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Tragedy and *Trauerspiel:* John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*[1]

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This article is the first entry in a debate on a contribution on "Tragedy and *Trauerspiel*: John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi.*" http://www.connotations.de/debate/tragedy-and-trauerspiel-duchess-of-malfi/. If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to editors@connotations.de.

Abstract

Critical literature has variously described *The Duchess of Malfi* as tragedy, tragicomedy, or anti-tragedy. The play actually features two interrelated journeys traceable to conflicting generic backgrounds carefully yoked together. One, shaped by Benjamin's martyr drama, underlines the Duchess's determination and resistance. The other is Bosola's tragic journey as a figure divided between conflicting loyalties, who eventually recognizes the wrongness of his choice and undergoes a moral transformation together with a dramatic conversion from hitman to avenger. Envisaged historically, Webster's counterpoint of tragedy and *Trauerspiel* is evidence at once of overall generic readjustments in the period, and of the specific crisis of revenge drama, as detected by Fredson Bowers. As an example of ongoing generic readjustments, Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* reflects the historical moment when drama addresses the social emergence of bourgeois figures and shifts from male, heroic subjects to increasingly female, domestic ones. Responding to the generic crisis of revenge drama, it challenges the system of norms which supports tragic discourse, inviting instead a recognition of the Duchess as the martyr, and her brothers as the tyrants of *Trauerspiel.*

> I do not altogether look up at your title; the ancientest nobility being but a relic of time past, and the truest honour indeed being for a man to confer honour on himself
> (John Webster, [Dedication] To the Right Honorable George Harding)

The Quarto title page of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* loudly proclaims the play a TRAGEDY, in bold caps and typeface so large it eclipses the protagonist's name. Middleton's commendatory verse confirms the label in English and in Latin, but it was to be questioned later by neoclassicists steeped in Aristotelianism and mindless of early modern generic flexibility. In 1818, John Wilson first remarked on the heroine's untimely death at the end of Act 4, a charge that was to endure (Moore 209). The Duchess should have died hereafter[2]; she also fails to go through the prescribed tragic recognition stage and pointedly dies unchanged (see Baker), which started to prompt doubts over her status as a tragic heroine. Thereupon, her executioner turns into an unlikely revenger after converting to remorse over her dead body. The much maligned fifth act—"an afterthought" (Jankowski 244)—sees him on a grotesque killing spree to avenge his victim. In 1920, William Archer called the play "a broken-backed" (128) piece of work, and the prejudice lasted well into the 1950s: in 1959, Richard Heilman was still uncertain if the play qualified as a tragedy, and Jane Marie Luecke argued in the early 1960s that, if a tragedy at all, it was marred by injudicious mixing with comic and satiric elements (see Luecke 275-76).

Over the past fifty years, a new wave of critics have questioned the relevance of judging a baroque composition by classical standards, and submitted alternative labels more consistent with the period's generic versatility, melodrama, tragicomedy, she-tragedy (Callaghan), victim tragedy (White 203), and tragedy of state (Lever 95). Jacqueline Pearson offers to call it anti-tragic: after the fairly regular tragedy of the first four acts, she argues, the deaths of Cariola, Julia, Ferdinand, the Cardinal and Antonio in Act 5 each appear as "the centre of a tiny anti-tragedy" (95), in which "tragic structures are suggested only to be negated, in-

verted, or parodied" under pressure from comic and tragicomic incidents (90). Despite sensitiveness to "the unruliness of a theatre where genre was not static but moving and mixing" (Danson 11), these labelling arrangements fail to offer a controlling vision of the play. Its rationale remains elusive and its design embarrassingly chaotic—efforts to rationalise Act 5 only expose the entrenched prejudice that it is an awkward appendix. Alone among critics, Ralph Berry holds that Webster's methods, albeit "the reverse of the classical," are nonetheless "based on a coherent artistic design" (Berry 5) but is at a loss to decide what this artistic design might be.

It is a well documented fact that, despite efforts by the likes of Sidney and Gascoigne, experimenting with generic and tonal fluidity was the rule and not the exception on the early modern stage. Polonius famously goes for generic concatenation, and Shirley declined to assign a specific genre to his *Cardinal* (1641): "Think what you please, we call it but a play" (Prologue 11). The irregularities that plagued twentieth-century critical reception of *The Duchess of Malfi* are evidence that Webster may have been experimenting with generic fluidity. Nevertheless, his remarkable insistence on calling his play a tragedy suggests he was concerned with the genre itself, not its combination—by then fairly common—with dark comedy or satire.

One of the pitfalls of revaluation is to declare original and stimulating the same features that had previously been considered flawed. They must be envisaged instead in a fresh way, not as a confusing, motley set but as parts of a system in which they interact with one another. Building on the play's most salient issues—the protagonist's death in Act 4, her lack of a discernible *anagnorisis*, the tool villain's change into an avenger—I propose to see *The Duchess of Malfi* as a generic transaction between tragedy and the baroque *Trauerspiel*[3] described by Walter Benjamin in his 1928 *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. This is likely to give new insight into the play's generic setup and resolve some of the difficulties identified in twentieth-century critical literature.

Although Benjamin, true to his method of indirection, fails to spell out a formal definition, he nevertheless regrets that the *Trauerspiel* is

often misunderstood as "a caricature of classical tragedy" or mistakenly equated with it (Benjamin 50). Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* develop on distinct historico-philosophical premises: one has its roots in pagan myth and cult, the other in history and spectacle. Where the death of the tragic hero is a sacrifice to a transcendental, meaningful ideal, *Trauerspiel* is a "secularized Christian drama" of "insuperable despair" (Benjamin 78), expressing the scepticism of the Baroque age in the face of a transient universe that offers neither meaning, redemption, nor transcendence. While Benjamin's main concern is with German drama, he gestures toward Calderón and Shakespeare. His famous gloss of *Hamlet* as a touchstone of *Trauerspiel* (158) is pursued by Julia Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard in the direction of Freud and Lacan, and by Hugh Grady who finds in Benjamin's theory of fragmented allegory a prototype of Derrida's logic of deferral.[4] Susan Zimmerman argues that *Trauerspiel* is broadly relevant to English Renaissance tragedies beyond *Hamlet*, and she sees in Act 4 of *The Duchess of Malfi* "one of the clearest early modern English examples of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*" (Zimmerman 167n54).[5]

Webster's experimenting with *Trauerspiel* in *The Duchess of Malfi* is not confined to Act 4. Crossing into metageneric territory, the play brings together as well as contrasts revenge and *Trauerspiel*. Taking my cue from Jameson's distinction between form and syntax and his insights into the privileged relationship between historical materialism and genre study (160), I wish to argue that the respective journeys of Bosola and the Duchess figure a dialogue between Aristotelian tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, and that they are engaged in a functional relationship in which one form exists to complement or challenge assumptions about the other.

