LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY IN THE PLAYS OF

JOHN WEBSTER.

A study of three plays - The White Devil,
The Duchess of Malfi, and The Devil's Law-Case -
and the elegy, A Monumental Column.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication in 1935 of Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it tells us*¹ a considerable amount of work has been done on the nature and function of imagery in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Surprisingly little attention, however, has been given to this aspect of Webster's plays. The few books devoted solely to Webster refer only incidentally to his use of imagery, drawing attention only to the most obvious image patterns, and of the more general studies of the language of drama none is sufficiently detailed to do justice to the work of an individual dramatist. The brief discussion of Webster's two most important plays in M.E. Prior's *The Language of Tragedy*² is perceptive and illuminating, but the scope of his enquiry allows him only a fleeting glance at the peculiarities of Webster's style. Nor has this gap been bridged by articles in literary and critical journals. In spite of the greatly increased interest in Webster's plays in recent years, there are, as far as can be ascertained, only three articles in English on Webster's language and imagery. H.T. Price's "The Function of Imagery in Webster"³ suffers from the extremely narrow approach the writer adopts; in making one point he misses many others of equal or greater


importance. Of two articles by Inga-Stina Skeblad, one, "Storm Imagery in Apelles and Virginia", deals with a play which falls outside the scope of this study, while the other "A Webster Villain", is restricted to an analysis, excellent in itself, of the use of imagery in relation to the character of Duke Ferdinand in The Duchess of Malfi.

This thesis has two main aims: to fill a gap in Webster studies by a survey of his imagery which will be sufficiently detailed to indicate the highly individual qualities of his style, yet broad enough to show the relationship between the manner and matter of his plays, and, allied to this, a vindication of Webster as a poet-dramatist, fully conscious of the necessary relationship between dramatic action and the language of poetic drama. An attempt will be made to refute those critics who subscribe, explicitly or implicitly, to the view expressed by C. Day Lewis in his Clark Lectures of 1946, when after praising the generally adventurous quality of Jacobean dramatic imagery and suggesting that its more extreme manifestations are often justified by the characteristic violence of the dramatic action, Day Lewis adds:

"This is not to say, of course, that in poetic drama anything goes; the violence of Webster's imagery in The Duchess of Malfi for example, often seems to be thrashing the air, because that


5 I. S. Skeblad, "A Webster Villain", Orpheus, (September 1956).
play lacks the consistency in characterization and the greatness of theme which could mould such imagery to a full dramatic meaning.  

It is the chief aim of this thesis to prove that such an estimate of Webster is incorrect, and to demonstrate that Webster the dramatist, Webster the poet, and Webster the moralist are not splintered fragments of a flawed and broken whole but are, indeed, aspects of a fully integrated sensibility. It will be argued that Webster's poetry is inseparable from the thematic content of his plays, and from characterization and dramatic action. All the elements cohere to form organically unified works of art.

The works which have been chosen for study and analysis here are the two tragedies, The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, the tragicomedy, The Devil's Law-Case, and the elegy on Prince Henry, A Monumental Column. Justifying the inclusion of the last two works it can be said that the former, though a flawed and imperfect work, yet shows sufficient signs of Webster's great gifts to warrant inclusion, and that the latter, though hasty and imperfect, is yet so closely bound up with the composition of The Duchess of Malfi that it warrants consideration on that score alone. Little explanation is needed to justify the omission of the rest of the Websterian corpus. The results of his collaboration with Dekker are too unlike any of Webster's later and more mature work to make a study of the three early plays profitable. Indeed it is hard to distinguish Webster's

hand from Dekker's most of the time. The later collaborative works are equally unlike the Webster of the great plays, and their parts equally difficult to assign to specific writers. The one play which in many respects merited inclusion is Appius and Virginia, but doubts as to Webster's sole authorship precluded this.

The method used in this study is essentially that first devised by Miss Spurgeon. The images have been card indexed, classified and sorted into groups under subject headings, and then extensively cross referenced. In all this Miss Spurgeon's classification system has been retained almost entirely, despite its drawbacks. Care has been taken to guard against these by a widening of the field of enquiry to include a study of how Webster uses direct, non-metaphorical references and key tone-words as well as images. Words such as 'black', 'rotten' and 'darkness' are as important to the Websterian tragedies as the celebrated 'blood' in Macbeth, which Miss Spurgeon's method led her almost wholly to disregard. Close adherence to Miss Spurgeon's methods has, however, the great and overriding advantage of enabling full use to be made of the information she obtained. It is thus possible to draw reasonably valid comparisons not only between Webster and Shakespeare, but also between Webster and other of his fellow dramatists for whom Miss Spurgeon gives some data - Chapman, Dekker, Jonson, Marlowe and Massinger. Unfortunately little precise information seems to be available on the imagery of Tourneur and Marston, whose
work would probably afford the most useful comparisons with Webster's, apart from Shakespeare's. To supplement the meagre information that is available on Marston and Tourneur in such non-statistical studies as Miss U. Ellis-Fermor's "Imagery in The Revenger's Tragedy and The Atheist's Tragedy (M.L.R. XXX. 1935), reliance has had to be placed on personal reading in these dramatists.

The first chapter of the thesis is a general one, involving a study of the whole body of images to be found in the four works under discussion. The intention here is to try to determine in what general ways Webster's imagery differs from, or is similar to, that of Shakespeare and his fellows. No specific attempt is made to deduce information about Webster the man from the images he used, though naturally it is impossible entirely to separate the man and his personality from his work. The aim is to discover what types of images, what areas of experience, he most frequently turned to for his metaphors; to try to trace, in short, the general pattern of imaginative emphases. This chapter also includes a general study of the language of the plays, and some discussion of the peculiarities of Websterian verse and prose as compared with those of his fellow-dramatists. In addition there is included in this general chapter a short section on Webster's borrowings. This is intended only to validate and justify a study of his imagery, despite the fact that many of the images are known to have been borrowed from other authors.
The second, third, and fourth chapters are devoted to the three plays under discussion, in chronological order. A Monumental Column is not given a full chapter to itself, but is dealt with in an appendix to the chapter on The Duchess Of Malfi on which the elegy has a considerable bearing. Each chapter involves a study of the subject matter of the imagery, emphases, patterns and leading motifs. Out of this arises a discussion of the themes and characters in each play, and an attempt to demonstrate the careful relationships Webster establishes between image, theme, action, and character. Evaluations of the plays as works of art are also made.

The fifth and final chapter rounds off the study with a general summary of the findings of the preceding four, concluding with an evaluation of Webster's claim to be considered a major poet and dramatist. Finally, there is a series of appendices in which the statistical information, on which the whole study is based, has been set out graphically, in a manner closely resembling that of the tables in Shakespeare's Imagery.

To questions concerning the accuracy of the statistical information Miss Spurgeon's remarks provide the best answer.

"The difficulties and problems connected with the counting and classifying of images could hardly be believed by one who has not experienced them. Probably no two people would entirely agree as to the number of images to be found in any one play."7

And again:

"It must be remembered that any count of this kind, however carefully done, must to some extent be an approximate one,

7 Spurgeon. op. cit. p.359
dependent on the literary judgement and methods of the person who has compiled it."\textsuperscript{8}

From the shelter of such caveats it can be claimed that the statistical information on which the study is based, and which is set out fully in the appendices, is generally accurate.

\textsuperscript{8} Surgeon. \textit{op. cit.} p.360
CHAPTER ONE

THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WEBSTERIAN LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY.

Webster's plays are full of imagery; fuller than those of any of his contemporaries. As Appendix one A indicates, both The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi are more closely packed with images than even Troilus and Cressida, the play with the largest number of images in the Shakespearean canon. It is by means of this unusual weight of imagery, allied with a tight, elliptical quality in the language, that Webster achieves a good deal of his intensity and power. But much of the power comes also from the single-mindedness of his approach to his chosen themes, from his concentration on particular aspects of life through particular angles of vision. The imagery might be expected to contribute to this. Yet at first glance the range and subject matter of Webster's images, as set out in Appendix two, seem remarkably similar to Shakespeare's, as graphed in Appendix five of Miss Spurgeon's book. There is none of the obvious imbalance in Webster's range such as is immediately apparent in Marlowe's. The latter's preoccupation with imagery drawn from the categories of learning and imagination proclaims him at once an intellectual. Webster's range does not do this, although the category of learning does feature more prominently in his work than in Shakespeare's. But for Webster, as for Shakespeare, daily life images figure the most prominently, with nature imagery second in importance. The only differences

1 see C.F.S. Spurgeon, op. cit. Appendix II.
which are immediately apparent are a lower incidence of domestic images in Webster (11% for Webster, 15% for Shakespeare), and a lower proportion of imaginative images (4% in Webster, 7% in Shakespeare). Overall, however, the two show a deceptive similarity. Just how deceptive a closer examination of the image groups will reveal.

A major difference in emphasis is apparent in the first section of images, classified as 'growing things' in the 'Nature' category. Shakespeare places a fairly even emphasis on images concerning flowers, trees, plants and fruit, with less use of weed images. In Webster's case the emphasis on tree imagery is at once evident; well over half the images in the section deal with this subject. Of the rest, fruit images make up the majority; plant, flower and weed images are negligible. The emphasis on tree images becomes even more marked when it is noted that the fruit images occur almost entirely in The Devil's Law-Case, and that elsewhere tree images have almost a monopoly within the section. This is not the place to try to explain the metaphorical use Webster makes of tree imagery, but certain general facts about the group are clear. Webster seems drawn to trees for their qualities of strength, massiveness and endurance. By contrast, he makes little use of flower imagery, where the interest of the subject for the creator of an image lies more in the qualities of delicacy, grace, and miniature perfection of form. Nor does he often use images concerning other small growing things, weeds and plants. Again, the fruit imagery, which forms his only other real interest, is often associated with the tree images, as in the following passages:
"Wee see that Trees beare no such pleasant fruite. There where they grew first, as where they are new set."

W.D. I. i. 45-62

"He, and his brother, are like plum-trees (that grow crooked over standing-pooles) they are rich, and ore-laden with fruite, but none but Crows, Pyres and Caterpillers feede on them."

D.M. I. i. 50-3

In the image groups found in the section 'weather', there is little to distinguish between their use by Webster and Shakespeare, except that 'storm' and 'cloud and mist' receive a little more emphasis in the former than in the latter. The same may be said of the 'sea' and 'seafaring' imagery which constitutes the third section. In both cases they make up a similar proportion of the 'Nature' class. Webster's 'celestial' imagery, however, like that in the category of 'growing things' shows an individuality of emphasis. Sun and moon images are almost entirely absent. So, too, are star images, except for those concerning meteors and 'blazing stars', or comets, which, with images of eclipse, fill the 'other celestial' category. Shadow imagery easily outweighs all the rest, forming two thirds of the group as a whole, whereas in Shakespeare sun imagery forms nearly half, and shadow less than a quarter. Webster's repeated use of the contrasting 'shadow' and 'meteor/comet' images is a first sign of a major interest of his - the antithesis between light and darkness, further examples of which will be noted later.

2 All references to Webster's works are to The Complete Works, ed. F.L. Lucas, 4 Vols. (London 1927). Hereafter cited as Works. Where, throughout this study, such Act, Scene and line references are made, the titles of Webster's works will be abbreviated thus: W.D. ('White Devil'); D.M. ('Duchess of Malfi'); M.C. ('Monumental Column'); D.L.C. ('Devil's Law-Case').
Most of the remaining sections of the 'Nature' group can be quickly dismissed. Webster makes little use of imagery concerning the elements, the seasons, gardening or farming, and those images he does use are general and fairly conventional, as for instance:

"I am strongly arm'd to brooke my overthrow,  
As commonly men beare with a hard yeere;"

D.M. III. ii. 231-2

Or:

"Vertue is ever sowing of her seedes,"

D.L.C. I. i. 73

Only in the group of images classified under 'natural features' does Webster show much individuality. The group is quite small in number (though five times greater, relatively, in Webster than Shakespeare) but it displays a constant interest in the contrast between mountain and valley:

"... and I'lle stand,  
Like a safe vallie, which low bends the knee  
To some aspiring mountaine."

W.D. IV. i. 25-7

"There's no deepe valley, but neere some great Hill."

D.M. III. v. 169

"Mountaines are deformed heapes, swel'd up aloft,  
Vales wholesomer, though lower, and trod on oft."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 672-3

The same antithesis occurs even in A Monumental Column which, by its very nature, often has rather different kinds of imagery. Thus:

"His minde quite voyd of ostentation,
His high-erected thoughts look't downe upon
The smiling valley of his fruitfull heart."

M.C. 33-5

As will be demonstrated, the mountain-valley antithesis expresses one of Webster's central ideas.

The second main category, following Miss Spurgeon's system, is that concerning 'animals'. Here again, the overall pattern is similar to Shakespeare's, but detailed study reveals some marked differences. In the first section, dealing with 'four-footed animals', it is at once apparent how Webster draws far fewer images than Shakespeare from domestic animals other than dogs, less than a third as many, in fact. All of these concern animals seen regularly in London; monkeys, asses, tame elephants. There are few images dealing with sheep, lambs, oxen, etc., so frequently found in Shakespeare. Webster does use a considerable number of dog images, however, of which some are quite vivid:

"I run on, like a frighted dog with a bottle at's taile, that faine would bite it oft, and yet dares not looke behind him."

W.D. V. i. 153-6

Others, again, are of the semi-proverbial kind:

"Cowardly dogs barke loudest"

W.D. III. ii. 169

The predominance of wild animal images in Webster's work is as marked as the absence of those concerning domestic animals. In Shakespeare the proportion is one to one, in Webster there are more than six wild to every one domestic animal images.
Among the wild animal images there are repeated references to hares, rabbits, foxes and dormice; often proverbial sayings being used as a basis. Because of their particular importance 'Wolf' images are classified separately in this study, and when these are added to the other wild animal images the preponderance of this kind of animal image becomes even more marked.

Webster's 'bird' imagery shows a similar pattern of emphasis to Shakespeare's though a special group of 'bird in captivity' images is found in Webster, this group being peculiar to The Duchess of Malfi. There is little difference, either, in the use of 'insect' and 'reptile' images, although Shakespeare uses proportionately more reptile and less images concerning insects. The images classed as 'fabulous' and 'fish' are of little importance in either case.

The relative smallness of the 'domestic' category of images has already been noted, but the category contains several types of image which should be mentioned as receiving strong emphasis from Webster. One of these concerns imagery of light, darkness, and fire. The fire images, which constitute the bulk of the group are found largely in The Duchess of Malfi, but they also occur frequently (if less significantly) in The White Devil. The light and darkness images are chiefly remarkable for their scarcity in plays in which this very contrast is so strongly emphasized. But Webster generally uses other means than direct 'light-darkness'
images to achieve his contrasts. One of these involves 'jewel' imagery, which is prominent in the 'domestic' class. Some of the usages are wholly conventional, and display no particular interest on the dramatist's part:

"Were the rich Jewell which we vary for,
A thing to be divided, by my life,
I would be well content to give you halfe."

D.L.C. II. i. 296-8

But most of the images in the group are concerned specifically with diamonds, which seem to have fascinated Webster by their combination of extreme hardness and great value with the clarity and brilliance of their beauty. Thus at W.D. III. ii. 147-9 it is hardness which is emphasized, while at D.M. I. i. 330-1 it is value. But the type of diamond image most persistently used is that involving the light-darkness contrast, a diamond set against a black background.

"Through darkenesse Diamonds spred their rithest light."

W.D. III. ii. 305

"We cannot say hee's dead,
But as a perfect Diamond set in lead,
(Scorning our foyle) his glories do breake forth."

M.C. 3-6

In The Devil's Law-Case gold replaces the diamond, but the antithesis is the same:

"The hindrance of it will breed more delight,
As blacke copartments shewes gold more bright."

D.L.C. I. ii. 317-8

The remainder of the image classes in the 'domestic' category display little that is unusual or individual in matters
of emphasis. The only unusual feature about these remaining images is the paucity in Webster of imagery concerning family and human relationships. The few there are are almost entirely about children, though one amusing 'wife' image occurs in The Devil's Law-Case:

"Never did wealthy man purchase the silence Of a terrible scolding wife at a dearer rate Then I will pay for yours."

The proportion of 'Body' category images to the remainder of Webster's work is similar to that of Shakespeare, but within the category the differences are once more considerable. In Shakespeare's work there is a fairly even weight of emphasis upon the three main groups, 'body', 'food' and 'sickness'. In Webster's case 'Sickness and Medicine' accounts for more than half the images, 'body' about a third, and 'food' less than a quarter. The only noteworthy feature of the 'body and bodily action' group is the small number of actual body images, as opposed to the large number concerning bodily action. This is particularly so in The White Devil and the later Acts of The Duchess of Malfi. The food images Webster uses are neither numerous nor vivid. There is little or none of the obviously first-hand experience that is to be found in Shakespeare's. The latter repeatedly uses cooking images with accuracy and vividness, Webster almost entirely limits himself to general terms like 'eat', 'taste', and 'cook'.

The group of images relating to sickness, medicine and poison
is the largest in Webster's range, and one of the most important. In Shakespeare's plays the group comprises a little less than 4% of the total number of images; in Webster the figure is more than doubled. The large number of images, seventy six, is divided almost equally among the three classes, sickness, medicine, and poison. Within the 'sickness' class it is noticeable that Webster reverts constantly to one particular idea - that of life as a sickness.

"Pleasure of life, what is't? Only the good hours Of an Ague: merely a preparative to rest, To endure vexation."

D.M. V. iv. 78-80

"The intermission from a fit of an ague Is grievous: for indeed it doth prepare us, To entertain torment next morning."

D.L.C. I. ii. 293-5

"Is not the shortest fever the best?"

D.L.C. III. iii. 7

"Of all, the shortest madness is the best."

M.G. 131

This concept is one of those which contributes most powerfully to the tone of Webster's plays, and to the individuality of his utterances. Several other concepts are found recurring in the sickness and poison images, that of poisons acting as counter-poisons (W.D. III. iii. 59-60) or of desperate remedies for serious diseases (D.M. IV. i. 170), but these are commonly found in Elizabethan drama. (cf. Romeo and Juliet, I. ii. 50, for the former, Hamlet IV. iii. 9, for the latter).

'Daily Life' images are of first importance, numerically,
in Webster's plays just as in Shakespeare's. As so often is the case, however, the patterns of emphasis within the category vary greatly. This is evident in the first group of images, which is headed 'classes and types'. Discussing this group in Shakespeare's Imagery, Miss Spurgeon points out how wide Shakespeare's range is, how many of the images deal with the poorer classes, and, above all, how vivid his images seem. Contrasting the work of some of Shakespeare's contemporaries with this, she points out how Jonson and Chapman, while equally vivid and first-hand in their images, tend to depict more particularly the well-to-do citizens. Massinger and Marlowe, however, have a tendency to bookishness, using images derived from their reading rather than from observation. Webster, if anything, is inclined a little towards bookishness, a penchant for imagery concerning type figures such as kings, tyrants, politicians, ambassadors, slaves, scholars. His images often sound as though they are the product of his reading:

"Let them like Tyrants Never be remembered, but for the ill they have done."

B.M. IV. i. 125-6

Yet there are a few of his images which display a keen observation of the same world which Jonson and Chapman survey:

"Rogues do not whisper't now, but seeke to publish't, (As servants do the bounty of their Lords) Aloud; and with a covetous searching eye, To marke who note them."

B.M. II. v. 9-12

Images concerning sport and games do not occupy much space in Webster's work. Like Jonson and Chapman he uses such topics
correctly, but without the vividness of touch which betokens close knowledge. There is no noticeable predominance of any particular sport, as with Shakespeare's bowls and Dekker's fishing, though his best sporting image is about bowls:

"And I perceive how like an earnest bowler He very passionately leans that way, He should have his boule runne."

W.D. I. ii. 62-4

The same uninspired correctness which characterizes his 'sport' images is also found in Webster's 'war' imagery. Like some of his fellows, he is interested in mining and explosives, and he makes use of these subtler methods of warfare to point contrasts by using in opposition imagery of open warfare, but he never displays the knowledge of, or interest in the soldier's craft which Dekker, Chapman, and Tournier do.

'Trades and Business' are, on the other hand, a major source of imagery for Webster; they bulk the largest in the daily life group. Webster reveals in his trade images a keen awareness of business routines and of the tricks shopkeepers get up to:

"You were ill to sell your selve, This darkning of your worth, is not like that Which tradesmen use i'th' City - their false lightes Are to rid bad wares off."

D.I. I. i. 496-9

"'Twas a hard pennyworth, the ware being so light"

W.D. III. ii. 250

"Will the Mercer take another's ware When once't is tosed and sullied?"

W.D. IV. ii. 159-60
"Now the wares are gone, wee may shut up shop."

W.D. V. iv. 103-5

It is worth bearing in mind at this point that Webster was born free of the Merchant-Taylor's Company, and might well be expected to possess some knowledge of business procedure and the life of the shopkeeper.

Webster being Webster, one finds in the daily life imagery the same repeated use of particular metaphors. The 'glassehouse' is one such. The 'glassehouse', as F.L. Lucas explains in his commentary on The White Devil, was a glass factory in Blackfriars, its chief point of interest being that the fires in the kilns were kept burning continuously. References to it are to be found in other dramatists, e.g., Dekker and Chapman, but no one else brings up the subject as persistently as Webster. The first reference to it is in Westward Hoe! (II. i. 215), though it may be part of Dekker's work. But it occurs again in The White Devil (I. ii. 134), The Duchess of Malfi (IV. ii. 81-3 and II. i. 6-10) and finally in Anything for a Quiet Life (I. i. 323).

The 'substances' imagery Webster uses is not particularly distinguished. The images display neither Shakespeare's sensitivity to texture nor Marlowe's preoccupation with appearance. Two repeated usages occur, however, both of which

3 Works I. 209
4 Spurgeon. op. cit. p. 36
5 ibid. p. 37
are used thematically. One involves magnetization - cf. W.D. I. ii. 162-3 and IV. ii. 94-5; D.M. III. v. 65-6 and V. ii. 281-4; M.C. 82-3; D.L.C. IV. ii. 373-4; the other the bruising of perfume-bearing plants - cf. W.D. I. i. 47-8; D.M. III. v. 89.

The next few image groups seem to be of little importance. None of Webster's 'money', 'town life' or 'roads and travel' images reveal any unusual emphases or interests. Nor do the topical images, though these are rather more numerous than in Shakespeare's plays. Like Jonson, Webster uses topicalities for satiric ends, both as direct satiric comment and as a fairly unobtrusive means of keeping plays set, perhaps, in Italy, in touch with the realities of Jacobean England. The remaining 'daily life' image groups can be summed up very briefly. The 'building' images alone are important, and then only in The Duchess of Malfi and The Devil's Law-Case in which they play significant thematic roles. Even so, the images themselves are rather ordinary.

Two omissions amongst the 'daily life' groups are worth noticing. There is no 'village life' imagery, and only one image concerned with statecraft and government. Since Webster was probably a Londoner the first is not surprising, but the lack of interest in the latter is unusual in a dramatist of the time. The one 'statecraft' image occurs where it would be most expected, in A Monumental Column. The absence of such images elsewhere is an accurate indication of the deliberately circum-
scribed world Webster chooses to depict in each of his plays. The world of great public events scarcely enters his work, and freed of wider social and political issues, Webster is able to concentrate on what he wants to illustrate and discuss.

Critics have been quick, in the past, to level at Webster charges of being too literary. Miss M.C. Bradbrook, for instance, says:

"Webster was in a sense too sophisticated; in the pejorative sense, too literary."

In view of such comments it is somewhat surprising to find that in the field of imagery which might most display this literariness, that of 'learning', Webster uses few more images, proportionately, than does Shakespeare. One in three of Marlowe's images is of this kind, but in Webster less than one in six. Furthermore Webster makes relatively less use of classical imagery than Shakespeare. What makes Webster's plays seem at times too consciously spiced with learning is his taste for inserting parable-like tales into his work. But these fall outside the category of imagery and are discussed later in this chapter as a feature of Webster's style.

Religious imagery dominates the 'learning' category; two out of every five images in the class are concerned with religion. Yet every few of the images concern the positive aspects of religious life. The vast majority deal with pagan rites, superstition, and, above all, Hell and Devils. This negative emphasis on religion is so pronounced as to be unique in the drama of the

6 M.C. Bradbrook. *Thames and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*.
(Cambridge 1935) p. 186
period. The two tragedies in particular are strongly coloured by this imagery, which plays an important thematic role.

Webster's legal imagery is less noteworthy than his direct references to, and depiction of lawyers and the law. There are fine trial scenes in The White Devil and The Devil's Law-Case (and in Appius and Virginia), and in all the plays the law is the subject of jibing criticism, but law images are neither frequent nor (except briefly at D.M. V. ii. and v.) significant. The same can be said of the remaining groups in the 'learning' category.

The most noteworthy fact about the images dealing with the arts is the scarcity of 'music' images; this by comparison with Marlowe and Shakespeare, both of whom use approximately equal numbers of images drawn from the visual arts, music and drama. This may be partly due to a lack of interest in music on Webster's part, though it is useless to speculate on this, but the absence is far more closely related to the breakdown, during the reigns of the early Stuarts, of the Elizabeth World Picture, as Tillyard calls it. The idea, found among Greek philosophers, and strongly held during the Middle Ages, of a universe created in harmony and existing ideally in a state of music attracted Shakespeare, as Troilus and Cressida and The Merchant of Venice particularly attest. But Webster makes only one reference to such a notion, in The Duchess of Malfi in which the very few music images occur. For the most part, as will become evident, Webster's vision of the world is hardly compatible with a belief in

7 see E.W. Tillyard. The Elizabethan World Picture (London 1943)
cosmological harmony.

The lower incidence in Webster's work than Shakespeare's of imagery in the 'imaginative' category has already been noted. Though the matter is significant, and is borne out generally by the way Webster seems to create his images, it should not be stressed too heavily, since images involving personification are by far the most ambiguous and resistant to satisfactory classification. It may well be that the difference in numbers would appear far less had the one person classified both Webster's images and Shakespeare's.

There are several general conclusions which can be drawn from a study of Webster's imagery. One is that, though his range of subject material is fairly close to that of Shakespeare, there are marked divergences within the individual classes which clearly separate the two. This has been emphasized throughout. A second conclusion is that despite the impression of narrow intensity, the restriction of field, which the plays give, there is considerable breadth in the subject matter of the imagery. Certain areas of experience are excluded - statecraft and government and many domestic topics for instance - yet the imagery is still drawn from a surprisingly wide range. It is as much a matter of the way the images are used as of what they consist which contributes to the narrowness. Thirdly, it is typical of Webster that he uses again and again certain images and concepts germaine to his purpose. These repeated images almost invariably represent concepts dominant in Webster's work, and their use in
play after play is an accurate indication of the way Webster
deals repeatedly with the same themes, though he may be using
very different plot material.

In John Webster's Borrowing R.W. Dent sets out to trace as
many of Webster's verbal borrowings as possible. He demonstrates
that Webster was an unusually heavy borrower of words, phrases
and ideas, even in an age when flattery by imitation was a
regular practice. Dent's conclusion is that "More than three
fourths of Webster could be so traced, I suspect, if only we
had access to all the works he employed." The question arises
whether the fact that much of Webster's material is borrowed
(and this includes many images), lessens the validity of an
approach to, and study of, Webster's plays through his language
and imagery. The answer is that it does not. The approach
remains perfectly valid, since all the imagery, original or
borrowed, was selected by the one mind. Provided the imagery
is moulded into a living and coherent whole (and the intention
is to prove that), the question of the origin of various images
does not affect the issue. In the lengthy introduction to his
book, Dent quotes passages of dialogue from the plays and, in
parallel, gives the various original passages used by Webster in
the formation of his dialogue. Working this way, Dent is able
to show that some passages in Webster (e.g. D.M. V. ii. 160-210)

9 Ibid p. 5
10 Ibid pp. 3-56
which are apparently logical and straightforward, still betray signs of their desperate origins in phrases which on closer investigation (and with a knowledge of the source) are only half-appropriate in the context. This may be so, but the result is still acceptable dialogue. More importantly, too, the inconsistencies do not extend to the imagery, with which, as a poet, Webster was primarily concerned. The discovery that half the stone used to build the Cathedral of Chartres was taken from older buildings would make no difference to a study of its architectural beauties; the overall coherence of the design would remain, the stone would be no less a part of the whole. So it is with Webster's plays. John Webster was a sufficiently gifted poet and dramatist to be able to use what others had quarried for his own purposes. It could not be said of Webster, as of Sheridan's Sir Fretful Plagiary, that

"even the finest passages you steal are of no service to you; for the poverty of your own language prevents their assimilating; so that they lie on the surface like lumps of marl on a barren moor, encumbering what it is not in their power to fertilize."

Critic I. i.

Almost the only thing that Webster's critics agree upon is that he is a fine poet. William Archer never assailed his ability to write poetry, or criticised him for "poverty of . . . language". Even the Leavisites allow him to be a poet, though they proceed to expose his 'decadence' by proving to their own satisfaction that his poetic gift is merely a fair covering masking a rotting carcase. It is agreed that Webster's use of language both in prose and verse, is highly individual, and

R.W. Dent, after summarizing the widely different range of styles
in the books from which Webster borrowed, comes to the following conclusion:

"Yet, when all is said and done, Webster clearly drew upon works in strikingly different styles, and I must agree with the majority of his critics that out of such varied materials he produced a style and tone distinctively his own." 11

The remainder of this chapter is devoted a study and analysis of Webster's use of language, in an attempt to define "a style and tone distinctively his own."

Webster was very much a man of his time - the time of the earlier metaphysical poets; of the 'Jacobean' dramatist. It was a time of rapid and major changes in the literature as well as the society of England; a time of unease. One major change that took place is that described by Miss Una Ellis-Permor - a change in the mood of the dramatists, reflected in the themes they used and the attitudes they adopted; a change from a state of mind which could be called Elizabethan, to one called Jacobean, which, though gradual, reached a crucial point about 1598 or 99. 12 A second major change, one that is obviously linked with the first, is the emergence of a new style in poetry and, to a lesser extent, prose; a style better fitted than the rather flowery and ornate Elizabethan genre to give expression to the new mood, to convey the complexities and uncertainties of the new mentality. It is this new style which is the subject of Patrick Cruttwell's book, "The Shakespearean Moment". Defining the new style he says:

11 Dent. op. cit. p. 52
"We can call it 'Metaphysical' or 'Mature Shakespearean' as we like, in essentials it is the same style, however varied be the subjects, forms or purposes which employed it."13

Cruttwell then goes on to describe the differences between the new style and the old:

"The least analytical reader, when he comes from the poetry of Spenser or Sidney or Marlowe to that of Donne and Mature Shakespeare, is made aware of a difference which he might describe to himself as an increased thickness of texture; there seems much more to the square inch of it."14

So it is with Webster. The most noticeable feature of his verse is its density, it is packed tight with words and with meaning. So tightly packed is it, indeed, that it stands out, even at a time when almost all the poets and dramatists were writing in the new style.

The reasons for Webster's peculiarly compressed style are several. In the first place, as was stressed at the beginning of the chapter, his plays are crammed with imagery. This is, in part, akin to the general trend among the new poets like Donne, to make any given subject involve as great a range of interests as possible, to fill a poem or a dramatic speech with as many related facets of experience as the form would bear. There is a conscious striving to introduce the seemingly incongruous and to link the incongruities together around the main subject, and so illuminate it. Imagery alone does not convey all this (though if C. Day Lewis is correct, and a successful image, a simile or metaphor, involves the "perception

13 P. Cruttwell. The Shakespearean Moment (New York 1960) p. 39
14 ibid. p. 105
of the similar in the dissimilar then imagery is peculiarly well suited to the requirements of the school of Donne) since direct references can also widen the poetic associations surrounding a subject, but in Webster's plays imagery is particularly important. An example of how Webster uses apparently incongruous images to great effect can be seen in Ferdinand's dialogue with the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi*, II. v. Within fifty or sixty lines Webster draws in images with such diverse subjects as servants whispering, the digging of a mandrake, besieged towns, a sponge, tempests, sickness and medicine, animals, and a bark of bulrushes, as well as direct references to madness, bawds, purgatives, blood, fire, and bandages. Yet with all this wide variety of ideas and associations Webster succeeds in making the speech dramatically appropriate. The packed, heated quality of the verse is wholly in keeping with Ferdinand's character. A similarly effective example in *The White Devil* is Monticelso's speech, IV. iii. 119-30.

A second factor contributing to the unique Websterian style is the dramatist's marked preference for metaphors and compressed similes over the more leisurely expanded simile. This preference is again a general characteristic of the new style. Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and their fellows, writing in the freeflowing "Elizabethan" manner, lyrical and rhetorical, tended to use more similes than metaphors. In Donne, the later Shakespeare, Webster and their contemporaries, the 15 C. Day Lewis. *op. cit.* p. 35
preference is for the pithier metaphor. In this respect Webster again stands out. Many of the finest of his images are brief metaphors.

"My life was a blacke charnell: I have caught An everlasting could. I have lost my voice Most irrecoverable."

W.B. V. vi. 270-2

"Their life a generall mist of error, Their death a hideous storme of terror."

D.II. IV. ii. 190-1

Pescara "These are your true pangues of death, The pangues of life, that strugle with great States-men. Delio In such a deformed silence, witches whisper Their charmes. Cardinal Both she make religion her riding hood To keeps her from the sun, and tempest?"

D.M. III. iii. 68-73

This last passage is one of the glories of Websterian verse. Not a word is wasted, yet immense tension is created by the use of the single metaphoric words 'strugle' and 'deformed', and by the 'riding hood' metaphor.

The same fine scene also includes several brilliant examples of short, pithy similes:

Pescara "The Lord Ferdinand laughs. Delio Like a deadly cannon, That lightens ere it smoakes."

