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# Matrimony and Change in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*\*

by

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Profound changes occurred in the institution of marriage during the Renaissance. Love was gradually replacing fiscal and dynastic considerations as the foundation considered crucial for a binding union. The love marriage was largely a middle-class phenomenon, born of the changing relationship between the family and the state, articulated and refined by Protestant divines, and diffused through aristocratic society. Drama of the period is much concerned with this shift. The bourgeois conjunction of love and marriage triumphs in the aristocratic societies of many a romantic comedy. The weddings at play's end promise a new social order. The disintegration of the old order, traced in the upheavals produced by the arranged marriage, is the subject of a number of Jacobean tragedies that, like many of the comedies, rely on female protagonists. *The Duchess of Malfi* is a unique amalgam of thematic features from both genres: the love marriage that releases and shapes the dramatic action brings the Duchess in conflict with the traditional values and entrenched power of her brothers. As one of the crucial themes of the play, the old and new concepts of matrimony help determine its action and characterization.

Conventionally *The Duchess of Malfi* has been viewed not as a work about marriage, but as a late variant of the "weak king" tragedy. The basic assumption behind such studies is that the play, in the tradition of many Elizabethan and early Jacobean tragedies, is concerned with the consequences of the Duchess's abrogation of her duties to the political and social hierarchy which she heads, a dereliction which is disastrous because it exposes her to the greater power of her corrupt brothers. Order can be restored only after she is "chastened" and victimized in Act IV and after the evil unleashed by her actions has produced the inevitable catastrophe. From

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this perspective, her marriage to Antonio is the key action establishing her culpability as a ruler. By heeding her passions rather than the dictates of her princely responsibilities, the Duchess brings chaos upon her realm.<sup>1</sup> However, viewing *The Duchess of Malfi* primarily as a "commonweal" tragedy tends to displace its thematic and structural center. A powerful ruler is not presented as the antidote for the sick society of this play. Rather, it is the Duchess as wife and mother who confronts its political and social corruption.

The love marriage, then, far from generating chaos in the world of the play, provides a foundation for restoring order.<sup>2</sup> Its significance can be clarified by examining how an opposition between love and arranged marriage functions as one manifestation of the pivotal struggles between the Duchess and her brothers. This opposition is established both by a submerged but relatively balanced exposition of the two kinds of matrimony and by a well-defined contrast between Ferdinand and Antonio, unsuitable suitor and tyrannical blocking figure in the one marriage that occurs in the play.

Webster's reliance on matrimony as a definitive theme and his endorsement of the love marriage are not surprising, given the ongoing re-examination of the institution in Reformation England. Issues that had traditionally occupied works on the subject, particularly the relative merits of married and single life, remained pertinent throughout the sixteenth century, but increasingly, attention focused on the nature and function of the institution itself, and on the roles of parents and children, husband and wife. A central concern, touching on virtually every other aspect of the topic, was the role of love. Conjugal love had not been ignored in medieval didactic works and it formed an enduring theme in the literature.<sup>3</sup> But in treatises and handbooks published during the Reformation it received concentrated study. Often, endorsement of matrimony was accompanied by an indictment of marriages based upon fiscal considerations rather than love. Contrasts between the two appear in secular and religious tracts directed toward both the aristocracy and the middle class.<sup>4</sup> Well-documented cases of forced marriage occurring throughout the period attest to the timeliness of the debate, as do the conventional "Advice to a Son" letters written by aristocratic fathers whose pragmatic calculations put money and lineage ahead of love.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, the Protestant divines who most systematically examined the nature of the love marriage as they sought to retrieve the institution of matrimony from what they saw as the obloquy it had suffered at the hands of the Roman Catholics.<sup>6</sup> While their perspective is explicitly religious in comparison to the more secular treatment offered by the playwrights, a popular, middle-class orientation figured for both, and some of the same issues dominated didactic works and literature. One of the most useful of these works for a study of the drama is the *The Booke of Matrimony*, by a well-known minister, Thomas Becon. While it was published in the third

quarter of the sixteenth century, it was still being appropriated verbatim half a century later by writers on marriage contemporaneous with Stuart playwrights. Becon's work is of particular interest because its vehement endorsement of the love marriage and indictment of the fiscal marriage are discussed in terms of their effects on society at large—a perspective pertinent to that of early seventeenth-century tragedy.

