

JOHN WEBSTER'S THE WHITE DEVIL: A LITERARY ARTIFACT OF THE  
JACOBEAN STRUGGLE FOR POWER BY KING, POPE, AND MACHIAVEL

by

KATHERINE JEANNETTE MOODY CAREY

(Under the Direction of Charles B. Davis)

ABSTRACT

This past century, playwright John Webster has gained in prominence within the canon of English Renaissance dramatic literature. Webster published his first independently written play, *The White Devil*, in 1612. The play's title proves enigmatic because no single character within the text is identified as the white devil. Re-examining the play's title in terms of historical and cultural significance, I posit that Webster's elusive white devil is the papacy fraught with corruption and abuse of absolute power. I also wish to examine Webster's play as a comment on the corruption and abuse of absolute political power within the reigning monarchy of James I. Jacobean England's power structure was evolving from a medieval feudal system toward a class structure including a thriving professional stratum with earning potential, land purchase opportunities, and municipal government representation. Corruption and abuse of power threatened this new-found bourgeois power. If James and the Catholic Church were to realign, divine right absolutism could destroy England's evolving class structure.

Literary anthropology and new historicism offer an avenue for discourse on *The White Devil* as a seventeenth-century literary artifact. Both James and the papacy claimed

divine right absolutism to rule, both considered themselves above subjugation to human law, both demanded complete obeisance of subjects, and both abused their power. Because censorship restricted playwrights' comments on the reigning monarch, anti-Catholic rhetoric could be enacted onstage, offering the same warning in a safely veiled package. Webster was free to attack the papacy and Italy as the seat of the Holy See, utilizing dialogue and visual imagery to portray the pope as the Antichrist. Drawing upon the previous generation's memory of Mary Tudor's reign of terror while attempting to realign England with Rome under the papacy of Pope Paul IV, Webster offers his audience a loathed enemy dressed in brilliant white and adorned with a triple crown, an enemy who has excommunicated the English to eternal damnation, an enemy who seats himself equal to God. As a propagandistic tool, Webster's play becomes a mirror for his audience, for characteristics of this staged enemy can be seen as well in their absolutist king.

INDEX WORDS: John Webster, The White Devil, Jacobean drama, Absolutism, Anti-Catholic rhetoric, Machiavel

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God, the source of all power and love, through whom all things are possible. This work is also dedicated to my husband Tim Carey and to my children Ryan and Erin whose love and patience support my endeavors.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Presentation of Thesis**

Playwright John Webster was relatively overlooked within the canon of English Renaissance dramatic literature, but in this past century he has gained in prominence as scholars investigate his body of work. Charles R. Forker comments in the preface to his book *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (1986), “John Webster is now firmly established (with Marlowe, Jonson, and Middleton) as one of the most important Renaissance dramatists next to Shakespeare” (ix). Although Webster’s plays were usually written in collaboration with other playwrights such as Thomas Dekker, John Marston, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton, Webster published his first independently written play titled *The White Devil* in 1612. The title of this play is an enigma because no single character is ever identified as the white devil within the text. Most theatre scholars who have examined *The White Devil*, such as David Bevington and John Russell Brown, have surmised that the white devil refers to the play’s femme fatale character, Vittoria Corombona. Bevington comments that she is “diabolical and yet somehow transcends that evil” (1659), and Brown hails her as a “challenging image of power, intelligence, and mysterious attractiveness; a dazzling clash of good and evil; in biblical language, Satan transformed into an Angel of Light; in theatrical terms, a sensational innovation” (4). Lara Bovilsky also claims that Vittoria is the white devil because her beauty is white but her indulged sexuality is black (“Black Beauties” 638).

This notion of Vittoria as Webster's elusive white devil may have come from the retitling of Webster's play by publishers in 1672 to *Vittoria Corombona, or the White Devil* (Dallby 11). Examining this play simply as a character analysis, I might agree with previous scholars. Vittoria is certainly a wily, willful, and seductive character. Re-examining the play's title in terms of historical and cultural significance, however, I posit that Webster's elusive white devil is actually the office of the papacy, fraught with corruption and abuse under the guise of absolute power. Following this same thread, I also wish to examine Webster's play as a comment on the corruption and abuse of absolute political power within King James's reign.

Webster scholar Ann Rosalind Jones calls *The White Devil* a "fantasy of irresistible evil" (260). To build the play's plot, Webster draws as its source the true story of an ill-fated romance that occurred thirty years earlier in Italy. He alters several of the character's names with respect to variations in spellings. For example, Webster changes the historical name Vittoria Accoramboni to the fictional name Vittoria Corombona and Cardinal Montalto to Cardinal Monticelso. There is a more notable change, though, in the name of one of Webster's characters that has no apparent relevance to variations in spelling. When the historical Cardinal Montalto was elected pope, he took the name Pope Sixtus V. When Webster's fictional Cardinal Monticelso becomes pope, however, he takes the name Pope Paul IV. Scholar F. L. Lucas comments on this odd name change in his Introduction and Commentary sections as editor of the 1959 MacMillan publication of *The White Devil*. Lucas questions why Webster would choose to change the name of the pope and suggests that it may have been because Paul V was the sitting pope in 1612, the year the play was published and performed. Lucas finally proposes that the character

name change to Paul IV was probably a simple mix-up stemming from Webster having heard an incorrect account of the historical event (34). Scholar Gunnar Boklund also discusses this odd name change in his book *The Sources of The White Devil* (1957). Boklund claims that the change in name from Sixtus V to Paul IV was irrelevant (85); he comments further:

The strange names under which Montalto-Sixtus V appears still remain to be accounted for. . . . To speculate that the name of Paul IV Carafa would convey more to the audience of *The White Devil* than Sixtus V Peretti is manifestly futile. It must, however, be admitted that this is a question where neither source nor play seems to offer any acceptable solution. (Boklund 139)

In the Preface to his book, Boklund offers, however, that his research is not exhaustive and future research could reveal new aspects (11). I wish to continue Boklund's journey and answer the mystery of Webster's character name change as a comment on the religious and political climate of Jacobean England.

Literary anthropologist Nicholas B. Dirks addresses the act of reading a text as a piece of history and asserts that as we construct historical knowledge through the cultural form, we must ask ourselves first if this can be done, and second if this construction is a conceit on our part (276-78). E. Valentine Daniel posits that the anthropologist's goal is to get to know the other even though the anthropologist is distanced both temporally and spatially. At the same time, the anthropologist must be aware that he exists in a dyadic relationship with his subject, affecting the material he is studying while at the same time being affected by the material itself (2-3). Mindful of these comments, I will explore

Webster's play as an artifact and at the same time, consciously steer clear of asserting my twenty-first century mindset and sensibility upon Jacobean English cultural values.

Instead, I will focus my concentration upon Webster's text combined with primary and secondary resource material to shed light upon Webster's socio-economic/political/religious environment.

Webster was not only an English Renaissance dramatist, he was also a product and living artifact of his time and environment. Margot Heinemann explains, "A play is not a photograph but a highly selective, constructed picture which attempts to make sense and pattern of the confusion of life" (66). *The White Devil* is Webster's artistic construct that portrays his environment. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz believes that cultural forms find articulation through artifacts and refers to Ward Goodenough's comment that culture is located in the hearts and minds of men (Geertz 11). Using new historicism, I will re-examine this play as an anthropological literary artifact of anti-Catholic sentiment and propaganda of early seventeenth-century England and then correlate this same, prevalent English attitude toward divine absolute power and its abuses evident within the reign of their monarch, James I. The key to my argument lies within the title of *The White Devil* and the play's fictional character Cardinal Monticelso whom Webster later names Paul IV when elected pope. By examining the historical Paul IV's legacy as well as England's growing fear of Catholicism's return, I will confirm that Paul IV is the titular white devil and that the play represents the anti-Catholic anxiety of Webster's environment.

English Renaissance theatre offered a milieu for popular opinion to be voiced, and Webster's play, *The White Devil*, mirrors early seventeenth-century anxiety stirred by corruption and abuse of power by leadership in the name of God. Both James and the

office of the papacy claimed divine right to rule without question, both considered themselves above subjugation to any human law, both demanded complete obeisance of subjects, and both abused their power. Because censorship and threat of imprisonment for treason restricted English playwrights' comments on the current reigning monarch, anti-Catholic rhetoric enacted onstage could offer the same message of warning in a safely veiled package. In order to publicly comment on the dangers and effects of corruption resulting from divine right absolutism, Webster was free to attack the papacy and Italy as the seat of the Holy See, utilizing visual imagery in addition to dialogue to portray the pope as the Antichrist and priests, particularly Jesuits, as devils. Drawing upon English memories only a generation earlier of Mary Tudor's reign of terror in the 1550s while attempting to realign England with Rome under the papacy of Paul IV, Webster presents to his audience an evil enemy dressed in brilliant white with a triple crown on his head, an enemy who has excommunicated the English people to face eternal damnation, an enemy who seats himself as equal to God Almighty. Webster's loathed enemy is easily identified. As a propagandistic tool, however, Webster's play also becomes a mirror for his audience, for characteristics of this staged enemy can be seen as well in their king.

Catholicism remained a strong undercurrent in early seventeenth-century England, and Rome zealously endeavored to squelch Anglicanism and reunite England with the "one true church." The death of England's beloved Protestant Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 left the Tudor throne with no direct heir. Since Mary Queen of Scots was Elizabeth's cousin, Mary's son, James, King of Scotland, was next in line to inherit the English throne. In that same year, George Downname wrote in his "Treatise Concerning Antichrist" a warning to their new king that the pope was the Antichrist and that



Bellarmino, the sitting Cardinal of Rome, was dangerous to the English realm. Downname implored James to defend the faith and save England from the evils of Catholicism. Leonell Sharpe voiced concern in his 1616 treatise “A Looking Glasse for the Pope” about the possibility of the pope recovering possession of England. Sharpe commented that Jesuits had infected England and their treason threatened the kingdom. Despite concerns voiced by James’s English subjects, he continued corresponding with the Holy See. In addition to his tolerance of Catholicism, James’s reign was noted for corruption, scandal, and lavish attention paid to his favorites at English taxpayers’ expense under the auspices of the divine right of kings to rule unquestioningly. Michael Sparke wrote later in the mid-seventeenth century in “Truth Brought to Light by Time, or the Most Remarkable Transactions of the First Fourteen Years of King James Reigne” that James treated England’s Parliament like “school-boys.” If Parliament would not appease James, he would simply find judges who would pass his desired legislation. Concerned with threats posed by English Catholic insurgents and Rome’s zeal to reunite the Church into one “true” Catholic Church, the House of Commons in 1615 began an inquiry into the cause of an increased number of popish recusants in England since the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Furious at such an inquiry, James stopped the proceedings by dissolving Parliament and imprisoning the leaders of the inquiry. Adding insult to injury, toward the end of James’s reign, he quietly attempted to arrange the marriage of his son and heir, Charles, to the Catholic Spanish Infanta. When news of this scandal became public in London, Sparke wrote that the Spaniards never had any intention of honoring this union; moreover, in Spain, comedians were parodying both James and England. Sparke called the situation a fiasco, insisted that the incident had cast a blot on James’s religion and

conduct, and asserted that James had lost the affection of the English people. I posit that Webster's play *The White Devil* not only addresses the abuse of absolute power within the Catholic Church, but also mirrors the abuse of absolute power within James's English monarchy.

New historicism and literary anthropology offer an avenue of discourse for this play as an artifact of the populace's growing anti-Catholic fever in Jacobean England. Literary anthropologist Zita Nunes asserts that literature "is central not only to the reflection but also to the formation of a national identity" (235). In order to present a propagandistic message to the audience, it is necessary to construct an enemy. In order for Webster to address the evils of absolute power, he cannot directly assert these evils against his king. Constructing a malevolent pope with these powers, however, offers Webster an enemy to present to the English people. Therefore, *The White Devil* completes Nunes's comment that literature reflects and forms national identity. England can rally against an enemy from Rome but cannot rally against a monarchical foe at home—to do so would be treasonous and punishable by death.

Webster's plays represent the thoughts of the English people as a common body under the rule of this Scottish king. As James's Court was rapidly becoming more corrupt, James frequently fought Parliament for exclusive governing rights claiming the divine right of kings to rule without question. Absolute rule, however, is acceptable to a populace only when dispensed with fairness and justice. Social anthropologist Giuliana B. Prato studies corruption and its effect on society and comments that "rules require a legitimate legislator, who guarantees reliability and predictability, even when they are violated . . . they are shared on the expectation of trust and accountability" (69-70). Well-

known for his favoritism when dispensing justice as well as his propensity for selling royal titles to increase his coffers, James was losing trust and accountability with his English subjects.

Throughout Europe, the concept of the role of the monarchy itself was falling into question. The movement of the Age of Reason would usher in the notion that man is capable of governing himself—self-government being the antithesis of divine right monarchy. Since the papacy is also viewed by Catholics as a form of divine absolute rule, it follows that the Reformation’s questioning of the pope’s power would come into play throughout Europe as well. In *The White Devil*, was Webster commenting on James’s monarchy through the veil of the papacy in order to perhaps elude censorship and imprisonment? Or was Webster’s evil papal character in *The White Devil* merely a reminder of the recent past under the rule of a Catholic monarchy, vis-à-vis “Bloody Mary” Tudor? Even if Webster was not consciously aware of his play as a judgment on James, new historicist Stephen Greenblatt comments that studying a culture through text “carries the core hermeneutical presumption that one can occupy a position from which one can discover meanings of those who left traces of themselves could not have articulated” (Gallagher 8). Webster’s play as a textual artifact of Jacobean England can illuminate the public’s growing fear and concern toward absolute monarchism.

### **Previous Scholarly Work**

A wave of scholarship on Webster as a prominent English Renaissance playwright developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the work of scholars such as F. L. Lucas, Gunnar Boklund, and R. W. Dent. Lucas’s Introduction and Commentary explores the meager early civic records of Webster’s life and works. Because there were

numerous citizens named John Webster in London in the early seventeenth century and because so many civic records were lost in the Great Fire of London in 1666, it is difficult to ascertain which John Webster in the records is the playwright. There are extant records indicating a John Webster enrolled to study law in Middle Temple in 1598 and later died in 1637/38; since these dates correspond appropriately to the time of the playwright Webster's life and career, it is believed that the playwright John Webster is in fact the man who enrolled in Middle Temple. Lucas offers an extensive list of the plays Webster wrote both collaboratively and independently along with their dates of publication. In addition to biographical information, Lucas examines Webster's source material for *The White Devil* and explains in detail the story of the ill-fated romance of Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano and Vittoria Accoramboni in Italy in the 1580s.

In *The Sources of The White Devil* (1957), Gunnar Boklund provides extensive research on Webster's source material for *The White Devil* including several accounts of the historical incident and possible ways in which London's Webster could have attained knowledge of this Italian story. Regarding the guilt or innocence of Vittoria, Boklund advocates that there is no direct evidence of her complicity in the murder of her husband to clear the way for her to marry Bracciano, but neither was she a model widow; she married Bracciano within two weeks after the death of her first husband. Boklund offers specific dates and names of people involved in the historical event, explaining variations in Webster's spellings of names such as Vittoria Accoramboni to Vittoria Corombona. Boklund acknowledges Webster's textual borrowing and suggests Webster's papal conclave scene is taken from a published 1585 letter by John Florio discussing the papal

election of Sixtus V and his cold reception of Bracciano and Vittoria (remembering that Sixtus V was the uncle of Vittoria's slain first husband). In the Preface to his book, Boklund comments, though, that his research is not exhaustive and future research could reveal new aspects (11).

Dent's *John Webster's Borrowing* (1960) explores Webster's influences, primarily Sidney and Montaigne, and offers a thorough discussion of textual lines in *The White Devil* that were extracted from previous writings. As was the custom of the time, Webster borrowed heavily from published works, conversations, sermons, and trials (11). In contrast to Boklund, Dent explains that Webster incorporated the papal election scene in *The White Devil* from Jerome Bignon's 1605 published letter describing the process of burying a deceased pope and electing a new pope. Dismissing the conclave scene in Webster's play, Dent describes it as "having no consequence whatsoever . . . a suspenseful dead end" (28). In my argument, I will contrast the play's fictional papal election with the historical corruption plaguing the Holy See. Dent also examines the term white devil during the early seventeenth century, explaining that the expression was common after 1612 and referred to courtesans, mortgages, and nonconformists in religion (69). Dent asserts that the origin of this expression is Martin Luther's comment in 1583 that the world is filled with black devils and white devils.

A renewed wave of scholarship on Webster's work began in the 1980s. Jacqueline Pearson's *Tragedy and Tragicomedie in the Plays of John Webster* (1980) explores Webster's view of his shifting world in which values, judgment, and language become uncertain. In a world that encompasses extremes of comedy and tragedy (2), Pearson offers that *The White Devil* challenges tragic structure by building sequences to a tragic

consequence that never come to fruition and then later exploding the stage unexpectedly with graphic violence so horrifying that cause and effect become dislocated (71). Webster combines parodied action with serious action such as Flamineo's mock death scene followed soon after with his actual death, thus illustrating the power of the comedy of cruelty (75). In the increasing corruption of James's Court where justice and mercy were irrationally meted out, the emergence of the tragicomedy seems a fitting genre to capture England's mounting uncertainty and despair that would culminate in civil war and the temporary removal of their monarchy.

