IMAGE PATTERNS

IN

WEBSTER'S

DUCHESS OF MALFI AND WHITE DEVIL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter I: Simple Imagery	6
Chapter II: The White Devil	28
Chapter III: The Duchess of Malfi	47
Conclusion	63
Appendix I	71
Chart I: Animal Imagery in The White Devil	71
Chart II: Animal Imagery in The Duchess of Malfi	72
Chart III: Repeated Plant Imagery	73
Appendix II	74
Significant Images and Sources	74
Notes	77
List of Works Consulted	82

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to prove that there is a pattern in Webster's use of imagery, at least in the two great plays. The pattern takes the form of a consistent image for an idea or theme; a consistent image representing a relationship (between the Duchess and Antonio, for example); or a consistent comparison between a state of mind and something more tangible. Even a casual reader of Webster would, I think, notice that there is a great deal of imagery present in his plays, but the purpose of this paper is to show that there is a pattern present, not merely to enumerate images.

Webster uses every trope occasionally, but he seems to prefer the simile,[1] a figure that is readily loosened from its matrix. When Cariola says that the Duchess looks "like some reverend monument / Whose ruins are even pitied" (IV, ii, 33-34),[2] the image is easily picked out. Webster's poetry, in general, has a more knotted character. A typical passage of Webster's imagery, involving the usual complexities, and showing the usual tangled quality, occurs when Bosola captures the Duchess. All that is required for the plot is that they greet each other with suitable words of a mocking and fearful nature, but note how complex is the imagery:

Bos. . . . you must see your husband no more—
Duch. What devil art thou, that counterfeits heaven's
    thunder?
Bos. Is that terrible? I would have you tell me
    Whether is that note worse that frights the
    silly birds
    Out of the corn, or that which doth allure them
    To the nets? you have hearken'd to the last
    too much.
Duch. O misery! like to a rusty o'ercharg'd cannon,
    Shall I never fly in pieces? come: to what
    prison?

(III, v, 99-106).

As far as plot goes, all the conversation needed in this situation is the first line and half the last. But the Duchess, in addition, compares Bosola to a devil, and his voice to thunder; she compares herself to a rusty cannon laden with miseries; Bosola calls himself a whistle of two sorts and the Duchess a bird either to be caught or scared away. A few lines later the Duchess compares herself to "Pheasants and quails", which men preserve "when they are not fat enough / To be eaten" (120-121). When these few lines contain so many images, how is one to study the poet's art?

A computer might help to find repeated words. There are, for example, over one hundred and thirty references to animals in the plays and presumably a machine could locate these. But this procedure does not help to reveal a pattern within the animal references; nor does it help when an image is merely implied. The famous line "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young" (IV, ii, 264), for example, does not in itself contain an image,[3] but as we shall see the

verb "dazzle" does form the zenith of a continuing comparison between sight and real knowledge.

The method I have in fact used to find the patterns of imagery present in the plays is one partly impressionistic and partly mechanical. I began by reading the plays many times. It became obvious that certain ideas recurred: the poisoned water imagery in The Duchess of Malfi, the references to horsemanship in both plays, and the fact that all of the villains in The White Devil were called natural cataclysms of some sort. Then I attempted to collect rigorously and with as little thought as possible, reiterated images. Finally I synthesized the reiterated images into what I have called patterns or clusters, when one comparison is maintained throughout the play. In my study of The Duchess of Malfi, I noticed that even the clusters were patterned. Lust is referred to as a fire, for example, but frost means chastity or death, and the complete pattern is fire/lust and frost/chastity.

By showing that there are patterns present in the imagery of the plays, I hope to show Webster's art to be more praiseworthy than some critics have found it. Dent's opinion that Webster "thought the resulting poetry, especially in its imagery would sound impressively 'original' to his theatre audience"[4], with its implication that the imagery which is found in the plays is found in the sources and added indiscriminately as part of Webster's borrowing, is just not true.

Even if three quarters of Webster's plays could be traced to his sources (a hope expressed by Dent), I suspect that careful comparison of the source and the play would show that the significant word is often changed, or the idea slightly modified, so that the image presented fits an overall scheme of Webster's for the play as a whole.

In the first part of this paper, I shall attempt to show that there is a pattern in the many references to animals and plants in both plays. Then I shall make a brief analysis of one series of images which compares sexual powers to horsemanship. An examination of the horsemanship imagery will, I hope, convince the reader that Webster is capable of making an extended comparison at least in one part of one play. After these examples of what I have chosen to call "simple" imagery, the following two chapters will discuss what I have found to be the patterns of imagery in The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi.

In The White Devil the image patterns are based primarily on a conflict between appearance and reality, a juxtaposition obvious in the play's title. A comparison between fair show and foul reality is at the root of most of the imagery in the play. In The Duchess of Malfi, however, the patterns are more complex. The relationship between Antonio and the Duchess is, for example, compared to a building made by the two lovers; after they are separated, any references to the affair, or even to the Duchess herself,

become comparisons to a ruined building. In the second play, the clusters are paired; lust reminds the reader of its opposite, chastity, or death; what Antonio and the Duchess have built is later "ruined". All of the significant patterns are of this double-edged nature. On the other hand, despite the sophisticated image patterns in the play, I can find no over-all image in the play which reveals a theme, although one might be implied in the black/white nature of each of the image clusters.

In the conclusion to the paper, I shall attempt to disprove Dent's implied claim that most of the imagery in the play came from Webster's sources, by taking a specific example, and showing that the word which makes the passage part of the image cluster is changed from the source. Finally I shall attempt to explain the purpose of a study of imagery in plays which were written to be performed. Even if their current form contains "diuerse things Printed that the length of the Play would not beare in the Presentment", is it reasonable to consider complicated patterns in the imagery of The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil? In my opinion, yes.

CHAPTER I

SIMPLE IMAGERY

> O, let us howl, some heavy note,
>   Some deadly dogged howl,
> Sounding as from the threat'ning throat
>   Of beasts, and fatal fowl!
> As ravens, screech-owls, bulls, and bears,
>   We'll bill and bawl our parts,
> Till irksome noise have cloy'd your ears
>   And corrosiv'd your hearts.
>
> (The Duchess of Malfi IV, ii, 62-70)

Before examining the patterns of imagery present in both The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, I shall consider some of the simpler kinds of imagery in the plays. Many critics have noticed Webster's numerous animal images; this imagery merits the first attention if only because it is so often noted. Next I shall attempt briefly to analyze the references to the plant world, since these references too are often pointed out as examples of Webster's imagery. Both of these kinds of imagery are, I believe, not very significant in Webster's overall plan for imagery, but they are present at the surface of the plays, and therefore ought to be discussed. The chapter will end with a detailed look at a series of images relating to horsemanship; a series which is fairly well developed in the plays. Once this less sophisticated imagery has been examined, the succeeding chapters will deal with the larger systems of imagery in each play separately.

I have chosen to deal with the imagery of the natural world and the series which relates to horsemanship separately from the detailed study of the two plays because of the effect of this imagery on the reader. In contrast to the imagery to be discussed later, the animal imagery is not as evocative in its effect on the audience as the more complicated series of images are. To some readers the animal imagery will suggest a kind of background for the plays' events; like Rupert Brooke, they will see the world of the play "full of the feverish and ghastly turmoil of a nest of maggots"[1] because of the continual reference to violent or repulsive animals. But the world picture thus formed is not a helpful one to the reader—instead of explaining the world, or causing us to examine it, this imagery gives us a vivid but fixed picture. We are like the man who said he had forty years' experience, but really only had one year forty times; we accept the picture because of the number of times it is drawn but we do not think about it. The plant imagery, in my opinion, is even more local in its effect. Except for three plants whose names seem to bear the same connotations throughout the plays, the references to plants are used for a momentary effect. Valuable as a temporary comparison may be at a particular point, it cannot produce echoing responses in the reader.

The more complicated patterns of imagery, especially in The Duchess of Malfi, do not limit our minds. We can use

the patterns which are built up by consistent imagery to give reasons for events, or motives for characters. We could say, for example, that Ferdinand has been shown to be in love with his sister by the fire/lust—frost/chastity series of images; we could account for Monticelso's and Francisco's absence in the final holocaust by noticing a theme which is almost entirely revealed by a series of images.[2]

In the horsemanship series we can perhaps see a use of imagery which is half way between simple and complex. Webster has suggested certain things about some characters by means of a series of allusions to the skill of the character in riding a horse. These comparisons are not as widespread in either play as are the image patterns; nor does the horsemanship imagery bind the play as a whole together.

"Simple" imagery, by this definition, does not have the far-flung effects of the more complicated patterns. Webster being a competent poet and a sometimes striking dramatist, even the simple imagery, however, has some pattern, and is put to some use.

According to one tabulator,[3] one image in every seven in Webster's work has to do with the animal world. Such a marked overbalance has been noted, as one might expect, by Webster's critics; often, it is the only quality of Webster's imagery that is noted. M. C. Bradbrook, for example, in a general analysis of Webster's two plays, counts up "more than a hundred" animal references in The White Devil, and comments:

> The effect is of course to reduce man to a brutish level: they [the animals] are nearly always contrasted for some repulsive quality, though sometimes (as in the images of caged birds) for their helplessness.[4]

Mere numbers is not the most significant of characteristics; it is interesting to note that Spurgeon,[5] listing images in Shakespeare's Hamlet shows that about one in ten has to do with animals (references to nature are more frequent, and "disease" images only one in fifteen). And yet the animal references are not the most important ones in that play. Neither are the obvious animal comparisons the essence of Webster's imagery.

A close look at the animal references in The White Devil[6] shows that although there are frequent comparisons to animals, Brachiano is the character most often compared, and Flamineo is the person who uses comparisons of this sort most frequently. The reason for the former's pre-eminence is that he is the central character in the play; despite the title, and the modern concentration on Vittoria as the main character, what theme there is depends on an exposition of his life. The theme, and Brachiano's relation to it, will be discussed later, in the chapter on The White Devil.

Flamineo plays an important role in The White Devil. He is nearly always on the stage; his speeches often comment on the action; he even begins the action by bringing the Duke and Vittoria together. His position as commentator is obvious at the beginning; his attendance when Brachiano and

Vittoria are courting is near-voyeurism, though his running commentary on the action is quite usual—compare his comment on his (supposed) suicide as he lies "dying", and note that he is just as wordy when he really is dying. He comments: "I recover like a spent taper, for a flash / And instantly go out" (V, vi, 263-264). Perhaps Webster is milking the mock-suicide for its dramatic effect, but it is "just like" Flamineo to revive and talk. The reason, then, that Flamineo is the character to use the most animal references is obvious; he talks the most.

His naming of himself is apt: "dog", "wolf", "snake", "rich man's ape"—or, when he is caught by circumstances towards the end of the play, "caged bird". Because Flamineo wishes to succeed as a hanger-on, he calls himself various kinds of animals that are predators of man. He would like to be a rich man's ape, even if it means playing a wolf. Zanche and Lodovico, two of the darker characters, are named "wolf" and "raven" (the raven was the bird of ill-omen in Anglo-Saxon times; it foretold a carnage). Brachiano is a "cony" and a "ferret"; that is, he is both lecherous and treacherous. Marcello's naviete earns him the name of "goose". In the parable of the crocodile, and the bird in its jaws, Flamineo's interpretation makes his sister the crocodile, and certainly she can dissemble successfully; at the trial she makes a valiant showing; when she thinks she can talk Flamineo into killing himself she again shows her treachery.

Flamineo does not use these epithets indiscriminately, though their number might suggest that. He picks out for each person he names an animal whose most obvious characteristic is his opinion of the person named. The reader, or the audience, is offered, in this way, a convenient pigeon hole for almost every character.

