The Evolution of Webster's Bosola

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As is generally agreed by the critics, Webster's reputation is based primarily upon his two tragedies: The White Devil (1612) and The Duchess of Malfi (1623). In both plays Webster set his scene in Renaissance Italy, a world in which beauty, blended with wickedness, was to fascinate the simpler mind of the English audience. The point of this paper is to observe and analyze the reactions of two of Webster's characters to this world: Flamineo in The White Devil and Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi; and to clarify Webster's motivation in their characterization.

From the thematic viewpoint we can say that The Duchess of Malfi is a sequel to The White Devil. The earlier play is explicitly concerned with political ethics and seeks to find some essential principle of behavior in a realistically depicted court society. The later play, The Duchess of Malfi is much broader in its implications. Evidently the political background is again present there, but it is no longer emphasized as it was in the earlier play. Here, the individuals must confront not merely their own society but the whole world -- the terror of a dying universe. The philosophical allusions in The Duchess of Malfi are richer, its universal implications are deeper than in the earlier work. Yet, in many important ways the two plays impress us as sister plays, the latter continuing the meaning of the former.

The sisterhood of the two plays is apparent in the close parallelism between them in both plot and characterization. This essay is an effort to explore some of the differences as well as the

similarities between the two plays by examining the relation between the villain Flamineo, of one play, with the corresponding character Bosola, in the other.

Both Flamineo and Bosola are villains, with a common nature based on a combination of three conventional types: the revenger, the malcontent, and the Machiavel. Some aspects of Webster's common formula for both characters may be best understood by comparing them with other stage villains of the period. Villains were important in English revenge tragedies especially because of their function of accelerating the play's actions by their malicious intrigues. In the late sixteenth century there arose on the London stage two different species of revenge tragedies: one which we associate with Marlowe and in which the motive of revenge was personal and voluntary as in The Jew Malta, and Othello; the other which we associate with Kyd and in which the motive of revenge was a sacred duty, as in The Spanish Tragedy, Hamlet, and The Revenger's Tragedy. To this latter class belongs Webster's White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. The revenge theme in this class of play owes much to Kyd, but late examples of the class such as The Revenger's Tragedy owe a good deal to Marston as well. Marston greatly enlivened the dialogue; he kept the meditative soliloquy of Kyd, but cut down long speeches and mere mood-scenes; and he decidedly increased the stage business by introducing disguises and torture scenes.(1) Most important for our purposes, Marston suggested a new dimension for the revenger by making Malevole not only a Machiavellian revenger but also a malcontent.

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1. See Elmer E. Stoll, John Webster (Cambridge, 1905), p. 101.

Marston's Malcontent, though called a comedy, has much of the technique of a revenge play -- having even the revenge-play treacherous masque at the end to bring about the (bloodless) catastrophe. The important point, however, is that the revenger hero, like Hamlet or Hieronimo, here has acquired two characteristics which one does not normally associate with the hero -- he becomes a Machiavel and a malcontent as well. Malevole is malcontent critic "par excellence;" he becomes in his disguise the tool of Mendoza the principal villain and takes money from him. He receives the villain's commission to commit murder and to tempt his own wife, just as Vindice later receives his to kill Piato and to tempt his own mother and sister. In all of these actions indeed Marston's Malevole is the model for Tourneur's Vindice. Tourneur of course, goes far beyond Marston in melodramatic atrocities, and he also makes one other important constructive contribution to the development of the revenge play which may be mentioned in passing: he breaks with the old stereotyped revenge plot and weaves into the revenge plot other motives, such as seduction and pandering. Thus the conventional revenge plots (i.e. father's revenge for son's death as in Spanish Tragedy, or vice versa as in Hamlet) are modified in Tourneur. A similar modification is observed in the plays of Webster, especially in his Duchess of Malfi, as I shall explain later. It was previously mentioned that the distinctive characteristic of Kydian revenge tragedy was the conception of the revenge motive as the sacred duty of a hero. In Marston and Tourneur that hero loses his heroic qualities, and moreover, the revenge motive loses its conventional

character as a duty; it falls back upon Nature as its basis, upon mere sentiment, and, shorn of its respectability, it can no longer provide the motivation for a hero, but is turned over to the villain instead. When Webster separates the hero from the actual work of revenge and passes the task over to the tool-villain as in both Flamineo and Bosola, he is following a pattern laid out for him by Marston and Tourneur.(2)

The Flamineo-Bosola character type involves two incompatible elements: malcontent and tool-villain. The intolerable chaos in the character lies in the fact that a malcontent is a sensitive and perceptive character who professes high ideals and deplores the lapses of ordinary men from those ideals, but as tool-villain, such a character has, at the same time, to abandon moral principle and speak and act in precisely the ways which he deplores in others. This contradiction in character was a problem which Webster failed to solve in The White Devil, Flamineo is thus inhumanly consistent in his selfish motive. In Webster's second effort, The Duchess of Malfi, he attempts another solution by making Bosola's character change. It is from this point of view that I shall now examine each of the two characters in more detail.

In The White Devil Flamineo is a knave used as a tool-villain by Brachiano. Duke Brachiano conceives a passion for Vittoria, and through the panderism of Flamineo, wins her. She suggests, and he plans with Flamineo, the death of Camillo, Vittoria's impotent husband; and Isabella, Brachiano's innocent wife. Their love is discovered by Vittoria's mother, Cornelia. Isabella's brothers, Francisco and Monticelso, try to put an end to this perverse love,

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2. See Rupert Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethian Drama (London, 1917), p. 69.

by giving it rope to hang itself. Before this plan can take effect the plotted murders are committed. Francisco and Monticelso arraign Vittoria for complicity in the murders and for the adultery. She is condemned to imprisonment; but Francisco, to bring the two nearer final ruin, plots so that she and Brachiano escape together to Padua and marry. Thither they are followed and killed.

Like Flamineo, Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi is also a knave and plays throughout a part much like that of Flamineo. The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow, forbidden by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to marry again. They put a creature of theirs, Bosola, into her service, as a spy. The Duchess loves and secretly marries her steward, Antonio, and has three children. Bosola ultimately discovers and reports this. The unfortunate lovers have to fly. The Duchess is captured, imprisoned, and mentally tortured and finally put to death by, the hands of Bosola and the orders of Ferdinand. Ferdinand goes mad. In the last act, however, Bosola repents. By accident he kills Antonio. In the following scuffle Bosola succeeds in revenge more for the cause of the Duchess and Antonio than of himself by killing the wicked brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal.

As indicated in the plot summaries I have just given the two parallel characters, Flamineo and Bosola have much in common. Both Flamineo and Bosola live the double life of a Machiavel-Malcontent. They both are tragic figures as well as villains who live their lives in frustration. Both of them try a court life aiming at preferment under ingrate masters and both failed in the end. They both initially believe they can attain glory simply by loyalty to their masters. They can distinguish what is goodfrom what is evil,

but their circumstances require them to choose the route of evil. Their character as courtiers of Renaissance Italy is largely conditioned by the realities of their court.

The court of Rome where Flamineo serves is corrupt. It is above all, a world of injustice. Lodovico, a prodigal count who "has in three years ruined his noblest earldom," (he later turns out to be an unsuccessful lover of Isabella, and the chief instrument in the downfall of Brachiano and Vittoria), after the sentence of his banishment, counters the assertions of his friends that there is some justice in the sentence, by asking what justice there is in his punishment when the greater criminals go untouched, and such men as Duke Brachiano, who, by "close panderism seeks to prostitute the honour of Vittoria Corombona," are permitted in Rome. But we soon notice that this observation of Lodovico's is merely superficial and that the actual injustice of the court is far worse than even Lodovico imagines because it is a world of cruelty and of treachery as well, where Brachiano poisons his innocent wife and where Francisco and Monticelso indicate their willingness to ruin Vittoria and her lover even at the cost of Camillo's life. Monticelso advises them not to begin a war openly but to wait treacherously for the chance of a "bloody audit.":

> Beare your wrongs conceal'd,
> And, patient as the Tortoise, let this Cammell
> Stalke o're your back unbruis'd: sleep with
> the Lyon,
> And let this brood of secure foolish mice
> Play with your nosthrils, till the time bee ripe
> For th' bloudy audit, and the fatall gripe:
> Aime like a cunning fowler, close one eie,
> That you the better may your game espy. (IV, i, 16-23)

Thus, rendering justice in the court of Rome means the cruel vengeance of the wicked princes. The "courtly punishment" of princes' personal vengeance we see exemplified in the inhuman actions of disguised Francisco and Lodovico when they poison Brachiano, and then reveal their true identity and strangle the dying victim.

However, this court of Rome preserves another function: "courtly reward," which is as precarious as "courtly punishment." To Lodovico, these two functions are everything; they dominate his whole world as he scornfully comments, at the beginning of the play:

> Lodovico: Ha, Ha, O Democritus, thy Gods
> That governe the whole world! Courtly reward
> And punishment. (I, i, 2-5)

It is to attain this "courtly reward" that Flamineo first visits the court and enters Brachiano's service as Secretary. Here, he learns courtesy and lechery, but at least he sees the path for success freely open and firmly resolves to pursue court preferment, with its promise of wealth and power. Once Flamineo has set his mind on preferment, he persistently follows that way to success. His determination is confirmed in his defiant speech rejecting his mother's admonition on his viciousness. Flamineo turns on his mother in a rage that she should interfere with his hopes for preferment. How, he asks, can one be virtuous when one is at the mercy of a corrupt world? He would not have to resort to pandering his sister except that his father's prodigality has consumed his estate and left him penniless! Flamineo

says to his mother:

> _____ and shall I,
> Having a path so open and so free
> To my preferment, still retaine
> your milke
> In my pale forehead? no, this face
> of mine
> I'le arme and fortefie with lusty
> wine,
> 'Gainst shame and blushing. (I, ii, 320-5)

When we turn from The White Devil to the Duchess of Malfi, we instantly notice that once more we breathe the hothouse atmosphere of the North Italian Ducal courts and Papal Rome, with their family entanglements and intrigues. Once more lust and murder confront us. Substantially, the court of Bosola is no different from that of Flamineo, with all its ugly, evil internal corruption and its external bloom of vain, courtly extravagance. The theme of courtly corruption and of courtly punishment and reward are continued. Antonio, who has been in France, makes an opening statement about the ideality of the French court, where the judicious King seeks to maintain a fixed order both for the state and the people, and where the court is the fountain-head of purity, virtue, and democracy. Antonio's description of this ideal French court is followed by scenes designed to show the contrasting ugliness of the Italian court. In fact, it is such a foul immoral world that there we find a Cardinal who uses his Bible as an instrument of poisoning his mistress when he tires of his adultery with her. There, the same Cardinal forsakes the holy robes, symbol of the servant of the fountain-head of peace, God; and dons the soldier's habit, symbol of the servant of the power of destruction, the Devil, in order to ruin his erring sister and her

husband. Bosola describes his court in a satiric instruction to Castruccio, an old lord who desires to have a legal career:

> I would have you learne to twirle the strings of your hand with a good grace; and in a set speech, (at th' end of every sentence,) to hum three or foure times, or blow your nose (till it smart againe,) to recover your memory--when you come to be a president in criminall causes, if you smile upon a prisoner, hang him, but if you frowne upon him, and threaten him, let him be sure to scape the Gallowes. (II, i, 6-12)

Bosola further suggests a way of knowing whether or not a person is eminent among courtiers: ___give out you lie a-dying, and if you heare the common people curse you, be sure you are taken for one of the prime night-caps. (II, i, 19-21)