Lee Bliss's *The World's Perspective: John Webster and the Jacobean Drama* (1983) explores the corruption of the Jacobean Court with its alienation of the commoner and the emergence of the Machiavel character in the revenge tragedy genre. While early Elizabethan plays, such as those by Christopher Marlowe, explored man defined against the cosmos, Jacobean playwrights twenty years later explored man defined against social and political boundaries (1). Referring to Hegel's initial use of the term alienation within cultural criticism, Bliss explains that the playwright must distance himself from his world and refers to Webster as the distanced observer of the Jacobean world (13). Webster's protagonists are victims of their own distorted ideals as well as their oppressive environments (97). Bliss offers that Webster's characters possess no noble motives, for in the Machiavel tradition, prizes go to the clever and not the good (99, 109). Therefore, in the increasingly corrupt world of James's Court, Webster's Machiavels intend to conquer their corrupt world on its own terms (198). Bliss comments that corruption is dangerous because it is "generated by society's most influential religious and political figures" (199). *The White Devil* is a historical artifact since Webster, as observer of his

environment, is chronicling England's anxiety resulting from its perceived dangers of government and religion.

M. C. Bradbrook's *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist* (1980) reviews Webster's life through revisiting civic records. The depth and breadth of her inquiry provides maps of Webster's neighborhood, timelines of Webster's life in relationship to historical events happening in London, a reconstruction of Webster's family tree, and discussion of London scandals at the time that would become ripe source material for Webster such as the famed Court adulteress, Penelope Devereux, who lived around the corner from the Webster manor (52). Because Webster was one of several playwrights working in London, Bradbrook explores his professional and personal relationships with theatre colleagues such as Henslowe, Dekker, and Marston. Bradbrook investigates at length the influence of Middle Temple on Webster, including its curriculum, professors, and student body/alumni. She explores the theatre life of London at the time with its plays, masques, audiences, and closings due to plague. In addition, she opens a discourse into the political problems that James faced, mentioning his highly unpopular decision to arrange the political marital union between his son, Prince Charles, and Spain's Infanta, a scandal that Middleton dramatized in his play *A Game at Chess* (1624). An interesting discussion within Bradbrook's book, in terms of my research, is her comment on the papal election. In contrast to Dent, Bradbrook explains that the election scene is central to the play and that the tone in performance would have been darker in Jacobean England (135). During this period of James's effort to arrange Charles's marriage, James instituted a lull in the persecutions of Catholics (Semper 46), and the country's increasing anxiety over a political alignment with Catholic Spain brought back memories of the period under the

Catholic reign of “Bloody Mary” Tudor and her allied marriage with Spain’s Philip II. Webster’s presentation of the pope onstage as Paul IV, the highly unpopular sitting pope during Mary’s reign, would indeed be viewed in a darker sense by Webster’s audience.

Charles R. Forker’s *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* (1986) extends Bradbrook’s labor on the influences on Webster’s life and work such as family, education, neighborhood characteristics, and theatre practitioners, especially the playwriting tutelage of Dekker and Marston. I am particularly interested in Forker’s idea of Webster’s world as an aesthetic of chaos, “a disorienting sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, a feeling that experience is puzzlingly discontinuous, its perspectives wrenched and shifting, its values unstable and self-canceling” (254). Bracciano and Vittoria may be able to rid themselves of their spouses in order to be free to marry each other, but because their deceased spouses are connected to prominent Italian families as well as to the papacy, they cannot rid themselves of familial retribution. There can be no happily ever after. In Webster’s world, love inescapably leads to chaos and death. Forker comments:

All of the institutions of a theoretically Christian society—family, palace, church, court of law—are seen to be in an advanced state of disintegration, honeycombed by viciousness, corruption, and hypocrisy. In this climate, those who seek to order or fulfill their lives through human bonds reap only cruelty and disaster. (263)

All relationships of love in the play—romantic, familial, and brotherly—end violently. Webster’s fictional world onstage mirrors the advancing state of disintegration of his real world.



A more general work on Jacobean literature, Margot Heinemann's *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (1980) delves into Middleton's work as a response to James's corrupt Court. Middleton was a personal friend and playwriting colleague of Webster. Heinemann explores the inner circle of James's favorites as well as the lucrative scandal of James selling English titles to increase his coffers. She explores Middleton's response play, *The Witch*, written after the incident of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and his wife's arranged murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. Although the Somersets were guilty of this crime, James punished their servants but allowed the Somersets to remain free because Carr was one of James's Scottish favorites. Heinemann also explores anti-popery propaganda on the public stage as popular entertainment for the lower classes at the Globe Theatre (12). When Londoners realized that James was arranging the marriage of his son to the Spanish Infanta, they feared James might be preparing to realign England with Rome. Middleton penned *A Game at Chess* for the Globe in response to this ordeal; it was the largest box-office success of the Jacobean period. When James learned of this play, however, he furiously ordered it closed and Middleton imprisoned (151). Soon after, James withdrew the marriage treaty and arranged the engagement of Charles to France's Princess Henrietta Maria. Although France was officially a Catholic country, its ample Protestant contingency of Huguenots diluted the fervor of France's Catholicism. Consequently, Catholicism was not as fiercely celebrated nationally by the French as it was by the Spanish; therefore an alliance with France was not perceived to be as severe a threat to England as a possible alliance with Spain.

Recent dissertation work in the area of John Webster and *The White Devil* addresses issues of widowhood, race, integrity, poison, witchcraft, melancholy religious despair, evil women, the female body, and violence. Noticeably absent is any discussion of this play as historical evidence of anti-Catholic propaganda or the abuse of power through absolute monarchy. My research, therefore, will steer the study of Webster's work into a new direction.

In addition to examining scholars who have focused their work on Webster, my research will utilize methods of literary anthropology developed in the work of such scholars as Clifford Geertz, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Margit Sutrop, E. Valentine Daniel, Stephen Greenblatt, Jeffrey M. Peck, and David Novitz as well as Italo Pardo's anthropological work on political corruption. Their work invites approaching a literary piece under the auspices of new historicism, re-examining a piece of literature as a slice of history within a specific culture in order to uncover new meaning. Iser's theory of the real, fiction, and the fictive allows exploration of this play in terms of what action its performativity is taking upon the Jacobean audience. Literary anthropology and new historicism will also allow me to approach Webster's well-known play in light of recent anthropological exploration of the Inquisition by scholars Paul Grendler, Anne Jacobson Schutte, Stephen Haliczer, John Tedeschi, and Gustav Henningsen. The midpoint of *The White Devil* contains a scene in which Vittoria is being tried for adultery and murder via an Inquisition. With these new discoveries on the nature and procedure of the Catholic Church's inquisitional process—a microcosm of absolutism itself—I am able to revisit Webster's scene within a framework of seventeenth-century English understanding.

Through primary sources, I will re-examine papal conclaves from the published letters of John Florio and Jerome Bignon who were witnesses at the time and whose published writing was available in London. Additional primary sources will offer public reaction to political and religious sentiment of the times—sources such as other plays by John Webster, principally *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Devil's Law Case*; pieces by Middleton, such as *The Witch*, *A Game at Chess*, and *The Blacke Booke*; Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter*; and writings by Dekker such as *The Seauen Deadly Sinnes of London*, *The Wonderful Year*, and *The Double PP: A Papist in Arms*. Further primary documents such as letters written by Thomas Howard and John Harington as well as treatises such as those by Michael Sparke, George Downame, and Leonell Sharpe will offer seventeenth-century social commentary on these political and religious issues.

Scholarship has not yet focused upon the pope as Webster's elusive white devil in the play. Martin Luther called the pope the very Antichrist in Article IV of *The Book of Concord: Smalcald Articles* in 1536. The year before, Luther addressed the nature of devils and evil in the world in chapter 1, verse 4 of his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*: "The white devil of spiritual sin is far more dangerous than the black devil of carnal sin." In Webster's *The White Devil*, Sixtus V is replaced by Paul IV, the historical pope who collaborated with Mary Tudor to attempt to realign England with Rome. Under Mary's rule, hundreds of English were burned at the stake for heresy after refusing to convert from Anglicanism back to Catholicism. Paul IV was known among the English for his ruthless actions toward all non-Catholics, his Index of prohibited books designed to halt the spread of Humanism and Protestantism, and his zealous reputation as a Grand

Inquisitor. Webster's white devil is indeed the office of the papacy as well as a referent to James's dangerous political absolutism.

### **Historical Account of Event**

Gunnar Boklund and F. L. Lucas provide the most detailed accounts of the events that transpired in the ill-fated Italian romance that Webster chose for his historical source material. Paolo Giordano Orsini, the Duke of Bracciano, married Isabella de Medici in 1558. Their marriage produced three children. Not a happy marriage, Paolo lived separately in Rome while Isabella resided in Florence. Isabella was known for extramarital and often incestuous affairs that caused embarrassment within the Medici family; Isabella was murdered in 1576, presumably strangled by Paolo with the consent of her brother, Francesco de Medici. In 1580, Paolo's servant Marcello Accoramboni introduced Paolo to his beautiful and alluring sister, Vittoria, who was married at the time to Francesco Perreti, nephew to the ambitious Cardinal Montalto. Because the Peretti and the Accoramboni families were not pleased with Francesco and Vittoria's marriage, the young couple resided in the Cardinal's home. Vittoria's marriage was also unhappy, but unlike Paolo's marriage to Isabella, Vittoria's marriage produced no children. Vittoria's renowned beauty attracted prominent and powerful men, including Cardinal Montalto's rival for the papacy, Cardinal Farnese.

One night in 1581, Francesco Peretti was lured out of his home prompted by a letter from Marcello Accoramboni; on a dark street, Peretti was shot and stabbed to death. His uncle, Cardinal Montalto, unexpectedly called for no investigation lest the dark nature of this crime and its ties to the Montalto family name interfere with his chances at becoming elected pope over Farnese. Instead, Montalto sent Vittoria quietly back to her

mother's home. Less than two weeks later, Paolo and Vittoria were clandestinely wed. Pope Gregory XIII learned of this wedding, ordered it null, and sent Vittoria back to her parental home. Soon after, Gregory learned that Paolo and Vittoria were together again and had privately renewed their wedding vows, so Gregory sentenced Vittoria to confinement in a nunnery. Paolo begged for help from the governor of Rome, but to no avail. In June of 1582, Paolo promised never to see Vittoria again so that Gregory would allow her to be released. Cardinal Montalto, the uncle of Vittoria's slain husband agreed with the pope's decision to release Vittoria. In April of 1585, Gregory XIII died. Paolo and Vittoria believed that this death released them from the pope's wrath; they wed a third time, this time a lavish, public wedding celebration in the Church. One hour after the wedding, ironically, Montalto was elected to succeed Gregory as pope, taking the name Sixtus V. Paolo begged a private audience to discuss this awkward situation, and Sixtus forgave Paolo his past wrongdoings. Sixtus, however, ardently warned Paolo not to incur any future wrongs against him or the Peretti family.

Paolo and Vittoria left Rome to live quietly in Padua and tried to reestablish amicable ties with Francesco de Medici who had taken Virginio Orsini, Paolo and Isabella's son, under his wing. In the meantime, a new investigation into Peretti's murder was opened in Rome, supposedly under the auspices of his uncle, Sixtus; witnesses were reportedly tortured to gain information. At the same time, Paolo's health began to fail rapidly. An obese man, he suffered from gluttonous eating, gout, and leg ulcers. Beautiful Vittoria, however, allegedly loved him in spite of his outward appearance and chronic illness.

Paolo crafted his will to leave the duchy of Bracciano to Vittoria along with considerable wealth; little remained for Virginio Orsini, his son by Isabella. Neither the Orsini nor the Medici families were willing to allow Vittoria to inherit this title and land. By November of 1585, Paolo had died amid rumors that he was poisoned at the orders of Francesco de Medici. In her grief, Vittoria attempted suicide with a pistol. Sixtus began proceedings to wrest away her inheritance for the financial benefit of the Papal Estate. Also concerned with reclaiming the inheritance, the Orsini and Medici families chose kinsman and known criminal Lodovico Orsini to meet with Vittoria to demand that she relinquish her inheritance. When Vittoria refused, Lodovico related her response to both Francesco de Medici, the Grand Duke of Florence, and Virginio Orsini, Paolo's son. Vittoria asked Sixtus for protection from the Osinis and Medicis, even offering to reenter the convent.

In December 1585, Lodovico and a band of approximately fifty masked henchmen broke into Vittoria's home. Interrupting her in prayer, they stabbed her to death along with her innocent brother Flamineo and her handmaiden Caterina. Lodovico and his bandits were arrested and publicly executed; Sixtus personally ordered the execution of Lodovico in June 1586 and the beheading of Vittoria's brother, Marcello, for the crime of murder. Francesco de Medici died mysteriously two years later (Boklund 15-35, Lucas 15-27). See Appendix B for a timeline of events.

### **Brief Summary of the Play**

For discussion of Webster's text, I will be using the Revels Student edition edited by John Russell Brown and published by Manchester University Press in 1996. Webster alters the historical source material somewhat. For name changes between the historical

person and the play's fictional character, please see Appendix A. The play opens with Lodovico being banished from Rome for the crime of piracy. He is secretly in love with Isabella de Medici, the wife of Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano. When the Duke meets the beautiful Vittoria Corombona (Accoramboni in the historical account), he is still married to Isabella and has one son, Giovanni. Vittoria's brother Flamineo (Marcello in the historical account) is a servant to the Duke and introduces him to Vittoria who is already married to Camillo (Francesco Peretti in the historical account), the nephew of Cardinal Monticelso (Montalto in the historical account). When the Duke offers Vittoria jewels as a token of his admiration and intentions, she mentions to him that she had a curious dream the previous night in which she was sitting at the graves of Isabella and Camillo. Flamineo suggests to the Duke that this dream is Vittoria's way of hinting that she would like their inconvenient spouses to be removed so that they might enjoy a future together. Vittoria's mother Cornelia (Tarquinia in the historical account) is greatly troubled at the prospect of her son Flamineo prostituting his sister Vittoria to the Duke.

Soon after meeting Vittoria, Bracciano leaves Isabella which displeases her brother, Francisco de Medici, Duke of Florence. Unlike the historical account in which Isabella was promiscuous, Webster's Isabella is a true and faithful wife. Through the convention of the dumb show, the audience witnesses a horrific fate befall Isabella and Camillo. One evening before retiring to bed, Isabella kisses a portrait of her estranged husband goodnight, unaware that the portrait has been laced with poison. Isabella's kiss proves fatal. Meanwhile, Camillo competes in a vaulting match with Flamineo, but at the moment that Camillo attempts to vault the horse, Flamineo snaps Camillo's neck. When

Isabella's brother Francisco and Camillo's uncle Cardinal Monticelso learn of their respective loved one's suspicious and untimely death, they are outraged and swear vengeance upon both Bracciano and Vittoria.

Vittoria is arrested and tried through an Inquisition for adultery and murder. Cardinal Monticelso, himself, serves as the Grand Inquisitor and sentences her to confinement in a nunnery. Bracciano rescues her. When Lodovico sneaks back into the country and learns that his beloved Isabella is dead, presumably at the hand of Bracciano, Lodovico joins Francisco de Medici and Cardinal Monticelso in seeking revenge. Meanwhile the current pope dies and a conclave convenes to elect a new pope. Cardinal Monticelso is chosen and adopts the name Paul IV. One of his first acts as pope is to give Francisco a black book listing the names of criminals in the area. Francisco pays Lodovico handsomely to kill Bracciano. Lodovico poisons Bracciano's war helmet so that when he puts it on, the poison seeps into his skull and death becomes imminent. Disguised as a priest summoned to provide extreme unction to Bracciano before dying, Lodovico taunts him saying that he will burn in hell for the death of Isabella.

Meanwhile, Flamineo believes that he can gain political favor if he kills Vittoria, so he concocts a triple murder-suicide pact to shoot and kill himself, Vittoria, and her handmaiden, Zanche. Vittoria agrees to shoot Flamineo but discovers he is not dead because he has loaded the gun with one blank. Two real bullets remain loaded for her and Zanche. Amid this confusion, Lodovico unexpectedly enters and stabs Vittoria and Flamineo to death. The play concludes with the young Giovanni, the new rightful Duke of Bracciano, entering to reestablish order and calling for Lodovico's execution as just retribution.



## Jacobean Tragicomedy Form

After Elizabeth's death, the tone of English theatre turned darker, and the tragicomedy genre became the perfect aesthetic vehicle for presenting satirical comedy of lost ideals in a spiteful and grotesque manner. Public theaters were competing with private theaters and boys' theaters for audience income, and romantic or humoural comedies were no longer satisfactory to English audiences. Commercial stage successes spawned fads such as the revenge tragedy form to which Webster espoused (Bliss 6-10). Webster's *The White Devil* is an amalgamation of the revenge tragedy and the tragicomedy forms. In this plot, the Peretti, Orsino, and Medici families seek revenge for the murders of their loved ones. The revenge element is coupled with the foppish antics of Machiavel characters like Flamineo who feigns madness and orchestrates fake suicide pacts for twisted personal gain.