Flamineo does not comment on Francisco or Monticelso in this way although he describes every other character as an animal of one sort or another (except his mother); perhaps this omission may be one reason why (although the brothers have good reason for their revenge) the final deaths of Brachiano and Vittoria appear to be engineered rather than integral to the plot. If Flamineo had commented on their unreasoning ferocity, or family pride, as an animal characteristic, we might be more prepared to accept them as capable of instigating the final chaos, but the character we remember is Lodovico. When one considers (in reading the play—the idea would not occur to an audience) how rarely Lodovico has been on the stage, it is strange that he seems a logical revenger. After his first explosive appearance in the first scene, he does not return until the middle of the third act—for one line (he is mentioned in Act II, Scene 1, and appears in the Dumb Show). Then he is seen briefly in Act III, playing melancholy with Flamineo. He is brought into the conspiracy in Act IV, and is in at the three deaths in Act V. He speaks less than one twelfth of the lines in the play.

And yet we are not surprised to find him the chief revenger. After all, he has been called a raven. But Monticelso and Francisco, although their royalty is pointed out ("lion", "hawk"), are given no names of ferocious animals. The animal imagery is largely used to give a convenient short summary of each character. Since Monticelso and Francisco are not characterized as ferocious beasts they almost appear innocuous. Until we start to think about the facts, we are almost persuaded that Lodovico is the person responsible for the murders. The animal imagery in The White Devil has thus helped to characterize each person in the plot; we respond to the characterization to some extent by using the comparison as a fact. In this play then the animal imagery has helped present a clear picture of each character in turn.

In The Duchess of Malfi, Webster's management of animal imagery has gained subtlely, as have most of his techniques. Once again, there are many comparisons between various characters and animals, but in this play, the characters are divided into two groups by the type of animal to which they refer, rather than just classified by a commentator for our edification. When Bosola or Ferdinand are speaking the animals referred to are repulsive, regardless of who is being named--"a dead pigeon", "lamprey" or the two basilisks. If the speaker is the Duchess, Antonio or Delio, however, the comparison is to "robin red breast and the nightingale" or "buntings" or a "cricket" (see chart II). When

the Duchess, Antonio or Delio speak of the three villians, even their villification is relatively mild—the worst the Duchess can say is "viper", or Delio, "spider". Even the wronged Antonio calls his arch-enemy merely a politic dormouse, and his pathetic enjoinder to his wife in Act III—

> . . . if I do never see thee more,
> Be a good mother to your little ones,
> And save them from the tiger: . . .
>
> (III, v, 84-86)

is only an oblique reference to the brothers; it may not be more than a rhetorical reference to the dangers of the world. In contrast, Ferdinand, Bosola and the Cardinal call themselves and each other, among other things, "basilisk", "scorpion", "fox", "cruel biter", "sheep biter", and "horseleech". Bosola and Ferdinand between them make over half the animal references in the play, and it is their constant use of repulsive animal imagery that has given the play its obvious character.

A more sophisticated use of imagery can be revealed by a study of Ferdinand and Bosola. The animals to which they refer are symtomatic (literally, in the case of the former) of their own natures. Ferdinand sees both himself and the Duchess as wolves; although he calls himself "sheep biter" once, he calls the Duchess a wolf three times and her children are her "cubs". But in the end, <u>he</u> is the wolf, "only the difference / Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside, / His on the inside" (V, ii, 25 ff). Webster has

added to the horror of the lycanthropia by preparing us for Ferdinand's specific type of insanity: the actual illness has been prepared for by symptoms throughout the play. As Flamineo says in The White Devil, "they that have the yellow jaundice, think all objects they look on to be yellow" (I, ii, 109-110). Ferdinand, who might aptly be called a wolf, sees wolves about him.

Bosola's case is less obvious. At the beginning of the play he appears to use ferocious or horrible images without any real cause. In the peculiar scene with Castruchio and the old lady (II, i) a parallel scene to the young lovers' marriage just preceding, Bosola works in "abortive hedgehog", "fat of serpents, spawn of snakes", "dead pigeon", man-shaped new-born "colt", "lamb", "fawn", and "goat", "ulcerous wolf", "swine", "lice, and worms". All this in a mere twenty-six lines. By late in Act IV, however, he is no longer the ranting, willing villain, eager to perform bloody tasks; he needs a disguise to return to the Duchess' presence. His change of attitude is reflected in his references to animals, as well as in his need for disguise. In Act III, scene v, when he captures the Duchess and her train, he refers to them ironically as birds:

> . . . you must see your husband no more— . . .
> Is that terrible? I would have you tell me
> Whether is that note worse that frights the silly birds
> Out of the corn, or that which doth allure them
> To the nets?
>
> (III, v, 99-104)

By the beginning of Act IV, Bosola admires the Duchess for her patience, calling her a mastiff (IV, i, 12). Throughout the scene (IV, ii) in which he acts as her torturer and confessor, leading her to save her soul by facing death, Bosola uses less repulsive animals. Compared to his previous ranting (for example, Act II, scene i), Bosola speaks mildly. The only frightening animals are mentioned by the masque of madmen, agents of Ferdinand.[7] Bosola refers to flies in a paper prison and to a lark in a cage, as a metaphor for the soul trapped in the body. When he repents of his murder (in the soliloquoy at the end of Act IV) he calls the Duchess a turtledove. His changed attitude to the Duchess is shown by his changed animal references; the animals he mentions now are less vicious. In Act V, however, as he avenges the Duchess by killing the brothers, his specific comparisons of the two to "basilisks" and "cruel biters" are typical of the man of blood he has again become.

Bosola appears to be an ambivalent character[8] in _The Duchess of Malfi_. Some readers might feel that his ambivalence is the result of poor characterization, but a cursory look at only one type of imagery shows that Webster has taken pains to present speech which is both characteristic of Bosola and changing as he changes. As Bosola becomes penitent or less violent, the kinds of animals to which he refers become less ferocious. He still uses many references to the animal world, however, and when he again becomes a man of blood, his animal references become more violent too. Thus, in _The Duchess of Malfi_, the

revenger who for one act pities his victim is allowed to show the pity he feels even while he murders her. Instead of revealing Webster's inept characterization, a look at the imagery of Bosola's speech shows the poet's consistency in using animal references. In this play, thoroughly bad characters use thoroughly vicious animals to explain their thoughts; the good people can hardly refer to an animal that is not like themselves.

Turning from the animal to the vegetable world, we note that The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi contain many references to plants, both general ("trees", "strong plant") and specific (the spring violet, "Heart's Ease"). In the former play, plants are named or referred to forty-eight times, and in The Duchess of Malfi thirty-four times. There is once again a marked difference between the two plays, however, in the way the names of the plants are used.

In The White Devil there are five passages in which plants are referred to at some length; these passages are the "yew-tree" dream (I, ii, 231 ff.), the mourning speech of Cornelia (V, iv, 66 ff.), a comparison between Vittoria and the fruits of Sodom and Gomorrah (III, ii, 63 ff.), Francisco's "flowery" letter to Vittoria (IV, ii, 25 ff.) and Flamineo's parable of the mistletoe (III, i, 46 ff.). There are no other extensive references to plants. The five passages, however, are very similar in one way: all are distinct from the rest of the play. Although Dent[9] finds no specific source for the pun, the letter, or the mistletoe

passage, in each case the writer's hand is so obvious in the poetry that the passage stands out from the play. The pun, for example, is worked over-time; having Brachiano interrupt—

Vittoria: . . . this yew.
Brachiano: That tree.
Vittoria: This harmless yew.

(I, ii, 238-240)

only underlines the joke, or the device. The letter is a good example of a piece written with conceits—in fact, it is so patently false, that Flamineo's comment, "a halter on his strange equivocation" shows him to be the shrewd courtier who knows all strategems; Brachiano's rage is another indication of his naviete. Only Brachiano could be taken in by such an artificial letter. Perhaps there might be a source for the first line and the couplet—"Nor for my years return me the sad willow: / Who prefers blossoms before fruit that's mellow?"—in an instruction book for writers of lovers' nonsense. The letter and the pun, though Dent can find no definite source for them, are not cases of plant imagery well-integrated in the play. One is overworked; the other probably has a source or is a parody of a type of writing.

One interpretation of Flamineo's rather obscure comments

. . . how shall we find reward?
But as we seldom find the mistletoe
Sacred to physic on the builder oak
Without a mandrake by it, so in our quest of gain.

(III, i, 49-52)

is that he feels that he and his brother are mistletoe (certainly they are parasites) on an oak (the great man he serves, Brachiano), and as in nature, mandrakes (evil or poisonous deeds) are to be expected close by. But these plants have common equivalents: mistletoe equalled parasite because it was the product of what it grew on; Gerard's Herball has this to say:

> [Mistletoe] hath not any roote, neither doth increase himselfe of his seed as some have supposed, but it rather commethe of a certaine moisture gathered together upon the boughes and joints of the trees, through the barke where of this vaporous moisture proceeding bringeth forth the Mistletoe.[10]

Mandrakes really are "deadly narcotic"[11] and when one adds all the superstition relating to them--their generation from the dripping of gibbets, their ability to make men run mad, and their horrible resemblence to men, (and thus their use as an aphrodisiac)[12] they could well stand for evil of a particularly dark and subtle kind. The "builder oak" is an almost proverbial epithet. The phrase is used, for example, in Spenser's catalogue of trees (F. Q. Bk. I, I, 8). Yew trees were emblematic of death.[13]

The three passages, the yew tree dream, the false letter and Flamineo's cynicism are all similar in being commonplace in their symbolism. The first two of the three are pointed out by the poet as artificial: in one he deliberately overworks a pun; in the other, the tripping couplets emphasize the falseness of the words (as do Flamineo's coarse

comments between them). In the mistletoe parable, Webster relies on traditional equivalents to complicate a rather trite piece of advice (which Flamineo has given before). All three passages are somewhat laboured. They rely on unimaginative connections between the plant and the object which is compared with it. The imagery here is traditional, and obvious.

The other two instances of extended plant imagery are the comparison of Vittoria to the ashy apples of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the keening of Cornelia in Act V. Dent[14] gives as a possible source of the Sodom and Gomorrah fruit comparison the Healey translation of The City of God (1610). In the brimstone sermons of the day the image would be a favorite one. The mourning speech of Cornelia is obviously an imitation of Ophelia's mad speech, "as all editors observe".[15] These two passages reveal Webster's use of plant imagery most clearly: when there is an extended comparison to plants, the passage can be easily detached from the surrounding poetry. In the biblical passage, which does give (at least to a modern audience, to whom the image is less familiar) a vivid impression of Vittoria, the lines are introduced quite formally—"You see my lords what goodly fruit she seems, / Yet like . . . " (III, ii, 63-64). Cornelia's dirge is an obvious change from her former speech. Although we can well imaging her saying prayers over a winding sheet for twenty years, we have never seen her use so many specific names of plants.

Since the scene, however effective it may be (perhaps because it reminds us of Ophelia), is out of character for Cornelia, the passage itself can be isolated from the rest of the play. Both of these passages, then, as well as the three previously discussed, are poorly integrated into the play.

In The Duchess of Malfi, all references to plants are scattered. Occasionally Webster uses plants as emblems—"My laurel is all withered" (III, v, 93), or even "the loving palms, / Best emblem of a peaceful marriage" (I, i, 485-486).[16] There is no person who uses plants in comparison more than others; nor is there any character specially noted as one kind of plant; there are no extended comparisons using plants. In fact the only pattern present is the repetition of the following five plants: plums/figs,[17] bay/laurel (often considered the same, says Ellacombe[18]), the cedar, rushes, and mandrake. ("Apricot" recurs also, of course, because Bosola uses it as a test for the Duchess' pregnancy.) In The White Devil too, Webster repeats the names of five plants: garlic (a symbol of lust), mistletoe, the yew, rushes, and again the mandrake.[19] Note that the mandrake, for subtle evilness, the yew or cedar, both connected with graveyards, and rushes, as a symbol of weakness are repeated in both plays. We may perhaps conclude that Webster finds these plants always equivalent to these things.