D.M. III. iii. 65-7

"Methinkes her fault and beauty Blended together, shew like leapersie - The whiter, the fouler."

D.M. III. iii. 74-6

The most famous image in all Webster is another brief simile:

"My soul, like to a ship in a block storme,
Is driven I know not whither."

The Devil's Law-Case also supplies good examples:

"To winde about a man like rotten ivie."

"Poore Jolenta, should she here of this!
She would not after the report keeps fresh,
So long as flowers in graves."

It is instructive to note that amongst some of Webster's most successful metaphors are a number which reveal just how close he is to the metaphysical poets in his resolution of apparent incongruities:

"Marke her, I prethee, she simpers like the suddes
A Collier hath bene washt in."

"Come, come my Lord, untie your fouled thoughts,
And let them dangle loose as a bride's haire."

"Thy loose thoughtes
Scatter like quicke-silver, I was bewitch'd."

These are very close to the conceits of Donne and his fellows. In another image Webster reverses the traditional association of a tree in blossom with spring, or youth, and makes it a wholly appropriate image of white-haired old age:

"When age shall turn thee,
White as a blooming hawthorne . . ."
Also akin to metaphysical poetry, and particularly to Donne's, is Webster's use of mathematical and other scientific terms in his conceits.

*Bosola* "for a soldier, that hazards his limbs in a battaile, nothing but a kind of *Geometry*, is his last supportation. *Delio* *Geometry*?

*Bosola* I, to hang in a faire paire of alings, take his latter-svinge in the world, upon an honorable pare of Crowtches, from hospitall to hospitall -.

D.M. I. i. 60-6

"The soule was never put into the body, Which has so many rare and curious pieces Of Mathematicall motion, to stand stille."

D.L.C. I. i. 70-2

The Websterian style does not spring entirely from the use of pithy metaphors and compressed similes, however, or from the use of metaphysical conceits. Equally as much a part of his style are deliberately extended and elaborated similes. Webster employs these chiefly for satiric purposes, and both Flamino and Bosola speak with a loquaciousness which contrasts vividly, at times, with the rather gnomic utterances of the other characters. The longer similes are usually in prose, and are designed to gain the maximum satiric effect from the comparisons.

"He carries his face in's ruffe, as I have seene a serving man carry glasses in a cipres hat-band, monstrous steddy for fear of breaking - He lookes like the claw of a blacke-bird, first salted and then broyled in a candle."

W.D. III. i. 76-9

"(when he weares white satin one would take him by his blacke mussel to be no other creature then a maggot."

W.B. I. ii. 136-7

"There was a Lady in France, that having had the small pockes,
fleat the skinne off her face, to make it more levell: and whereas before she look'd like a Nutmeg-grater, after she resembled an abortive hedge-hog."

D.M. II. i. 27-30

"You have certaine rich citie Chuffes, that when they have no acres of their owne, they will goe and plow up fooles, and turn them into excellent meadow; besides some Inclosures for the first Cherries in the Spring, and Apricocks to please a friend at court with."

D.L.C. II. i. 197-201

Occasionally, too, Webster uses an expanded, relaxed simile in non-satiric circumstances. One notable example occurs in Flamino's soliloquy in Act One of The White Devil.

"As Rivers to finde out the Ocean Flowes with crooke bendings beneath forced banks, Or as we see to aspire, some mountaines top, The way ascends not straight, but imitates The suttle foldings of a Winter's snake, So who knowes policy and her true aspect, Shall finde her waies winding and indirect."

W.D. I. ii. 342-8

Dent conjectures that this may be a borrowing which Webster did not bother to trim and reshape as closely as usual. Certainly it is more relaxed and elaborate than most he uses - more akin to Chapman's style than Webster's.

An individual element in Webster's work is provided by the prose and verse 'characters' he scatters throughout. It seems fairly certain that he was actually engaged in writing characters at one point in his career, and that he contributed thirty two to the sixth edition of Overbury's Characters, which appeared in 1615. He may well, indeed, have edited that edition. But he had essayed the character study in verse well before this, and
he continued to do so until the end of his career. The first
and most notable example is the character of a whore in III. ii.
of *The White Devil*. Then there are several brief character
sketches in *The Duchess of Malfi* (W.M. I. i. 157-67, 169-89 and
191-209), one of Edward the Black Prince in *A Monumental Column*
(W.C. 70-96), and lastly, the character of a petty notary in
*Appius and Virginia* (III. ii. 242 ff.). In all these characters
Webster displays at its fullest his gift for aphoristic statement.
In the character of a whore he introduces eleven similes and
metaphors within twenty or so lines. It is, as F.L. Lucas has
said, "a typical specimen of its kind, made up of the usual
string of conceits and metaphors", but it is nevertheless a
piece of virtuosity in a vein strongly Websterian.

Another characteristic element in Webster's work - perhaps
the most strikingly individual trait of all - is his fondness for
sententiae. They form a prominent portion of his work from
*The White Devil* onwards. Typical 'sentences' emerge in the first
scene of the play:

"Fortunes a right whore."

W.D. I. i. 4

"Wee see that Trees beare no such pleasant fruite
There where they grew first, as where they are new set."

W.D. I. i. 45-6

"Perfumes the more they are chaf'd the more they render
Their pleasing sents."

W.D. I. i. 47-8

Webster does not use these aphorisms altogether uncritically.

16 Works. IV. 8
That he is aware of the possible triteness of the last two is shown in Lodovico's angry reply to such cold comforts:

"Leave your painted comforts."

W.D. I. i. 50

Nevertheless, the frequency with which Webster uses such sayings clearly indicates his taste for them. He often deliberately gives them a general, extra-dramatic appeal by introducing them with 'we' or 'they'. Many are very brief, merely single lines:

"Intemperate agues, make Physicians cruel."

D.S. IV. i. 170

"Sorrow is held the eldest child of sin."

D.S. V. v. 74

"Tis better to be fortunate then wise."

W.D. V. vi. 183

"For wounds smart most, when that the blood growes cold."

M.C. 14

"... Piramides ath top, are stille most weake."

D.L.C. II. iii. 196

Many of the best sententiae are contained in rhymed couplets, however, for like Dryden and the Eighteenth Century satirists, Webster realized the value of neat and polished couplets in the presentation of aphoristic concluding remarks. He uses many such couplets to round off crucial scenes, either summing up what has immediately preceded the lines, or what is to follow in the next scene. This is particularly the case in The Duchess of Malfi. So, at the end of II. iii. we have:

"Though Lust doe masque in nev'r so strange disguise,
She's oft found witty, but is never wise."

-D.M. II. iii. 92-3

It is a couplet which looks both backward and forward, with ironically varied relevance. At the end of III. i. is another couplet, (D.M. III. i. 116-7). The final scenes of the various plays are equally larded with sententiae in couplet form.

"Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust."

-D.M. V. v. 91-2

"Integrity of life, is fame's best friend, Which nobly (beyond death) shall crown the end."

-D.M. V. v. 145-6

"O happy they that never saw the Court, Nor ever knew great men but by report."

-W.D. V. vi. 261-2

"This busy trade of life appears most vain, Since rest breeds rest, where all seek pain by pain."

-W.D. V. vi. 273-4

Webster's sententiae are not always a success. Some are trite or ill-connected to the narrative or dramatic situation. But the many better examples play an important part in the formation of his style; they give bite to situations through their conciseness and pithy vigour; they point the action. Besides this they also contribute something to the rhythm and movement of the verse, helping to break it up into something close to the rather abrupt, dislocated pattern of everyday speech. A quotation from Monticelso's last speech in W.D. IV. iii. will illustrate this:

"Do'st thou imagine thou canst slide on blood"
And not be tainted with a shameful fall?
Or like the bluckle, and melancholikeugh-tree,
Do' st thinke to roote thyselfe in dead mens graves,
And yet to prosper? Instruction to thee
Comes like sweet showers to over hardned ground;
They wet, but pierce not deepe. And so I leave thee
With all the Furies hanging bout thy necke."

W.D. IV. iii. 121-8

The verse runs quite smoothly until halfway through line 125
when, with the introduction of the 'sentence', there is an
abrupt change of rhythm. The aphoristic phrasing of the next
two lines alters the pattern of the verse, which is only resumed
when the bridge phrase "and so I leave thee" is introduced.

Broken rhythms are a major feature of Webster's verse style,
as indeed they are of the other poets of the new mood. Donne
and his fellows, breaking with traditional poetic forms and
metres, sought to get closer to the rhythms of everyday speech
in order to enjoy the benefits of the resultant immediacy and
force. And as Donne went furthest amongst the poets towards
the colloquial rhythms and involved syntax of spontaneity, so
did Webster among the dramatists. Webster achieved the effects
he required through the use of a close-packed, knotty syntax,
and complex uneven rhythms. The result, as R.W. Dent describes
it, is verse which shows

"Rapid shifting of thought, as of a mind proceeding by spurts,
with the resulting impression of the mind thinking rather than
presenting the poised consequences of thought or the orderly
and logical summation of its processes."17

A good example of this is Bosola's soliloquy in The Duchess of
Malfi, IV. ii.:
"What would I doe, were this to doe againe?
I would not change my peace of conscience
For all the wealth of Europe: she stirres; here's life:
Returnes (faire soule) from darkenesse, and lead mine
Out of this sensible Hell: she's warme, she breathes
Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart
To store them with fresh colour: who's there?
Some cordiall drinkes! Alas! I dare not call:
So pitty would destroy pitty: her eye opes,
And heaven in it seems to ope, (that late was shut)
To take me up to mercy."

D.M. IV. ii. 365-75

The broken quality of the rhythms is emphasized by the succession
of colons and semi-colons, as well as several exclamation marks.
Another good example of these rhythms is Flamineo's address to
Brachiano's ghost, (W.D. V. iv. 118-44). Again the speech is
broken up, and the abrupt rhythms are emphasized by a series of
question marks, colons and full stops.

Even more broken, however, is Bosola's soliloquy after the
Duchess's death. In it the blank verse is so irregular in
metre, and the length of the lines varies so greatly, that the
verse seems to be approaching a point of disintegration.

"Oh sacred innocence, that sweetely sleepes
On Turtles feathers: whilst a guilty conscience
Is a blake Register, wherein is writ
All our good desedes, and bad: A perspective
That shows us hell, that we cannot be suffer'd
to doe good when we have a mind to it!
This is manly sorrow:
These tears, I am very certaine, never grew
In my Mother's Wilke. My estate is sunke 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;"

D.M. IV. ii. 383-98
Yet the very irregularity adds power here, for Bosola's soul is in torment, and his speech reflects its abrupt twistings and turnings, the convulsive leaps from idea to idea, the movement from hope to despair.

This new complexity in rhythms is inevitably accompanied by syntactic changes. The new colloquial rhythms require a new vehicle of expression. Patrick Cruttwell expresses the parallel thus:

"Syntax and rhythm alike, in the new style, become more complex. The rhythmical change is obvious; in itself it needs no comment. But not so clear, perhaps, is that the change in rhythm is there to serve a change in the shape of the sentences. They go together, inevitably; if the sentence structure is involved, if it breaks and turns and alters in mid-career to match a change in thought or an after-thought, then the rhythm must do the same."18

Actually in this study the emphasis is the reverse of Cruttwell's, syntax serving rhythms rather than rhythms syntax, but the result is exactly the same for, as Cruttwell says, "They go together, inevitably."

Examples of the complex syntax of the new style, as Webster developed it, have already occurred in the two speeches of Bosola's. But some other highly individual aspects of Webster's syntactic practice need to be noticed. Of these almost all spring from his predisposition towards ellipsis in his sentence construction, in which he stands out amongst his contemporaries. The result is an even greater compression of the already tightly packed lines, full as they are of imagery. Ellipsis is particularly prevalent in the two great tragedies. The Devil's Law-Case is a more relaxed

18 Cruttwell. op. cit. p. 61
work, but even there the Websterian hall mark, the tendency to leave out whatever possible, remains. One frequent trick is to omit relative pronouns. A simple example of this is Bosola's:

"... here is a sight
As direfull to my soule, as is the sword
Unto a wretch hath slaine his father."

D. S. IV. ii. 394-6

The omission is hardly noticeable, nor is it much more so in this remark by Antonelli:

"... One citizen
Is Lord of two faire Manors cald you master,
Only for Caviare."

W. D. I. i. 19-21

Rather more noticeable, though still clear in meaning, is Gasparo's comment to Lodovico in the same scene:

"You terme those enemies
Are men of Princely ranke."

W. D. I. i. 9-10

Yet another example, one which might cause the reader a second thought before he fully comprehends it, is Vittoria's curse on Monticelso:

"Dye with those pills in your most cursed mawe,
Should bring you health."

W. D. III. ii. 287-8

It is only, however, on rare occasions, and usually in cases like this, when the subject of the omitted relative pronoun is separated from the dependent clause, that any ambiguity arises.

Webster frequently omits other conjunctions and conjunctive phrases. A good example is Ferdinand's:

"... I would not for ten Millions
I had beheld thee: therefore use all means
I never may have knowledge of thy name."

-D.N. III. ii. 112-4

But not all the examples of Websterian ellipsis and complex syntax are successful. The results are occasionally confusing. One can perhaps catch the meaning of the following lines at first glance, despite the multiplicity of clauses and commas:

"Perfumes the more they are chaf'd the more they render
Their pleasing scents, and so affliction
Expresses: vertue, fully, whether trew,
Or ells adulterate."

-W.D. I. i. 47-50

A first reading, however, of the following lines from The Devil's Law-Case surely leaves one a little confused as to the exact meanings:

"Having received from me some certaine wounds,
Which were not mortall, this wild murderer,
Being by Will deputed overseer
Of the Nobleman's Estate, to his sister's use,
That he might make him sure from surviving,
To revoke that Will, stole to him in's bed, and kild him."

-D.L.C. IV. ii. 591-6

The succession of brief qualifying clauses leaves the meaning as involved as the syntax, even though both resolve themselves on re-reading.

But examples of overcompression and of a confusion of clauses are relatively few; in the main, Webster's compressed and vigorous, if sometimes knotty, style succeeds in conveying the meaning required with force and clarity. It is verse ideally suited to conveying meaning at moments of pressure; it reaches its finest quality when dramatic tension is greatest. Then Webster's great gift for being able to say exactly the right thing in as few
words as possible manifests itself most clearly.

"While we looke up to heaven wee confound
Knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist."

W.D. V. vi. 259-60

"Looke you, the starres shine still."

D.R. IV. i. 120

Ferdinand "Cover her face: Mine eyes dazell: she di'd yong.
Bosola I thine not so: her infelicitie
Seem'd to have yeares too many."

D.R. IV. ii. 281-3

Webster puts this gift to fine comic effect, too, in The Devil's
Law-Case, when Sanitonella says:

"Udes foot, we are spoyled -
Why my Clentins prooved an honest woman."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 534-5

There yet remains to be discussed one major aspect of
Webster's language and style. Up to now the emphasis has been
on his affinities with the new style, with Donne's poetry
particularly, and on his use of broken rhythms and knotty syntax,
of elliptical sentence structure and pithy aphoristic phrases.
But Webster also has strong links with the older 'Elizabethan'
style, with its smoother and more regular blank verse, and its
eyasy lyricism. The lyrics scattered sparingly throughout his
plays in the form of dirges and meditations are amongst the finest
produced by any dramatist of the time. The earliest of these
lyrics is Cornelia's dirge in The White Devil. It is perhaps less
even in quality than later lyrics he wrote, but the first four
lines, at least, display the felicity and ease of expression of his
best work:
"Call for the Robin-Red-Brest and the wren,
Since our shady groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers doe cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men."

W. D. V. iv. 89-92

In *The Duchess of Malfi* there are two lyrics. The first, the madmen's song, is chiefly remarkable for the very effective use Webster makes of alliteration and onomatopoeia:

"O let us howle, some heavy note,
some deadly-dogged howle,
Sounding, as from the threatening throat,
of beasts, and fatal fowle.
As Ravens, Schrich-owles, Bulls and Beares,
We'll bell and howle our parts,
Till yerksome noyce have cloy'd your eares,
and corasiv'd your hearts."

D. M. IV. ii. 65-72

The second is undoubtedly Webster's finest achievement in the lyric form; a dirge of effortless ease and beauty yet full of meaning. A whole attitude to life is reflected in its climatic lines:

"Of what is't fools make such vaine keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth, weeping;
Their life, a general mist of error,
Their death, a hideous storm of terror."

D. M. IV. ii. 188-91

Romelio's dirge, in *The Devil's Law-Case* has unmistakable Websterian traits but these are allied with a tune more courtly, more Caroline. It has something of the quality of Shirley's great lyric, "The shadows of our blood and state":

"All the Flowers of the Spring
Meet to perfume our burying:
These have but their growing prime,
And man does flourish but his time.
Survey our progress from our birth,
We are set, we grow, we turne to earth."
Courts adieu, and all delights,
All bewitching appetites;
Sweetest Breath, and clearest eye,
Like perfumes goe out and dye;
And consequently this is done,
As shadowes wait upon the Sunne.
Vaine the ambition of Kings,
Who seeke by trophies and dead things,
To leave a living name behind,
And weave but nets to catch the wind."

D.L.C. V. iv. 131-46

Jolenta's lyric is as gentle and graceful, in its way, as anything
in Dekker, with whose work it invites comparison:

"Like or dislike me, choose you whether -
The Downe upon the Ravens feather
Is as gentle and as sleeke,
As the Mole on Venus cheeke.
Hence vaine shew! I onely care,
To preserve my Soule most faire.
Never mind the outward skin,
But the Jewell that's within;
And though I want the crimson blood,
Angels boast my Sister-hood.

For I proclaim't without controle,
There's no true beauty, but ith Soule."

D.L.C. V. v. 41-50 & 55-6

But Webster did not restrict his gifts for fluent and
mellifluous versification to his lyrics. At times he dropped
his compressed and knotty 'new style' in favour of blank verse
of the greatest ease and beauty, just as, at times, Donne wrote
passages of smooth regularity amid his jagged verses. The nature
and quality of the smoother Websterian verse vary considerably.
Sometimes there is a combination of lyricism and harsher rhythms
and syntax:

"O thou soft naturall death, that art joint-twin
To sweetest slumber: no rough-bearded Comet,
Stares on thy milde departure: the dull owle
Beates not against thy casement: the hoarse wolfe
Sents not thy carrion. Pity winces thy coarse,
Whilst horror waits on Princes."

W.D. V. iii. 30-35

Other passages are just two or more lines amongst others of a
totally different type:

"Do'st thou imagine thou canst slide on bloud
And not be tainted with a shamefull fall?"

W.D. IV. iii. 121-2

"You may discern the shape of lovelinesse
More perfect, in her teares, then in her smiles;"

D.M. IV. i. 8-9

"... I have liv'd
Riotously ill, like some that live in Court,
And sometimes, when my face was full of smiles,
Have felt the maze of conscience in my brest."

W.D. V. iv. 112-5

Webster sometimes uses smoother verse to characterize a speaker.
The speeches by Duke Brachiano in V. i. of The White Devil are
dignified and evenly paced verse, fitting his role at this point.
Use is also made of smoother, expanded lines in Contilupo's
opening speech in the trial scene of The Devil's Law-Case.
The measured eloquence of a legal address is perfectly caught:

"May it please your Lordship and the reverend Court,
To give me leave to open to you a case
So rare, so altogether void of Precedent,
That I doe challenge all the spacious Volumes,
Of the whole Civill Law to shew the like."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 108-112

A similarly measured gravity is evident in the echo scene of
The Duchess of Malfi:

"I doe love these auncient ruynes:
We never tred 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 interr'd
Loved the Church as well, and gave so largely to't,
They thought it should have canonize their Bones
Till Doomesday.'"

D.M. V. iii. 10-18

But the finest examples of Webster's smoother verse style are
to be found, like the short, inevitable lines, at peaks of
dramatic tension, when the author's poetic and imaginative
sympathies are most powerfully engaged. During the quarrel
with Vittoria Brachiano cries:

"Thou hast lead mee, like an heathen sacrifice,
With musicke, and with fatall yokes of flowers
To my eternall ruins."

W.D. iv. ii. 90-2

Vittoria, faced with death, has a semi-apocalyptic vision of
the day of judgement:

"I prethee yet remember,
Millions are now in graves, which at last day
Like Mandrakes shall rise shreeking."

W.D. V. vi. 66-8

Similar great flashes occur in The Duchess of Malfi. One is
from the beautifully modulated wooing scene:

"I thanke you (gentle love)
And cause you shall not come to me in debt,
(Being now my Steward) here upon your lippe,
I signe your quietus est."

D.M. I. i. 529-32

Another, perhaps the finest of all, is from IV. ii.:

"Th' heaven ore my head, seems made of molten brasse,
The earth of flaming sulphure, yet I am not mad:
I am acquainted with sad misery,
As the tan'd galley-slave is with his Oare,
Necessity makes me suffer constantly,
In face of such poetry as this, there cannot be any doubt that Webster's adoption of the 'new style' was deliberate. He used broken rhythms and complex syntax in his verse because he felt they would suit his purpose. Following the lead of Donne and Shakespeare, he nevertheless developed a prose and verse style which is an intensely individual medium. Not all the verse he wrote is good, as The Devil's Law-Case, in particular, shows. The rhythmic disintegration which is a near neighbour of metaphysical poetry appears in Webster's work also. There are lines which are almost impossible to scan, and which are so shambling that they might as well be prose. But generally the individual verse style he evolved served Webster well, proving rarely less and usually very much more than an adequate medium for his requirements.
CHAPTER TWO

THE WHITE DEVIL

The White Devil is surely one of the most strikingly individual of all English Renaissance plays. From the sudden opening word "Banish't!" it holds the attention of the audience or reader closely, driving on with unremitting intensity through a succession of vivid and dramatic scenes to a splendid climax. This intensity and brilliance is largely gained through Webster's willingness to limit his scope, to concentrate upon one narrow aspect of life and to exclude all the rest. This is even more pronounced in The White Devil than The Duchess of Malfi, for although both are set in Italian ducal courts, yet the later play transcends these restrictions in the implications it raises.

The narrow intensity and brilliance of The White Devil is evident in all aspects of the play, but in none more clearly than the imagery, for it is through this medium that Webster achieves many of his finest dramatic effects, and through this medium also that he carries out much of his exposition of themes and his portrayal of characters. Supporting the impression of intensity which the play conveys is the significant fact that The White Devil is more closely packed with images than any other play of the time, its nearest rival in this

1 see Appendix 1a
respect being *The Duchess of Malfi*. A comparison of Appendices two, three and four reinforces the impression of narrowness of scope, for it is evident from them that not only are there broad differences of emphasis in the subject-matter of the imagery by comparison with the other two plays under consideration, but also that there is a noticeably greater imbalance between the eight main subject groups in *The White Devil*. Imagery concerning things domestic is scarcer, so is that relating to the arts and to learning. By contrast the daily life, nature and animal image-groups are prominent. Within each of the eight subject groups the patterns of emphasis vary. Images concerning sickness, weather and growing things are dwelt upon in both tragedies, but other subjects, animals, birds, insects, house (indoor), fire, jewels, food and trade are more heavily emphasized than usual. On the other hand, images about classes and types, war, religion and some domestic subjects are relatively scarcer.

Such patterns of emphasis are significant. They indicate a certain limitation to particular spheres of experience, a limitation which is inseparable from the limitation in scope and themes which Webster imposed upon himself, for it is as much through the imagery as the action that he expressed his ideas. It is therefore essential, if the imagery is to appear properly meaningful, that it be studied in conjunction with the themes, rather than in the abstract.

Thematically, the play opens as abruptly as it does
theatrically. Within three or four lines Lodovico quite baldly states one of Webster's major preoccupations in the work - "Courtly reward and punishment". This is quickly followed by the direct or indirect introduction of several other concepts which run through the play. Indeed the scene is a small masterpiece, carrying out the task of plot exposition quite naturally while at the same time introducing the various themes. There is a great deal that is of far wider application than its immediate significance in the following dialogue.

Lodovico - "Banish't!
Antonelli It greev'd me much to heare the sentence.
Lodovico Ha, Ha. O Democritus thy Gods
That govern the whole world! Courtly reward And punishment. Fortune's a right whore. If she give ought, she dealing it in small parcels, That she may take away all at one swope. This tis to have great enemies, God quite them: Your woolfe no longer seemes to be a woolfe Then when shees hungry.
Gasparo You terme those enemies Are men of Princely ranke.
Lodovico Oh I pray for them.
The violent thunder is adored by those Are pash't in pieces by it.

W.O. I. i. 1-12

Much of what Lodovico says is applicable to Flamineo, as becomes increasingly evident. Brachiano and Vittoria, too, come to feel the truth that the whore, Fortune, gives a little, only to take it all back. The illusory nature of courtly love is paralleled by the illusory nature of happiness and of security. Further, as Flamineo perhaps realizes but fails to heed, to serve great men is to adore the violent thunder which will ultimately destroy one.
The dialogue continues. The term "justice" is bandied about contumeliously, and Lodovico bitterly comments on Brachiano's disregard for the law, and the fact that, as a prince, he can escape its retributive arm. A little later Lodovico rejects his friends' conventional phrases of comfort. This is a play in which talk, empty phrases and conventional sententious, accomplish little; action is the means to success - even if that success turns out to be illusory. For as Lodovico says, describing a world which is busy praying on itself:

"This is the world's almes; pray make use of it -
Great men sell sheep thus, to be cut in pieces,
When first they have shorne them bare, and sold their fleeces."

W.H. I. 1. 60-2

Thus the scene ends, as it began, on the themes of courtly reward and punishment and the ruthlessness of great men.

Such themes are typical of the time during which the play was written. All of the major dramatists of the Jacobean period touch on them. Criticism of courtly life and princely behaviour is found in one form or another in the works of Chapman, Jonson, Marston and Tourneur, and reflects the concern of the average literate Englishman at the excesses and follies of the court of James I. Together with other special targets for social criticism - usury, whoredom, luxury, and land enclosure - they recur again and again in comedies and tragedies alike. Tourneur is a particularly good example, for in his two tragedies can be seen how deeply the dramatists felt about these matters, and how, as
L.G. Salingar has pointed out, these preoccupations appear in the imagery as strongly as the action. Vindice's opening soliloquy in The Revenger's Tragedy is illustrative of this (R.T. I. i. 1-49) as is the famous 'silkworm' speech (R.T. III: iv. 72-99). Webster's concern with these themes is typically Jacobean then, but it is also particularly Websterian, for he uses them as a backdrop, in front of which the love of Brachiano and Vittoria is played out in a wholly individual way. Because of the importance of the themes of courtly reward and punishment and of princely behaviour as a context it is perhaps worthwhile studying them first, in action and imagery.

Note has already been taken, in Chapter One, of Webster's great fondness for tree imagery, which constitutes a major part of the 'growing things' group in each play. As has been said, Webster's liking for tree images seems to stem from an interest and delight in massiveness, strength and durability. The almost complete absence of flower and plant images is a form of confirmation of this. It is thus natural that Webster should utilize tree images to illuminate his study of great men, and of the parasitic life at court, where favourites vie for the rewards of serving the great. True, the first tree image is only remotely concerned with this theme, but it does have some relevance here. Antonelli says:

"Wee see that Trees beare no such pleasant fruite
There where they grew first, as where they are now set."

W.D. I. i. 45-6

He is voicing an empty phrase of comfort in sententious terms, but he is also establishing the metaphorical relationship of 'tree' to 'man', which the following images are to elaborate in the next scene, in the extended metaphorical pun which is Vittoria's dream of the yew-tree.

"Me thought I walkt about the mid of night,
Into a Church-yard, where a goodly Eu Tree
Shed her large root in ground - under that Eu,
As I sat sadly leaning on a grave,
Checkered with cross-p'rickes, their came stealing in
Your Dutchesse and my husband - one of them
A picax bore, th' other a rusty spade,
And in rough terms they gan to challenge me,
About this Eu.

Brachiano That Tree?
Vittoria This harmelesse Eu.
They told me my entent was to root up
That well-growne Eu, and plant i'th stead of it
A withered blacke-thorns, and for that they vow'd
To bury me alive; my husband straight
With picax gan to dig, and your fell Dutchesse
With snowell, like a fury, voyded out
The earth and scattered bones -
When to my rescue there arose me thought
A whirlwind, which let fall a man's arm
From that strong plant
And both were strucke dead by that sacred Eu
In that base shallow grave that was their due."

W.D. I. ii. 222-45

The undeniably portentous note the verse sounds is renewed when the yew tree image is taken up again later in the play. Monticelso, newly-elected Pope Paul IV, warns Lodovico against murder:

"Or like the blacke, and melancholike Bugh-tree,
Do'st thinke to roote thyselfe in dead men's graves,
And yet to prosper?"

W.D. IV. iii. 123-5
The warning is addressed to Lodovico, but the audience would be unlikely to miss the relationship of the two images, or fail to apply the second to Vittoria and Brachiano as much as to Lodovico.

Courtly life, and the search for advancement at the hands of the great involves parasitism, and Webster introduces this element also through imagery as well as through the action. The parasitic roles of Lodovico and Flamineo are paralleled by the use of images involving mistletoe. The first is the curt comment by Francisco on Brachiano and Vittoria:

"Like mistletow on seere elmes spent by weather, Let him cleave to her and both rot together."

W.D. II. i. 393-4

Certainly the explicit meaning here is that Brachiano is clinging to Vittoria, but tonally it leaves an impression of a wider parasitism, which is reinforced by the explicit comment of Flamineo, the arch-parasite:

"But as we seldeome find the mistle-towe Sacred to physike on the builder Oke, Without a Mandrake by it, so in our quest of gaine."

W.D. III. i. 52-4

It is typical of Flamineo, however, that while he pursues the parasite's policy, he is well aware of the risks involved. Another parasite, Vittoria, is the subject of two vine images. In the first Francisco, predicting her downfall, says:

"As in cold countries husband-men plant Vines, And with warme bloud manure them; even so One summer she will bear unavoury fruite, And ere next spring wither both branch and roote."

W.D. III. ii. 193-6
Then in the following Act a directly related image occurs in Francisco's letter to Vittoria, not only using the vine as subject, but significantly reiterating the verb 'wither':

"Your prop is fall'n; I pittie that a vine Which Princes heretofore have longed to gather, Wanting supporters, now should fade and wither."

W.D. IV. ii. 27-9

Marcello and Cornelia are also parasites, for despite their opposition to the activities of Vittoria and Flamineo they both compromise themselves by living at Brachiano's court. Marcello seems to be aware that he is implicated, for in his dying words he comments on rising "by all dishonest meanes."

"Let all men know That tree shall long time keepe a steddy foote, Whose branches spread no wider then the roote."

W.D. V. ii. 24-6

This is the last tree image in the play. The summing up on the subject is through Flamineo's use of one of the rare farming images, one which expresses the futility of the search for advancement:

"Why heere's an end of all my harvest, hee has given me nothing."

W.D. V. iii. 190

Another element of courtly life which is made quite plain in the play is also developed out of the first scene, from Lodovico's bitter remark:

"Your woolfe no longer seems to be a woolfe Then when shee's hungry"

W.D. I. i. 8-9
Exploitation is also the theme of the last image from that scene, an image already quoted:

"This is the world's almes; pray make use of it -
Great men sell sheep thus, to be cut in pieces,
When first they have shorne them bare, and sold their fleeces."

W.D. I. 1. 65-2

Wolf images occur several times in the play, and these strongly reinforce the action. So Vittoria, at III. ii. 188, refers to her accusers as wolves; Brachiano, in his anger exclaims during his quarrel with Vittoria:

"Woman to man
Is either a God or a wolf."

W.D. IV. ii. 92-3

Then later Flamino refers to his relationship with Tanche:

"I do love her, just as a man holds a wolf by the ears,
But for fear of turning upon me, and pulling out my throate,
I would let her go the Devil."

W.D. V. i. 149-51

Certain other wild animal images are also used to denote preying. Francisco refers to 'pole-cats' haunting Camillo's 'dove cot' (II. i. 2-5), and the lawyer tells Flamino:

"My Lord Cardinal will ferit them -"

W.D. III. i. 21-2

Again, Monticelso counsels Francisco to hide his time patiently:

"... . . . . . . . . . . . . . sleep with the Lyon,
And let this brood of secure foolish mice
Play with your nostrils, till the time bee ripe
For th'bloody audit, and the fatall gripe."

W.D. IV. i. 17-21

Not for nothing did Webster scatter such images equally amongst the various factions groups; by doing so he is able to reinforce through imagery what becomes increasingly apparent
in the action, that every character is exploiting others, and in turn being exploited.

Bird imagery makes the same fact plain. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, as will be shown, there is a clear distinction between the creatures of prey (Ferdinand and the Cardinal) and the hunted (Antonio, the Duchess and their children). In *The White Devil* this distinction is not made clearly. Flamindo, satirizing extravagant sonneteers and his sister at the same time, refers to her as a blackbird:

"What an ignorant ass or flattering knave might he be counted, that should write sonnets to her eyes... or compare her hair to the blacke-birds hill, when 'tis liker the blacke-bird's feather."

W.D. I. ii. 113-117

Marcello makes her a bird of prey, a crow:

"I had rather she were pitch'd up on a stake
In some new seced garden, to affright
Her fellow-crowes hence."

W.D. V. i. 187-9

Vittoria, however, uses the blackbird comparison, with the hawking element added:

"I have seene a black-bird that would sooner fly
To a man's bosome, then to stay the gripe
Of the feirce Sparrow-hawks."

W.D. V. iii. 185-7

When Brachiano quarrels with Francisco he uses a hawking image:

"Do not like yong hawkes fetch a course about,
Your game flies faire and for you."

W.D. II. i. 47-8

Francisco, however, turns the metaphor to apply it to Vittoria and Brachiano:
"I'lle answer you in your owne hawking phrase —
Some eagles that should gaze upon the sune
Seldom soare high, but take their lustfull ease,
Since they from dunghill birds their prey can ceaze —"

W.D. II. i. 49-52

Then in Act Four, when Vittoria and Brachiano are fooled by
Francisco's stratagems into quarrelling, Flamineo uses a
slang term of warning as an image:

"Ware hawke, my Lord."