Ancient critics of the dramatic form, most notably Aristotle and Horace, proscribed that tragedy and comedy remain separate forms. Jacobean drama, however, offered an acceptable climate for the hybrid of these forms into the tragicomedy. Lee Bliss explains that the Jacobean tragicomedy combines vice characters from medieval morality plays with satirical characters from the 1590s. He asserts that the highly competitive, commercial realm of English theatre encouraged this hybrid (4) and that experimentally combining comedy and tragedy intensifies the relation between character and society as well as the relation between audience and play (16).

Interspliced between scenes of violent retribution in *The White Devil* are comic sequences such as the triple murder suicide pact between Flamineo, Vittoria, and Zanche in act 5 scene 6. Flamineo continues in his Machiavel attempt to rise in power through

pleasing the powerful Orsinis and Medicis by offering to kill his sister Vittoria and her maid Zanche. He gulls Vittoria into believing that she will surely be brutally murdered by Bracciano's enemies now that Bracciano is dead and can no longer protect her. Flamineo explains that his life is in danger as well because he served Bracciano. Therefore, if they agree to shoot each other in a suicide pact, then they can both die without the pain of being tortured and executed by the nobles. Succumbing to Flamineo's con, Vittoria agrees to shoot Flamineo with the pistol he has supplied. After the audience hears the gunshot and witnesses his fall, he unexpectedly jumps back up, very much alive, because he filled Vittoria's pistol with blanks. As Vittoria realizes Flamineo's true plan to eliminate her, he quickly claims this whole ruse was just a joke. As the audience absorbs Flamineo's bizarre high jinks, Lodovico enters and abruptly stabs them all to death. Although there is nothing comical about death, Webster crafts absurd humor into the scene which ultimately intensifies the horrific nature of the world of this play. As Bliss points out, the dramatic structure of this play reinforces the idea of man's continual fall as the characters delight in humiliating and punishing each other; ironically, these Machiavel characters ultimately destroy themselves (133-34).

Bliss describes the tragicomedy form as spiteful, grotesque, and very funny—filled with tricksters, villainous protagonists, and ambitious politicians. Jacobean tragicomedies include stereotyped Machiavellianism, caricatured evil, and metaphysical evil (Bliss 54-56). In *The White Devil*, stereotyped Machiavellianism exists in the characters of Francisco de Medici, the Grand Duke Florence, and in Flamineo, brother to the siren Vittoria. Francisco desires omnipotence and will eliminate anyone he deems a threat to that goal. After the historical Francesco de Medici was publicly embarrassed at

his sister Isabella's brazen extramarital lechery, he consented to have her murdered. When Bracciano left his inheritance to Vittoria, Francesco commissioned the assassination of Vittoria so that the inheritance of land and title would remain in his family. The fictional Francisco forges an alliance of vengeance with the Antichrist pope-figure, arranges for the Inquisition of Vittoria as well as the repossession of her inheritance, and eliminates Bracciano and Flamineo via assassination. At the end of the play, Francisco assumes complete power by means of serving as regent to the young, orphaned Giovanni, the new Duke of Bracciano. In the Machiavel tradition, the intelligent and the resourceful rule. Also in keeping with stereotyped Machiavellianism, Flamineo begins his climb toward power by serving the Duke of Bracciano. In order to continue this climb, Flamineo pimps his sister to the Duke, murders his innocent brother Marcello for no apparent reason, and attempts to murder his sister to gain favor with the Medici. When Flamineo is arrested along with his sister Vittoria for complicity in the death of Camillo, he feigns insanity so that he may not be judged in the Inquisition. As a Machiavel character, Flamineo thinks only of himself and his ascension within the power structure.

Caricatured evil in *The White Devil* occurs when Lodovico and Gasparo dress not as Jesuits, but as Capuchin priests to deliver last rites to the dying Bracciano. Earlier, Lodovico and Gasparo had poisoned Bracciano's helmet, and now Bracciano lays dying from the poison that has seeped into his head. Lodovico and Gasparo return dressed as Capuchin priests, a Catholic order that was as recognizable at the time for religious extremism in the same fashion as the English Puritans. Much like Puritan ministers' dress, Capuchins wore coarse, brown robes and wide-billed hats. Usually barefoot, they

begged for their food in the streets while they preached and performed works of mercy. Webster chooses Capuchin over Jesuit as the disguise for his characters because unlike Jesuits, Capuchins were almost comical in appearance. This countenance would have been accepted by the Jacobean audience both as comical because they looked like the ridiculous Puritans and as dangerous because these men were still Catholic priests who served the pope. Continuing with the caricatured evil nature of these disguised characters, Lodovico and Gasparo mimic the prayers and actions of real priests while supposedly performing the rite of extreme unction to Bracciano. The script instructs the characters to present Bracciano with a crucifix and hallowed candle (5.3.130). In addition, Lodovico and Gasparo speak Latin, the official language of the Catholic Church. After the other characters onstage exit this scene, Lodovico and Gasparo remove their disguises and reveal themselves to Bracciano so that he will know that he has been cruelly duped, that he has been murdered out of revenge, and that his soul has not received true extreme unction and therefore will suffer eternal damnation.

The presence of metaphysical evil in this play lies within the enigma of the white devil character and its connection to the papacy. When Webster chooses not to name Cardinal Monticelso as Pope Sixtus but rather selects the name of Paul IV, Webster transcends the physical attributes of the historical Sixtus and summons the memory of the historical Paul IV, a name that would evoke sentiments of anger and fear among the English audience. To present this character onstage as an Antichrist-like figure adds to the metaphysical evil in that the Antichrist is an immortal figure who continually seeks to unseat Christ and will do so until the end of time. When one pope dies, another is immediately elected to replace him. The office of the papacy, therefore, is in essence

immortal. Even the act of choosing a new name when elected elevates the pope above his earthly being. He is robed all in white and crowned. His divinely absolute authority is unquestioned. Moreover, he has the power to grant or deny absolution to men's souls. Within Catholic Church doctrine, the pope is both mortal and divine as Christ was. This metaphysical mystery is the cornerstone of my argument concerning the solution of the play's enigmatic title.

Jacobean tragicomedies manifest the corruption of the period. Their final scenes of death and disillusionment illustrate the superficial success of control gained within a world that is constructed with no loving commitment in its foundation. Without a loving commitment to each other, the characters of *The White Devil* take great pride in punishing and humiliating each other. Ultimately, though, these characters implode and destroy themselves (Bliss 133-134, 191). While denouncing moral constancy, Webster's tragicomic characters ironically look no higher than the height their own fingertips can reach (194). Their ideals are distorted, so in order to find a life worth living, they must find a life worth dying for (192). Even though Vittoria is married, she agrees to see Bracciano and then marry him immediately after her husband is murdered because Bracciano can offer her financial security. Even though Lodovico knows murder is a mortal sin, he agrees to murder Vittoria and Bracciano because it will give him personal revenge for the death of his beloved Isabella. Even though Bracciano is married, he hires the assassination of his wife Isabella so that he can be with the siren Vittoria. In the end, Webster's struggling and striving characters lose their lives, for their proverbial fifteen minutes of fame and personal power within their corrupt world is fleeting.

Jacqueline Pearson's *Tragedy and Tragicomedy in the Plays of John Webster* also discusses Webster's choice of tragicomedy for dramatic structure. Within *The White Devil*, Pearson notices that some scenes seem to build to tragic consequences but never quite get there, while other scenes explode into violence (71). For example, Vittoria's brother Flamineo, with no apparent motive, suddenly attacks and kills their brother, Marcello. The audience is caught off guard by this random act of violence. Again, when Flamineo laughingly celebrates his own cleverness at outwitting Vittoria and Zanche via his concocted triple murder-suicide pact, Lodovico suddenly enters and stabs Flamineo to death. Pearson comments, "Cause and effect are dislocated: murder is greeted by laughter, celebration is torn apart by violence" (71). She refers to the violence in Webster's play as a parody and notes that the dramatic structure of serious actions are immediately followed by parody (78). For example, as Bracciano dies as a result of hired assassins' work, we see priests enter presumably to unfetter Bracciano's soul via last rites of extreme unction. Then, the audience realizes that the priests are actually the same assassins, only now in disguise. While they seem to be performing last rites, they are in fact mocking Bracciano, whispering into his ear that his soul will not leave this world with absolution and therefore will be eternally damned. Webster moves from the serious nature of Bracciano's eminent death to the parodying of extreme unction ritual. Because of parody, Pearson believes that Bracciano's death scene fails to maintain tragic dignity (75). This loss of dignity is Webster's mirror reflecting his world which has lost its dignity through mass corruption and abuse of power.

## **Anthropological Function of Literature**

Prior to the Renaissance, literature was not mired with issues of authorial agency. With the advent of modernity, however, the birth of the individual offered agency to the creator of individual thoughts and ideas. The author now “owned” his work, and with the increased availability of the printing press, he could mass disseminate his thoughts via broadsides, pamphlets, books, etc. The literary work was acknowledged as the product of the author who possessed complete ownership and agency of the words printed on the page, and his intention, either conscious or subconscious, was indelibly inscribed upon the text.

A post-WWII rejection of New Criticism ushered in Poststructuralist ideas of theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. They challenged the validity of a secure analysis of text, offering that any textual analysis would invariably be influenced by the social parameters of the culture analyzing it and therefore would result in a destabilization of the text’s hierarchical binaries. This paradigm questions any interpretation of an inherent universal truth within the text. Like New Criticism, this paradigm becomes problematic in the interpretation of a dramatic text; when it asserts that there can be no universal truth spoken by a text, the paradigm eliminates that thread of investigation. There are some universal truths that span time and space such as the nature of absolute power within a system of government, regardless of the continent or time period in which it exists. Furthermore, to imply that a twenty-first century analysis of a seventeenth-century text would discount the hierarchical binary of king/pope or nobility/middle class is absurd, for the tension of these binaries in Webster’s *The White Devil* is undeniable.

The final line in Barthes's essay, "The Death of the Author," explodes with this principle: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), effectively prying the text from the hands of the author, rendering him impotent and thereby offering full agency to the reader. Barthes asserts that analysis of a text with respect to the author forces the text to remain in the past and cannot allow it to move forward until the author is removed, for knowing the author's intent cannot offer a magical unlocking of the text's meaning. To Barthes, the "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination," (148) for it is the language of the text that is speaking rather than the author. Barthes calls for a distancing of the reader from the author in the same vein as Brecht's call for a distancing of the audience from emotional attachment with a play. By distancing the reader from the author, the text can be considered sans author.

While these interpretive movements of the twentieth century hold merit in analyzing a text, it seems that to espouse one movement essentially means to reject the previous movement, a rejection which can only limit the scope of any analysis and thereby slant the results. Future scholarly interpretation of text should never be restricted by the given parameters of a paradigm.

Literary scholars from the 1980s into the twenty-first century have reconsidered the polemic theoretical stances of the previous century and now espouse a paradigm which embraces and celebrates multiple modes of textual analysis. The scholar may view the text on the page in terms of structure, language, and modern metaphor, or acknowledge the text's author and temporal and spatial point of origin. Lawrence Lipking comments in his article, "Life, Death, and Other Theories," that the author "informs the text, rereads it and revises it, and takes responsibility for what it says" (188). Whether or



not the scholar wishes to utilize the author's biographical information, he must acknowledge that the text was created by someone in a certain space in time. The literary scholar is now permitted to consider the text's implication for current society by viewing the text as an active, performative art form. Moving away from the reductionary scope and parameters of previous literary analysis paradigms, the literary scholar's new-found freedom to explore a dramatic text and render any method of inquiry valid can only serve to produce a richer analysis of the dramatic text.

Stephen Greenblatt's methodology of new historicism opened the exploration of written material outside the realm of the literary canon in order to uncover cultural meaning. In the same manner, the recent work of Wolfgang Iser, which focuses on literary anthropology, intrigues me as an appropriate method of inquiry for my analysis of Webster's *The White Devil*. Like Barthes, Iser acknowledges the text as an action capable of affecting the present rather than being eternally trapped in the past. In Iser's book, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, he prefers to probe the text in terms of what it is doing rather than what it means, thus reducing the danger of succumbing to intentional fallacy. The text, then, is seen as performative and offers a potential response between the reader and the text. So, what exactly is Webster's play doing? It is speaking to an audience through visual images of evil combined with action and dialogue enacting corruption on all socio-political levels. Webster's play presents the pope as a servant of God who also happens to possess a black book listing the names of murderers and panderers; Webster's play illustrates the English land inheritance controversy by enacting the scandal that occurs when Bracciano bypasses his first-born son, Giovanni, and instead bequeaths his land to his second wife Vittoria; Webster's play

displays Jacobean despair and its justification of revenge as a despondent method of attaining personal gratification and autonomy; Webster's play shows that love on any level will result only in destruction; Webster's play embodies high-level corruption when allowing Lodovico, a known pirate and murderer, to officiate as security for the papal conclave; Webster's play enacts the brutality of a judicial system bent against those who are left alone to defend themselves via the Inquisition of Vittoria; Webster's play illumines the accepted norm of misogyny through the brutal murder of the faithful Isabella, the prostituting of Vittoria by her own brother Flamineo, and the suffering of Vittoria's widowed mother Cornelia who is helpless to defend her family against the tyranny of her community's rulers; finally, Webster's play presents the Machiavel character's pathetic attempt to use his own wiles to acquire autonomy, only to have his fleeting moment of power and glory wrested away in absurdly comical overtones. All of these actions in the text are within the realm of Webster's historical world, yet they are also beyond the realm of Webster's agency. According to Iser's position that the text must be free to move into the future, Webster's text allows the audience of any time period to witness the ramifications of corruption emanating from absolute power.

Iser's work explores the human need for fiction and the capital that it holds. In his essay, "Why Literature Matters," he focuses on literature's function, dividing it into three categories: cultural capital, perturbing noise, and human self-enactment. The latter two categories are applicable to Webster's work. Iser explains that culture consists of the interaction of various systems in a reciprocal relationship, and literature is the noise produced by this interaction. In keeping with his earlier work in reader response theory, this idea of literature as noise hinges on the precept that literature alone is a void. It only

becomes an organism when it comes in contact with the reader. Webster's text was meant to be performed live before an audience. An allonomous system that depends on external stimuli, Webster's dramatic text depends upon performance in order to convey meaning. Iser comments, "In this respect literature highlights important systemic features of the world we live in" ("Why" 17). *The White Devil* becomes cultural noise as it represents the reciprocal interaction of Jacobean England's socio-economic, political, and religious systems.

Within the category of human self-enactment discussed as a function of literature in "Why Literature Matters," Iser delves into literature as anthropology. He carries this notion further in his book, *The Fictive and the Imaginary* and comments that literature is "the anthropological equipment of human beings, whose lives are sustained by their imagination. . . . Literature fans out human plasticity into a panoply of shapes, each of which is an enactment of self-confrontation" (Iser, *Fictive* xi). Plasticity is defined as the various shapes that human beings have assumed. They create their own shape, but they are not imprisoned within any one shape. Literature mirrors human plasticity, and because the shapes are not binding, literature can only show "all determinacy to be illusory" (Iser, *Fictive* xi). Webster's historical source material for *The White Devil* involves Pope Sixtus V as the pontiff who dealt with Vittoria and Bracciano. Iser claims that humans are protean, and Webster illustrates this concept by not binding his text to the historical shape of Sixtus. Instead, he utilizes plasticity by shaping the play's illusory pope as the most recent evil pope in his audience's memory. Iser notes that humans wish to become present to themselves. "The impossibility of being present to ourselves makes

it possible for us to play ourselves out to a fullness that knows no bounds” (Iser “Why” 19). He refers to this notion of playing out of ourselves as literary staging.

Staging allows us . . . to lead an ecstatic life by stepping out of our entanglements and into zones we are otherwise barred from. On the other, staging reflects us an ever fractured whole, so that we constantly speak to ourselves through the possibilities of our otherness in a manner that is a form of stabilization. Both can occur simultaneously. (Iser, “Why” 21)

Webster is barred from the zone of making explicit commentary on the reign of James. He steps out of his entanglement by addressing the same concepts of corruption and monarchal absolutism by way of staging papal absolutism. Italy and Catholicism become the other. Stabilization is attained both in the sense that first the censors allow the play to be performed for it is not perceived as overtly dangerous to the king, and second that the production enables its audience to see the shape of its government reflected in this possible world.