In summary then, Webster does not use plant imagery, however impressive it may be at the moment, in any over-all pattern. There are many references to plants in the two plays. In The White Devil any extended passages tend to be unintegrated. In The Duchess of Malfi there is no discernible pattern.

Webster seems to use, however, a few plants whose names connote ideas to himself, and also possibly, to his audience. Evidently the mere mention of "mandrake" implied poison, subtle evil, and the possibility of insanity, and because of the bawdy associations with the plant, lewdness. The use of the plant as an image produces a complex response because the mandrake had so much folk-lore connected with it. Reeds are traditional symbols for weakness; Tilley[20] gives several examples under his heading of "To lean upon (trust to) a broken Reed"; there is one from Erasmus, and one from Isaiah. Yews and cedars combined several contrasting ideas, as emblems: they represented strength, of an enduring sort; they were dark trees growing in church-yard grave-yards; the wood of the yew also made graves, since it was used to make bows. It is always impossible to tell how much of the connotation of a word is implied by the author, but since Webster always used the three plants consistently, he may have been attempting to use associations common to himself and his audience.

From images that may have a significance to the audience, a priori, let us turn to the series of images

relating to horsemanship, which at the beginning of the play are probably more personal to the poet than relevant for the audience. Is it really significant that Antonio wins a prize for his ability to manage a horse? Collecting passages within The Duchess of Malfi, the reader will at once see that there is some connection between a man's ability to ride a horse and his ability to be successful sexually. In The White Devil there is a passage which shows the obvious double entendre which is the basis of this series of images. At first Flamineo merely jokes bawdily before the trial (Act III, scene 1, 15-16) saying that whore-masters would be the best judges of his sister, because "none are judges at tilting, but those that have been old tilters". Then he and the lawyer engage in an interesting exchange about the French Ambassador:

> Law.: O my sprightly Frenchman, do you know him? he's an admirable tilter.
> Flam.: I saw him at last tilting, he showed like a pewter candlestick fashioned like a man in armour, holding a tilting-staff in his hand, little bigger than a candle of twelve i'th' pound.
> Law.: O but he's an excellent horseman.
> Flam.: A lame one in his lofty tricks,—he sleeps a'horseback like a poulter,—
>
> (III, i, 65-73)

Considering that poulterer (poulter) might be a synonym for whore-master, if poultry is a common term for loose women, one may see that this passage does make a linkage between sexual skill and riding a horse.[21] It contains a few phallic images as well. There is a somewhat similar passage in The Duchess of Malfi:

Ferd.: How do you like my Spanish jennet?
. . .
Ferd.: . . . he runs as if he were ballasted with quicksilver.[22]
Sil.: True, my lord, he reels from the tilt often.

(I, i, 116-120)

Castruchio, as his name implies, is impotent. He is also such a poor rider that Delio can say of him:

. . . if he had had a good back,
He would have undertook to have borne his horse,
His breech was so pitifully sore.

(II, iv, 54-56)

The more important characters are also classed as managers of horse. In The White Devil, for example, Flamineo is even called a "stalking-horse" by his brother (III, i, 35): this is clearly a euphemism for pimp. When the Cardinal asks Lodovico what he and Francisco are conspiring about, he facetiously replies:

Why, my lord,
He told me of a resty Barbary horse
Which he would fain have brought to the career,
The'sault, and the ring-galliard. Now, my lord,
I have a rare French rider.

(IV, iii, 92-96)

In fact, the subject of their conversation has been the murder of Brachiano. Bosola, another villain, has the official position of "provisorship of [the Duchess'] horse." A few lines after he is granted the position, Ferdinand tells Bosola that his job is:

> To live i'th' court, here; and observe the duchess,
> To note all the particulars of her'haviour;
> What suitors do solicit her for marriage
> And whom she best affects: . . .
>
> (I, 1, 252-255)

Bosola summarizes his position as "an intelligencer". Bosola is the provisor of the Duchess' horse, or, the supervisor of her lust.

Ferdinand, strangely enough, is not described as a rider at all. But throughout the play, of three times a horse is called for, three times it is Ferdinand who is calling for the mount. His reaction after confronting his sister is a very odd one: he does not stay at her court to witness her suicide, nor does he continue to spy to find out who her lover is. Instead, he rides away in great haste. By itself, this incident means little, especially since motives are often obscure in Webster's plays. But taken with all of the rest of the various riders, Ferdinand as a man who dashes off on a real horse seems different from the other male characters. He does not approve of the bawdy joke made by Silvio, either. Could Webster be suggesting that Ferdinand's sexual position is a very strange one? Ferdinand does not have any overt sexual encounters during the play; he is not rated in terms of horsemanship. He does, however, rush off on horses throughout the play, just as he reacts violently when the Duchess remarries. His need for physical action may reflect the necessary suppression of his sexual needs.

The series of horsemanship images does, in any case, help illuminate a statement of the Cardinal's about his sister. When told of her pilgrimage after the confrontation with Ferdinand, he exclaims, "Doth she make religion her riding-hood / To keep her from the sun and tempest?" (III, iii, 60-61) The Duchess is feigning a pilgrimage to prevent the consequences of her lust (her riding) from affecting her. This exclamation is impressive to the audience partly because, I suggest, it is part of the series on horsemanship.

But any analysis of the series on horsemanship has to be based on the comments by or on Antonio. He is, after all, the lover whose prowess begins the action. (Although the Duchess woos him on the stage, the steward is the first to bring up the subject of marriage.) At the very beginning of the play Bosola is presented as a melancholic, perhaps a future villain, but Antonio too is characterized, by the third line, as "A very formal Frenchman". In case this does not convey his prowess,[23] we are shown the man excelling at riding for the ring (note-ring) above the whole court. Even Ferdinand comments "You are a good horseman, Antonio" (I, i, 140). Later in the play, when Bosola suspects someone but does not know about Antonio, he warns the lover jealously:

> . . . I look no higher than I can reach: they are the gods that must ride on winged horses; a lawyer's mule of a slow pace will both suit my disposition and business: for mark me, when a man's mind rides faster than his horse can gallop, they quickly both tire.
>
> (II, i, 88-93)

In the context this comparison (at least from Bosola's point of view) refers to their jockeying for position at the Duchess' court. It seems to be a prophetic statement too, for it is followed immediately with the Duchess' first labour (which in turn first reveals her to be sinning). The comparison is apt, for it shows Antonio's sexual ambitions as well, even if Bosola does not mean to refer to it.

The most revealing passage is one in which Antonio is asked to comment on horsemanship. He replies:

> . . . as out of the Grecian horse issued many famous princes, so, out of brave horsemanship, arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind to noble action.
>
> (I, i, 143-146)

His first "noble action" after this speech is to describe the Duchess' family, and to praise her. The next time we see him, he suggests to the Duchess that she take a husband. From the brother's point of view, Antonio is indeed a Trojan horse: on the outside he looks so honest that the Cardinal rejects him as a spy in favour of Bosola; but he is the hidden betrayer of the Duchess' virtue, in the eyes of the brothers. Of the "sparks of resolution" more will be said in the chapter on <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u>. Antonio is the best rider in the play; he is the only successful lover. This fact, added to the other references to horsemanship, show that in <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u> at least, Webster has expressed an idea through a series of images, which (whether they are consciously noted by the audience or not) are related to one another.

In this chapter, some simple imagery has been analyzed. Even Webster's animal references, it has been shown, have some pattern and purpose to them, other than just that of bestializing the world of The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil. Webster's plant references are not as effective, in my opinion, because they are not well organized; except for the constant use of the yew, the mandrake and the rushes, Webster has not used plant imagery to help express his ideas as a whole, but only to make a temporary comparison. One series of images has been analyzed to reveal that at least for part of one play, Webster has consciously suggested an idea by the use of a series of images, making intermittent reference to a connection between horsemanship and lovemaking ability. In the next chapters, Webster's ability to express a theme by means of a series of images throughout a play will be examined in more detail.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WHITE DEVIL

Critics can be divided into two groups according to their analyses of The White Devil. Some, like J. R. Brown and Travis Bogard, find the play an exposition of "courtly reward and punishment", others, like B. J. Layman and Hereward T. Price, perceive the play to be on the subject of (fair) appearance and (foul) reality.[1] The advocates of the "White Devil" image as central to the play, like H. Bruce Franklin, naturally fall into the second category. The two groups are not necessarily exclusive since courtly reward always promises well but turns out badly; indeed courtly reward may be another example of fair show and false reality. This chapter will examine each of these themes in the light of the imagery of the play. It will conclude with an analysis of the play based on recurring images which seem to me to reveal a third theme. This theme is first revealed when Cornelia declaims:

> The lives of princes should like dials move,
> Whose regular example is so strong,
> They make the times by them go right or wrong.
>
> (I, ii, 286-288)

Cornelia means that the lives of great men provide guidance for their whole society. This statement is part of an idea which can be briefly expressed by saying that princes should

be above the storms of other men; if they are aloof, then "the times" are regular and fairly calm; if they are not, chaos results. The plot of The White Devil is, I believe, an example of what happens when a prince, Brachiano, becomes involved in the storms of life.

"Courtly reward and punishment" may be a theme of The White Devil. Certainly it is exemplified in the action of the play, and is commented on by nearly every character. Lodovico begins the comment: emerging from his trial as a banished man, he does not feel that his punishment is justified because, in his opinion, others are more guilty—specifically his lustful judge, Brachiano. Later on in the play, he says that kings give rewards "Not for desert so much as for their pleasure" (IV, iii, 87). Francisco comments on court justice too, more specifically:

> Your poor rogues pay for't, which have not the means
> To present bribe in fist: the rest o'th'band
> Are raz'd out of the knaves' record; or else
> My lord he winks at them with easy will,
> His man grows rich, the knaves are the knaves still.
>
> (IV, i, 83-87)

In the world of The White Devil, moreover, even the virtuous are poorly rewarded. Flamineo taunts his mother with the family's poverty which he says is caused by her virtue (or at least cannot be prevented by virtue). He makes the same kind of statement later to his brother:

> . . . thou art a soldier,
> Followest the great duke, feedest his victories,
> . . .
> Even with thy prodigal blood,—what hast got?
> . . .
> Thou hast scarce maintenance
> To keep thee in fresh chamois.
>
> (III, i, 38-45)

Isabella dwells on just rewards as well. She asks her husband, "Doth not my absence from you two months / Merit one kiss?" (II, i, 156-157). She receives in answer a curse on her bad breath! When her brothers return, and she is pretending to hate Brachiano, she exclaims "Are all these ruins of my former beauty / Laid out for a whore's triumph?" (II, i, 238-239).

Vittoria makes two speeches on the subject of rewards and justice. Her magnificent "whirlwind" speech, in which she heaps coals on Brachiano's head, explains clearly what her reward for the affair has been:

> What have I gain'd by thee but infamy?
> . . .
> What do you call this house?
> Is this your palace? did not the judge style it
> A house of penitent whores? who sent me to it?
> Who hath the honour to advance Vittoria
> To this incontinent college? is't not you?
> Is't not your high preferment?
>
> (IV, ii, 107-118)

According to this speech, she has gained the opposite of what she might have wished. Instead of a palace, (a place for luxury in its Biblical meaning) she is imprisoned in a convent; the advantage of knowing Brachiano has been to be publicly named a whore. In the final scene Vittoria's moving speech,

"O my greatest sin lay in my blood. / Now my blood pays for't." (V, vi, 240-241), echoes her first statement made to her mother " . . . If anything but blood could have allayed / His long suit to me,—" (I, ii, 292-293). Suits, payments and preferements all refer to a system of rewards and punishments.