I. *The Duchess of Malfi*, a Tragedy?

1. Webster's Generic Signals

The sheer number of generic cues in *The Duchess of Malfi* suffices to confirm Webster's concern with the genre(s) of his play. The dying Bosola looks back on it as a drama of revenge:

> Revenge—for the Duchess of Malfi, murdered
> By th'Arragonian brethren; for Antonio,
> Slain by this hand; for lustful Julia,
> Poisoned by this man; and lastly for myself,
> That was an actor in the main of all […]. (5.5.79-83)

The Duchess accounts the world a "tedious theatre" (4.1.81), a theatre of *taedium vitae* (4.2.35). The slightly discordant labels suggest a tension between revenge tragedy and what could tentatively be termed at this stage a tragedy of melancholy mourning. The text additionally summons generic markers at critical junctures. Cariola's choric conclusion to the wedding scene of act 1 is a compact metageneric statement:

> Whether the spirit of *greatness* or of woman
> Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows
> A *fearful* madness: I owe her much of *pity* (1.1.487-89; my emphasis)

Cariola rehearses the classical definition of tragedy as the fall of the great; summons the joint concepts of pity and fear,[6] the catalysts of *catharsis*, as broad signals that the tragedy is underway; and singles out the Duchess's marriage as the tragic error prompting the downfall to come—a questionable labelling in view of the no less questionable nature of the Arragonians. Along the same lines, Webster's use of "wake" attends moments of recognition and self-discovery. Bosola's execution of the Duchess is an eye-opener that wakes him up to a new perception of himself:

> I stand like one
> That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream:
> I am angry with myself, now that I wake. (4.2.307-09)

Other generic signals include the enlisting of humoral/medical language in the service of *catharsis*. Ferdinand's neurotic preoccupation with "purg[ing]" his sister's "infected blood" (2.5.26) climaxes in the grotesque masque of madmen, a raucous performance allegedly devised to "cure" and "break th'impostume" of her melancholy (4.2.42).[7]

Finally, moving from discourse to figure, Webster frames his play between the tying of a knot and the tightening of a noose, a literal rendering of Aristotle's terms for complication and denouement, *desis* and *lusis*, binding together and loosening. One must assume Webster had some Greek—as well as a grim sense of irony for choosing the garrotte as the instrument of his provisional "denouement" in act 4.[8]

When, to return to Berry's phrase, a playwright's methods are the reverse of the classical, markers of tragedy are likely to draw attention to customs that are more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Webster's generic terminology is no sign of deference to classical tragedy but serves instead to identify departures from it. While Bosola by and large can be said to follow the classical course through inner conflict, *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* and *catharsis*, the Duchess pointedly does not. They go their separate ways, Bosola to tragedy and the Duchess to *Trauerspiel*.

2. Bosola's Classically Tragic Course

Bosola's inner conflict, one of the most baffling in Jacobean drama, is that of a Machiavellian henchman with a conscience, conflicted between his moral sense and his sinning self. Torn between perverse loyalty to his masters and an enduring sense of right and wrong, he hates the Arragonians even as he serves them, and hates himself for serving them. On hearing the Duchess has married below her status, he praises her choice of founding preferment on merit but feels nonetheless compelled to inform his master against her. His lament that "we cannot be suffered / To do good when we have a mind to it" (4.2.344-45) rehearses the definition of the tragic conflict as one between the ethos of the protagonist and that of society—a depraved ethos as things stand.[9] Unable to adjust his actions to his proclaimed moral standards, Bosola is "at once an agent of God and of the Devil" (Gunby 226).

Bosola's memorable *hamartia*, it would appear, is to accidentally stab the very man he had pledged himself to protect. *Hamartia*, the tragic

error, was originally identified in the *Poetics* as an action that materially brings about the hero's fall, not as an instance of "vice or depravity" (53a7), a sense it only acquired later when the notion was reassigned to the sphere of character. Webster acknowledges the concept's initial sense when Bosola, failing to recognize Antonio in the dark, mortally wounds him:

> MALATESTE (*To* BOSOLA) Thou wretched thing of blood,
> How came Antonio by his death?
> BOSOLA In a mist; I know not how—
> Such a mistake as I have often seen
> In a play. (5.5.91-94)

Play, *mist* and *mistake* metadramatically intimate the nature of the moment as an instance of "missing the mark," the literal sense of *hamartia* (from *hamartano*, to err). Yet, Bosola's stabbing of Antonio is only the material counterpart of his character flaw, blindness to the Duchess's true nature. More than a prop, the dark lantern he carries about is a symbol. The hired intelligencer tracks information and interprets clues but fails to draw appropriate conclusions. He correctly establishes the Duchess's condition, noticing how she gets rounder by the day, but fails to identify the child's father until the horoscope fatefully drops out of Antonio's pocket. A fine connoisseur of men, Bosola judges the Arragonians and Antonio for what they are, but choosing not to act upon this knowledge, he embraces instead the brothers' depraved perspective. However reliable his compass may be—*bóssola* is the Italian for compass[10]—he knowingly goes down the wrong path in accordance with the original sense of *hamartano*:

> I served your tyranny, and rather strove
> To satisfy yourself than all the world;
> And, though I loathed the evil, yet I loved
> You that did counsel it, and rather sought
> To appear a true servant than an honest man. (4.2.313-17)

It takes the execution of the Duchess for Bosola to experience *anagnorisis*, Aristotle's "change from ignorance to knowledge" (52a29), and grasp the consequences of not acting according to his conscience.[11] Now

available for pity and repentance, the cold, dry melancholic finds himself accessible to tears:

> This is manly sorrow:
> These tears, I am very certain, never grew
> In my mother's milk. My estate is sunk
> Below the degree of fear. Where were
> These penitent fountains while she was living?
> Oh, they were frozen up. (4.2.346-51)

From the vantage point of his newly acquired awareness, Bosola sets about purging the world of its vitiated humours—himself being one—, a task for which his posture as a satirist uniquely qualifies him.