In order to address the fiction of playing ourselves, Iser rejects the binary opposition of reality versus fiction and offers instead a triad of the real, the fictive, and the imaginary, defining the real as reality, the fictive as the fictional text, and the imaginary as the liminal area where the boundaries between reality and fiction are crossed (*Fictive 1*). Iser calls for a literary anthropology that traces historical manifestations while simultaneously conceptualizing the fictive and the imaginary, for he asserts that human beings interact with historical contexts and cannot be separated. When the reader crosses over the boundaries of real and fictive and enters into the realm of the

imaginary, he can then enter into the world of play. Webster borrows a historical event of the ill-fated romance of Bracciano and Vittoria and thrusts it into the fictive, creating a dramatic imaginary. Fiction builds signals into the text to denote to the reader that the text is indeed a piece of fiction. At the same time, though, the fictional world is presented as a real world, for it is the reality of the characters living within its domain. The reader agrees to accept this fiction (ala Coleridge's discussion of willing suspension of disbelief) and wants to construct meaning from it. When creating this fictional world, the author must use recognizable signs from the real outside world in order for the reader to accept this alternate reality in the text. Crossing the boundary of the real and the fictive allows the reader to consider this new possible world. Webster utilizes images of Catholicism with which his Anglican audience would have easily recognized such as papal and Capuchin priestly garments, a crucifix, and the delivery of sacramental rites spoken in Latin. By entering into a representation of the Catholic Church, fraught with high-level corruption, the audience is invited to consider the possible world of high-level corruption in other environments, namely in their monarchy. As Iser asserts that literature is a self-confrontation, Webster's audience confronts their perceived construct of Catholic administrative corruption and then is able to transfer that construct toward recognizing high-level corruption inherent to their own government.

Literary anthropologist Margit Sutrop explains that literary theorists approach a text in order to uncover what the text reveals about its society—gender, class, race, culture, and memory (29). She explains that literary theory considers the way in which the reader sympathizes with the fortunes of characters and responds emotionally to the events in the story, easily forgetting that the story is a fictional invention of a writer

(187). Eckhard Lobsien, a student of Iser, believes that when the reader sympathizes with the characters and responds emotionally to the story, he has entered into an illusion in which he believes that what he is seeing is really happening (Sutrop 188-89). Webster's audience was aware that the source for *The White Devil* was historically factual, but was the audience aware of the moment that historically factual material ceased and the fictional realm began? If an audience becomes involved in what they are seeing as an alternate reality, as Lobsien suggests, then Webster's play possessed the potential to wield enormous power and influence over his audience by melding truth and imagination and blurring the boundaries that separate them.

Iser acknowledges that the text is a product of an author's attitude toward himself or his world (*Fictive* 4). Every literary text contains social, historical, cultural, and literary systems that exist as a referential outside the text. Iser explains that in order for fiction to mirror society, it first requires a reality to reflect. Webster employs the reality of the historical Pope Paul IV who only a generation earlier had affected terror among Protestants in England as he and Mary Tudor tried to reinstate England as a Catholic nation once again. Webster is also mirroring the institution of the papal office that professes itself to be divinely appointed to rule and whose actions are answerable only to God. Likewise, James professes his office/monarchy to be divinely appointed and writes that his words and actions are answerable only to God. Iser explains that the imaginary leads to "a temporary displacement of the reader's own reality" (*Fictive* 20). While Webster's audience would spend an afternoon engaged in watching this play performed, they would discard their own reality for the length of two hours and accept Webster's alternate reality. Following Lobsien's idea that the audience enters into an illusion of

believing what he sees as reality, Webster's audience exited the alternate reality of *The White Devil* within the playhouse and re-entered seventeenth-century London. Their perceived boundaries between papal and monarchical absolutism could then become blurred, for corruption can occur just as easily in one system as in another. The audience members retained memories of the visual images Webster presented to them of a pope wearing papal array and a triple crown, holding a black book in his hand, speaking to known murderers, and making arrangements with unscrupulous political rulers to enact personal vengeance. Would the audience equate these images with James's distributed images of himself as Augustus Caesar, the Prince of Peace? Would the audience make the connection that the pope claims to be the highest ranking shepherd on earth in the image of Christ, also called the Prince of Peace? Would the audience equate the pope and James as equal leaders of their respective churches—Catholic and Anglican? Would the audience recognize political corruption caused by the placing of inexperienced and morally inept favorites in positions of power such as Webster's fictional Lodovico within the papal conclave and James's historical Robert Carr as a member of England's Privy Council?

Webster's audience is given an onstage glimpse into a corrupt and abusive world and is invited to imagine corruption reigning elsewhere. Kendall Walton explores the idea of self-awareness in his book, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, and states, "Imaginations about oneself plausibly contribute to self-understanding" (211). Webster's imagined world focuses on the corruption of an Italian papal state. The audience is invited to consider this world of the play as a metaphor for their own government. Iser refers to this idea of self-awareness as the "as if" proposition. If Webster's audience members possibly

consider the dilemmas facing the powerless fictional characters of *The White Devil* “as if” they, the audience members, were experiencing similar dilemmas in their lives, then the play would indeed achieve action as performativity outside of Webster as author. This play could then move into the future and not be locked forever in Webster’s time. Iser believes that “the fictionalizing act converts the reality produced into a sign (*Fictive 2*). Webster creates his fiction based on an actual historical event with real people such as Bracciano, Vittoria, Pope Sixtus V, and Pope Paul IV. When Webster transports these people across the boundary of reality into the realm of fictional characters, he can then use them as transgressive signs of corruption resulting from absolutism. The act of fictionalizing is a crossing of boundaries. While Webster and his playwriting colleagues were prevented by governmental censorship from directly addressing James’s monarchy and his premise of divine absolutism, they were free to cross the boundary into Catholicism and comment on the divine absolutism of the papacy.

When a scholar considers what is in the text, he must also consider what is absent from the text. As Iser explains, the text itself is acting. So, what action is being taken in the absence of material? To tell a historical event as fact rather than fiction, the author must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If, however, any component of this triad is selectively removed, then the truth becomes skewed toward a determined slant and propaganda ensues. Absent material within Webster’s fictional world includes Pope Sixtus V who was not considered a malevolent pope in real life, the incestuous Isabella de Medici who brought embarrassment to her family and to her marriage with Bracciano, and the names of kings who were reigning during this period. In order to offer a propagandistic enemy to loathe, a truly malevolent pope must be chosen; therefore,



Webster inserts Paul IV. In order to illicit sympathy for the plight of the faithful wife juxtaposed to the wrathful husband, Isabella must be presented as an angelic spouse who is wrongfully killed; therefore, Webster's Isabella manifests tragic innocence. Moreover, in order to create a sense of timelessness for this piece and to avoid censorship, names of specific political leaders must be eliminated; therefore, Webster offers vague terms such as "the English ambassador" and mentions no English monarchs. With the absence of key pieces from the historical event, Webster's play is presented as the reenactment of a true story; however, Webster's skews the story and it becomes propaganda enacted before a live audience.

With respect to John Webster as authorial agent, the literary scholar of course can never ascertain Webster's intention in the penning of *The White Devil*. Even if Webster had written an accompanying diary in which he offered written evidence of his true intention for the text, the scholar must still wonder if Webster was cognizant of all his underlying intentions. Authors are perfectly capable of creating a fiction of themselves as author as well as creating fiction upon the page. Furthermore, the scholar of Renaissance literary works must acknowledge the text itself as unstable considering the lack of proofreading by printers and the cooperative writing efforts of dramatists during the period. These points of discussion would seem to point to a defense of the Deconstructionists' argument. However, I assert that these points of discussion serve to create a richer analysis of Webster's play. I embrace any reference that the text imparts. The paradigm of New Historicism offers a method of discussion in which all aspects of the text are considered in that they present a three-dimensional glimpse of the text's temporal and spatial origin. Whether the author is lying, whether he is pontificating,

whether he is in fact not the sole author, all facets must be considered, for then the text becomes even more an artifact of its time.

To analyze a text as a literary artifact, the scholar becomes an anthropological fieldworker of sorts. Literary anthropologist Talal Asad comments in his article, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” that the anthropological fieldworker starts with a social situation in which a comment is made, and then he reconstructs the cultural significance of the comment (144). The anthropologist and the linguist differ because while the linguist looks at a text produced within a society, the anthropologist looks at the text as a cultural text. While linguists look for rules and patterns in a language, anthropologists look for meaning (161). To complete a close reading of *The White Devil* in terms of dramatic structure, pace, and diction would serve as only the beginning of the analysis. Stepping back from the page and listening to the story and the characters’ actions and motivations allows the process of uncovering Webster’s world picture to begin. Asad continues to explain that “society is not a text that communicates itself to the skilled reader. It is people who speak. And the ultimate meaning of what they say does not reside in society—society is the cultural condition in which speakers act and are acted upon” (155). Webster and his colleagues’ writings are artifacts of their time which collectively speak the pulse of their society. Even when Jacobean playwrights are explicitly commenting on their political or religious environment, they are still speaking on the world picture itself. Iser’s concept of considering not only what is in the text, but also what is absent from the text (*Fictive 5*) is applicable to this context. Under the ever-present scrutiny of government censorship, Webster’s silence on James’s system of absolute monarchy speaks volumes about

England's suppression of public speech on issues including James's corrupt Court, his lavish expenditures while essentially bankrupting his country, and his bestowal of land and titles to undeserving favorites. Offering Paul IV as Webster's example of evil absolutism while maintaining silence on James's absolutism, Webster asks the audience to cross boundaries and transgress evil pope to king.

## CHAPTER 2

### WEBSTER'S WORLD

#### Webster's Place in Society

Webster was a student of the Inns of Court in which men of privilege were sent to study law as well as to receive polishing in the art of being a gentleman. It was quite common for students at the Inns of Court not to graduate with law degrees but rather assume positions in government or the arts. Theatre was ubiquitous in education; students read the works of Plautus and Terence in order to study Latin, plays were regularly produced with students as actors, and students frequented the theaters throughout London. As a student at the Inns of Court, Webster made his entrance into the world of drama.

Stephen Greenblatt writes in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* that the dead leave textual traces of themselves, “even the most trivial or tedious, contains some fragment of lost life” (1). *The White Devil* acquaints us with Webster's concern for the religious, political, and economic well-being of his country. The medieval feudal system, with its Augustinian cosmic worldview, had begun to deteriorate but had not yet disappeared. Rather, it was transforming into modernity. The acceptance of absolute power as ordained by Providence was weakening. As England's government moved toward a system by and for the people with civilly elected magistrates, James fiercely defended his position of monarchical power by claiming divine right absolutism and warned his subjects that to

rebel against his rule was tantamount to rebelling against God. Concurrently, the power of the Catholic papal office was becoming increasingly secular as it tried in vain to stem the tide of Protestantism and reform. Like James, Pope Paul V also defended his right to power by claiming divine right absolutism. To rebel against his rule would lead his subjects to eternal damnation. This dichotomy of power leads us to question how could God bestow absolute power upon these two men? And, would two men making such a claim at the same time ultimately negate the idea of absolute power? Since the fourth century when Augustine professed God as First Cause and all subsequent world events occurring as an effect of his teleological design, rulers who claimed that their powers came from Providence were well entrenched by the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Renaissance historian Felix Raab explains that in order to convince the masses, any argument brought about by teachers, statesmen, and rebels that might tip the balance of the status quo against the ruler must be defended in theological terms, claiming that their position was the true Will of God (9). For example, if God appointed James to succeed the throne of England, could he not also appoint someone to depose James? *The White Devil* offers us a glimpse into the confusion and anxiety of a populace scolded into blind obeisance by a foreign-born monarch whose words of divinely appointed power do not correlate with his actions of corruption and favoritism.

Webster scholar Jacqueline Pearson comments on Webster's chosen dramatic form of tragicomedy through which to write this story of political destruction and chaos. She notes that the dramatic structure of tragicomedy allows the Jacobean playwright to examine his seismically shifting world and its uncertain values, judgments, and language (Pearson 2). Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England had experienced

shifting monarchal dynasties, Tudor to Stuart; shifting religions, Catholicism to Anglicanism; shifting ideologies of monarchism, king as gift from God to king as lieutenant of God; and shifting economic strata, aristocracy/nobility as inherited upper class to a rising professional middle class capable of buying land and accumulating wealth outside of inheritance.

Webster addresses the anxiety felt by the English citizenry at the thought of England realigning with Rome. Webster's images of the papacy and the Catholic Church as an evil entity are presented vividly in *The White Devil*, and the memories of the confusion and horror in England when Mary Tudor took the throne were still prevalent in his English audience's mindset. Although Webster was not yet born during Mary's reign, his father lived through that time period and would certainly have him told stories of the executions, especially in light of the fact that the Webster family lived across the street from Smithfield at Newgate Prison, a principal location for executions of treasonous heretics. Executions were a reliable source of income for the Webster family since the elder Webster was London's leading coach maker whose products served, among other things, as hearses for the removal of the executed bodies.

If England realigned with Rome, citizens feared that not only would the Catholic heresy executions return, the autonomy of their burgeoning professional class could conceivably disappear. Webster enjoyed his status as a first-generation recipient of this rising professional middle class, a class structure that could now afford to educate its children, vis-à-vis Webster's own education at Middle Temple and Inns of Court. There were no scholarships offered at the Inns of Court, and matriculation was a cash-only proposition with costs averaging £40-50 per year (Cook 38). In addition to access to

education, this new social stratum was assuming power of its own in terms of locally elected magistrates and local laws. If England realigned with Rome, England would return to a papal state that would grant the pope authority to dismiss these local magistrates and appoint papal legates to rule instead. The newly-formed rising middle class could suffer the fate of losing all the autonomy that it had struggled to acquire. Furthermore, this middle class enjoyed its growing wealth. Paying taxes to the kings was one thing, but the additional burden of paying taxes to the pope would deplete the middle class coffers. Prior to this burgeoning middle class, power and wealth were the territory of the nobility. During Webster's lifetime, however, the growing power and influence of the trade guilds were replacing the fading medieval ideal of feudal economic and political hierarchy. Returning to a papal state would reverse this rising capitalist economy with its developing democratic government.

The most effective method for presenting a viewpoint, in terms of propaganda, is to name an enemy, to give it a face, and then to blame all social ills upon it. Protestants viewed the papacy as an individual enemy rather than simply an office. Although the historical pope during the Vittoria/Bracciano story was Sixtus V, Webster, a master at intuitively packing visual imagery onstage, selects the historical Paul IV to become the evil pope in his play, drawing on the memory of terror in England equated with Paul IV and Mary Tudor in the 1550s, albeit that this memory maintained a generation later was a construct as well. Two years before *The White Devil*, Caracciolo published a biographical account of the life and legacy of Paul IV, a biography that could have offered rich source material to Webster in London. Webster selects a truly evil pope in order to paint the papacy itself as the source of evil, the Antichrist if you will. Understanding that all popes

dress alike regardless of which individual cardinal is elected to succeed the previous pope, Webster visually presents his audience with Paul IV dressed in white papal garb. Through this action, Webster presents the ultimate visual cuing—the pope, inclusive of individual and office, is the Antichrist who professes absolute power. The English audience knows the name and face of the archenemy now. All despair, hatred, and chaos can be blamed upon him as the satanic source, the one who professes himself to be appointed by God and answerable to no human law—a profession whose rhetoric sounds like James's position of monarchal absolutism.

### **Dissemination of Printed Material**

Early seventeenth-century English citizens gained access to a wealth of printed material. Sir Francis Bacon commented that the three inventions that he believed most influenced his world were gunpowder, the mariner's compass, and the printing press. Furthermore, John Foxe believed that the moveable type was the result of divine intervention (Katz 41). The printing press contained the power to shape thoughts and beliefs within the Christian world. English citizens had access to Latin textbooks for university studies, psalm and prayer books for household devotions, inexpensive pamphlets and almanacs, and moralizing broadside ballads. Pedlars carried and sold printed material throughout the countryside (Watt 310). Much of the material disseminated throughout England was anti-papist propaganda. One such broadside ballad by John Awdeley in 1578 told an allegorical story of King Edward VI building a fort to shield God's truth. The papists attack the fort during the Marian period under the military leadership of General Garden and Captain Boner. Numerous Protestants martyrs are



killed in the siege, but the ballad ends with the hopeful and triumphant coming of Elizabeth (Watt 312).

### **Theatre as Seventeenth-Century Mass Media and the Spectator as Participant**

Theatre served as a prevalent form of mass media in seventeenth-century England disseminating news, information, and propaganda packaged as popular entertainment. Not all Englishman approved of this medium, though. Since the ancient Greek writings of Plato and early Christian Church father Tertullian, antitheatrical prejudice has embedded itself in Western theatre history claiming charges against the stage such as immorality, crossdressing, and idle mongering. In Jacobean England, theatre was loathed by both Catholics and Puritans. William Harrison, the last archpriest of England, forbid his priests to see plays acted on public stages by common players, citing Aquinas who believed that plays were morally indifferent (Semper 45-47). Jonas Barish's work *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* explains that Puritans engaged in a published pamphlet warfare arguing in favor of closing England's theatres (82). William Rankin's pamphlet "A Mirroure of Monsters" called all theatrical phenomena monstrous for promoting moral transgression and demonic possession (Crewe 49-50). William Prynne's *Histriomastix* avidly attacked theatre, asserting that plays go against God, Scripture, and the Church, and that actors are corrupt, pernicious, satanic, and condemned souls (Barish 84).