W.D. IV. ii. 84

Fowling images also occur. Monticelso says to Francisco:

"Aime like a cunning fowler, close one eie,
That you the better may your game espy."

W.D. IV. i. 22-3

And when Flamineo pretends he is dying he says:

"O, I am caught in a springe!"

W.b. V. vi. 134

Two "caged-bird" images by Flamineo also reinforce the concept.

Referring to the lovers he says:

"Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden,
The birds that are without, despaire to get in, and the
birds that are within despaire and are in a consumption
for feare they shall never get out."

W.D. I. ii. 41-4

Referring to himself later, he comments:

"Wee thinke cag'd birds sing, when indeed they crie."

W.D. V. iv. 117

It is in this thoroughly Jacobean setting of ruthless
exploitation and the ceaseless search for advancement at
court that Webster places his story of the adulterous passion
of Brachiano and Vittoria. And Webster makes it plain that
it is adulterous, even though his heroine is involved in it. There is no moral ambiguity about the play; none of the equivocation found in Fletcher's or Ford's studies of incest for example. Adultery is called adultery, and murder murder. Even while he is casting his protagonists in the heroic mould, Webster is steadily exposing their behaviour to criticism. This criticism is made largely through two closely related classes of images, that concerning sickness and medicine, and the poison images. For the purposes of this study they will be considered as one group.

Together the sickness and poison images constitute one of the two major image groups in the play, and their significance is heightened by the considerable number of non-metaphorical references which are associated with them. Further, their thematic impact is increased by the coherent and unified way in which they are used. Of the twenty nine images, only one does not have Vittoria, Brachiano or Flaminio as its subject. This is Gasparo's 'mummia' image at I. i. 15-18, which is aimed at Lodovico. All the rest, although spoken by a variety of characters, play a part in the commentary on the behaviour of the lovers and their pandar. The series of images opens in I. ii. with an image of wide significance. Discussing cuckoldry and jealousy, Flaminio says:

"they that have the yellow Jaundice, thinke all objects they looke on to bee yellow.

W.S. I. ii. 108-9

It is an image not only relevant to the subject under discussion, for it also explains many of the examples of flagrant inversion
of values which Brachiano's and Flammeo's sickness images are to reveal. Then later in the scene, when Camillo leaves and the lovers are free to talk, they indulge in a witty conceit on the subject of doctors:

**Vittoria** "Sir in the way of pittie
I wish you hart-hole.
**Brachiano** You are a sweet Phisition.
**Vittoria** Sure sir, a loathed cruelty in ladies
Is as to Doctors many funerals:
It takes away their credit."

*W.D. I. ii. 198-202*

It is a thoroughly ironical situation, for Vittoria is to inflame his sickness, and to infect herself. A little 'loathed cruelty' on her part would preserve her credit where her kindly surrender will not. The inversion of values has begun. Cornelia's denunciation of the two, which follows shortly after this involves references to poison and witchcraft (I. ii. 264-8), two ideas which occur strongly from that point onwards.

**Act Two Scene One** contains many references to, and images of, sickness and poison. Early in the scene Isabella tells Francisco how she hopes to regain Brachiano's love:

"As men to try the precious unicorns horne
Make of the powder a preservative circle
And in it put a spider, so these armes
Shall charm his poison, force it to obeying
And keepe him chast from an infected straying."

*W.D. II. i. 14-18*

During the argument between Brachiano and Francisco and Monticelso more references occur, i.e., at lines 37-8, 61-2, 72 and 93. Of these, two display Brachiano's angry rejection as slander (61-2) and poison (72) facts which are true enough, even though his accusers are themselves Machiavels.
Webster's irony is evident in the next image, which Brachiano uses when the quarrel is temporarily patched up:

"Like bones which broke in sunder and well set
Knit the more strongly."

W.B. II. 1. 143-4

For the quarrel is about to break out more virulently than ever, following Brachiano's rejection of Isabella. During their meeting Brachiano's inversion of values is again revealed in his imputation of sickness in Isabella:

"O your breath!
Out upon sweete meates, and continued Physicke!
The Plague is in them."

W.B. II. 1. 166-7

To this Isabella replies:

"You have oft for these two lippes
Neglected Cassia or the naturall sweetes
Of the spring-violet - they are not yet much withered."

W.B. II. 1. 168-70

The inference is, surely, that Brachiano's comment is wholly subjective. Later Isabella, to protect Brachiano and Giovanni, turns 'fury' and curses Vittoria:

"To dig the strumpet's eyes out, let her lye
Some twenty moneths a-dying, to cut off
Her nose and lippes, pull out her rotten teeth,
Preserve her flesh like Mummia,"

W.B. II. 1. 248-51

It is not without significance that the mutilations Isabella proposes were well known in Webster's day as symptoms of leprosy and venereal disease.

Further sickness and medical references occur during Flamineo's exuberant dialogue with the doctor and Brachiano.
It is a highly amusing display of verbal fireworks but with the underlying note of seriousness in the fact that the doctor has come to agree to poison Isabella. Indeed the next scene depicts the poisoning in the most callous and off-hand manner. A great deal of what Flamino says is subtly coloured by current or subsequent events. There is a continual interplay between Flamino the chorus-observer and Flamino the pander who rejects Marcello’s advice:

“For love of vertue beare an honest heart,
And stride over every politicke respect,
Which where they most advance they most infect.”

W.D. III. i. 60-2

He is infected as Vittoria or Brachiano.

The great trial scene, III. ii., is a complex mass of imagery. In it Webster brings together in a medial climax many of the streams of imagery running through the play. Sickness and allied imagery plays a considerable role in the scene, for both sides are at fault, and references to venom and poison, as at lines 70-1, 84-5, 107-8, 198-9 and 287-8 often refer as much to the speaker as to the person addressed. At the end of the scene Webster characteristically links the imagery to the action by bringing on Giovanni to tell of his mother’s death by poison. III. iii. contains only one poison image, but it is an important one:

“There’s somewhat in’t.
Phisitions, that cure poisons, still doe worke
With counterpoisons.”

W.D. III. iii. 58-60

This is an accurate prefiguration of the coming death by poison,
of the poisoner, Brachiano.

The complex of sickness and poison images occurs strongly in the quarrel between the lovers. During the quarrel each sees the other with unflattering clarity, and it is instructive to note how many times they refer to each other in terms of poison or disease. Thus Brachiano sees Vittoria as a whore, bringing disease:

"Oh I could bee mad, Prevent the curt disease shee'l bring mee to, And teare my haire off."

W.B. IV. ii. 47-9

Flaminio follows this with a back-handed, punning insinuation of disease in Brachiano (lines 54-5) and with a reference to poisoning (lines 61-3). Brachiano, however, is seeing things in true perspective for a moment, and his earlier disgust with Isabella is reversed:

"O my sweetest Dutchesse How lovlie art thou now!"

W.B. IV. ii. 100-101

Vittoria is acutely aware of the fact that she is now tainted:

"Like those, which sick o'th'Palsie, and retain ill-senting foxes 'bout them, are still shun'd by those of choicer noothrills."

W.B. IV. ii. 112-4

She resolves to reform:

"I had a limbe corrupted to an ulcer, But I have cut it off; and now Ile go Weeping to heaven on crutches."

W.B. IV. ii. 122-4

Since the first three scenes of Act Five are concerned with
the plot to poison Brachiano and his death, it is not surprising that they should contain many poison references. There are, however, no poison images in the death scene, nor are any needed, since Webster has brought the stream of images to a climax in the action. Brachiano's death by poisoning is highly appropriate, since he so callously engineered his wife's death in this way. This is recalled to the audience by Brachiano's warning to Vittoria:

"Do not kiss me, for I shall poison thee."

W.D. V. iii. 27

This is a direct reminiscence of the refusal to let Giovanni kiss his poisoned mother:

"They wrapt her in a cruel fold of lead, And would not let me kiss her."

W.D. III. ii. 343-4

It also recalls Cornelia's curse:

"Bee thy act Judas-like, betray in kissing -"

W.D. I. ii. 291

And this in its turn links up with Isabella's death by kissing her husband's picture, and her refusal to let her entourage come near her, as the elaborate stage-directions relate:

"Enter Isabella in her night-gowne as to bed-ward . . . shee kneels downe as to prayers, then draws the curtains of the picture, doe's three reverences to it, and kisses it thrice, shee faints and will not suffer them to come nere it, dies,"

W.D. II. ii.

The fiendish taunts with which Lodovico and Gaspago torment the dying man contain many references to poisons, and to the poisoning activities of a man "whose art was poison, and whose conscience murder." (line 156).
After Brachiano's death no further sickness or poison images occur until the final scene. Here the images not only carry out the role of commenting upon the relationship of Flamindo and Vittoria, but also become part of the stoic commentary which the former makes on life and death - first in jest, then in earnest. The first mock-death he greets in serio-comic vein:

"Then here's an end of mee: farewell day-light
And O contentible Physike! that dost take
So long a study, onely to preserve
So short a life, I take my leave of thee.
These are two cupping-glasses that shall draw
All my inflected blood out -"

W.D. V. vi. 104-6

The second he speaks of in almost as exuberant a vein:

"I have caught
An everlasting could. I have lost my voice
Most irrecoverably."

W.D. V. vi. 270-2

It is an apt enough comment from the most garrulous character in the play.

By his use of this large body of sickness and poison images, Webster keeps the unsavoury elements in the relationship of Vittoria and Brachiano to the fore. He succeeds in presenting their love as both diseased and contagious. But in contrast to this, he portrays the main figures in the play as great and individual personalities. Even if not good, the lovers and their pandar are created on heroic lines. Vittoria is one of the most powerful and brilliant female characters in English Renaissance drama. Only Cleopatra, the Duchess of Halfi, and perhaps Lady Macbeth, can match her; for
she has all the fortitude and endurance of Ford's heroines, and the resourcefulness and willpower of Middleton's, with a magnificence of stature not found outside the greatest heroines in Shakespeare. From the very first Webster emphasizes Vittoria's brilliance, and her entrance for the first time, in I. ii., is framed for that purpose. Amid a blaze of torches she sweeps on stage, says a few words of welcome, calls for more lights, and sweeps off. It is a fine piece of theatre, and is followed by an equally effective gesture after she leaves – the dismissal of the torchbearers, leaving Brachiano and Flamineo plotting in the gloom. But this vivid contrast of light and darkness is not just a masterly stage effect, it is an integral part of Webster's characterization of Vittoria, and closely linked to two groups of images designed to achieve the same effect, images concerning stars and jewels.

Stars are linked to the brilliant first appearance Vittoria makes when Monticelso, in the arraignment scene, accuses her of luxury:

"Who knowes not how, when severall night by night
Her gates were choaked with coachee, and her roomes
Out-braved the stars with severall kinds of lights"

W.D. III. ii. 75-7

Later, after Vittoria's spirited defence, Monticelso sums up before sentencing her:

"Such a corrupted triall have you made
Both of your life and beauty, and bene stil'd
No lese in ominous fate then blazing starres
To Princes."

W.D. III. ii. 269-72
Star imagery occurs again in the final scene. When Vittoria believes Flamino to be dying she taunts him:

"This thy death
Shall make me like a blasing ominous starre -
Looke up and tremble."

W.D. V. vi. 132-4

Later Lodovico tells her:

"O thou hast bin a most prodigious comet,
But Ile cut off your traine."

W.D. V. vi. 215-6

This comet image perfectly sums up Vittoria's career; a brief meteoric course across the sky, then darkness.

It is interesting to note that there is no sun imagery in The White Devil. This is no doubt due mainly to Webster's desire to contrast light with darkness, but the choice of stars as images may also be due partly to something more personal. This is suggested by Webster's natural predilection for diamond images, which comprise almost all the jewel imagery in the play. For both stars and diamonds have a distinctive white or blue-white light, hard and cold. Whether this was one of Webster's reasons for the two kinds of images or not, they certainly convey something of that effect. The first two diamond images in the play occur in I. ii., but one of these is not relevant (I. ii. 152-3) while the other's relevance depends upon the interpretation of Flamino's reference to Camillo, "yon counterfeite dyamond" (I. ii. 139), as indicating the latter's unsuitability as a husband for a true diamond, Vittoria. This is open to question. III. ii.
contains three significant diamond images, however. The first and second come after Vittoria's impassioned defence has drawn a word of admiration from the English Ambassador, a character who twice in this scene acts as a mouthpiece for the audience's probable reaction:

Monticello Well, well, such counterfet Jewels
Make trew ones oft suspected.
Vittoria You are deceaved.
For know that all your strict-combined heads,
Which strike against this mine of diamonds,
Shall prove but glassen hammers, they shall breake -"

W.D. III. ii. 144-9

When Brachiano has left, and Vittoria faces her accusers alone, she bursts out in final defiance of the sentence passed on her:

"Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spight,
Through darkenesse Diamonds spred their ritchest light."

W.D. III. ii. 304-5

It is a concept central to the characterization of Vittoria.

Brachiano is a far less brilliant figure than Vittoria, and though Webster takes steps to ensure that he is an adequate protagonist and foil for her, he still remains somewhat overshadowed. He lacks the essential greatness which Webster gives his heroine. For there is in Brachiano an element of ducal bluster as well as courage, and a strain of criminal callousness as well as devotion to the woman he loves. It is his mixture of bluster and rash courage which Webster portrays through a group of war images. Through these images, too, he is able to contrast the subtler natures of Brachiano's enemies,
Francisco and Monticello with his own. When the quarrel between Brachiano and his two opponents first breaks out, both sides threaten openly. Brachiano declares his intention of keeping Vittoria:

"were she a whore of mine,
All thy loud cannons, and thy borrowed Switzers
Thy Gallics, nor thy swarne confederates,
Durst not supplant her."

W.D. II. i. 62-5

Francisco is equally threatening:

"W'e'le end this with the cannon."

W.D. II. i. 76

But Brachiano is in his element, and replies:

"Thou'lt get nought by it but iron in thy wounds,
And gunpowder in thy nostrils."

W.D. II. i. 77-8

He is not lacking in courage; in the arraignment scene he is ready enough to threaten open violence:

"Sirrah priest,
Ile talke with you hereafter, - Do you heare?
The sword you frame of such an excellent temper,
Ile sheath in your owne bowels."

W.D. III. ii. 169-72

He acts up to his motto, "Nemo me Impune lacessit", (II. ii. 186) perfectly in his defiance. Nevertheless he lacks the subtlety and patience of his enemies, and this is his downfall. For Monticello and Francisco now alter their earlier threats; images of open warfare are replaced by those of subtler techniques. As Monticello says:

"We see that undermining more prevails
Then doth the canon."

W.D. IV. i. 15-16
Francisco's soliloquy, later in the scene, indicates that he too is renouncing open conflict:

"He that deals all by strength, his wit is shallow: When a man's head goes through each limb will follow."

*W.D. IV. i. 135-6*

The effect of this undermining is reflected in Flamineo's exclamation:

"We're blowne up my lord!"

*W.D. IV. ii. 141*

Brachiano, however, can only reiterate his open defiance of the world:

"Bee thou at peace with me; let all the world Threaten the cannon."

*W.D. IV. ii. 176-7*

Flamineo seems to be correct in his later summing up of Brachiano:

"He was a kind of states-man that would sooner have reckon'd how many cannon-bullets he had discharg'd against a towne, to count his expence that way, then how many of his valiant and deserving subjects he lost before it."

*W.D. V. iii. 60-3*

This contrasts with Francisco's apparently sincere abhorrence of war:

"Shall I defy him, and impose a warre Most burthensome on my poure subjects neckes, Which at my will I have not power to end?"

*W.D. IV. i. 7-9*

It is singularly appropriate that Brachiano should finally be poisoned while wearing full armour.

Another aspect of Brachiano's character is seen in a
small group of animal images which Webster uses to contrast Brachiano's opinion of himself with others' views of him. So Francisco comments:

"If I had such a Dove-house as Camillo's I would set fire on't, weren't but to destroy The Pole-Cats that haunt to't."

Brachiano's own image of himself is the conventional regal one, however:

"Have you proclaimed a Triumph that you baite A Lyon thus?"

Nevertheless, Francisco compares him to a stag in the rutting season:

"When Stagges grow melancholike you'll finde the season."

Webster provides the explanation for these images a little later, when Francisco says:

"See a good habite makes a child a man, Whereas a bad one makes a man a beast."

The characterization of Flamineo is carried out somewhat differently from that of Vittoria and Brachiano, in that Flamineo is depicted largely through what he says, and how he says it, rather than through imagery used by others about him. There is no counterpart in his case to the 'star' imagery related to Vittoria or the 'animal' images to Brachiano. By virtue of his role as Webster's chief satiric commentator
Flamineo speaks over forty per cent of the images in the play, and many of the satiric images contribute indirectly to our impressions of the restless, ambitious malcontent. There are certain groups of images, however which Flamineo uses, which are there primarily to characterize him. Many of these are also satiric, since he is a satirist, but their main function is to establish him as a character, not to act as satire. The first of these groups is that concerning food. The group is a small one, only nine images in all, but of these Flamineo speaks six. The majority of them seem to indicate little more than Flamineo's interest in material things, his ready turning to a congenial topic for metaphors. But one at least seems to be closely linked to the theme of the search for advancement, and to indicate some general metaphorical association between food and worldly success. So Flamineo tells Brachiano:

"You know that painted meat no hunger feedes."

W.W. IV. ii. 205

A more important group so far as Flamineo's characterization is concerned, is one composed mainly of domestic images, but including also several from the trade and other everyday life groups. All these images serve to place Flamineo socially and to differentiate him from Vittoria and Brachiano. Flamineo's humble social origins come through clearly in his familiarity with, and ready reference to, the homelier subjects.
of these images. So, speaking of jealousy, he hits on this image:

"Jealousy is worse, her fits present to a man, like so many bubbles in a bason of water, twenty several crabb'd faces."

[4.6. 1. II. 109-111]

Another domestic image reveals his characteristic liveliness of wit:

"I saw him at last Tilting, he shewed like a peater candlestickes fashioned like a man in armour, holding a Tilting staffe in his hand, little bigger then a candle of twelve i'th pound."

[4.6. III. 1. 69-71]

The faintly malicious jibes behind so many of his remarks are in evidence in another vivid image:

"He carries his face in's ruffe, as I have seen a serving-man carrying glasses in a cipres hat-band, monstrous studdy for feare of breacking."

[4.6. III. 1. 75-7]

The only other person to use an image of a similar sort and quality is his fellow malcontent, Lodovico:

"Markes her! prethee, she swerres like the saddes A Collier hath bene wash't in."

[4.6. V. III. 248-9]

Another domestic image, one with a proverbial quality about it typical of Flamineo, occurs in the lovers quarrel scene:

"O sir, your little chimneys Doe ever cast most smoke."

[4.6. IV. II. 200-1]

The chimney is the subject of yet another Flamineo metaphor which occurs in a short speech containing two other typical
images:

"O! I smell soote,
Most stinking soote, the chimneis asfire;
My liver's purboiled like scotch holly-bread;
There's a plumber laying pipes in my guts, it scalds."

W.D. V. vi. 142-5

The impression such images create emphasizes what Flamineo tells us of his poverty-stricken upbringing; of his bitter experience at Padua, for example:

"where I protest
For want of meanes, the university judge me,
I have bene faine to heele my Tutors stockings
At least seven years."

W.D. I. ii. 313-16

Like many another malcontent in the drama of the period Flamineo is a poor but gifted graduate, disillusioned by the lack of prospects in a highly stratified society.

Flamineo's reaction to such conditions is to lay aside scruples and treat life as something to be exploited and used for gain. This wholly mercenary and materialist attitude is reflected in the number of trade images he uses. So, for him:

"Misfortune comes like the Crowners businesse,
Huddle upon huddle."

W.D. III. iii. 70-1

He regards Brachiano's passion for Vittoria as a means to his own advancement, and takes up the trade of pandar readily. His mercenary attitude is reflected in the image:

"Will any Mercer take anothers ware
When once't is tow'sd and sullied?"

W.D. IV. ii. 159-60
He compares the lover's enjoyment to that of a vintner trying
a new line of wine:

"thou shalt go to bed to my lord... with a relish as
curious as a vintner going to taste new wine."

W.D. I. ii. 141-4

Flamineo's attitude to life is summed up in one final image,
which also illustrates his ultimate disillusionment with such
a philosophy:

"This base trade of life appears most vaine,
Since rest breeds rest, where all seeke paine by paine."

W.D. V. vi. 273-4

Flamineo is not the only one to use trade imagery.
Cornelia uses an image which reveals a similarly mercenary
attitude:

"His wealth is sum'd and this is all his store:
This poore men get; and great men get no more.
Now the wares are gone, wee many shut up shop."

W.D. V. iv. 103-5

There is a curious parallel, in tone and structure, between
two observations by Flamineo and Lodovico. Flamineo says:

"No cruell Land-ladie i' th' world,
Which lends forth grotes to broome-men, and takes use for them
Would doe it."

W.D. IV. ii. 167-9

Lodovico's comment is strikingly similar:

"No woman-keeper i' th' world,
Though shee had practis'd seven yeare at the Pesthouse
Could have done't quaintlyer."

W.D. V. iii. 178-80

In his use of this image, as in other respects, Lodovico
reveals himself as the character most akin to Flammeo.

The satire in The White Devil is both general and specific. The general satire is similar to that found in other Jacobean dramas; satiric comment on the social, political and economic ills of the society of the time. The specific satire concerns the themes and characters in the play only. The two types are not readily distinguishable; each is dependent on the other, and the two often coincide. Nevertheless the groups of images which are used for predominantly satiric purposes can be divided into two sections. The 'topical', 'classes and types' and some 'trade' images constitute the bulk of the general satiric imagery, the 'animal', 'insect' and 'sickness' images being mainly reserved for specific satire. Similarly, some general distinction can be made between the characters Webster uses as satirists for the two types. The general satire is fairly widely distributed among the characters, but in the case of the specific satire, the vehicle is far more Flammeo alone.

The Jacobean quality of the themes of courtly reward and punishment and the dependence on great men has already been noted earlier in this chapter. So has the occurrence in the play of the main targets of the Jacobean dramatists; luxury (or incontinence), usury, and the injustice and corruption of the law. These are repeatedly alluded to in the general satiric images and non-metaphoric references. The legal profession is a favourite butt for Webster. He satirizes
lawyers in The Devil's Law Case and Appius and Virginia as well as The White Devil. In all three plays he introduces verbose, bombastic pedants, full of long, obscure legal phrases and bad Latin. In each case he has them thoroughly discomfited and ridiculed. Webster is at his most comic in the lawyer's speeches, as the arraignment scene in The White Devil testifies:

"Most literated Judges, please your Lordships, 
So to connive your Judgments to the view 
Of this debaush't and diversivolent woman 
Who such a blacke concatenation 
Of mischief's hath effected, that to extermpe 
The memory of't, must be the consummation 
Of her and her projections . . . 
Exorbitant sinnen must have exulceration."

W.B. III. ii. 29-35 & 37

Other references to lawyers occur outside the two comic scenes, at IV. i. 62 and V. iii. 113-115 for example. The most interesting reference to the law occurs in Monticelso's character of a whore, when he describes a whore in a succession of metaphors:

"They are those brittle evidences of law Which forfeit all a wretched mans estate 
For leaving out one allible. What are whores? 
They are those flattering belts have all one tume 
At weddings, and at funerals: your ritch whores 
Are only treasuries by extortion fild, 
And emptied by curs'd riot. They are worse, 
Worse then dead bodi'es, which are beg'd at gallows."

W.B. III. ii. 93-100

The intimate association of the ideas of sexual licence, corrupt legal practice, extravagance and death is a wholly typical one in Jacobean drama, as a comparison with Vindice's opening soliloquy in The Revenger's Tragedy will show.

Usury is not specifically included in the "character of
a whore' imagery, though extortion is akin to it. Nevertheless
Webster attacks usurers at several points in the play. Uncom-
plimentary references occur at III. iii. 41-2, IV. i. 60-1, IV.
ii. 167-9 and V. iv. 21-5. Court favouritism is another general
target, and one which is closely linked with the theme of
courtly reward. Flamineo attacks the two evils when he refers
to the Young Lord as:

"A new up-start: one that sweares like a Falckner, and will
lye in the Duke's ear] day by day like a maker of Almanacks;
And yet I knew him since he came to th' court smell worse of
sweat than an under-tennis-court-keeper."

W.D. V. i. 142-5

Upstarts are also the subject of another Flamineo image:

"For if there were gentlemen enough, so many earlie mushrooms,
whose best growth sprang from a dunghill, should not aspire to
gentilitie."

W.D. III. iii. 43-5

Flamineo's advice on how to be a successful upstart involves
a double image, with topical and class references:

"Let others live by begging. Bee thou one of them practive
the art of Wolnor in England to swallow all's given thee; and
yet let one purgation make thee as hungrie againe as fellowes
that worke in a saw-pit."

W.D. III. iii. 45-9

The specific satire is both more frequent and more virulent
than the general. The main groups of images concerned are
those derived from animals, insects and sickness and poison,
subjects in themselves well adapted to satiric purposes. Of
these the animal and insect images are the most persistently
employed. Attention has already been drawn to several animal
images used in the depiction of Brachiano; images which invite
that contrast between illusion and reality which lies at the
basis of satire. But Brachiano is not the only character to
be satirized; almost every character in the play is so attacked.
The whole world of The White Devil is corrupt and debased, and
the widespread imagery of animality and degradation illustrates
this. The majority of the animal and insect images are used
by Flamindo, who turns his nimble tongue on everyone, not
excepting either his family or himself. Thus he refers to his
relationship with Zanche, half in amusement, half in contempt:

"Faith, I made her some such darke promise, and in seeking
to fly from't I run on, like a frightened dog with a bottle at's
taile, that faine would bite it off, and yet dares not looke
behind him."

W.D. V. i. 153-6

Dog images are numerous and almost invariably they are
derogatory. Flamindo chides his sister:

"Come sister, darkenesse hides your blush, women are like
curst dogges, civilitie keepes them tyed all day time, but they
are let loose at midnight, then they do most good or most
mischief."  

W.D. I. ii. 188-90

Others also use dog images. Brachiano tells Monticelso:

"Cowardly dogs barke loudest."

W.D. III. ii. 169

Similarly, Monticelso warns Lodovico:

"I know that thou are fashion'd for all ill,
Like dogges, that once got blood, they'll ever kill."

W.D. IV. iii. 105-6

In Brachiano's death scene, Lodovico and Gasparo use a dog image
as the expression of final contempt:

Lodovico  "And thou shalte die like a poore rogue,
Gasparo     And stinke
Like a dead flie-blowne dog."

W.D. V. iii. 167-8

Similar use is made of other animal images. Francisco refers to Brachiano and Flamino as 'pole-cats' in the "dove-house" image at II. i. 2-5. The lawyer and Flamino see the Cardinal as a ferret catching rabbits (III. i. 21-2). Other images concern toads, hares, camels, mice, foxes. Flamino comments on Vittoria's actions:

"Yong Leverets stand not long; and womens anger
Should like their flight, procure a little sport;
A full crie for a quarter of an hower;
And then bee put to th' dead quat."

W.D. IV. ii. 162-5

The insect images add a note of insignificance to the tones of animality. So Flamino says of Camillo:

"(when he weares white satthin one would take him by his black mussel to be no other creature then a maggot)."

W.D. I. ii. 136-7

The maggot is the subject, too, of a comment on lawyers, later in the play:

"Yon diversivolent Lawyer; marke him, knaves turne informers,
as maggots turne to flies, you may catch gudgeons with either."

W.D. III. iii. 21-3

At times several image themes are linked in one metaphor, as in Flamino's observation:

"I am confident
They have a certaine spice of the disease
For they that sleep with dogs; shall rise with fleas."

W.D. V. i. 161-3
Gasparo's comment on Lodovico and his followers similarly links images:

"Your followers
Have swallowed you like Mummia, and being sicke
With such unnaturall and horrid Phisicke
Vomit you up i'th kennel."

W.D. I. i. 15-18

The bulk of the sickness, medicine and poison images have already been shown in their thematic role. Many of the images so employed carry as well satiric connotations, for Webster is engaged at the same time in presenting and criticizing the theme of adulterous love. It is this fact which creates much of the individual flavour of The White Devil. For Webster is writing both satire and tragedy, and he makes wide use of imagery for both purposes. The majority of the tragic imagery has yet to be discussed, but some idea of Webster's use of it can be gained from his handling of star imagery in the characterization of Vittoria. The star images, and the concept of light and darkness of which they form part, are not used satirically at all. The effect is to give stature to the character of Vittoria, to create a figure of heroic and tragic proportions. Brachiano is not developed so fully, but in the war images as well as in his actions Webster conveys the impression of a vigorous, forceful personality, and one who if he loves wrongly, yet does so in no half-hearted fashion. But while on the one hand Webster shows the lovers as their splendid and courageous selves, worthy of real admiration, on the other he provides a steady stream of satiric comment, modifying the
viewpoint and sifting the unpleasant aspects of the liaison before us. Very often this satiric commentary is being made at moments when Vittoria and Brachiano are at their most heroic and passionate. This can be seen in I. ii., where the lovers' first meeting is accompanied by a series of asides from Flamineo; comments which are obscene and debased, yet generally true.

The same thing happens during the second lovers' meeting, in IV. ii. While Brachiano and Vittoria quarrel and then become reconciled, in a scene which shows the intensity and curious nobility of their love, Flamineo is busy modifying the audience's reactions by insisting on the less savoury aspects of their relationship in images of animality and degradation. Our reaction to the leading figures, indeed to all the characters in the play, is kept ambiguous by constant modification.

Webster is continually altering the satiric-tragic balance through the use of his spokesman, Flamineo. No matter how much Webster alters the balance, however, he never obscures the moral issues. This point has been made earlier in the chapter. Webster, like all satirists, is a moralist. Flamineo's satiric comments are not gratuitous, for through them Webster makes his moral standpoint clear. Words like sin, murder, and adultery occur frequently. Further, he reinforces these plain statements through the use of religious imagery, particularly images concerning hell and devils.

The hell imagery in The White Devil is not as pervasive as in The Duchess of Malfi, but it is reinforced by the large number of non-metaphorical references to hell and devils. As
with the animal images, the greater part of the group is
directed at the lovers and Flamineo. A small group of images,
however, occurring in IV. iii., is concerned with Francisco
and Lodovico. Here the speaker is the newly-elected Paul IV.
The moral condemnation which the images imply is rendered
equivocal, however, because we feel that Monticello may be
dissimulating. In the case of the main body of the images
this is never so. Webster's mouthpiece, Flamineo, may be
amoral, but the moral standpoint he presents remains consistent
and clear.

The series of images and references opens, significantly,
with Flamineo's blunt comment on Vittoria's yew-tree dream.
When she says, "I could not pray," he says:

"No, the devill was in your dreame."

W.B. I. ii. 240

To reinforce this comment there follow two statements by Cornelia,
referring to poison and witchcraft (I. ii. 264-8) and to the
betrayal of Christ by Judas (I. ii. 291-3). The passion of
Vittoria and Brachiano is placed, morally. It is born of the
devil; it is adultery; it is doomed by a mother's curse.

After this opening the hell imagery does not recur signif-
ically until the arraignment scene, in which it becomes part
of the rich complexity of image patterns. At III. ii. 66-70
Vittoria is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah. In the next lines
another religious image occurs:

"I am resolved
were there a second Paradise to loose
This Devell would betray it."

In his denunciation of Vittoria Monticelso adds two further images. Whores, he says are "the true material fire of Hell" (line 89) and comments:

"You know what Whore is; next the devell Adultery Enters the devell, Murder."

Vittoria retorts defiantly:

"Terrify babes, my Lord, with painted devils, I am past such needless palsy -"

In the last devil image of the scene Monticelso recalls to the reader, by implication, the meaning of the play's title, The White Devil:

"If the devill Did ever take good shape behold his picture."

The hell imagery re-emerges strongly in the lovers' quarrel scene, just as do the images of animality and disease. So when Brachiano, angry at Flamincio's defiance, says threateningly, "Do you know mee?", the other replies:

"O my Lord! Methodically, As in this world there are degrees of evils: So in this world there are degrees of devils. You'r a great duke; I your poore secretarie. I doe looke now for a Spanish fig, or an Italian Ballet daily."

Brachiano's angry outbursts are full of violence, and of his characteristic oath - "Death and furies". He becomes obsessed by the idea that Vittoria is a devil who has used witchcraft to
win him. So he says:

"You are reclaimed, are you? Ile give you the bells
And let you flié to the devill."

W.D. IV. 11. 84-5

"Your beautie! O, ten thousand curses on't,
How long have I beheld the devill in christall!
Thou hast lead mee, like an heathen sacrifice,
With musicke, and with fatall yokes of flowers
To my eternall ruine."

W.D. IV. 11. 88-92

"I was bewitched;
For all the world speakes ill of thee."

W.D. IV. 11. 102-3

Vittoria, on the other hand, is very aware of her own wrongdoing,
for she says:

"For your giftes,
I will return them all; and I do wish
That I could make you full executor
To all my sinnes - ."

W.D. IV. 11. 124-7

Later she turns on Flamineo:

"Hence you Pandar.
Flamineo Pandar! Am I the author of your sinne?
Vittoria Yes: Hee's a base theif that a theif lets in."

W.D. IV. 11. 138-40

Such outspoken comments as these, the use of terms like sin,
adulterous, pandar, when linked to the hell imagery, produce
a powerful effect - the lovers are damned.