3. The Duchess's Eccentric Course

The Duchess, however, hand fails to experience any of this. Hers is another voyage. Within minutes of her brothers prohibiting marriage, she moves on to challenge them and weds her steward without so much as the hint of a scruple. Her desire never wrestles with moral/social imperatives she does not share. When Antonio expresses misgivings about future strife should her brothers find out about their marriage, she replies, embracing him: "All discord, without this circumference, / Is only to be *pitied* and not *feared*" (1.1.456-57; emphasis added). By naming the component notions of tragedy, language registers the symbolic import of the moment, but by asserting their discontinuity—discord is *only* to be pitied and *not* feared—the Duchess simultaneously appears to repudiate the very possibility of tragedy. It takes Cariola to restore it as she reflects the Duchess's spirited action "shows / A fearful madness" deserving "much of pity" (488-89), a tension that increasingly exposes the double system of reference underlying Webster's "Tragedy."

In most of the play's analogues, and notably in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, the Duchess's lack of remorse is offered as evidence of the moral failure of women. A lascivious creature who takes a husband to "glut her libidinous appetite" after her first lord's death, she adds insult to injury by following "a poor and simple gentleman […] that was the

household servant of her court" (Painter 146-47). Webster instead shifts the Duchess's clear conscience from evidence of moral bankruptcy to evidence of unfailing honesty, and methodically plays down lustful appetite and mismatch. The Duchess radiates healthful companionate love, not lust. Nor is Antonio a poor and simple gentleman. He is a devoted spouse, noble in mind if not in title, and with enough wealth for his estate to be worth confiscating. The Duchess's tragic error does not lie in transgressing a brother's order so much as in believing she can shrug off the injunctions of a society whose hierarchies are based on degree, not on merit (Coddon 34), as well as in her firm conviction that "time will easily / Scatter the tempest" she has raised (1.1.458-59). Underestimating her move's tragic potential and overestimating time's healing power are the twin errors she repeats again on the cusp of the tragic reversal. "You shall get no more children till my brothers / Consent to be your gossips" (3.2.67-68), she playfully declares, unaware that the bantering intended for her husband is being picked up by her brother, a permutation of addressees that achieves the play's brutal reconnection with the tragic.

At no point, and significantly not at the moment conventionally assigned for tragic recognition, does the Duchess assess her choice as a moral lapse. Unmoved by Bosola's attempt to bring her to "mortification" (4.2.164), she remains "duchess of Malfi still" (131), utterly unchanged, another of Webster's persistent signals that she does not belong with classical tragedy. The Duchess's *anagnorisis* is of a different order, not the recognition of past error but a clear vision of the nature of death and how to welcome it stoically: "I perceive death, now I am well awake, / Best gift is they can give or I can take" (4.2 210-11). Proof against *anagnorisis*, she is impervious to *catharsis*: Ferdinand's interlude of singing and dancing bedlamites is ineffectual. Far from distressing her, the spectacle of madness "keep[s] [her] in [her] right wits" (6). The sight of rope, bell and coffin arouses no fear, much to Bosola's metageneric dismay to find her immune to his tragedic strategies: "this cord *should* terrify you" (201; emphasis added). Alien to tragedy in the Aristotelian sense, the Duchess rather stands as the protagonist of martyr

drama, where "not so much the deeds of the hero as his endurance" matter (Benjamin 58). The play must be observed in a different light and its central figures recast under a different name to discover that *The Duchess of Malfi* is actually two plays in one.

II. Reading *The Duchess of Malfi* as Trauerspiel

1. Recasting the Tragedy: Martyr, Tyrant, and Intriguer

Unlike tragedy, *Trauerspiel* is rooted in history, one that is haunted by the idea of catastrophe and devoid of any sense of eschatology. The setting is a mostly corrupt court with the sovereign at its centre, "the representative of history" who "holds the course of history in his hands like a sceptre" (Benjamin 65), but is left to mourn the misery of those that are born great in a transient world forsaken by God.

The *Trauerspiel* sovereign, subject to his moral and political choices, evolved one of two faces, the martyr and the tyrant. "For the 'very bad' there was the drama of the tyrant and there was fear; for the 'very good' there was the martyr drama and pity" (Benjamin 69). The Duchess is the sovereign/martyr, the "radical stoic" (73) put to the test in a struggle at the end of which torture and death await her. Opposite her, the Arragonian brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, are an augmented version of the merciless sovereign/tyrant. Ruled by their passions—incestuous jealousy for one and a collection of all the vices associated with the catholic stage prelate for the other—they sadistically unleash unspeakable torments on their intractable sister, torture, murder and, like the emblematic tyrant Herod, child slaughter, until Bosola exacts retribution, moving the play in a new direction.

What engaged German dramatists in *Trauerspiel* was how this "summit of creation," the seventeenth-century ruler, could be overwhelmed by the magnitude of his own crimes and turn into a maddened autocrat, "erupting into madness like a volcano and destroying himself and his entire court" (70). Like Hallman's Antiochus on seeing a dead fish's

head, Ferdinand is plunged into madness on gazing upon the face of his dead sister. He externalises his creaturely nature in the shape of a werewolf, like Hunold's Nebuchadnezzar growing feathers and talons when exiled from mankind to graze with the animals (86). Mad or murdered, the martyr and the tyrant fall victim to the disproportion between the power they are invested with and the absolute infirmity of their earthly condition (70).

Deploring this tragic contrast while exploiting it to his advantage, the intriguer is the third black star in the *Trauerspiel* constellation. A courtier, servant or henchman, he plays on the sovereign's foibles to orchestrate the plot. He is also the provider of grim humour, an apparent paradox that exposed the affinity between comedy and *Trauerspiel*. Comedy, or rather "the pure joke," Benjamin argues, is "the essential inner side of mourning which from time to time, like the lining of a dress at the hem or lapel, makes its presence felt" (125). Bosola, planted by the Arragonian brethren to spy on the Duchess, has none of the latitude of a Iago, however. Most of the time, he merely implements the brothers' designs. The stratagem of offering a dish of unripe apricots to verify his suspicion of the Duchess's pregnancy is entirely his own, but the sick turns of act 4 are of Ferdinand's devising, not his. Yet, lack of direct information from the mad Duke[12] together with Bosola's active participation in the sequence—he introduces, comments upon the "sad spectacle" (4.1.56) and comforts the Duchess—make it seem as if he bears full responsibility for running the show. This, combined with his satirical turn of mind, is enough to make him the comic/devilish intriguer while crucially ensuring that his change of heart retains credibility.