Thus it is suggested that the great men in Bosola's court are enemies of the people, making a sharp contrast with the popularity of the leaders of the French court. And the true meaning of these suggestions is that Bosola's court is a world where the conventional moral code no longer serves; it is the exact opposite of the moral world. Bosola, mocking an old lady of the court for her painted face, says in disgust:

> One would suspect it for a shop of witch-craft, to finde in it the fat of Serpents; spawne of Snakes, Jewes spittle, and their yong children/s/ ordures--and all these for the face: I would sooner eate a dead pidgeon, taken from the soles of the feete of one sicke of the plague, then kisse one of you fasting. (II, i, 37-41)

In spite of his negative attitude toward the court, having no other choice, Bosola returns to the court to make his life. At the outset of the play he manifests a great distaste for his work. He is still fresh from his bitter memory of the hell of galleys where he has served for seven years. He is a man desperate for a

living. But he is no fiend. He well deserves to be a courtier. The other people in the play find a goodness in him that was never known in Flamineo. Antonio comments:

> Tis great pitty
> He should be thus neglected--I have heard
> He's very valiant: This foule mellancholly
> Will poyson all his goodnesse. (I, i, 76-9)

His desperation, like Flamineo's, makes him resolve upon a life of criminal service. His society itself is a corrupted one, and is filled with hypocrisies, treacheries, and vices. Those who are not vicious are as helplessly embroiled in the meshes of court life as are the men and women who are fundamentally evil, as we observe in The White Devil.(3) So again Bosola has no choice but to resolve to devote his life to court service. Once resolution is made, he cleaves to it. He is absolutely loyal to his master, numbing himself to the condition of an automaton when he is forced to the cruelties of the fourth act. As a matter of comparison, I would say, that although Vindice's court certainly also represents an entangled depravity of lust, adultery, fratricide, mutul suspicion, hate and bloodshed; it is still a world where Vindice, believing himself an instrument of divine justice, can, if only for a moment, right its injustice. However, Flamineo's and Bosola's courts are different from Vindice's. Thus it is an utterly helpless world. We see Vittoria, Brachiano, Flamineo, the Duchess, and Bosola confidently setting out to attain what they seek. We watch them strike into the existing order of their dark world in pursuance of their ideas, but after their long, blind fight in

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3. All the virtuous people in The White Devil meet a tragic end except Giovanni: Marcello is insifnifically killed by Flamineo (V,ii); Cornelia goes mad at the death of Marcello (V,ii); Isabella is poisoned by her cruel husband. (III,i)

the dark, they are forced to admit their fatal defeat. They become aware too late of the mysterious power of destruction that works through them and makes them the instrument of a design which is not theirs. In the end of The White Devil when Vittoria and Flamineo die, they comment on their court in words implying a sense of tremendous waste after their futile struggle:

> Vittoria: O happy they that never saw the Court,
> Nor ever knew great Man but by report.
> /Vittoria dyes/
>
> Flamineo: Let all that belong to Great men remember
> Th'ould wi/v/es tradition, to be like the
> Lyons ith Tower on Candlemas day, to
> mourne if the Sunne shine, for feare of
> the pittifull remainder winter to come. (V, vi,265-8)

In the Duchess of Malfi, at the play's end, Antonio remarks as his dying request: "And let my son fly from the court of princes." Thus, Webster's major characters all agree that their-tragic ends would not have come if they had avoided the court, the place of the "poison-bowl and the vendetta."(4) In a discussion in Castiglione's Courtier on the attitude of the courtier of Renaissance Italy, Sir Frederick says:

> "But if it fell to our Courtyers lott to serve one that wer vitious and wycked, as soone as he knoweth it, let him forsake hym, least he taste of the bytter peine that all good menne feele that serve the wicked. Me thinke, (quoth SYR FREDERICKE), duetye oughte to prevayle beefore all other respectes, but yet so a gentleman forsake not his Lorde at the warre or any other adversities, and bee thought to doe it to follow Fortune, or because he wanted a meane to profitte by, at al other times I believe he maye with good reason, and oughte to forsake that service, that among good men shall put him to shame, for all men will imagine that he that serveth the good, is good, and he serveth yll, is yll." (5)

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4. Walter Raleigh, "Introduction," The Book of the Courtier, (London, 1900), p. 50 "...and their moral standards /were/ sadly deteriorated. The land of the new learning and fine arts was also the land of the poison-bowl and the vendetta."
5. Sir Thomas Hoby, Trans. The Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione (London, 1900), pp. 129-130.

However, Flamineo and Bosola are not in a position to take this advice. They have no choice. It is not that Flamineo lacks in appropriate advice from virtuous people or that Basola is unable to distinguish evil from good. They both simply realize that the court is the nation itself, or rather the whole universe for them because it is their sole center of social advancement, culture, and civilization.(6) Accordingly, it is not Flamineo's or Bosola's duty to correct the wicked princes, but to please them in order to be promoted from their lower estates. This, both Flamineo and Bosola do, as tool-villains to their masters.

Another aspect of the similarity between Flamineo and Bosola is the fact that they are both malcontents. The Elizabethan word "malcontent" meant "suffering from the melancholy of the age." It was a symptom of the age, a mentally infectious state which might be called the humour of discontent. This type is in essence a humour, partly melancholy, partly cynical, with its natural expression in satire. Mr. Babb, in his work, The Elizabethan Malady, suggests that with a criminal bias it could easily lead a man to villainous purposes:

> "...Both of them(i.e. Flamineo and Basola), to use a phrase of E. E. Stoll's, are tool-villains, that is cat's-paws for villains of higher social rank. To the Elizabethan audience it would seem quite natural that a malcontent should easily be induced to play such a role. A great man who needed an instrument for criminal service would be likely to look for just such a person. The malcontent is shrewd and ambitious, but frustrated, poverty-stricken, and embittered. One would suppose that he could be bribed, either with money or with promise of preferment, to perform the greatest iniquities. His bitterness and

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6. Walter Raleigh, "Introduction," The Book of the Courtier (London, 1900), p.61 "It was the center, not of government alone, but of the fine arts: the exemplar of culture and civilization."

and his melancholy have smothered all his scruples;
his needs are urgent; he has little to lose and
everything to gain." (7)

We see, now that Flamineo and Bosola are exactly the type of man whom their masters wanted to find to carry out their criminal purposes. Bosola, though probably somewhat melancholy by nature, has been rendered bitterly malcontent by the Cardinal's failure to reward him for his past services, apparently criminal services. He is a witty and bitter railer, "the onely Court-Gall." (8) His "foule-mellancholly," says Antonio,

Will poyson all his goodnesse, for (i'le tell you)
If too immoderate sleepe be truly says
To be an inward rust unto the soule;
It then doth follow want of action
Breeds all blacke male-contents, and their close rearing
(Like mothes in cloath) doe hurt for want of wearing.
(I, i, 78-83)

The Cardinal and Ferdinand, the two major villains of the play, see in Bosola the ideal instrument for their cruel practices upon their sister. When the Cardinal recommends employing Bosola as Ferdinand's "intelligencer" and Ferdinand prefers Antonio for the post as being "fare fitter," the Cardinal counters:

You are deceiv'd in him (*i.e.* Antonio),
His Nature is too honest for such businesse. (I,i,241-2)

The Cardinal believes that the disposition of the malcontent befits Bosola for employment as an "intelligencer." Ferdinand, as he engages Bosola for criminal services, instructs him to continue his customary melancholic manner:

Be your selfe:
Keepe your old garbe of melencholly: 'twill expresse
You envy those that stand above your reach,
Yet strive not to come neere 'em: This will gaine
Accesse, to private lodgings, where your selfe
May (like a pollitique dormouse _____ (I, i, 302-7)

7. Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady (East Lansing, 1951), p.85.
8. The Duchess of Malfi, I, i, 24.

The malcontent intriguer was a convenient, ready-made disguise of which Ferdinand wants Basola to take advantage. Since a melancholy man may be supposed to be somewhere near the borderline of insanity or abnormality, others are inclined to regard him as a harmless eccentric, interesting, but not to be taken too seriously. A melancholic, then, without changing his customary manner, may act as a spy and plotter without arousing suspicion. It is by taking advantage of this fact that Flamineo escapes the suspicion of his guilt, after the trial scene of Vittoria, in The White Devil. Flamineo experiences a breath-taking shock of astonishment toward the end of the famous trial scene when Monticelso passes out the sentence:

> Monticelso: ____ [Heare] your sentence--you are confin'd
> Unto a house of convertites and your baud--
> Flamineo: [aside] Who, I?
> Monticelso: The Moore
> Flamineo: [aside] O, I am a sound man againe. (III,ii,272-

Flamineo is momentarily relieved from his danger, but his guilty conscience keeps him vigilant. A little while later, when the death of Isabella is about to be reported, he decides to feign madness to avoid suspicion:

> [Aside] Good, this is a preface to the discovery of the Dutches death: Hee carries it well: because now I cannot counterfeit a whining passion for the death of my Lady, I will faine a madde humor for the disgrace of my sister, and that will keepe off idle questions--Treasons tongue hath a villanous palsy in't, I will talk to any man, heare no man, and for a time appeare a polliticke mad-man. [Exit] (III, ii, 313-9)

Here, Flamineo finds the best use of his character as Elizabethan

malcontent. We remember that in Kyd's Spanish Tragedy Hieronimo goes mad after the discovery of his son's murder. Yet he is cannily shrewd in his madness, shrewd enough to use his distraction to allay suspicion, and shrewd enough to plan and execute his revenge. In the Elizabethan drama, an intriguing villain or revenger who is in any degree mentally abnormal is very likely to utilize his abnormality for the purpose of convincing others that he is helpless and harmless. Here, Flamineo's feigned "politic" madness is nothing but an exaggerated expression of his melancholy character, motivated to insure his safety and to gain opportunity to make his observation, and devise and execute his further plots.

It is possible that Webster uses this "politic madness" for another purpose as well, to enable himself to comment upon the social injustice in general, yet evidently the antagonistic satire made by feign-mad Flamineo is the familiar railing of the malcontent. In his distracted condition Flamineo becomes sharply critical, stripping the disguise from the true world. He not only describes his world, its money, politics, courtly services, and religion, he also expresses his stubborn hatred of that world. Flamineo bewails his lot in Francisco's hearing -- as the convential malcontent does:

> Wee indure the strokes like anviles or
> hard steele,
> Till paine it selfe make us no paine to
> feele.
> Who shall doe mee right now? Is this
> the end of service? (III, iii, 2-4)

Flamineo shrewdly expresses his regret in having taken Brachiano's service, and when the Savoy Ambassador comforts him, he rails at the malice of politicians in a typical tone of malcontent:

> Your comfortable wordes are like honie. They rellish well in your mouth that's whole; but in mine that's wounded they go downe as if the sting of the Bee were in them. Oh they have wrought their purpose cunningly, as if they would not seeme to doe it of malice. In this a Polititian imitates the devill, as the devill imitates a Canon. Wheresoever he comes to doe mischiefe, he comes with his backside towardes you. (III, iii, 11-7)

He also comments, in disgust, upon his world as being venal, and he specifies money as the cause of corruption:

> Proofe! 'twas corruption. O Gold, what a God art thou! and o man, what a devill art thou to be tempted by that cursed Minerall! (III, iii, 19-21)

He curses men of religion who meddle with affairs of the state:

> _____and I hope you Cardinall shall never have the grace to pray well, till he come to the scaffold....Religion; oh how it is commeddled with policie! The first bloudshed in the world happened about religion. Would I were a Jew! (III,iii,31-8)

And all this upsetting of the existing order is nothing but the antagonism of a malcontent. We further observe a common trait in Flamineo and Bosola: that is, their misanthropy. They both are unsociable, and seem to be inclined to seek solitary life because throughout the two plays neither of them has one single friend. This is one of the obvious features of the malcontent. It seems that ordinary humanity cannot furnish fit companionship for the malcontent.