Because Flamineo is hardly ever off the stage, and because he is the most consistent commentator on events, his words about courtly reward and punishment are the most extensive of all. At one point in the play, Flamineo gives "politic instruction" to Francisco (who certainly knows the system well). His cynical advice is "The duke says he will give you pension; that's but bare promise: get it under his hand" (V, i, 133-135). Unfortunately Flamineo has done nothing of the kind himself. He has acted as pandar for his sister—"I made a kind of path / To her and mine own preferment" (III, i, 36-37)—but he does not have enough courage to press Brachiano very far. Even the method of the parable is a little too near Brachiano's displeasure, for when Flamineo tells the tale of the crocodile and the bird (III, ii, 222 ff), he cannot admit that he is calling Brachiano an ingrate. He turns aside from the point of the story; far from forcing Brachiano to write a promise down, Flamineo cannot even make the Duke _say_ it.

At Brachiano's death, Flamineo realizes that he has been done out of his reward. He comments:

> Why here's an end of all my harvest, he has given me
> nothing—
> Court promises! Let wise men count them curst
> For while you live he that scores best pays worst.
>
> (V, iii, 187-189)

Then Flamineo tries to collect his reward from Brachiano's executor, Vittoria. She gives him "that portion . . . and no other, / Which Cain groan'd under having slain his brother" (V, vi, 13-14). Flamineo replies that the curse of Cain is "A most courtly patent to beg by", that is, murder suits the court. But Flamineo's final comment on courtly reward and punishment is one that reflects deep pessimism, not merely fashionable cynicism. With his last breath, he philosophizes:

> This busy trade of life appears most vain,
> Since rest breeds rest, where all seek pain by pain.
>
> (V, vi, 273-274)

Even if the couplet is very close to its source,[2] it does sum up the plight of the courtier—his task is to seek preferment as he may, despite hypocrisy and injustice, but to receive as his only reward what Cornelia claims for Marcello, merely a grave:

> His wealth is summ'd, and this is all his store:
> This poor men get; and great men get no more.
>
> (V, iv, 109-110)

Obviously there are many lines in the play which refer to reward or punishment. But it must be significant that there is so much talk on this subject. The theme of courtly reward and punishment, however, is most strongly

revealed in what Hereward T. Price calls "figures in action".[3]

By "figures in action", Price seems to mean action that is symbolic of what he believes to be the theme—the contrast between fair show and foul reality. For this critic the mock suicide, an event, becomes a symbol of the duplicity of Flamineo. The play is full of "figures in action", for there are many false actions; Price contrasts these with verbal figures, such as the title The White Devil.

As an exposition of reward and punishment, compare what each character asks for with what he gets. Vittoria seeks worldly goods from Brachiano but receives a "palace"—the house of convertites. Isabella asks for a kiss, but the only one she gets from Brachiano (a "painted devil") is a poisoned one. Flamineo seeks the reward for his pandarism from Brachiano; he gets only promises (which is what he expected to receive all along), and from his sister the curse of Cain. From Francisco he does not get even personal justice.—"Princes give rewards with their own hands, / But death or punishment by the hands of others." (V, vi, 188-189) The theme of courtly reward and punishment is one which is shown largely in the action, and the imagery which reinforces this theme is largely that which is produced by action.

Flamineo's opinion that the promises of princes should always be obtained in writing is in itself merely words on the subject of courtly reward. The real illustration of the theme of courtly reward and punishment comes in the plot.

We see that Flamineo gets nothing, except death. Vittoria gets a bad name and death. Francisco, who merits less than nothing, is rewarded with "a competent pension" (V, 1, 46) by Brachiano. If figures in action are imagery, then the theme of courtly reward and punishment is well brought out by the imagery in the play.

As a central core to the play, the reward and punishment juxtaposition is related to another theme—the one which is revealed by the title, The White Devil. A great deal of time can be spent in trying to decide which character is the "white devil".[4] The point is, of course, that all the devils in the play are white, and all the white things or people are devilish. Just as the courtly reward and punishment contradiction depended on a central hypocrisy and injustice in the court which created a conflict between expectation and fulfillment, so the "white devil" image relates to a wider theme, the appearance-reality conflict. This conflict is of course common in literature; perhaps it occurs even more often in drama in particular because drama is itself an appearance/reality contradiction—there is the actor as himself, and the actor in his role on the stage. (The dramatists of this period seem to have been especially aware of the conflict in terms of theatre—Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage," and Webster's "Such a mistake as I have often seen / In a play" are merely two of many possible examples of this awareness.)

According to Hereward T. Price[5] the word "devil" occurs twenty-six times in this play. (I count twenty-seven and one "infernal", meaning devil). Vittoria is, as Franklin[6] points out, called a devil at least twice. The two famous lines about Vittoria—"If the devil / Did ever take good shape behold his picture" (III, ii, 216-217) and "How long have I beheld the devil in crystal" (IV, ii, 88)—specifically connect the beauty with fair-seeming evil. But the mere word is not the most important use of the contrast implied by the title. There are also the images in action. Flamineo pretends to help a cuckold when he is really betraying him, for example, and there are also "a false letter, a false bribe, a false commission, a false dream, innumerable false oaths, a feigned death and six physical disguises".[7] The appearance of the letter, bribe, dream, etc., is fair or at least innocuous, but the real intent of each is foul indeed. Not only are there devils masquerading as people here, but ordinary actions are devilish under their surface appearance.

The only good that is done, is done by lying. Isabella, to protect her husband from her family, falsely pretends to be a fury: Cornelia tries unsuccessfully to lie about her son's murder. The only courtier to be rewarded, Francisco, is the most Machiavellian and treacherous of them all; the originator of the revenge, he is the only one to escape Giovanni's justice. The Pope, too holy to take part in a revenge, supplies Francisco with a choice of tool villains.

Every action is false.

An even more intriguing series of figures in action are the inverted rituals.[8] First there is the parody of the marriage ceremony, with the cursed priest, the kiss, the ring, and vow to separate bodies. Isabella repeats the ceremony, as a bride would, later. The second inverted ritual is, according to Hurt, the "confession" of Lodovico to the new Pope, Monticelso. The ritual that is inverted is not the confession itself but the absolution of sins. The Pope, far from blessing Lodovico, curses him. Instead of "a go in peace", the Pope says

> And so I leave thee
> With all the Furies hanging 'bout thy neck.
>
> (IV, iii, 124-125)

This inversion is the least convincing—but given the other two, it is fairly easy to see that Webster might be tempted to form this curse as a backwards blessing. The most horrible of the black rituals is the rite of extreme sanction given to Brachiano. The purpose of the rite, instead of speeding him on to Heaven, is the direct opposite—to damn him perpetually. After the fearsome capering, the cry for charity—to give the murders time to finish Brachiano off—and the true-love knot that strangles are a little anticlimatic.

The effect of the inverted rituals is, as Hurt suggests, to present the outward form of the ritual, which appears to be holy, but to reverse the meaning so that the effect of the

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The effect of the inverted rituals is, as Hurt suggests,[9] to present the outward form of the ritual, which appears to be holy, but to reverse the meaning so that the effect of the

action is "black". These rituals thus are white devilry, the actions of white devils, the figures for the appearance/reality conflict.

Yet another series of images which illustrates the underlying theme of fair show and foul reality is the series of references to jewels. The word itself, jewel, is used at two points in the play. In the first act there are the double entendres about Brachiano giving a jewel to Vittoria, and where she shall wear it (I, ii, 211 ff.). Flamineo's purient glee leaves us in no doubt of what is meant. In the last scene of the play, Flamineo brings in "two case of jewels" which he says Brachiano left him. When he returns with the pistols (often used as phallic symbols[10]) they bandy words about Vittoria's "jewel house", the lustre of the stones and the sparkling of the jewels when pointed the right way. In this image jewel equals lust. I do not doubt that we are expected to remember the first play on words about jewels when we hear the second. The jewels referred to have been lewd ones. Gold does not connote beauty or value either, for it is only used to guild pills of poison or to win Lodovico by "sounding" him with a "golden plumet".

There are counterfeit jewels and coins in the play. Surprisingly Camillo is called a "counterfeit diamond" (I, ii, 137), because he is not worthy of his foil, Vittoria. The image as usual reverses the truth—it is Vittoria who is not worthy of Camillo. Later Flamineo calls him an adamant

(a diamond and/or a magnet) "shall draw her to you, though you keep distance off" (I, ii, 171-172). In reality, Flamineo wishes to separate them. Whores, according to Monticelso, are "counterfeit coins" (III, ii, 99) and a few lines later, Vittoria is a counterfeit jewel (138).

Vittoria considers herself a diamond of strength against her enemies (III, ii, 141 ff)—enemies who in the end completely destroy her—and later makes references to her own spirit as a diamond. "Through darkness diamonds spread their richest light." Evidently she expects to shine forth in the house of convertites, but in reality all we see of her there, before she escapes the place, is a lovers' quarrel; Vittoria as a whirlwind is magnificent, but except in vitality she does not outshine the other women. The "nails of diamond" which fix the meeting of Brachiano and Vittoria also fix their fates—which will not be that of the man smothered (to death) in roses, but of murder, war, betrayal and murder. Each jewel, then, is an equivocal symbol. Fair jewels do not exist in this play; for appearance only masks the grim reality.

In this part of the study of The White Devil we have looked at two themes often considered separately: the courtly reward idea, and the appearance/reality conflict. Each theme is brought out by many kinds of images, from images in action, to specifically inverted rituals, to jewels that are not fair except on the surface. The courtly reward and

punishment theme is an extension of the appearance/reality conflict, for it too is an example of fair appearance covering foul reality. But even combining the two, it seems to me, leaves little of the imagery in the play connected to the theme. Even when the figures in action are included as well, there is much imagery unaccounted for. Let us consider the imagery that is connected to the third possible theme, which is, I have suggested, the theme of "princes above the storm".

In the course of The White Devil many comments are made about princes and their courts. Certain things are expected of princes because of their position. Lodovico, for example, remonstrates with Francisco for hanging about Brachiano's court. First he exclaims:

> But, sir, I wonder you'll engage yourself,
> In person, being a great prince.
>
> (IV, iii, 73-74)

After Brachiano's death, he tells Francisco that he has "most ridiculously engag'd [himself] / Too far already" (V, v, 2-3). When Flamineo calls for Florence to kill him, he is corrected by the retort: "Princes give rewards with their own hands, / But death or punishment by the hands of others" (V, vi, 188-189).

Princes, the arbiters of courtly reward and punishment, cannot be trusted.[11] Their lives, even if happy ones, are not pleasant at their end. Brachiano describes his own case well as one example of a prince's death when he groans:

> O thou soft natural death, that art joint-twin
> To sweetest slumber: no rough-bearded comet
> Stares on thy mild departure: the dull owl
> Beats not against thy casement: the hoarse wolf[12]
> Scents not thy carrion. Pity winds thy corse,
> Whilst horror waits on princes.
>
> (V, iii, 29-34)

In Brachiano's case horror does literally wait on him, as he dies attended by his devilish murderers. The deaths of princes are solitary too, as Flamineo points out, and the only mourning for great men is always false. Brachiano's murderers curse him with the words "be forgotten / Before thy funeral sermon" (V, iii, 166-167), and the man cries out with his last breath for "Vittoria", his only loved thing. Flamineo then comments on how passing are a woman's tears. In his mock suicide he warns men who die beside a howling wife that the woman's grief is always illusionary.