2. Portrait of the Heroine as a Protestant Martyr

Trauerspiel found its breeding ground in the political and religious upheavals that had rocked the period for almost a century. If Haugwitz looked as far back as the death of Mary Queen of Scots for his *Maria Stuarda* in 1683, *Carolus Stuardus* (1649) was Gryphius's immediate response to the execution of Charles I. The same shift away from tragic-

mythological to historical subjects is detected across Europe. It is Shakespeare's linkage of tragedy and history as early as the 1590s that enables Martinez to identify in *Richard II* elements of *Trauerspiel* long before it developed as a genre in Germany.

The true story of Giovanna d'Aragona is not History as much as *fait divers*, admittedly, but it obliquely returns to the religious issues that were shaping the English nation. When "English identity was defined as Protestant" and Roman Catholicism was "the hated and dangerous antagonist" (Marotti 9), Jacobean Italianate plays, drawing on Protestant satires of the Roman Church, fuelled anti-Catholic sentiment. Webster's scheming Cardinal fits the conventional representation of the popish stage prelate exposed as an Antichrist by his ambition to achieve the papacy. Opposite the Romish tyrant, Huston Diehl has persuasively argued, the unbroken Duchess is in many ways aligned with the reformed religion:

> First, by locating her conflict with her brothers in the issue over whether a private vow of marriage is a legitimate one, [Webster] links her to some of the more radical Protestant positions on ritual and authority. Second, by depicting her as a rebel against powerful agents of the Roman church […], he appeals to English prejudices against the Roman clergy and implicitly associates her with English Protestantism. Finally, in portraying her responses to her tortures, he emphasizes her renunciation of earthly things […] precisely the qualities celebrated in Protestant martyrs. (Diehl 198)

Webster's appropriation of the "rhetoric of martyrdom" deployed by Foxe in *Acts and Monuments* is explicit, Diehl writes (197). The Duchess stoically meets the vengeful sadism destined to break her will as much as her will to live. Her suffering, fortitude and characteristically her "long[ing] to bleed" are those of a martyr (4.1.106). They are remarkably recognisable as the categories and the language of *Trauerspiel*, as in this outcry addressed by the martyr to the intriguer about the tyrant:

> Let [my brothers], like tyrants,
> Never be remembered but for the ill they have done!
> […]
> Let heaven, a little while, cease crowning martyrs,
> To punish them! (4.1.100-08)

In line with the view of martyrdom as *Imitatio Christi*, the Duchess's stoic death and brief resurrection make her into a Christ-like figure, Celia R. Daileader has argued (67).[13] Building on gender and role, Webster seizes the opportunity to combine *Imitatio Christi* with a Protestant take on *Imitatio Mariae*.[14] The Duchess's seemingly unexplained pregnancy gestures toward Mary, and the birth of her son at Christmas time has been identified with a Nativity of sorts (see Garcette 169-77). Wry at first—her delivery is farcically triggered by Bosola's dish of unripe apricots—it turns tragically serious as the play moves on. Her flight to Loreto—home to a major Marian shrine—has been identified with the flight into Egypt (Borlik 141) and the slaughter of her children with the Massacre of the Innocents (Mitchell and Brady).[15]

This sustained flow effectively constructs *The Duchess of Malfi* as *Trauerspiel*: it grounds the play in history, constructs the heroine as a martyr and sets a framework for assessing her merits. Unlike the hero of classical tragedy, the perfect hero/martyr of *Trauerspiel* "must be the embodiment of all virtues" (Harsdörffer, qtd. in Benjamin 72). Such is the Duchess, as Antonio establishes in the opening moments[16]:

> Her days are practiced in such noble virtue
> That sure her nights—nay more, her very sleeps—
> Are more in heaven than other ladies' shrifts.
> Let all sweet ladies break their flatt'ring glasses
> And dress themselves in her. (1.1.194-98)

Antonio's praise, "She stains the time past, and lights the time to come" (202),[17] makes her an undisputed model for emulation. Her death prompts in Bosola the same conversion the death of martyrs achieved for onlookers: "God knows it is not force nor might, […] that must convert the land, / It is the blood by martirs shed."[18] His conversion is identified here with the character's *anagnorisis* and dramatically coincides with the play's turn into a new direction. The spectacle of martyrdom has worked its miracle.

3. Appointing Genres

Bosola's transformation is the moment when the values of *Trauerspiel* challenge the tenets of revenge tragedy, for Christian martyrdom is *not* meant to excite revenge. As the Duchess briefly revives, Bosola reassures her that her family are alive:

> DUCHESS Antonio!
> BOSOLA Yes, madam, he is living.
> The dead bodies you saw were but feigned statues;
> He's reconciled to your brothers: the Pope hath wrought
> The atonement.
> DUCHESS Mercy! *She dies*. (4.2.334-38)

"Mercy" is indifferently a word of gratitude ("thank you"), a plea for compassion ("have mercy"), or even the bow of a player before they take their leave. But the religious phrasing of the exchange, "heaven," "reconciled" and "atonement," together with the Duchess's brief resurrection, rather suggest a plea for pardon at the exact point where Bosola prepares to engage in violent expiation. The play is at a generic crossroads. Bosola's compass points him the way to retribution, and he sets about setting up Act 5 as a tragedy of blood against the dying wish of the *Trauerspiel* heroine. That his botched, grotesque endeavour results in the parody of a tragedy (Pearson 90) is a measure of the folly of his choice. Bosola "misses the mark" again—adding generic *hamartia* to the list of his errors.