Damnation comes closer to Brachiano during the early
scenes of Act Five. Images and references to devils increase
in frequency. There are six references to witches and devils
in ninety lines of V. 1. Lodovico, himself no saint,
anticipates that in poisoning Brachiano he will also be
sending him to perdition (V. i. 70-2). In V. iii. the hell
imagery and references reach a climax as Brachiano lies dying.
Brachiano, in agony and half-mad, confuses "Deepe sense with
folle" (line 74) as Lodovico says. Webster takes advantage
of the Elizabethan dramatic convention for dealing with the
ravings of the mad, and mixes Brachiano's lunatic statements
with real insight. Consequently, the Duke's repeated
references to the devil cannot be dismissed as mere raving,
but must seriously be considered as an indication that he is
really being claimed by the devil. Thus at lines 87-90
Brachiano associates himself with the devil, and a little
later has a vision of Satan himself entering the room (lines
97 to 106). This is no melodramatic flight of the imagination
on Webster's part. Elizabethans believed so firmly in the
corporeal existence of devils that such a vision would be taken
seriously. Madness, after all, was demonic possession,
according to the medical theories of the time.

As a climax to Brachiano's damnation come the whispered
torments of Lodovico and Gaspardo. The stylized duo-dialogue
emphasizes the Duke's fate:

**Lodovico**  "Devill Brachiano,
Thou are damn'd.  **Gaspardo**  Perpetually.
Lodovico  A slave condemned, and given up to the gallows
Is thy great Lord and Master.  **Gaspardo**  True: for thou
Art given up the devill."

W.D. V. iii. 150-4

This section of the death-scene constitutes something akin to
a satanic parody on the last rites, with the supposed priests whispering words, not of comfort, but of despair, and with Brachiano's strangulation constituting the climatic act, the despatch of the victim to perdition. One feels, as Brachiano lies dying, that he is already experiencing the pangs of hell. Vittoria's cry, "O me! this place is hell", (line 182) sums up the final impression.

The incidence of, and emphasis upon hell and damnation is less heavy in the Flamineo-Vittoria death scene. Further, almost all the significant references and images occur prior to the entry of Lodovico and Gasparo; that is, during Flamineo's mock-death. The first is Flamineo's statement to Vittoria:

"Thou hast a devill in thee; I will try
If I can scare him from thee;

W.D. V. vi. 19-20

Another reference to the devil occurs at V. vi. 59-64, in the speech Vittoria makes to Flamineo in order to gain time; for that reason it should not be taken too seriously. The third reference, however, is undoubtedly serious. It is the comment Vittoria and Zanche make to the supposedly dying Flamineo:

Vittoria  "Whither - to hell?
Zanche       To most assured damnation.
Vittoria     O thou most cursed devill."

W.D. V. vi. 123-4

The condemnation in these lines is unequivocal, as it is in Vittoria's remark:

"No fitter offering for the infernall furies
Then one in whom they raign'd while hee was living."

W.D. V. vi. 137-8
Shortly after this the devil images and references cease with Flamineo's bitter comment:

"Trust a woman? never, never; Brachiano be my precedent: we lay our souls to pawn to the Devill for a little pleasure, and a woman makes the bill of sale."

W.D. V. vi. 161-3

The absence of hell and devil images and references in the latter part of the final scene is quite deliberate. It arises out of the dual aims Webster evidently had in writing this play; those of tragedy and satire. Usually the two are mutually destructive; either the satiric commentary destroys the illusion of the inherent greatness and nobility of man which tragedy requires, or else the tragic vision dominates, and the satiric element seems flat and pointless. The last scene of The White Devil is Webster's attempt to surmount the problem of reconciling the tragic and satiric elements in the play. He wishes to point out that Vittoria and Flamineo are damned, just as Brachiano was; but he also wishes to depict them dying courageously, tragically. To do so he provides a twin ending. Firstly, he depicts Flamineo's mock-death. It is a grotesque parody of approaching reality, an ironic piece of stagecraft. But it is also a means for Webster to make a statement on the moral issues at stake, quite bluntly, before the real climax and test of character comes. Once this is done, he can proceed with the tragic culmination.

The tragic imagery in the play reaches its climax in
Vittoria's famous cry:

"My soule, like to a ship in a blacke storme, Is driven I know not whither."

W.D. V. vi. 248-9

This is justly one of the most famous lines in the drama of the period. It is not just a brilliant flash, however, as some of Clifford Leech's comments would seem to indicate. The lines depend for their effect as much on the patterns of imagery which they sum up as upon their own intrinsic merits. To see the climax in true perspective, it is necessary to examine the groups of images which lead up to it.

The White Devil is a violent play and one of the principal tasks of the tragic imagery is to create a violent atmosphere surrounding the protagonists. Several groups of images contribute to this effect, particularly those concerning earthquakes, bodily action, cloud and mist, and storm and wind. The three earthquake images provide an element of uncertainty as well as of violence. They also link up with the 'undermining' in the war images and so draw in Monticello's and Francisco's plotting as part cause of the uncertainty. The large group of bodily action images occur almost exclusively from Act Three onwards, paralleling the increasing violence which surrounds the three main figures from that point on. Vittoria's defiance is well expressed:

*for your names
Of Whore and Murdresse they proceed from you,
As if a man should spit against the wind,
The filth returne's in's face.

W.D. III. 11. 152-5
IV. ii. is sufficiently violent in itself to require little violence in the imagery, but the bodily action references recur during the plotting of Francisco and Monticello. There are references to drowning in blood (IV. iii. 60) breaking one's neck (IV. iii. 99-100) and sliding on blood (IV. iii. 121). Besides these there are frequent references to striking and killing. Interestingly, Webster half repeats one of the images from this scene in a later one. Monticello warns Lodovico:

"Take you heed; least the Jude break your necke."

W.D. IV. iii. 99-100

This is echoed in Mortensio's comment:

"These strong court factions that do brooke no checks, in the cariere oft breake the riders neckes."

W.D. V. v. 14-15

A weaker echo is found in two drowning images. Francisco says:

"The hand must act to drowne the passionate tongue."

W.D. IV. iii. 60

Flamineo's image is:

"I will drowne this weapon in her blood."

W.D. V. iv. 143

The images of storm and wind, cloud and mist, are inextricably bound to the last group to be discussed - the seafaring and sea images. Together, operating against the background of darkness, violence and uncertainty, they form a coherent medium for the tragic elements of the play, and
lead directly up to the final "ship in a black storm" image. There can be no doubt that Webster intends us to see the careers of Vittoria and Flamino depicted in the seafaring imagery. That life is a voyage is a commonplace, and so are images on the subject. Nevertheless Webster manages by virtue of his poetic and dramatic gifts to make something extremely powerful out of a near-platitude.

The stormy setting is established in the first scene. Lodovico says:

"The violent thunder is adored by those are past in pieces by it." W.D. I. i. 11-12

Another element is added by Flamino's remark early in the next scene:

"I am prompt As lightning to your service, O my Lord!" W.D. I. ii. 4-5

This is his characteristic. It is he who provides the bitter flashes of satiric comment and insight; the brighter flashes of wit and exuberance. Not for nothing did Webster reverse the names of the historical Marcello and Flamino, and give the latter's name to his loquacious villain.

Camillo is briefly included in the seafaring images, replying to Flamino's question:

"What, travelling to bed to your kind wife? Camillo I assure you brother, no. My voyage lies More northerlie, in a farre colder clime." W.D. I. ii. 49-51
And so it does, for within a few scenes he is dead. As a character he is dismissed by Flamineo’s punning aside:

"(I will put bree in’tayle, set him gadding p presentlie)"

W.D. I. 11. 155

The voyage of the lovers and Flamineo is set in motion by a vision of the happiness to come:

"So perfect shall be thy happiness, that as men at sea think: land and trees and shippes go that way they go, so both heaven and earth shall seeme to go your voyage."

W.D. I. 11. 150-2

It is a subtle piece of irony, for the happiness suggested in the allusion is itself to prove illusory.

At this stage in the play Webster introduces for the first time the tone word "black", which is to occur frequently henceforth. The occurrence, at I. 11. 234 has little significance in itself, nor have most of the references later in the play, but together they add a strong tonal element. They likewise contribute to two aspects of the imagery, the light-darkness contrast used in portraying Vittoria, and the cloud and storm imagery in the tragic section. In this connection the references to blackness, darkness and night in the final scene are particularly important, as will be noted.

Cornelia’s outburst at I. 11. 259 ff is the beginning of the storm of violence which is to continue until the lovers and Flamineo are dead. Webster emphasizes that in Brachiano’s angry retort:
"Uncharitable woman, thy rash tongue
Hath raised a fearfull and prodigious storm"

W.D. I. ii. 298-9

This theme is resumed early in the following scene by Monticello, who points out how wretched Princes are:

"When they do wilfull shipwracke loose good Fame."

W.D. II. i. 41

Then Francisco threatens Brachiano:

"Looke to't, for our anger
Is making thunderbolts."

W.D. II. i. 74-5

Monticello, endeavouring to patch the quarrel, uses Giovanni as the means, and urges Brachiano to

"Leave him a stocke of vertue that may last,
Should fortune rend his sailes, and split his mast."

W.D. II. i. 110-111

Brachiano's interview with Isabella is full of unrestrained violence. He greets her thus:

"I wonder much,
What amorous whirlewind huryed you to Rome?"

W.D. II. i. 151-2

He repudiates her in his usual blustering defiant veins:

"let thy brother rage
Beyond a horred tempest or sea fight,
My vow is fixed."

W.D. II. i. 206-3

After this stormy outburst, the play quietens once more. Only one relevant image occurs in the arraignment scene. Monticello defines whores as:

"Shipwrackes in calmest weather."

W.D. III. ii. 86
Similarly, there is only one significant image in IV. i.

It is Francisco's hypocritical comment:

"Free me, my innocence, from treacherous actes;
I know ther's thunder yonder!"

W.D. IV. i. 24-5

The atmosphere of violence and storm bursts forth again in the lovers' quarrel scene. Typically, Brachiano's immediate reaction to Francisco's letter is a violent outburst:

"Udadeath, Ile cut her unto Atomies
And let th' irregular North-winde sweepe her up
And blow her int' his noothrils."

W.D. IV. ii. 43-5

As Brachiano's anger arouses Vittoria's ire, it is no wonder Flammeo comments:

"Now for two whirlewindes"

W.D. IV. ii. 198

Flammeo's attempts at reconciliation involve an apology for Brachiano's anger:

"The Sea's more rough and raging than calme rivers,
But nor so sweet nor wholesome."

W.D. IV. ii. 181-2

He adds to the metaphor when the reconciliation is effected:

"So - now the tide's turned the vessel's come about."

W.D. IV. ii. 196

The domestic storm is succeeded by a more dangerous one. As Monticelso says, suspecting Lodovico's intentions:

"0 thou'rt a foule blacke cloud, and thou do'ast threat
A violent storme."

W.D. IV. iii. 102-3
In the same scene Lodovico compares himself to the sea:

"Hee soundes my depth thus with a golden plummet."

W.D. IV. iii. 152

V. i. contains only one pertinent image - or presumably pertinent. It is Francisco's satiric remark:

"As shippes seeme verie great upon the river, which shew very little upon the seas: So some men i'th' court seeme Colossusses in a Chamber, who if they came into the field would appear pitiful Pigmies."

W.D. V. i. 116-9

Whether Brachiano is definitely the object of the satire cannot be said. But the statement has a certain aptness.

Certainly, for all his rage and defiance we never see him in the field. It is noteworthy, too, that Webster surrounds his death with no ennobling imagery. Brachiano dies in squalor; Vittoria and Flamino in tragic grandeur.

The sea imagery takes up again in the final scene of the play, during the preparations for Flamino's mock-death. Zanche says:

"How madam! Do you thinke that I'le out-live you? Especially when my best selfe Flamino Goes the same voyage."

W.D. V. vi. 68-90

It is a wholly conventional image - just the basic commonplace. The really memorable culminating images occur only when Flamino and Vittoria have come face-to-face with the final storm of death. Then Vittoria can cry in her extremity:

"My soule, like to a ship in a blacke storme Is driven I know not whither."

W.D. V. vi. 248-9
Flamineo's reply has a characteristic Websterian note:

"Then cast ancor,
Prosperity doth bewitch men seeming cleere,
But seas doe laugh, shew white, when Rockes are neere."

W.D. V. vi. 249-51

It is an image perfectly in keeping, yet which includes the salient fact of Flamineo's experience, the transitory nature of prosperity, the illusory quality of the quest for security.

A materialist to the last, he achieves no more than a passing intuition of greater things:

"While we looke up to heaven wee confound Knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist."

W.B. V. vi. 259-60

So he dies, calling down the last thunder clap of the storm:

"Strike thunder, and strike loude to my farewell."

W.D. V. vi. 276

Act Five Scene Six contains significant last speeches not only by Flamineo, but also by Vittoria, Lodovico, and Giovanni. Each of these speeches provides final summings up of themes running through the play. One of these themes is that of courtly reward and punishment. Webster emphasizes the futility of the search for advancement, and the illusory nature of the quest for security. Lodovico gains nothing, except the satisfaction of revenge. The justice he railed at in the opening scene finally catches up on him. Flamineo likewise gains nothing, for all his Machiavellian clear-sightedsness. He is fully determined to work according to the demands of utility, not ethics. He knows that Marcello will get nowhere as a soldier:
"what hast got
But like the wealth of Captaines, a poore handful?
Which in thy palme thou bear'st, as men hold water
Seeking to gripe it fast, the fraile reward
Steales through thy fingers."

W.D. III. i. 38-45

Flamineo is aware of the need to watch Brachiano carefully; aware of the risks he runs. Yet despite his wariness he obtains nothing from his master:

"Why heere's an end of all my harvest, hee has given me nothing"

W.D. V. iii. 190

The same is true of the security of position he seeks. Briefly, in V. i., he feels secure:

"In all the weary minutes of my life,
Day nere broke up till now. This mariage
Confirms me happy."

W.D. V. i. 1-3

But this security is illusory, and shortly he is in difficulties again.

This poses the question of whether Flamineo is really as clear-sighted as critics make him out to be. For Webster seems here to be making an accurate study of Machiavellian realism, and pointing out that very often the so-called realist is badly blinded by his very clear-sightedness. For all his wariness, Flamineo fails to see the paradox inherent in his search for advancement; the fact that no man is ever secure in such a way of life. Only at the point of death does Flamineo perceive the futility of his earlier actions:

"This busie trade of life appears most vaine,
Since rest breeds rest, where all seeke paine by paine."

W.D. V. vi. 273-4
This is a paradox which is to lie at the heart of Bosola's predicament also.

This seems, perhaps, to indicate a final refutation of Machiavellian realism, and an assertion of the greater stability of good in society. But several factors make such a conclusion difficult to accept. One is that despite the downfall of Lodovico and the deaths of Vittoria, Flamineo and Brachiano, some of the characters escape punishment for their crimes. The arm of justice fails to reach Francisco or Monticello. In the world of *The White Devil* crime seems to pay if the criminals are sufficiently exalted in rank. A second reason why an optimistic view of the play is unacceptable is that there is a lack of positive assertions in the play. Cornelia, Marcello, and Camillo are 'good' characters, but not one of them is capable of bearing any weight of emphasis. Isabella displays the only altruism in the play in her attempts to protect Brachiano, but she, like Camillo is ineffectual. The only honest characters left to bear the weight of a positive assertion at the end of the play are the English Ambassador and the boy-prince Giovanni. Of these the former is only sketchily portrayed, and never does more than offer an occasional normative comment, while the latter seems a deus ex machina, designed to make the orthodox final statement:

"Let guilty men remember their black deeds, Do lean on crutches, made of slender reeds."

This is a wholly inadequate note on which to end such a play.
It is Webster the moralist speaking, not Webster the tragedian. The same is true of Vittoria's last couplet:

"O happy they that never saw the court, Nor ever knew great Man but by report."

W.D. V. vi. 261-2

The absence of positive assertions in The White Devil and the dichotomy of the moralist and tragedian in Webster are closely related. The explanation lies in Webster's Calvinism. The White Devil presents a world which is corrupt; a world in which evil is rampant and aggressive, good helpless and defensive. This is fundamentally a Calvinist view; a belief in "man's helplessness and total depravity". Another Calvinist tenet, the doctrine of predestination and election, also finds a place in the play. Excepting only Tourneur, no dramatist of the period places as heavy an emphasis on hell and damnation as Webster. The third major tenet of Calvinism, however, the positive one, does not occur in this play. There is little or nothing in The White Devil to point to a belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. The emphasis is always on the negative aspects, depravity and damnation. Only briefly in the final scene is there an exception to this. But the sight of Vittoria at her prayers is so startling to the reader, and is so quickly passed over, that no certain meaning can be derived from it, while Flamineo's dying intuition of heaven is only partial and momentary:

"While we looke up to heaven wee confound"

Knowledge with knowledge, O I am in a mist."

W. D. V. vi. 259-60

Yet in Webster the moralist and satirist has no positive assertions to make, Webster the tragedian has. Principally he asserts the triumphant vindication of the human spirit through courage. Vittoria and Flamenco are damned, but they die nobly. So does Zanche; so will Lodovico. Webster recognizes the paradoxical fact that courage and nobility of spirit exist in criminals as well as saints. Nevertheless, the acceptance of this paradox does not wholly obviate the conflict in the play between the tragic and the satiric elements; nor does the double ending, moral then tragic, of V. vi., though it is a masterly way of avoiding the problem. Indeed, the double ending is symptomatic of the dichotomy which remains in Webster's mind throughout the play. He manages to maintain a delicate balance between satire and tragedy, but never succeeds in fusing the two into a unified vision. There is continual tension between the two; a tension which nevertheless contributes much of the play's individual flavour, a uniquely bitter-sweet tang. In his second great play Webster comes nearer to achieving a unified vision. He does so because his satiric pessimism has become less extreme and because the negative elements of the Calvinist outlook on life have been balanced by the addition of the third, positive, element. He does so, too, because his source-material provides him with greater opportunities, in The Duchess of Malfi, for the unification of the moral, the satiric, and the tragic elements.
In *The White Devil* he is hampered by his desire to criticize and admire Vittoria at the same time; in *The Duchess of Malfi* he has a heroine he does not have to criticize.

Lacking, as he does in *The White Devil* a unified vision of the world, Webster is unable to make more than limited tragic assertions. Those his protagonists do make are typically stoic in tone. Lodovico says:

"Ha, are we betraied? Why then lots constantly dye all together, And having finisht this most noble deede, Defy the worst of fate; not feare to bleed."

*W.D. V. vi. 278-81*

Then he adds:

"For my part, The racke, the gallowes, and the torturing wheele Shall bee but sound asleepes to me,"

*W.D. V. vi. 296-8*

Flamineo exhibits a similar stoic defiance:

"Wee cease to greive, cease to be fortune's slaves, Nay cease to dye by dying."

*W.D. V. vi. 252-3*

His attitude is the traditional one of self-sufficiency:

"I doe not looke Who went before, nor who shall follow mee; Noe, at my selfe I will begin and end."

*W.D. V. vi. 256-8*

In *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster is to transcend this limited tragic vision; in *The White Devil* he could make no more positive assertion.
CHAPTER THREE

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi have frequently been referred to as sister tragedies. The title is apt, for no two great plays by one dramatist could be more closely related than are these. Once allowances have been made for differences occasioned by the very different sources of the two, it becomes evident that The Duchess of Malfi is in many ways a continuation of The White Devil. Much of the thematic content is the same, involving studies of courtly reward and punishment and of the lives of great men. The idea of a corrupt and predatory society is also common to both. There are significant parallels, too, in the central situation and in the main characters. Both plays have a heroine as the central figure: a woman of courage and nobility undergoing persecution. Both heroines have lovers of lesser stature than themselves, though Brachiano and Antonio have little in common apart from this. Flaminio is, to some extent, paralleled by Bosola, and there is a similar correspondence between Francisco and Monticelso on the one hand, and Ferdinand and the Cardinal on the other.

There are differences between the two plays, also; for The Duchess of Malfi is a development as well as a continuation of the earlier work. The most immediate difference is one of tone and mood. The Duchess of Malfi is quieter, more restrained.
Even though only two years separated the composition of the two tragedies Webster's outlook seems to have altered considerably in the interval. As F. A. Lucas has noted, the play "seems the work of a dramatist definitely older, in mind as well as in years, than the creator of The White Devil". ¹

The similarities and differences between the two plays extend to the imagery. On the one hand, many groups of images are used in almost identical ways in the two plays, on the other there are important individual variations, such as the use of textile images in The Duchess of Malfi, or the emphasis on jewel images in The White Devil. More general differences are revealed by comparative study of appendices two, three, four, which show the range and subjects of Webster's imagery in the two tragedies and throughout his work. The most obvious difference is the evenness of emphasis on the six dominant groups in The Duchess of Malfi, by comparison with The White Devil. The 'daily life' group dominates both plays, but whereas there is a difference of thirty six images between the second and sixth groups in The White Devil, the difference in The Duchess of Malfi is only seven. Further, the 'arts' and 'imaginative' groups, both very poorly represented in the earlier play, are far more strongly emphasized in The Duchess of Malfi. The patterns of emphasis in fact corroborate the

¹ Works II, p. 18
general impression which the reader gets from the later work; that of a wider and more balanced approach than is evident in The White Devil. Within the eight subject groupings other differences are observable: the complete predominance of tree imagery in the growing things section in the case of The Duchess of Malfi; the decline in importance, in the same play, of dog images, compensated by greater emphasis on wild animal imagery; the increased emphasis upon textile images, and the comparative lack of imagery concerning jewels and trade. Other categories are equally important in both plays, the weather and weather groups, for example. Noteworthy is the clear predominance of sickness and allied images over all others in The Duchess of Malfi, and the importance of religious imagery. Both these groups play major roles in the tragedy.

The opening of The Duchess of Malfi is leisurely compared to that of The White Devil. Lodovico's cry, "Banish't!", is replaced by Dello's affectionate greeting of Antonio:

"You are wel-come to your Country (deere Antonio) You have bin long in France, and you returne A very formall French-man in your habit".

D.M. I. i. 1-3

Yet Webster is not slow in introducing some of the themes he is to concern himself with throughout the play. For in response to Dello's question, "How doe you like the French Court?", Antonio launches into a panegyric of praise for the young French King, Louis XIII, who has just driven from his court "flattering Sico-bants", and "dissolute and infamous"
persons*. The reference is straight away to the same kind of world as that portrayed in The White Devil, a world of dissolute court life, of favouritism. The picture painted is a hopeful one, since the King has just driven such elements out and replaced favourites by a "most provident Council" (i. i. 15). This optimism is quickly nullified, however, by the conversation of Bosola and the Cardinal, in which the theme of courtly reward and punishment emerges as clearly as in the opening scene of The White Devil. Bosola complains to the Cardinal:

"I have done you better service then to be slighted thus: miserable age, where only the reward of doing well is the doing of it!"

D. W. I. i. 32-4

In The White Devil tree imagery was used to depict great men, and related vine and mistletoe images to introduce the idea of parasitism. In The Duchess of Malfi there are signs in Act One that tree images are to be used in a similar way. Bosola speaks of Ferdinand and the Cardinal in these terms:

"He, and his brother, are like plum-trees (that grow crooked over standing-pools) they are rich, and overladen with fruit, but none but Crows, Fies and Catter-Pillers feed on them!"

D. W. I. i. 50-3

This image theme is scarcely pursued, however, as the play progresses. Most of the other tree images (and there are eight altogether) are used freely concerning all the major characters, including the Duchess. The only link between them is the one common to almost every tree image in Webster's plays.
the metaphorical association of trees and persons of rank. The only other tree image, besides the one quoted, which may be linked to the great men – courtly reward theme is Ferdinand's remark to Bosola later in Act One:

"You must give great men leave to take their times: distrust, doubt cause us selions be deceiv'd; You see, the oft shaking of the Cedar-Tree Fastens it more at rootes".

D.M. I. i. 255-8

The explanation for the restriction of the tree images in their thematic use to Act One lies in the way Webster discusses the theme of courtly reward and punishment in The Duchess of Malfi. In The White Devil the quest for advancement and courtly reward is all pervasive. It is Flamineo's main motive in life; it concerns Vittoria, Lodovico and others. In The Duchess of Malfi it is of lesser importance. It is essential in Act One, where the establishment of Bosola as intelligence and agent of Ferdinand is taking place, but after that it becomes of secondary importance. Few of the other characters are involved in the search for advancement and security, almost all of them have a rank or position of some sort. Webster therefore quickly develops the theme of courtly reward and punishment to its full extent in Act One, then leaves it in the background as a motive for all Bosola's future actions, something to be referred to occasionally, but developed no further. Bosola is already at the stage of disillusionment with courtly reward when he uses the plum tree image. He reaches in Act One the conclusion Flamineo is driven to only
in Act Five of *The White Devil*:

"Who would relie upon these miserable dependences, in expectation to be advanc'd tomorrow? what creature ever fed worse, then hoping Tantalus? nor ever died any man more fearfully, then he that hop'd for a pardon."

D.M. I. 1. 56-9

It is Bosola's tragedy however that circumstances force him to rely on courtly reward when he knows only too well that he is likely to be "i'th'end neglected". So he is. For Ferdinand goes mad, and Bosola's pathetic pleas for his reward of a pension are vain. Bosola reminds Ferdinand of his obligation:

"Let me quicken your memory: for I perceive You are falling into ingratitude: I challenge The reward due to my service."

D.M. IV. ii. 341-3

When Ferdinand refuses him any material reward, Bosola pleads:

"Let me know Wherefore I should be thus neglected? sir, I served your tyranny: and rather strove, To satisifie your selfe, then all the world; And though I loathed the evill, yet I lov'd You that did councell it; and rather sought To appeare a true servant, then an honest man."

D.M. IV. ii. 353-9

No wonder that when the Cardinal seeks to use Bosola further, he replies:

"Shall I go sue to fortune any longer? 'Tis the fools Pilgrimage."

D.M. V. ii. 334-5

By contrast with his restricted use of tree imagery for thematic purposes, Webster's use of images to illuminate his
second theme, that of the predatory society, is full and extensive. The two main image groups involved are those concerning birds and animals; the former generally associated with the quarry, the latter with the predator. The association of bird imagery with the persecuted is one which has already occurred occasionally in The White Devil, as when Vittoria says:

"I have seen a black-bird that would sooner fly
To a man's bosoms, then to stay the gripe
Of the fierce Sparrow-hawk".

W.D. V. vi. 185-7

In The Duchess of Malfi Webster uses similar images to convey the defencelessness of the Duchess, Antonio and their children against the persistent malice of her brothers. The series of significant bird images begins in III. ii., when the Duchess faces the raging Ferdinand, after the discovery that she is married. She says:

"I pray sir, heare me: I am married --
Ferdinand So!
Duchess Happily, not to your liking: but for that
Alas: your sheeres doe come untimely now
To clip the birds wings, that's already flowne:"

D.M. III. ii. 95-9

The second bird image occurs early in III. v., as their persecution begins. Antonio, commenting on the flight of most of the Duchess's retainers, says:

"... your wiser burntings
Now they are fledg'd, are gon".

D.M. III. v. 8-9

In the same scene the Duchess compares her family's situation with that of the birds:
"The Birds, that live i'the field
On the wilde benefit of Nature, live
Happier then we; for they may choose their Mates,
And carroll their sweet pleasures to the Spring:"

D.M. III. v. 25-8

When Bosola arrests the Duchess he professes to be helping
her, and uses one of the significant bowling images:

"Is that note worse, that frights the silly birds
Out of the corne; or that which doth allure them
To the nets?"

D.M. III. v. 118-20

He offers her her brothers' pity, and the Duchess replies:

"Pitie!
With such a pitie men preserve alive
Pheasants, and Quailles, when they are not fat enough
To be eaten".

D.M. III. v. 129-132

Other bird images occur in IV. ii. Replying to Cariola's
attempt to comfort her, the Duchess says:

"Thou art a foole,
The Robin red-breast, and the Nightingale,
Never live long in cages".

D.M. IV. ii. 15-17

Later in the scene Bosola uses a bird image which is the
culmination of the sequence. It refers ostensibly to the
position of the soul in the body, but it images the Duchess's
physical imprisonment equally aptly and universalizes it,
linking her individual predicament with the human condition
in general:

"aidst thou ever see a Lark in a cage? such is the
soule in the body: this world is like her little turfe
of grasse, and the Heaven are our heades, like her looking
grasse, onely gives us a miserable knowledge of the small
compasse of our prison".

D.M. IV. ii. 127-31
Only one relevant image occurs after the Duchess's death, a fowling image in v. 1. Delio warns Antonio:

"For though they have sent their letters of safe conduct for your repaire to Millaine, they appeare But Meta, to entrap you".

D.Y. V. i. 3-5

The use of animal images to indicate the predatory nature of the actions of Ferdinand and the Cardinal is nearly as extensive as the use of bird imagery to illustrate the other half of the theme. The majority of the images will not be discussed at this point however, since the wolf imagery involved is more usefully considered in relation to the characterization of Ferdinand. It can be noted, however, that the predator images first occur at approximately the same time as the bird images, late in Act Three. The few images not referring to wolves show a concentration on similar animals of prey. So Antonio tells the Duchess:

"My brothers have dispers'd Blood-hounds abroad; which till I heare are mazell'd, No truce, though hatch'd with nere such politick skill Is safe,"

D.II. III. v. 59-62

A little later, as they separate, Antonio says to Cariola:

"Be a good Mother to your little ones, And save them from the Tiger;"

D.II. III. v. 100-101

Two references to 'fowling', made by the Duchess just before her death, also reinforce the idea of animals of prey. Taken alone, the first with its reference to 'guests' would not convey such an impression:
"Farewell Gerullia, 
In my last will, I have not much to give -
A many hungry guests have fed upon me, 
Thine will be a poor reversion."

D.M. IV. ii. 202-5

When the second image is added, the two assume more suggestive 
proportions, however:

"Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out, 
They then may feed in quiet."

D.M. IV. ii. 243-4

The third theme in the play, and the one which ultimately 
is of greatest importance, is the contrast in imagery and 
references between light and darkness. In The White Devil this 
contrast is made only for the purposes of characterization and 
dramatic effect. In The Duchess of Malfi too, the contrast 
helps to characterize particularly the Duchess and Ferdinand. 
But this is incidental, for the main purpose is thematic; to 
portray the two great conflicting forces at work in the world; 
good and evil. The Duchess and Ferdinand are not the only 
figures involved. Antonio is associated with the Duchess, and 
the Cardinal and (for a time) Bosola with Ferdinand. As with 
the light-darkness contrast in the earlier tragedy, Webster uses 
imagery, direct references and repeated tone words in conjunction 
with the action to depict the conflict. The opening moves by 
Webster are two uses of the tone word 'black', referring to Bosola, 
"black-birds" (I. i. 39) and "blacke male-contents" (I. i. 82). 
When viewed singly such references may seem incidental or trivial. 
Webster, however, is a master of 'atmosphere', and the effects 
he creates often depend for their full success upon his repeated
and unobtrusive use of key words to achieve gradual results.

So it is with his references to black. Almost every one has some relevance. Another black reference occurs a little later in Act One, when Belio refers to Ferdinand as a Spider in a "fowle blacke cob-web" (I. i. 181).

The series of light references begins with Antonio's concluding remarks in praise of the Duchess:

"She stains the time past: lights the time to come".

**D.M. I. i. 214**

More explicit is Antonio's remark to Bosola in II. i.:

"The Divell, that rules i'th'aire, stands in your light"

**D.M. II. i. 98**

As will be discussed later, this comment is one of the most important to an understanding of Bosola. In II. v. a sinister note is struck by Ferdinand's opening remark, with its reference to the digging of a mandrake:

"I have this night dig'd up a man-drake".

**D.M. II. v. 1**

Later in the same scene he threatens his sister the Duchess, and determines to "fix her in a generall eclipse" (II. v. 102). Eclipse is also threatened in his speech to his sister in III ii., where it reveals the way in which Ferdinand inverts values. Addressing the Duchess, he apostrophizes Virtue:

"Vertue, where art thou hid? What hideous thing Is it, that doth eclipse thee?"

**D.M. III. ii. 81-2**

The same inversion of values can be seen in his later remark to the Cardinal about their sister:
"Me thinkes her fault, and beauty
Blended together, show like Lea-prosie -
The whiter, the fowler!"

D.M. III. iii. 74-6

The association of darkness and evil is seen in the next relevant reference, the comment by the Duchess on Bosola's dissimulation:

"Thou do' st blanch mischief -
Wouldst make it white:"

D.M. III. v. 33-4

The light-dark contrast is make strongly through both action and speech in IV. i. For when Ferdinand comes to see his sister he will do so only in darkness. Bosola explains this to the Duchess:

"Your elder brother the Lord Ferdinand
Is come to visite you: and sends you word,
'Cause once he rashly made a solemn vowe
Never to see you more; he comes i' th' night:
And prayes you (gently) neither Torch, nor Taper
Shine in your Chambers"

D.M. IV. 1. 25-30

The servants remove the lights, and Ferdinand enters, revealing once again his perverted sense of values when he says:

"This darknesse suites you well."

D.M. IV. 1. 36

Something closer to reality is revealed, however, when he says:

"It had bin well,
Could you have liv'd thus alwayes: for indeed
You were too much i' th' light:"

D.M. IV. 1. 48-50

The ironical twist of meaning reveals an attitude very similar to that of Iago towards Cassio in 'Othello':
"He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly."

"Othello" V. i. 19-20

Then Ferdinand presents his sister with the dead hand, and
she cries out for lights. As the servants re-enter with them,
Ferdinand rushes out crying:

"Let her have lights enough."

D.M. IV. i. 64

The climactic moment in the conflict between the forces
of light and those of darkness does not come until just after
the apparent defeat of light, with the death of the Duchess.
The apparent defeat is in reality a triumph, however, for when
Ferdinand comes to view the dead body of his sister, he cries
out:

"Cover her face: Mine eyes dazell: she di'd yong."