Ascribing powers to "holy matrimony" that are analogous to those generally accorded the ruler,<sup>7</sup> Becon defines the ideal marriage as one contracted through a "free, louinge, hartly and good consente" of husband and wife. Such a union promotes virtue in the home and in the "publique weale" where it prevents not only sexual laxity but broader kinds of social disorder. And the children protect the commonweal against enemies foreign and civil and insure its longlasting prosperity (fols. Dcxvi<sup>r</sup> -Dcxvi<sup>v</sup>). According to Becon, this kind of marriage was formerly the norm; he deplors its replacement by prevailing "Romish" customs, marriages contracted by parents attentive only to financial advantage, who consequently sell off their children like cattle. Such marriages engender domestic strife, which spreads to the lower orders and corrupts society. This, he insists, is the reason for the "cursing, lieng, manslaughter, thefts and whorehunting" rampant in his day (fol. ccccl [xii]<sup>v</sup>).

Becon's ideas provide a fruitful foundation for discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*, illuminating aspects missed by interpretations that stress the definitive role of the ruler. The world of the play contains not a little lying, manslaughter, and adultery. The social rather than political thrust of this corruption is emphasized by the nature of the brothers' persecution of the duchess. She is imprisoned, tortured, and murdered not out of political motive on their part or political dereliction on hers, but because she has contracted precisely the kind of marriage that Becon extolls, thus rejecting the aristocratic values he excoriates.

The significance of the play's action is apparent if it is remembered that Becon's work arises in the historical context of a long transformation of the institution as it responded to the larger social, political, and economic changes of the times.<sup>8</sup> In replacing the arranged marriage with the love marriage Becon is, in effect, condemning the old and embracing the new. Examination of *The Duchess of Malfi* reveals a similar juxtaposition of two visions of marriage.

The older concept of marriage, endorsed by Ferdinand and his brother, corresponds to the one outlined by Thomas Becon in his indictment of aristocratic matrimonial mores. It rests on the most traditional of foundations—the protection and augmentation of the lineal and fiscal interests of the family, responsibilities of the parents or male family members. They determine the fate—that is, the spouse—of female members of the family. Their primary considerations are the welfare of the family as a

whole rather than the personal happiness of the women. Love is irrelevant in the formation of such a marriage. Ferdinand articulates this traditional expectation in his speech to the Duchess on reputation:

Love gives . . . counsel  
To inquire for him 'mongst unambitious shepherds,  
Where dowries were not talk'd of, and sometimes  
'Mongst quiet kindred that had nothing left  
By their dead parents. . . (III.ii.126-30).<sup>9</sup>

This vision of marriage relies on conventional medieval and Renaissance notions of hierarchy; pedigree must be maintained to preserve societal order and women must be subordinate to men to insure pedigree.

The circumscribed role of the woman in such a marriage derives from the fact that she is seen exclusively in terms of one small part of her total self, namely the possibilities she presents for solidifying family fortune and lineage. She is self as function. Her virtue, defined by her loyalty to the kin structure, lies only in her preservation of her chastity for its requirements.<sup>10</sup> This explains, in part, Ferdinand's view of the Duchess as "vile woman." When she betrays the family by marrying outside of it for her own fulfillment rather than for her family's, she is totally renegade. Thus Ferdinand sees her as a whore and her children as bastards even after he learns of her marriage (III.ii.99-100; IV.i.35-8). His vision of his sister is synecdochic, since a small part of her defines the whole.

Webster contrasts this perspective on marriage, the family, and the individual with another, provided by the Duchess and Antonio. Exemplifying Becon's ideal, their marriage replaces familial claims with voluntary contract and celebrates love over money and pedigree. Accordingly, it levels rather than perpetuates hierarchy and degree; as the Duchess says, "I do here put off all vain ceremony / And only do appear to you a young widow / That claims you for her husband . . ." (I.i.456-8). Such a marriage is not anarchic but relies as Antonio notes, on natural and cosmic harmonies.

Ant. And may our sweet affections, like the spheres,  
Be still in motion.