The cause of melancholy is the same for Flamineo and Bosola: it is their embittered past life of poverty. Flamineo was almost a pauper student at the University of Padua because of his father's prodigality,and only after working his way through seven years did

he barely manage to graduate by impressing the university authorities with his beard.[9] Similarly Bosola describes his poor, miserable life in the galleys after being slighted by the Cardinal:

> I fell into the Gallies in your service, where, for two yeares together, I wore two Towells in stead of a shirt, with a knot on the shoulder, after the fashion of a Romaine Mantle: Slighted thus? I will thrive some way: black-birds fatten best in hard weather: why not I, in these dogge dayes? (I, i, 36-40)

In such a poverty-stricken, neglected, and frustrated life it is not strange that Flamineo should start his service by the base work of pandering even of his own sister. He could not be a chooser. Perhaps Tourneur gives us a good example of Flamineo's situation. In The Revenger's Tragedy when the lustful prince Lussurioso feels the need of a pander, he prefers a malcontent:

> Some strange digested fellow....
> Of ill-contented nature: either disgraced
> In former times, or by new grooms displaced. (R.T. I,i,75-7)

Vindice takes the job, and like Flamineo, happens to be a sister pander.

Another similarity evident in the character of Flamineo and Bosola is their Machiavellian trait. A melancholy, discontented, man will choose any means to satisfy his thirst. He is easily associated with devilish beliefs and Machiavellian actions. A clearcut motto of Machiavellianism is shown in the following passage of Dr. Mario Praz: "When Faust turns conqueror, Mephistopheles turns pirate and repeats the famous maxim of Machiavellianism: If one has might, one has right: one asks about what,

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9. The White Devil, I,ii, 313-7 "At Padua I confesse, where I protest, / For want of meanes--the University judge me, / I have bene faine to heele my Tutor's stockings, / At least seven yeares: conspiring with a beard, / made me a Graduate."

and not how.' That is, the end justifies the means."[10] Lying, scheming, murdering, cruelty, and cold-blooded opportunism all operating impiously in a moral vacuum have been the indispensable attributes of the stock character of the Machiavellian villain since Marlowe and Kyd. One of the most thoroughly Machiavellian figures on the English stage is Iago in Shakespeare's Othello. In Iago as in other Machiavellian characters the key principle is "the end justifies the means."

Webster's Flamineo in The White Devil is a Machiavellian after Kyd's Lorenzo in The Spanish Tragedy: in both cases, the aim of their policy is the marriage of a sister to a powerful lord, an aim which leads to the murder of the person to whom the sister is engaged.[11] In The White Devil (I,ii) Flamineo's speech against his virtuous mother's admonition shows his renunciation of the conventional morality and commencement of his new life as a Machiavellian:

> _____and shall I,
> Having a path so open and so free
> To my preferment, still retaine your milke
> In my pale forehead? no this face of mine
> I'le arme and fortefie with lusty wine,
> 'Gainst shame and blushing. (I, ii, 320-5)

Thus Flamineo resolves to substitute "lusty wine" for his mother's "milk". He confidently replaces human virtue with devilish vice. Once he "arms and fortifies" his "pale forehead" with Machiavellianism, he accumulates vice on vice. In sacrificing his sister's honour to his own desire to please Brachiano he feels no conscientious remorse. He gives the devil full play. In act II, scene i,

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10. Mario Praz,"Machiavelli and The Elizabethans," "Proceedings of The British Academy, Vol. XIV (London, 1928), p.97

11. Lorenzo helping Balthazar, surprises Horatio and Bel-Imperia at their love-making at night, hangs Horatio in the arbor, and stabs him with a sword as he hangs.

Brachiano, Flamineo, and a hired doctor provided by Flamineo conspire to murder Camillo, Vittoria's husband and Isabella, virtuous wife of Brachiano. And soon, Flamineo slays Camillo, and the doctor, Isabella. These people are the innocent victims of the ruthless Machiavel, and the murders shown in dumb shows only impress their villains as "excellent" and "quaintly done." And especially the death of Isabella is made intensely pathetic through the words of her young son. Giovanni's words show us an example of the cruel results of Machiavellian inhumanity.

> Giovanni: Good God let her sleepe ever,
> For I have knowne her wake an
> hundreth nights,
> When all the pillow, where shee laid
> her head,
> Was brine-wet with her teares. I am
> to complaine to your Sir.
> Ile tell you how they have used her
> now shees dead:
> They wrapt her in a cruell fould of
> lead,
> And would not let mee kisse her. (III, ii,338-44)

Thus Isabella dies as "a woman killed with unkindness" in contrast with Mistress Anne Frankford in A Woman Killed with Kindness, a play by Thomas Heywood, Webster's contemporary, and friend.[12] If Flamineo does not feel any pity or remorse in his cruelties, it is because of his nature of coldbloodedness which is typical in a Machiavel. Words of exclamation such as "excellent" or "quaintly done" are reflected in Flamineo's later speech in the form of surprised admiration for the Machiavellian poisoning of Brachiano:

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12. Rupert Brooke, John Webster & Elizabethan-Drama (London, 1917), p. 77. "He (Webster) was an Elizabethan dramatist, a friend of Dekker and Chapman and Heywood."

Those are found waightie strokes which come
from th' hand,
But those are killing strokes which come
from th' head.
O the rare trickes of a Machivillian!
Hee doth not come like a grosse plodding slave
And buffet you to death: No, my quaint knave--
Hee tickles you to death; makes you die laughing;
As if you had swallow'd downe a pound of saffron.
You see the [f]eat--'tis practis'd in a trice--
To teach Court-honestie it jumpes on Ice.(V, 888, 194-202)

But we have not yet dealt with all of the important characters of the Machiavel. According to Dr. Mario Praz, Machiavellianism has one more distinctive trait. He says: "In the cant use of the word, Machiavellianism suggested chiefly two things: a treacherous way of killing generally by poison; and atheism."(13) Webster establishes Flamineo's atheistic character almost at his birth by revealing to us the fact that one day when he was still a baby at his mother's breast, he accidentally broke a limb of a crucifix. This act is symbolic of his later fratricide and even of his entire Machiavellian life.

Marcello: I have heard you say, giving my
brother sucke,
Hee tooke the Crucifix betweene
his hands, [enter Flamineo]
And broke a limbe off.

Cornelia: Yes: but 'tis mended. (V, ii, 11-13)

In addition to "atheism" Webster frequently associates the word "policy" with Machiavellianism.(14) In the scene in which

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13. Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XIV (London, 1928), p. 80.

14. Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," Proceedings of the British Academy, Vo. XIV (London, 1928), p. 61. "As soon as the dramatists became haunted by the character of Machiavellian knave, they began to use with an unprecedented frequency the words 'policy' and 'politic'. The Spanish Tragedy teems with stratagems: Viluppo, Lorenzo, Hieronimo, all make use of villainous tricks. Lorenzo never gets tired of speaking of his 'policy' (III, iv. 38; x. 9); he is called 'too politick' by Bel-Imperia (III, x. 83) etc.

the murders of Camillo and Isabella are planned, the plotters converse:

Brachiano: But for Cammilo:

Flamineo: He dies this night, by such a pollitícke straine,
Men shall suppose him by's owne engine slaine.
But for your Dutchesse death?

Doctor: I'le make her sure. (II, i, 311-4)

It is evident that Flamineo's words "pollitícke straine" mean "crafty, treacherous strain" by which he can confidently deceive everybody. In The Duchess of Malfi (III, v.), Ferdinand's letter to the Duchess delivered by Bosola contains the expression: "Send Antonio to me; I want his head in a business." This phrase provokes from the Duchess the following remark:

A politicke equivocation---
He doth not want your councell, but your head;
That is, he cannot sleepe till you be dead.
And here's annother Pitfall, that's strew'd ore
With Roses: marke it, 'tis a cunning one --- (III, iv, 38-42)

Thus, it is further reasserted by the Duchess that what a politician does is to trap a victim in a deceitful "pitfall", and "it is a cunning one." Ferdinand is the arch-Machiavel in The Duchess of Malfi, and under him serves the tool-Machiavel, Bosola. When Bosola discovers the secret husband of the Duchess, he meditatively soliloquizes on his, (and Ferdinand's) Machiavellian way of life:

A Polititian is the divells quilted anvell,
He fashions all sinnes on him, and the blowes
Are never heard. (III, ii, 371-3)

In the employment scene where Bosola becomes the "intelligencer" of Ferdinand, Bosola criticizes the treacherous nature of his mission as a spy:

> Why, a very quaint invisible Divell,
> in flesh:
> An Intelligencer. (I, i, 280-1)

In this speech we see another word closely associated with "Machiavel"--the word "devil". This association of Bosola's is quite possible because "Machiavellianism" became a label for all sorts of political crimes and the fountain-head of all horrors and sins. Bosola almost believes that the synonym for Machiavel is "devil". Before Bosola goes on multiplying his wickedness and giving his "devil" full play, we notice that Bosola from the beginning has had"the inclination to shed blood." As soon as he receives gold from the Duke, his remarks are both callous and direct:

> Bosola: Whose throat must I cut?
> Ferdinand: Your inclination to shed blood
> rides post
> Before my occasion to use you.(I, i, 266-8)

This dialogue between the master and the employee is enough to show Bosola's Machiavellian trait. Thus Bosola, trusting Ferdinand's promise that "ere long, thou maist arrive/At a higher place by 't," (I,i,283-4) faithfully performs his duty of Machiavellian tool until he reminiscently speaks, after the Duchess' death, to the Duke that he "rather sought

> To appeare a true servant, than an honest man."(IV,ii,358-9)

Bosola is so faithful to the Aragonian brothers that his Machiavel services exactly and effectually represent the princes' cruelties

to the horror and despair of the helpless Duchess: Bosola tests the Duchess' pregnancy by merely presenting her with some green apricots which she craves (II,ii); he provides Ferdinand a counterfeit key to make his surprise attack into the Duchess' room possible (III,ii); he makes a false praise of Antonio to trap the Duchess (III,ii); after a cruel, long persecution of the Duchess he bids his executioners, with unimaginable coldbloodness, strangle the Duchess, Cariola, her maid, and her two children (IV,ii).

Another similar function of Flamineo and Bosola in their respective plays is their role as a choral commentator. The choral comment is one of the simplest ways of bringing out a desired satiric interpretation. Thus Flamineo and Bosola are frequently allowed by Webster, apart from their original selves, with an objective point of view, to make realistic observations concerning those about them. Brachiano, at the moment of his triumph, is poisoned by the avengers: Francisco, Lodovico and Gaspero. And when Francisco and Flamineo have the stage, without any more ado about the dying man, Flamineo remarks: "To see what solitarinesse is about dying Princes!" With the cold objectivity of a satirist, he predicts that the tears shed for Brachiano will be dry within a few hours. This comment is integrated with the action in such a way as to permit intensification rather than diminution of the tragic situation because it is always a sad scene to see a man of power and glory die unmourned.[15]

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15. Flamineo's feeling on this occasion may be summed up in an old proverb of the Orient: "Mourners pour in when a Sheriff's horse dies, but no mourner comes when the Sheriff dies."

Flamineo: To see what solitarinesse is about
dying Princes!
As heretofore they have unpeopled
Townes; divorst friends, and made
great houses unhospitable: so now,
O justice! where are their flatterers
now? Flatterers are but the shadowes
of Princes bodies, the least thicke
cloud makes them invisible. (V, iii, 42-6)

Flamineo stands as a living example of his own statement.