D.M. IV. ii. 281

Following the moment of dazzling clear-sightedness, Ferdinand
goes insane. And from this point on the play becomes a series
of confused struggles in the dark, as the forces of darkness
destroy themselves. All the later references are to darkness.
Ferdinand says:

"I'll go hunt the Badger, by Owle-light:
'Tis a deed of darkness."

D.M. IV. ii. 360-1

He prowls around at night, a prey to Lycanthropia, and fears
his shadow in the daylight. He enters in darkness in V. iv.
muttering to himself about his sister's death, adding:

"So - it must be done i'the' darke;"

D.M. V. iv. 41
Bosola listening to him in the darkness, knows that "black deeds must be cur'de with death" (V. iv. 45). The confusion grows as Antonio and the servant enter, and the servant leaves to fetch a dark lantern. Throughout this scene, as in the preceding one, the emphasis is upon darkness, confusion and death. Once the Duchess is dead only darkness is left. As Bosola says, as he lies dying:

"Oh this gloomy world,
In what a shadow, or deepe pit of darkness,
Both (womanish, and fearfull) mankind live."

B. H. V. v. 124-6

The darkness and light theme is obviously central to The Duchess of Malfi. As it progresses it incorporates many facets of the imagery besides those discussed above. The characterization of the main characters is closely integrated with the theme, as will be illustrated. So is the theme of predator and prey. So, too, is the tragic dilemma of Bosola. All of these, as I hope to show, combine to form a play with a more unified and coherent view of life than that which Webster was able to present in The White Devil.

Critics have proclaimed the Duchess to be the sister of Vittoria. So, in many ways, she is. She lacks Vittoria's brilliance and magnificence, but none of her courage. It is transmuted from an active to a passive force, from proud defiance to patience and stoic fortitude, but it is none the less great. Other of the Duchess's characteristics make her equally the sister of Isabella, however. There is no gentleness in Vittoria; the tenderness and love the Duchess reveals are in quality akin
to the love of Isabella for her husband and son in *The White Devil*. It is to be expected, therefore, that the imagery Webster uses to depict the gentler, more domestic figure of the Duchess differs somewhat from that used to portray Vittoria. The cold, hard light of the diamond imagery is almost entirely absent from *The Duchess of Malfi*. Only once, early in the play, does the Duchess refer to herself in such terms:

"Diamonds are of most value
They say, that have past through most Jewellers hands."

*D.H. I. i. 330-1*

This and other early flashes of pride which the Duchess reveals leave her as her tribulations grow. The change in her character is very like the change in her jewels, of which she dreams:

"As I thought I wore my Coronet of State,
And on a sudden all the Diamonds
Were changed to Pearles."

*D.H. III. v. 19-21*

The pearl, with its softer beauty, is the fitter image for the Duchess.

The impressions we gain of the Duchess as a tender wife and mother, derived from the brief scenes of domestic happiness, are reinforced by the domestic imagery she uses. During the wooing scene the Duchess says:

"I have seen children oft cute sweete-sweetes thus,
As fearefull to embrase them too sorely."

*D.H. I. i. 534-5*

During the loving banter of III. ii, another domestic image occurs:
"I entred you into my heart
Before you would vouchsafe to call for the keyes".

During her suffering it is a homely image she uses to
describe her situation:

"I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,
And comar'd my selfe to't: noght made me ere
Go right, but Heavens scourge-sticke."

The same kind of images are also used by Antonio. Indeed
the note of happy domesticity is used to characterize the
two of them together. Antonio says:

"he's a foole
That (being a-cold) would thrust his hands i' th' fire.
To warme them."

He refers again to the fireside and the fire in another image
in Act Three:

"Tis ev'n like him, that in a winter night
Takes a long slumber, or a dying fire;
As loth to part from't: yet parts thence as cold
As when he first sat downe."

Yet another domestic situation is seen in Antonio's wry
comment:

"Say a man never marry, nor have children,
What takes that from him? Onely the bare name
Of being a father or the weake delight
To see the little wanton ride a cocke-horse
Upon a painted stickes, or heare him chatter
Like a taught Starling."

The religious imagery which Webster uses to characterize
the Duchess is closely associated with the thematic contrast
between light and darkness, and is itself contrasted with the hell imagery which plays so strong a part in the characterization of Ferdinand. Emphasis is first laid on the purity and virtue of the Duchess in Antonio's panegyric:

"Whilst she speaks,
She throws upon a man so sweet a look,
That it were able to raise one to a Galliard
That lay in a dead palest; and to doate
On that sweete countenance; but in that looke,
There speaketh so divine a continence,
As cuts oft all lascivious, and vaine hope.
Her dayes are practis'd in such noble vertue,
That sure her nights (nay more her very sleepes)
Are more in Heaven, then other Ladies Shrifts."

The images reinforce Antonio's portrait. Antonio vows to her:

"I will remain the constant Sanctuary
Of your Good name."

In III. i. the Duchess asks Ferdinand:

"Why should onely I,
Of all the other Princes of the World
Be cas'd up, like a holy Relique?"

Later in the same scene the Duchess receives an apparently sincere tribute from Bosola:

"Fortunate lady,
For you have made your private nuptiall bed
The humble, and faire Seminary of peace."

Antonio is also included in the image which the Duchess uses at their separation:
"Your kisse is colder
Then that I have seene an holy Anchorite
Give to a dead man's skull."

D.M. III. v. 103-5

The impression which the religious images leave of virtue and peace is in strong contrast with the violence and disorder of the personality of Ferdinand. Antonio describes him as being of "a most perverse, and turbulent Nature", which fits him admirably. He is, in fact, a perfect example of the choleric temperament, just as his brother the Cardinal is of the phlegmatic; and it seems more than likely that in creating the two brothers Webster was working along these lines, which provided him with a ready-made contrast with great dramatic possibilities. The turbulence of Ferdinand's nature is well brought out in a series of storm and wind images. The raging violence of his reaction to her secret marriage is presaged in the Duchess's say reply to Antonio's note of foreboding:

"time will easily scatter the tempest."

D.M. I. i. 539-40

The tempest is seen first in II. v. when Ferdinand so completely loses control of himself that the Cardinal remonstrates:

"Why do you make your selfe
So wild a Tempest?"

D.M. II. v. 23-4

Ferdinand reacts by immediately imagining he is such a storm:
"Would I could be one, 
That I might toss her palace 'bout her eares, 
Roote up her goodly forrests, blast her meades 
And lay her generall territory as wast, 
As she hath done her honors."

D.M. II. v. 25-9

The Cardinal has to reprove him again:

"How idlely shewes this rage! - which carries you, 
As men convai'd by witches, through the ayre, 
On violent whirle-windes -"

D.M. II. v. 65-7

In the following scene Delio and Antonio, discussing 
Ferdinand's behavior, are alarmed at his unnatural calm 
and restraint. As Antonio says:

"He is so-quiet, that he seems to sleepe 
The tempest out."

D.M. III. i. 24-5

Ferdinand's next outburst is during his intrusion into 
the Duchess's bedroom, after which he rushes out, and takes 
horse for Rome. As Bosola describes it:

"The Duke your brother is ta'ne up in a whirlwind - 
Hath took horse, and's rid post to Rome."

D.M. III. ii. 194-5

Storm and violence are not only portrayed in imagery related 
to Ferdinand. There are references to several actual 
storms during the play, which provide an effective tonal 
background. II. iii. takes place on a cold and windy 
night as the dialogue of Antonio and Bosola indicates 
(II. iii. 22-4). Another storm is mentioned in the 
conversation between the courtiers in V. iv., in such a way
as to hint at a direct relationship between Ferdinand's violence and that of the elements.

Grisolen: "Twas a foule storme tonight.
Roderigo: The Lord Ferdinand's chamber shooke like an Ozier.
Malatesta: Twas nothing but pure kindnessse in the Divell,
To rocke his owne child."

D.M. V. iv. 23-6

The thematic use of the wolf and other predator images has already been discussed briefly. The series of wolf images and references was not examined in detail, however, since these play a major part in the characterization of Ferdinand, and are most usefully discussed in relation to him. Indeed, certain aspects of his later madness only become fully meaningful when discussed in conjunction with the wolf images. The first reference by Ferdinand to wolves is in III. ii., when he tells the Duchess:

"The howling of a Wolfe
Is musicke to thee..."

D.M. III. ii. 105-6

The next also involves the Duchess, whom Ferdinand asks:

"where are your Cubbes?
Duchess: Whom?
Ferdinand: Call them your children."

D.M. IV. i. 40-1

Ferdinand displays the same attitude towards her children when he is shown their bodies:

"The death of young Wolves, is never to be pittied."

D.M. IV. ii. 274-275

Shortly after this Ferdinand, horrified by what he has done, begins to go mad. His utterances become increasingly wild
and he displays the first signs of what is to become lycanthropia. He actually prefigures his future actions when he answers Bosola's question:

"Who shall dare
To reveal this?
Ferdinand 0 I'll tell thee:
The wolf's shall find her Grave, and scrape it up;
Not to devour the corpse, but to discover
The horrid murder."

D. V. IV. ii. 330-4

When we next hear of Ferdinand, in V. ii., he is wholly mad.

His affliction is explained to Pescara by the doctor:

Pescara "Pray-thee, what's his disease?
Doctor A very pestilent disease (my Lord)
They call Lycanthropia.
Pescara What's that?
I need a dictionary to't.
Doctor I'll tell you:
In those that are possess'd with't there are flowers
Such melancholy humour, they imagine
Themselves to be transformed into wolves,
Steale forth to Church-yards in the dead of night,
And dig dead bodies up; as two nights since
One met the Duke, 'bout midnight in a lane
Behind St Markes Church, with the leg of a man
Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully:
Said he was a wolf; onely the difference
Was, a wolf's skinne was hairy on the out-side,
His on the In-side: made them take their swords,
Rip up his flesh, and trie;"

D. V. V. ii. 5-20

Ferdinand remains deranged until he dies. Only for a brief moment or two does he seem to regain his sanity at the point of death.

Fire images and references play a major part in the characterization of Ferdinand. The sequence of images opens with his seemingly innocuous remark to the courtiers in Act One:
"Why do you laugh? We thinkes you that are courtiers should be my touch-wood, take fire, when I take fire; that is, laugh when I laugh, were the subject never so wity."

D.M. I. i. 124-6

The succeeding fire images make it clear, however, that Ferdinand is obsessed by the subject. His wild outbursts in II. v. contain several references to fire:

"Apply desperate physicke — We must not now use Balseamum, but fire, The smarting cupping-glasse, for that's the means To purge infected blood, (such blood as hers;)

D.M. II. v. 33-6

A little later the fire is in himself:

"Coe to (Mistress) 'Tis not your whores milke, that shall quench my wild-fire, But your Whore's blood."

D.M. II. v. 62-4

Ferdinand's obsessed mind devises a punishment for his sister and her lover:

"I would have their bodies Burn't in a coale-it, with the vantage stopp'd, That their ours'd smoke might not ascend to Heaven: Or dippe the sheetes they lie in, in pitch or sulphure, Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;"

D.M. II. v. 37-91

In the next scene Ferdinand tells Bosola:

"Her guilt treads on Not burning cultures;"

D.M. III. i. 68-9

In his violent intrusion into the Duchess's bedroom he describes her heart as a fire:

"Thine? Thy heart? That should I nam't, unlesse a hollow bullet Fill'd with unquenchable wild-fire?"

D.M. III. ii. 135-7
The next 'fire' reference is by Pescara, one of the characters in the play who can be safely taken as providing a norm. Talking with the other courtiers, Pescara says:

"Markes Prince Ferdinand
A very salamander lives in's eye,
To mocke the eager violence of fire."

D.M. III. iii. 58-60

There is a suggestion of flame, too, in the courtiers’ comment:

Pescara "The Lord Ferdinand laughs.
Dello Like a deadly Cannon
That lightens ere it smokes."

D.M. III.iii. 65-7

The last fire image Ferdinand uses again reveals the fire raging within himself:

"Antonio
Lurkes about Villaine, then shalt shortly thither,
To feede a fire, as great as my revenge,
Which ne’er will slacke, till it have spent his fuel."

D.M. IV. i. 166-9

Pescara’s 'salamander' image, quoted a little earlier leads on to a relatively minor, but interesting, piece of characterization by Webster; that is, emphasis on Ferdinand’s eyes. The first relevant reference is Ferdinand’s reply to the Duchess’s question:

"Will you see my Husband? Ferdinand Yes, if I could change
Eyes with a Basilisque;"

D.M. III. ii. 100-102

The next remark, Pescara’s, also refers to a fabulous creature, the salamander and links the fire imagery to the eye references. It is worth quoting:
"Marke Prince Ferdinand,
A very Salamander lives in's eye,
To mocke the eager violence of fire."

D. H. III. iii. 58-60

It is as if Webster is using the medieval idea of the eye as the body's window, through which the soul may be viewed. When he sees the dead children Ferdinand's basilisk eyes are unmoved, but when he views the duchess they are dazzled, and he turns away. The fires within him are momentarily doused, and he sees clearly: too clearly; for he goes mad. In the scene with the doctor a further eye reference occurs. Ferdinand tells the doctor:

"I have crucell sore eyes."

D. H. V. ii. 62

Whether this is a following up of the fire imagery or the dazzling, it is highly effective and suggestive. It is one further part of the retributive process which is under way, and of which his madness is part. The fire is now self-consuming.

It is instructive to notice, as Miss Inga-Stina Skeblad has pointed out, how cleverly Webster contrasts Ferdinand with his brother, the Cardinal. There is contrast in their actions, cold scheming and frenzied activity. There is contrast, too, in the in the lack of image themes in the Cardinal's utterances. It suggests, as Miss Skeblad points out, that the Cardinal weighs

and chooses his phrases, whereas Ferdinand's, pouring out,
express his turbulent personality. There is also a third
contrast, which lies in the kind of images the two use. To
quote Miss Lkeblad:

"The Cardinal employs carefully constructed comparisons;
he likes to speak through the simile. The thing he means
and the thing he compares it with remain quite distinct in
his mind and ours. In Ferdinand's language, on the other
hand, metaphors are uppermost. Not only that, but the two
"halves" in each of his metaphors tend to coalesce. The
thing and what it is compared with not only stand initially
much closer to each other, but they become one, or inter-
changeable, or confused. That way madness lies, and Ferdinand
goes mad in the end." 3

The Cardinal's images have a touch of precision about them, a
logical completeness. This is as much true of his rare
metaphors as his similes. So he tells Julia:

"You may thank me, (Lady)
I have taken you oft your melancholly search,
Bear you upon my fist, and shew'd you peace,
And let you flie at it!"

D.M. II. iv. 38-41

Ferdinand's images are not only violent and often blurred,
they also tend to extend themselves by thought association.
At the same time Ferdinand enters wholly into the extending
metaphors and identifies himself with his image. II. v.
illustrates all this clearly; the way he advances from image
to image by association; the way, too, he enters an image, as
when he seizes on the Cardinal's mention of "Tempest" (line 24)
and at once conceives of himself as one (lines 25-9).

Another significant distinction between Ferdinand and his

3 Ibid. p. 130
brother which is made through language and imagery is of
added interest since it bears on the problem of Webster's
motivation of Ferdinand. This is the way the two men use
and react to the term 'blood', when it concerns their sister.
II. v. portrays the differentiation admirably. 'Blood', for
the Cardinal, is an abstract term for lineage. Insofar as he
objects to his sister's re-marriage it is because she is dis-
honouring the family by marrying beneath her. The Cardinal
says:

"Shall our blood
(The royall blood of Arragon, and Castile)
Be thus attainted?"

Ferdinand, however, seizes upon the Cardinal's reference to
blood, and interprets it in its literal sense. His mind
leaps ahead from image to image with characteristic violence:

"Apply decentre physicke -
We must not now use Balsama, but fire,
The assterting cupping glasse, for that's the meane
To purge infected blood (such blood as hers)"

A few lines later he is still thinking literally of his sister's
blood:

"Go to (Kistris)
'Tis not your whores milke, that shall quench my wild-fire,
But your whores blood."

This distinction between the brothers' differing reactions to
'blood' is interesting because of its possible relationship to
the incestuous love theory which some critics advance as
Ferdinand's motive for persecuting his sister. The idea that
Ferdinand may have been unconsciously giving vent to jealousy
born of an incestuous passion in his tormenting of the
Duchess does provide a sound motivating factor for his actions.
Evidence for it can be adduced from the play. The obsession
with the term 'blood' in its literal sense could be inter-
preted thus. So could Ferdinand's frenzied outbursts when
he imagines his sister and her unknown lover together. He
says to the Cardinal:

"He thinkes I see her laughing,
Excellent Hyenna - talke to me somewhat, quickly,
Or my imagination will carry me
To see her in the shamefull act of sinne."

_D.M. II. v. 52-5_

The violent and obsessively sexual punishment he imagines for
the lovers also reveals how his mind dwells on the physical
relationship of the Duchess and Antonio:

"I would have their bodies
Burn't in a coale-pit, with the vantage stop'd,
That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to Heaven:
Or dippe the sheetes they lie in, in pitch or sulphure,
Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;

_D.M. II. v. 87-91_

Ferdinand reveals a similar obsession with his sister's body
elsewhere in the play. In IV. i. he discusses with Bosola
his sister's reaction to imprisonment. The tone of his
utterances is calm and reasoned until Bosola says:

"this restraint
(Like English Mastiffes, that grow fierce with tying)
Makes her too passionately apprehend
Those pleasures she's kept from.

_D.M. IV. i. 14-17_

At the mention of 'passionately' and 'pleasures' Ferdinand
at once becomes violent and shouts as he rushes out:

"Curse upon her! I will no longer study in the book of another's heart:"

D. M. IV. i. 18-20

In the same scene a similar thing happens again. Bosola protests at his master's cruelty, and once again a casual mention of some physical aspect concerning the duchess (here her 'delicate skinne') sets Ferdinand off.

Bosola 'Faith, end here:
And go no farther in your cruelty -
Send her a penitentiall garment, to put on,
Next to her delicate skinne, and furnish her
With beades, and prayer bookes.
Ferdinand Damn her, that body of hers,
While that my blood ran pure in't, was more worth
Then that which thou wouldst comfort, (call'd a soule) -"

D. M. IV. i. 141-8

There is a marked similarity between these outbursts by Ferdinand, and those of Othello when Iago is insinuating that Desdemona and Cassio have committed adultery in III. iii. Othello cries, very like Ferdinand:

"Damn her: lewd minx! O, damn her!

Othello III. iii. 477

He refers, too, in a similarly obsessive tone to "her sweet body" (line 346). Critics have noted, too, how when Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the duchess against re-marrying Ferdinand says:

"You are my sister,
This was my father's poyniard: do you see,
I'll be loth to see't looke rustie, 'cause 'twas his:
And women like that part, which (like the Lamprey)
Hath never a bone in't.
The obscene implication is obvious, and there seems to be also a strong note of phallic symbolism about the poyniard, which it must be remembered Ferdinand presents to her when he confronts her in Act III. ii. Finally, Ferdinand's remarks to Bosola in IV. ii, should be noted:

"She, and I were Twinnes; And should I die this instant, I had liv'd Her Time to a Mynute."

"I bad thee, when I was distracted of my wits, Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast don't."

The traditional idea of the close affinities existing between twins may have some bearing on Ferdinand's actions. This sort of argument can, of course, be carried too far. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Webster either had an idea of so motivating Ferdinand or else that he almost unconsciously developed it. For as T.S. Eliot has said:

"If a a play is any good, it ought to have a great deal in it that its author doesn't completely understand."

Even if such incestuous feelings are admitted as implicit in Ferdinand's conduct towards his sister, it is evident that

4 T.S. Eliot. His reported reply to questions put to him at the premiere of his play, The Elder Statesman
Webster is more explicitly concerned with the more fundamental and far-reaching conflict between the forces of light and darkness, in which Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the agents of the devil, are working to destroy good (in the person of the Duchess) through their half-unwilling tool Bosola. This view of Ferdinand is borne out by the prevalence of hellish and demonic imagery in association with him. This group of images is, in fact, the most important to a discussion of his character. The images do not refer only to Ferdinand; many refer to the Cardinal as well, and some to the latter alone. It will be necessary, therefore, to consider this aspect of the characterization of the Cardinal at the same time as that of Ferdinand.

The first devil reference in the play is to the Cardinal. Bosola mutters as the Cardinal leaves:

"Are you gone? Some fellows (they say) are possessed with the devil, but this great fellow, were able to possess the greatest devil, and make him worse."

_D.M. I. i. 45-8_

A malcontent's bitter comment is not, perhaps, to be taken wholly uncritically. But Bosola's comment is reinforced by the remarks Antonio makes about the brothers, and by these lines about the Cardinal particularly.

"Last: for his brother, there, (the Cardinal) They that doe flatter him most, say Oracles Hang at his lips: and merely I believe them: For the Divell speakes in them."

_D.M. I. i. 187-90_

A little later, during Bosola's interview with Ferdinand there is a flurry of hell and devil images and references. Bosola
tells Ferdinand that the latter is trying to make him "a very quaint invisible divell, in flesh: an intelligencer," and at first rejects the offered bribe, saying:

"Take your divels, which Hell calls Angels: these curst pilts would make you a corrupter, me an ingenuous traitor, and should I take these, they'd take me to Hell."

When finally induced to accept a post as bribe, Bosola comments:

"Thus the divell candies all sinnes o'er: and what Heaven terms wild, that names he complemantall."

And, he adds, turning the cynicism upon himself,

"Sometimes the divell doth preach."

The relationship of Bosola and Ferdinand is clearly stated in the next relevant image. Antonio says to Bosola:

"You would looke up to Heaven, but I thinke the divell, that rules i'th'aire, stanres in your light."

Images of, and references to witches and witchcraft are peculiar to Ferdinand alone, and the first of these occurs when he warns the Duchess against a secret marriage:

"For they whose faces doe helye their heats, are witches, e're they arrive at twenty yeeres, is, and give the divell sucke."

Ferdinand's anger in II. v. is compared by the Cardinal to a "violent whirle-wind" carrying a man through the air "as
men convaid'd by witches" (II. v. 66). A satanic element is present during many of his outbursts, and particularly during the latter part of II. v., when Ferdinand imagines torments for the lovers which include fire and the exclusion of their smoke from Heaven (II. v. 87-91). Witchcraft again occurs in III. i. when Ferdinand, talking about the mountebanks who pretend to possess love potions, mentions witches. At once his mind jumps to the subject of the Duchess, and he cries out:

"The witch-craft lies in her rancke blood:"

D.M. III. i. 94

In the bedroom scene, too, Ferdinand again reveals his obsession with witchcraft. — For when the Duchess asks why she should not marry, since she is still young and has "a little beautie", Ferdinand replies:

"Do you have some Virgins
That are witches."

D.M. III. ii. 164-5

The insistent comparison of Ferdinand with the Devil is seen in Bosola's bitter comment on his own position as Ferdinand's agent:

"A Polititian is the divells quilted unvell,
He fashions all sinnes on him, and the blowes are never heard -"

D.M. III. ii. 371-3

Again, in III. v. the Duchess rejects Ferdinand's casuistic note, telling Bosola:

"The Divell is not cunning enough
To circumvent us in Ringes."

D.M. III. v. 49-50
Witchcraft recurs again early in Act Four. When Ferdinand leaves his sister the dead hand she exclaims:

"What witch-craft doth he practise, that he hath left A dead-man's hand here?"

D.M. IV. i. 65-6

Then the wax figures are shown her and she says:

"There is not betwene heaven, and earth one wish I stay for after this: it wastes me more, Then were't my picture, fashion'd out of wax, Stucke with a magician needle, and then buried In some fowle dung-hill!"

D.M. IV. i. 72-6

If further proof is wanted to show that Ferdinand is acting as the agent of the Devil in tormenting the Duchess it can be found in IV. i. when Bosola asks Ferdinand why he torments his sister so. Ferdinand replies:

"To bring her to despaire."

D.M. IV. i. 140

That this is to be interpreted in its religious sense can be seen from Bosola's earlier reproof to the Duchess:

"O fye: despaire? remember You are a Christian."

D.M. IV. i. 87-8

To bring man to despair was regarded as the Devil's chief aim, since in despairing of God's mercy, man lost all hope of salvation. Such a significance can be seen in A New Way to Pay Old Debts, in which Massinger evidently sees Sir Giles Overreach as an incarnation of the Devil, Overreach bids Harrall "Do anything to work him [Wellborn] to despair", (II. i.). When Harrall attempts to do this, Wellborn comments:
"Twill not do, dear tempter,
With all the rhetoric the fiend hath taught you,
I am as far as thou art from despair".

"The Way" II. 1.

Ferdinand's purpose is the same as Overreach's.

After the Duchess is strangled, Ferdinand has his moments
of horrified lucidity. In his revulsion at what he has done
he says:

"Where shalt thou find this judgement register'd
Unless in hell?"

D.M. IV. ii. 326-7

Ferdinand is appalled that Bosola could commit such an act:

"O horror!
That not the fear of him, which bindes the divels
Can prescribe man obedience."

D.M. IV. ii. 340-2

Ferdinand's shocked horror turns to madness. This is doubly
significant not only because it is that form of madness known
as Lycanthropia but also because madness signified demonic
possession. The last stage in Ferdinand's career as the agent
of the devil is begun. Like most Elizabethan dramatists
Webster gives his madmen sense to speak as well as babblings,
and like Brachiano in The White Devil Ferdinand mentions hell
frequently. He feels he is certain he is to go there, for he
says:

"When I go to hell, I meane to carry a bribe!"

D.M. V. ii. 40-1

At this part in the play Webster shifts the emphasis to
the Cardinal. Bosola is amazed at how well the Cardinal controls himself in the dangerous situation, and remarks:

"how this man
Beares up in blood! - seems fearless! - why, 'tis well;
Securitie some men call the Suburbs of Hell,
Onely a dead wall betwenee"

\[ D.M. V. ii. 370-3 \]

The Cardinal, however, is inwardly disturbed:

"O, my Conscience!
I would pray now: but the Divell takes away my heart
For having any confidence in Praier."

\[ D.M. V. iv. 30-32 \]

The same trouble is still haunting him in the last scene:

"I am puzzell'd in a question about hell:
He saies, in hell, there's one materiall fire,
And yet it shall not burne all men alike.
Lay him by: How tedious is a guilty conscience!
When I looke into the Fish-ponds, in my Garden,
He thinks I see a thing, arm'd with a Wake
That seems to strike at me:"

\[ D.M. V. v. 1-7 \]

Like his brother, the Cardinal is being claimed by the devil. It is fitting that, in his madness, Ferdinand should take his brother for the devil, and slay him.

F.A. Lucas has written of Ferdinand in his introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi*:

"As for Duke Ferdinand, he is mainly what the plot requires him to be, an angry tyrant. Only a sudden flash here and there quickens the spectators' imagination to try to fathom him more deeply."

This is a wholly inadequate view of Ferdinand, as the complex

5 *Works II.* p. 23
of imagery used to characterize him shows. To regard him
simply as a creation controlled by the exigencies of the plot
is to miss the point. Through the character of Ferdinand
Webster is working out the most important of his themes,
the struggle between good and evil on earth, and unless the
deeper motive behind the Duke's actions is understood,
Ferdinand becomes in Shakespeare's phrase:

"full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

"Macbeth" V. v. 27-8

The same is true of Bosola. He is not only a mal-
content villain and satiric commentator, he is also a
human being caught up in the struggle between the two
opposing forces. He is forced by circumstances to lead
a life of dishonesty, like Flammeo, but because at heart
he recognizes moral precepts, he has to suppress part of
himself to commit the evils he is ordered to carry out.
As a result he is a saddened cynic, where Flammeo is gay.
His response to life is cold, where Flammeo's was warm
if amoral. Bosola is, in fact, the third psychological
type which Webster portrays; the melancholic man. There
are references to this predominant characteristic throughout
the play. Early in the first scene, for instance, Antonio
says of him:

"Tis great pity
He should be thus neglected - I have heard
He's very valiant: This foul melancholly
Will poison all his good ease,"

D.M. 1. 1. 75-8
Ferdinand's opinion is the same. He tells Bosola:

"Be your selfe:
Keepe your old garbe of melancholy:"

D.ii. i. 1. 302-3

At the end of the play his mood is still melancholic, only now mingled with remorse. Bosola says:

"Still me thinkes the Butchesse
Haunts me: there there! ... 'tis nothing but my melancholy"

D.ii. V. ii. 380-1

Just as the cholera of Ferdinand is imaged in fire, so the melancholy of Bosola is imaged in cold and ice. There is a relatively small but highly significant number of images and references to cold, freezing, ice, and (when appropriate) melting. The series has a partial explanation in the first cold image in the play. Bosola says:

"Slighted thus? I will thrive some way: blacke-birds
fatten best in hard weather:"

D.ii. I. 1. 39-40

Bosola is forced into evil by hard times. To commit the deeds he is ordered to do, he has to chill all his natural human feelings, to freeze any sympathy for the Duchess. Throughout, Bosola is a man with a half-frozen heart. The cold images and references first occur - apart from the introductory image - in II. iii. Bosola enters, and explains his need to discover what is going on, using the characteristic phrase, "My intelligence will freize else:" (II. iii. 6). It is an expression he uses again in a similar context later in the play, saying:

"Well, I'll not freeze i'th' businesse."

D.ii. V. ii. 147
In II.iii. there are two further references to cold. Bosola says to Antonio:

"He thinkes 'tis very cold, and yet you sweat."

*D. M. II. iii.* 25

Then a few lines further on Antonio uses the old fable of the ungrateful snake to refer to Bosola's ingratitude to the woman who has given him a position in her household. Unfortunately the text is corrupt at this point, and Bosola's reply is missing, but Antonio's comment is clear enough:

"You are an impudent snake indeed (sir) - Are you scarce warme and doe you shew your sting?"

*D. M. II. iii.* 52-3

When the next cold images occur, however, the crucial moment has come for Bosola. The Duchess's nobility in the face of death reawakens the human feelings he had earlier frozen into silence. He thinks back over his actions:

"While with vaine hopes, our faculties we tyre, We seeme to sweate in yce, and freeze in fire;"

*D. M. IV. ii.* 363-4

When the Duchess stirs he feels renewed hope, and the last ice melts within him:

"She's warme, she breathes: Upon they pale lips I will melt my heart To store them with fresh colour."

*D. M. IV. ii.* 369-71

She dies, and Bosola is moved to tears:

"These teares, I am very certaine, never grew In my Mothers Milke. My estate is suncke below The degree of feares: where were these penitent fountaines, While she was living? Oh, they were frozen up."

*D. M. IV. ii.* 389-94
We could ask for no more explicit comment on the sequence of cold images.

Like his counterpart Flamineo, in *The White Devil*, Bosola acts as the chief satiric commentator in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Many of his statements have a choric ring about them. Through him, as through Flamineo, Webster speaks. The author's tone has changed, however. His spokesman in *The Duchess of Malfi* is a sadder being than the exuberant Flamineo. Throughout, Bosola's utterances tend to sound colder, harsher, more bitter. The satirist in *The Duchess* is not a gay, uncomplicated amoralist, but a complex suffering human figure. One feels in his remarks a greater personal involvement than is found in Flamineo's. It is for this reason that Bosola's cynicism is the more convincing. It is so obviously the fruit of bitter experience.

While the satire may be harsher and more bitter in *The Duchess of Malfi* it is, however, less prevalent. This can be judged from the fact that Bosola uses only a little over two-thirds of the number of images used by Flamineo. The implication is that less imagery is being used for satiric purposes in *The Duchess of Malfi*. An examination of the play bears this out. In *The White Devil* Webster is holding satire and tragedy in a somewhat precarious balance. In *The Duchess of Malfi* the weight is firmly in favour of tragedy; satire is kept in a subsidiary role. The decrease in the satiric element is not a uniform one. The general satire on aspects
of Jacobean society is, for the most part, as strong as in *The White Devil*. The big decrease is in the satire on matters and individuals peculiar to the play. Because of this marked but unequal decrease in the satiric element, combined with the correlative fact that the satire is more bitter, the distinctions made in the previous chapter as to the use of the various image groups are no longer very meaningful. In *The White Devil*, the types of image which were used satirically could be comfortably divided into two groups; images concerning trade, classes and types, and topicalities being used mainly for general satiric purposes, and animal, insect and sickness images being reserved for more specific satiric attacks. In *The Duchess of Malfi* this distinction is thoroughly blurred. Many animal and sickness images are used for general satire, for instance. For this reason the discussion of the satiric use of imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi* will cut across the classified groups of images, even though the distinction between general and specific satire is maintained.

The targets of the general satiric criticism are, in the main, the same as those in *The White Devil*. There is the same emphasis on the less desirable aspects of Jacobean society and of life at James I's court; on favouritism, legal corruption, whoredom and usury. The criticism of courtly life, and of favouritism in particular, begins in Antonio's 'French court' speech (I. i. 6-23). He praises the French King for cleansing his court of undesirable elements and adds:
"... a Princes court
Is like a common Mountaine, whence should flow
Pure silver-droppes in generall: But if't chance
Some curs'd example poys'n't neere the head,
'Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.'"

Bosola's criticism, which follows shortly after, is more bitter,
He uses images of depravity - insect, animal and disease -
Frequently, as when he describes the sycophantic followers of
the Aragonian brothers:

"Could I be one of their flattering Panders, I would
hang on their eares like a horse leach, till I were full,
and then droppe off;"

Later he refers to the Duchess's officers as "lyce" (III. ii. 275)
and describes the lengths such men would go to to curry favour
with Antonio, when he was treasurer and grand master:

"those are Rogues; that in's prosperitie,
But to have waited on his fortune, could have wish'd
His durtty Stirrop rivetted through their noses;
And followed after's rule, like a Beare in a Ring."

Bosola describes court life:

"places in the Court, are but like beds in the hospitall,
where this man's head lies at that mans foote, and so lower,
and lower."