Duch. Quickening, and make  
The like soft music.

Ant. That we may imitate the loving palms,  
Best emblem of a peaceful marriage,  
That ne'er bore fruit, divided (I.i.482-7).

The family life emerging from this union illustrates the oft-repeated

justifications for marriage offered in the domestic handbooks: as a solace against loneliness, for the propagation of children, and for the avoidance of "fornication."<sup>11</sup> Suggestions of ongoing domestic harmony are found in the "apricock" scene, in the hair-brushing episode, in the separation scene, and in the Duchess's last request, which concerns her children's welfare. As one critic has commented, the couple's marriage reflects a "strain of simplicity, of almost bourgeois sentiment, which establishes a viewpoint and a value."<sup>12</sup>

In this context, it is important to look briefly at Antonio's vision of the Duchess, which is so different from that of her brothers. He does see her, and realistically so, as a woman within a kin structure (suggested by his justifiable fear of the anger and power of her brothers), and as Duchess (as in his speeches on ambition in I.i and in his teasing comments in II.i and III.ii), but for the most part he sees the integrity and beauty of the woman who becomes his wife and the mother of his children. From this perspective, of course, her virtue is unassailable, since it is self-generated, separate from both support of and loyalty to the kin structure. His referents are her character and actions. Such an attitude can be seen as a product of an "early modern" concept of the aristocratic individual, who is at the beginning of a gradual emergence from total definition by relation to kin structure into a social and economic member of society in his or her own right.

Webster's dramatic representation of the changing institution of matrimony demonstrates how unequivocally the play's balance is thrown toward endorsement of the love marriage.

The traditional marriage in all its ramifications provides an important thematic foundation for the play; Webster invariably concentrates on its destructive energies. One important example is the Cardinal's liaison with Julia. In both the literature and the social documents of the period, adultery is the conventional accommodation made to the dissatisfactions arising from an arranged marriage. Condemnation of adulterous and even incestuous relationships found in many late Renaissance tragedies such as *The White Devil*, *Women Beware Women*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is tempered by the fact that they contain the only love to be found in the play. The reverse is the case in *The Duchess of Malfi*, which follows contemporary books on marriage in that it charts only the destructiveness of the adulterous relationship (see Becon, fol. cccclxiii<sup>v</sup>). The Cardinal offers Julia a joyless relationship resulting not in the defiant love found in other plays but in promiscuity and murder. Depicting the Cardinal as her partner affixes this view of adultery to the corruption of institutionalized religion.<sup>13</sup> The otherwise virtuous Delio's eagerness to succeed the Cardinal suggests that it is a societal norm. Webster uses adultery not to insist on the survival of love, in however warped a fashion, in a society whose values are hostile to it, but to establish a more devastating statement through depicting the impossibility of

any love in that society.

Even more significant is the consistent perversion of traditional matrimonial mores by both the Cardinal and Ferdinand in their treatment of their sister; the result is the subversion of the very social structures these mores were supposed to uphold. Such a pattern is made explicit at the beginning of the play. On their departure from Malfi, Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the Duchess against independent action.

- Card.                    You may flatter yourself,  
                          And take your own choice: privately be married  
                          Under the eaves of night.
- Ferd.                    Think't the best voyage  
                          That eer you made; like the irregular crab,  
                          Which though't goes backward, thinks that it goes right,  
                          Because it goes its own way: but observe,  
                          Such weddings may more properly be said  
                          To be executed, than celebrated (I.i.316-323).

Calderwood argues that Ferdinand is asserting the importance of degree, of the "rigidly established social hierarchy," and ultimately of the cosmological order upon which degree is based.<sup>14</sup> However, the part of this speech determining its meaning is the threat at the end, which suggests an attempt to control the Duchess going far beyond any sanctioned authority, and thereby destroying all order. Bosola's covert employment as intelligencer is equally significant. While the brothers tell the Duchess that her "own discretion / Must now be [her] director" (292-3), in fact they hire Bosola to ensure their continued control. The traditional and legitimate oversight has gone underground. This perversion of a once viable ethos reappears periodically, for instance in their misuse of their authority to arrange a marriage for their sister, a power that each evokes at a different time as a cover for his persecution of her (see III.i.39-45 and V.ii.124-6). It is in Ferdinand's character, though, that the corruption of the older order is most carefully delineated.