Although theatre was condemned by both Catholic and Puritan officials in Jacobean England, it was nevertheless a popular form of entertainment and was well attended by England's citizenry. Margot Heinemann's *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* explains that entry into the theatre cost a penny whereas the cost of a quart of ale in a pub at fourpence was

considerably higher. She comments, “The dramatist was thus in a sense working for the equivalent of the mass media” (10). Charles Forker’s *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster* explains that the theatre provided a public forum for young men like Webster who were trained in rhetoric. “What better medium than the stage for the clever wordsmith, eager to comment obliquely on the mores and leadership of his age, bent upon taking up the latest ideological posture, or keen to explore ethical and metaphysical ideas” (Forker 52). As the West End theatre district flourished, it experienced a growing social and economic separation of audiences. Court performances of masques and pageantry grew more lavish, and indoor theaters catered to upwardly mobile merchants and professionals. Heinemann explains that London was experiencing the advent of man-about-town fashion (12). Although the demographics may have been different among the theaters, all stages offered the wordsmith an opportunity to comment on his times and offered the audience a venue to absorb enacted rhetoric.

Hans Robert Jauss posits in his book *Aesthetic Experiences and Hermeneutics* that speech and poetry can bring about change in beliefs and can liberate the minds of the listener or spectator (92). In this sense, Jacobean audiences became active participants in the fiction they were seeing presented onstage. They agreed to enter into what Iser’s calls the world of the imaginary and accept its magical “as if” premise. The mimetic connection between performer and audience holds immense power potential. James understood the strength of the English theatre and was especially wary of satirical plays, often closing them down. For example, when Jonson, Marston, and Chapman produced *Eastward Ho!* in 1605 satirizing James’s Scottish favorites, his love of hunting, and his selling of knights’ titles, James closed the show and imprisoned all three playwrights.

Continuing this thread of the audience entering into the powerful, fictional world of the stage, Kendall Walton believes that spectators are naturally drawn into the game of the fiction. In his book, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, he comments that spectators first must agree to the rules of the game. As for Webster's spectators, they must agree that Catholicism is a clear and present danger, and that if it should return to England, disastrous/evil events would incur. Walton asserts that when spectators agree to the rules of the game, then the fiction they are watching becomes a fictional truth. When Jacobean citizens see and hear the evil actions and words of the characters in *The White Devil*, associate them with the Roman Catholic Church, and recall the persecutions of Protestants at the hands of Mary Tudor and Pope Paul IV, then the fictional truth presented onstage strengthens their personal fear of the return of Catholicism under James's reign. Walton states that "imaginings about oneself plausibly contribute to self-understanding" (211). Memories of the persecutions under Mary Tudor contribute to an understanding of what English Protestants would face again should James reconcile with Rome. Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, the longest running Jacobean play, provides another example of this mimesis as make-believe concept. Spectators watched allegorical characters allegedly represent the Courts of England in battle against the Courts of Spain via a chess game. Knowing that James was in negotiation with Spain to arrange the marriage of his heir Charles to Spain's heir, English spectators witnessed an allegory melded with truth, and the result no doubt contributed to the play's successful run and to James's insistence that this volatile production be closed.

Stephen Greenblatt states that theatre is a product of collective intentions and addresses its audience as a collective community (4-5). Webster was not a lone voice in Jacobean dramatic literature crying out against the enemy of the Catholic Church; he was a friend and colleague of London's preeminent playwrights who shared a network of similar values. Greenblatt explains that English Renaissance plays were "products of extended borrowing, collective exchanges, and mutual enchantments. . . . Theatre in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constantly violated its interest and transgressed its boundaries" (7, 16). Theatre possesses the capacity to mirror the times it enacts, and the boundary which divides the fiction of theatre from the reality of the world outside the theatre's walls is not fixed.

### **The Jacobean Audience**

Webster and his colleagues wrote their plays to please, instruct, and entertain London's audience members. Who would have been in the audience? The demographics of Webster's public and private theatre audiences are currently under debate among scholars. Prior to the 1980s, Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatre audiences were thought to be comprised of uneducated groundlings and working class merchants while private theatre audiences were allegedly comprised of gentry, nobility, and wealthy merchants. Ann J. Cook revisits the theatergoing social strata in her book *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London* and comments that early seventeenth-century London's privileged created and sustained local law and public policy.

Though the clever, the ambitious, and the newly rich enormously expanded the ranks of the privileged under Elizabeth and James, they still stood firmly apart from the mass of society. Most people ate, dressed,

worked, and lived as best they could. The fortunate wrote music and poetry. They made the laws. They ruled the government and the church. They monopolized education. They led armies. They claimed estates and controlled companies. They elevated dining and dress and décor to an art. And they were avid playgoers, men and women alike. (Cook 272)

Cook's work explores the possibility that earlier scholarship may have misinterpreted the audience makeup. She explains that early twentieth-century scholars such as Robert Bridges, Alfred Harbage, and G. E. Bentley believed that the lower classes held back Shakespeare's genius, or conversely that public theaters were filled with artisans and craftsmen to whom Shakespeare wrote. With respect to Webster and *The White Devil* which was performed in the Red Bull, Bentley proposed that the Red Bull, while private, catered to vulgar audiences. Using economic indicators of the period, Cook challenges the assertion that public theaters catered to the illiterate, boorish, lower class groundlings while private theaters catered to the educated elite. She posits that only the privileged class could have regularly afforded the price of an admission ticket as well free time during the workday to attend the theatre.

Cook defines the privileged as scholars, university students, landowners, wealthy merchants, professionals, nobility, and royalty who possessed growth potential directly resulting from opportunities in education, wealth, and achievement. She warns, though, that to refer to England's economic strata as upper class, middle class, and impoverished is relatively misleading as these are twentieth-century terms and England's economic system was still largely feudalistic. A small, elite layer of England's social strata—five to ten percent—had already established loyal financial support for theatre, first as

schoolboys and later as patrons. Cook asserts that this privileged class regularly attended both private and public theaters as well as hosted plays within their own homes.

Gentlemen were defined as people who did not labor with their hands. They worked in positions of authority which allowed them to control the socio-economic and political life of England. London was the center of activity including gossip, gambling, whoring, dueling, theatre, feasts, and fashion (Cook 74), and the population of London swelled. In 1603, the year of James's coronation, 4,000,000 people inhabited England, and the population of London was believed to be 250,000. While the percentage of privileged in outlying England averaged 4 to 6%, the percentage of privileged in London was 15% (94). Catering to this privileged class, playhouses were built with easy access by boat or coach. The elite were the only economic stratum who could afford the price of admission, transportation to and from the theatre, dinner at a tavern either before or after the play, refreshments during the play, printed material for sale by vendors at the playhouse, and professional female companionship after the performance. Because the same plays were presented at both public and private theaters, elite playgoers frequented both theaters. The Globe theater audience contained distinguished patron such as Ambassador Giustinian of Austria who saw *Pericles* in 1608, Prince Lewis Frederick of Wurtemberg who saw *Othello* in 1610, and the Duke of Buckingham who saw *Henry VIII* in 1628. The Venetian embassy attended a tragedy at the Fortune in 1617, and John Milton visited the Fortune in 1611. Thomas Killigrew visited the Red Bull in the 1620s (Cook 133-38). Larger playhouses such as the Rose, the Curtain, and the Globe accommodated 3,000 spectators with 1,000 in the pit and the remaining 2,000 in the galleries. Obviously, theater managers understood that the majority of the ticket buyers

would be elite. While admission for the first English Renaissance public playhouses was as low as one penny for entrance into the yard, by 1599 the price had increased to a shilling or more for better seating (180). When Webster's *The White Devil* was produced in 1611, there were nine London theaters in use offering a combined audience of 8,000-10,000 spectators at full capacity Monday through Saturday (176). According to Henslowe's record of receipts, income was higher for holidays and premieres of new plays. On ordinary days, his house was about half full (Cook 190-91). When the Globe burned down in 1613, it was immediately rebuilt, costing £1400, and when the Fortune burned in 1621, it was also immediately rebuilt (210-11). Obviously there was profit to be made in the theatre, and wealthy theatre managers like Henslowe depended upon the privileged rather than commoners for his company's livelihood.

Cook does not deny visits by London's commoners to the theater but merely purports that they could not afford to frequent the theatre and offer sustained financial support (3-12). The law ordained the work day between the months of March and September as 5:00 a.m. until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., six days a week (224). Apprentices would not have received permission from their masters to leave work to attend the theatre, and if they had, apprentices would have had no available cash in their pockets with which to purchase tickets, refreshments, etc. Household servants would not have been able to complete their daily chores by early afternoon in time to see a play. Moreover, shopowners would be hesitant to leave their place of business all afternoon to see a play. Missed work hours equaled missed wages. A skilled craftsman typically earned £10 per year which equated to seven pence each day to clothe, shelter, and feed himself and his family (232). While wages were set by law and could not be raised, prices for goods such

as food, rent, and fuel continued to spiral out of control. In 1595, the price of one egg was one penny and one pound of butter cost seven pence (231). James raised wages when he assumed the throne, but earnings could not keep up with costs. The common worker simply would not have possessed the disposable income necessary to enjoy the theatre except at rare times such as holidays.

So, who were the commoners attending the theatre? Soldiers and sailors had available time in the afternoon to see a play when on leave in the city. Prostitutes, cutpurses, and cozeners frequented the theatre as parasites upon wealthy theatergoers. These were perhaps the commoners that Dekker referred to when he complained that actors often played to London's twopenny, drunken plebians or those that Jonson called rude, brainless, barbarians (Cook 261-63). Five commoners were once arrested at the Red Bull and charged with disorderly conduct in 1610, and two butchers were charged with abusing gentlemen at the Fortune in 1611 (258-59).

Given the current scholarly debate on Jacobean audience demographics, if Webster's audience was comprised of the lower classes as previous scholars maintain, then Webster's visual imagery as context clues would become essential to convey his propaganda regarding the nature of evil resulting from absolute power. If Cook's conjecture is correct, however, and the public and private theatres were filled with homogeneous audiences of privileged playgoers, then Webster's audience would have been acutely mindful of the corruption of James's Court as well as his selling of titles and land which was eroding England's traditional feudalistic land inheritance system.



## CHAPTER 3

### POWER—MONARCHY AND PAPACY

#### **England's Secession from the Roman Catholic Church**

At the turn of the sixteenth century, England and Spain, both Catholic nations subject to the pope in Rome, forged an alliance when Henry VII, King of England, and Ferdinand, the first King of Spain, arranged a marriage in 1501 between their children, Prince Arthur of England and Catherine of Aragon. The pope blessed this political union. Married at fifteen, Arthur died within only two years, leaving no heir. Seven years later, when Henry VII died and his next son Henry VIII became king, Henry married his deceased brother's wife, Catherine, in 1509. Although this nature of this union was strained given that Henry and Arthur were essentially sharing the same wife, the pope agreed to bless this union as well. Catherine gave birth in 1516 to a daughter, Mary, whom she raised as a devout Catholic subject. After nearly twenty-five years of marriage, Catherine still had not given birth to a son, and Henry, who desperately needed a male heir to insure the continuation of the politically volatile Tudor throne, asked Cardinal Reginald Pole to help with petitioning Rome for a divorce from Catherine. Pole's conscience, however, could not allow him to grant this request, for he saw no legitimate grounds for annulment. As retribution for refusing his king, Pole was denounced as a traitor, his family was persecuted, and he was forced to flee to Rome (Wagner 345-46).

Since Henry had earlier asked the pope to bless his union with Catherine, the pope was now hesitant to reverse his blessing. Like Pole, the pope saw no relevant grounds to

warrant an annulment, for marriage is a sacrament in the Catholic Church. Thus, Henry was forced to decide whether to remain subject to Catholic jurisdiction or secede from the Church as other European countries had already done as a result of the Reformation movement. When Henry disassociated himself from the Roman Catholic Church and established himself as the head of the Church of England, he was then free to appoint his own Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and marry the young and beautiful Anne Boleyn in hopes of siring a son. Boleyn later give birth to yet another daughter, Elizabeth I. Whereas Catherine was a pious Catholic, Boleyn was an avid Protestant who introduced Henry to an essay written in 1528 by William Tyndale who was the author of the first English translation of the Bible. The essay was titled “The Obediance of a Christian Man” and called for Henry to save his people from the powerful and corrupt Catholic Church (Katz 33). England’s relationship with the Roman Catholic Church was officially severed in 1534 with Henry’s formal Act of Secession.

England’s conversion from Catholicism to Anglicanism was not an immediate transition. At the time of secession, England’s clergy were priests with priestly vestments. England’s churches were Catholic-built sanctuaries with Catholic dressed altars, stained glass windows, statues, and votive candles. It was not a quick and easy feat to change centuries of religious tradition. Henry finally fathered a son, Edward VI, by his third wife, Jane Seymour. Although Edward ruled as a boy, along with a regent, he continued his father’s work in the establishment of the Anglican Church, and the schism between England and Rome grew wider.

## **England's Brief Return to the Catholic Church**

Edward VI died at the age of sixteen. Although he had been officially engaged to Mary Queen of Scots, they never married, and subsequently Edward left no heir.

Renouncing both Mary and Elizabeth as his successor, he passed the throne to Lady Jane Grey, his cousin who was also a great grand-daughter to Henry VI. Grey ruled for nine days at which time England's Council called for Mary to ascend the English throne.

Although England was officially a Protestant country, Mary had continued to practice Catholicism as her mother, Catherine, had done. So, when Mary Tudor became queen, she began efforts to re-establish England as a Catholic nation. English Protestant ministers were forced to flee into exile or revert back to serving as priests. Protestant English subjects were also encouraged to flee; arrest warrants were issued, but Protestant subjects were given a limited window of opportunity to escape. By 1554, one thousand English had fled. Most went to Germany and Switzerland (Wagner 287). Cardinal Reginald Pole returned to England to serve as the Archbishop of Canterbury and worked along side Mary to reverse the secession efforts of her father Henry VIII and her brother Edward VI. To further her resolve to re-establish England as a Catholic nation, Mary followed in her father's early footsteps and allied England with Spain, still a strong Catholic nation, by marrying Spain's Prince Philip II. Although Julius III was the reigning pope when Mary ascended the throne, Paul IV reigned as pope during her last years. I posit that Paul IV is the pope that Webster chooses for his evil pope in *The White Devil*.

Heresy laws were written in England in the early fifteenth century by Henry IV to stem the growing Lollardy movement that questioned the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Those who were guilty of heresy according to these laws were to be burned to death, and the Catholic Church depended on the secular criminal justice system to carry out the execution. In 1547, England was no longer a Catholic country and therefore transubstantiation was no longer a doctrinal issue, so Edward Seymour, regent on behalf of Edward VI, repealed England's heresy laws (Wagner 232). Mary Tudor, however, reinstated the previous heresy laws and sanctioned heresy trials beginning in January 1555. One month later, John Rogers, the Calvinist vicar of St. Sepulchre, was the first Protestant to be executed. Rogers was rumored to be the true translator of the first folio of the Old and New Testaments in the English vernacular (Katz 35). Because the Webster home and family business were situated near this church as well as adjacent to the execution venue of Smithfield, historian Charles Forker believes that John Webster Sr., our playwright's father, may have witnessed Rogers's execution as a young boy (16). Public burnings at Smithfield for heresy continued until 1612, the same year that *The White Devil* was produced and published. English historian John Wagner explains that with three hundred Protestants executed, "Instead of instilling horror of heresy in the populace as the government intended, the burnings only aroused sympathy for the victims and anger against the government, earning for the queen her later appellation of 'Bloody Mary'" (289). Under English heresy laws, the crown could not only execute the convicted, it could also confiscate all of the victim's property, leaving surviving family members destitute. Mary's persecution of Protestants antagonized her English subjects, and therefore the reunification of England and Rome became a bitter pill for the English to swallow.

## **Elizabeth I and the Return of the Church of England**

Mary died after only five years as England's monarch, and like her brother before her, left no heir. The process of reunifying England with the Church of Rome had not yet been finalized, so when Mary's Protestant sister Elizabeth ascended the throne, the process of reunification ended. With Paul IV still in papal power in Rome in January of 1559, Elizabeth abolished papal authority in England as well as Catholic heresy statutes. England's definition of heresy as a crime moved from opposing the doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church to opposing the doctrinal teaching of the Church of England. Whereas Henry IV's heresy laws had attempted to eliminate reformist ideology, Elizabeth's heresy laws attempted to eliminate Catholic ideology. Since England's monarch was also the head of the Church of England, to disobey church doctrine was to disobey the crown, a treasonous offense. Like her father Henry VIII, Elizabeth was officially excommunicated by Rome. Furthermore, the Catholic Church recognized the pope's power to excommunicate every person who serves a monarch who has been excommunicated (Gavin 392), in effect excommunicating all English Catholics. Furthermore, Pope Pius V granted permission to any Catholic to assassinate a heretical monarch. Therefore assassination attempts on Elizabeth's life were numerous, and throughout Elizabeth's reign, popes such as Gregory XIII continually schemed to remove her from the throne and invade England to reclaim it as a papal nation (Hsia 83).

As Elizabeth held firm supporting the Church of England over the Catholic Church, the Catholic bishops that Mary Tudor had installed were either imprisoned or fled the country for refusing to acknowledge Elizabeth as the head of the Anglican Church. Rome continued plotting, however, to thwart Elizabeth's rule. Between 1574 and

1603, there were 440 priests trained at Douai College in France specifically to serve in England; 98 of them were executed by Elizabeth. Her persecutions of priests were brutally savage in order to dissuade any thoughts of internal rebellion. In 1581, she declared any Catholic clergy on English soil to be a capital offense; 183 Catholics in England were executed between 1577 and 1603 with 123 of them being priests. Thousands more Catholics were fined, imprisoned, tortured, and deported (Hsia 83-84).