The Duchess of Malfi thus offers two narratives of murder and retribution, interwoven albeit distinct, and developing on either side of a dividing line that is the Duchess's death. They are assigned two distinct albeit related generic codes, concerned with choices between right and wrong, punished or vindicated by death as the case may be. The question is now that of their relationship to each other as a generic system. By the late 1600s, the popularity of Kyd's mix of ethics and action in revenge drama had begun to ebb. Attention was relocated away from the moral, social and political issues characteristic of early revenge plays to the thrill of horror, and from the tortured mind of the avenging

hero to the tortured bodies of the villain's victims. Ever more sophisticated crimes called for ever more sophisticated plots and for ever more flexible notions of revenge to secure variety. Motives ranged from avenging murder to avenging flimsy points of honour to opposing all manner of restraint, eroding revenge as a moral issue. The brethren's offered reasons for dispatching the Duchess are a mix of lineal concerns, incestuous lust and greed. The villain gradually took centre stage. Webster's villains are a spectacularly sick triad, a Machiavel, a pervert, and their henchman. Even when, from act 4, the Duchess's death, not social prejudice, is the wrong to be righted, seemingly returning the play to formerly moral configurations, Webster nonetheless continues to wreak havoc on moral dichotomies and to overturn tragic expectations, structure, and tone. The Duchess's unlikely avenger is a two-time murderer, a choice unlikely to restore the distinction between right and wrong, while her natural avenger, decent, upright Antonio, is kept away from the main action, unaware of his spouse's death. Ferdinand's tragic recognition never takes place, precluded first by wilful blindness ("Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle" [4.2.249]), then by insanity. The range, variety, and ultimately the sheer absurdity of the final bloodbath shift the focus away from death as a marker of justice to death as a marker of theatrical ingenuity. The quasi-mechanical arrangement of the final carnage recalls Bergson's definition of laughter as "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (Bergson 37). But laughter, Bergson observes, "imposes silence upon our pity" (4). The audience's cathartic experience is accordingly compromised, and tragedy dissolves in grim farce, while the mixture of tones resonates like a confirmation the generic framework guiding reception is fractured. Like the bodies which Bosola imagines festering underneath rich tissue, the tragic corpus rots away.

Fredson Bowers has described Bosola as a complex, self-conscious misfit, a villain somehow engaged in a self-reflexive assessment of his own typecasting[19] or, in metageneric terms, aware of the impasse revenge drama has reached. It is by inviting *Trauerspiel* into his tragedy

that Webster draws attention to this impasse. Nor is it a strategy of substitution whereby he would offer martyr drama as an alternative to restore awareness of moral issues. Martyr drama is a product of Baroque scepticism. The martyr's sacrifice carries no sense of achieving a spiritual realm. *Trauerspiel* is "countertranscendental" (Steiner 16), "confined to a context of strict immanence, without any access to the beyond of the mystery plays […], limited to the representations of ghostly apparitions" (Benjamin 80). Though the Duchess greets death "[k]nowing to meet […] excellent company / In th'other world" (4.2.198-99), the other world extends no further than the outskirts of Amalfi and the ruined churchyard where her disembodied voice issues futile warnings to Antonio. The horrific titillation of death which drew audiences to the stage in the 1610s, Webster suggests, have obliterated considerations of the hopelessness of the human condition. This is the lesson the audience receives from Bosola as he displays for them—for us—the melancholy props of Benjaminian allegory: effigies, hand, and coffin.

4. Allegories

Benjamin does not envisage allegory as a way of accessing the transcendent via the material but as a mode of representation that disrupts the illusion of their continuity. Allegory does not denote "the will to symbolic totality" (which Benjamin locates in the symbol); it lays bare the fragmentation of living matter, its irredeemable thing-ness (186). This explains the baroque cult of the ruin and its human counterpart, the corpse, Benjamin's emblems of fragmentation, and the signature of Webster's art.

"Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (178). On his way to the Cardinal, Antonio walks past the ruins of an abbey:

> I do love these ancient ruins:
> We never tread upon them but we set
> Our foot upon some reverend history;

> And questionless, here in this open court,
> Which now lies naked to the injuries
> Of stormy weather, some men lie interred
> Loved the church so well, and gave so largely to't,
> They thought it should have canopied their bones
> Till doomsday; but all things have their end:
> Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
> Must have like death that we have. (5.3.9-19)

For an English audience, Antonio's musing would have conjured up memories of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, offering visual proof of the success of the Reformation (see Diehl 210), or voicing nostalgia for the Catholic past (see Borlik 143). From the perspective of the *Trauerspiel*, Antonio's reflection on the transience of marble and gilded monuments uncannily rehearses Benjamin's view of the connection between history and the ruin:

> The word "history" stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history […] is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. (187)

The Duchess herself wastes away. Transience/history stands written on her countenance. "Who do I look like now?" she asks Cariola. "[L]ike some reverend monument / Whose ruins are even pitied" (4.2.29, 32-33). Before the scene is out, the ruined Duchess will have turned into a corpse, "the pre-eminent emblematic property" (Benjamin 218). "The characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory," Benjamin writes: "It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse" (217-18). The function of the corpse is to lay bare the degradation, the meaninglessness and the corruption of human existence. The corpse is not the ending—the term—but the end—the ultimate aim—of the *Spiel*. This is the truth revenge tragedy has turned its back on in pursuit of cheap audience gratification, and which *The Duchess of Malfi* as *Trauerspiel* mercilessly restores.

With the new art of anatomy, one of the play's ruling tropes, the Benjaminian corpse is an endless reservoir of props/dead objects. The mad Ferdinand roams graveyards with a man's leg slung across his shoulder. The dead hand he extends to the Duchess instead of his own was probably cut off from the body of some anonymous criminal in the cabinet of an anatomist.[20] Webster annexes the props of revenge drama to make them into *Trauerspiel* props endowed with allegorical meaning. Bosola is uncommonly alert to the melancholy thing-ness of the human condition. A philosopher/satirist capable of giving an extempore speech on funeral monuments, he points to the skull beneath the skin, the corpse always already buried within the living body: "we bear about us / A rotten and dead body" that "we delight / To hide […] in rich tissue" (2.1.56-58). In his capacity as tomb maker-cum-executioner, he is a maker of dead objects, effigies, rope, and coffin. The Duchess's continually pregnant body cannot compete with the host of dead bodies spawning dead fragments that he seems to marshall. He confronts her throughout Act 4 with the "*facies hippocratica*," the death's head that bespeaks man's subjection to nature (Benjamin 166), and with the fluids of bodily decomposition, the ultimate stage of fragmentation. "Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little cruded milk, fantastical puff paste" (4.2.115-17), he muses in response to the Duchess's ontological question, "[w]ho am I?"