After the Duchess's murder, in the midst of recriminations directed toward himself and toward Bosola, Ferdinand says, "For let me examine well the cause: / What was the meanness of her match to me?" (IV.ii.281-2). What he comes up with—his hope to gain "An infinite mass of treasure by her death"—itself exploits his traditional control over her destiny. But even that does not explain why her marriage "drew a stream of gall, quite through my heart" (285,287), or the extent of his persecution of her, or his vivid fantasies concerning her sexuality. All these factors underlie the fairly widespread agreement that Ferdinand's attitude toward the Duchess is closer to that of a



the males in her family, who are responsible for dynastic honor. Ferdinand's feelings are an extreme form of the possessiveness toward and identification with the aristocratic woman that is socially sanctioned for her male protector. His actions, which proceed from a warped intensification of that defined responsibility, make explicit the decadence of traditional matrimonial customs. In other words, the structure of Ferdinand's role (*i.e.* his concern for honor) remains to rationalize his actions, but the actions destroy what that role was designed to protect.

If Ferdinand's incestuous feelings reflect the perversion of his legitimate role, his insanity is the culmination of a centripetal and consistently self-destructive process, one clarified by the lunatics that he parades in front of his sister, ironically hoping to drive her mad. As the world of the madmen is the world of Aragon,<sup>17</sup> the servant's description of the origins of their insanity is pertinent. For instance, he speaks of

an English tailor, craz'd i'th'brain  
With the study of new fashion; a gentleman usher  
Quite beside himself, with care to keep in mind  
The number of his lady's salutations,  
Or "how do you," she employ'd him in each morning . . .  
(IV.ii.50-4).

Both, as well as many of the others, have become insane because of an overly conscientious effort to fulfill their social roles. The Duke is no different. The responsibility to protect has become a compulsive desire to possess and finally to destroy; this process culminates in madness. His lycanthropy, permeated with erotic and incestuous overtones<sup>18</sup> (he calls the Duchess's children "cubs" and "young wolves") and suggesting a lapse from the human to the animal level of the great Elizabethan hierarchy, effectively pictorializes the transmogrification of traditional attitudes toward marriage and the family in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

The destruction of the family and the State which ensues from Ferdinand's obsessions is ironic, for he assumes that it is the Duchess, not he, who threatens traditional structures. In his increasingly hysterical interchange with the Cardinal after he hears of the Duchess's child, Ferdinand rapidly runs through his fantasies about the identity of her lover: "some strong thigh'd bargeman" or "one o'th' woodyard" or "some lovely squire" who delivers her coal. For him, disobedience is tantamount to sabotage of the aristocratic hierarchy and hence of all order.

In contrast to these fantasies, the Duchess marries a man who, though lacking birthright nobility, has been carefully endowed with a personal and political ethos that could ensure the re-establishment of a healthy society. In

this, he is quite unlike characters in other tragedies who achieve status incommensurate with their birth. He is dissimilar, too, in his pronounced lack of drive, which is his other defining characteristic. The contradictions inherent in his portrayal, that is his virtue as opposed to his passivity, give him a complicated function in Webster's treatment of marriage in the play.

Demonstration of Antonio's integrity proceeds methodically through Act I. The play opens with a statement of his political ideals, couched in his encomium of the French king. In his striking comparison of a good king's influence to the "silver drops" of a fountain, he suggests a different kind of societal hierarchy than that envisioned by the Aragonian brothers, one proceeding from virtue rather than pedigree. He lives by a private ethos which is similarly based upon virtue. His skill at jousting and horsemanship, established during his first interchange with Ferdinand, shows that he has the accouterments of a gentleman. But for Antonio, these accomplishments are most important for the inner qualities they develop: "out of brave horsemanship, arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind to noble action" (I.i.143-6). The most forceful statement of his integrity occurs during the marriage scene:

- (Duch.) If you will know where breathes a complete man—  
I speak it without flattery—turn your eyes  
And progress through yourself.  
Ant. Were there nor heaven nor hell,  
I should be honest: I have long serv'd virtue,  
And ne'er ta'en wages of her (I.i.435-40).