Elizabeth reigned for nearly fifty years, an unusual feat considering the average life span and the political instability of the time. When she died in 1603, she left no heir, and the Tudor line came to a halt. Webster's friend and playwriting collaborator, Thomas Dekker, chronicled public sentiment concerning their beloved Elizabeth's death in his pamphlet of the same year titled "The Wonderful Year."

The report of her death, like a thunder-clap, was able to kill thousands. It took away hearts from millions. For having brought up even under her wing a nation that was almost begotten and born under her, that never shouted any other *ave* than for her name, never saw the face of any prince but herself, never understood what that outlandish word 'change' signified—how was it possible that her sickness should throw abroad an universal fear, and her death an astonishment? . . . Never did the English nation behold so much black worn as there was at her funeral . . . for her departure was so sudden and so strange that men knew not how to weep because they had never been taught to shed tears of that making. . . . The whole kingdom seems a wilderness and the people transformed to wild men. (33-34)

Dekker continued his discourse in this pamphlet of his country's general malaise at facing the uncertainty of having no remaining Tudor to succeed the throne and its possible repercussions. Would England fall into civil war like France? And if so, what would the religious implications be?

Who did expect but ruin, blood and death  
To share our Kingdom and divide our breath?  
Religions without religion  
To let each others blood; Confusion  
To be next Queen of England; and this year  
The Civil Wars of France to be played here  
By Englishmen. (Dekker, "Wonderful Year" 35)

Dekker comments that although their future king was a Scot and a Stuart, England's countrymen were at least thankful that James was married and therefore could produce an heir to secure the English throne.

### **A Strained Stuart Ascension to the English Throne**

Immediately following the passing of Elizabeth, Englishmen feared civil war would break out because Elizabeth had no direct heir (Harington, *Nugae* Vol. 2, 6). Doctor Whitegift, Archbishop of Canterbury, officially proclaimed James their new king, placing the crown on his head and anointing him with holy oil. Thus, the Tudor dynasty had ended and the troubled Stuart reign was to begin. James was faced with replacing a cherished monarch. At the death of Elizabeth, England deeply mourned its loss. Even two years after her death, dramatist Thomas Heywood wrote a play commending Elizabeth's honor and goodness, *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Body: Or the Troubles of Queen*

*Elizabeth.* In the play, the character of a young boy defies Queen Mary Tudor's admonition by taking a bouquet of flowers to Elizabeth whom Mary had imprisoned in the Tower. A poor man on the street comments how good Elizabeth is, for she will take flowers and accept a cup of cool water from a commoner. Heywood is offering an interesting statement at this particular moment in England's history because James distanced himself. Not sharing, Elizabeth's ability to "work the crowd," James was reserved. Although his English subjects were loyal, they did not love him as they did their Queen Bess (Goldberg 31). In 1611, Lord Thomas Howard wrote a letter to Sir John Harington in which he described Elizabeth and James as two very different monarchs, "Your Queen did talk of her subjects love and good affections, and in good truth she aimed well; our King talketh of his subjects fear and subjection, and hereon I think he dothe well too, as long as it holdeth good" (Goldberg 28). Harington wrote a letter in 1606 to Robert Markham about how successful Elizabeth was as a powerful ruler, and how everyone loved her for several reasons: because she was gracious and benevolent, because she was unafraid like her father Henry VIII, and because she was a mirror of the people's hopes and wishes (Goldberg 28-29). Furthermore, Harington's "Breefe Notes and Remembraunces 1594-1603" discusses his personal mourning of Elizabeth as well as his distrust of James in 1603:

For in soothe, I have loste the beste and fairest love that ever shepherde knew, even my gracious Queene; and sith my good mistresse is gone, I shall not hastily put forthe for a new master. I heare oure Kynge hathe hangede one man before he was tryede; 'tis strangely done: now if the



wynde blowethe thus, why may not a man be tried before he hath  
offended. (180)

Rumors of impending change ran rampant in England prior to James's arrival. While English Catholics believed that James would restore Catholicism in light of the fact that James's wife and his parents were Catholic, Anglican reformers believed James would further separate England from Rome given that James was a confessed Calvinist. All English citizens, though, were fearful at the idea of a sitting monarch who was a foreigner. Regardless of whether the rumors were valid or baseless, they planted seeds of doubt and apprehension.

Michael Sparke penned a historical narration of the first fourteen years of James's reign in which Sparke explains the unsettled atmosphere in England due to friction caused by Protestants, papists, and military conflicts with Ireland, the Low Countries, Spain, and France. His piece, which covered many aspects of James's reign, was printed twice—in 1651 and again posthumously in 1692. In his narration, Sparke commented that James wanted to establish religious peace in England. Then, the Gunpowder Plot was discovered. Sparke explained that there were fights in the streets between Protestants and papists, and that it was God's mercy that prevented Catholic insurgents from taking over England's government ("Truth . . . Uncovered" 2). Later in his narration, Sparke criticized James's obsession with hunting and carousing in the countryside in lieu of running the government. Sparke also criticized James's outlandish affection for his favorites Somerset and Buckingham, stating that James had "young, wanton, and every way undeserving Favourites" ("Truth . . . Most Remarkable"). Sparke continued to admonish James for his actions in 1615 against Parliament. Apparently, the House of

Commons had begun an inquiry into the cause of the increase in popish recusancy in England since the Gunpowder Plot. The scope of their inquiry also investigated miscarriages of justice carried about by James's Court. When James learned of this inquiry, he dissolved Parliament and imprisoned the leaders of the inquiry. James alleged that Parliament's only duty was to provide him with money. Sparke concludes his narration by addressing James's negotiation to marry his son Charles to Spain, the Catholic enemy of England, a negotiation which Sparke believes caused James to lose the affection of his subjects. Sparke's comments are enlightening given that in a purported divine right monarchy, James could not afford to lose the blind obedience of his subjects.

### **James's Tolerance/Intolerance of English Catholics**

While James upheld the Church of England, colleges in Europe continued to train priests for covert service in England. Spain's Philip II financed a college in Valladolid for English Catholics. Priests came into the country in disguise and were hidden by Catholic households. During the last part of Elizabeth's reign, there were allegedly 18 Jesuits in England; in 1607 under James, there were 130 Jesuits and approximately 300 priests in England. R. Po-chia Hsia, a historian of Catholicism, estimates in his book, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, that in the year 1603, 30,000 Catholics lived in England whose total population was 2.5 million (84-85). James tolerated Catholics until the 1605 Gunpowder Plot assassination attempt by English Catholic rebels. From that point on, James vacillated between tolerance and intensive persecution of Catholics. For example, Henry Garner, an English subject who left for Rome to train as a Jesuit priest, returned to England to support fellow Catholic priests in the English underground. Garner was caught and arrested. Catholic bishop Bellarmine in Rome wrote to James in defense of

Garner's work and pleaded for Garner's release, but the effort was to no avail, for Garner had previously campaigned against James's Oath of Allegiance. Garner was tried and publicly executed in 1606 with guards posted to protect the body, preventing any pieces being taken by Catholics as relics (Pollen).

### **King James Bible**

When James ascended the English throne, he maintained Elizabeth's decision to hold a middle ground between the extremes of Catholicism and Puritanism, particularly at the council of Hampton when the Puritans petitioned James for even more reform in the Anglican Church. John Harington writes in his "Breefe Notes and Remembrances 1594-1603" of James's reaction to these petitions: "He rather usede upbraidings than argumente; and tolde the petitioners that they wanted to strip Christe againe, and bid them awaie with their snivellinge. . . . It seemethe the Kynge will not change the religious observances" (181-82). James saw no reason to shift the Anglican Church toward either polar extreme or to swing the Church toward Calvinism (Cavendish 54). One of the only changes to come from this Conference in James's early English reign was a compromise agreement for a new English translation of the Bible that would become known as the King James Bible.

In a discourse that focuses on the Jacobean political and religious environment in early seventeenth-century England, it seems appropriate that I take a moment to address the King James Bible, which was first printed in 1611, one year before *The White Devil*. This particular Bible was not popular at the time it was first printed. John Reynolds of Oxford believed a new English vernacular Bible should be written to replace Tyndale's earlier translation. When this idea was mentioned to James at the Hampton Court

Conference of January 1604, he agreed with Reynolds, and a commission was therefore established to complete this endeavor under the direction of Lancelot Andrewes of Westminster, Edward Lively of Cambridge, and John Harding of Oxford. This new edition, however, was never officially authorized; therefore, parishes were never required to purchase it. They continued using the Bishops Bible in the pulpit. Furthermore, early editions of the King James Bible were not well received by the English citizenry either because they enjoyed the Geneva Bible for their home use (Katz 38, 45).

### **Divine Right Absolutism—James**

James's first words in 1603 to England's Parliament were: "I am the Husband, all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body" (Goldberg 141). Thus began James's absolutist attitude that he assumed with his subjects who were unaccustomed to this line of reasoning from their monarch. Henry VIII did not establish divine right absolutism as part of the Tudor line. The concept of divine right absolutism came into being in Renaissance England with James via his belief in coronation as an appointment to the throne by God Almighty, his obligation to care for his country and its subjects, and his demand that England's subjects obey him without question. To rebel would be to go against God's ordinance which would ultimately bring complete destruction to England. Calling upon divine right absolutism as his justification for rule allowed James, in effect, to render papal authority impotent in England. Gordon Schochet's book *The Authoritarian Family and Political Attitudes in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century England: Patriarchalism in Political Thought* presents a chronology of the ideology behind divine right absolutism. Ancient Greek philosophers combined the patriarchal family order with the nature and role of government. Plato's *Republic* presented the

family as the basis of society, Aristotle's *The Politics* presented the family as the precursor to political community, and Cicero's *De Officiis* presented the family as the foundation of civil government (Schochet 20-24). The connection of the family to the nature and role of government filtered down through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. In the early Christian Church, Sts. Augustine and Aquinas accepted the family unit as the beginning of the city (25-26), and medieval writer Marsilius's *Defender of the Peace* explained that the father/mother unit becomes a community as soon as children are born.

The only defense written on the subject of divine absolutism during the Stuart reign was Sir Robert Filmer's seventeenth-century commentary, *Patriarcha*, (Goldberg 85) which presented patriarchalism as a natural order that was genetic rather than teleological (Schochet 27). Key to Filmer's argument is the scriptural explanation of Creation in Genesis in which God created Adam and gave him dominion over all living things including his wife Eve. Beginning with the story of Adam and continuing through the story of Noah, Filmer explains that God's design has filtered down genealogically to kings. I find it intriguing, though, that James would ascribe so whole-heartedly to this precept in light of the fact that he was not a descendant of his predecessor, Elizabeth I. After several unsuccessful attempts to wrest the throne from Elizabeth, Mary Queen of Scots was executed for treason. James later denied any treasonous link with this mother and begged Elizabeth's understanding and forgiveness. James wanted to ensure that nothing would impede his chance at someday ruling England. For James to rebuff his lineage as son of Mary, Queen of Scots and then to later claim divine right through lineage seems a contradiction in reasoning.

When James ascended the English throne in 1603, he wrote two treatises that same year through which he argues his divine right supposition. *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies or The Reciproock and Mutual Dutie betwixt a Free King and His Naturall Subjects* lays the foundation of James's argument. He explains that he presents this treatise "lovingly" in order to teach his subjects how to "frame" their actions in perfect obedience. James claims that wise men throughout time have acknowledged that the monarch resembles perfect divinity and that rebellion leads undoubtedly to misery; he points to Britain's riotous past as proof of the social and political ills of rebellion. Then James continues to plead his case, referencing biblical scripture:

The Princes dutie to his subjectes is so clearely set downe in many places of the Scriptures, and so openly confessed by all the good Princes, according to their oathe in their Coronation. . . . Kings are called Gods by the prophetical King David, because they sit up-pon God his throne in the earth, and have the count of their administration to give unto him. Their office is, to minister justice and judgement to the people, as the same David saith. (*True Lawe*)

In this treatise, James describes the duties of a divinely appointed king: advancing the good, punishing evil, establishing good laws for the people, procuring obedience to these laws, procuring peace, deciding controversies that arise between the people, and being the minister of God. James further associates himself within the biblical realm of the kings of Judah, Kings David and Solomon, and St. Paul. James professes that he is directly answerable to God alone and serves as God's lieutenant.

According to James's patriarchal hierarchy, the subjects' response must be complete obedience; he referred to the book of Samuel to support this allegiance. God gives the people a king as his gift; only God can appoint and remove a king. If there is rebellion, James points to the book of Jeremiah to show that God will destroy all insurrections. Even if God sends an evil king, the people are still to obey him. And in doing so, God will reward the people for their actions and erase their sin. Regarding Parliament, James believes that God creates the monarchy and man creates Parliament. Parliament may establish laws, but the divinely appointed king will insure that the laws are just and in keeping with God's will. Finally, James illustrates the king as the "head" and his subjects as the "body." The head takes care of the body and makes all decisions based upon what is best for the body. Finally, James points out that the focal point of his treatise is to persuade people not to rebel so that in return God will bless England.

In addition to *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, James wrote a letter to his son Henry, the Crown Prince, titled *Basilikon Doron or His Maiesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne Henry, the Prince* (1603) which consists of three sections: Of a Christian's Dutie Towards God, A King's Dutie in His Office, and A King's Behavior in Indifferent Things. Because James believed himself to be a public person, he published this letter to his son so that all Englishmen might understand the role of a king and his subjects. James's argument opens with a sonnet telling the people that because God gives the throne and the scepter, they should fear and obey God, for happiness can only come through perfect obedience. James instructs his son Henry that he is God's blessing to the continued throne of England, and it is a weighty responsibility to be born in line for the throne. Therefore, Henry's first duty is to God because he is a Christian, his second duty

is to the office of king, and his third duty is to live his life as an example to the people. To appease James's English subjects, he comments that he feels obligated to prove to the English people that he holds no grudges against them for their imprisonment and execution of his mother and that he is firmly a Protestant and will maintain Protestantism, pledging to fight Anabaptists, Puritans, and papists. From that point on, James gives Henry practical governing advice such as to be careful of secrets and those who keep them, to marry a woman worthy of being a queen and then honor her always, to study the scriptures because they are divinely inspired, to balance law with mercy, to always consider what is best for your people, to protect the country's borders, to keep a watchful eye on power-hungry nobility, to enjoy friendships and celebrate holidays, to surround yourself with honest men, to choose your court wisely, and above all to practice temperance. The final section of this letter to Henry addresses James's notion that the monarch is a public person. He warns Henry to "frame your actions and outward behavior." Ironically, James's advice was for naught because Henry died before attaining manhood, and the next in line to the throne would be none other than Charles, the king whose monarchy would be brought down by his own subjects.

### **Renaissance Views of the Role of the Monarch**

In Stephen Orgel's essay, "The Royal Theatre and the Role of King," he comments on the relationship of the monarchy and its believed authority from God as being a Renaissance mindset stemming from mythology (261). Renaissance by its very definition was a rebirth of classical learning. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* introduced the concept that kings descended from the gods, and this belief continued through Julius Caesar and Augustus, a theme which would be mirrored in James's reign as he



considered himself a model of Augustus. Boccaccio's *Genealogies of the Gods* explains the myths that justify the divine right of kings to rule unquestioningly. Renaissance men were concerned with lineage because legitimacy is derived from lineage, and with legitimacy comes power and position within the social order. The ancient Greeks understood the intimate relationship of the gods and daily human life within the social order. While early modern Christians wanted to expose the errors of Greek mythology as paganism, they also wanted "to preserve its pantheon and celebrate its heroes" (264). Thus, Renaissance Christians accepted the ancient Greek gods' role in life as a model for God's role in human life.

Divine absolutism, however, was not the prevailing ideology of governance throughout Renaissance Europe. Renaissance political observer and writer Machiavelli wrote that the strongest and most courageous person should be chosen to rule; genealogy should not be the governing a factor. Erasmus wrote that a monarch should rule like a kind and gentle father-figure. Again, no genealogy or descent from Adam was required (Schochet 29).

### **Divine Right Absolutism—Pope**

James professed himself as divinely appointed to rule and answerable to no human law, and the office of the papacy professed the same assertion. Both claim God as their validation; if you are chosen by God to rule, then you are armed with the Word of God as your sword. The Catholic Church proclaims that the pope is the descendant of Peter, the first man commissioned by Christ to build the Christian Church. Hence, the pope receives the symbol of St. Peter's Keys to rule the Church. When a pope dies, the Church's College of Cardinals convenes through a conclave to pray and then elects a

successor. When the newly elected pope is “adored” by the Cardinals, he is then acknowledged as the voice of God to humanity; therefore to Catholics, the Church of Rome is considered infallible (Gavin 289). For centuries, the papacy has struggled with secular heads of state over the issue of who possesses supreme authority to rule. If James is a divinely appointed absolute monarch and the pope is also a divinely appointed absolute monarch, which one is more absolute? To English Catholics, James expected them to serve only him as their king, and Pope Paul V expected them to serve only him as their pontiff. Both threatened their subjects with divine retribution for serving the other. This religious and political tension stemming from absolutist doctrine manifested itself in other European countries as well. For instance, a massacre broke out in Paris in 1572 on St. Bartholomew’s Day between Catholics and Protestant Huguenots. Following the massacre, Pope Gregory XIII commissioned a medal to be coined depicting his image on one side and an angel of destruction on the other holding a cross and thrusting a sword, with the inscription “Hugonotorum strages”—The Slaughter of the Huguenots (Gavin 393).