The Duchess thus learns the *Trauerspiel* lesson under the instruction of Bosola, her mentor/tormentor. His "bóssola" points her the way to the corpse, her assigned journey. She travels from celebrating life as a wedded wife and mother to "mourning for mortality" (Zimmerman 15); from the attempted totality of the closed, perfect circle of married life to melancholy dissolution; from happy mother to "green mummy" (4.2.116); from proliferating subject to proliferating earthworms, and from ruler to martyr. Apprehending death at the heart of life is the recurring motif of the torments devised for her. She is first made to grieve for a spouse and children who are actually still alive, then, moments before her death, to apprehend herself as an already decomposing corpse. In both instances, the matters she is confronted with, body rot

and wax, operate like ruins on the borderline between existence and obliteration, something and nothing. Rot is the quintessence of eternal transience, the something that remains behind to mourn nothingness. It represents and somehow freezes the moment and process of *un*becoming. The wax effigies standing for the supposedly dead bodies of the Duchess's kin blur the boundaries between animate and inanimate—wax is known for its eerie capacity to imitate the flesh. More significantly, they enshrine—for what is the space discovered behind the traverse but a monstrous shrine?—the concept of the human as object. Wax and rot encapsulate between them thing-ness and eternal decay, the concepts at the heart of *Trauerspiel* which it exists to mourn. Mourning is also the disposition, Benjamin notes, "in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it" (139). The Duchess finally acknowledges, "now [she's] well awake," that the end the brothers have engineered for her is the "[b]est gift they can give or [she] can take" (4.2.209-11).

III. Reading Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* Historically

In his analysis of the relationship of romance and comedy, Jameson has shown the value of a "historical regrounding" of genres (157) beyond the mode/syntax, Frye/Propp dichotomy that has governed contemporary criticism for over sixty years. They have valid intuitions to offer but they would carry more weight if tethered to a concrete historical situation, enabling a reading of forms as ideological formations. A historical regrounding of the dialogue of tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, so far developed in terms of syntax and mode, is thus called for to make sense of their coexistence within *The Duchess of Malfi* as an individual work.

The conceptual category informing both tragedy and *Trauerspiel* is the hero's submission to an existing order or law, human, divine, or social as the case may be. Conceived as a "balance in nature" which the hero's free act briefly disturbs, order "sooner or later *must* right itself" (Frye 209). The function of tragedy is to "lead up to an epiphany of law, of

that which is and must be" (Frye 208). In *Trauerspiel*, it is the tyrant, no matter how discredited, who embodies the law, for "not even the most dreadful corruption […] can really disturb this norm of sovereignty" (Benjamin 69-70). The Duchess's move to marry regardless of blood and lineage disrupts the "balance in nature" (Frye 209), whereupon the Arragonians, corrupt as they are, act to reassert "that which is and must be" (Frye 208), namely what is declared "good" under the(ir) law.

As it stands, this framework undermines both order and sovereignty. The Arragonians at first shroud their marriage prohibition in authoritative, quasi-sacred mystery—"Do not you ask the reason, but be satisfied / I say I would not [have her marry again]" (1.1.250-51). Yet, their declared concern for the purity of "[t]he royal blood of Aragon and Castile" (2.5.22) exposes it as an ideological formation that "draw[s] the boundaries of a given social order and provid[es] a powerful internal deterrent against deviancy or subversion" (Jameson 140). Bosola eventually cancels the Arragonians' aristocratic revenge by a revenge of his own that brings a socially mixed ruler, Antonio's son and heir, to the throne. It vindicates the Duchess's initial breach, *de facto* questioning the law that initially organized the tragedy. *Trauerspiel* reshapes the perception of sovereignty, unassailable as it is, by lodging it in the hands of a ruthless, mad autocrat. It redeploys the categories of good and evil, locating good on the side of the martyr, while the fountainhead of rule is "poisoned" (1.1.14). Generic counterpoint thus redistributes categories of good, evil and order in ways that are likely to unsettle the reception of the drama. "What is and must be" (Frye 208) is no longer aligned with, or irrelevant to, questions of good and evil. It stands pitted against moral categories, questioning the justice of the law. Resulting uncertainties over type (is the Duchess a type of the lusty widow?), genre (is the play tragic or anti-tragic?), and meaning (how far does the Duchess actually transgress?) are evidence of the tensions induced by the coexistence of dramatic codes, what Whigham in a different context called "uneasy dissonance" (177).

These tensions, of course, can be and have been imputed to an evolution of revenge tragedy "away from a worn-out convention" in the mid-

1600s, an evolution predictably prompted by the usual suspect, "the coarse taste" (Bowers 155) of popular audiences. Able dramatists were persuaded against their better sense to jettison the hero of older Elizabethan drama. Too "narrow" a type, it was unable to adjust to the new demand for "more variety and less high seriousness" and "violent, far-fetched, and surprising situations" (155). "Far-fetched" is the give-away term establishing absence of cause as a valid reason for the emergence of new trends. Genre criticism should realize instead that "generic affiliations and the systematic deviation from them provide clues which lead us back to the concrete historical situation of the individual text itself and allow us to read its structure as ideology, as a socially symbolic act, as a prototypical response to a historical dilemma" (Jameson 157). The "historical dilemma" that informs Webster's tragedy is twofold. One branch is the decline of the aristocracy and the pressures induced by the emergence of a new social formation; the other is its counterpart, the redefinition of the place of woman in Jacobean society. The early modern declining elite came to regard intermarriage as "contamination […] by invasion from below," Whigham recalls, following Lawrence Stone (168). Ferdinand's incestuous inclination toward his sister, Whigham famously postulates, is "a *social* posture of hysterical compensation—a desperate expression of the desire to evade degrading associations with inferiors" (169). Opposite him, the two servants represent emerging, socially mobile classes—or tentatively so. Antonio must be coerced into social mobility, while Bosola never achieves it. The former is at first taken aback by the Duchess's marriage proposal, having duly internalised the ideological hierarchy of rank, the law which in a not so distant past kept everyone in their right place. He is reluctant to seize the opportunity she offers him to leave behind his obsolete, socio-economically fruitless stance: "You may discover what a wealthy mine / I make you lord of" (1.1.417-18). Inhibited by residual processes from "the time past," he is not ready to step into "the time to come": "his horizon of mobility is clearly circumscribed; beyond its limits he is ill at ease, unprepared for a society open to the top" (Whigham 175):

