role of Romelio as rich, arrogant, and of the wealthy merchant class; his position is critical for understanding his motivations throughout the play. Romelio's disdain for the young Contarino, a nobleman whose is "a suitor to [his] sister" (1.1:27), becomes apparent, and hints at the complicating factors that drive his actions later in the play. This disdain, additionally, stems from a jealousy that he *himself* is not of the ancient gentry. He remarks that "'tis nought else / but a superstitious relic of time past; / and sift it to the true worth, it is nothing / but ancient riches" (1.1:33-36). Contarino enters and entreats Romelio for "[Jolenta's] worthy mother's and your fair consents" (1.1:85) for his intended marriage to Jolenta, Romelio's sister. Romelio, however, does not look upon the match favorably; because Contarino is not of the ancient gentry and as such able to raise *his* status, Romelio instead favors the older Ercole as a suitor for his sister. Though not directly stated, it becomes clear in this first scene that Jolenta herself is in love with Contarino as well. Moreover, this interaction foreshadows the complications that arise from the discovery that Jolenta's "worthy mother" Leonora is herself infatuated with Contarino. Romelio exits as Leonora herself enters, and Contarino inadvertently begins to woo her, with the innocent notion that he is flattering the mother of his would-be bride. Their interaction proves quite interesting; besides presenting worthy examples of flattery, it also references two aspects of London culture: "th'Exchange bell" (1.1:127) and "the New Burse" (1.1:132). Sadly, Leonora

misinterprets Contarino's flattery of Jolenta as self-directed and sets up one of the principle misunderstandings of the play.

The second scene features the audience's first glimpse at Jolenta, who has been the subject of much of the discussion in the first scene. She enters with Romelio and older Ercole, his intended suitor for her. The opening lines of this scene are quite significant; as Romelio mentions Jolenta's wedding clothes, she responds, "the tomb-maker, / to take measure of my coffin" (1.2:2-3). This reference directly connects with the ideas presented in both *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, as in both works the betrothals of major characters lead to slaughter. With this in mind, these lines prove ominous. As the scene progresses, another important dynamic of the play emerges, with Romelio questioning, "have I any interest in you?" To which Jolenta replies, "you are my brother" (1.2:33), pointing to a possible incestuous motif in the work (this is reinforced later in the scene when Jolenta refuses Ercole's hand, yet takes Romelio's, lines 98-102). Both Romelio and Leonora later push Jolenta towards Ercole's suit, though she does not consent to it. Everyone but Jolenta exits soon after, with her servant Winifred placed to prevent her from seeing Contarino. Winifred, however is sympathetic to the girl and instead allows the two to meet. The lovers embrace, and the scene ends shortly following. Besides the aforementioned action, new motifs arise. A large number of references surrounding lawyers and legal jargon reinforces the formalized aspects of the play, possibly in order to draw attention to the hypocrisy and ridiculous role of the court in interpersonal discourse that was occurring in England at the time. In addition, another incestuous reference is presented, strangely by Contarino, at the close of the act: he remarks to Jolenta that Romelio, her brother, "is part of yourself" (1.2:258), again drawing attention to the relationship that is emerging between the two characters. This also is a pointed reference to the power that Romelio wields

over his sister's head; as the head of the house (with his father dead), he becomes both her father and brother, distorting the relationship that *should* exist between the siblings.

Act II

The second act opens with the introduction of a sub-plot; the Spanish judge Crispiano, with the help of Sanitonella, has arrived in a merchant's disguise to spy on his son, Julio, who has been "spending [money] riotously" (2.1:26-27). The interaction between Crispiano and Sanitonella is telling because they discuss the role of the lawyer in a sexualized context. Romelio and Julio enter together, along with Ariosto and Baptista. Crispiano (in disguise) and Romelio are introduced, and Ariosto and Julio soon get into a (humorous) quarrel, revolving around Romelio's actions; he has been exploiting Julio by encouraging him to spend money he does not have. Ariosto warns Julio to "take heed of [Romelio]… there has been gold conveyed beyond the sea in hollow anchors" (2.1:192-194), indicating that Romelio's business ventures are not as trustworthy as they appear. Soon after, Ariosto, Sanitonella, Crispiano, and Romelio exit, with Ercole entering to speak with Julio and Baptista (and soon is followed by Contarino). Contarino enters and immediately confronts Ercole about the nature of his relationship with Jolenta. The two settle on a duel, though Ercole remarks that Leonora motivated his design on Jolenta (lines 256-258), which is of interest because he also claims that "[Romelio] had no hand in't" (2.1:252). In addition, Ercole notes that Contarino has "not appareled [his] fury well; / it goes too plain, like a scholar" (2.1:270-271). This line suggests a superficiality or weakness in Contarino's affections for Jolenta, which are in direct contrast with his actions earlier in the play. The scene also makes several references to "the Italian," which points towards an otherness, a characterization also present in Webster's other works (see particularly lines 243-246 and 285-

288). The exchanges regarding Italianate characters also reinforce the aggressive, more bestial nature of Italians that various critics have noted throughout Webster's works. The scene itself closes with the two suitors agreeing to a duel for Jolenta's hand.