The Renaissance papacy transformed into an absolute monarchy with the development of its papal courts (*curia*) and a strong, centralized administration of its Papal States. Between 1540 and 1770, there were twenty-nine popes, all of whom were Italian, and all but two were from dynastic families who strived to elevate their family member to the throne of St. Peter. This group of Renaissance popes were groomed and behaved like elite princes (Hsia 96-98).

## **Father-Figure and the Image of God**

James professed himself as a father-figure to his subjects. In his treatise, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, James explains that a monarch's role with his people is "to maintain concord, wealth, and civilities among them, as a loving Father, and carefull watchman, caring for them more then for himselfe." He viewed his subjects as obedient children. James was certainly not the first to develop this patriarchal concept. William Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) taught that God's design is that all men should honor and obey their parents (Schochet 39), claiming authority from the fifth commandment that God presented to Moses. This concept of the fifth commandment was taught to all English subjects by the Church of England via mandatory catechism. Furthermore, Chief Justice Coke wrote his pamphlet *Postnati* (1606) as catechistic instruction on patriarchy as God's natural order (Schochet 91).

Sir Robert Filmer wrote in *Patriarcha* that the defense of James's divine right absolutism was based on the belief that the political order of Stuart England had evolved from the family (Schochet 1). Patriarchalism professes the father figure as the head of household. He rules the family unit and nourishes and educates his children. In return, they are bound to him for life (32). Adam was the first father, and therefore the ancestor of all kings, and since the king makes the queen possible, the king/father is also the creator (Goldberg 85, 88). To James, the state was an extended family with himself as the head of household. In "An Advertisement to the Reader" within James's treatise, *The True Lawe of Monarchies*, he explains that he writes this treatise lovingly in order to teach his subjects the right way to live. As God is the father in heaven, so too is James the father of England. James refers to himself as the head and his subjects as the body, for the

king is the head of the body because the head is the seat of judgment. The head takes care of the body; all discourse comes from the head and disseminates to the members.

Furthermore, James explains in this treatise that it is natural for a king to be the father of his people. In James's letter, *Basilikon Doron*, which is addressed to his son Henry, James warns Henry not to sin because when the king sins, the whole country enters into sin. Furthermore, James explains to Henry that a father must punish some subjects in order to keep order.

James reasoned that because the king made it possible for there to be a queen, the king therefore was the creator, both father and mother to the kingdom. Goldberg explains that James's theory in actuality made him a hermaphrodite so that what we perceive as homosexual relationships were in fact heterosexual relationships to him. While sodomy was considered a treasonous offense punishable by death, James reasoned he was excluded from the commission of sodomy because he was both male/female as well as above human law. Englishmen within the inner circle of James's Court, such as Francis Osborne, wrote of their reaction at witnessing James publicly kiss his favorites Somerset and Buckingham, both of whom Osborne commented dressed effeminately. When Somerset and Buckingham were away from Court, they would write love letters back to James who in turn would have them read aloud in public. While this behavior upset members of James's English advisors, it apparently did not seem in the least bit inappropriate to James (Goldberg 142).

As for the papacy as father-figure, Dante and Augustinus Triumphus both justified pure obedience to the pope on patriarchal grounds (Schochet 29). According to the *OED*, 2nd edition, the word pope (also as pápa, pape, paip, pope, pope, pā pas, pá

paj), pā pa, was used by Tertullian in approximately AD 220 as a term of respect for ecclesiastics of high position, especially bishops. From 1703, the term pope was reserved exclusively for the Bishop of Rome. Therefore, the title of pope assumes a father-child relationship between the pontiff and his subjects.

### **Jacobean Masques and the Image of Power**

Elizabeth loved theatre, pageantry, and spectacle. Jonathan Goldberg's book, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries*, claims that in Elizabeth's pageant entrance into London, her "legitimacy and her faith were celebrated" (33). Elizabeth wanted to be a part of the pageants. James, on the other hand, desired to be separate from the people. He spoke no lines during pageants; he merely wanted to be seen by his subjects (31). James disliked making public appearances, preferring to write to his subjects than actually speak to them (143). In the last years of James's reign, he was rarely seen in London at all, choosing to stay in his country homes to hunt.

James, like Elizabeth, patroned theatre and commissioned plays and pageants, especially to celebrate holidays and state occasions. The first Christmas of James's reign, he commissioned thirty plays for the season (Cook 114). This extravagance of costly entertainment would continue throughout James's reign. While plays presented at Court allowed James and his entourage to watch plays performed, masques allowed them the opportunity to perform. Because James disliked public speaking, most of James's participation in masques involved silent appearances or simply the commissioning of them for his wife and Court to enjoy performing. Goldberg discusses the masques that were performed during the reigns of James and Charles I, asserting that these masques

expressed imagined power. For example, in *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610), James presents himself as an immortal, a god. He aligns his own images with those of the legendary King Arthur and Merlin and the biblical King Solomon. James most enjoyed presenting himself as the image of Augustus Caesar within the realm of the Pax Romano and called himself the Prince of Peace because he claimed that he forged peace between England and Scotland, thus creating a Great Britain.

James believed that his power as king was divinely appointed, and Goldberg posits that the masques illustrate this mystery (39-57). As God's lieutenant, James stands in his place, and thereby doubles his power. Goldberg explains that Artaud comments in his "Theatre and Its Double" that the last time theatre had presented this idea of the double that he ascribed to was Jacobean theatre, for it went beyond pointing out as representation and instead spoke another language (154). Without lines of dialogue, the masque offers James an avenue to present connections visually rather than aurally. Members of Court clamored to act in these masques so that they might be seen as participating in this presentation of monarchal, absolute power.

In addition to Court masques, power as an ideal was portrayed through public spectacles of theatre, bearbaiting, sermon attendance, and executions/tortures. Goldberg explains that all of these were moral mirrors and displays of power.

Power is manifested in the spectacle, the mirror of the King. . . . This is what the sovereign displays in public, his own unobservability, observed in his spectacles: the divine word preached, ferocious power unleashed; and these meet in the theatre, where the audience saw king treading the stage, where the public assembled to see itself. The theatre, that tragic

scaffold, was a place for self-knowledge precisely because it mirrored the state, because its re-representations duplicated public life. It is there that Renaissance man went to know himself. (Goldberg 149)

Bearbaiting offered scenes of the violent repercussions when power is restrained, for the bear was chained and could not defend itself as it would in the forest. The chain offered the advantage of power to the dogs that could run free as they attacked the bear. Sermons narrated the power of God against the forces of evil such as the Catholic foe. Preachers wielded the Bible as their weapon of inerrant truth in this struggle for salvation. Public executions displayed the power of the government to take away human life. The executioner was licensed to torture his victim and then decide when the final moment of death would occur. The theatre possessed the power to display all socio-economic, political, and religious issues. Webster's stage offered the playwright the power to inspire, enlighten, anger, and terrify the Jacobean audience.

### **Corruption and Scandal**

Referring to the emerging corruption of the Renaissance popes, British historian Lord Acton coined the phrase, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" ("To Mandell Creighton" 357). Acton continued his discussion to comment that corruption is inherent to absolute power within all political systems, not just the Renaissance papacy. Because James proclaimed that his inheritance of the English throne was a gift from God to England, James believed himself and all kings to be above the law (James I, *True Lawe*). Therefore, James reasoned that all his actions including sodomy, selling of titles, bankrupting the coffers, and appointing Privy Council positions to Scottish favorites were deemed acceptable behavior. If the English disagreed with

James's actions and behavior, he placated them with rhetoric concerning God's will and calamitous retribution should they brew a rebellion (James I, *True Law*). In the introduction to anthropologist Italo Pardo's book, *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption and Comparative Society*, Pardo comments on the nature of abuses of power and its ensuing corruption within the fabric of the political system:

In its most basic form, abuse of power in public life is characterized by the sale of the functions of office. It consists of actions, or the failure to take actions that favour selected individuals or groups in exchange for money or other returns, such as the expectation of a job, a favour, or political support. (Pardo 1)

Abuse of power directly affects the relationship between the state and its citizens, and James's reign contained abuses in all forms that Pardo mentions.

Under James's rule, corruption became commonplace. When Thomas Dekker was imprisoned in King's Bench debtor's prison for seven years, he wrote of the Marshall, Sir George Reynell, whom the prisoners accused of demanding extortion fees (Pendry 6-7). Dekker comments, "As laws are the foundation on which kingdoms are grounded, so when that ground fails there follows ruin. . . . In prison, 'men are buried alive.' . . . What a loss is this to the King! What dishonour to the country! What scandal to Christianity!" (*English Villainies* 270, 274). Dekker explains that the courts were so full of accused that they ran both day and night, and he refers to the cruel Justice of the County as Don Lucifer (197).

James's reign was ripe with numerous scandals such as the case of Thomas Howard, Lord Treasurer and Earl of Suffolk, and his wife's extortion; the case of Thomas



Lake, Secretary of State, whose son-in-law committed an incestuous affair with his grandmother, the Countess of Exeter; and most famously, the case of James's favorite Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, who conspired along with his wife to assassinate Sir Thomas Overbury. The death of Overbury would have been of particular interest to playwright John Webster because they were schoolmates at Middle Temple (Gunby 10). Michael Sparke's "Truth Brought to Light and Uncovered by Time of a Discourse and Historicall Narration of the First XIII Yeares of King James Reigne" offers a primary source perspective account of the Carr incident. While King of Scotland, James chose Carr as his favorite. Although Carr had been born to parents of low social standing, James chose to lavish Carr with large sums of money. When James became King of England, he knighted Carr and presented him with gifts of land which caused acrimony among the English people. At tax payers' expense, James's favorites were given excellent clothes, homes, and food. They frequented brothels, alehouses, and dicing tables—all of which displeased the English (4). Frances Howard, the Countess of Essex, drew a liking to Carr and asked her uncle, Earl of Northampton, to arrange an introduction over dinner. When the Earl of Essex learned of his wife's brazen and lustful behavior, he chastised her and called her "loose" and "vulgar" (Sparke, "Truth . . . Remarkable Transactions" 24). The Countess, whom Sparke refers to as evil (15), hired a known sorceress, Mrs. Turner, to concoct a poison to kill her husband Essex as well as a potion to intoxicate and bewitch Carr.

Sparke continues to explain the controversy surrounding Carr. James elevated Carr to Viscount Rochester and granted him a position on the Privy Council as Secretary of State, an action that was surprising to the English people given Carr's youth,

inexperience, and lack of education (Sparke, “Truth . . . Uncovered” 14). As a result, angry English nobles plotted to ruin Carr. Soon after, strange deaths occurred in London and Carr’s name was implicated. For example, following an argument with Carr, Treasurer Cecil died from poisoning.

Carr employed Thomas Overbury to handle his affairs, so Overbury endeavored to distance Carr from the scandalous Countess Essex. Consequently, she sought retribution. Again, she asked her uncle, Earl of Northhampton, for help. On dubious charges, Overbury was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower. In the meantime, in order to please Carr, James granted the Essex divorce so that the Countess might be free to marry Carr. With Overbury in the Tower and therefore unable to protect Carr’s affairs, the Countess Essex and Carr were wed. James commissioned an elaborate masque to celebrate the nuptials and granted them the new title, Earl and Countess Somerset. Countess Somerset again visited Mrs. Turner for sorcery help in permanently silencing Overbury. Soon after, Overbury began to fall ill and died in the Tower from apparent poisoning. In the meantime, James promoted Carr again to Lord Chancellor of Cambridge. Unfortunately for Carr, James discovered a new favorite, George Villiers, whom James would later title Buckingham. Carr and his wife were arrested and taken to the Tower for complicity in Overbury’s murder. The Countess confessed but Carr claimed no part in the murder. To stem this scandal at Court, Sir Frances Bacon spoke at Carr’s arraignment, defending him on grounds that he was a high ranking member of Court. James granted a pardon to the Somersets, but ordered the execution of Mrs. Turner and the Somersets’ servants for the murder.

The most damning evidence Sparke discusses concerning the Carr scandal is the possible connection between Carr and the death of England's beloved crown prince Henry who strongly and publicly disapproved of Carr. Seemingly virile, Henry suddenly became violently ill in 1612 and died. Rumors spread of possible poisoning or bewitching. Henry's body was autopsied the day of his death, but no certain cause of death was discerned. Rumors abounded that Carr was believed to be responsible. Fear of a coup spread throughout London with the unsubstantiated news that a ship of guns and ammunition was on its way from Spain for the papists to mount a massacre in the city (Sparke, "Truth . . . Remarkable Transaction" 31-34). Public opinion in London against Carr continued to escalate.

Italo Pardo's book, *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society*, compiles essays that address the nature of political corruption and its affect on the state. Pardo comments that abuses of power present themselves in political systems in which power is asymmetrical, and these abuses affect the relationship between the citizen and the state (1). Within James's Court, justice was meted out according to status as one of his favorites such as the pardoning of favorite Robert Carr for the death of Overbury but the public execution of Carr's household staff for the crime. In Webster's *The White Devil*, although Marcello is a brave soldier for Bracciano, Bracciano grants favors instead to Marcello's brother, Flamineo, for pimping their sister Vittoria to satisfy Bracciano's lust. In addition, justice for the murders of Isabella and Camillo is executed by the powerful Orsini and Medici families, not through legal channels, but through vendetta assassins for hire. Jonathan Parry's essay, "The Crisis of Corruption and the Idea of India: A Worm's View," explains that when corruption in

government exists, the relationship between the citizens and the state is visibly weakened, especially the belief in and acceptance of the legality and value of the existing order. Moreover, the mere belief by the citizen of the prevalence of corruption is corrupting in its own right as citizens become resentful and distrusting of their leadership. Parry comments, "Corruption at once draws and thrives on injustice, exploitation of inequality, distortions of power and betrayal of fundamental principles of citizenship . . . the misuse of power breeds corruption and feeds on it" (9-12). As James lavished money, wealth, and titles to his favorites, his support from the English nobility weakened. Palpably missing in the spirit of Jacobean England was the worship of the monarch like that of Queen Bess who led them to spectacular military victory against the Spanish Armada. Furthermore, as James sold land and titles to the highest bidder, confidence within the traditional feudal-system nobility weakened even further. In *The White Devil*, Giovanni Orsini, son of Isabella and Bracciano, was the rightful heir to the duchy of Bracciano upon his father's death. However, in Webster's play, the inheritance is given to Vittoria, a woman with no family political clout. The angered and disbelieving reaction of the Orsini and Medici families to Bracciano's action mirrors the historical reaction of the traditionally feudal dukes in England. They had been born into land and wealth but were now losing their elite status because of James's sale of land.

In addition to unprecedented land sales, James was also upsetting the balance of English institutions such as the sanctity of marriage. For example, England's Lord Essex was married to Frances Howard for eight years and never petitioned James for a divorce. As a woman, Howard had no legal ability to petition. Instead, she found midwives who would testify that after eight years of marriage, she was still a virgin. James agreed to

dissolve this sanctioned marital union for his own personal gain by appealing his favorite.

Upsetting the balance of institutions such as marriage weakens the balance of the state itself. Giuliana Prato comments that rules require a legitimate legislator who guarantees reliability and predictability even when the rules are violated because the people expect trust and accountability (69-70). James's behavior was neither reliable nor predictable. Therefore, the English people lost their trust in this king, a trust that would continue to deteriorate for the next several decades until the people eventually deposed the Stuart reign and dissolved the English monarchy. After years of rumor, scandal, and acts of corruption, shouting divine right absolutism and quoting scripture accounts from the Book of Samuel became too weak a defense for James's behavior. In James's treatise, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, James warns the English that God threatens destruction for any form of rebellion and uses the scripture account of Jeremiah as his defense. James explains that God can send an evil king to punish the people, but if they obey that king, their obedience will heal their rebellious sins in God's eyes. Apparently this rhetoric became less effective as James's reign became fraught with rampant inflation, flamboyant favoritism, and scandal.

### **Erosion within Jacobean Justice and Economic Systems**

Thomas Dekker, a playwriting colleague of John Webster as well as a chronicler of their time, often wrote pamphlets illustrating the sentiment of London's society. Imprisoned several times for inability to pay debts, Dekker's writings often addressed the deplorable and corrupt conditions of London's prisons, and he laid the ultimate blame for this travesty upon James's feet. Dekker writes that the men locked with him in prison

were not only murderers and panderers, but Englishmen from all walks of life:

The cry of these men is loud, it is heard above the stars . . . it is the cry of sickness, melancholy, madness, hunger, cold, thirst, nakedness, penury, beggary, misery. It is the cry of churchman, tradesmen, husbandmen, men undone, of scholars, soldiers—all penniless, all prisoners. . . . Men are buried alive! . . . What a loss this is to the King! What dishonour to the country! What scandal to Christianity!” (*English Villainies* 273-74).