In The Duchess of Malfi Bosola comments on the treacherous nature of a "politician," showing that he is fully aware of what he is doing.

A Polititian is the divells quilted anvell,
He fashions all sinnes on him, and the blowes
Are never heard.... (III,ii,371-3)

This terrible power of evil forged soundlessly on "the devil's quilted anvil" sneaks into human society to destroy whatever is destroyable. Therefore Bosola cannot find the significance of the word "security." In act V, scene ii, Bosola's comment on "securitie" is both reasoned and impressive: "Securitie some men call," says Bosola, "the Suburbs of Hell / Onely a dead wall between". (372-3) When Julia dies poisoned by her lover, the Cardinal, he cries impatiently to the dying woman:

Oh foolish woman,
Couldst not thou have poyson'd him? i.e. [The Cardinal] (V,ii,312-3)

The epithet "foolish" is about the best one that he can give to Julia. In the scornful light of that one epithet there stands outlined for an instant not merely the soul of Bosola himself, but all the ruthlessness of Renaissance Italy. This rebuke of Bosola's, too late to be useful, is the intense passion of a Machiavel in a Machiavellian world, and at the same time it is a representation of the sympathetic mind of the Elizabethan audience.

One final element of similarity between Flamineo and Bosola is that both characters may be traced to known sources. Webster took Flamineo from real events of Renaissance Italy and Bosola from an Italian novella. He characterized both of them as Malcontent, Machiavel, puppet-devils to make them serve their function as tool-villains in his two great tragedies,[16] but their source counterparts were actually rather different.

According to Dr. E. E. Stoll, Flamineo's historical source was "Marcello", Vittoria's bad brother, instead of "Flamineo" who was an upright one.[17] Webster purposely transposed the names of "Marcello" and "Flamineo," quite evidently because the first has an essentially virtuous sound about it, and the second, something sinister. The historical Marcello followed a criminal career; as in the play, he was a confidential chamberlain of "Brachiano"" pandered his sister, and became the ungrateful murderer of "Francesco Peretti" (Webster's Camillo), her husband, who had been kindly sheltering him in his need when he was in banishment after an earlier homicide.[18] Dr. F. L. Lucas gives additional

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16. Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malddy (East Lansing, 1951), p. 78. "...The malcontent pose suggests aristocracy...In Lyly's King's Midas a page rebukes the barber for complaining of melancholy: 'is melancholy a word for a barbers mouth? Thou shouldst say heavie, dull and doltish: melancholy is the crest of Courtiers arms, and now every base companion...says he is melancholy'."

17. See Elmer E. Stoll, John Webster (Cambridge, 1805), p. 86.

18. Frank Lawrence Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster Vol. 1, (London, 1928), p. 73. "Marcello brought trouble on his own head by murdering Matteo Pallavicino in Rome, in the summer of 1580."

information about historical Flamineo: "Whether or no he first excited his master's passion for his sister, he certainly inflamed it with all his power -- and even, said rumour, with the philtres of a Greek witch...[19]." If so, Zanche, the Moorish maid, is the transformation of this "Greek witch" and it is not accidental that the Cardinal Monticelso should not forget to punish her at the trial scene saying "...and your bawd," and also that Flamineo should slay his brother for the seemingly unimportant cause of Zanche because she is the metamorphosis of his indebted instrument which helped to open the path for his intended preferment. Villainous "Marcello" (Webster's Flamineo), according to Dr. Lucas, accidentally escaped his sister's fate [who had been murdered by "Lodovico" as in the play] but was removed by Sixtus (Webster's Monticelso) from Venice and executed at Ancona in the following June "for the murder of Matteo Pallavicino." This was the end of Flamineo in actual events, but the reason for his escape from his sister's fate is further explained by the fact that he had just previously fled from Padua, after knifing a servant whom he owed money.[20] " Marcello's" Machiavel acts, known in history, obviously suggested to Webster the Machiavellian deed of Flaminec as committing a fratricide in the play,[a] deed which gives consistency to his villainous personality. According to what we have studied about historical Flamineo, thus far, we are obliged to regard his real character as merely that of an extremely vicious man both base and ungrateful: base because he knifed a

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19. See Frank Lawrence Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster, Vol. 1. p. 73
20. ibid. p. 84

low servant to whom he owed some money; ungrateful because he murdered his kind host, his brother-in-law, who had protected him in his difficulties; he is simply an evil man hopelessly small. Webster raised and established his personality on a much higher level, evidently shaping it after the conventional villain type which we see in Kyd's Lorenzo, in Marston's Malevole, or in Tourneur's Vindice, especially by adding the malcontent element. (Webster's raising of his villain's character reminds us of the scene in which the Duchess, in his later play, endeavored to heighten the station of Antonio with such words as: "Sir, this goodly roof of yours, is too low built, / I cannot stand upright isn't, nor discourse, / without I raise it higher: raise yourself ...") (I,i).

To this character of Flamineo, Webster also added the Machiavelli of popular imagination, giving him a devil's wit and courage.

Bosola's source figure is "Daniel da Bozola", a certain Lombard captain of whom we know only from Bandello's Novelle: One day when a certain Antonio of Milan (who is a close parallel to Webster's, both in his personality and in his tragic life story), who had been under constant danger, was on his way to Mass at the church of St. Francesco, in Milan, accompanied by two servants, "Bozolo", with three other ruffians, attacked and stabbed him to death, and the assassins escaped unmolested from the territory of Milan.[21] That is all that is known about the historical "Bozolo". He is merely a hired assassin, but Webster

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21. See Frank Lawrence Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster, Vol. II (London, 1928), p. 11

carefully rebuilt this sketchy outline of a mercenary into a vital man of drama, largely after the model of Flamineo. That is the main reason why Flamineo and Bosola are so much alike in personality.

But what is interesting is the fact that Webster developed this Bosola from the stage of Flamineo to a character of far more complexity. As Mr. Stoll points out, most of the actions done by Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi are Webster's creation: ---such as his discovery of the birth of the first child and his report of it, his discovery from the Duchess herself of the name of her husband and of her plans for flight, his torturing of the Duchess, his refusal to continue the persecution, his execution of the Duchess, Cariola, her two children, his conversion, his revenge on the Duchess' brothers, his killing Antonio only by mistake.

Bosola covers a very wide range of human nature in his activities, climbing from the bottom of evil to the maximum height of goodness that a converted man can reach. I cannot help emphasizing Bosola's final awakening to morality as an important quality of his personality because Bosola is truly weeping and appealing to the audience when he repents of his cruelty and treachery to the Duchess, immediately after her death. It is the suffering of true, unmasked Bosola. He cries out in his soliloquy.

> O sacred Innocence, that sweetly sleepes
> On Turtles feathers: whil'st a guilty
> conscience
> Is a blacke Register, wherein is writ
> All our good deedes, and bad: a Perspective
> That showes us hell; that we cann be suffer'd
> To doe good when we have a mind to it!
> This is many sorrow:
> These teares, I am very certaine, never grew
> In my Mothers Milke. My estate is suncke
> below
> The degrees of feare: where were these
> penitent fountaines,
> While she was living?
> Oh, they were frozen up: here is a sight
> As direfull to my soule, as is the sword
> Unto a wretch hath slaine his father. (IV, ii, 383-96)

In order to understand Webster's motive in developing his villain agent from the Flamineo stage of coldbloodedness to the height of Bosola's humanized emotion, we now must analyze the fundamental differences between the two characters.

What is distinctively different in Flamineo from Bosola is his consistency both in personality and motive of life. His character remains consistent throughout the play, while Bosola's makes a dramatic change. Flamineo, viciously witty and independently courageous,sets his mind on preferment and pursues his rule and aim of life as consistently as Brachiano's promise of reward is latent throughout the play. Flamineo resolves to live

> "As Rivers to finde out the Ocean /
> Flow with crooke bendings beneath forced
> bankes,/ Or as wee see,to aspire some
> mountaines top, / The way ascends not
> straight, but Imitates / The suttle fould-
> ings of a Winter's snake,/ So who knowes
> policy and her true aspect,/Shall finde
> her waies winding and indirect." (I,ii,
> 342-8)

From the beginning to the end of the play, Flamineo's interest in life is concentrated in attainment of preferment. The struggle

for courtly reward is too deeply ingrained in him as a way of life to allow him to change. He discards virtue as "pale" and utterly useless for the realization of his purpose. Therefore, he is defiant in rage when his mother, Cornelia, admonishes him on his viciousness at the scene of sister-pandering. And therefore,he feels no conscientious remorse in sacrificing his sister's honor to please his lord, Brachiano. He promptly accumulates his vices one after another as if, by so doing, he meant to cut short the path to success: he "excellently" kills his brother-in-law, Camillo, and he succeeds in "quaintly" poisoning Isabella, virtuous wife of Brachiano by providing a doctor--because both of these victimshave been obstacles to the illicit love of his lord, who was to bring him preferment. Meanwhile, Flamineo is once more admonished by his honest brother, Marcello, against his vicious way of life, just before Vittoria's trial starts. (III,ii), but Flamineo is again deaf to his remonstrance and still sticks to his own way. One day he gets furious and braves even Brachiano when Brachiano becomes jealous at the interpretation of Francisco's false letter. Flamineo's anger on this occasion, however, is not motivated by his resentment that his sister should be falsely accused, but by the delay of Brachiano's "courtly reward."

> All your kindnesse to mee is like that
> miserable curtesie of Polyphemus to
> Ulisses, you reserve mee to be devour'd
> last,
> You would dig turves out of my grave to
> to feed your Larkes: that would bee
> musicke to you. (IV, ii, 65-68)

Though out of momentary fury Flamineo braves his duke, he recovers his reason soon enough to reconcile the lovers as if he

feared to lose the preestablished foothold for his future success, and returns to the loyal service of Brachiano. However, after his success in reconciling the the lovers, Flamineo remembers to warn Brachiano against ingratitude by telling a parable of "The Crocodile and the little bird", evidently told to make his selfish preferment sure. Brachiano knows the meaning of the tale and attacks: "Your application is, I have not rewarded / The service you have done me;" to this Flamineo replies by carefully shifting his "yes" to "no". In order to avoid his difficult situation Flamineo ironically has to liken his beautiful sister to an ugly animal:

> No, my Lord; You sister are the crocodile;
> you are blemisht in your fame, My Lord cures
> it: And though the comparison hold not in
> every particle; yet observe, remember, what
> good the bird with the pricke i'th head hath
> done you; and scorne ingratitude. (IV, ii, 237-41)

In the meantime, Monticelso is elected to the papacy and promptly excommunicates both Vittoria and Brachiano. But in Padua, quite indifferent to the excommunication, the cursed lovers greet a marriage day. When thus the flower of evil blooms, Flamineo's hope seems to brighten because his hope is rooted in the soil of evil. Their marriage seems to Flamineo an assurance that at last he will gain preferment:

> In all the weary minutes of my life,
> Day nere broke up till now. This
> marriage
> Confirmes me happy. (V, i, 1-3)

Life for the first time is promising, but Flamineo's hope for a bright future proves ephemeral. Flamineo sees his prospects of

reward ruined when Brachiano punishes him cruelly for Marcello's death, forcing him to sue for renewed pardon for each day of his life.