While living, the prince is surrounded by flatterers, Flamineo, for instance, who knows quite well that "To reprehend princes is dangerous; and to over commend some of them is palpable lying" (V, iii, 67), also points out that flatterers are "but the shadow of princes' bodies" (V, iii, 45)—suggesting how commonly they accompany princes. Francisco, whose Machiavellian intelligence never stops acting, chides himself for self-flattery when he writes his cozening letter to Vittoria:

> . . . O the fate of princes!
> I am so us'd to frequent flattery
> That being alone I now flatter myself.
>
> (II, i, 123-125)

Brachiano is surrounded by people who are referred to by themselves and others as various sorts of natural cataclysms. Lodovico is described at the very beginning of the play as "an idle meteor" and "begotten in an earthquake" (I, i, 25 and 28), and later Monticelso calls him a "black cloud". Flamineo, in his first speech, calls himself "lightning". His last words are "Strike thunder, and strike loud to my farewell." Monticelso calls Vittoria "No less in ominous fate than blazing stars / To princes" (III, ii, 262-263), and Lodovico calls her "a most prodigious comet" (V, vi, 214). Only a few lines earlier she names herself a "blazing ominous star".

Whores in general, not only Vittoria, are described as being unnatural in the natural world. Monticelso, in his famous character of a whore calls them "Shipwrecks in calmest weather . . . /Russian winters, that appear so barren, / As if that nature had forgot the spring" (III, ii, 82-84). Cornelia's reaction to lust is somewhat similar, for she philosophizes:

> Earthquakes leave behind,
> Where they have tyrannized, iron, or lead, or stone,
> But—woe to ruin—violent lust leaves none.
>
> (I, ii, 218-220)

Brachiano's lust becomes a "whirlwind" in Vittoria's yew tree dream "which let fall a massy arm / From that strong plant, / And both were struck dead by that sacred yew" (I, ii, 252-254). Both lovers, when they quarrel, are called whirlwinds by Flamineo. Whores are unnatural; Vittoria is typified as the

violent part of nature; all of the villains are also called various kinds of cataclysms of nature. Even Brachiano, when he is swept up by his love for Vittoria, becomes a kind of violence in nature. All the evil people surrounding Duke Brachiano are various kinds of storms.

Let us return to the basic statement of this theme of the play, from Cornelia's speech early in the play. She chided Brachiano with the following words:

> The lives of princes should like dials move,
> Whose regular example is so strong,
> They make the times by them go right or wrong.
>
> (I, ii, 287-289)

These words can be interpreted at least two ways: first—as the princes live, so shall the society; second, and I believe more correctly—princes should be uncorrupted by their surroundings. The reason for choosing the second interpretation as more accurate is based on Cornelia's previous speeches. She has been bewailing Brachiano's corruption by Vittoria. His honour is the flower which has been mildewed by contact with her two children's evil. After all, Brachiano has just sworn to neglect government to love Vittoria; his statement "you shall to me at once / Be dukedom, health, wife, children, friends and all" (I, ii, 267-268) is the kind of oath a devil might extract to damn a soul.[13]

In the next scene, Monticelso and Francisco between them outline Brachiano's position also. Monticelso warns of the consequences:

> When you awake from this lascivious dream,
> Repentance then will follow; . . .
> . . . wretched are princes
> When fortune blasteth but a petty flower
> Of their unwieldy crowns; . . .
> . . . but alas!
> When they to wilful shipwreck loose good fame
> All princely titles perish with their name.
>
> (II, i, 35-42)

In other words, Monticelso claims that ill fortune can harm princes by even slightly detracting from their reputations, but when the princes by their own will choose to loose their honour, (wilful shipwreck—note the image of cataclysm) they loose even their name of prince. Francisco also warns Brachiano of the results of his adultery (significantly, he uses more concrete persuasions than Monticelso: "lust carries her sharp whip / At her own girdle,—look to't for our anger / Is making thunder-bolts" (II, i, 70-73). In the previous scene Brachiano has blamed Cornelia for the "fearful and prodigious storm" (I, ii, 306) which is to ensue. Certainly Vittoria, a "shipwreck in calmest weather", is affecting the life of the prince.

Monticelso attempts to persuade Brachiano to better behaviour by admonishing him to be a good example to his son Giovanni:

> Be his pattern then,
> Leave him a stock of virtue that may last,
> Should fortune rend his sails, and split his mast.
>
> (II, i, 105-108)

Again the tempest is chosen an image for bad fortune, and

specifically lust. Flamineo refers to the same kind of image late in the play when he comments that

> Lovers' oaths are like mariners' prayers, uttered in extremity; but when the tempest is o'er, and that the vessel leaves tumbling, they fall from protesting to drinking.
>
> (V. 1. 176-179)

In other words the act of love is compared to a tempest: lust is a storm; whores are shipwrecks; individual plotters against Brachiano's position or honour are various kinds of natural cataclysms.

One possible theme of The White Devil then, revolves around the position of the prince. He ought to be above the storms of the world—lust and revenge of adultery. Brachiano is not aloof from his corrupt society. He is dragged down, killed in a horrible manner, and damned to hell in a particularly remorseless and devilish way. I am not suggesting that Brachiano's lust is a tragic flaw, like Antony's in Antony and Cleopatra. It is difficult to admire Brachiano; he is not shown in any conflict over his decision to love Vittoria (he begins "quite lost"). Any of his threats are idle ones; Webster even emphasizes their emptiness by juxtaposing Brachiano's punishment of Flamineo (who says, ironically as it turns out, "Your word is law") with the duke's murder. As he condemns Flamineo to beg for life each day, he is doomed to die, begging for more life, that very day.

If "the prince above the storm" is a theme of The White Devil, the play is a kind of improving history, of what happens when the prince is not above the lust and corruption. At least this theme accounts for Francisco's not being punished; for if this is the theme there is no need to punish him. He has not exhibited any involvement with his society, except for a certain longing to be in at the kill. But he is warned off by Lodovico, and thus escapes the holocaust. Giovanni under this analysis has turned out well; he resembles his uncle more than his father (as Flamineo points out) and is ready to punish from his Olympian position—he does not deign to do his own revenge. In this way of looking at the play there are not "good guys" or "bad guys", only the "tragedy of Paulo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Brachiano, with the Life and Death of Vittoria Corombona the famous Venetian Curtizan". Brachiano's life, as it is shown by the aloof prince and raging tempest imagery, is an exemplum. It illustrates the improper attitude of princes to their world, and the results for the prince who is involved with his world.

To sum up this analysis of the imagery of The White Devil may be done simply. In my opinion, the real theme of the play is the fair appearance/foul reality conflict; this conflict is reflected in the paradox of the title, in the many white devils, their deeds, in the illustrations of "courtly reward and punishment" presented, and in some incidental imagery, such as the jewel series. Another theme,

of less major proportion, is also present in the play. Less fully worked out, not as obvious, and perhaps not as deep a concern to the poet, the theme of princes above the storm of their society is present in The White Devil. That each villain presents himself at once as a cataclysm of nature cannot be coincidental. Hurt, in his article on inverted rituals, suggests that part of the witchery in the play is revealed by the villains being "revels against the order of nature".[14] I suggest that their villainy is symbolized by their representation as the violent forces of the natural world, to which the prince should be, but Brachiano is unfortunately not, immune.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

In the previous chapter we have seen that the title of *The White Devil* illustrates the central theme of the play—the contrast between appearance and reality. This contrast is also present in *The Duchess of Malfi*; but in the second play Webster has organized several other pairs of figures which overshadow the appearance-reality conflict in importance. In *The White Devil*, the appearance/reality juxtaposition occurred so often that by the end of the play, the audience is almost automatically looking for foul reality under fair show. In *The Duchess of Malfi* this technique has become dominant, for Webster has not only consistently used the same metaphor, but also has consistently paired it with another.

An evenly developed series of images is one which compares the relationship between the Duchess and Antonio to a building; when the two are separated, the building becomes a ruin. But Webster has also developed a vision/blindness cluster which, like a similar pattern in *King Lear* contrasts physical vision with true perception. Water imagery is also paired to some extent, for while most of the comparisons are to polluted water gradually infecting a whole country, there are a few impressive comparisons to pure water spreading its

benefits over a wide area. Webster makes as well a continual comparison between lust and fire; he also continually compares chastity (or death) to frost. As lust and chastity are opposite conditions of mind, so are fire and frost opposing conditions in nature. By the end of the play either frost or fire reminds the audience of the opposite condition as well as the attitude it metaphorically represents; to mention chastity is to suggest lust. Paired images can thus be very effective in producing subtle innuendo and delicate foreshadowing or irony.

The building/ruin cluster is a series of images which together form a kind of objective correlative for the two lovers. As their relationship grows, so does their building—as they consummate their "marriage" the building is a palace; three years later, it is a "house" (as in most marriages familiarity removes some of the gilt). By the time they have been separated for good, the building is merely a ruined wall. By the last act of the play, however, the mention of either buildings or ruins evokes the other in the mind of the audience.

In the last speech in the play, Delio advises "Let us make noble use / Of this great ruin". The ruin to which he is apparently referring is the stage strewn with bodies. The play, however, concerns the building and ruin of one relationship: that of the Duchess and Antonio. When the Duchess proposes to Antonio, she speaks of his kneeling (or perhaps

his lowly position in society) when she says:

> This goodly roof of yours is too low built,
> I cannot stand upright in't, nor discourse,
> Without I raise it higher.

(I, i, 416-419)

Note the two words which create the image—"roof" and "raise". When they vow their marriage, she exclaims "How can the church bind faster", that is, more solidly (I, i, 491).[1] When their relationship is threatened by Ferdinand's visit, Antonio explains the atmosphere of tension to Delio by saying "Those houses that are haunted are most still, / Till the devil be up" (III, i, 23-24). The word "houses" may refer to the palace, or it may refer to the two lovers. When Antonio, the Duchess, and Cariola are talking, just before Ferdinand breaks in upon them (III, ii), there is much talk of a "night's lodging" and the "keys" to the Duchess' heart. These in themselves are conventional terms for a lover's visit, but joined to the list they help bolster what will become an evocative series of images.

When the relationship is being threatened by Ferdinand, or when it is crumbling, all of these references change to comparisons with ruins. When the Duchess' retinue begins to dwindle after her banishment, for example, Antonio comments that "Men cease to build where the foundation sinks" (III, v, 11). Ferdinand howls for power in order

> That I might toss her palace 'bout her ears,
> Root up her goodly forests, blast her meads,
> And lay her general territory as waste
> As she hath done her honours.
>
> (II, v, 18-21)

Part of the answer to the Duchess' famous question "who do I look like now?" is Cariola's comparison "like some reverend monument / Whose ruins are even pitied" (IV, ii, 33-34). On the night of the first birth, as well, Bosola and Antonio exchange threats:

> Ant.: I'll pull thee up by the roots;—
> Bos.: May be the ruin will crush you to pieces.
>
> (II, iii, 36-37)

Ironically it is the ruin of Antonio and the Duchess' affair that crushes Bosola.