The brief second scene is the actual duel between Contarino and Ercole; in it, Contarino clearly wounds Ercole more than he receives blows in return. Both men are severely hurt, however, and the scene closes with their discovery by Romelio, Prospero, Baptista, Ariosto and Julio. The gentlemen remark that "there are none love perfectly indeed, / but those that hang or drown themselves for love" (2.2:40-41).

Scene three opens with Romelio and Ariosto in discussion regarding the nature of cuckoldry and wives. Interestingly, their conversation revolves around the intersection of married wives and the law, drawing analogies between the unfaithful wife and the lawyer (and his possible associates). Besides this topic, Ariosto attempts to draw Romelio's attention to the news of his failed trading ventures, with three (poorly named) ships lost at sea. Instead of listening to the wiser lawyer's counsel, Romelio brushes his assistance off, and instead is aggressive and rude. Leonora enters, and news is brought forth of the duel between Contarino and Ercole, though both are reported to be "slain in single combat" (2.3:86). Leonora remarks that she is "lost for ever" (2.3:86), a clear reference to her love for Contarino, though her comment is not understood by the other characters. Contarino's will names Jolenta as his heir (thus giving Romelio another reason for desiring Contarino dead), though Prospero shortly after enters and reveals that both men are alive. Romelio comments, "Living? The worse luck" (2.3:142), because he hopes to prosecute Contarino for the murder of Ercole. Romelio then immediately sets out to see Contarino with the intention of murdering him to compensate for his losses at sea.

The final scene of the act opens with Ercole, two Monks, and Capuchin; the gist of the dialogue revolves around Ercole's desire that Contarino and Jolenta be allowed to wed. This is complicated, however, because he also requests, "continue the report of my death" (2.4:13); his being dead results in "the law strictly prosecut[ing Contarino's] life / for your murder" (2.4:24-25). The conundrum of the play is thus introduced, along with an interesting close: Ercole knows "the guilt of this lies in Romelio. / And as I hear, to second this good contract, / he has got a nun with child" (2.4:38-40). This information sets up the pandemonium of the later acts.

Act III

The opening scene of Act III is a short interchange between Ariosto and Crispiano, in which the misogyny of the time shines through. Both gentlemen abuse the nature of wives thoroughly, with Crispiano finally remarking that he has "vowed / that I will never sit on the bench more, / unless it to be to curb the insolencies / of these women" (3.1:25-27). The scene closes with Ariosto replying that his "place will not long be empty" (3.1:28-29); the foreshadowing of the trial scene is quite obvious here, connoting that the "women" that Crispiano will try in court will shortly be present (Leonora). The scene draws legalese speech into the conversation surrounding the manipulations of women, thus likening their position to a devil (an interesting parallel in many of Webster's works).

Romelio enters in the second scene in the habit of a Jew; he remarks that he "could play with [his] own shadow now, / and be a rare Italianate Jew" (3.2:2-3). This remark connects back with the idea of otherness, specifically Italian, which Webster uses to present his characters negatively. Romelio also references Turks (line 13), along with politicians (line 15), reinforcing the otherness the Italianate Jew exudes. Two of Contarino's surgeons enter, and reveal to

Romelio that Contarino is in failing health. Again, Jolenta is named his heir; placing this comment here reinforces the clear motive for the actions Romelio takes following this interchange. His design is to murder Contarino for his money. To gain admittance to Contarino's chamber, Romelio attempts to bribe the surgeons: "If you will seriously mind your own good, / I am come about a business shall convey / large legacies from Contarino's will / to both of you" (3.2:34-37). Romelio requests a private audience with Contarino, to which the surgeons utter that they "will not trust this Jew" (3.2:69). Though Romelio's design is so clearly colored with ill intentions, the reactions of the surgeons to not trust "the Jew" may also be indicative of a prejudice against religious otherness. Romelio, once alone, validates the fears of the surgeons by stabbing Contarino in his wound. However, instead of effectively murdering Contarino (and thus making it seem as though it was the fault of surgeons, or the wound itself), the "steel has lighted in the former wound, / and made free passage for the congealed blood" (3.2:148-149), and thus Romelio's "intent to kill [Contarino] should become / the very direct way to save his life" (3.2:153-154). The surgeons catch Romelio in the act and force him to buy their silence. The scene closes with the surgeons vowing adequately to care for Contarino.