Other images are no less mordant. Talking of the disgrace
of Antonio he says to the Duchess:

"Will you make your selfe a mercinary herald,
rather to examine mens pedigrees, then vertues?"

There is no lawyer in The Duchess of Malfi to be the butt
of satiric criticism, as there is in The White Devil and
The Devil's Law-Case. Nevertheless the legal profession
and the flagrant abuses of the law perpetrated by lawyers
and laymen alike are criticized. Antonio describes Ferdinand
using the law for his own ends:

"He speaks with others Tongues, and heares mens suites,
With others Bares; will seeme to sleepe o' th bench
Onely to intra_ offenders, in their answers;
Doombes men to death, by information,
Rewards, by heare-say."

D.M. I. i. 175-9

Bosola, too, satirizes the legal profession. In one of his
rare gay passages he advises Castruchio on how to become a
lawyer:

"Let me see, you have a reasonable good face for't
already, and your night cap expresses your eares
sufficient largely - I would have you learn 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 -"

D.M. II. i. 4-9

Behind the jesting there is a note of seriousness, however.
He advises Castruchio:

"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."

D.M. II. i. 9-12

Bosola also voices the popular hatred of lawyers. Castruchio
asks how he shall know he is a successful and eminent judge.
Bosola replies:

"I will teach a tricke to know it - 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."

D.M. II. i. 19-21

Lines like these recall the odium Middleton heaps on the dying lawyer Dumit in A Trick to Catch the Old One, or of the depiction of Harrall in Massinger's A New Way to Pay Old Debts.

Whoredom is naturally less prominent in this play than in The White Devil, where Vittoria herself provides a focus for criticism. For though Ferdinand frequently refers to his sister as a whore (e.g. at I. i. 330-2; II. v. 5-15; II. v. 63-4 etc.) the title is patently undeserved, and no valid satiric criticism emerges from his remarks. There is criticism, however, of Julia, the Cardinal's mistress. When Roscara, at the Cardinal's request, grants lands forfeited by Antonio to Julia, he comments to Delio:

"tis a gratification
Onely due to a Strumpet: for it is injustice;"

D.M. V. i. 51-2

It is Julia whom the Cardinal refers to as, "my lingering consumption." (V. ii. 244). Whores and disease are commonly associated in Jacobean drama, and this link is seen in two of Bonola's bitter remarks:

"There's no more credit to be given to th' face,
Then to a sick a mans uryan, which some call
The Physitian whore, because she cozens him"

D.M. I. i. 250-2

"Here are two of you, whose sin of your youth is the very patrimony of the Physitian, makes him renew his foote-cloth with the Spring, and change his high-priz'd Curtisan with the fall of the leaves."

D.M. II. i. 62-5
The references to Usury are not extensive. The main remarks occur when the Duchess is forced to invent an excuse for Antonio's hasty departure. Her excuse is:

"Antonio, the master of our house-hold
Had dealt so falsely with me, in's accounts:
My brother stood engag'd with me for money
Take up of certain Neapolitaine Jewes,
And Antonio lets the bonds be forfeit."

D. M. III. ii. 204-5

Bosola dissembling, comments on the confiscation of Antonio's goods:

"Here's an example, for extortion: what moisture is drawne out of the Sea, when fowle weather comes, poures downe, and runnes into the Sea againe."

D. M. III. ii. 249-51

Later he defends Antonio, however, and comments, in a typically Websterian parable, on quick riches and dishonesty:

"Sure he was too honest: Pluto the god of riches,
When he's sent (by Jupiter) to any man
He goes limping, to signifie that wealth
That comes on god's name, comes slowly, but when he's sent
On the divells errand, he rides post, and comes in by scuttles:"

D. M. III. ii. 283-7

One of the noticeable features of the satiric commentary on individuals in The Duchess of Malfi is the decline in the use of animal imagery. There is no parallel in this play to the persistent virulence of the comments on Brachiano, for instance. At the same time there is a decline in the number of characters against whom such satire is directed. In The White Devil the heroine is included in the satire, in The Duchess of Malfi, by the very nature of the play, she is largely excluded. So is
Antonio. The personal satire is almost exclusively directed at Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Images involving toads, dormice, hyenas, foxes and leverets are used to describe them, besides those concerning animals of prey, which are more thematic and characteristic than satiric in purpose. Antonio says of the Cardinal:

"The spring in his face, is nothing but the ingendring of Toades:"

_B. I. i. 159-60_

Ferdinand is described as being:

"so quiet, that he seems to sleepe
The teapest out (as Dormise do in Winter) -"

_B. III. i. 24-5_

The Cardinal himself cries:

"Shall I die like a Leveret
Without any resistance?"

_B. V. v. 61-2_

Images of sickness, poison and decay are similarly used. Basola tells Ferdinand:

"Your brother, and your selfe, are worthy men;
You have a paire of hearts, are hollow Graves,
Rotten, and rotting others; and your vengeance,
(Like two chain'd bullets) still goes arme in arme -
You may be Brothers: for treason, like the Plague,
Both take much in a blood:"

_B. IV. ii. 344-9_

Basola, on occasions, turns such imagery against himself:

"Physitians that apply horse-leiches to any ranke swelling,
use to cut off their tailes, that the bloode may run through
them the faster: Let me have no traine, when I go to shed
blood, least it make me have a greater, when I ride to the
gallowes."

_B. V. ii. 348-52_
As a malcontent it is his task to rail against the world, and he does this particularly strongly in Acts One and Two. So he says of wisdom:

"the opinion of wisdome is a foule teetor, that runs all over a man's body."

D.M. II. 1. 81-2

Bosola delights in reducing seeming greatness to absurdity. He ridicules the pretensions of Princes:

"The like passions away them, the same reason, that makes a Vicar goe to Law for a tithe-pig, and undone his neighbours, makes them spoile a whole province."

D.M. II. 1. 106-3

Another major target is hypocrisy. Speaking to the Cardinal of honesty Bosola says:

"I have knowne many travell farre for it, and yet returns as arrant knaves as they went forth; because they carried themselves always along with them;"

D.M. I. 1. 42-5

Textile and clothing images are used to describe deceit, as when Ferdinand says:

"Hypocrisie is woven of a fine small thred, Subtler, then Vulcan's engine:"

D.M. I. 1. 317-8

The Cardinal, the arch-hypocrite, waxes indignant at the Duchess's ruse of a pilgrimage to Loreto:

"Doth she make religion her riding hood To keepe her from the sun, and tempest?"

D.M. III. iii. 72-3

Julia tells Bosola how she will extract information from the Cardinal:
"You shall see me winde my tongue about his heart, Like a skeine of silke."

D.M. V. ii. 237-8

Bosola, in a mixture of deceit and bitter self-disparagement tells the Duchess her secret is safe with him:

"O the secret of my prince, Which I will weare on th' inside of my heart."

D.M. III. ii. 344-5

In the previous chapter it was shown how Webster failed, in The White Devil, to present a unified and coherent vision of life; how the two aspects, tragic and satiric were kept balanced, but never resolved. In The Duchess of Malfi the balance has tilted firmly in favour of tragedy. But though the final vision is tragic, satire is by no means relegated to a position of unimportance. For Webster succeeds, or almost succeeds, in unifying the tragic and the satiric elements, and in this process the satire takes on new importance and wider meaning. This is particularly true of those portions of Bosola's satiric commentary which could be termed a criticism of life, or of its material aspects at least. This criticism begins in II. i., when Bosola turns from jesting with Casruchio to say to the old lady who has just entered:

"You come from painting now?"

D.M. II. i. 22

He then launches into a bitter and seemingly gratuitous attack on cosmetics and their use. To his original question the old lady replies:
"From what?

Bosola: Why: from your scurvy face-physicke - to behold thee not painted enclines somewhat near a miracle; These... in thy face here, were deepr ruts, and foule sloughes the last progress: There was a lady in France, that having had the small pockes, fleed the skinne off her face, to make it more levell; and whereas before she look'd like a Nutmeg-grater, after she resembled an abortive hedgehog.

Old Lady: Do you call this painting?

Bosola: No, no, but I call it carreening of an old morphew'd Lady, to make her dissembogue againe -"

This if followed up by an attack on cosmetic closets which is as playingly outspoken as anything found in Marston's satires.

The old lady asks Bosola:

"It seemes you are well aquainced with my closet?

Bosola: One would suspect it for a shop of witch-craft, to finde in it the fat of Serpents, spawn of Snakes, Jewes scittle, 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!"

Cosmetics had been a favourite target for satirists since the early Middle Ages, and in Webster's own day not only puritan pamphleteers but also playwrights like Marston and Tourneur attacked such aids to beauty. Tourneur made particularly effective use of the subject in The Revenger's Tragedy. Vindice's addresses to his mistress's skull, the 'silkworm' speech and others, contrast worldly vanities with the enduring reality of death. Webster does a very similar thing here, for out of the seemingly gratuitous attack grows Bosola's meditation. Bosola concludes his attack on cosmetics with:

"I doe wonder you doe not loath your selves -"
Then with just a casual remark he begins:

"... observe my meditation now: What thing is in this outward form 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 prodigy. Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity, In any other Creature but himselfe. But in our owne flesh, though we bear diseases Which have their true names onely tane from beasts, As the most ulcerous Woolfe, and swinish Seszeall; Though we are eaten up of lice, and worms, And though continually we bear about us A Rotten and dead body, we delight To hide it in rich tissew - all our fear, (May all our terour) is, least our Physion Should put us in the ground, to be made sweete."

The emphasis in the meditation on the contemptibility of "this outward form of man", on his bodily defects and infirmities, on the transitoriness of the flesh and the joy of purification in death is in keeping with the medieval tradition of 'de contemptu mundi'. Or rather, with half of it, for Bosola is here making only the negative statement on man's place in the world. For the medieval clerics who wrote on this theme aimed not only to inspire contempt for this material world but also joyful expectancy of the life hereafter. This can be seen from Bede's remark on the effects Caedmon's poetry had on his fellow men:

"Ond for his leopsonum monigra mona mād oft tō worulde forhognissee and to gedognisse þes heofonlican lifes unberene waoron."

6 Bede. History of the English Church and People. Translation
"And because of his verse - songs the hearts of many men were often kindled to contempt for the world and to association with the heavenly life".
The positive note is not sounded in Webster's play until the Fourth Act, just prior to the Duchess's death. Until then Bosola continues his contemptuous denigration of the world, mixing this important thematic satire with other satiric railing in the usual malcontent vein. At IX. i. 99–109 he pricks the bubble of the pretensions of those of high lineage and emphasizes the fact that all men share the same defects.

He does the same to Ferdinand at the end of III. ii., and again, climactically in IV. ii., when his exposure of the vanities of the material world reaches its peak. In his satiric comments he reduces the body to its elements, and contemptuously compares it to a prison:

"Thou art a box of worme-seede, at best, but a salvatory of greene mummy: what's this flesh? a little cruied milke, phantasticall puffe-waste: our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boyes use to keepe flies in: more contemptible: since ours is to preserve earth-wormes: didst thou ever see a harke in a cage? such is the soule in the body: this world is like her little turle of grasse, and the Heaven are our heads, like her looking glasse, onely gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compasse of our prison.

_Duchess_ Am not I, thy duchesse?

_Bosola_ Thou art some great woman sure, for riot begins to sit on thy fore-head (clad in gray haires) twenty yeaeres sooner, then on a merry milkesaydes. Thou sleep'st worse, then if a mouse should be forc'd to take up her lodging in a cats eare: a little infant, that breedes it's teeth, should it lie with thee, would crie out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bed-fellow.

_Duchess_ I am Duchesse of Malfy still.

_Bosola_ That makes they sleepees so broken: Glories (like glow-wormes) afarre off, shine bright, But look'd to neere, have neither heate, nor light."

_D.ii. IV. ii. 122–142_

Bosola's satire on the material world, his contemptuous exposure of the transitoriness of earthy life is almost complete.
His second and complementary task, that of exhorting the Duchess to fix her mind on heavenly things and to prepare herself for the eternal peace of death is beginning. And as Bosola's negative task ends, and the positive one begins, satire moves almost imperceptibly into tragedy.

It is important to notice at this point how complex Webster's handling of Bosola is in this scene, and how the dramatist uses the standard theatrical convention of disguise to add further dimensions to Bosola's rôle. Later in the previous scene Bosola had announced his intention of seeing the Duchess again only if disguised:

Ferdinand  "Your worke is almost ended.
Bosola  Must I see her againe?
Ferdinand  Yes.
Bosola  Never.
Ferdinand  You must.
Bosola  Never in mine own shape,
That's forfeited, by my intelligence,
And this last cruell lie: when you send me next,
The businesse shalbe comfort."

D.M. IV. i. 158-64

When he enters in IV. ii. he is disguised as an old man, and announces after a while:

"My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living -
I am a tombe-maker."

D.M. IV. ii. 144-5

He is at this point still engaged on his negative task of satirization; trying to bring the Duchess to see earthly life as the worthless, transitory thing it is. His role of tomb-maker epitomizes his satire, and underlines the theme of transitoriness. At the same time it brings the Duchess, as
Bosola says:

"By degrees to mortification."

D.M. IV. ii. 179

Then his role changes; he takes up the bell, and says:

"I am the common Bell-man,
That usually is sent to condem'nd persons
The night before they suffer."

D.M. IV. ii. 173-5

His aim is no longer to dwell on transitoriness, but eternity. And just as the tomb-maker symbolizes mortality, so the bell-man points the way to heaven and life everlasting. F. S. Lucas's note 7 on the tasks of the bell-man in Elizabethan England makes clear just how appropriate Bosola's new guise is. His intention is to direct the Duchess's thoughts heavenwards, and the famous dirge is directed to that end. First there are the last references to this life, contrasted with the serenity of the next:

"Much you had of Land and rent,
Your length in Clay's now competent.
A long war disturb'd your minde,
Here your perfect peace is sign'd -"

D.M. IV. ii. 184-7

This earthly life is rejected as ultimately valueless:

"Of what is't fools make such vaine keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth, weeping:
Their life, a generall mist of error,
Their death, a hideous storne of terror."

D.M. IV. ii. 188-81

7 Works II, p. 193
Then Bosola concludes with the call to purification and preparation for the journey to eternity:

"Strewe your hair, with powders sweet:
Don clean linen, bathe your feet,
And (the foul fiend more to check)
A crucifix let bless your neck,
'Tis now full tide, 'twixt night and day,
End your groans, and come away."

D.M. IV. ii. 192-7

After this Bosola has only to test the Duchess' resolve to find that she has been brought to mortification, and his task towards her is completed. He can once more become Bosola, the unwilling tool, making his own tragic way through life.

Though Webster uses several classes of images for tragic purposes which are peculiar to The Duchess of Malfi, the majority of them are similarly employed in The White Devil. So, while images concerning torture, bodily action and buildings are peculiar to the second tragedy, those involving storm and wind, sea and seafaring, cloud and mist, and light and darkness are common to both. There is some difference, however, in the way in which these common images are used in the two plays. In The White Devil Webster is at some pains to develop his main tragic image-themes in a long and steady sequence, building them up to the final and comprehensive 'ship in a black storm' image. In The Duchess of Malfi his method tends to be somewhat different. The majority of the images used for tragic purposes are not brought out in sequential fashion, but more intermittently. There are exceptions, particularly with the war and the sea images, but even these tend to
disappear for scenes at a time.

A notable feature of the imagery in The Duchess of Malfi is the use Webster makes of it for purposes of dramatic irony and premonition. Such premonitory imagery is particularly evident during the wooing scene in Act One. While handling the dialogue between the Duchess and Antonio with beauty and delicacy, Webster yet manages to sound a persistent though unobtrusive note of premonition, using images and references involving death. Coming so soon after the strict warning against re-marriage given by Ferdinand and the Cardinal they are particularly significant. The first of these premonitory utterances is part of the subterfuge used by the Duchess to begin her wooing:

"I am making my will, (as 'tis fit Princes should In perfect memory) and I pray Sir, tell me Were not one better make it smiling, thus? Then in deep groans and terrible ghastly looks,"

D.M. I. i. 427-30

There is a faintly ominous note in Antonio's reply to the Duchess's question:

"What do you think of marriage? Antonio I take't, as those that deny Purgatory, It locally contains, or heaven, or hell, There's no third place in't."

D.M. I. i. 448-51

The Duchess's plight in Act Four is obliquely prefigured in Antonio's extensive 'madness' image at I. i. 483-7, with its reference to "the wild noyse of pratling visitants". Three strongly premonitory images occur towards the end of the wooing.
The Duchess rallies Antonio:

"Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh
To feare, more then to love me: Sir, be confident,
What is't distracts you? This is flesh, and blood, Sir
'Tis not the figure cut in Allabaster
Kneesles at my husbands tombe:"

_II.I.1. 517-21_

Yet another ominous image is the Duchess's light-hearted conceit:

"Here upon your lippes
I sign your Quletus est."

_II.I.1. 531-2_

There is a hint of violence, too, in the Duchess's reference to the Gordian knot; the audience knowing full well the fate it suffered at the hands of Alexander the Great:

"Bless (Heaven) this sacred Gordian, which let violence Never untwine."

_II.I.1. 549-50_

The significance of the storm and wind and light and darkness images has already been discussed, the former in connection with the characterization of Ferdinand, the latter as a theme. It should be noted here, however, how great a role these two groups of images play in establishing also the tragic atmosphere of the play. This is particularly so in the latter part of I. i., in II. iii. and v., III. ii. and v., and in Act Four. At each point these images add to the tragic atmosphere while they develop a theme or characterization. Like so many image groups in Webster's plays they are rarely limited to a single function or significance, but are part of a truly organic unity.
The sea and seafaring images are amongst the most important in *The White Devil* since Webster uses them to portray the careers of Vittoria and Flamineo. In *The Duchess of Malfi* such imagery has far less significance. Webster uses the 'life as a voyage' idea in an almost wholly conventional way, as in the first sea-faring image, Ferdinand's comment:

"Think't the heat voyage
That ere you made."

*D.M. I. i. 354-5*

The one image in this category which does deserve notice is Bosola's last-cryptic comment:

"Mine is another voyage."

*D.M. V. v. 129*

The interest of this image lies in what it tells us of Bosola, however, not in its metaphorical qualities. For as an image it is as conventional as the rest.

The most persistently recurring tragic imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi* is that relating to war, which Webster uses to depict the struggle between light and darkness, and the oppression of the Duchess by her brothers. The opening of the wooing scene provides the first significant image. The Duchess says:

"Even in this hate (as men in some great battailes
By apprehending danger, have atcheived
Almost impossible actions: I have heard Souldiers say so)
So I, through Frights, and threatenings, will assay
This dangerous venture."

*D.M. I. i. 385-9*
Something of the wholly defensive nature of the Duchess's side of the struggle is seen as a by-product of one of Ferdinand's images:

"Oh confusion sease her,
She hath had most cunning baudes to serve her tunne,
And more secure conveyances for lust,
Then townes of garrison, for Service."

D. M. II. v. 12-15

The wilder aspects of Ferdinand's personality sometimes express themselves in martial images. He says to the Duchess:

"Thine, Thy heart?
What should I nam't, unless a hollow bullet
Fill'd with unquencheable wild-fire?"

D. M. III. ii. 135-7

Similarly Pescara and Delio at one point say of Ferdinand:

Pescara  The Lord Ferdinand laughs.
Delio  Like a deadly Cannon,
That lightens ere it smoakes."

D. M. III. iii. 65-7

The mining image, used to express violence and uncertainty in *The White Devil* (vide W.D. IV. ii. 141) is similarly used in *The Duchess of Malfi*. In the confusion following on the discovery of her marriage by Ferdinand, the Duchess says:

"I stand
As if a Myne, beneath my feet, were ready
To be blowne up."

D. M. III. ii. 185-8

Later in the play, after the Duchess's death, Bosola describes the brothers' revenge on the Duchess for remarrying.

"your vengeance,
(Like two chain'd bullets) still goes arme in arme -"
The ruthless efficiency of chain-shot is in striking contrast to the pathetic inability of the Duchess to resist physically. Despairingly she says:

"O misery: like to a rusty ore-charg'd Cannon, Shall I never flye in peeces?"

D.M. III. v. 121-2

In the light of these war images, two lines from Bosola's dirge assume greater significance. Their primary reference is to the inner struggle of the heroine, to which reference will be made shortly, but they also fittingly conclude the series of war images:

"A long war disturb'd your minde, Here your perfect peace is sign'd."

D.M. IV. ii. 186-7

Though the Duchess is virtually on the defensive from that moment when, in spite of her brothers' warning, she determines to re-marry, her sufferings do not really begin until III. v. Quite early in the scene comes the parting of the Duchess and Antonio. Antonio says:

"Best of my life, farewell: Since we must part, Heaven hath a hand in't: but no other wise, Then as some curious Artist takes in sunder A Clocke, or Watch, when it is out of frame To bring't in better order."

D.M. III. v. 74-8

The dialogue which follows reinforces this:

Duchess "For all our wit And reading, brings us to a truer sense Of sorrow: In the eternall Church, Sir, I doe hope we shall not part thus. Antonio Oh, be of comfort, Make Patience a noble fortitude: And thinke not how unkindly we are us'd:}
Man (like to Cassia) is prov'd best, being bruiz'd.
Duchess Must I like to a slave-borne Russian,
Account it praise to suffer tyranny?
And yet (O Heaven) thy heavy hand is in't.
I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,
And compar'd my selfe to't: naught made me ere
Go right, but Heavens scourge-sticke.
Antonio Doe not weep;
Heaven fashion'd us of nothing: and we strive,
To bring our selves to nothing;"

D.M. III, v. 82-98
The two elements which emerge most strongly from this dialogue
are highly significant in the light of what is to follow.
There is, firstly, strong emphasis on the role of Heaven in
the disaster of banishment and parting. This emphasis is too
persistent and explicit here to be dismissed as conventionally
pious acceptance of misfortune deserved. The second element,
stoicism, is less prominent. It is found mainly in Antonio's
'cassia' speech (lines 87-89), but even there it is mingled
with the idea of trial by Heaven. A similar amalgam of the
two can be seen in the explanation which the Duchess appends
to her 'sad tale':

"So, to Great men, the Morrell may be stretched.
Men oft are valued high, when th'are most wretched.
But come: whither you please: I am arm'd 'gainst misery:
Bent to all swaies of the Oppressors will.
Theres no deepe Valley, but neere some great Hill."

D.M. III, v. 165-9
The Duchess's behaviour is not always at this high level of
stoic composure. If it were there could be little dramatic
tension in the scenes which follow. Chapman proved this in
his study of a complete stoic, Clermont D'Ambois. The
fluctuations in the Duchess's moods, from near-madness and
despair to serenity and calm acceptance keep the outcome in sufficient doubt to hold the audience completely. Once already in III. v. the Duchess has lapsed into semi-hysteria, from which Bosola saves her. Seeing that his sympathy only induces hysteria and self-pity, he reverses his tactics and abuses Antonio for his low birth. This has the desired effect; the Duchess is roused to anger, and the crisis passes.

Webster's handling of the relationship between the Duchess and Bosola in this and the two succeeding scenes is masterly. Bosola's role is complex. On the one hand, at plot level, he is acting as the agent of evil, helping Ferdinand torment the Duchess. On the other hand he is used thematically as the instrument of Heaven, watching over her. Webster is able to use him thus only because he is an unwilling villain, divided within himself. Bosola is not Bosola just because his creator has altered in mood, and grown older and sadder than when he created Flamindo; he is Bosola rather because a Flamindo could not carry out the role.

In IV. i. we see the Duchess still in the mood of composure achieved at the end of the previous scene. Bosola describes her to Ferdinand:

"She's sad, as one long us'd to't; and she seems rather to welcome the end of misery Then shun it: a behaviour so noble, As gives a majestie to adversitie"

D.iii. IV. i. 4-7

But after the double shock of the dead hand and the wax figures she relapses first into despair, then hysteria. Bosola first
tries sympathy, then, as before, sterner measures. His famous comment, "hooke you, the Starres shine still:" (IV. i. 120) is part of this attempt to re-awaken her former composure. In this case Bosola is less successful, for the Duchess does not regain this composure until the following scene; though when she does regain it, it is to remain with her until the end.

Early in IV. ii. the Duchess asks Cariola how she appears to her in her suffering. Cariola, in part, replies:

"rather like some reverend monument whose ruines are even pittied."

B.M. IV. ii. 35-6

The image is a significant one. It is one of a group of building images, very small in number, which depict the changes which take place in the Duchess before her death; changes which make her a finer, as well as a wiser, being than when we first see her. For however sympathetically we may view the Duchess in Act One it cannot be denied that she has several small yet important faults. Of these the most apparent are a certain degree of wilfulness and pride. Both of these are imaged in the first building image:

"If all my royall kindred Lay in my way unto this marriage: I'll'd make them my low foote-steps;"

B.M. I. i. 382-4

It is her wilfulness which leads her to brush aside her brothers' warning against remarriage. This is not to lay any blame on her for what her brothers do to torment her: she is in no way responsible for the sufferings she endures. But she has these
faults, nevertheless. Her pride, for instance is clearly
imaged in her response to Antonio's kneeling:

"Sir,
This goodly roofe of yours, is too lowe built,
I cannot stand upright in't, nor discourse,
without I raise it higher: raise your selfe,
Or if you please, my hand to helpe you: so."

D. II. i. 478-82

This is not pride in the worst sense, of course. Rather it
is a decided awareness of her status in society, the same kind
of awareness that Queen Elizabeth had, and never let any of her
subjects forget. The Duchess can put it aside, as when she
woos Antonio (of lines 522-4) but it shows in her comments:

"How can the Church build faster?
We now are man and wife, and 'tis the Church
That must but echo this!"

D. II. i. 562-4

It is significant here that Webster never names his Duchess;
throughout the play she is known by that title alone. Because
of this she never becomes just a woman, not even in the wooing
or bedroom scenes. It is this pride and wilfulness which
Bosola seeks to eliminate from her character in Act Four. He
is "Heavens scourge-sticke" and his satire on the world,
designed to bring her "by degrees to mortification", aims at
her pride of status. It is in response to her questions,
"Who am I (IV. ii. 122) and "am not I, thy Duchesse?" (IV.
ii. 132) that he pours out his attack on the material world.
It is because she reaffirms, "I am Duchesse of Walfy still."
(IV. ii. 139) that he replies, "That makes thy sleepe so
broken:" (IV. ii. 140). His satiric remarks about effigies
on prince's toobs have a similar purpose. And when the Duchess says

"I have so much obedience, in my blood,
I wish it in ther veins, to do them good."

Bosola has succeeded. His efforts have been directed not
to destroying her personality, but to instilling in her humility
and a due disregard for the things of this world. Her courage
she retains to the end; Bosola tests her deliberately to
ensure this. But it is no longer the courage she displayed
when her brother appeared to her in her bedroom:

"For know whether I am doomb'd to live, or die,
I can doe both like a Prince."

It is rather the courage of calm humility:

"Tell my brothers,
That I perceive death (now I am well awake)
Best gult is, they can give, or I can take -"

The twin qualities which make up this new courage, stoic
acceptance and christian humility, are seen in the final
building image, which contrasts strongly with the two in
Act One:

"Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength,
Must pull downe heaven upon me:
Yet stay, heaven gates are not so highly arch'd
As princes pallaces - they that enter there
Must go on their knees."

The contrast with I. i. 478-82 cannot be other than deliberate,
for in these two images Webster portrays the whole of the
Duchess's spiritual pilgrimage.

It is one of the critical commonplaces concerning Webster's work that when the Duchess is dead, the best is gone out of the play. L.G. Salingar, for example, considers that:

"The remainder of the action consists of tedious moralizing, posturing, and blood-and-thunder."8

This is an extreme view, but, when allowance is made for the emotive quality of it, still typical of the kind of misunderstanding which leads critics to regret that Webster extended his play into Act Five. Critics who regret this underestimate both the significance of the theme of retribution in Act Five, and the importance of Bosola.

Act Five is largely concerned with the retribution which inevitably befalls evil-doers. At the moment of the Duchess's death evil seems to triumph, but it is at that very moment that retribution begins. Ferdinand is stricken with horror at what he has done; so is Bosola. Ferdinand rushes off "much distracted"; Bosola receives no reward but neglect. Then when next we see Ferdinand, he is lycanthropic. Elizabethan audiences would certainly have regarded his madness as retribution; Bosola confirms this in his comment:

"Mercy upon me, what a rustall judgement
Hath faine upon this Ferdinand."

B.M. V. ii. 53-4

Images of, and references to, justice and retribution fill Act Five. Later in the same scene, V. ii., when the lascivious Julia woos Bosola, and dies gaining him the information he requires, the theme of justice and the law runs as an undertone throughout. Julia's death is ironically prefigured by the references, which grow stronger as the scene progresses. The first reference is merely a conceit:

"Nay, if you lay beauty to my charge, I must plead my guilty"

D.M. V. ii. 186-7

A second oblique reference to stealing (lines 190-201) is followed by a third, strongly ironic. Julia says:

"I am like one
That is condemned: I have my pardon promis'd.
But I would see it seal'd."

D.M. V. ii. 234-6

Then at lines 265-7 there is a reference to racking and judgement, followed by a further strongly ironic statement, when Julia says:

"Sir, never was occasion
For perfect triall of my constancy
Till now:"

D.M. V. ii. 276-8

Finally, when Julia is poisoned, she cries:

"I forgive you
This equall piece of Justice you have done!"

D.M. V. ii. 307-8

Julia, like all the other characters, knows that she is paying the just penalty for her sins. This is a distinguishing mark of Webster's villains, they are all of them aware of moral
values. They never transgress in ignorance. When Bosola
hears Ferdinand talking he says:

"My death is plotted; here's the consequence of murder."

 _ * M. V. iv. 43

The deaths in the final scene, too, are accompanied by
explicit statements on retribution. The Cardinal says:

"Oh Justice;
I suffer now, for what hath former bin:
Sorrow is shed the eldest child of sin."

 _ * M. V. v. 72-4

Ferdinand has a moment of sanity just long enough to say:

"My sister, oh! my sister, there's the cause on't.
Whether we fall by ambition, blood or lust,
Like Diamonds, we are cut with our owne dust."

 _ * M. V. v. 90-92

The Cardinal, seeing Bosola is wounded, comments:

"Thou hast thy payment too."

 _ * M. V. v. 93

When Bosola is questioned as to the reason for the slaughter,
his answer again suggests a retributive justice:

"Revenge, for the duchesse of Milly, murdered
By th' Arragonian brethren; for Antonio,
Slaine by this hand: for lustfull Julia,
Poison'd by this man: and lastly, for my selfe,"

 _ * M. V. v. 102-5

Lastly, it should be noticed how the very welter of killings
comes about by another retributive move. The Cardinal's
subtlety in ordering that he be not disturbed even if he
cry out for help is the cause of his own destruction. It
is not just a clever theatrical move on Webster's part, it
is proof in action of Webster's thesis that evil preys upon
and ultimately destroys itself. As Pescara says of the Cardinal's action:

"How fatally (it seems) he did withstand
His owne rescwe!"

Bosola's importance has always been underestimated by critics. This is not surprising, since beside the Duchess he is a grey and rather unattractive figure. But Webster did intend, I think, that this play should be seen as the tragedy of the malcontent as well as of the Duchess. For much of the play Bosola's role is necessarily secondary; during the imprisonment of the Duchess particularly. But even then the image of a man divided against himself, forced into evil through hard times, is built up. His complex role as agent of both good and evil in Act Four is only possible because of this duality; the struggle between his better instincts and the need to obey Ferdinand. After the Duchess's death, the main dramatic interest centres on Bosola, however, and he achieves, if only in flashes, truly tragic stature. For unlike the other villains he is filled by genuine remorse, and the agony of knowing that repentance is now too late. All he can do is try to redress the balance a little by aiding Antonio. Yet he only succeeds in accidentally killing the man he wants to help. The Bosola of Act Five is a confused and bewildered figure, lost and despairing. Several of his most significant images show this. He has a sense of complete
helplessness:

"We are merely the stars' tennis-balls (strooke, and banded Which way please them)"

D.M. V. iv. 63-4

He sees only a mist, or shadow:

Malatesta "How come Antonio by his death? Bosola In a mist: I know not how, Such a mistake, as I have often seen In a play."

D.M. V. v. 117-120

The world to him is "a shadow, or deepe pit of darknesse."

His life has been even as he spoke in the dirge, "a generall mist of error". Faced by such mists he can only fall back on the same stoic resolution that served Flamineo, Lodovico and Vittoria:

"Oh, I am gone - We are only like dead walls, or vaulted graves, That ruin'd, yeldes no echo: Fare you well - It may be paine, but no harme to die, In so good a quarrell . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Let worthy minds here stagger in distrust To suffer death, or shame, for what is just - Mine is another voyage."

D.M. V. v. 120-129

The difference between Flamineo's final utterances and those of Bosola lies in the last line of Bosola's dying words; in the stoic acceptance of certain damnation. Flamineo is damned; Webster damns him. But his villain is not fully aware of his fate. He dies in noisy defiance. Bosola, on the other hand, is in despair at what he has done. He knows he cannot save himself from the pangs of hell. His stoic calm is greater than Flamineo's because of this. There is full self-knowledge
and acceptance in Bosola's death, whereas in Flamineo's defiance there is only a fragmentary perception of his situation.

In the final paragraphs of the previous chapter it was asserted that The White Devil suffers from two main defects. One is the lack of any major positive assertion other than that of courage. The other is the dichotomy between two sides of Webster's personality: the moralist and satirist on the one hand, the tragedian on the other. These two matters were related to the pessimistic Calvinism of Webster's attitude to life, with its emphasis on the negative aspects of Calvin's doctrine, and the exclusion of the major positive tenet; belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. This positive element is present in The Duchess of Malfi, and it is this which makes the second tragedy so much greater than the first. For through the greater balance which the introduction of the positive element provided Webster was able to integrate satire and tragedy.