In his last speech, Bosola makes an interesting suggestion when he says "We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves, / That ruin'd yields no echo". He means that with death there is an end to one's being. But the audience has seen, only 170 lines before, a dead wall, which did retain an echo. The wall, a continuing metaphor for the relationship between the two lovers, is specifically identified as the Duchess. The stage direction, "Echo from the Duchess' grave", conflicts with Delio's idea that it is the ruined wall of a cloister. But by now the reader is accustomed to equating the Duchess with a ruin, and therefore her grave may very well be represented by a ruined wall. The whole effect of the echo scene is strange. It is not necessary to the plot;[2]

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Delio, usually a sensitive and perceptive character, makes a suggestion in direct contrast to the whole atmosphere of the scene when he says "you may make it / A huntsman, or a falconer, a musician" (V, iii, 23-24). At least twice it is obvious from the wording that the voice is the Duchess'— once when she identifies herself (29) and once when she says directly that Antonio will never see her again. Even though the scene is an outworn gimmick[3] the fact that the echo comes from a ruin, part of an important image cluster in the play, injects new life into an old trick. The physical ruin is a concrete metaphor of the relationship: it has been called a foundation, fair lightsome lodgings, palace, house, and now it is a wall. One reason why the echo scene makes a deep impression on the reader is because he knows that the echo scene is not a useless frill; it is only a very explicit metaphor in a series of images.

The vision/blindness cluster, though not great in number of references, illustrates a repetition of images. One of the Duchess' striking statements just after her marriage is "I am blind" (I, i, 493). She had used her wedding ring to cure Antonio's bloodshot eyes, to clear his vision, but the result was "You have made me [Antonio] stark blind" (I, ii, 410). When her brother confronts her with knowledge of her sin, he asks rhetorically, "Virtue, where art thou hid? What hideous thing / Is it doth eclipse thee?" (III, ii, 71-72). At this point, virtue is in the dark (blind). Only

a few moments later Ferdinand says that he would like to see the Duchess' husband, "If I could change / Eyes with a basilisk" (III, ii, 87-88). In this case, Ferdinand's vision would kill Antonio by its power. But after his sister's death, the Duke himself is blinded by the sight of her face. Although the words, "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle" are very ordinary, they seem charged with emotion when uttered in this situation because they remind us of so many other times when characters have been struck blind. The fact that any reader will react to this line suggests that the purpose of the vision/blindness imagery is to prepare for it—or rather that the vision/blindness imagery _has_ prepared us for it. It is no accident that the Duchess, Antonio and Bosola have all been struck blind when they have fallen in love; Webster is at this point suggesting that Ferdinand is blind for a similar reason.

There are moments when characters have a brief glimpse of the truth. "On the sudden a clear light / Presented me a face folded in sorrow" (V, iii, 45-46) is one example of momentary vision. The Duchess, who thinks in wide-eyed sleep like a madman, is able towards the end of her life to say to Bosola:

> . . . Tell my brothers
> That I perceive death now I am well awake,
> Best gift is, they can give or I can take.
>
> (IV, ii, 223-225)

Ferdinand's "cruel sore eyes" are part of his blindness (which originated in the "dazzle" of his sister's dead face). The Duchess, however, and even Antonio, have come from blindness to vision in the course of the play.

This particular image cluster, then, suggests certain things about the development of the characters throughout the action of the play. Both the Duchess and Antonio are struck blind during the declaration of their love; what happens to the Duchess throughout the play ends in her awareness of death, and Antonio's vision of a face folded in sorrow. In contrast Ferdinand has been "awake" throughout the play. His eyes, in fact, have had the power of killing others, the power of basilisks. But he ends with "cruel sore eyes" after he is dazzled by the sight of his sister.

For vision then, we should read ability to perceive. Blindness or being in the dark is the state of one who is unable to cope, one who is acted upon, one who is in love. The Duchess, Antonio and even Bosola to some extent[4] are incapacitated when they are in love. Their only action is the ability to die well. Ferdinand is capable of much, even striking another dead with his vision, but when he realizes how much he loved his sister, he becomes incapable of carrying out any motivated action at all, though he can still murder by error.

Considering the complex of vision/blindness images, Antonio's brief mention of the story of the choice of Paris

is interesting, as it in some ways echoes the action of the play. Antonio said that he was blind when he gave in to the Duchess: did he in fact make a mistake by choosing her beauty as opposed to the other two possibilities? Is Antonio implying that he regrets his marriage to the Duchess? Webster may be using image clusters to hint at an idea not directly expressed, but in this case, the image seems to be something of a red herring.

Even though the image cluster is not very well paired off with its opposite, the series describing polluted water gradually spreading (in contrast to the wide-spread effects of sweet water) is important to the theme. Water as a source of refreshment or poison is discussed in the first few lines of the play by Antonio, who says:

> . . . a prince's court
> Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
> Pure silver drops in general but if't chance
> Some curs'd example poison't near the head,
> Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.
>
> (I, 1, 11-15)

The flow of "pure silver drops", corrupted by a "cursed example" may be what happens in the play. The evil of Bosola and Ferdinand corrodes the peaceful lives of Antonio and the Duchess, and a general war is the final result. Ferdinand, and some of the critics, might see the action of the play in terms of a river of peaceful life disturbed by the pollution of the Duchess' sin—or a river of noble blood tainted by some crime. In <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u> there are only two

cases of the spreading effects of "pure silver drops". One is in the introduction to the play (the first scene) as quoted above. The other example is Bosola's idyllic picture of the ideal gratitude of princes:

> . . . an honest statesman to a prince
> Is like a cedar, planted by a spring;
> The spring bathes the tree's root, the grateful tree
> Rewards it with his shadow.
>
> (III, ii, 262-265)

Except for these two passages where the possibility of pure water spreading its benefits is expressed, all the water imagery speaks of poisoned water. But, of course, there are no honest statesmen in Webster's Italy. Bosola never receives what he considers a just reward, but neither is he an honest servant to his mistress or to his master.

Water that spreads its poison is a more common image in The Duchess of Malfi. Bosola makes his first entrance heralded by the epithet, "the only court-gall".[5] After the general statement about the courts of princes, where fountains spread water of either a good or a bad nature, Bosola enters as a specific example of poison near the head. Bosola can be picked out as the specific example of the maxim, given in Antonio's illustration because the word "court", which is used three times before it is connected to Bosola's name, creates an emphasis on the phrase "the only court gall". In the same scene, Antonio defines Bosola's illness more explicitly when he says "This foul melancholy / Will poison all his goodness" (I, i, 76-77). Bosola, who is himself

the source of poison in the court, is as well an example of a person poisoned. In the first scene Ferdinand and the Cardinal are also presented as cause and result of poisoned water. Bosola calls them "plum trees that grow crooked over standing pools", whose fruit is therefore eaten only by "crows, pies and caterpillars". (I, i, 50 ff) The Cardinal is pictured by Antonio as a "melancholy churchman. The spring in his face is nothing but the engendering of toads" (I, i, 156-158). In the two quotations, water causes the result that is loathsome—fruit or toads. Later in the play, Ferdinand attributes his need to revenge to "her marriage! / That drew a stream of gall, quite through my heart" (IV, ii, 287-288). The line itself is an apt description of the action of the play, for until Ferdinand hears of his sister's lover, he is an apprehensive but ordinary enough brother. Why his heart should be so susceptible to the actions of his sister is not explained, but certainly the news of her actions poisons his life and the lives of many around them both.

All three villains, then, are revealed both as the cause and as an example of the gradual effect of poisoned water slowly spreading. That all three are described by similar images reveals that Webster's imagery here is consciously controlled.

The best developed series of images is the fire/frost series. The fire seems to represent lust. In Ferdinand, whose normal sexual impulses have taken a wrong turn somehow,

"fire" becomes his jealousy or lust for revenge. The lust is projected outwards until it becomes the revenge itself, the tortures to which he would like to put Antonio and the Duchess. This transition is well illustrated in the second act, in the scene (II, v) where Ferdinand raves about his sister's sin to the Cardinal. He begins by saying fairly calmly, "We must not now use balsamum, but fire" (line 24). But a few moments later, his rage overcomes him as he says:

> 'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild fire
> But your whore's blood.
>
> (II, v, 47)

His horrible vengeance (67 ff) involves fire too: the suitable punishment is either to burn the lovers in a coal pit without allowing the smoke to escape, or to light them like candles wrapped in their bed sheets. Strangely enough, when Ferdinand confronts his sister, the fire has been transferred:

> . . . thy heart!
> What should I name't, unless a hollow bullet
> Fill'd with unquenchable wild-fire?
>
> (III, ii, 114-116)

In both cases the "wild fire" is lust. In the first it is Ferdinand's lust for his sister; in the last it is her lust for her lover.

Fire is equated with lust by characters other than Ferdinand. The Cardinal, by the end of the play, refers to his revenge-plotting as fire, for he says to Bosola "the fire burns well, / What need we keep a stirring of't and make / A greater smother?" (V, ii, 308-310). When Julia is

trying to tempt Bosola, she comments "Sure, there wants fire where there are no lively sparks / Of roughness" (V, ii, 174-175). Antonio's comparison of good horsemanship to the Trojan horse, "as out of the Grecian horse issued many famous princes, so, out of brave horsemanship arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind of noble action" (I, i, 143-146) may not appear to be part of this cluster until we notice that the first "noble action" he takes after the winning of the prize, spurred on by "sparks" of fire, is the acceptance of the Duchess' proposition. In taking this action, moreover, Antonio states that he realizes what the Duchess is hinting at, but "he's a fool / That, being a-cold, would trust his hands i'th'fire / To warm them" (I, i, 426-428). Here he is calling the Duchess' lust "fire". At his death Antonio remarks of Bosola's mentioning the Duchess and their children, "Their very names / Kindle a little life in me" (V, iv, 59-60). To Antonio, his love for the Duchess, her love for him, and even his familial love are "fire".

Ferdinand's peculiar sensuality is emphasized when a bystander remarks "a very salamander lives in's eye / To mock the eager violence of the fire" (III, iii, 49-50). Salamanders were supposed to be able to live in fire, which their extreme chill would eventually put out. Ferdinand is full of lust, but his lust is quenched by the chill of the salamander—perhaps his incestual love of his sister.

The reverse of the fire/lust idea is shown by a

series of images connecting coldness, frost, or freezing with chastity or occasionally death. The first time this image is hinted at is the Duchess' reference to herself as flesh and blood (warm), "not the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb" (I, i, 454-455). The word alabaster might suggest whiteness, or purity, rather than coldness, if it were not for the Duchess' mention of her flesh and blood as contrast. The badinage of Antonio about Anaxarete who "was frozen into marble" (III, ii, 27) is parallel to the alabaster image for it equates chastity with cold stone. At the touching farewell scene, the Duchess complains to Antonio "Your kiss is colder / Than I have seen an holy anchorite / Give to a dead man's skull" (III, v, 86-89). This comment is effective not only because the picture is an eloquent one, but because the playwright has been using a system of images of fire and frost to talk about lust and its opposite. When the Duchess touches Ferdinand's dead man's hand (supposed to be Antonio's) she remarks "You are very cold" (IV, i, 52). This speech could not be effective without the series of frost images that has gone before it. The next comment too, attains a depth of connotation that would not be possible without what had gone before: the Duchess renounces all life and love when she wishes that "they would bind me to that lifeless trunk / And let me freeze to death" (IV, i, 8-9).

The final touch is put on the whole cluster of fire/frost images when Delio, at the end of the play, reverses the image by saying:

> . . . These wretched eminent things
> Leave no more fume behind 'em than should one
> Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow;
> As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts,
> Both form, and matter.
>
> (V, v, 113-118)

Although this comment may be related to the evanescence of the worldly fame formerly held by the Cardinal and Ferdinand, the audience may connect the quotation to the lovers because of the imagery. Here instead of fire which is chilled and put out by the chastity of death, we have the frost melted by the sun, and turned to water. What can we make of this example? Perhaps Webster merely wished to stress the evanescence of love—"it melts / Both form, and matter".

Looking back over this analysis of The Duchess of Malfi one may say that Webster has carefully worked out the imagery of this play. It seems to be organized into three strongly paired image clusters: the building/ruin group, vision/blindness, and fire/frost pair. In addition there is a pervasive imagery based on the idea of a fountain of water and its effects on its surrounding. There is also much incidental imagery, such as the horsemanship imagery and the animal imagery (examined in Chapter I).