Then the situation turns from bad to worse. Somewhat later, Brachiano meets death by putting on a poisoned beaver. Brachiano dies never to reward Flamineo. Indeed, Brachiano's death brings more serious disappointment to Flamineo than to Vittoria since "there's nothing sooner drie than womens teares." (V,iii,189) He sheds no tears for the death of his ingrate master but he feels disillusioned to think of the vain promises of the court:

> Why, heere's an end of all my harvest;
> hee /h/as given me nothing.
> Court promises! Let wisemen count them curst,
> For while you live hee that scores best paies worst. (V, iii, 190-2)

Even in this complete despair Flamineo indefatigably seeks to recover his lost hope. He clings to a feeble thread of hope, which he finds in Giovanni, the young heir. He flatters and courts the boy who will succeed to the dukedom. But Giovanni, who has earlier shown his brilliance and promise as a ruler, will have nothing to do with him, and forbids him the court.

Flamineo is still not defeated, however; he has one more card to play. In a last effort, he goes to Vittoria. His plan is to appeal to her generosity; if that fails, he will avenge himself by killing her:

> _____All these
> Shall with Vittoria's bountie turne to good,
> Or, I will drowne this weapon in her blood. (V, iv,141-3)

Flamineo, who has earlier killed his honest brother, Marcello,

quite insignificantly after a quarrel, now resolves to kill his sister if she should fail to reward him -- even before the doleful songs of his mother's lamentation on his brother's murder can have been forgotten. It should be noted that Flamineo is as consistent in his Machiavel nature as in his motive in life. When Vittoria gives him nothing for his services but "Cain's portion", Flamineo's long pursuit of reward finally ends. His hope dies here completely, yet his Machiavellianism is still alive.

Webster makes Flamineo demonstrate one more final Machiavellian treachery before he dies. Flamineo attempts to test Vittoria and Zanche by his mock death. And when he "riseth" again from his pretended death as if he were an immortal devil, readers are shocked with an unutterable horror. Then again, when his resolution to kill Vittoria is interrupted by Lodovico and Gaspero, he fiercely protests:

> You shall not take Justice from forth
> my hands,
> O, let me kill her! (V, vi, 176-7)

Even at the imminent moment of his own death, in the presence of the very enemies who are there to execute him, Flamineo is thus faithful to his original self. His unparallelled consistency in character can be seen epitomized in his dying words:

> I doe not looke
> Who went before, nor who shall follow mee;
> Noe, at my selfe I will begin an end. (V,vi,256-8)

What could have moved a person of such conviction to change? Flamineo's stubborn consistency almost seems to impress us that it is a matter of pride with him that misfortune does not change him. We

observe Webster making Flamineo struggle from time to time, to preserve and demonstrate the core of his identity: his personality of Machiavel-malcontent. Flamineo's striking of Lodovico (III,iii); his murder of innocent Marcello (V,ii); his mock death to test Vittoria and Zanche (V,vi) are more or less insignificant actions as far as the central plot of the play is concerned, yet they are designed by Webster purposefully to show Flamineo's Machiavel fury or treacherousness. At the end of Vittoria's trial Flamineo feigns madness to avoid suspicion of complicity in the death of Isabella and Camillo. And he says he "will talk to any man, heare no man." His speeches on this occasion are unusually long, and they impress us as tedious but they are intentionally devised by Webster to show Flamineo's satirical stoicism as a malcontent. He rails at social corruption and contemptuously criticizes religion, money, and all other conventional values. For example in the following scene Flamineo enters as distracted and his first words are his contempt for the suffering and the willingness to take evil as good, ideas which reflect purely Senecan stoicism:

> Wee indure the strokes like anviles or
> hard steele,
> Till paine it selfe make us no paine to
> feele
> ----------.
> Would I had rotted in some Surgeon's
> house at Venice, built
> upon the Pox as well as on piles,
> ere I had serv'd Brachiano! (III, iii, 1-9)

This stoic disgust again impresses us even at the moment of his death from his dying lips:

> Wee cease to greive, cease to be
> fortunes slaves,
> Nay, cease to dye by dying. (V, vi, 252-3)

Thus Flamineo dies a consistent character to the end. The two contradictory elements[22] in his character were carefully joined by subordinating both to his passion for "courtly reward". In other words, Webster did not alter, but attempted to give consistency to, this strange figure of two incompatible roles.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of Webster's efforts, Flamineo's character in The White Devil, is not altogether coherent. Mr. Lucas suggests the generous attitude that the Elizabethan audience might have taken towards the irrelevancies or incompatibilities occuring in the play:

> "How could the hero say such a thing when he had said precisely the opposite two scenes before? 'Did he?' an Elizabethan might have answered, "What a memory you have! But it is better than your wits, if you would have us lose the best scene in the play merely on that account.' (23)

Flamineo's ardent pursuance of reward contradicts his very warning to Mulinassar that all the court promises are vain (see V, i, 130-8); and also it contradicts his prediction

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22. I.e. Malcontent and villainy: see Elmer E. Stoll, John Webster (Cambridge, 1905), p. 124

23. Frank Lawrence Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster, Vol. 1, (London, 1928), pp. 17-18.

to his brother, Marcello, that there is no distinction, in his mind, between Marcello's honest soldiering and his dishonest route to preferment, and the result for both may be that"the frail reward" will steal through the fingers like the water held fast in a hand.(24) Of course, this obvious paradox is caused by the conflict between Flamineo's two incompatible roles -- now, stoic philosopher, now, venal tool-villain. This contradiction could not be solved by merely inventing an ethical, or a psychological patch-work of coherence between the two incompatible elements. The solution required a complete change or rebirth of characters: For instance, such a repentant conversion as Bosola makes in The Duchess of Malfi. We can say that the character Flamineo is

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24. The White Devil, III, i, 38-45. Flamineo says to Marcello:

> "Hum! thou art a souldier,
> Followest the great Duke, feedest his victories,
> As witches do their serviceable spirits,
> Even with thy prodigal bloud--what hast got
> But like the wealth of Captaines, a poore handfull?--
> Which in thy palme thou bear'st, as Men hold water--
> Seeking to gripe it fast, the fraile reward
> Steales through thy fingers.

formed in the conventional way by combining mechanically the incompatible malcontent and Machiavel tool-villain. A man formed thus is too chaotic to be either a character or a moral entity. If Flamineo is "not a character at all", as Dr. Stoll judged, it is because the character is made up of abstract evil and of the principles of the malcontent. A Jacobean audience might have allowed the existence of such a strange character, but Webster was dissatisfied with it, and endeavored to break the tradition, making the same character into a full human being in Bosola. Bosola, villain though he be, was not required to dispense with moral quality.

If we observe closely, however a symptom of Webster's later change in his villain-agent is suggested even in the unnaturally conceptual character of Flamineo. After the long lamentation of his mother in distraction upon Marcello's death, the evil incarnate, Flamineo, is moved to say.

> I have a strange thing in mee, to th' which
> I cannot give a name, without it bee
> Compassion-- (V, iv, 107-9)

And almost at the same moment, Brachiano's ghost appears and Flamineo asks the ghost:

> ____No? not speake?
> Pray, Sir, resolve mee, what religions best
> For a man to die in? (V, iv, 121-3)

He gets no answer from the ghost, but it is clear that Flamineo's long-dry mind dimly thinks of salvation after death. In developing

Flamineo into Bosola, Webster's effort was directed toward an emphasis of this symptomatic, moral feeling betrayed by Flamineo in the midst of his full evil. That is why Bosola, from the first, appears in the second play as a person making a moral judgement. Bosola before he performs his mission as Ferdinand's spy, questions the absurdity of the cruel declaration that the Duchess should never marry again, in spite of her youth and beauty.(25)

> Ferdinand: _____and observe the Duchesse,
> To note all the particulars of her haviour:
> What suitors doe sollicite her for marriage
> And whom she best affects: she's a yong widowe,
> I would not have her marry againe.
>
> Bosola: No, Sir?
>
> Ferdinand: Doe not you aske the reason: but be satisfied, I say I would not. (I, i, 269-76)

Bosola's desperation, after seven years of hard life in the galleys, brings him to the disagreeing court to make his life. In that corrupt court where he finds himself, though he is ready to take any criminal service, he hesitates to follow blindly his master's order because of his natural moral power to judge the wrong from the right. Bosola's short words of question "No, sir?", which fail to obtain the reasoned answer, prove to be a symptom that Webster will later separate the cat's paw part of Bosola's role from the Malcontent part, and make him a repentant avenger. At the

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25. The Duchess later protests to Ferdinand after confessing her marriage:

> Why should onely I,
> Of all the other Princes of the World
> Be cas'de-up, likeaa holy Relique? I have youth,
> And a little beautie. (III, ii, 160-3)

outset of The Duchess of Malfi, we see Bosola, because of his moral quality, manifest a great distaste for his base work, but Ferdinand says: "Be your /villian/ selfe!" and Bosola replies with bitter self-awareness, "I am your creature." Bosola's difficulty is that he knows he is not himself. He is completely aware that he is selling out. By his intelligencing, as he says, he "forfeits his own shape." Bosola is a man in whom Antonio, his fellow courtier, and the lover of the Duchess, finds a goodness that was never known in Flamineo:

> 'Tis great pitty
> He should be thus neglected--I have heard
> He's very valiant: This foule mellancholly
> Will poyson all his goodnesse. (I, i, 75-8)

But once he inevitably becomes the creature of a man whom he despises, he devotes himself to service as a tool-villain with the same callousness, cruelty and treachery as Flamineo demonstrated. The part of Bosola's actions as tool-villain in the play is essentially the same as Flamineo's; in order to avoid repeating what I have earlier said, I shall simply enumerate his actions as a tool-villain, in order to supply the background for my later discussion on Bosola's change in character.

In act II, scene i, Bosola, suspicious of the Duchess' pregnancy, attempts to discover her secret by the treacherous means of giving some green apricots to her. The Duchess, by eating the unripe fruit offered by Bosola, gives birth to a premature baby. And Bosola knows the childbirth when he finds the horoscope of the child's nativity which Antonio happens to have dropped. Bosola immediately sends Castruchio to Ferdinand in Rome notifying him of

the childbirth. This is his first report to Ferdinand as his spy. Now, Bosola realizes that he must discover the child's father, but Ferdinand does not leave this part of the assignment to Bosola. In a furious rage Ferdinand makes a surprise attack on the Duchess' room with the help of a counterfeit key provided by Bosola. But he learns nothing: The Duchess admits the remarriage but refuses to name her husband. In the meantime the Duchess feels increasingly the danger coming from her brothers, and she pretends to banish Antonio. All four of the officers present at the scene praise her action in banishing Antonio, thus proving themselves false flatterers. Only Bosola defends Antonio and blames the Duchess, in order to trap the Duchess. Bosola's apparent sincerity moves the Duchess to reveal her fatal secret, and thus Bosola learns that it is Antonio who is her husband. Then the Duchess makes a hasty plan for flight, proposing to follow Antonio north to Ancona, but Bosola counsels the Duchess to go to Loretto on a pretended pilgrimage with princely trappings and not like a frightened girl. With this advice, Bosola's duty as spy is finished; he has found out what he wanted to know and he takes up his new duty as a persecutor.

The banished Duchess (in dumb show, III, iv), deprived of her dukedom in exile, separates from Antonio and the first child in the hope of avoiding the impending misfortune as best they can. When the wretched company of the Duchess is travelling the lonely road near Loretto, Bosola appears to capture her (III,v). Bosola is vizarded as becomes his diabolic function, and the first words he speaks are a judgement: "You must see your husband no more." (III,v)

For the first time in the play Bosola appears, to the Duchess, a

definitely hostile, enemy figure. The Duchess denies the judge rather than the judgement of Bosola:

What Divell art thou, that counterfeits heavens thunder? (III, v, 116)

Thence, the Duchess, led by Bosola, is restored to her palace for confinement. Thus she enters her purgatory, abandoning forever all pleasure and comfort:

Bosola: All comfort to your Grace.