Thus Webster consistently portrays Antonio as a man whose concept and practice of virtue make him at once a counterpoint and a standard for the lineal noblemen of the play, Ferdinand and the Cardinal.

Although his commitment to virtue is everywhere apparent, equally notable is Antonio's passivity, which first emerges during the marriage scene. The Duchess initiates and structures much of the wooing and wedding, drawing from him the comment, "These words should be mine, / And all the parts you have spoke, if some part of it / Would not have savour'd flattery" (I.i.472-4). Throughout this scene Antonio makes other remarks indicating his awareness of the discrepancy in birth between himself and the Duchess. Those referring to ambition suggest his ambivalence about the opportunities opened to him by marriage; of the wedding ring itself, he says, "a saucy, and ambitious devil / Is dancing in this circle" (I.i.411-12). His attitude may be contrasted to that of the Duchess, who forthrightly refers to the "wealthy mine" he will gain by his marriage.

Antonio's discomfort with the social mobility accompanying his marriage bespeaks a submission to hierarchy which is projected onto his actions. From the time that he uneasily—and prophetically—raises the spectre of the Aragonian brothers during his marriage ceremony, he shows himself incapable of dealing assertively with them. He panics when the Duchess becomes ill after eating the apricots, leaving Delio to distract the court. And after Ferdinand's exit following the bedchamber confrontation he lodges an inelegant accusation of complicity against the Duchess's maid, Cariola. In this scene he professes eagerness for a meeting with the brothers, one when "standing on my guard, I might relate / My warrantable love," but in practice he avoids it until after the Duchess's murder, when he decides upon a last appeal to the Cardinal, an act motivated by the fatalism bred of desperation—"better fall once, than be ever falling" (V.ii.70,74)—that produces the same incompetence found elsewhere in his reaction to the brothers.

These contradictory aspects of Antonio's character have puzzled critics, whose evaluations of him tend to ignore either his integrity or his passivity.<sup>19</sup> Reconciling these disparate elements, necessary for understanding Antonio as an integrated personage as well as his dramatic function as the Duchess's husband, lies in recognizing the frame of reference for each side of his character. His ideals are aristocratic—of a particularly well-defined cast. Despite Ferdinand's insistence that Antonio "ne'er in's life look'd like a gentleman / But in the audit time" (III.iii.73-4), it is clear that Webster has taken care to endow him with the accouterments of the compleat gentleman.<sup>20</sup> As such, his portrayal reflects the emphasis of the humanists on character and action in their definition of nobility—in contrast to more traditional notions espoused by Ferdinand and the Cardinal, which are based upon pedigree and birth.<sup>21</sup> Such a distinction emerges in a discussion of Antonio which occurs between the Duchess and Bosola.

Bos.	Fie, madam, Forget this base, low fellow. ..... One of no birth—
Duch.	Say that he was born mean: Man is most happy when's own actions Be arguments and examples of his virtue (III.v.116-117,119-21).

The Duchess here articulates a concept of the nobleman, emphasized at the time of the Reformation, that sanctioned the ennoblement of the gentry, merchants, and middle-class professionals who formed the foundation for a "new",

aristocracy loyal to Tudor monarchs.<sup>22</sup> Needless to say, this humanistic concept of nobility found its way into contemporary marriage tracts. Heinrich Bullinger, an important European Protestant theologian who was widely translated into English, states it best: "The hyghest nobilitie, & most worthy of commendacion, is to be noble in vertues in good woorke's, maners and condicions. . . . Ther haue bene found many which came of a low birthe but they garnyshed their kynred so with virtuous and noble actes, that they and their stock attained to great prosperite."<sup>23</sup> Thus Antonio's integrity is explicitly tied to a vision of nobility that is, relatively speaking, independent of birth and lauded in marriage tracts of the period.