What has been Webster's purpose in using imagery to such an extent? We can only speculate, of course. In

The Duchess of Malfi, as far as I can see, there is little attempt to use imagery to reveal a theme. The great number of fire/frost images does not appear to me to support any of the usual themes suggested for The Duchess of Malfi. If the theme is the effects of social evil as Bogard[6] has stated or the effects of disrupting social order as Calderwood[7] would say, the image cluster of buildings and ruins runs counter to the idea; how can we be persuaded that the Duchess has sinned when she is presented as a builder in contrast to the villains who ruin the building? If the theme is integrity of life[8] (that is, the presentation of one who meets death well) the vision/blindness cluster would support the theme, for the idea of perceiving the right way after being blind is a natural concomitant of this particular theme. The poisoned water imagery does support the social evil theme, for it would be possible to see the Duchess as a kind of island in a world of evil--but in this method of looking at the play, she does not sin, but is slowly eaten away by the lapping waters of evil which surround her. The last analysis of the theme seems to me to be the most valid one.

But the image clusters are used in other ways than just as theme echoes. They explain motives, for example. Ferdinand's love for his sister is expressed as the fire in his breast, one which never comes out into action. We can accept this as proof of his love (even though we may not put a name to it) because we have been hearing a whole series of

fire/lust comparisons in the lovers on the stage. Similarly we can understand (and certainly be moved by) the references to vision throughout the play. The Duchess, Antonio, Ferdinand and Bosola all make references to being blind at one time, and being able to see. Ferdinand loses his sight, but the other three are like Bosola who in a less tragic context than the others says:

> I stand like one
> That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream:
> I am angry with myself, now that I wake.
>
> (IV, ii, 323-325)

Some of Webster's celebrated "coups de théâtre" are partly the result of his imagery. The dead man's hand, the effect of the Duchess' face on Ferdinand, the echo scene, all are impressive because they are the crowning touch of a series of images. We may not consciously have noticed that there is a series of references to vision, for example, but we react very sensitively to the line "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young."

CONCLUSION

Two questions remain to be answered. How much of the imagery was present in Webster's sources? How much of the imagery would be noticed in the theatre?

R. W. Dent's encyclopedic book, John Webster's Borrowing, of which the motto is "Quic quid bene dictum ab ullo, meum est" (obviously referring to Webster's habits) seems to me to negate Webster's abilities as a writer. On one hand Dent calls Webster a "first or second cousin to the Autolgean wits described by Thomas Walkington, . . . [writers who] 'cull out all the witty speeches they can finde appropriating them to their own use' "[1]. He goes on to contradict himself by saying that "such castigation cannot, of course, be justly applied to Webster's labored and thoughtful procedure". He concludes that "with a few such exceptions [Webster's most frequently quoted lines in The Duchess of Malfi], plus some of the occasional realistic topical satire, I suspect almost everything in Webster has a basic source".[2] Does the imagery appear in these two plays because it was present in Webster's sources?

If the imagery were only incidental in the overall borrowing of material, one would expect perhaps that all of one image cluster, wherever its parts were scattered, would come from one source.[3] But the sources of the forty-one

images in the three major clusters of The Duchess of Malfi show no such unanimity. Of definite sources there are two from Hall's Characters, two from Shakespeare, three from The Arcadia and one each from Painter, Alexander, Chapman, Marston, and Whetstone. Others are "possible references" or "influenced by" various writers. More than half of these significant images are without source in Dent at all. It is not possible to conclude, then, as one might from reading Dent's introduction to his book, either that all the images come from one source, or even that Dent has found sources for most of the images. The echo scene, which is fairly common in literature as a device, has no direct source, being only "based on an undiscovered source"[4] and containing some glimpses of Montaigne and Alexander.

There are places in Webster's writing where the author has quoted almost verbatim from his source. Surely the imagery there is from the source? Not always. The explanation of Lycanthropia in Act V of The Duchess of Malfi, is one example of almost direct quotation; in this case it is from Goulart. According to Dent and Lucas the original version was this: "For there be Licanthropes in whom the melancholike humor doth so rule, as they imagine themselves to be transformed into Wolves . . . "[5] Compare the play:

> In those that are possess'd with't [lycanthropia] there overflows
> Such melancholy humour, they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves
>
> (V, ii, 8-10).

Despite the metre, when even the difficult phrase "transformed into" is repeated, Webster has changed the word "rule" to the word "over-flow". There can be only one purpose in the change: to reinforce the series of images of poisoned water spreading into the lives of evil people. Ferdinand has before been shown as an example of poisoned water spreading, as have all the villains in The Duchess of Malfi; either consciously or unconsciously, Webster has changed a word in his source, so that an otherwise unoriginal passage can conform to an over-riding series of images. Perhaps it is unfair to credit Webster with always changing the imagery in his sources to conform to the rest of the play on the proof of one example, but it is instructive to note that he has done so in a case where he is very close to his source, hardly even changing it into blank verse from its original prose.

To prove that Webster made similar changes in imagery in The White Devil is a little more difficult because there are fewer extensive images. But we can at least examine one of Webster's "images in action". Of all the false but fair-seeming actions in this play, the most audacious is, it seems to me, the false suicide in the last act. It is "fair" because it appears that Flamineo is trying to be loyal himself as well as trying to keep his sister loyal to Brachiano by the suicide pact he attempts. Here, as has often been pointed out, Webster risks breaking the tension with a false death too near the real climax of the play. This particular event

is indeed part of the appearance/reality imagery. Everything else that seemed true has turned out to be false; Webster's characters even play at being dead—the last reality. We have seen a divorce that is a reversed marriage ceremony, followed by a devout wife who plays the shrew to demand her own hated divorce (although she shows a little too much vehemence for the goody-goody she pretends to have been). Even Brachiano's love for Vittoria, which although it is a fault does seem to be wholehearted, is not entirely so because in his madness he shows that secretly he knows of her corruption. A mother who mourns both her sons, one victim and one murderer, cannot tell the truth. Priests only curse; the Pope gives no blessing, only a curse. Why then should a death be real?

The figures in action, moreover, are always followed by an ironic reaction. Brachiano's divorce—an un-marriage—is followed by his wife's repetition of the words which traps the Duke in his divorce. The Pope's refusal to be one of Lodovico's sponsors results in Lodovico's near-rejection of the plan, and then in his increased cynicism as Francisco makes the Pope appear to be false. In the mock-suicide, there is again a reversal. Flamineo has barely time to spring to his feet and explain why he made his experiment, when the "matachin" appears, to threaten them both with real death. According to both Dent and Boklund, the mock death is one of Webster's additions to the play; there was no indication of it in his sources. It has been added as the crowning touch

of the fair action being foul in intent; it is like the other fair-seeming but false actions—ironic when considered in the light of events that follow.

Analyzing the question of sources and imagery, then, the position I have taken is that, while parts of the imagery may have occurred in the sources, in general the imagery has been changed to conform to the pattern of the rest of the play. In any case, the imagery is not purely incidental, the result of continual borrowing only, but polished painstakingly by Webster for his own purposes.

What were these purposes? Could Webster's audience be expected to catch a repeated image and follow its pattern throughout the play? Listening habits of contemporary audiences were far more rigorous than those of a modern audience. Illiterate people (I am not claiming that all of Webster's audience were illiterate) _do_ have the ability, a necessary faculty, of memorizing words heard very quickly. The Elizabethan (and to some extent Jacobean) fondness for words is well known. Jokes and games involving elaborate word play were common and popular. Muriel C. Bradbrook, in her seminal book _Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy_, sums up her ideas on current habits of listening this way:

> . . . these habits meant that the audience would follow the dialogue as poetry and not merely as the speech of a given character. Repetition of a word or a phrase would be noted instinctively as a reader picks up clues in a detective story to-day. The signals of the way the play is moving were as likely to be in words as in action; and

> though writer and spectators might be indifferent to the sequence of events they were alive to the sequence of words.[6]

As to us the cursing of Brachiano by the disguised revengers is doubly horrible because of the deception (even an obtuse modern audience could hardly miss the juxtaposition of "for charity, / For Christian charity, avoid the chamber" [V, iii, 172 ff] and the "true love-not"), the other reversed rituals, and in fact all of the figures in action, would be impressive to an audience of the time. In The Duchess of Malfi, I suggest, the image clusters are so well organized that their effect is strongly felt even in modern times.

Lamb, for example, felt strongly at certain points in The Duchess of Malfi. He admires Webster's ability to "move a horror skillfully". His exclamation, "What are 'Luke's iron crown', the brazen hall of Perillus, Procrustes' bed, to the waxen images which counterfeit death . . . the mortification by degrees", shows that he has found the Duchess' agony very moving—but because it implies more suffering than mere physical pains. Lamb has intuitively realized that Webster's horror is effective. He also comments "writers of an inferior genius may mistake quantity for quality, they 'terrify babes with painted devils' ". The "painted devils" in this case would be purely physical horrors unrelated to a scheme of imagery. When Dent comments[8] that lines like "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young" are devoid of imagery and depend on their context for their gre

effect, he has felt the emotion of Lamb, but is mistaking its cause. The effectiveness of such lines depends on <u>the imagery</u> as its "context".

The use of a series of images (whether repeated or related) to provide a subtle background to drama is commented on by Wolfgang Clemen in his book on Shakespeare's imagery. He writes:

> The dramatist is continuously spinning threads which run through the whole play . . . in order that, by their aid, we may understand what follows, and accompany it with greater tension and keener participation. It is one of the artistic achievements of the great dramatist to prepare in the mind of the audience a whole net of expectations, intuitions and conjectures so that each new act, each new scene, is approached with a definite predisposition. This unobtrusive preparation of our mind for what is to come is . . . necessary for a powerful dramatic effect.[9]

When Webster uses image clusters to the extent to which he does in his two great plays, particularly <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u>, he is "spinning threads" to support the play. What have sometimes been called his "flashes" of dramatic effect are often moments when imagery has created tension.

Even if Lamb's impressions of the plays have been denigrated by such people as Archer, his raptures are felt to some degree, I suspect, by most readers of the play. The dead man's hand is effective as a producer of horror only because it is "cold" and the coldness is part of the fire/frost imagery; the echo scene has an effect on the reader because it is a more specific example of the metaphor comparing the lovers' relationship to a building; the "dazzle" of the

Duchess' eyes is the zenith of the vision/blindness image pattern. To answer, then, whether or not Webster's audience could in fact find the images, or notice what he intended by the image clusters, one can only answer first, that Webster's audience was accustomed to look for repeated significant words, and second, that Webster's imagery is still quite able to affect a reader.