Duchess: I will have none: 'Pray-thee, why
do'st thou wrap thy poysond Pilles
In Gold and Sugar? (IV, i, 21-4)

A long and cruel persecution is thus inflicted upon the Duchess throughout the whole of the fourth act until the Duchess, her children, and Cariola are strangled by Bosola's executioners. It is Ferdinand and not Bosola who controls the slow tormenting and the execution in the fourth act. Bosola is merely a loyal mercenary for Ferdinand, the frenzied Duke. He is an automaton quite mechanically used for Ferdinand's revenge, which is motivated by an unquenchable fury. With this relationship between them, the master and the servant work to persecute the Duchess, ruthlessly and persistently until they (Ferdinand and Bosola) are exhausted, like men who have come to the end of a long journey. "Cover her face:/ Mine eyes dazell,/she di'd yong." are the words of worn-out Ferdinand.

It should be first noted that Bosola does not have the independence of mind of Flamineo. Flamineo advised Brachiano to elope with Vittoria to Padua when Brachiano did not know what to do. Flamineo even dared to "brave" him at the House of Convertites.

But Bosola has none of this quality: he accepts the dictate of circumstance too easily, there is hardly a struggle against his fate in him. He is a far smaller man than Flamineo even in his ambition. One day Bosola says to Antonio about his modest desire for preferment.

> Shall I confesse my selfe to you?
> I looke no higher then I can reach: they are the gods, that must ride on winged horses, a Lawyers mule of a slow pace will both suit my disposition, and businesse:
> For (marke me) when a mans mind rides faster then his horse can gallop, they quickly both tyre. (II,i,91-6)

Without any great dream in life, Bosola seeks a steady climb in society. That is why he becomes the cursed instrument of Ferdinand. He is no different from Flamineo in his degree of callousness when he persecutes the Duchess. However, Bosola is definitely different from Flamineo in his humanity, in his capacity for pity. "These teares, I am certaine, never grew/ In my Mother's Milke" says Bosola in his deep remorse immediately after the Duchess' death, but Bosola is not "certaine" at all. The tears that he could not stop had grown in his "Mother's Milk." He had conscience by birth. He simply had long forgotten the conscientious flow of tears in his embittered years of hardship in order to live through the wickedness of society.

How, then, can the apparent detachment or objectivity in Bosola's actions be explained? How can this basically humanitarian character be so callous at the scene of the execution of the Duchess, Cariola, etc? It is Bosola who says to his insatiably sadistic lord:

'Faith, end here:
And go no farther in your cruelty--
Send her a penetentiall garment, to put on,
Next to her delicate skinne, and furnish her
With beades, and prayer bookes. (IV, i, 141-5)

And when Ferdinand does not hear this and goes on torturing the Duchess to disturb her slumber, Bosola determinedly refuses to further the cruelty:

Bosola: Never.

Ferdinand: You must.

Bosola: Never in mine owne shape,
That's forfeited, by my intelligence,
And this last cruell lie: when you
send me next,
The businesse shalbe comfort. (IV, i, 159-64)

How can the same man who has said this be so coldblooded and inhuman in his commands to the executioners at the end of the fourth act? No villain on the Jacobean stage could be more Machiavellian than Bosola in conducting the bloody murder of the defenseless victims: women and children. Bosola was perfectly sane when he carried out this cruel mission.

To explain this unbelievable contradiction in Bosola between his moral self, and his cruel self, I shall suggest two possibilities. One is Bosola's smallness of mind, which makes him incapable of boldly disregarding human morality as a full, perfect villain like Flamineo can. Bosola's smallness makes him a weak character as a villain agent. (I will present the evidence shortly.) The other explanation is Webster's change of thematic treatment in The Duchess of Malfi. In his second tragedy Webster shows us a dying universe. Webster is testing his world of doubt, shadow,

terror and death by imposing the forces of oppression and of mortality upon the individual. Webster seems to show us the path toward death of suffering human beings, under the relentless force which plays destructively upon individuality. The death of the Duchess, for this reason, is more than a murder. It is an almost clinical investigation of the breaking point of human spirit.

With ever increasing horror, the torture of the Duchess goes beyond normal human understanding. This situation is more than the smallness of Bosola can cope with. The situation is far greater than this weak, imperfect villain can comprehend. That is why Bosola refuses to torment the Duchess any further immediately before the eight mad men are brought in. Bosola is even frightened by the horror of it. That is why he asks the Duchess: "Doth not death fright you?" and once more, as his final words before her execution:

> Yet, me thinkes,
> The manner of your death should much afflict you,
> This cord should terrifie you? (IV, ii, 219-21)

In act IV, scene i, in the darkness the Duchess sees and is made to believe that Antonio and her children are murdered. To Bosola, that is enough torture; it brings the Duchess to despair because it means she has lost all the human foundations of her life. To this utmost despair, Ferdinand, still unsatisfied, attempts to introduce her madfolks who represent the upset, orderless world. Bosola's weak mind can no longer bear this. Therefore, Bosola tries to comfort her. After the presentation of "a dead hand" Bosola begins to comfort the Duchess:

_____remember,
You are a Christian (Iv, i, 87-88)

When he sees that the Duchess' despair has no remedy, Bosola again tries to give her courage, wishing to save her life, if possible.

Come, be of comfort; I will save your life.

In a sense, Bosola's words of comfort are addressed to his coward self as well as to the Duchess because Bosola is also tested by Webster's fierce force of oppression and mortality, and so are Ferdinand and the Cardinal. (As a result of the test Ferdinand falls victim to "lycanthropy," the "melancholy humour" whereby men imagine themselves to be transformed into wolves; and the Cardinal, tormented by a guilty conscience, fancies he sees "a thing arm'd with a / Rake/That seemes to strike at me," whenever/looks into the fishpond in his garden.)

As the dismal fourth act progresses, the horror of suffering is intensified especially by the speeches, songs and dances of the mad men,which take place in a vacuum world where order is completely absent. The horror of suffering becomes unbearable to everyone. Bosola, in his ironic effort to encourage both the Duchess and himself to continue his mission as persecutor, points, in vain, to the invulnerability of the stars:

Looke you, the starres shine still:(IV,i,120)

But the stars, the symbol of fate and human ideals lie too remote from the actual pains suffered by the Duchess in the earthly purgatory. This phrase of Bosola is rather an assertion of man's impotence, of the remoteness, the impersonality of the cosmic powers. The Duchess bravely struggles to answer this: "Oh, but you must remember, my curse hath a great way to goe: __" This cruelty,

as the Duchess predicts, seems to have a long way to go. Then, Bosola's protest never to see the Duchess "in mine shape" is rejected by Ferdinand who urges: "you must" because Bosola is his "creature." Then Bosola assumes symbolical disguises: Bosola enters "like an old man" after the dance of the eight mad men; then "a maker of tombs"; lastly the "common bellman" who exhorts condemned criminals on the eve of execution. These symbolical disguises are intended by Webster to personify the storm of terror. (The conventional purpose of the disguise does not apply here because, on this occasion, the opponent is completely defenseless without any power to resist.) But at the same time, these disguises are used by Bosola to fortify his weakness as villain to carry out the rest of Ferdinand's assignment. Before the madmen enter, the Duchess leaves the stage longing for a quick death: "It is some mercy when men kill with speed." Bosola seems to know the inevitability of the Duchess' fate. If it is inevitable the best thing for him to do is to finish the cursed task as soon as possible; and thus, to relieve himself from the pain and terror that he feels with the Duchess. That is why he seems to be so impatient in urging his executioners to strangle the victims promptly. After the Duchess is strangled, Cariola resists death, she "scratches and bites." To Bosola, hers is a useless struggle. Bosola's commanding words are short and stern: "Delayes: __throttle-her". Cariola is strangled. Bosola orders: "Beare her into th' next roome". He sees once more the dead Duchess and says: "Let this lie still." Rapid orders are followed by quick actions. Behind the curtain the children are already strangled. Bosola's impetuosity to end the Duchess's life in order to get the Duchess, as well as himself,

relieved from the suffocating terrors of the purgatory is well expressed in the following dialogue between Ferdinand and Bosola on the still bloody stage after the death of the long tormented victim. Bosola is firm in his belief that the Duchess should have died long before:

> Ferdinand: Cover her face: Mine eyes dazell: she di'd yong.
>
> Bosola: I thinke not so: her infelicitie Seem'd to have yeeres too many.(IV,ii,281-3)

On the basis of what has been said so far, we may draw the following conclusions as to the treatment of the villain-agent by Webster. Webster developed his villain character in three stages: First came the historical figure (i.e. "Marcello"); then came Flamineo, and finally Bosola. A vague character of an actual event, "Marcello," the bad brother of Vittoria Accoramboni, was characterized by Webster as Flamineo in The White Devil along the lines of the conventional villain such as Vindice, Malevole; and this Flamineo was humanized into the character of Bosola. Flamineo, to Webster, was a preliminary study of Bosola. I used the words "further developed" because Bosola's character at the end of the fourth act, not only changes but also develops throughout the rest of the play while retaining its earlier Machiavel element. Bosola discards the tool-villain part of his nature and replaces it with the agency of conscience, while preserving all his earlier elements, his malcontent character included.

I have earlier pointed out that the character of Flamineo is inconsistent in his two incompatible roles: the stoic malcontent and the Machiavellian tool-villain. Webster intended to correct

and the

this incompatibility in the character of Bosola by exercising on him a change and development.

How did Webster effect this change? In order to make Bosola's change and development natural, Webster changes both the plot and the theme of his later play.

Webster's changes in the plot of The Duchess of Malfi, involve s simplification of the characters' relation to the other characters. The only blood kinship retained is that between the Duchess and her two brothers. And Bosola is detached (without any relationship) to be impartial from their family affairs, and is set free to change. In The White Devil, all the main characters were related to each other by blood or marriage. Isabella was the sister of Francisco, and Monticelso; Camillo and Lodovico, kins to Monticelso; Vittoria, sister of Marcello and Flamineo. Flamineo, once attached to the sinful world of Vittoria, could not be impartial because of the involvement in his sister's world, nor was he free to change, for he was bound by the obligation which brother and sister relation required. The excessive relating of the characters (by kinship) in The White Devil diminished the freedom of the other characters too: For instance, Monticelso was, I think, a fair judge at the trial of Vittoria, but his objectivity was spoiled by his kinship with Camillo and Isabella.

In addition to plot changes, Webster also makes changes in theme between the two plays.

In The White Devil, the theme of "courtly reward and punishment is consistent and central. The plays begin with the angry word

"banished!" of Lodovico who received "courtly punishment" for his prodigality, and it ends with young Giovanni's promises to bring to justice all who have had a hand in that melancholy affair. And throughout the play we have seen Flamineo, though uncertain, persistently pursuing court preferment in his evil way; as Marcello does in his honest way of soldiering. Brachiano promises to reward Vittoria in order to be reconciled with her.

> ___for you, Vittoria,
> Thinke of a Dutchesse title. (IV, ii, 222-3)

Mulianassar (Francisco), who comes to Brachiano's court for his sister's revenge, is rewarded with a "competent pension" by Brachiano for his proffered service. The reward is given not to Flamineo, who has so long sought after it, but to an enemy who comes as an instrument to render courtly punishment. Indeed Webster places his dramatic irony in the entanglement of courtly punishment and reward. The famous scene of Vittoria's trial is done in the formal court of justice, with its prison, where the "penitent whores" are confined. The Cardinal, after his ascension to the papacy, punishes the illicit lovers by excommunication, and pardons Lodovico in banishment. No more evidences are needed to prove the consistency of the theme.