ANTONIO There is a saucy and ambitious devil
Dancing in this circle.
DUCHESS Remove him.
ANTONIO How? (1.1.400-01)

Bosola on the other hand cannot find a place for himself in the proto-capitalist framework. His aspiration to "thrive some way" (1.1.37) is regularly frustrated: he goes his way through the play claiming due payment for service. An unrewarded henchman he begins (he never got cash payment from the Cardinal for committing a murder on his behalf), an unrewarded henchman he ends, vainly claiming from Ferdinand his reward for killing the Duchess (4.2.278).[21] Yet, characteristically, his final complaint is that he dies "neglected" (5.5.84), not cheated out of his wages. Beyond cash payment, what he longs for, Whigham suggests, is the identity that service used to confer in the feudal system. Between feudal and capitalist discourses, Bosola fails to recognize that "cash payment is the full exchange value to be got from his employer" (Whigam 178)—and ironically does not even get that. As much as Antonio, the aspiring Bosola is hampered by residual processes.

Mediating between feudality and the marketplace, upper and emergent classes, the widowed Duchess holds the key to "the invasion from below."[22] She authorises mobility across class lines by marrying Antonio (and by readily turning into a bourgeois wife as if she were born to it), while Bosola offers the ideological subtext to her move—before he informs against her to Ferdinand. His discourse on merit and the revolution that merit will work on existing social practices is worth quoting at length:

Fortunate lady!
For you have made your private nuptial bed
The humble and fair seminary of peace.
No question but many an unbeneficed scholar
Shall pray for you for this deed, and rejoice
That some preferment in the world can yet
Arise from merit. The virgins of your land
That have no dowries shall hope your example
Will raise them to rich husbands. Should you want

> Soldiers, 'twould make the very Turks and Moors
> Turn Christians, and serve you for this act.
> Last, the neglected poets of your time,
> In honor of this trophy of a man,
> Raised by that curious engine, your white hand,
> Shall thank you in your grave for't, and make that
> More reverend than all the cabinets
> Of living princes. For Antonio,
> His fame shall likewise flow from many a pen,
> When heralds shall want coats to sell to men. (3.2.268-85)

Ingrained relics of obsolete ideologies are a measure of the difficulty of navigating paradigm changes. The progressive Duchess is at first dismissively returned to the stage type of the lusty window (see 1.1.330). By the end of Act 4, the order of tragedy has prevailed. But its rules are discredited enough to ratify the presence of *Trauerspiel* as an alternative mode, one that can harbour a positive reading of the Duchess. It eventually takes Bosola's revenge to precipitate the end of aristocracy by eradicating the household of Aragon and Castile, substituting a new generation of "young hopeful gentlemen" (5.5.110) to whom signs of worth, crown, nobility and fame, are transferred:

> *Integrity of life is fame's best friend,*
> *Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.* (5.5.118-19)

The redefinition of gender roles in Jacobean society—the Renaissance controversy about women—is a special chapter in ongoing social changes (see Crunelle-Vanrigh). Long viewed as vehicles securing the continuity of lineage, pawns in alliances that fostered male wealth and influence, or cultural embodiments of evil sexuality, women were being gradually invited as equal partners in the joint venture of companionate marriage. Protestant discourse dignified matrimony as a central institution; the private sphere was granted significance on a par with the public, the political and the spiritual spheres (see Rose 97-98). By the time Webster composed *The Duchess of Malfi*, the change had started to affect cultural production, prompting generic readjustments. With

Romeo and Juliet, marriage had ceased to be an exclusively comedic motif and competed with matters of state as a valid subject for nobler genres. It conquered further territory at the turn of the century when the cultural significance of the warrior, the staple of heroic tragedy, waned under the combined influence of the decline of the aristocracy and the accession of a pacifist sovereign. Playwrights turned away from the battle front to the home front, from the public to the private sphere, and from an all-male world to one where women possessed or tried to achieve agency. The Duchess metagenerically registers the change when she describes her move in the military idiom, redefining it as a heroic endeavour and herself as a hero of marriage:

> […] as men in some great battles,
> By apprehending danger, have achieved
> Almost impossible actions—I have heard soldiers say so—
> So I, through frights and threat'nings, will assay
> This dangerous venture. (1.1.334-338)

The Duchess's venture is fraught with peril for the course of change, empowerment and disempowerment never did run smooth. "[T]he historical moment blocks off a certain number of possibilities which had been unavailable in earlier situations, all the while opening up certain determinate new ones which may or may not then come into being" (Jameson 158)—and the issue is tragic when they do not. The dramatic landscape of *The Duchess of Malfi* is an instance of Jameson's "limiting situations," not of triumphant empowerment. The Duchess is likely to founder at every step of the way, tripped by unwanted relics of the past: the ambiguity of her marriage contract, valid but marginal; her position as a widow, legally autonomous but actually dependent and as likely to be forbidden to remarry as to be coerced into an unwanted union. Like Bosola, she belongs nowhere, a condition epitomised by her undecidable position as ruler and wife, both superior and inferior—the historically embedded version of the elevated/ creaturely dichotomy which Benjamin detects in the ruler.

Concluding Remark

The tragic *agôn* of *The Duchess of Malfi* is thus inscribed in a historical determination opposing old to new standards at the juncture between two paradigms. The standards of the past materialise in the Arragonians' "anachronistic neofeudal regime in the process of decline" (Rose 157), while bold, pioneering, but doomed choices are located in the Duchess, only too aware of the risks of breaking new ground: "I am going into a wilderness / Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clew / To be my guide" (1.1.349-51). To weather the dangers of the moment, she alternates between the court and the bedchamber and confines her utopia to a parallel world that never sees the light of day. As long as the same rules do not prevail for all, hers is a mock revolution that is not destined to last, doomed before it is (belatedly and perhaps artificially) vindicated. This is the conclusion invited by Webster's choice of combining tragedy and *Trauerspiel* as reading contracts. It endorses the Duchess's aspirations and mourns her tragic failure. It also explores the twilight zone between the "time past" and the "time to come," the dangerous interstice Antonio tragically fails to envisage in his original praise of the Duchess.[23] For between the moment the old world dies and the moment the new world is born, there is the time of monsters, of martyrs and of tyrants.