APPENDIX I

CHART I

Animal Imagery in <u>The White Devil</u>

Speaker	Spoken of									
	Zanche	Vittoria	Isabella	Marcello	Flamineo	Lodovico	Giovanni	Brachiano	Francisco	Monticelso
Monticelso						dog		game barbary horse	lion	
Francisco	strange fowl	dove				falcon		pole cat stag		
Brachiano							lapwing	lion raven	hawk dog-fox	hawk dog
Giovanni							frog			
Lodovico		snake						barbary horse snake		
Flamineo	wolf dog	hawk hound on leash cony crocodile		goose	dog wolf snake caged bird ape	raven	peacock eagle wolf raven	ferret cony bird		
Marcello	crow				stalking horse					
Isabella								spider		
Vittoria		dog or hawk (pets) (smallness) blackbird			fox			fox		wolf

APPENDIX I

CHART II

Animal Imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi*

Speaker	Spoken of						
	Delio	Antonio	Duchess	Ferdinand	Bosola	Cardinal	Number of Animals Referred to
Bosola			bird mastiff turtle	cruel biter	horseleech (2) blackbird mice	cruel biter basilisks fox	35
Ferdinand			hyena wolf (3) screech-owl her "cubs"	basilisk eagle sheep- biter	dormouse scorpion	fox	25
Cardinal						leveret	3
Delio				spider			5
Duchess		bird	bird pheasant and quail	viper		viper	7
Antonio				dormouse tiger (?)	mole snake	tiger (?)	10
Minor Characters				salamander dormouse		porpoise	13

APPENDIX I

CHART III

Repeated Plant Imagery

Plant	Reference	Thing Represented
mandrake	*D. M.* II, v, 1	the news of the adultery
mandrake	*D. M.* IV, ii, 244	death
mandrake	*W. D.* III, i, 46	evil deeds
mandrake	*W. D.* III, iii, 113	a product of Vittoria's blood, *i.e.*, she is a murderer
mandrake	*W. D.* V, vi, 67	Flamineo is a murderer
yew	*W. D.* I, ii, 231 ff. (the dream)	Brachiano
yew	*W. D.* IV, iii, 120	Lodovico
cedar	*D. M.* I, ii, 171	the brothers
cedar	*D. M.* III, ii, 267	an honest statesman
rushes	*D. M.* II, v, 35	women (too frail to hold honour)
rushes	*W. D.* II, i, 122	Giovanni's court setting
rushes	*W. D.* V, vi, 301	evil deeds which fail their owners

APPENDIX II

Significant Images and Sources in Webster's <u>Duchess of Malfi</u>

Buildings/Ruins

Line	Quotation	Source
I, i, 416 ff.	This goodly roof is too low built, I cannot stand upright in't nor discourse Without I build it higher . . . Ambition, madam, ... is not kept . . . in close-pent rooms, But in fair lightsome lodgings.	both from Hall's <u>Characters</u>
I, i, 491	How can the church build faster?	no reference
II, iii, 36 ff.	pull thee up by the roots . . . ruin.	no reference
II, iv, 18	. . . that I might toss her palace about her ears.	no reference
III, i, 23-24	houses that are haunted	no reference
III, v, 11	men cease to build where the foundation sinks	no reference
IV, ii, 33	like some reverend monument Whose ruins are even pitied	no reference
V, iii	the echo scene	no reference, perhaps Scot, some verbal echoes of others
V, v, 97	dead walls	no reference
V, v, 110	this great ruin	no reference

Significant Images and Sources in Webster's Duchess of Malfi,

Continued

Vision/Blindness

Line	Quotation	Source
I, i, 493	I now am blind	influenced by Montaigne
I, i, 404 ff.	the bloodshot eye—cured by the Duchess' ring—Antonio's reply: You have made me stark blind	no reference
I, i, 349	. . . let old wives report I wink'd and chose a husband	proverbial
III, ii, 36	Myth of Blind Paris	possibly Whetstone
III, ii, 72 ff.	Virtue, where art thou hid? what hideous thing Is it doth eclipse thee?	Arcadia
III, ii, 86	Will you see my husband? . . . basilisk	Richard III
IV, ii, 35	Fortune seems only to have eyesight To behold my tragedy.	perhaps Arcadian
IV, ii, 264	Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle.	no reference
IV, iii, 5 ff.	Duchess muses—sleeps—like a madman with his eyes open.	no reference
IV, ii, 224	Duchess perceives death, "now I am well awake."	Alexander
V, ii, 64	cruel sore eyes	no reference
V, iv, 44	a clear light Presented me a face folded in sorrow	no reference
V, v, 93	Antonio dies "in a mist"	possibly Alexander

Significant Images and Sources in Webster's Duchess of Malfi.

Continued

Fire/Frost

Line	Quotation	Source
I, i, 426	but he's a fool, That being acold, would thrust his hands i'th'fire To warm them.	no reference, but see Tilley, F 230 and F 487
I, i, 453	the figure cut in alabaster	Merchant of Venice
II, v, 24	balsamum and fire	Matthieu suggests the existence of some source
II, v, 47	my wild-fire	Chapman
II, v, 67 ff.	Ferdinand's revenge	no reference
III, ii, 27	Anaxarete	Whetstone
III, ii, 114	unquenchable wild fire	no reference
III, iii, 49	salamander in's eye	no reference
III, iv, 88	a kiss colder than an anchorite would give to a dead man's skull	no reference
IV, i, 52	the cold dead man's hand	no reference
IV, i, 67	. . . . bind me to that lifeless trunk And let me freeze to death	many references, also Marston's Fawn
V, iv, 57	Their very names Kindle a little life in me.	no reference
V, v.	eminent things . . . fall in a frost . . . it ever melts	no reference

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]This is only a personal impression, although F. J. Carpenter, in Metaphor and Simile in the Minor Elizabethan Drama (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967) p. 76, expresses without statistics the same opinion.

[2]All quotations from the plays will be referred to as briefly as possible. The texts used are those of the Revels editions. See bibliography for details.

[3]According to R. W. Dent, John Webster's Borrowing (Berkely, California: University of California Press, 1960), p. 9. He comments that the line is "stripped to a bareness free of imagery".

[4]Ibid., p. 5.

CHAPTER ONE

[1]Rupert Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama (New York: Russell & Russell, reissued 1967), p. 158.

[2]One reason that The Duchess of Malfi seems more unified than The White Devil is, in my opinion, that the image patterns are far stronger because of their dual nature.

[3]See Carpenter, Metaphor, p. 159, for a "Table by Authors and by Topics of Tropes Indexed". He compares Webster, Lyly, Peele, Marlowe, Greene, Tourneur, Chapman and Jonson.

[4]M. C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1935), p. 194-195.

[5]Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and what it tells us (Cambridge: University Press, 1935), Appendix IV, p. 367 ff.

[6]See Appendix I, Chart I.

[7]Ferdinand's references to wolves at the end of the scene are all the more shocking because of Bosola's restraint.

[8]See C. G. Thayer, "The Ambiguity of Bosola", _SP_, LIV (1957), 162-171, for a discussion of this matter; on the same subject, Gunnar Boklund, _The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters_ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 143-145.

[9]Dent, _Borrowing_, _passim_.

[10]Quoted in Henry N. Ellacombe, _The Plant-Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare_ (London: Satchell, 1884), p. 163.

[11]Ellacombe, _Plant-Lore_, p. 154.

[12]See Thomas Browne, for example, on mandrakes in _Pseudodoxia Epidemica_, _Works_, edited by Geoffry Keynes, Vol. II, p. 140-145.

[13]Ellacombe, _Plant-Lore_, p. 329.

[14]Dent, _Borrowing_, p. 103.

[15]_Ibid._, p. 157.

[16]See K. H. Ansari, _John Webster: Image Patterns and Cannon_ (New Delhi, India: Julaluddin Rumi Publications, 1969), Appendix II, "Imagery and Emblems, Devices, etc.", p. 272-287, for a discussion of this subject.

[17]Speaking of the plums over standing pools image, Dent, _Borrowing_, says that "every version I have seen says 'figtrees' ", (p. 178), and Ellacombe, _Plant-Lore_, p. 93, comments that figs are usually bawdy references in Shakespeare; Eric Partridge, _Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary_ (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), agrees. Hence I have put the two plants together as one. (The "winter plums" of _The White Devil_, V, vi, 65, are a bawdy continuation of the "pistol" jest a few lines earlier.)

[18]Ellacombe, _Plant-Lore_, p. 32.

[19]See Appendix I, Chart III.

[20]Tilley, _Dictionary of Proverbs in English in The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries_ (University of Michigan Press, 1950), _s.v._ R 61, To lean upon [trust to] a broken Reed.

[21]Partridge, Bawdy, s.v. "horse", "horsemanship", "mount", "rider", for example.

[22]Quicksilver (mercury) poisoning, in popular belief, lead to impotence as well as insanity; hence the line in The White Devil, spoken of another cuckold: "a guilder that hath his brains perished with quicksilver is not more cold in the liver" (I, ii, 27-28).

[23]See above, p. 23, comments on Lodovico's joke about a "rare French rider".

CHAPTER TWO

[1]Elizabeth Brennan, in the Introduction to The White Devil (The New Mermaids: London: Ernest Benn, 1964), p. xx. Travis Bogard, The Tragic Satire of John Webster (Berkely, California: University of California Press, 1955), p. 119 ff. B. J. Layman, "The Equilibrium of Opposites in The White Devil: A Reinterpretation", PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 336-347. Hereward T. Price, "The Function of Imagery in Webster", PMLA, LXX (1955), 717-739. H. Bruce Franklin, "The Trial Scene of Webster's The White Devil Examined in Terms of Renaissance Rhetoric", SEL, I (1961), 35-51.

[2]Dent, Borrowing, p. 173, gives Alexander as a specific source.

[3]Price, "Imagery", p. 219.

[4]See Franklin, "Trial", p. 35-36, for a brief review of this topic.

[5]Price, "Imagery", p. 720.

[6]Franklin, "Trial", p. 35; also James R. Hurt, "Inverted Rituals in Webster's White Devil", JEGP, LVI (1962), p. 45.

[7]Franklin, "Trial", p. 35.

[8]Hurt, "Rituals", is the source of most of the following material.

[10]by Shakespeare, for example, according to Partridge, Bawdy, p. 166.

[9]Hurt, "Rituals", p. 47.

[11]See the discussion above (p. 29 ff.) of rewards and punishments in courts.

[12]The wolf that dug up a corpse did so because the man was murdered—see, for example, Cornelia's dirge for her son (V, vi, 93 ff.). Thus Brachiano implies that murder is a common end of princes.

[13]Note that Cornelia's following line—"Woe to light hearts—they still forerun our fall."—underlines Brachiano's oath by its rhyme.

[14]Hurt, "Rituals", p. 46.

CHAPTER THREE

[1]The quarto word "build", rather than Leech and Brown's emendation "bind" makes perfectly good sense considered in the light of the continued reference to "building" the relationship. (See the Revels edition, p. 37, for a defense of "bind".)

[2]Brown suggests that the scene may not have been acted at the Globe. See p. xxxv, note.

[3]Lucas, volume two, p. 195-196, gives a "not exhaustive" list from Euripides to Poe. He concludes that Webster has remolded the commonplace, "Making beautiful what most of his contemporaries made banal", but Lucas does not explain how Webster achieved this feat.

[4]See V, ii, 177 ff., where Bosola comments on the effects of Julia's eyes.

[5]Although Brennan and Lucas explain that "gall" in this case means sore spot, with a secondary comment that the bitterness of gall is implied, I think it is fair to take the line as part of the poisoned water imagery because later in the same play (IV, ii, 280-281), the expression "a stream of gall" is used by Ferdinand. This use of the word, plus the repetition of the word "court" leads me to believe that gall as a liquid is meant.

[6]Bogard, <u>Satire</u>, p. 131.

[7]James L. Calderwood, "<u>The Duchess of Malfi</u>: Styles of Ceremony", in <u>Essays in Criticism</u> XII, 1962, suggests that the play is a "powerful and subtle articulation of the religious and political doctrine of degree" (p. 133).

[8]Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 140.

[9]Bogard, Satire, p. 141.

CONCLUSION

[1]Dent, Borrowing, p. 8.

[2]Ibid., p. 9.

[3]See Appendix III.

[4]Dent, Borrowing, p. 256.

[5]Ibid., (from Lucas), p. 247.

[6]Bradbrook, Themes, p. 86.

[7]Lamb, Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets (London: Routledge and Sons, 1808), p. 178 n.

[8]Dent, Borrowing, p. 9.

[9]Wolfgang Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p. 6-7.

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