Webster's vision of the world is as strongly Calvinistic in The Duchess of Malfi as The White Devil. Corruption and evil are rampant. Mankind is helpless and depraved; the few good people in the world are on the defensive in a malevolent environment. Marston's Malevole sums up Webster's view well:

"World? 'Tis the onely region of Death, the greatest shop of the Divell, cruellst prison of men, out of the which none
pa•se without paying their dearest breath for a fee. There's nothing perfect in it but extreme calamity."

"Malcontent" IV. ii. 25-9

Equally heavy is Webster's emphasis on hell and damnation. But whereas in The White Devil all the major figures are hellbound, this is not true of The Duchess of Malfi. It is here that the more positive element makes itself evident. The workings of God in the world are felt and seen. Webster is far too great a tragedian to introduce them too baldly or overtly; to do so would almost certainly destroy the dramatic element in the play. This can be seen happening in The Atheist's Tragedy: when Pourneur introduces a note of divine intervention too blatantly, the dramatic tension goes out of the play. One knows d'Anville cannot defeat God's will, and when the villain brains himself with an axe the undramatic degenerates into the near-preposterous. Webster avoids such pitfalls. Yet he is able to depict the positive influence exerted on the Duchess by Bosola, who is as busy elevating and purifying her spiritual being as he is destroying her body. Ferdinand's demonic efforts are in vain: ironically, his attempts to destroy his sister only further her progress towards 'contempt for the world and association with the heavenly life.' Retribution, too, follows the Duchess's murder. No sin goes unpunished, whether it be Julia's lust or the Cardinal's many crimes. There is no Monticelso or Francisco here to escape scot-free. Because retribution is full and effective, the optimistic
statements which end the play seem less empty and more appropriate than those in The White Devil. Delio says:

"These wretched eminent things
Leave no more fame behind 'em, then should one
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow -
As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts.
Both forme, and matter: I have ever thought
Nature doth nothing so great, for great men,
As when she's pleas'd to make them Lords of truth:
Integrity of life, is fame's best friend,
Which nobly (beyond death) shall crowne the end."

D.M. V. v. 138-46

The spiritual triumph of the Duchess makes such limited optimism acceptable, whereas Giovanni's lines which end The White Devil seem only a mockery.

Not only are the positive notes stronger in The Duchess of Malfi, the former dichotomy between the satirist and tragedian has almost gone. There is no longer any need for carefully engineered separate endings as in The White Devil, for the satire - in its most important aspects at least - has united with the tragic elements, helping to transform the Duchess's death from defeat to triumph. No longer is stoic courage the solitary positive affirmation, set against strongly negative satiric elements. Satire is used here to induce Christian humility in the Duchess, and this quality is linked to stoic courage in a manner wholly absent from The White Devil. Yet if the satirist and tragedian have become one, the moralist in Webster still, at times, obtrudes. Delio's last comments, which have just been quoted, are a case in point. His remarks are acceptable, since they do not misrepresent circumstances, but they are not wholly
adequate as a statement of the final impression the play leaves. It is significant that it is a moral tag Webster chooses as a couplet to end the work; the moralist in him has the final say. This raises the question of whether the moralist in Webster is not the basic motivating force behind his tragedies; whether the tragedian in him only forces itself to the fore as the play gets under way, and his imaginative powers become fully aroused. Be that as it may, it is certain that the overwhelming impression the reader or member of the audience retains of the play is not of the vindication of any particular moral precept. What remains in the imagination is a vision of the tortured soul of Bosola and the sufferings of the Duchess. The sublimity of her end brings the reader, like Oswald, in Wordsworth's play *The Borderers*, face to face with the mystery of things, and to the conclusion that

"Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of Infinity."

"Borderers" III. v. 82-3
A Monumental Column is not a successful poem; though as Elizabethan occasional poetry goes it is by no means bad. Webster himself apparently knew his elegy was not great poetry. He writes:

"And for these worthless lines, let it be said,
I hasted, till I had this tribute paid
Unto his grave, so let the speed excuse
The zealous error of my passionate Muse."

Yet the poem is not without interest and significance in a study of Webster's work. Its value as a document in Websterian studies lies in three main directions. Its date of composition, for one thing, makes the elegy of great interest. A Monumental Column must have been written between November 6th, 1612, when Prince Henry died, and Christmas Day in the same year, when the Elegy, (with those by Heywood and Tourneur) was entered in the Stationers' Register. This means that the poem was written during the period of the composition of The Duchess of Malfi, to the study of which it thus forms an interesting adjunct. Secondly, in the poem we have Webster speaking on a serious subject, not through some dramatic character, but in his own person. This is the only work in which this is so, his other non-dramatic pieces dealing with trivia or forming part of the pageantry of a Lord Mayor's Show. Thirdly, because he wrote the elegy in such haste that it went to press unpolished and imperfect, we have an opportunity to see something akin to an early draft of a Websterian work; to see the results of Webster's
borrowing before he had reworked the material into a form wholly his own.

To deal with this third point first: *A Monumental Column* is an excellent aid to a study of Webster's technique of composition. More than his other work it reveals his use of the commonplace book. So frequent and so obvious are the borrowings that Webster, in his haste, must have been working from commonplace book to the page in front of him with far less revision than usual. For the poem as a whole lacks proper unity and, upon examination, breaks up into a series of couplets, sententiae and semi-relevant parables. The poem has an undigested appearance; it is strung together rather than created. This is evident within the first twenty odd lines, in which the thought switches with disconcerting frequency from one concept to another, each being embodied in a central, telling, phrase, around which Webster builds a line or two before moving on. This is nothing unusual in Webster as a means of composition; it is his method in his plays. The difference is that there the patchwork is disguised, here the seams show up clearly, as in this passage:

"We should not grieve at the bright Sunnes Eclips
But that we love his light. So travellers stray
Wanting both guide, and conduct of the day;
Nor let us strive to make this sorrow old,
For wounds smart most, when that the blood growes cold.
If Princes thinke that Ceremomy meet,
To have their corps imbal'm d to keepe them sweet:
Much more they ought to have their Fame express
In Homer, though it want Darius' chest;
To adorne which, in her deserved Throne,
I bring these colours, which Truth calleth her owne."
Nor gaine, nor praise, by my weake lines are sought, 
Love that's borne free, cannot be hire'd nor bought.

M.C. 10-22

But if as a work of art the elegy is only of limited, analytic value, as a document for the study of Webster's ideas and attitudes it is of more positive worth. For in the poem we get Webster's opinions on life and death, society and its corruption, and on the poet's place in society. Webster displays in A Monumental Column an almost medieval distrust of the things of this world. To him material pleasures are illusory. The long (and only semi-relevant) parable on care and pleasure makes this very clear. In the course of the tale Webster details and castigates some of the aspects of the corruption he sees in society. Though the passage is lengthy it repays quotation, since it contains the kernel of Webster's view of life. Webster relates how, when pleasure is recalled to heaven, she leaves her garment behind her, in case it be sullied, and tells how sorrow found it:

"Till by good chance, (ill hay for us) shee found, 
Where Pleasure laid her garment; from the ground 
Shee takes it, dons it, and to add a grace, 
To the deformity of her wrinkled face, 
An old Court Lady, out of mere compassion, 
Now paints it o're or puts it into fashion - 
When straight from Country, City, and from Court, 
Both without wit or number there resort 
Many to this imposter - all adore 
Her baguish false-hood, Usurers from their store 
Supply her and are cosened, Citizens buy 
Her forged titles, riot and ruin flye, 
Spreading their poison universally, 
Nor are the bosomes of great Statesmen free 
From her intelligence, who let's them see
Themselves and fortunes in false perspectives; Some landed Heirs consort her with their wives, Who being a baud corrupts their all-spent oaths - They have entertain'd the divill in Pleasures cloaths. And since this cursed masks, which to our cost Lasts Day and night, we have entirely lost Pleasure, who from Heaven will us be advis'd, That our false Pleasure is but Care disguis'd."

M.C. 170-192

Here we have a usual catalogue of targets for Jacobean complaint and satire; usury, whoredom, forged land titles, riot, flattery and cosmetics. But in the last few lines we have something beyond the usual satire of social corruption, we have something akin to a complete rejection of the things of this world as worthless. Much of what Webster says here he puts into Bosola's mouth in The Duchess of Malfi; and A Monumental Column is as much part of the "de contemptu Mundi" tradition as Bosola's satire in Acts One, Two and Four of the play. And since the elegy must have been composed during the time Webster was writing his second tragedy, such close correspondences become important. They enable us, in fact, to say with some degree of certainty that what Bosola says on such matters is what Webster himself thinks. Thus the elegy adds certainty to the interpretation of the play.

Already in his two tragedies Webster has revealed his distrust and dislike of court life, of worldly greatness, In A Monumental Column he continues to show such greatness as illusory, and to set it in contrast with the reality of death. At the end of The Duchess of Malfi Delio says:

"These wretched eminent things Leave no more fame behind 'em, then should one
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow—
As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts, 
Both forme and matter:"

In *A Monumental Column* Webster partly takes up the snow
image when he writes:

"O Greatness! What shall we compare thee to? 
To Giants, beasts, or Towers fram'd out of Snow, 
Or like wax-guilded Tapers, more for show 
Then durance? Thy foundation doth betray 
Thy frailty, being built on such clay."

The greatest praise which Webster can give Prince Henry, 
and which he gives sincerely, is that of humility:

"His minde quite voyd of ostentation, 
His high-erected thoughts look't downe upon 
The smailing valley of his fruitfull heart."

Webster describes the Prince's mien as he lay dying, in
a passage which has greater strength than any other in the
poem. The lines display some of the lyric fervour of
Webster at his best:

"There his humility, setting apart 
All titles did retire into his heart. 
O blessed solitariness that brings, 
The best content, to meanes men and to Kings: — 
Manna there falls from Heaven, the Dove there flies 
With Olyve to the Arke (a sacrifice 
Of God's appeasement), Ravens in their beaks 
Bring food from heaven, Gods preservation speaks 
Comfort to Daniel in the Lyons den — 
Where contemplation leads us, happy men..."
To see God face to face:

These could quite easily be the thoughts of a medieval anchorite. To Prince Henry, as to Webster, death is a triumph, not a disaster:

"He knew the place to which he was to go
Had larger titles, more triumphant wreathes,
To instate him with; and forthe his soule he breaths
Without a sigh: fixing his constant eie,
Upon his triumph, immortality."

Webster uses two images also found in The Duchess of Malfi to depict the chastening but perfecting process of death, and the perfection of life in eternity.

"... so many times miscarries
A Christall glasse whilst that the workeman varries
The shape i'th'furnace (fist too much upon
The curiousnesse of the proportion)
Yet breaks it ere't be finish't, and yet then
Moulds it anew, and blowes it up a'gen,
Exceeds his workmanship and sends it thence,
To kiss the hand and lip of some great Prince.
Or like a dyall broke in wheele or screw,
That's tane in peeces to be made go true:
So to eternity he now shall stant;
New form'd and gloried by the all-working hand."

The elegy ends on the same note:

"Thus tooke He acquaintance of all worldly strife,
The evening shewes the day, and death crownes life."

If Webster's utterances in the elegy are to be taken as sincere, and there seems no reason why they should not be; then there emerges from A Monumental Column an instructive
glimpse of Webster's vision of life, at least as it was in 1612 and 1613 when he was writing The Duchess of Malfi. It is a vision of a world in which evil is rife and corruption widespread. All worldly honours are illusory; greatness lies in humility; reality not in life but in death and eternal life thereafter. It is the vision of an intensely religious man, who is somewhat of an ascetic. It is the vision of one who can look forward to death with anticipation:

"Both life and death have equally exprest Of all, the shortest madness is the best."

M.C. 130-1

"... . . . . we are full of spots, . . . . . like new-writ copies, t'avoid blots, Dust must bee throwne upon us."

M.C. 116-118

In Marston's The Malcontent Piero says of Malevole:

"his highest delight is to procure other's vexation, and therein hee thinkes he truly serves Heaven; for 'tis his position, whosoever in this earth can be contented is a slave and dam'd."

"Malcontent" I. i. 31-4

This is equally true of Bosola. The satire he utters is directed to religious ends. The great interest in A Monumental Column lies in the fact that it provides an explicit statement of the positive religious beliefs which lie behind the satire of The Duchess of Malfi, and which Webster instinctively knew, as a tragedian, he dare not express too strongly in the play.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEVIL'S LAW-CASE

The general tendency in Websterian criticism is either
to ignore The Devil's Law-Case completely or merely to mention
it in passing. An appreciative reference to Romelio's
meditation or to the court scene, a brief plot summary, a
comment to the effect that the play shows Webster's powers to
be on the wane - such are the remarks usually devoted to the
work. With the few critics who do discuss the play in any
detail, the tendency is to concentrate on the figure of Romelio,
stressing his kinship with the Machiavellian figures of the
tragedies. This is Una Ellis-Fermor's approach.¹ Robert
Ornstein, on the other hand, while admitting that The Devil's
Law-Case is "closer in spirit to Webster's masterpieces than
'Appius and Virginia", feels that:

"When we look in Webster's later plays ... we find little
worthy of the genius that created The White Devil and The
Duchess. So far as we can see Webster said all that he had to
say artistically in these two plays. The rest should have
been silence ... .²"

This is far from being true. Certainly The Devil's Law-Case
cannot rank with the two great tragedies, but neither is it
negligible. For as F.: Lucas has observed,³ until the play

³ Works II. p. 224.
goes to pieces in the final act, it might not, well acted, seem unworthy of its author. There are some vivid scenes, and one or two brilliant ones. There are characters like Romelio, Jolenta and Leonora, each interesting in a different way. There is, too, some fine dramatic verse. Finally, there is something about the play which is unmistakably Webserian: "this sour sharpness of its characters and situations", which as Lucas says, "leaves The Devil's Law-Case, if not a good play, at least no insipid one." 4

For present purposes the play is of interest and importance. Critics tend to pay too much attention to the six year gap between The Duchess of Malfi and this work, and to the fact that the later play is in a different genre. Because of this they tend to exclude The Devil's Law-Case from the study of Webserian drama. But The Devil's Law-Case has a considerable amount to offer. Webster's handling of certain themes is particularly interesting and through a study of these themes I hope to show not only that the play has more depth than is usually conceded, but also that it is far more closely related to The Duchess of Malfi than has hitherto been suggested.

As might be expected, there are far fewer images in The Devil's Law-Case than in the two tragedies. Yet the play is more than a witty and facile tragi-comedy of the Fletcherian type; at times it reaches near-tragic intensity. Indeed a

4 Works II. p.228
tragic conclusion would be as much in keeping with the action as the happy ending which Webster engineers, and the imagery, while sometimes merely pretty or decorative, often carries considerable significance. When the appendices showing the range and subjects of the images in Webster's three main plays are compared one notices first the decline in importance of the animal imagery in *The Devil's Law-Case*. Whereas such imagery was third in numerical importance in *The White Devil* and fourth in *The Duchess of Malfi*, in *The Devil's Law-Case* it has dropped still further to sixth place. This is clearly due to a decrease in the more virulent type of satire which abounds in *The White Devil*. Dog images, for instance, are entirely absent from *The Devil's Law-Case*, and other images concerning animals are few and mild. The worst is but an expression of unwilling admiration; Ariosto's comment on Winifrid:

"An old hunted Hare, She has all her doubts."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 448

Sickness and poison images are also less common. The few that remain play a minor part, but not as satiric imagery. In spite of the title satire is almost entirely absent from *The Devil's Law-Case*. The old bitterness is gone from Webster's vision of the world. He laughs now, instead of railing.

Of the other main image categories, that concerning daily life remains the most important, with nature imagery in second place. There is a small but noticeable increase in domestic imagery, a fact which assumes some significance when it is
recalled that in this play Webster is dealing not with the aristocracy, as before, but with the bourgeoisie. There is a small but interesting increase in the number of images in the arts and imaginative categories. In each case there is a steady upward trend in importance from the first play to the last. Imaginative images in *The Devil's Law-Case* are twice as numerous, proportionately, as in *The White Devil*, while the rate of incidence for arts imagery is five times higher in the tragi-comedy. These figures seem to indicate that along with the loss of his satiric animus went a certain freeing of Webster's poetic gifts. Certainly there are more purely delicate and pretty images in *The Devil's Law-Case* than in the tragedies. Flower images occur for the first time, in lines like these:

"- you'll find the Rose
The sweeter for the dewe."

*D.L.C. I. ii. 147-8*

There is in the play a lyric note which occurs only rarely in the tragedies.

Within the various categories variations in individual emphases are apparent also. Tree imagery, so strongly represented in the tragedies, is almost wholly absent. Instead fruit images are common. One or two would seem to indicate some thematic significance, notably Leonora's remark:

"So the last fruit of our affection,
Wherever we bestow it, is most strong,
Most violent, most unresistable."

*D.L.C. III. iii. 280-2*

But the metaphorical association of fruit with result or consequences
is not followed up systematically by Webster, except in one other remark by Leonora at IV. i. 112-3. A similar thing happens with the textile and clothing images. These are more prominent, numerically, in The Devil's Law-Case than either of the tragedies, yet except on odd occasions Webster makes no apparent attempt to use clothing images to portray hypocrisy and deceit, as in The Duchess of Malfi. The discrepancy between appearance and reality is evident in one or two images, particularly this of Rosario's:

"Here is cruelty appareled in kindness."

D.L.C. II. iii. 187

Jolenta's simulated gaiety is also expressed in a clothing image:

"Oh my phantasticall sorrow! - Cannot I now Be miserable enough unless I weare A pyde foole's coat?"

D.L.C. II. iii. 208-10

But apart from these, the usages seem to bear no relationship to any pattern whatsoever. Herein lies a major difference in the use of imagery in The Devil's Law-Case, as opposed to the tragedies. In the latter it is rare to find any group of images used for only immediate effect. There is usually some patterning evident, some purpose and direction in their use. In The Devil's Law-Case this is usually not the case, and this is perhaps because Webster is not fully committed, imaginatively. He seems not to have conceived the play as an organic whole, with the images carefully patterned and interwoven, consequently his handling of the imagery is fragmentary and tentative. It lacks
cohesion. For this reason the language and imagery in the play cannot be studied in quite the same manner as with the two tragedies. To gain a fully balanced view of the play it is necessary to go beyond the imagery and themes it serves to establish the contemporary context against which Webster works out his main theme.

The Devil's Law-Case is in many ways very much a product of its time. In it Webster can be seen responding to social and economic conditions of England in the latter part of James I's reign. It is significant that The Devil's Law-Case is the only play of which Webster is sole author for which no general source has been discovered. It has been demonstrated that he used various material as the basis of individual incidents, but the plot as a whole seems to have been Webster's own. The significance of this is that it reinforces the impression which the play creates of having been deliberately plotted to air and ridicule particular social problems and abuses. The central situation, the law-suit brought by Leonora, is an example of this. Almost all the characters, too, epitomize some fault or abuse, either personal or social, which was a topic of discussion at the time of writing. This is particularly so of Leonora and Romellio, but it also applies to Winifrid, Angiollica, Contarino, Julio, Contiluppo, Sanitondella, the two surgeons, and perhaps even in part to Crispiano. The Devil's Law-Case is really comédie à thèse; in it Webster takes a comprehensive look at society and lists its worst faults as he

5 Works II. p.p. 217-221
sees them. Massinger, who like Webster is primarily a moralist, affords an instructive parallel, and his two finest plays, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *A City Madam* are very close in aim to *The Devil's Law-Case*. Like Webster's play, they are not comedy in the true sense but serious dramas which stop short of a tragic ending. In these plays Webster and Massinger are engaged in a wholly serious attempt to expose and correct the faults of the age. What makes this parallel the more interesting is that the three plays are very nearly contemporaneous, all being written between 1617 and 1621.

The majority of the characters in *The Devil's Law-Case*, and the faults they embody, can be quickly dismissed, since they have little bearing on the central theme. Angiolella, for instance, who is a warning against sexual licence, as well as a warning to

"... all honest Virginia, not to seke
The way to Heaven, that is so wondrous steepes,
Thorough those vowes they are too fraile to keepe."

*D. I. C. V. v.* 87-9

Julio is a typical young rakes; dissolute, spendthrift, yet oddly likeable, for all his faults. In this, as in many ways, he is like Tournour's two candid young rakes, Sebastian in *The Atheist's Tragedy* and Junior in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, who are perhaps the most human of all Tournour's creations. The two surgeons exemplify the popular suspicion of physicians which is almost traditional in Elizabethan drama, just as Sanitonella and Contilupo represent the equally unpopular legal profession.
Of Contarino a little more needs to be said, partly because the portrait is not as simplified as those listed above, partly because a more detailed investigation of Webster's portrayal of Jolenta's lover helps to make clearer the final dénouement, in which Ercole, not Contarino, wins Jolenta, and in which Contarino is paired with Leonora. Contarino's name is introduced early in the first scene. Prior to his actual entry he is discussed by Romelio and his friend Prospero. Romelio admits that he intends to prevent Contarino marrying Jolenta. Prospero protests:

"You are ill advised then; There lives not a compleater Gentleman In Italy, nor of a more ancient house."

Romelio's reply indicates his contempt for the nobility and for Contarino:

"What tell you me of Gentrie? - 'tis nought else But a superstitious relique of time past: And sift it to the true worth, it is nothing But ancient riches: and in him you know They are pittifully in the wane; he makes his colour Of visiting us so often, to sell land, And thinkes if he can gaine my sisters love, To recover the treble value."

Here we have a familiar situation in Webster's day: the impoverished nobleman selling land to maintain his high style of living, and hoping for a rich marriage to recover his fortunes. Romelio's statements must, of course, be accepted with reserve; he is the soul neither of love nor of truth. And Prospero's remark which follows goes some way to win the audience to Contarino:

"Sure he loves her Intirely, and she deserves it."
But if the comments on Contarino which occur throughout the play are examined it will be seen that the charges of wasting his estate in gambling and other extravagances are never challenged. Webster emphasizes this. The first words Contarino utters are:

"I sent you the evidence of the piece of land I motioned to you for the sale."

D.L.C. I. i. 57-8

A little later he tells Romelio he plans to use most of the money to pay his debts (I. i. 80-2). In I. ii. Leonora and Romelio refer more explicitly to these:

Leonora "Contarino
Were you talking of? He lost last night at Dice
Five thousand Duckets; and when that was gone,
Get at one throw a lordship, that twice trebled
The former losse.
Romelio And that fled after
Leonora And most carefully
Carried the Gentleman in his Carroch
To a Lawyers Chamber, there most legally
To put him in possession: what this wisdome?
Romelio O yes, their credit in the way of gaming
Is the same thing they stand on - that must be paid,
Tho the Brewer bawle for's money."

D.L.C. I. ii. 76-87

Once again it may be urged that malice lies behind these remarks, but there is still no reason to disbelieve them. Such actions as Contarino's were regarded with great concern by the thinking men of Webster's day. L.C. Salingar has pointed out how much writers like Tournemour deplored the impoverishment of the old nobility, the sale of estates and the attempt to live up to extravagant court standards. With such happenings writers

coupled two further regrettable features of society, a decline in the hospitality for which the landed gentry had once been famous, and the growth of a class of nouveau riche merchant landowners. Webster shows his concern over almost all of these in The Devil's Law-Case. At one point he seems to speak through Leonora, voicing his disapproval:

Leonora "I pray sir tell mee,
You are about to sell a piece of land
To my sonne, I heare.
Contarino 'Tis truth.
Leonora Now I could rather wish,
That Noblemen would ever live i' the Countrey,
Rather then make their visits up to' th Citie
About such businesses: Oh Sir, Noble Houses
Have no such goodly Prospects any way,
As into their owne land: the decay of that,
Next to their begging Churchland, is a raine
Worth all men's pitie."

D.L.C. I. i. 200-211

Once it is established that Webster disapproves of Contarino's actions it becomes clearer why Ercole eventually wins Jolenta. Ercole is on every count a finer figure than Contarino. In fact he seems to embody Webster's ideal of a truly Christian gentleman. His behaviour towards Jolenta in I. ii. is both noble and sympathetic. Further, (and the significance of this is apparent in the light of remarks on the subject in the previous chapter) for all his exalted rank, Ercole is a humble man. His use of one of Webster's most significant images confirms this:

"Mountaines are deformed heaps, sweld up aloft;
Vales wholsomere, though lower, and trod on oft."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 672-3
Webster's previous use of this concept, it is worth noting, is in praise of Prince Henry in *A Monumental Column*. Ercole, then, like Lord Lovell in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, is almost a positive norm of aristocratic behaviour. Measured against him, Contarino fails to impress. It should be noted, too, how Contarino breaks his word, given on his honour to Jolenta, not to quarrel with Ercole. This he promises at the end of I. ii., yet the next time he appears he at once picks a quarrel with his rival and challenges him to a duel, which Ercole can hardly refuse. Contarino is thus not only forsworn but also guilty of provoking a duel, illegal in Jacobean England. Webster's views of duelling can be seen in the reply of Prospero to Julio's eulogy of the presumed dead rivals. Prospero comments tartly:

"Come, you doe ill, to set the name of valour
Upon a violent and mad despair."

*D.L.C. II. ii. 50-1*

Further, Contarino doubts Jolenta's constancy, which is unworthy in him:

"She is not chang'd I hope. Ile thither straight:
For womens Resolutions in such deeds,
like Bees, light oft on flowers, and oft on weeds."

*D.L.C. I. i. 230-2*

There could conceivably be here an ironic reference by Webster to Jolenta's love for Contarino's unworthy self. All things considered, Contarino's ultimate loss of Jolenta does not come wholly as a surprise. It is emotionally disturbing because the reader tends to sympathize with Jolenta and take her part, and because the volte face is sudden, but otherwise the conclusion
is explicable. Webster does to Contarino rather what Massinger does to Frank Wellborn at the end of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. Despite his repentance and the recovery of his fortunes Wellborn is packed off to serve in the army for a time, as a form of purgation. Further he is denied a bride, the traditional prize for the hero at the end of a comedy. Webster does something similar. Viewing the situation as a moralist, as Massinger does, he allots the heroine to the deserving Ercole, leaving Contarino to repent at leisure with the elderly Leonora.

This rather sternly moralistic attitude does not mean that Webster is indifferent to Jolenta's troubles or that he approves forced marriages. *I. ii.* makes this quite clear, particularly Winifrid's outspoken:

"... Plague of these Unsanctified Matches; they make us lothe The most natural desire our grandame Eve ever left us, Force one to marry against their will! Why 'tis A more ungodly worke, then inclosing the Commons."

*D.L.C. I. ii. 226-30*

The comparison with enclosures, and the use of the adjective 'ungodly' are evidence of Webster's distaste for such unions. Here, as elsewhere, he is attacking a prevalent social evil; how prevalent can be seen from the bitter resignation of Jolenta's reply to Winifrid:

"Prethee peace; This is indeed an argument so common, I cannot think of matter new enough, To express it bad enough."

*D.L.C. I. ii. 231-4*
Leonora's law-suit, which supplies the central situation in the play is yet another attack on a social evil, this time the spate of legal actions brought by domineering women like Lady Lake and Lady Coke. As Lucas says, there was a "wave of exasperation against domineering women" which ran strongly from about 1617 to 1621. Ariosto, who occupies a semi-choric role in The Devil's Law-Case, attacks such women:

"Why they use their Lords, as if they were their Wards; And as your Dutchwomen in the Low Countries, Take all and pay all, and doe keeps their husbands So silly all their lives of their owne estates, That when they are sicke, and come to make their will, They know not precisely what to give away From their wives, because they know not what they are worth!"

Crispiano, in reply, makes his attitude clear:

"Well, I have vowed, That I will never sit upon the Bench more, Unless it be to curbe the insolencies Of these women."

To this Ariosto wryly returns:

"Well, take it on my word then, Your place will not long by empty."

Webster makes fine dramatic use of the court scene, engineering also some fine comic moments, involving Winifrid and the rogue lawyers Contilupo and Sanitonna. But he obviously takes the position very seriously, for he uses the few poison images in the play exclusively to portray it. When Leonora is devising her plan to ruin Romello, in III. iii. she says to Winifrid:

7 Works. II. p. 215-216
my sonne has six Lordships left him.

Winifrid Tis truth.

Leonora But he cannot live foure dayes to enjoy them.

Winifrid Have you poysoned him?

Leonora No, the poyson is yet but brewing.

Winifrid You must minister it to him with all privacie.

Leonora Privacie? It shall be given him
In open court - Ie make him swallow it
Before the Judges face."

D.L.C. III. iii. 426-34

The next mention of poison is in Crispiano's puzzled query:

"... tis most strange:
... why with such a poysoned violence
Should shee labour her sonnes undoing?"

D.L.C. IV. ii. 273-5

In the next image Romelio broadens the issue, and berates womankind:

"... Oh the violencies of women!
Why, they are creatures made up and compounded
Of all monsters, poysoned myneralls,
And sorcerous Herbes that growses."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 326-9

The poison images mirror Webster's evident belief that such suits as Leonora's have an insidious corrupting effect on society.

This can be seen in one of Crispiano's speeches:

"... we observe
Obedience of creatures to the Law of Nature
Is the stay of the whole world; here that law is broke,
For though our Civill Law makes difference
Tween the base, and the legitimate; compassionat Nature
Makes them equall."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 275-30

Ariosto also has some outspoken comments to make to Leonora.
When he tears up the preferred brief, and she expostulates that he forgets himself, he retorts:

"Cry ye mercy, doe I so?
And as I take it, you doe very little remember
Either womanhood, or Christianitie."

D.L.C. IV. i. 55-7

Ariosto exonerates the law, blaming such suits wholly on the women who bring them:

"... such wild suits
Disgrace our Courts, and these make honest Lawyers
Stop their own ears, whilst they plead, & that's the reason
Your younger men that have good conscience,
Weare such large Night-caps; go old woman, go pray,
For Lunacy, or else the Devill himselfe
Has taken possession of them may like cause
In any Christian Court never find name:
Bad suits, and not the Law, brod the Lawes shame .."

D.L.C. IV. i. 69-77

The reference to the Devil in this speech is not a casual one; Webster never uses the term lightly. It is a further indication of the seriousness with which he regards Leonora's actions, and the actual law suits which lie behind the play.

Romelio is undoubtedly the dominant figure in The Devil's Law-Case. It is perhaps difficult to go all the way with Una Ellis-Fermor and agree that he "is the fullest, and in some ways, the most interesting character Webster ever drew". Nevertheless, it is certainly true that in creating Romelio Webster infused him with the same intensity of being which makes Flamino, Vittoria, Bosola, and the Duchess so real and vivid. Of all the characters in The Devil's Law-Case only Romelio seems to show undisputed signs that Webster was imaginatively committed in his creation. The reason for this appears to be that Webster conceived Romelio as something more than a representative figure.

8 U. Ellis-Fermor. op.cit. p.182
He is, of course, representative of the unscrupulous and ambitious merchant princes, but he is individually important as a proud, self-satisfied, callous man whom Webster depicts moving towards his downfall and eventual regeneration. In the person of Romelio Webster offers the reader a study in pride humbled which is not unrelated to that of the heroine in The Duchess of Malfi.

While his decision to make his hero-villain a merchant rather than a duke marks a new development for Webster, his action is in keeping with the trends in the drama of the time. The meteoric rise to positions of wealth and social eminence of merchants, speculators, monopolists and the like was a major feature of Jacobean society. Such figures occur frequently in the plays of the period. One of the earliest of such self-made men is the Lord Mayor, Sir Roger Otley, in Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday. Quasmodo in Middleton's Michaelmas Term, though less exalted socially, has much in common with him. Closest to Romelio in time and type, however, are Massinger's Luke Frugal and Sir Giles Overreach. Like Overreach, Romelio is a man of immense wealth, as his boastful speeches to Prospero indicate (I. i. 1-30). These opening speeches show how engrossed he is in his mercantile activities; so, too, do various images scattered throughout Romelio's many speeches. His besetting interest is in trade and business; his scale of values is monetary. Aristocracy is, to him, "But ancient riches:" (I. i. 43); his mind turns naturally to business images, such as:

"No, no, the world and I
Have not made up our accounts yet."

D.H. V. iv. 53-4

The marriage he arranges for his sister Jolenta is, to him, a business proposition:

"This maine business of life, which wants Greatest consideration, your marriage, By my direction."

D.H. I. 11. 45-8

In determining upon Ercole as a husband for Jolenta, Romelio is stirred equally by cupidity and ambition. Contarino may be of noble lineage, but he is also poor. Ercole is both aristocratic and wealthy; therefore Romelio concludes a marriage contract with him. Webster depicts Romelio's ambition, his desire to raise the social status of his house, in a series of building metaphors. His dynastic ambitions can be seen in the biting irony of his reply to Contarino's request for Jolenta's hand:

"Believe me, sir, as on the principal Column To advance our House:" 

D.H. I. i. 106-7

Faced with a set-back Romelio turns to another building image, describing himself as a pyramid (II. iii. 196). An extension of the metaphorical association of dynastic ambitions and building images occurs in III. iii. Romelio tells Jolenta of his plan:

"... - it shall breed Out of the death of these two Noblemen, The advancement of our House."

D.H. III. ii. 22-4

Jolenta takes up the term 'house' and replies:
"Oh take heed, A grave is a rotten foundation."

D.L.C. III. iii. 25-6

The foundations of his family's prosperity are indeed threatened when his plotting miscarries and his mother's schemes also fail. At the crucial point in the trial Ariosto observes, using a semi-proverbial phrase:

"You may see now what an old house You are like to pull over your head, Dame."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 315-6

The metaphor of the rotten foundation recurs with a slight twist in the last building image when Ariosto rejoices that

"... these passages, Which threatened ruine, built on rotten ground, Are with successse beyond our wishes crown'd."