The final scene of the act opens with Jolenta and Romelio; after stabbing Contarino (and thus believing him dead), Romelio informs his sister of his death. Though he presents Contarino's death as trivial, Romelio needs Jolenta's help for a plot that he hopes will "breed, / out of the death of these two noblemen, / the advancement of our house" (3.3:19-21). Even in the face of Contarino's death, Romelio thinks only of profit and personal advancement. To this proposal, Jolenta replies, "O take heed, / a grave is a rotten foundation" (3.3:21-22). This line is quite important, especially considering her earlier remark that linked marriage with death; the image of putrefaction in intricately tied to intrigue, attempts at accruing wealth, and intimacy

(using Jolenta as the object). Romelio's plan, as he presents it, is to have Jolenta claim to "have issue by Lord Ercole" (3.3:28), though she protests herself a virgin. To achieve the proposed claim to Ercole's wealth, Romelio remarks that, "with a little dispensation, / a money matter" (3.3:48-49), he will effectively alter Ercole's will. This strategy clearly reflects the greed Romelio personifies, but more importantly it presents the notion that individuals with wealth may not be subjected to the same social laws that govern "normal" society. Instead of agreeing to the plan, Jolenta instead tests her brother by claiming that she is truly carrying Contarino's child; she reveals her awareness that Romelio seeks "to poison [Jolenta's] fame" (3.3:79). At this moment, Jolenta reveals her trick, from which Romelio quickly alters course, instead claiming that Contarino instead is in love with Leonora. His description of their plans to be together "living all three together in one house" (3.3:102) convey an incestuous relationship between Contarino and Leonora, and ultimately Jolenta agrees to pretend to be with child. Before she exits, Jolenta and Romelio spend time elucidating the fallibilities of women, likely highlighting Webster's own perspective on the behavior that wives demonstrate. This likely reflects Webster's desire to convey the weaknesses of women and is reinforced by Romelio's soliloquy after her exit; he remarks, "oh jealousy, / how violent, especially in women, / how often has it raised the devil up / in the form of a law-case" (3.3:188-191). These lines are doubly significant, pointing to the supposed emotionality of women while highlighting the connection between the law and jealous women. By presenting the two themes in the singular quotation, Webster reinforces the perception of women as emotional and capable of being objectified (this is interestingly touched upon in Romelio's comment on lines 221-225). Leonora enters during Romelio's soliloquy, and he reveals that he has murdered Contarino to advance his plot. Following his exit, Leonora's soliloquy presents her anger towards her son, and reveals her plot

to claim that he is a bastard in order to punish him and ruin his reputation. Her speech is fascinating in that it presents various references to animals and madness; Leonora "has a strange noise in [her] head" (3.3:264), and actually compares herself to various creatures, connoting a self-awareness of her anger. Moreover, the self-references to animals reinforces Webster's presentation of women as more bestial than man, itself a commentary on the function of women in society. Ercole and Capuchin enter, with Ercole hiding (with plans to reveal himself at the proper moment) when Capuchin approaches Leonora. He believes Contarino to be dead, and upon revealing that Ercole is living (and thus comes forward), Leonora comments on the complex circumstances of Ercole supposedly getting Jolenta "with child" (3.3:309). However, Ercole correctly asserts that the child must be by Contarino, though he will gladly pretend to be the father, because he "loved [Jolenta] 'bove the world" (3.3:313). Once the men leave, Leonora reveals her plot to "poison" (3.3:382) her son in open court. The ending to the act introduces the court scene that soon follows and also references the actors as actual parts in the play. By using language such as "here begins / my part i'th'play" (3.3:350-351), Webster draws the audience back, and removes them from the actions that occur *within* the work. Moreover, Leonora's plot revolves around the notion of dependency; with his ships lost at sea, Romelio is thus reliant on his family for income. By challenging his right to such wealth, Leonora seeks to cut all monetary obligations to Romelio and therefore leave him to fend for himself.

Act IV

The fourth Act opens with Leonora, Sanitonella, Winifred, a Register, and Ariosto entering. The short first scene revolves around the role of women in the court; the gentlemen of the scene all lament on the fallibilities of females, and more particularly, how the law is used to

achieve their “mad” goals. The scene concludes with Contilupo, another lawyer, remarking, “’tis a case shall leave a precedent to all the world. / in our succeeding annals, and deserves / rather a spacious public theatre / than a pent court for audience; it shall teach / all ladies the right path to rectify their issue” (4.1:97-101). Not only does this scene speak directly to the perceived weaknesses of women, but it also lays the motivations for the following scenes as presentations of exemplary actions to be taken when women need a path to “rectify their issue,” or rather, give women recourse when using a pregnancy to glean money from a supposed father.