In The Duchess of Malfi also we notice that the themes of courtly corruption and courtly reward and punishment are continued. Even before the removal of the dead bodies from the nightmarish stage, we see Bosola remind Ferdinand to render appropriate reward for his accomplished work. The play begins with Antonio's description of the ideal French court and his dying request at the end of the play is: "And let my sonne, flie the Courts of Princes." These facts are enough to show that the themes of the

earlier play are present in The Duchess of Malfi. But in the second play they are no longer central. As a step toward this thematic change, Webster makes the later love-pair (Antonio and the Duchess) defensible from a humanistic viewpoint, whereas he made his earlier love-pair (Brachiano and Vittoria) defenseless from the religious or moral viewpoint. If the love of the Duchess and Antonio had been made damnable, by Webster, as in his first play, Bosola's conversion could not have happened, and if it had happened, it would have been utterly meaningless because a conversion to conscience cannot be motivated by a desire to side with evil. Again, let us assume that Ferdinand's revenge on the Duchess is motivated by his desire to justly "punish" her because she disgraced her royal blood and rank by her illicit marriage when she was a widow without the rites of the church, without the advices of her kindred, thus violating the "order" and "degree" of her society. Why, then, after her capital punishment, should Ferdinand lament: "her Innocence and my Revenge!" ? When the Duchess, after a momentary revival, dies again forever, why should Bosola weep at her body: "O sacred Innocence." ? Lodovico, in The White Devil, in a parallel situation, was perfectly satisfied with what he had done. He was happy and proud that he could accomplish his work of due punishment upon the illicit lovers even when his own death was awaiting.

> Lodovico: I do glory yet,
> That I can call this act mine owne: For my part,
> The racke, the gallowes, and the torturing wheele
> Shall bee but sound sleepes to me, here's my rest--
> I limb'd this night-peece, and it was my best. (V,vi,295-9)

This is proof that Webster altered his theme in his second play. It is no longer a simple and narrow theme of punishing the guilty and rewarding the meritorious.

When, indeed, we come to the fourth act of The Duchess of Malfi, questions of innocence and guilt seem irrelevant, or boldly disregarded by the poet. We have here a long ectasy of pain which gives its own cosmic vision. What had led to the darkness, what may supervene, we do not care. With a kind of resignation we speculate that these moments of torment exist in their own right. Hierarchial conceptions of the universe, scales of value, no longer obtain. Here, we are only reminded of that uncontrollable storm scene of King Lear in which a king, a Fool, and a beggar are equalized.

In The White Devil, Webster treats evils in a limited sense -- the evils which man creates. Webster depicts for us the forces of social tyranny in the Jacobean world. In The Duchess of Malfi, Webster reveals to us all the terrors of a dying universe, treating evils that rather naturally exist than those created by men.

The Duchess' painful endurance in the adversity has made her look like a weathered monument standing in ruins, deprived of all human status:

> Duchess: ____who do I looke like now?
>
> Cariola: Like to your picture in the gallery
> A deale of life in shew, but none in practise;
> Or rather like some reverend monument
> Whose ruines are even pittied. (IV, ii, 326)

There is no character in The White Devil that we can imagine brooding like Antonio over the ruined abbey at Milan with a sadness that

recalls at once that of Hamlet over Yorick's skull.

> I doe love these auncient ruynes:
> We never tread upon them, but we set
> Our foote upon some reverend History.
> And questionles, here in this open Court
> (Which now lies naked to the injuries
> Of stormy weather) some men lye Enterr'd
> Lov'd the Church so well, and gave so largely to't,
> They thought it should have canopide their Bones
> Till Doombes-day: But all things have their end:
> Churches, and Citties (which have diseases like to men)
> Must have like death that we have. (V, iii, 10-20)

"All things," says Antonio, "have their end." Bosola savagely realizes the loathsome reality of the process of natural decay in the slowly dying universe. Bosola explains it pungently in his extended meditation:

> Observe my meditation now:
> What thing is in this outward forme of man
> To be belov'd? we account it ominous,
> If Nature doe produce a Colt, or Lambe
> A Fawne, or Goate, in any limbe resembling
> A Man; and flye from't as a prodegy.
> Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity,
> In any other Creature but himselfe.
> But in our owne flesh, though we beare diseases
> Which have their true names onely tane from beasts,
> As the most ulcerous Woolfe, and swinish Meazeall;
> Though we are eaten up of lice and wormes,
> And though continually we beare about us
> A rotten and dead body, we delight
> To hide it in rich tissew--all our feare,
> (Nay all our terrour) is, feast our Phisition
> Should put us in the ground, to be made sweete. (II,i,45-62)

Man's own "deformity"; diseases, beast incarnate; corruptibility of flesh; bodily worms --- these are the causes of decay. But the image of corruption further spreads in this world of Malfi. If there be any such thing as law to maintain order in this helpless universe, that law is commented on by Delio in the imagery of a gluttonous, cruel insect:

Delio: .....the Law to him (Ferdinand)
Is like a fowle blacke cob-web, to a Spider--
He makes it his dwelling, and a prison
To entangle those shall feede him. (I, i,180-3)

To the cynical eyes of Bosola, nothing is free from the corruption. Bosola says at his new job:

What's my place?
The Proviso/r/-ship o'th horse? say then my corruption
Grew out of horse-doong: (I, ii, 311-3)

Antonio earlier emphasizes the uncheckable flow of distaste in the corruption of the political ethic.

A Princes Court
Is like a common Fountaine, whence should flow
Pure silver-droppes in generall: But if't chance
Some curs'd example poyson't neere the head,
Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.
(I, i, 12-6)

Bosola's "meditation" is the synthesis of the various elements of the play's main theme, and it is followed by abundant animal metaphors and images of degeneration, such as diseases. The pregnancy of the Duchess is described in terms of the corruption of the flesh. Not only do we find social and individual degradation in this Malfi world, but also we see the image of man's bestiality coming to a terrible actuality. Ferdinand's "lycanthropy" is introduced by Webster to show us a spectacle of the bestial overthrowing the human; the causes of destruction are everywhere, driving the universe to its ruin, forces of natural evil which man cannot control or check. Ferdinand's revenge on the Duchess was not motivated by such a simple cause as "courtly justice". Ferdinand's motives for torturing (and later killing) his sister are obscure. He gives them only after she is dead.

....let me but examine well the cause;
What was the meanenes of her match to me?
Onely I must confesse, I had a hope
(Had she continu'd widow) to have gain'd
An infinite masse of Treasure by her death:
And that was the mayne cause; her Marriage--
That drew a streame of gall quite through my heart.
(IV, ii, 300-6)

However, I agree with Mr. Bogard's viewpoint on Ferdinand's true motives. He says:

> "Commentators have been at pains to point out that the 'infinite masse of Treasure' could scarcely have been his, since there was a Duke of Malfi, the Duchess' son by her previous marriage. Faced with such a weak motivation, some critics, responding to the implications of Ferdinand's more horrifying imagery, have suggested that Ferdinand had an incestuous love for his twin sister and tortures her because of his perverted jealousy. Whatever his motives, they are obscured by the madness that seizes him immediately after her death, and it is possible to hold that he acted as he did because of a congenital psychopathic condition which gave rise to his 'most perverse, and turbulant nature'." (26)

I accept the whole of the above comment. Ferdinand himself admits to Bosola that what he has done to his sister is caused by his madness. He says to Bosola with a regret:

....her Innocence, and my Revenge!
I bad thee, when I was distracted of
my wits,
Goe kill my dearest friend, and thou
hast don't. (IV, ii, 297-9)

Whatever his true motives, they seem distinctly abnormal; if we think of this abnormality in terms of mental disease, we might conclude that Ferdinand's evil is a natural evil which lies beyond man's control. I do not say, however, that Ferdinand should not be held responsible for his sister's death; Ferdinand is after all represented as sane at the time when he summoned and conjured up the storm of terror which rages in the fourth act.

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26. Travis Bogard, The Tragic Satire of John Webster (Univ. of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955), p. 53.

Webster, then, presents us with a world throttled by a concentration of evil in the climactic fourth act of his later tragedy, showing us a "perspective of hell." The purpose is to see whether a force of pure, motiveless evil can shake the fundamental integrity of man. The whole fourth act is a relentless test, inflicted upon all the major characters of the Malfi world, with an oppression, persistent and cruel. It is not only the Duchess, but also Bosola, Ferdinand, and the Cardinal that suffer. Ferdinand suffers throughout the period of the test, he has been a helpless fiendish patient of a mental disease of which he himself has not been aware. The Cardinal's later obsession (27) is the result of the suffering which he had to undergo during the test. At his death he asks, as his dying request to let him "be layd by, and never thought of." (V,v,113) as if he meant to seek oblivion of his painful, sinful past. Bosola suffers, of course, through the entire test, through his acts of torture as villain-agent of Ferdinand, wavering between his cruel duty and his moral self, shrinking from the terror of the dying universe.

Webster, indeed attempts to prove for all men the value in tenacious resistance to destruction. He tests the individuals with the forces of oppression and mortality and make them assert their own integrity of life --- whether of virtue, or of vice. We can say that his characters, Bosola included, are, in the end of the test, what they were at the outset. The naturally evil men remain evil;

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27. In act V, scene v, the Cardinal suffers from the pains of his guilty conscience and meditates on the hell-fire. He tells of his obsession in his soliloquy:

> How tedious is a guilty conscience!
> When I looke into the Fish-ponds in my Garden,
> Me thinkes I see a thing, arm'd with a Rake
> That seemes to strike at me. ---

the good remain good. This tendency of Webster is even stubbornly consistent, as the last two lines of The Duchess of Malfi significantly show.

> Integrity of life, is fames best friend,
> Which noblely (beyond Death) shall crowne the end.

Webster realized that there was still a glory about life, however stained it appeared. Especially there was a grandeur in the capacity of individuals to struggle to preserve what they are. Integrity of life was valuable to him because the forces of oppression and mortality could not shatter.

Thus indefatigable persecution cannot change the Duchess. She is "The Duchess of Malfi still." Through the storm of misfortune she maintains her integrity in love (for Antonio). Therefore, she dies, in the end, in her belief that she will be reunited with Antonio in the heaven where the gates "are not so highly arch'd / As Princes pallaces." (Iv,ii,239-40)

Ferdinand, who was of the "most perverse and turbulent nature" at the outset turns a "turbulent" madman. Ferdinand, whose mind dwelt upon wolves in comparing the Duchess' voice to the howling of a wolf, falls victim to "lycanthropy." Thus the image becomes actuality after the test.

Likewise, Bosola, originally a moral man, goes back to his moral self. Being desperate for living, he has long been engaged in base employment under a vicious lord. Bosola finally finds himself in the emptiness of the Malfi world from which the Duchess, the finest human spirit, has vanished after her dignified endurance of pain as if she were a martyr.

Bosola's conversion to his moral self is of essential importance to Webster. In The Duchess of Malfi, with the termination of its fourth act, the story of the destruction of good by evil is told, and there, though we already have to lose our heroine in the courageous human struggle to assert her integrity even in defeat, still the story of the revelation of the real condition of man's world has not been completed. To complete the story, Webster assigns to moral Basola new missions in the fifth act. The forces of horror which have raged in the fourth act have to spend themselves in destruction, in the final act, bringing about the collapse of all. In other words, Webster intends to describe a world where the good is forced to die. Webster asserts that the quality of human greatness lies not in power or rank, but in individualism, which cannot be destroyed until death. To make this important conclusion, Webster uses Bosola, this time as a tool-agent of conscience, or rather, of humanity.