Antonio's passivity, which never vitiates his virtue but rather exists alongside it, is linked in a different manner to his "base birth." His ambivalent attitude toward ambition and his indecisive actions form a striking contrast to qualities displayed by similar characters in other tragedies who move beyond the sphere allotted them by birth. Edmund in *King Lear* exemplifies such a character, often called the New Man or the Machiavellian individualist. Displaying energy, ambition, cunning, and above all the ruthless abuse of traditional institutions and relationships that impede his drive to "prosper," such a figure threatens the old order, often embodied in the person of the tragic protagonist, through direct power confrontation. The reverse process governs *The Duchess of Malfi*, since it is the Aragonian brothers, heads of traditional religious and secular institutions, who are villainous and powerful. Liberated by the princess's kiss from his inferior rank in the feudal hierarchy ("And 'cause you shall not come to me in debt, / Being now my steward, here upon your lips / I sign your *Quietus est*. . . ." [i.i. 462-4]), Antonio is installed by virtue of his marriage to a position approaching equality—but only within "this circumference" (469) of his marriage. Outside it, he is in the world of the brothers, and the Duchess's last words before her kiss are horribly apt. Antonio's passivity is essentially emblematic of his powerlessness in that traditional world; as such, it is significant to the thematic structure of the play. If Edmund, as has been claimed, embodies the threat and apparent amoral power of the new order,<sup>24</sup> Antonio's portrayal seems to represent an earlier point in the long continuum marking the transition from feudalism to the modern age. His inability to act evokes the larger powerlessness of an emergent class.

Like Ferdinand's, Antonio's portrayal helps inform the juxtaposition of the love and arranged marriages that is central to the play. In Antonio, Webster depicts a man with a vision inspired by humanist values, but with no power, a condition identical to the status of the love marriage in the play. And that marriage is destroyed, as is Antonio, not by any inherent flaw in its conceptualization or practice—it is the only institution containing any integrity to be found in the play—but by the power of the older order,

exemplified by the Aragonian brothers.

In Act V, *The Duchess of Malfi* charts the disintegration of the old order as it methodically annihilates the new. In the last scenes the corrosive energies of Aragon turn inward, apparent both in the tortured consciences of Ferdinand and the Cardinal and in their desperate, mutual destruction of one another. Their world is accurately rendered by Bosola as a "deep pit of darkness" (V.v.103). And in his dying words, Antonio draws the bleak moral he has gleaned from his own experience with aristocratic society: "let my son fly the courts of princes" (V.iv.72). However, Webster ensures that the drama itself transcends both perspectives.

At the play's close a significant turn of the action proclaims the viability and power, albeit inchoate, of the love marriage. Webster alters his sources to install Antonio's son on the throne rather than the Duchess's son by her first marriage. In so doing, he chooses the thematically apt rather than the historically accurate heir for the promise of renewed order conventionally closing tragedies. This suggests that the values of the Duchess and Antonio, and the image of loving union that their marriage represents, may one day triumph, politically and socially. The dominion traditionally accorded the strong ruler has here been wedded to the definitive power which Thomas Becon insists is to be found in the institution of matrimony:

no degree, no state, no order of life in maintayned  
and conserued, but whole Realmes, whole  
kingdomes, whole Common weales fal to ruine,  
decay, and vtter bothe destruccion and desola-  
cyon: so that the whole health and prosperity of  
mankynde, of publique weales, of kyngdomes,  
and finally of all degrees, may iustly be ascribed  
to matrimony alone (fol. Dcxvi<sup>v</sup> ).

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, marriage provides the structure for Webster's depiction of a society in transition; the portrayals of Ferdinand and Antonio illuminate the contours of that transition. The older vision of marriage as a fiscal and dynastic contract is affixed to a traditional but decadent aristocratic order. Webster is careful to indicate that the personal evil of the Aragonian brothers is part of a larger corruption that permeates religion, state, and court alike.<sup>25</sup> The demise of this aristocratic society, and of the vision of marriage it endorses, is particularized deep within Ferdinand himself, in his incestuous impulses toward his sister. Into this dying system, Webster injects the concept of the love marriage, represented by the union of the Duchess and her steward. Antonio's portrayal as a person with integrity but no power reflects the status of that concept of marriage in the aristocratic society of the play.