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NOTES

[1]I am deeply grateful to my anonymous reviewers for their insightful remarks and suggestions.

[2]The death of Julius Caesar in Act 3, Scene 1 similarly prompted nineteenth century critics to question Shakespeare's construction and raised controversy about who is the real hero of the play. For a related discussion, see Zirker and Riecker in this volume of *Connotations*: http://www.connotations.de/debate/shakespeares-julius-caesar/

[3]A group of plays by Gryphius, Lohenstein, Hallmann, Haugwitz and several others, the genre of *Trauerspiel* contributed to shape a national German literature in the second half of the seventeenth century.

[4]Building on Benjamin's view that the death of Socrates is the *Ursprung* of *Trauerspiel*, Lupton and Reinhard suggest the death of Hamlet is its *Untergang*: "*Hamlet* appears as the English flower of German drama, which, blossoming before the fact, cankers all future Germanic production"

(Lupton and Reinhard 49). Grady focuses on Benjamin's theory of fragmented allegories and finds allegorical dynamics in *Hamlet*'s props, stage effects and imagery—the Ghost, the unweeded garden, Ophelia's flowers, Yorick' skull, the king's signet, the sword, the pearl and the poisoned cup. "These allegories for Benjamin are typically ambiguous, and in this quality *Hamlet* is quintessentially allegorical" (Grady 104).

[5]For Benjaminesque takes on English early modern drama, see among others Zenon Luis Martinez on *Richard II*, Margaret Owens on *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and William Remley on *Timon of Athens*.

[6]A similar collocation occurs on Bosola's transformation from hitman to avenger (4.2.347-52).

[7]Webster may have been aware of Aristotle's reference to musical forms of *catharsis* in book VIII of the *Politics*, ch. 6 and 7. The sequence gestures toward the medical dimension of catharsis which Jacob Bernays was to explore in the nineteenth century.

[8]The young Webster was educated at Merchant Taylor's School (possibly under the instruction of Richard Mulcaster before Mulcaster left as first headmaster in 1586). An early advocate of English as a language of learning, Mulcaster taught the usual Latin and Greek courses and had an interest in drama, a favourable context for Webster to develop his sense of how "the figural inhabits discourse" (Lyotard 279).

[9]For Huston Diehl, the play is "deeply informed by English Calvinism" and explores "Calvinist notions of predestination" (182) through the character of Bosola, who cannot do good despite his better knowledge.

[10]"*Bóssola*, a boxe that mariners keepe their compasse in. Also taken for the com|passe. *Bossolare*, to put in a boxe" (John Florio, *A vvorlds of wordes, or Most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian*, 1598). The sense anticipates Bosola's self-presentation as the Duchess's grave maker (4.2.110).

[11]"What would I do, were this to do again? / I would not change my peace of conscience / For all the wealth of Europe" (4.2.323-25). Bosola's sudden awareness matches Frye's gloss of Aristotle's *anagnorisis* as "the recognition of the determined shape of the life [the hero] has created for himself, with an implicit comparison with the uncreated potential life he has forsaken" (Frye 212).

[12]Prior to the severed hand/wax effigies scene, Ferdinand's "Inform her what I told you" (4.1.17) is characteristic of Webster's reticence to have the audience identify Ferdinand too closely with the specifics of the torments.

[13]The garrotting is frequently staged as a Crucifixion of sorts, see Dominic Dromgoole's production (Globe Theatre, 2014).

[14]Protestants no longer regarded Mary as an intercessor, yet devotion to the Virgin was still vivid under Anglicanism.

[15]The Duchess's fake pilgrimage to Loreto to meet up with Antonio contains elements of anti-Catholic satire, reviving the Reformers' association of pilgrimage with erotic trysts. But the principal butt of the satire in the complex pantomime at the shrine of Our Lady (3.4) is the Cardinal more than the Duchess. "The minimalism of the stage direction in which the Duchess presents herself constitutes a simple act of piety, shorn of the trappings of Marian idolatry," contrasting with the elaborate, sacrilegious ceremony of the Cardinal's instalment as a soldier (Borlik 142).

[16]Antonio speaks here in his capacity as the trusted Chorus before he is drawn into the action as a participant.

[17]The line is borrowed from "A Monumental Column" (1613), Webster's elegy on the death of Prince Henry in 1612, widely regarded as a national tragedy. Inserting in Antonio's tribute to the Duchess a line lifted from Webster's own heart-felt tribute to the young heir is suggestive of the status he intended for her. On the influence of Prince Henry's funeral on the wax figures episode, see Owens, "John Webster, Tussaud Laureate."

[18]From a poem uncertainly attributed to Thomas Pounde, "The complaynt of a Catholike for the death of M. Edmund Campion," Guiney 131, 11.69-72.

[19]"Enough of his independent better self are shown to stir the interest of the audience and the more to horrify them by the cynical brutality that follows. Indeed, Bosola has an almost surgical interest in torturing the human spirit to see how much it can endure before the veniality he seeks as the excuse for his own existence is forced to the surface. The unworldly bravery of the duchess proves to Bosola that his theories are false" (Bowers 178-79).

[20]As in Rembrandt's "Anatomy lesson" (1632), and as early as Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), dissection was performed on the bodies of recently executed criminals, long before the practice was written into law in 1752. With the Barber-Surgeons' Hall looming large in the background (see 5.2.76), and with Ferdinand roaming graveyards for dead bodies, Jacobean audiences would have been in no doubt about the origin of the severed hand.

[21]For Whigham, Bosola is the first tragic figure of the worker alienated from his own work (see 178).

[22]The Duchess is nominally free from her brothers' domination. Widows and women who were heads of households were the only women assumed to have any independence (see Cressy 34).

[23]Webster represents aristocratic prerogatives as perverse or unnatural but does not authorize new possibilities to come to fruition yet. It comes as no surprise that the dish of apricots triggering the Duchess's delivery of the fruit of her marriage to Antonio is reputed to have been ripened in horse dung (2.1.137).

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