D.L.C. V. v. 100-2

Although he has strong dynastic ambitions, Romelio has the deep hatred for the aristocracy typical of the nouveau riche. This can be seen in I. i., at lines 40-43 and 106-111. This hatred is again part of the conventional representation of the rich merchant or monopolist. It is as evident in Sir Roger Otley's animosity towards the Earl of Lincoln in The Shoemaker's Holiday as it is in A New Way to Pay Old Debts, when Overreach says:

"Tis a rich man's pride! There having ever been More than a feud, a strange antipathy, Between us and true gentry.

"New Way" II. i. 100-102

It is important to notice how very much alike Overreach and
Romelio are in conception. Overreach is, of course, a monopolist not a merchant, but this (and differences in personality) apart, the similarities are very marked. Both are immensely wealthy, neither is miserly, as Middleton's Hoard and Quomodo are, for instance, both hate the aristocracy yet aspire to its ranks through marriage, both are callous, hard-headed, ruthless men of business; their only ethic is expediency, their justification success. But the similarities of conception go deeper than this. Both Webster and Massinger conceive their characters in moral, even religious, terms. Sir Giles is not only a ruthless monopolist but also a specifically anti-religious figure, representing Avarice or the Devil himself. Such resemblance between Overreach and Ferdinand were pointed out in the previous chapter. Equally, there are similarities between Overreach and Romelio, who is regarded by Webster as an anti-religious figure. Like Ferdinand, Romelio repeatedly uses hell, devil and witch images in such a way as to leave little doubt that he is an agent of the Devil.

The association of devil images with Romelio begins in I. ii. The first reference is not at first sight very significant—Winfried's comment on the marriage Romelio is forcing on Jolenta as,

"A more ungodly worke, then inclosing the Commons."

D.L.O. I. ii. 230

But this is re-emphasized some twenty lines later by the dialogue between Jolenta, Contarino and Winifrid:
"Reach me the Caskanet, I am studying sir,
To make an Inventory of all that's mine.
What to doe with it Lady?
That's done already; you are all mine.
Yes, but the Devil would faine put in for's share,
In likenesse of a Separation.
Oh sir, I am bewitcht.
Most certaine, I am forespoken,
To be married to another: can you ever thinke
That I shall ever thrive in't? Am I not then bewitcht?

The next reference is in II. i. Ariosto and Romelio are baiting Julio who, becoming nettled, says in an aside: "I thinke this fellow is a witch." (line 195) Romelio takes this to refer to himself, and exclaims, "Who - I sir?" (line 196).

To see significance in Romelio's hasty conclusion that he is being referred to may seem far fetched until a curious parallel in The White Devil is considered. Sentencing Vittoria, Monticelso says:

". . . - you are cont'in'd
Unto a house of convertites and your band -
Who I?
The Moore.
I am a sound man againe.

Flamineo's misapprehension is due to a guilty conscience, and knowing Webster's penchant for repeating lines, phrases, and situations, Romelio's hasty rejoinder could well be due to a similar cause.

Romelio's pride is castigated by Ariosto as devilish in II. iii. He tells Romelio the ships he lost were given ominous names:
"Did you not call one, The Stormes Defiance; Another, The Scourge of the Sea; and the third The Great Leviathan?
Romelio Very right sir.
Ariosto Very devillish names
All three of them: and surely I thinke, they were curst In their very cradles."

D.L.C. II. iii. 62-7

When Ercole reveals to the Capuchin Friar Romelio's crimes, the Capuchin replies:

"These are crimes That either must make worke for speedy repentance, Or for the Devill."

D.L.C. II. iv. 45-7

In III. iii. Romelio is several times associated with witch and devil images. Jolenta says to him:

"Have you not made me yet wretched enough, But after all this frostie age in youth, Which you have witcht upon me, you will seeke To poyson my Fame?"

D.L.C. III. iii. 89-92

To destroy Jolenta's love for Contarino and protect his own interests, Romelio pretends that Leonora and Contarino planned to commit incest after Jolenta's marriage. Romelio tells in an aside how the idea came to him:

"The Devill has on the sudden furnish't mee With a rare charm'e, yet a most unnaturall falsehood;"

D.L.C. III. iii. 103-4

He discloses the story to Jolenta, together with a remark which is an unconciously revealing comment on his own motives:

"My mother doated upon him, and it was plotted Cunningly betweene them, after you were married, Living all three together in one house -
A thing I cannot whisper without horrour:

Why, the malice scarce of Devils would suggest,
Incontinence 'tweene them two."

Later, dissembling, he tells Jolenta to put the tale out of
her mind:

"... . . . But come, here thinke on't,
Throw the fowle to the devill that hatcht it,"

It is another unconsciously revealing phrase. Romelio
recognizes that hope lies in using his mother to foster
jealousy in Jolenta:

"... . . . oh, Jelousie,
How violent, especially in women,
How often has it rais'd the devil up
In forme of a law-case! My especiall care
Must be, to nourish craftily this fiend,"

There is a strong note of dramatic irony in the reference to
law-cases, for it is Romelio's devilish motives which lead
Leonora to conceive her equally malevolent law-suit. The
devilish motives behind the trial are referred to several times,
at III. iii. 444; IV. i. 36-7 and 74-5; and again at IV. ii.
23-5.

After the trial the Capuchin Friar tries to help Romelio
by acting

"As one that faine would justle the devill
Out of your way."

Romelio, however contemptuously rejects his aid:
"Um, you are but weakly made for't: Hee's a cunning wrastler, I can tell you, and has broke Many a man's knecke."

D.L.C. V. iv. 89-91

He is, at this point in the play, firmly of the Devil's party, and quite unable to see the danger he is in. The Capuchin sums up Romelio's position:

"Some evill Angell Makes him deafe to his owne safetie While they [wretches] aspire to doe themselves most right, The devil that rules i' th ayre, hangs in their light."

D.L.C. V. iv. 203-4 & 221-2

The key to Romelio's behaviour, the central element of his personality, is his pride. As Contarino truly says:

"I doe observe how this Romelio Has very worthy parts, were they not blasted By insolent vaine glory."

D.L.C. I. i. 123-5

And just as humility is the greatest of virtues in Webster's eyes, so pride is the greatest of sins. In Romelio Webster depicts the evil consequences of overweening pride, and charts the voyage to humility which the hero-villain undergoes. He does this primarily in sea-faring imagery, though the theme is also elaborated in other images and by a considerable amount of direct statement. All these have to be considered as one. Sea images are peculiarly appropriate to Romelio, who gains his living by trading "in the furrowes of the sea" (I. i. 75). So Prospero says to him:

"You have the springtide of Gold."

D.L.C. I. i. 27
Romelio's pride receives a set-back, however, when he hears of his losses at sea, which Ariosto blames on the blasphemously proud names Romelio gave his ships (II. iii. 62-7). Ariosto is one of the two characters in the play - the other is the Capuchin Friar - whose task it is to work Romelio's redemption. Throughout the play the lawyer's behavior is inexplicable unless he is accepted in a choric capacity. His prescience is remarkable, as at II. iii. 76-80, for instance, and goes far beyond any normal possibility. Here Ariosto urges patience on Romelio, who is angered by his losses. After his wholly out of character meditation, however, he is in a more philosophical mood, and replies to the Capuchin's condolences:

"Oh sir - the more spacious that the Tennis Court is, The more large is the Hazard, I dare the spitefull Fortune doe her worst, I can now feare nothing."

D.L.C. II. iii. 149-52

To this the Capuchin replies, significantly:

"Oh sir, yet consider, He that is without feare, is without hope, And sins from presumption."

D.L.C. II. iii. 153-5

This is one of the major statements of the play, for it puts Romelio's case in a nutshell. Romelio himself, brought up short by his setbacks, has a moment of clear-sightedness which further explains his situation:

"How I am impayred in an houre, and the cause of't - Lost in securities: oh how this wicked world bewitches Especially made insolent with riches! So Sayles with fore-windes stretcht, doe soonest breake."

D.L.C. II. iii. 192-6
The phrase "lost in securitie" calls to mind Bobola's comment on the Cardinal's calmness:

"... how this man Beares up in blood! - seems feareles! - why, 'tis well: Securitie some men call the Suburbs of Hell,"

D.M. V. ii. 370-2

Despite his moment of clear-sighted self analysis, however, Romelio reverts to his habitual attitude of proud self-sufficiency. For when, at the commencement of the trial, Crispiano warns him against overconfidence Romelio replies:

"Let feare dwell with Earth-quake,s, Shipwreckes at Sea, or Prodigies in heaven, I cannot set my selfe so many fathome Beneath the hight of my true heart, as feare."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 99-102

It is Ariosto's task, during the trial, to try to goad Romelio out of this dangerous state of calm. The first step is to make him angry. Leonora's testimony finally does this; Romelio's self-control breaks, and he rages against women:

"they have no more mercy, Then ruinous fires in great tempests."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 333-4

Romelio is still not won to repentance however, as his actions in V. iv. show clearly. Although the stage directions and his utterances indicate that Romelio is "very melancholly", his obstinate pride remains unbroken, as the Capuchin discovers:

Capuchin "Shall I pray for you? Romelio Whether you doe or no, I care not. Capuchin O you have a dangerous voyage to take. Romelio No matter, I will be mine owne Pilot; Doe not you trouble your head with the businesse."

D.L.C. V. iv. 55-9
The Capuchin's persistent efforts to make Romelio "a good Christian" (V. iv. 76), are met only by an equally persistent calm self-confidence, and a refusal to take the Friar seriously. Romelio's behaviour leads the Friar to exclaim:

"O, I tremble for you:
For I doe know you have a storme within you,
More terrible than a Sea-fight, and your soule
Being heretofore drown'd in securitie,
You know not how to live, nor how to dye;"

D.I.C. V. iv. 121-5

For a second time there is emphasis laid on the dangers of 'securitie'.

Romelio's last minute change of heart is not a particularly convincing one, even taking into consideration the Elizabethan dramatic convention which utilized such instantaneous changes. In Romelio's case, it is almost entirely unprepared for and does considerable violence to the reader's conception of the merchant. For apart from the two out-of-character meditations, and the momentary self-analysis in II. iii. Romelio remains firmly resolved until the last. His conversion can only be taken as an act of God, a moment of divine intervention somewhat similar to that at the end of The Atheist's Tragedy, though far less preposterous. From this point of view Romelio's conversion is far more convincingly prepared, for since II. iii. Ariosto and the Capuchin have been seeking to effect such a change. Webster shows both spiritual and temporal agencies seeking to reclaim Romelio, for in his spiritual pride he offends God, and in the actions his pride leads him to commit, he offends against the law. The efforts of the two forces are carefully alternated.
in the first half of II. iii. Ariosto tries to show him how he deserved his losses, then the Capuchin tries to shake him out of his materialism with news of the deaths of Contarino and Ercole in the second half of the same scene. While the Friar is furthering the action against Romelio in one way in II. iv. and III. iii., Ariosto is preparing the ground for the coming court case in III. i. and IV. i. The two attempts reach their separate climaxes; Ariosto's in the celebrated trial, which effectively counters both Leonora's and Romelio's schemes, the Capuchin's in V. iv., which though it has no immediate apparent effect, we must assume to be behind Romelio's conversion in the following scene.

It is evident that Romelio's situation has something in common with that of the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi*. It is ridiculous to identify the gentle Duchess too closely with him, of course, since in his gross callousness and indifference to the claims of ethics or humanity Romelio has more in common with the Cardinal than the Duchess. But in essence a connection exists. The Duchess is proud and a little wilful. Through suffering and the agency of Bosola she attains humility. Romelio, too, is proud (devishly proud, like the Cardinal), but sobered by his losses and the joint action of spiritual and temporal forces, he is also brought to submission. Not only is Webster dealing with a situation closely analogous to that in *The Duchess of Malfi*, he is also handling it from a similar viewpoint. Bosola's task in the tragedy is to bring home to the Duchess the illusory and valueless quality of earthly life. In *A Monumental*
Column Webster dwells on the same theme:

"Both life and death have equally express
Of all the shortest madnesse is the best."

M.C. 130-1

The same attitude is visible in Romello's comment:

"Is not the shortest fever the best?"

D.L.C. III. iii. 7

And the oppressed Jolenta cries:

"The intermission from a fit of an ague
Is grievous: for indeed it doth prepare us,
To entertaine torment next morning."

D.L.C. I. ii. 293-5

Further, Romello's meditation (II. iii. 115-46) and dirge (V. iv. 131-46), spoken quite out of character as they are, seem to have a choric ring about them. The opening lines of the meditation parallel in thought lines from Rosola's dirge:

"You that dwell neere these graves and vaults,
Which oft doe hide Physicians faults,
Note what a small Rooms does suffice,
To express mans good - their vanities
Would fill more volume in small hand,
Then all the evidence of Church-land."

D.L.C. II. iii. 115-20

"Much you had of land and rent,
Your length in clay's now competent."

D. M. IV. ii. 184-5

There is powerful emphasis on transitoriness in the dirge in V. iv.:

"Sweetest Breth, and clearest eye,
Like perfumes goe out and dye;
And consequently this is done,
As shadowes wait upon the Sunne."

D.L.C. V. iv. 139-42
Despite the fact that Romelio says it hypocritically there is significance in his comment:

"... this Shroud
Shows me how rankly we doe smell of earth,
When we are in all our glory."

D.L.C. V. iv. 153-5

This might be Bosola speaking, or Webster himself, meditating on life and death in *A Monumental Column*.

While his insistence on the impermanent and illusory nature of earthly life remains, other aspects of Webster's vision of life alter. The former emphasis on the predominance of evil in the world, which is so overwhelming in *The White Devil* and not much less so in *The Duchess of Malfi*, is almost entirely gone, and with it the kindred conception of man's utter helplessness and depravity. Instead there is greater emphasis on the power of good in the world, which is reflected in the greater emphasis placed on Ariosto and the Capuchin. Further, God's sovereignty is repeatedly demonstrated as evil frustrates and negates itself. In *The Duchess of Malfi* examples of this occur several times in Act Five, as when the Cardinal locks himself into his room, or when Ferdinando accidentally stabs his brother. In *The Devil's Law-Case* such events are frequent. Leonora's law-suit rebounds on her, and on Romelio who is the originator of the mischief. Most important of all, Romelio's attempted murder of Contarino is, paradoxically, the means of saving the dying man's life. The Capuchin comments quite explicitly on this act of Providence:

"... see how heaven
Can invert mans firmest purpose! his intent"
Of murthering Contarino, was a means
To works his safety."

D.L.C. V. iv. 214-7

The final demonstration of God's power is meant to be
Romello's last-minute conversion. Unfortunately though we are
partly prepared for it by the efforts of Ariosto and the Capuchin,
it still does not carry conviction. Romello has remained so
splendidly fixed in his wrongdoing that the hasty conversion does
violence to our conception of his character, and appears no
better than a theatrical gesture. The note of optimism on which
the play ends thus seems unjustified, and Ariosto's concluding
remarks are quite inadequate as a summing-up of what has gone
before:

"so we leave you
Wishing your future life may make good use
Of these events, since that these passages,
Which threatened ruin, built on rotten ground,
Are with success beyond our wishes crown'd."

D.L.C. V. v. 28-102

It is the perfunctory handling of the dénouement
which is so unconvincing. The reader is left with the impression
that Webster had tired of his task and simply wrenched the action
round to an orthodox tragic-comic ending, with punishments and
rewards as deserved. The devil's Law-case must, then, be
considered unsuccessful as a unified work of art. It is uneven,
with brilliant passages alternating with mediocre ones, and fine
scenes like IV. ii. with poor ones like V. v. At times there is
evidence of uncertainty of handling and of a lack of interest on
Webster's part. Yet the play is far from uninteresting, for it
shows that though he is working in a different genre Webster is still seriously concerned with the same thematic problems which lie at the heart of the tragedies.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

"Thunder: the flesh quails, and the soul bows down.
Night: east, west, south, and northward, very night.
Star upon struggling star strives into sight,
Star after shuddering star the deep storms drown."

In these lines from Swinburne's sonnet "John Webster" is epitomized a typical critical response to Webster's plays during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Swinburne's sonnet is not criticism, of course, but it is at one with his study of Webster in *The Age of Shakespeare*, and with the general tone prevailing in Websterian studies, as can be seen by comparing it with this summation of Webster's work by Rupert Brooke:

"A play of Webster's is full of the feverish and ghastly turmoil of a nest of maggots. Maggots are what the inhabitants of this universe most suggest and resemble. The sight of their fever is only alleviated by the permanent calm, unfriendly summits and darknesses of the background of death and doom. For that is equally a part of Webster's universe. Human beings are writhing grubs in an immense night."

The inadequacy of such a critical approach to Webster is twofold. Firstly, the approach is wholly subjective; we are really learning more about the effect Webster's poetry has on the critic than about Webster's work itself. Secondly, and far


more seriously, such criticism has led generations of critics astray in their attempts to discover the themes and ideas underlying Webster's plays. The overwhelming nature of their imaginative response to the imagery of darkness and decay, hell and death, has led critics to miss the more positive aspects of the Websterian universe. This is still happening to some extent today. In Travis Bogard's study, which appeared in 1955, we read:

"The White Devil is a tragedy of disillusion, The Duchess of Malfi, a tragedy of despair."

Amplifying his remark on The Duchess of Malfi, Bogard says:

"Decay is everywhere. It is in the body, which is 'to preserve earth-worms'. It breaks through the bars of the mind to let the beast in man roam loose. It confounds even good deeds with tragic error. The pathway to death is the gutter, the sewer, the dung heap. In the end, man is powerless to foster good or to check evil, because death surrounds all actions and renders them meaningless. Both good and evil are appearances when seen against the background of common mortality."

This is, in a limited sense, true of Webster's view of this earthly life as it is seen particularly in The White Devil; but as a depiction of the Websterian universe it is quite wrong. It is the product of Bogard's imaginative response to certain aspects of Webster's work at the expense of others.

Yet such a response, if critically unfortunate, is understandable. For Webster's own vision of life, strongly coloured as it is by Calvinism, is an extremely sombre and powerful one.

4 ibid. p.141
5 ibid. p.142
This is particularly so in *The White Devil*, which most clearly shows its Calvinistic background. The world is portrayed as full of rampant evil; man is hopelessly depraved, the society in which he lives treacherous and predatory. Webster's first tragedy is a pessimistic work. The few good people are weak and ineffectual in a hostile environment. The world of *The White Devil* is the Devil's domain; the bad order society and manipulate the law to suit themselves. Retribution is haphazard and incomplete. The pessimistic effect is deepened by the lack of any but a minimal positive assertion at the end of the play. And even courage is not put forward as a counter to the vicious depravity, only as a last assertive stand which good and bad alike can make before their extinction.

In *The Duchess of Malfi* there is evidence of a more mature and balanced vision. The world is still evil, man still generally depraved, but Webster offers some positive assertions to set against this. Not all the characters are depraved and predatory; not all of them are doomed to an eternity in Hell. In the Duchess Webster depicts a human soul destined to be saved. God intervenes to foil the machinations of the Devil's agents, and reveals his sovereignty over the world by meting out full and effective punishment to all wrong-doers. There is no evasion of justice as in *The White Devil*. There is a further move towards a more positive vision of the world in *The Devil's Law-Case*. Despite the faulty and sometimes uncertain handling of the themes, it is clear that Webster is offering, in Romellio, another study of the redemption of a human soul. God's absolute sovereignty.
is again demonstrated when devilish influences are defeated and through the joint endeavours of human justice and divine love. Homelio is saved from spiritual pride. The greatest positive development, however, is that the world is no longer regarded as wholly depraved. The law, for instance, is no longer the tool of evil, as in The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, it is truly the upholder of justice. The retribution in The Devil's Law-Case is meted out by a human agency as well as by divine intervention.

Despite the gradual changes in Webster's views as he grew older, his belief in a number of basic tenets remained almost unaltered. They can be seen occurring again and again in his plays, often appearing each time in the same simile or metaphor.

The first of these basic convictions which Webster held arises directly out of his Calvinistic distrust of the things of this world; it is the belief in the emptiness of worldly glory. This is illustrated in The White Devil in an obviously choric sentence from Flamino:

"Glories, like glowwormes, afarre off shine bright
But looke to neere, have neither heat nor light."

W.H. V. i. 38-9

The importance attached to this idea by Webster is seen when he repeats it word for word at a climactic moment during Bosola's purification of the Duchess in The Duchess of Malfi:

Duchess "I am Duchesse of Malfy still.
Bosola "That makes thy sleepes so broken:
Glories (like glow-wormes) afarre off, shine bright,
But look'd to neere, have neither heate, nor light."

B.W. IV. ii. 139-42
The same image occurs again in a modified form in *The Devil's Law-Case*, when Romelio is being stripped of his honours in the court scene:

"For those false beams of his supposed honour,\[as voy\] as wa\[of true heat, as are all painted fires, Or glow-wormes in the darke,"

*D.L.C. IV. ii. 119-21*

The same conviction of the essential worthlessness of worldly glory can be seen in other images; it is evident in Romelio's dirge, for example:

"Vain the ambition of Kings,\[who seeke by trophies and dead things\] To leave a living name behind, And weave but nets to catch the wind."

*D.L.C. V. iv. 143-6*

Significantly, too, the same attitude is dominant in *A Monumental Column*:

"O Greatnesse! What shall we compare thee to? To giants, beasts, or Towers fram'd out of Snow, Or like wax guilded tapers, more for show Than durance? Thy foundation doth betray Thy frailty, being building on such clay."

*W.G. 109-113*

Closely allied to his conviction that worldly glory is empty of real significance is Webster's distrust of earthly possessions, of office, of material security. Both Flamineo and Bosola sell themselves to gain wealth and security, and Webster emphasizes both the dangers of seeking earthly security and the disillusionment which eventually follows such a search. Flamineo is aware of this as he lies dying:

"This base trade of life appeares most vaime,
Since rest breeds rest, where all seeke paine by paine."

W.D. V. vi. 273-4

In The Duchess Of Malfi Webster comments more particularly on the dangers of security:

"Securitie some men call the Suburbs of Hell, Onely a dead wall between."

D.M. V. ii. 372-3

Similarly, in The Devil's Law-Case the Capuchin says to Romelio:

"... your soule Being heretofore drown'd in seouritie, You know not how to live, nor how to dye."

D.L.C. V. iv. 123-5

The 'securitic' of which Webster speaks is not only a material situation but also a spiritual one. Romelio is endangering his soul because financial security has engendered spiritual complacency and pride. To quote again Marston's lines, applying them to Webster:

"'tis his position, whosoever in this earth can be contented is a slave and dam'd."

Malcontent I. i. 33-4

The third major conviction revealed in Webster's works is closely allied to the preceding two, springing equally from a Calvinist mistrust of the world. Summed up in the image usually used to embody it, it is the attitude that life is a sickness for which death is the cure. In The White Devil this is implied only (vide W.D. V. vi. 101-6), but elsewhere it is made explicit.

"Pleasure of life, what is't? Onely the good houres Of an Ague: merely a preparative to rest, To endure vexation."

D.M. V. iv. 78-80
"The intermission from a fit of an ague
Is grievous: for indeed it doth prepare us,
To entertain torment next morning."

D.L.C. I. ii. 293-5

"Is not the shortest fever the best."

D.L.C. III. iii. 7

"Both life and death have equally exprest
Of all, the shortest madness is the best."

M.C. 130-1

By comparison with the corrupt and unwholesome nature of earthly
life, death is a purification:

"... like new-writ Copies, t'avoid blots,
Must must be thrown upon us:"

M.C. 117-8

Thus Bosola is amazed at the way men fear death:

"... all our feare,
(And all our terror) is, least our position
Should put us in the ground, to be made sweete."

D.M. II. i. 60-2

To the Duchess, death is the "best gift" her brothers can give
her (D.M. IV. ii. 229-31). Similarly, Webster sees Prince
Henry's death as a triumph:

"... and forth his soule he breathes
Without a sigh; fixing his constant eie,
Upon his triumph, immortality."

M.C. 228-30

Only through death can the soul achieve release from the body
in which it is imprisoned. As Bosola says:

"Didst thou ever see a Lark in a cage? such is the soule in
the body: this world is like her little turfe of grasses, and
the Heaven onr our heads, like her looking glasses, only gives
us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison."

D.M. IV. ii. 127-31
Little wonder, then, that, for Webster, death is the climax of a man's life:

"The evening shows the day, and death crowns life."

Webster's vision of an evil and corrupt world, so powerful and unrelieved in The White Devil, is brightened a little in his later works by his conviction that wrong-doing is followed by certain retribution. This is clearly demonstrated in both imagery and dramatic action. Most of Act Five of The Duchess of Malfi is devoted to the retribution which befalls all the evil-doers in the play. All those on whom such retribution falls are fully aware that they are receiving their deserts. As the Cardinal says:

"Oh Justice:
I suffer now, for what hath former sin:
Sorrow is held the eldest child of sin."

This, of course, is closely paralleled by Giovanni's reproof of Flaminio in The White Devil (V. iv. 18-19) but the effect of such a comment in the earlier tragedy is vitiated by the fact that in it retribution is far from complete. Associated with the idea of retributive justice in Webster's mind is the thesis that evil ultimately destroys itself. This is illustrated in image and action in both The Duchess of Malfi and The Devil's Law-Case. Ferdinand's last words recognize both the idea of retribution and that of evil as a self-destructive force:

"Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, like diamonds, we are cut with our owne dust."

D.M. V. v. 72-4

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"Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, like diamonds, we are cut with our owne dust."

D.M. V. v. 91-2
In *The Devil's Law-Case* Contarino early foresees that Romelio's and Leonora's plots will nullify each other:

"... Let those that would oppose this union, Grow here so subtil, and intangle themselves In their owne worke like Spiders, ..."

*D.L.C. I. ii. 313-5*

This particular image is also used to describe evil destroying itself in *The White Devil*. Francisco is talking hypocritically, but what he says we are obviously meant by Webster to take seriously:

"Treason, like spiders weaving nets for flies, By her foule worke is found, and in it dies."

*D.W. IV. i. 28-9*

As with the imagery, so in the action. The Cardinal helps to make his death at Bosola's hands easier (D.L.C. V. iv. and v.), and Pescara's comment on this is explicit:

"How fatally (it seems) he did withstand his owne resc ew!"

*D.M. V. v. 114-5*

In the central situation of *The Devil's Law-Case* there is a similar sort of self-hinderine act when Romelio stabs Contarino, only to save his life by doing so (D.L.C. III. ii). This paradox is commented on explicitly by the Capuchin:

"... see how heaven Can invert mans firmest purpose! his intent Of murdering Contarino, was a means To worke his safety, ..."

*D.L.C. V. iv. 214-7*

The only conclusion one can draw is that God possesses powers beyond those of evil, and is able, when He wishes, to negate evil actions, or turn them to advantage. This is clearly related to
the Calvinist doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God over a depraved world.

Though for the good of Webster's world life is "a state in which much is to be endured and little enjoyed," it is ultimately little more enjoyable for the wrong-doer. For however evil the world may seem, it is still the creation of God, and He retains final authority over it. Thus for those who live evil lives there is only ultimate disillusionment and bewilderment. This is repeatedly illustrated in Webster's plays. Vittoria dies courageously, but bewildered:

"My soule, like to a ship in a blakke storme, Is driven I know not whither."

W.D. V. vi. 248-9

Julia dies echoing the last part of Vittoria's cry:

"... I go,
I know not whither."

D.M. V. ii. 315-6

Romelio experiences similar feelings when he expects to die:

"Stay, I doe not well know whither I am going;"

D.L.C. V. iv. 10

The most characteristic image at such times is that involving mist. Bosola uses such an image several times, last of all when he lies dying:

Malatesta   "Thou wretched thing of blood,
How came Antonio by his death?"
Bosola     In a mist: I know not how,"

D.M. V. v. 116-8

6 Dr Johnson's phrase.
But the most explicit use of the image is Flamineo's, for he sees, momentarily, the delusions he has lived under:

"While we looke up to heaven wee confound knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist."

W.D. V. vi. 259-60

Webster's villains die bewildered and disillusioned, but they also die courageously. Courage is the one virtue the dramatist allows to good and bad alike. As F.I. Lucas says, speaking of The Devil's Law-Case,

"One virtue alone remains outstanding...; one commandment, Webster's first and last, still keeps its force - 'Thou shalt not be afraid'."

With the villains such courage takes the form of Stoicism. This is evident in the memorable declaration of self-sufficiency by the dying Flamineo:

"... I doe not looke
Who went before, nor who shall follow mee;
Noe, at my selfe I will begine and end."

W.D. V. vi. 256-8

It is also seen clearly in the last words of Zanche, Vittoria, and Lodovico. It is equally in evidence, too, in The Duchess of Malfi. Antonio makes a typical stoic declaration:

"Though in our miseries, Fortune hath a part,
Yet, in our noble sufferings, she hath none - Contempt of paine, that we may call our owne."

D.M. V. iii. 70-2

Julia dies in true stoic fashion, so do Bosola and (after a moment of cowardice) the Cardinal. Even the insane Ferdinand dies
with a flourish.

In The Devil's Law-Case Romelio exhibits the same qualities of stoic resolution as his machiavellian predecessors:

"... Resolution
Should ever wayt upon a noble death
As Captaines bring their Souldiers out o' th field,
And come off last: for, I pray, what is death?
The safest Trench i'th' world to keepe man free
From Fortune's Gunshot; to be afraid of that,
Would prove me weaker then a teeming woman,
That does indure a thousand times more paine
In bearing of a child."

D.L.C. V. iv. 113-21

It should not be assumed, however, as some critics imply, that Webster is an uncritical admirer of courage. He is fully conscious, for instance, of the villainy and pride on which Romelio's resolute bearing rests. The Capuchin reminds us that there are moral issues involved when he tells Romelio:

"This confidence,
If it be grounded upon truth, 'tis well."

D.L.C. V. iv. 111-2

Further, Webster shows us that, while villains may die courageously, the finest courage and the most sublime acceptance of suffering are displayed by the Duchess. Her behaviour in the face of death is tempered by an element of calm assurance found in none of the villains. This assurance springs from the Duchess's certainty of her entry into the life hereafter:

**Bozola**  "Both not death fright you?
**Duchess**  Who would be afraid on't?
Knowing to meete such excellent company
In th'other world."

D.M. IV. ii. 215-8
The most important fact about the way the Duchess meets her end, however, is not that she does so in courage and calm assurance, but that she does so humbly. It is the mixture of stoic acceptance and Christian humility which is so important, for it is the latter which Webster regards as the cardinal virtue, a quality more admirable even than courage. References to humility occur frequently, and the image Webster regularly uses to depict it is that involving a 'mountain - valley' contrast. The image occurs first in The White Devil, used hypocritically:

"... I'll stand,
Like a safe vallie, which low bends the knee
To some aspiring mountaine."

W.B. IV. i. 25-7

The way Webster repeats the image in later works indicates, however, that it embodied an important truth for him. In The Devil's Law-Case Ercole comments chorically:

"Mountaines are deformed heaps, sweld up aloft; Vales wholsomer, though lower, and trod on oft."

D.L.C. IV. ii. 672-3

The contrast between pride and humility is also fully drawn out in A Monumental Column, humility being the virtue around which Webster builds most of his praise of the dead prince.

"His mind quite voyd of ostentation, His high-erected thoughts look't downe upon The smiling valley of his fruitfull heart."

M.C. 33-5

In his introduction to the Twickenham edition of Pope's Essay on Man, Maynard Mack summarizes the central theme under-
lying the poem thus:

"One way of stating this [the central theme] would be to call it the theme of constructive renunciation. By renouncing the exterior false Paradises the true one within is won; by acknowledging his weaknesses man learns his strengths . . . Renunciation in this sense, conceived not as stagnation of the spirit but redirection towards its truest ends, is a ruling principle with Pope."8

So, too, it is with Webster. Not that the two men's work shows a great deal else in common or that their attitudes to life are similar. But what Maynard Mack says here of The Essay on Man is applicable to Webster's work. Like Pope in this respect at least, Webster is treating of the dangers of spiritual pride, and advocating humility, constructive renunciation. Pope, of course, took more pleasure in the material world than Webster, who in A Monumental Column and The Duchess of Malfi reveals himself as possessing strains of asceticism, but the thematic similarity is there; both men show a concern with the need for the "redirection of the spirit to its truest ends". That is Bosola's role, and the Capuchin's.

In the introduction to this study it was stated that one of the main aims was to demonstrate that Webster the poet, Webster the moralist, and Webster the dramatist are not separate entities, as so much criticism implies, but rather aspects of the one mind working to create organically unified works of art. This has now, it is hoped, been shown. A systematic study of

the language and imagery has revealed that, though some of Webster's views may have altered or developed, there lies behind the four works in question a single coherent philosophy of life. It has become equally evident that in the presentation of this philosophy Webster relies heavily on poetic methods. For he is largely dependent on imagery not only for the embodiment and exposition of his thematic material, but also for his tragic effects, for satiric purposes and as an aid to characterization. Consequently, unless the complex patterns of imagery which Webster so carefully places at the heart of his plays are properly understood the works themselves lose half their meaning, and more than half of their significance. In the various dedications and addresses to the reader with which he prefces his plays, Webster consistently refers to those works as poems. It seems obvious that he conceived of them primarily in poetic terms. It is hardly surprising, then, that for a real understanding of what Webster is trying to say a similar approach is required of the reader.

9 see Works I. 107-8 and II. 33, 235 and 236.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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(b) The Critics. (particularly useful works are asterisked)


Bradbrook, Muriel C. "Two Notes upon Webster." M.L.R. XLII (1947)


Ekeblad, Inga-Stina. "Webster's 'wanton boyes'". N. and Q. (July 1955).


Stoll, Elmer E. John Webster. Boston, 1905.
Table Showing the Density of Imagery in Webster's Plays and Others by Contemporaries.

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The Chart comprises images taken from:
- The White Devil 334
- The Duchess of Malfi 346
- A Monumental Column 59
- The Devil's Law Case 216

Total 955
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