Webster rewrote Painter's cautionary tale of "a Princesse loue, that was not very wise, and of a gentleman who had forgotten his estate"<sup>26</sup> into a complex study of a society in transition. His use of marriage rather than power for his governing theme marks a change in tragic technique that is found in other tragedies of the late Renaissance. In works of Middleton, Ford, and minor dramatists the destructive energies generated by fiscally motivated, arranged marriages are one measure of a disintegrating society. *The Duchess of Malfi* utilizes a different pattern. The love marriage, endorsed in romantic comedies and in religious and secular tracts of the period, becomes a powerful ordering force in the tragic world of the play.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Leech first presented this argument in *John Webster: A Critical Study* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1951, reissued by Haskell House in 1966), and in "An Addendum on Webster's Duchess," *PQ*, 37 (1958), 253-6. Robert R. Whitman, in "The Moral Paradox in Webster's Tragedy," *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 894-903 extends Leech's analysis. See also James L. Calderwood, "The Duchess of Malfi: Styles of Ceremony," *Essays in Criticism*, 12 (1962), 133-147, an article which has circulated widely in reprint (*Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Duchess of Malfi"*, ed. Norman Rabkin [Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968]). In *Curs'd Example: "The Duchess of Malfi" and Con monweal Tragedy* (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1978), Joyce F. Peterson presents a detailed discussion of the play as a tragedy about a ruler who makes the mistake of placing "her [personal] good above political Good" (p. 69). For a view of Webster's play as a political tragedy where the protagonist is victim, not perpetrator, see J. W. Lever, *The Tragedy of State* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 15, 89-95.

<sup>2</sup> See the provocative study by Nigel Alexander, "Intelligence in *The Duchess of Malfi*," in *John Webster*, ed. Brian Morris (London: Mermaid Critical Commentaries, Ernest Benn, 1970), pp. 93-112.

<sup>3</sup> H. A. Kelly systematically dismantles the traditional view (argued most memorably by C. S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love*) that love and marriage were presented as incompatible in medieval religious and literary works. See *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), especially pp. 39, 295, 333.

<sup>4</sup> For a typical treatise on marriage directed toward the aristocracy which endorses the love marriage by contrasting it with forced marriage for financial motive, see George Whetstone, *An Heptameron of Civill Discourses* (London, 1582), sigs. Fl<sup>r</sup>-14<sup>v</sup>. A Church of England minister with Puritan leanings who is consistently critical of aristocratic marriage practices is Samuel Hieron. See "The Marriage Blessing" and "The Bridegroom," in *All the Sermons* (London, 1614), especially p. 405. This collection of sermons went through four editions in one decade.

<sup>5</sup> See G. R. Hibbard, "Love, Marriage and Money in Shakespeare's Theatre and Shakespeare's England," in *The Elizabethan Theatre VI*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Hamden, CT.: Shoestring, 1977), pp. 134-55. William Cecil, Lord Burghley advises his son to first consider his estate "Because a man can buy nothing in the Market without money" (*Certaine Precepts* [London, 1617], p. 6). See also John Norden, *The Fathers Legacie* (London, 1625), sig. 12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> See Chilton Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487-1653* (1917; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), chapter 4, and William and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," *HLQ*, 5 (1941-2), 235-272.

<sup>7</sup> Matrimony provides the seminal structure for society, "for out of it as oute of a most riche and golden foud all other orders and degrees of life issue and flow forth. . ." *Workes* (London, 1564), I, fol. Dcxvi<sup>v</sup>. All quotations will be taken from this edition. (Throughout, contractions have been expanded in accordance with modern spelling.) William Perkins, whose *Christian Oeconomie* appeared in translation from the Latin by Thomas Pickering at the time of *The Duchess of Malfi*, makes clear the connection between this familiar idea and Antonio's metaphor of the ruler-as-fountain (in *Workes*, [Cambridge: Cantrell Legge, 1613], III, 761).

<sup>8</sup> In *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 4-9 and chapters 3-8, Lawrence Stone provides extensive discussion and documentation of the changing institutions of marriage and the family—and of the concomitant transformation of the concept of the individual—that took place during the Renaissance and after.