Bosola has long lost himself. Now he awakens from his dream after the Duchess' death when Ferdinand refuses to reward him. Bosola, on reflection, realizes that he has done everything in vain, and that he has sold his conscience for nothing. He wakes up to feel a self-disgust:

> I stand like one
> That long hath ta'ne a sweet, and golden dreame.
> I am angry with my selfe, now that I wake. (IV,ii,349-51

Bosola's change in character starts here. He forsakes Ferdinand, for whom he has worked as a cat's-paw. Webster eliminates the role of tool-villain from Bosola's character. However, before

he leads Bosola into the satire of the final act, he makes Bosola renounce his hope for worldly honour and restore his true self with "peace of conscience," because rank or wealth have nothing to/do with man's greatness.

> Off my painted honour!
> While with vaine hopes, our faculties we tyre,
> We seeme to sweate in yee, and freeze in fire;
> What would I doe, we/r/e this to doe againe?
> I would not change my peace of conscience
> For all the wealth of Europe. (IV, ii, 362-7)

This is Webster's teaching on life, spoken in the words of Bosola by which he leads the audience into the generalized observations of the final act. Bosola sees the strangled Duchess momentarily revive. She prays for "Mercy" of God and dies again. Bosola's subsequent words are spoken in true tears, which he had never before experienced:

> O sacred Innocence, that sweetely sleepes
> On Turtles feathers: whil'st a guilty conscience
> Is a blacke Register, wherein is writ
> All our good deedes, and bad: a Perspective
> That showes us hell; that we cannot be suffer'd
> To doe good when we have a mind to it!
> This is manly sorrow:
> These teares, I am very certaine, never grew
> In my Mothers Milke. My estate is suncke below
> The degree of feare: where were these penitent fountaines,
> While she was living?
> Oh, they were frozen up: here is a sight
> As direfull to my soule, as is the sword
> Unto a wretch hath slaine his father: Come,
> I'll beare thee hence,
> And execute thy last will; that's deliver
> Thy body to the reverend dispose
> Of some good women: that the cruell tyrant
> Shall not denie me: Then I'll poast to Millaine,
> Where somewhat I will speedily enact
> Worth my dejection. (IV, ii, 383-403)

Bosola's tears have come from a truly deep source. Bosola,

converted, begins a new life by executing the last will of the deceased Duchess. He resolves to deliver her body "to the reverend dispose of some good women." And thus the painful fourth act ends. But Bosola makes his perfect conversion from evil to good in act V, scene iii, after his pretended acceptance of the Cardinal's order to murder Antonio. Bosola now sees the insecurity of human life. This time he truly resolves to protect Antonio, "in a most just revenge," if possible, for the Duchess. (This resolution is made in act V, scene iii, by Bosola before he overhears the Cardinal's intention of killing him, which happens in act V, scene iv.)

> Oh poore Antonio, though nothing be so needfull
> To thy estate, as pitty, Yet I finde
> Nothing so dangerous: I must looke to my footing;
> In such slippery yce-pavements, men had neede
> To be frost-nayld well: they may break their neckes
> else.
> The Pre/ce/dent's here afore meL how this man
> Beares up in blood!--seemes feareles!--why, 'tis well:
> Securitie some men call the Suburbs of Hell,
> Onely a dead wall betweene. Well (good Antonio)
> I'll seeke thee out; and all my care shall be
> To put thee into safety from the reach
> Of these most cruell biters, that have got
> Some of thy blood already. It may be,
> I'll joyne with thee, in a most just revenge.
> The weakest Arme is strong enough, that strikes
> With the sword of Justice: Still me thinkes the Dutchesse
> Haunts me: there, there!...'tis nothing but my melancholly.
> O Penitence, let me truely tast thy Cup,
> That throwes men downe, onely to raise them up! (V,iii,365-83)

In the above soliloquy of Bosola's, the line "I'll join with thee, in a most just revenge," is noteworthy. We have already seen that the revenge motives of the Aragonian brothers were obscure. If The Duchess of Malfi can be called a revenge tragedy at all, its revenge plot, in the pure sense, begins here. The innocent death of the Duchess has to be revenged. Ferdinand, sub-humanly devilish, who

has conjured and summoned the terror and despair of evil, has to receive his due payment. The hypocritical Cardinal, who had ordered the murder of his sister, as he later admits to Julia, his mistress, has to receive his own due punishment. In this real world of men, to which Webster brings us back, the revenge is "a most just" one, as Bosola says. However, the problem of who will be the avenger is not decided yet, (I reserve this for my later discussion), but the motives and the opponents of the revenge are already obvious.

One night Bosola overhears the Cardinal meditate his murder, and soon after, hearing some one prowling in the dark, by mistake, Bosola stabs Antonio, whose life, as atonement, he has resolved to save. Thus Antonio dies much later than the Duchess, but he is made to be killed by Bosola, if "unwittingly".

However, Bosola's resolution bears fruit. He does one last deed of virtue in his life: his revenge for the Duchess. After the death of Antonio he seeks out the Cardinal, who cries for help, but is ignored as he had ordered. When the Cardinal, entrapped, asks the cause of Bosola's intent to murder him, he points to the dead body of Antonio and peremptorily declares his motive of revenge, and explains his belief that the brother's cruelty toward their sister has been utterly causeless:

> Slaine by my hand unwittingly:
> Pray, and be sudden: when thou kill'dst thy sister,
> Thou tookst from Justice her most equall ballance,
> And left her naught but her sword.(V, v, 51-4)

Duke Ferdinand comes to the scuffle and gives Bosola a mortal wound; however Bosola manages to stab him before his death. Bosola is satisfied with this last service.

> Now my revenge is perfect: sinke (thou
> maine cause Of my undoing)--the last
> part of my life [He stabs Ferdinand]
> Hath done me best service. (V, v, 81-83)

Thus Bosola makes the most of his brief time before he dies, and does justice on the cruel brothers of Aragon.

After the death of the Duchess, the only character that holds us is Bosola. Bosola is no longer the tool-villain that he used to be. He is the tool-agent of his conscience. His contrition and acts of redemption are so true that we are tempted to wish him to survive at the play's end, but he has to die according to the moral rule of tragedy. He has killed too many persons for him to live.[28] Only when it is toc late, has he deserted the side of sin to earn the wages of death.

What is the purpose of Webster's change in Bosola's character? One purpose, as we have seen, was the necessity of escaping from the unreality of the malcontent villain trap. Another purpose in making Bosola change character is that Webster wants Bosola to avenge the Duchess; as a result of his use of Bosola as avenger he greatly improves the quality of his play,both in artistry and morality. One might ask, "why did not Webster use Antonio as revenger instead of Bosola?" Webster might have used Antonio for that purpose since he is the most wronged of the remaining persons after the death of the Duchess. And the possibility is suggested in Bosola's line to which I have already drawn attention: "I'll joyne with thee, in a most just revenge." (V,iii)

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28. Bosola's victims are eight: The Duchess, her two children, Cariola, Antonio, (by mistake), The Cardinal's servant, the Cardinal, Ferdinand.

However, Antonio is of too weak a nature to do the manly work of revenge. Once he courageously plans to surprise the Cardinal in his room at night -- as Ferdinand once did the Duchess, but it is not to kill him, but to beg his reconcilement: Antonio says to Delio:

> This night, I meane to venture all my fortune
> (Which is no more then a poore lingring life)
> To the Cardinals worst of mallice: I have got
> Private accesse to his chamber: and intend
> To visit him, about the mid of night.
> (As once his brother did our noble Dutchesse.)
> It may be that the sudden apprehension
> Of danger (for I'll goe in mine owne shape)
> When he shall see it fraight with love, and dutie,
> May draw the poyson out of him, and worke
> A friendly reconcilement; if it fails.....
> Yet, it shall rid me of this infamous calling,
> For better fall once, then be ever falling. (V,i,69-81)

It may be said that Antonio is not yet ready to be an avenger since he does not know of the Duchess' death. Even if he knew it, however, it is very doubtful that he could undertake the courageous work of revenge since in the above speech of his, he says that he had "better fall once, than be ever falling", instead of saying "better kill them once." After the hard years of separation from the Duchess and from his children, all he can think of as a solution is to commit suicide.

> "We do not demand that every character shall be cast in heroic mould: but we blush uncomfortably at the scene where Antonio enters, pistol in hand, after the Duke has safely retired, only to bluster where he should have acted. The dagger left by Ferdinand has a handle, he cries to his mistress, as well as a point: but whose hand should grasp that hilt if not his own? We come to feel that Antonio is not good enough for the woman he has won. Perilous as his position was, hard as it might have been to ride out into the night after Duke Ferdinand and

> meet sword to sword the brother of his mistress,
> or to try to raise Amalfi in its Duchess' name,
> none the less a stouter heard would have found
> a better end." (29)

Antonio's fatal defect, as we have read in the above quotation, is his weakness of nature as a man, which definitely disqualifies him as an avenger.

In this play, then, if not Antonio, there is none but Bosola who will do justice for the innocent death of the Duchess. Bosola, in spite of his ironic position -- an executioner and avenger, of the Duchess, is far better qualified than helplessly timid Antonio.

By converting Bosola from a villain to a just avenger, Webster achieved a great improvement in his second twin play.

First in the treatment of his villain agent Webster largely modified what was defective in Flamineo's character, the incompatibility of his exaggerated apathy as a human being, with his exaggerated evil as a mover of the plot. Flamineo is a trite Elizabethan villain mechanically characterized by Webster after the conventional villain type, such as Lorenzo, Malevole, Vindice. This type of villain is merely a creation of popular mythopoeic fancy. We have seen Flamineo live as his evil self is in the face of all opposition, all ties of loyalty, indeed of all the human life. He was made to be a convenient man only to serve evil tasks in the play, only knowing a half of life: the evil part of life. But Webster made converted Flamineo into a full being in his characterization of Bosola, his later villain. Webster gave Bosola, like Hamlet, a constant wavering of conscience

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29. Frank Lawrence Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster, Vol. II. (London, 1928), p. 22.

as long as Bosola was Ferdinand's tool, then for the final act he converted him into a humane tool of conscience. Man is not at all so simple and crude a creature as Flamineo. Bosola (in the fifth act) is made almost as vital as Edmund, or Macbeth, largely because he was modeled after human nature. In Bosola, Webster shows us a Flamineo no longer looking on men as "maggots" but as men. Leaving his old cynical heights of censure, Flamineo comes down to participate in the mystery and pathos, the paradoxes and irony, of human inquiry and struggle.

Incidentally the change in Bosola's character also results in a structural improvement in The Duchess of Malfi. Suppose this play had ended --- without Bosola's later revenge --- with the death of the Duchess and Antonio, as The White Devil did with the death of the parallel hero and heroine; it would have turned out to be a frustrated or unfinished play. Bosola's final retributive revenge tightens the whole plot of the play and redeems whatever was weak in Ferdinand's initial revenge motives against the Duchess.

Moreover, Webster also improved the morality of the play. It is a natural human desire that the wicked and cruel should be punished. The pattern of tragedy requires Ferdinand and the Cardinal to be doomed to fall for the cruelties which they have inflicted upon the innocent, defenseless martyr. And who will not agree with Bosola's declaration of his known motive for revenge:

> When thou kill'dst thy sister,
> Thou tookst from Justice her most
> equall ballance,
> And left her naught but her sword. (V, v, 52-4)

In completing his noble vengeance for the Duchess, Bosola liberates the audience from their psychological pain. Bosola's vengeance is moreover moralizing in that he accomplishes his own redemption by it.

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