In the actual court scene, Ercole, Contarino, and the surgeons enter the courtroom in various disguises. Early in the scene, the audience learns from Contarino that under Romelio’s instruction, “her brother / is marrying the infant [Jolenta] goes with, / ‘fore it be born; as, if it be a daughter, to the Duke of Austria’s nephew; if a son, / into the noble ancient family / of the Palavafini” (4.2:61-20). In this way, Romelio’s drive for wealth and status are again highlighted. Various judges and lawyers enter the courtroom, and it is revealed that Leonora has brought a suit against Romelio for the legitimacy of his birth. She hires Contilupo to present her suit, and interestingly refers to “Romelio the merchant; [he] will name him to you / without either title or addition, / for those false beams of his supposed honour” (4.2:102-104). Stripping Romelio of his titles provides a sharp contrast with his aspirations for noble status, recognition, and respect—all attained through Jolenta. Contilupo claims that Romelio “is a bastard” (4.2:151), though she inadvertently claims that Crispiano is the father through her testimony (and that of Winifred) of her time when her husband is away. This claim is fascinating because it mirrors an actual Spanish case occurring in 1610. Following the lengthy oratory of Leonora’s adultery, Crispiano questions why she would admit to her fault in open court, thus drawing attention to the vindictiveness that motivates Leonora. Romelio accurately characterizes her: “O the violencies

of women! / why, they are creatures made up and compounded of all monsters, poisoned minerals, / and sorcerous herbs that grows" (4.2:290-293). This speech connects so clearly with the full title of the play: *The Devil's Law-Case Or When Women Go to Law, the Devil is Full of Business*. Additionally, it reinforces the sexist notions that the male characters of the play consistently define and describe. Following Winifred's interrogation, Ercole reveals himself (alive), and Contarino goes to do the same before the surgeons stop him. Ercole is immediately arrested for the murder of Contarino; this aspect of the play makes little sense, mainly because Contarino revealing himself would eliminate Ercole's arrest, and thus simplify the confusion that surrounds the duel and Jolenta's supposed pregnancy. The act closes soon thereafter with Romelio (with Julio as his second) and Ercole (with the still-disguised Contarino) planning to duel. This arrangement is quite paradoxical; the two suitors who once dueled themselves are paired against Romelio and Julio, though the duel would not need to occur had Contarino revealed himself in court. Ultimately Webster, in the last scene of the act, implements complex legal jargon in the context of an "issue" of pregnancy, marriage, and adultery to highlight how women function in the patriarchal legal and social system. In this vein, females become the source of many (if not all) legal issues. Thus, their role is defined negatively, as a liability, that inhibits the fluidity and functionality of modern society through their perceived interpersonal flaws.

Act V

This final act is opened by two of the leading ladies of the play, one of whom the audience is seeing for the first time. Jolenta and Angiolella, the pregnant nun, discuss their connected past. Jolenta remarks that they "were playfellows together, little children, / so small a

while ago, that I presume / we are neither of us wise yet" (5.1:2-4). Their conversation is brief, but touches on an important point: the status accompanied with being a "maid" in society (and thus, a virgin). Of note, once Angiolella laments that she wishes she were a maid again, Jolenta remarks, "I would never give great purchase for that thing / is in danger every hour of being lost" (5.1:20-21). In Jolenta's opinion, virtue (read: virginity) is not worth troubling oneself over. This modern opinion is rarely shown in Webster's work and presents an interesting counterexample to many of his other female leads.

Prospero and Sanitonella open the brief second scene, only to be quickly ushered out upon the entrance of Ercole and Contarino (still in disguise as a friar). In a personal aside, Contarino remarks that he needs to reveal himself, lest "all the blood which shall be shed tomorrow, / must fall upon my head" (5.2:17-18). When questioning Ercole about his dedication to Jolenta (pretending to father a child, marrying her, willingness to kill Romelio), he replies: "My love, as I have formerly protested, / to Contarino, whose unfortunate end / the traitor wrought" (5.2:27-29). His honorability here shines through, revealing that he is an exemplary nobleman, quite in contrast with Romelio. In this way, Webster highlights the divergence in class as potentially reflective in morality; even Contarino, who is by no means a beggar, is not immediately able to grasp at the nobility of Ercole's actions. Moreover, the next interchange is especially shocking as it again reinforces the incestuous motif that has emerged between Romelio and Jolenta; in her letter to Ercole, she lies and claims that the child she is carrying "was begot by her brother" (5.2:35). Though this is likely a metaphor for the plan that Romelio has "hatched," it still is interesting to hear her present the same vein of familial relations that Romelio himself is also privy to. The scene ends shortly thereafter, though Contarino has an interesting line, "Of my mother, I was thinking of my mother" (5.2:41), which appears

immediately following the revelation of Jolenta's letter. It is quite possible that this too is a guise for the care and love he feels for Jolenta, it may also reinforce this same incest the audience sees between Jolenta and Romelio.