<sup>9</sup> All quotations from the text are from John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: The Revels Plays, Methuen, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Kelso discusses the centrality of chastity in Renaissance definitions of the ideal woman in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Powell, p. 102; Becon, Part III. Interestingly, even the last is touched on; when the Duchess solicits opinions about her husband from her officers, one says of Antonio, "Some said he was an Hermaphrodite, for he could not abide a woman" (III.ii.220-1).

<sup>12</sup> Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Webster's Realism or, 'A Cunning Piece Wrought Perspective,'" in *John Webster*, ed. Brian Morris, p. 172. See also Gunnar Boklund, "The Duchess of Malfi": *Sources, Themes, Characters* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> In Becon's view, adultery would be as predictable for the Cardinal as for the aristocratic woman. According to him, "the vowe of chastitie sayeth: Rather commit adulterye a thousand tymes, then thou shalt once go away from thy professed promise" (fol. Dcii).

<sup>14</sup> Calderwood, p. 135. See also Peterson, p. 55. While both critics acknowledge the self-interest in the speech, they argue that Ferdinand is expressing Webster's views here. Richard F. Hardin provides an illuminating study of the relation of the Duchess to ceremony and degree by examining the problem in terms of the "virtual secularization of marriage" advanced by the Puritans. See "Chapman and Webster on Matrimony: The Poets and the Reformation of Ritual," *Renaissance and Reformation*, NS4 (1980), 65-73.

<sup>15</sup> The poniard reappears in the bedchamber confrontation where the Duke gives it to her, intending that she turn it on herself (III.ii.150-2). The instrument of her self-policing suicide would then be the symbol of the institution she has betrayed.

<sup>16</sup> A number of critics in the 1950s and after have noted these differing uses of blood. See, for instance, Inga-Stina Ekeblad (Ewbank), "A Webster Villain: A Study of Character and Imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi*," *Orpheus*, 3 (1956), 130-1, and McD. Emslie, "Motives in *Malfi*," *Essays in Criticism*, 9 (1959), 393.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> See Elizabeth Brennan, "The Relationship Between Brother and Sister in the Plays of John Webster," *MLR*, 58 (1963), 494; and Giles Mitchell and Eugene Wright, "Duke Ferdinand's Lycanthropy as a Disguise Motive in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*," *L & P*, 25 (1975), 117-123.

<sup>19</sup> One analysis which encompasses both is Boklund's argument that Webster has deliberately created Antonio to represent the "human average" (p. 95). Antonio's political vision gets short shrift in such a view. More recently, Ellen Belton has offered a reading attempting to rationalize Antonio's virtue with his passivity through her discussion of him as Webster's portrayal of the Stoic ideal. ("The Function of Antonio in *The Duchess of Malfi*," TSL, 18 [1976], 478). But such an endorsement of Antonio's passivity is problematic, since it does not account for the nature of his inaction, which smacks more of incapability than of retreat.

<sup>20</sup> See Ruth Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 70, 154.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2, and Diane Bornstein, *Mirrors of Courtesy* (New York: Archon Books, Shoestring, 1975), p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> See Paul N. Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> *The Christen State of Matrimonye*, trans. Miles Coverdale (London, 1552), fol. xlvi<sup>v</sup>. See also Frank W. Wadsworth, "Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* in the Light of Some Contemporary Ideas on Marriage and Remarriage," *PQ*, 35 (1956), 401-406.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Delany, "King Lear and the Decline of Feudalism," *PMLA*, 92 (1977), 429-30. For similar ideas, see also John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of "King Lear"* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 46 and Rosalie Colie, "Reason and Need: *King Lear* and the 'Crisis' of the Aristocracy," in *Some Facets of "King Lear": Essays in Prismatic Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 205-6.

<sup>25</sup> Hardin, p. 70. For a detailed discussion of this societal corruption, see Larry S. Champion, *Tragic Patterns in Jacobean and Caroline Drama* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), pp. 134-9. Travis Bogard, in *The Tragic Satire of John Webster* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), also usefully discusses the world of "oppression" within which the Duchess must act. His illuminating view that "integrity of life" is the only counterforce offered in the play does not adequately account for the Duchess's function (see especially pp. 40-43).

<sup>26</sup> William Painter, "The Duchess of Malfi," from *Palace of Pleasure* (reprinted in the Revels edition of *The Duchess of Malfi*), p. 208.