The third scene opens with Winifred and one of the surgeons, discussing their (mutual) affections for each other. The meat of the scene revolves around the surgeon hoping to convey to Jolenta that Contarino is still living, though various obstacles are placed in the way of Winifred effectively conveying said message. Instead, she is sent to the Capuchin to reveal Contarino as alive, whereas the surgeon, for reasons quite unclear, dons the habit of a Jew to claim he was robbed and draws "all passengers" back. This scene sets up the final movements of the play, though the surgeon's costume seems somewhat out of place.

Scene four opens with Julio, Prospero, and Sanitonella discussing Julio's poor decision in seconding Romelio in the upcoming duel with Ercole and (the disguised) Contarino. Romelio and the Capuchin enter, and Prospero and Sanitonella leave, while the Capuchin, having received word from Winifred, has "come / to sound Romelio's penitence; that performed, / to end these errors by discovering / what she related to me" (5.4:43-46). In doing so, the Capuchin questions Romelio about his faith; through this dialogue, he ends up simply asking, "did you murder Contarino" (5.4:74) hopefully to mitigate the necessity of the impending duel. Their discussion veers towards decay and putrefaction. The words "feed" and "hunger" appear multiple times, connoting that death may be "the great devourer" (5.4:89). These lines (particularly 81-104 and 136-138) are especially important because they connect deeply with both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*; the imagery of "feeding" on the dead connects with Webster's broader fascination with putrefaction and how the body is feeble relative to the power of death. Leonora enters with two coffins (for Romelio and Julio), both reinforcing the impending doom of the two

gentlemen, while strengthening a connection with putrefaction. The scene ends with Julio uneasy and Romelio appearing confident in their impending duel.

The penultimate scene opens with Capuchin revealing to Leonora that Contarino is alive, and involved in the duel. The two are locked in a small, elevated room by a window, with no ability to stop or interact with the various duelers or lawyers below.

The final scene of the play opens with the Marshal, Crispiano, and Ariosto as judges of the duel. Romelio and Julio enter from one side of the area, whereas Ercole and Contarino (still disguised) enter from the other; their duel begins, though interestingly the Herald officiating speaks in French. This may be a cultural aspect of Italy at the time, or may point to another, deeper meaning on Webster's part. Eventually, Leonora and the Capuchin break from their holdings and stop the duel, revealing that Contarino is alive (and thus he finally reveals himself), leading to a moment between him and Ercole. Paradoxically, Contarino remarks to Leonora, "and to you, dear lady, / I have entirely vowed my life" (5.6:25-26). This line may be read in two ways; on one hand Contarino may simply be thankful that he has survived the duel, yet on the other, it may be an offering of marriage. Scholars are somewhat split on the actual meaning of this passage, though it seems most plausible that it should be taken as merely an expression of gratitude. Stranger still, Jolenta enters dressed as a Moorish nun, Angiolella enters veiled, and the surgeons enter with one dressed like a Jew. The meaning behind their disguises is quite unclear, though it highlights the ridiculous nature of the disguises in the play. Shortly thereafter, Ariosto takes control of the scene, ordering Romelio to pay Julio the money he owes and to marry Angiolella. He forces Angiolella, Leonora, and Jolenta, "for their vows' breach unto the monastery, / shall build a monastery" (5.6:85-86). Lastly, the surgeons, "for concealing Contarino's recovery, / shall exercise their art at their own charge / for a twelvemonth in the

galleys" (5.6:87-89). These commands are quite strange; requiring Jolenta to help build a monastery when she has broken no laws seems out of place, though may be reflective of the general attitude towards women in the play. The final lines are also interesting: "of these events, since that these passages, / which threatened ruin, built on rotten ground, / are with success beyond our wished crowned" (5.6:91-93). Though there are some minor conclusions to the play, there remain major questions unanswered: Does Ercole or Contarino end up with Jolenta? Why does Contarino mask his identity for so long? What of Angiolella's status as a nun? Overall, the play, though fascinating, does not appear to provide a strong conclusion in any particular direction.