In a monarchical system where James believed himself to be a gift from God to the people, it is interesting that Dekker describes the English cries reaching above the stars to heaven. Dekker continues to explain that James’s judges and jail keepers were corrupt, that The Prince of Darkness ran the court system, and that honest people were imprisoned with no opportunity for appeal.

In addition to the deplorable justice system, James’s economic system was crumbling as well. His spending was out of control. Robert Cotton and Lionel Cranfield, both financial ministers, implored James to curtail his spending, but to no avail (Peck 36-37). The English taxpayers were resentful (Heinemann 8), inflation and unemployment were rampant, and begging was at an all-time high. Officers of the court and servants were working without being paid (Sparke, “Truth . . . Remarkable Transactions” 70).

### **Venality of Titles**

When James ascended the English throne, he had the power to grant honors, land, privileges such as pensions and annuities, and offices such as ministers of Court. England witnessed James’s lavish extension of privileges. During the half century span of her reign, Elizabeth awarded a total of 878 knighthoods; James, in contrast, awarded 906 in

the first four months alone of his reign. By 1620, approximately 50,000 Englishmen could call themselves esquire (Cook 40-41). In Linda Levy Peck's essay, "Court Patronage and Government Policy: The Jacobean Dilemma," she explains that the Tudor patronage system had integrated local political elites into the state system in order to establish links between central and local governments. When James began his system of installing Scottish favorites, however, the system broke down and polarized the country (31). In response, English members of the Privy Council built alliances to secure their own positions. The number of available offices diminished while the number of people desiring an office increased, but James continued to bestow offices anyway. In order to generate more income, James created a venal system of selling titles to anyone with the ability to pay. Peck comments, "Everything seemed to be for sale at the Jacobean Court: titles, honors, offices, privileges, and monopolies" (42). For example, in 1622, one could purchase the title of baronet for £220 (Peck 42). If an Englishman could manage to get into Court, he could ask for and be granted favors. Venality, by means of purchasing titles, destroys the traditional hierarchical notion of Chain of Being which proscribes that everyone is born into the universe with a particular role to play. With the buying of titles, the individual then possesses the power to usurp Providence by deciding his own place in the cosmic order.

### **Deterioration of the Aristocracy and Emergence of a New Class Structure**

In medieval England, land and titles had traditionally been handed down through heirs of generations. Therefore, wealth had been relegated to the nobles and aristocracy. The end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, witnessed a burgeoning of professional, middle class citizens, particularly in the urban areas. Wealth

could now be earned in addition to inherited, and greed was the all-consuming vice of the day. Large land sales had the potential to overthrow established social structure, and capitalism was replacing the long-established institution of family. Within the social milieu, arguments broke out in London over which rank was higher—alderman or knight (Cook 42).

Webster himself was a product of this new middle class. His father was a successful and wealthy coach maker during the first decade of the seventeenth century, a period when ownership of coaches spiraled (Forker 27-28). Despite the noise, horse dung, and traffic congestion in the streets, owning a coach was considered a symbol of status, and Webster and his brother inherited this profitable business after their father's passing. In addition, the Webster family's flourishing business produced the income that allowed our playwright John Webster to attend law school. While England's budding, bourgeois class found promise in their new-found wealth and power, the aristocracy and nobility found it disturbing. Merchants and professionals were threatening England's elitist economic status quo. With a growing professional middle class, the availability of higher education, and the increasing urban population, the volume of citizenry claiming gentility was increasing. Once there is an inflation of gentility, however, it begins to lose the aura it once possessed.

This new English merchant and professional class garnered authority to rule in a civic capacity. The Lord Mayor of the City of London, for example, was chosen from among the town's merchants to govern. London city proper ruled under the auspices of James as well as the control of citizen magistrates. Court and Parliament may have been comprised of aristocracy and gentry, but the city government was the realm of rich and



powerful merchants. Wealth was avidly sought. Margot Heinemann's book, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts*, describes London as a land of risky investment. With the widening gulf between the wealthy and the poor, people invested in schemes that could win them instant riches or the loss of what little they owned. Heinemann also explains that the early seventeenth-century London was the beginning of fashionable society with their coaches, clothes, weapons, banquets, gambling, and dancing (4-7).

Webster's colleague and friend, Thomas Dekker, believed himself to be a gentleman and scholar, but he lived in London's slums and found himself thrown into debtor's prison on several occasions. Evidently, to be considered privileged did not necessarily mean possessing an abundance of cash in one's pocket. Dekker relegated himself to begging other thespians such as Henslowe and Alleyn for loans in order to be released from debtor's prison. Dekker wrote pamphlets on varying topics illustrating the class structure chasm including the escape of London's wealthy at times of plague outbreaks. He was outraged at the disparity between wealthy people who could afford to flee to their country houses and the poor who were trapped in the city to endure as best they could.

Urban society crumbles; families are broken up, civic duties forgotten . . .  
Individuals go to their deaths with acts of charity, but others simply look out for themselves. The citizen's place is in London, infection or no infection, to help as best he can, even if this is only to make sure that the dead receive a decent burial. (Pendry 13)

Dekker explained in his pamphlet, “The Wonderful Year,” that 40,000 people had died in London from plague (43). Although the plague was devastating to London, Dekker considered it to be an ironic economic equalizer because it killed without regard for family title or land ownership.

Not only was England experiencing the emergence of a new class structure, during the reign of Pope Paul V, Italy was ushering in a new structure as well. Nobles held aristocratic titles, but they had little cash in pocket to support their claim to gentry. Although Paul V was a member of the noble Borghese family, he represented a burgeoning professional class structure that consisted of merchants, lawyers, and professors who were quickly becoming the new nobility of Italy (Hsia 99). Paul’s father, Camillo Borghese, worked as an attorney to support their family financially. As a Borghese, though, he sought to utilize family connections to advance his son within the Church. Economically, the omnipotent powerbase that Italian noble families had previously enjoyed was transforming.

### **Chaotic Social Structure Reflected in Jacobean Dramatic Comedy**

Jacobean comedies portray the idea that when hierarchical order and established chain of command are compromised, chaos will ensue. Ben Jonson, James’s Court poet laureate, penned several early seventeenth-century comedies such as *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *Volpone*, which illustrate the repercussions of a chaotic social structure. Peggy Knapp’s essay “Ben Jonson and the Publicke Riot” explores the changing social structure of the early seventeenth century. Evolving from a predominantly agrarian society in the Middle Ages, England’s hierarchical feudal system based itself upon land ownership passed down as inheritance. Between 1500 and 1650,

though, inflation soared and prices tripled, but wages and rent could not keep pace. While gold from the Americas did stimulate English investment capital, James's reign created economic catastrophe. His sale of large parcels of land changed the established inheritance method of land ownership. Knapp posits that the majority of the period's economic woes stemmed from a simple lack of understanding of economic principles (165-66). By bestowing titles to a vast number of people, James upset the balance of the Chain of Being to which Jonson ardently subscribed. *Volpone* (1605) explores a changing society in which ownership and wealth had been dependent on humans begetting humans but is now being replaced with Jacobean land ownership and wealth which revolves around the importance of gold (Knapp 167). In *Volpone*, Jonson toys with the outcome of this societal change through his title character Volpone who falsely claims that he is dying in order to sell his inheritance to the highest bidder in the community. Volpone promises his inheritance, however, to every bidder that replies and thereby accumulates a compounding amount of wealth as a result of his inherent human greed. Volpone chooses to forgo love and marriage, England's traditional institutions of land and wealth inheritance, for the instant economic gratification of cold, hard cash. Knapp finds it interesting that Volpone begets gold with gold which therefore usurps God's role as creator of the natural order (167). The Middle Ages' concept that Providence has ordained man to till the earth and break a sweat to produce his daily bread is now effaced and replaced with instant wealth earned from little or no labor. Man now has no need to work to contribute to society. As Knapp points out, though, gold has no care for its owner (168). Gold cannot love you or care for you in your later years. Knapp comments that

through Jonson's comedies, we can see that "the new way is evil, the old way is gone" (178).

### **Maintaining Appearance of Control—Punishment or Mercy?**

James wrote in his letter, *Basilikon Doron*, to his son Crown Prince Henry that the king is a public persona and as such is constantly observed. He must always take care with his words and gestures for appearance is paramount. James also explains to Henry that a king must punish some of his subjects in order to keep order. Stephen Greenblatt's book, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, offers an excellent historical illustration of the Jacobean appearance of absolute monarchism. Greenblatt draws his story from William Stachey's account published in London in 1612, the same year that *The White Devil* was produced. In 1608, a ship of colonists bound for Jamestown was hit by an Atlantic storm and shipwrecked along the coast of Bermuda. The English government's leader onboard was Governor Gates who quickly lost control of the shipwrecked colonists. The island of Bermuda offered a paradise of food, fresh water, and utter freedom. Jamestown, on the other hand, offered prospects of starvation, disease, and hostile Indians. Understandably, these stranded colonists were content to remain on Bermuda. To maintain control of the colonists, Gates instituted martial law and imposed the death penalty upon any crimes of blasphemy, insubordination, and criticism of the Virginia Company or its officers. One colonist, Henry Paine, questioned the Governor's authority on this island in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean. In response, Gates ordered Paine shot to death. At that point, the group agreed to try to sail on for Jamestown. Greenblatt continues to explain that this display of absolute authority continued to be hammered upon prospective colonists for the next two years. In the English pulpit, William Crashaw delivered a sermon to

colonists setting out for Virginia, warning them that the only peril to their voyage would be the devil, the pope, and idle players (Greenblatt 152-58). It is interesting to hear how the Jacobean government equates any peril suffered at sea under natural phenomena such as climactic conditions as the direct result of Satan, Pope Paul V, or actors.

Under a divine right absolute monarchy, the tenet holds that God's wrath will descend upon those who disobey or even question Providence. God's wrath proves him to be a righteous and just deity. Greenblatt refers to this paradox of terrorizing people in order to maintain absolute control as "salutary anxiety" (138), and he applies this anxiety to James's rule. James regularly tortured and executed people, then immediately following, granted pardons in order to demonstrate his justice and mercy, believing that without mercy he would be perceived as a tyrant and without punishment no one would obey. Following the failed Bye Plot, the convicted were tortured so brutally, to the horror of the public watching, that when the last convict was finally beheaded, the executioner held up the head and shouted, "God save the King!" The only person in the audience who seconded the cry was the sheriff (Greenblatt 137-38).

In terms of mercy versus punishment, Michael Sparke wrote of pardons and executions at the hand of James in 1611, the year before *The White Devil* was presented. Living in the neighborhood of Smithfield, where public executions were performed, Webster would have certainly had considerable knowledge of these proceedings. Sparke presents one scenario of James's policy of meting out execution followed by pardon. James ordered Englishman Bartholomew Legatt excommunicated and burned for blasphemous heresy because he refused to recite the Nicene Creed or the Anathansius's Creed and would not profess belief in the Godhead Trinity. No matter how often the

Anglican Church tried to plead with Legatt to confess the faith of the Church, he refused. Edward Wightman was also excommunicated for heresy and ordered burned at the stake in order to deter others from following his theories of using water for communion instead of wine and of baptizing older children instead of babies. Juxtaposed to these executions, James pardoned Theophilus Higgins for renouncing Catholicism and embracing Anglicanism. Sir Eustace Hartes also received a pardon from James for his crimes of adultery and fornication (Sparke, "Truth . . . Remarkable Transactions).

When Webster's play *The White Devil* conjures his audience's memories of earlier religious executions by Catholics upon Protestants under the reign of Mary Tudor and Paul IV, Webster is certainly pointing to religious intolerance. Given the religious executions of Webster's day, James proved that he was no more tolerant than "Bloody Mary." The religious tolerance that James proudly professed to his subjects evidently limited itself to tolerating only those who ascribed to his way of worshipping.

### **Possible Return to Catholicism?**

Although England was officially a Protestant country at the turn of the seventeenth century, Catholicism survived in homes of Englishmen who could afford to maintain chapels and priests. Mark Kishlansky's *The Monarch Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* explains that these Englishmen supported the crown but distinguished between private devotion and public duty. As decades passed, though, there were fewer Roman Catholics residing in England (65). As mentioned earlier, when James I ascended the English throne in 1603, he inherited England's ongoing polemical struggle between its Catholic and Protestant subjects. Rome was optimistic that Catholicism might be restored to the English monarchy because both of James's parents were Catholic as well

as his wife Anne and his first lover Esme Stuart, Duke of Lennox. Catholic English gentry petitioned James in 1604 for limited toleration of Catholic practice (Kishlansky 66). Radical Anglican reformers on the other end of the religious spectrum, however, assumed James would support them since he was a professed Calvinist, educated by Presbyterian ministers. Like his predecessor, Elizabeth I, James chose to maintain a middle ground between these warring factions. Sir John Harington wrote of the general public fear during this period perpetrated by this polemic division, although he fervently believed that James's heir, Prince Henry, would not destroy the Anglican Church on the grounds that many good Englishmen had suffered imprisonment, banishment, and death fighting for the Church of England (*Nugae* Vol. 2, 12-14). James agreed to tolerate English Catholics as long as they swore loyalty to him and practiced their faith in private. In Rome, sitting pope Clement VIII, however, urged English Catholics to insist upon a Catholic monarch on the throne and labeled James a "tyrant of usurpation" because of his Presbyterian faith. Furthermore, Clement initiated a secret correspondence with England's ambassador to Paris in a scheme to seat a French Catholic on the English throne (Comerford 369). Having no success in converting James and seeing no immediate, viable challenge to James's throne, Clement acquiesced and granted English Catholics permission to show loyalty to both pope and king (John, "Clement" 356).

This period of Catholic tolerance ceased abruptly in 1605 with the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot to end James's life at the hands of English Catholic rebels. Robert Catesby led the group of conspirators: Thomas Percy, Guy Fawkes, and Francis Tresham. They purchased the house next door to the Palace of Westminster and dug a tunnel connecting the two buildings. After bringing in casks of gunpowder, Tresham warned the

Catholics serving in Parliament not to report to work on Nov. 5, 1605. Rumors caught the attention of both Privy Council and James. On the night of Nov. 4, Fawkes positioned himself under the palace, ready to light the gunpowder. The plot was foiled, however, and the conspirators were arrested. In fear of reprisal, English Catholics went into hiding (Kishlansky 66). Newly elected Pope Paul V urged James to show mercy to the English Catholics who were innocent of this assassination attempt, but Parliament and James speculated that the Gunpowder Plot was a popish conspiracy. Consequently, James imposed severe measures upon Catholics. For example, English Catholic leaders such as Jesuit priest Henry Garnet were arrested and executed as publicly witnessed retribution (Hudon 375). Months later, in 1606, James commanded an Oath of Allegiance denouncing papal authority and claiming that the pope's power was impious, heretical, and damnable in doctrine. In response, Paul V condemned this Oath and forbade English Catholics to swear it (John, "Paul V" 375). English Catholics were trapped between allegiance to their monarch and allegiance to their pontiff.

Following the Gunpowder Plot, English citizens were fearful and anxious at the prospect of possible widespread, treasonous rebellion. In 1606, Lord Harington, who was commissioned to care for James's young daughter, Princess Elizabeth, wrote a letter to Sir John Harington at Bathe in which he states:

The late devilish conspiracy did much disturb this part. The King hath got at much truth from the mouths of the crew themselves; for guilt hath no peace, nor can there be guilt like theirs. One hath confessed that he had many meetings at Bathe about this hellish design; you will do his Majesty



uspeakable kindness, to watch in your neighborhood, and give such intelligence as may furnish inquiry” (Harington, Lord 371-72).

Lord Harington’s letter continues on to warn of “evil-minded Catholics in the west, whom the prince of darkness hath in alliance” (372). “I have seen some of the chief, and think they bear an evil mark on their foreheads, for more terrible countenances never were looked upon” (373). Lord Harington believed that several of the conspirators had fled to Bathe and therefore was worried that Princess Elizabeth was in peril. Describing how he was sick with fever from worrying about this clear and present danger, he called for vigilance in neighbor watches should these conspirators surface in the area. Harington further comments that because the pope had granted absolution for the deeds of these insurrectionists, God had miraculously protected James from the triumphs of Satan and the rage of Babylon. Harington’s final words of this letter implore God’s help in protecting Princess Elizabeth from this foe as well (374).

To further complicate the Catholic and Protestant situation in England, James agreed to join the Union of Protestant Princes in 1612, the same year that Webster’s play *The White Devil* was produced. James arranged the marriage of his daughter, Princess Elizabeth Stuart, to Frederick V, a fellow Calvinist who was the Elector Palatine and the future King of Bohemia. With Catholic and Protestant religious tension escalating in Germany, Frederick led the Evangelical Union, which was created to protect Protestants in the Empire. Responding to the Evangelical Union’s military escalation, Paul V heavily financed the Catholic League to eradicate this Protestant insurgence (Hudon 374). Thus the Thirty Years’ War began.

The religious struggle existed in England as well. Although the English Crown had officially seceded from the Catholic Church, the country's citizens did not convert so quickly. History revisionist Christopher Haigh explains in his article, "The Church of England, the Catholics and the People," that Protestantism spread at a much slower rate in the outlying areas of England. Because the country had teeter-tottered between Catholicism under Henry VIII followed by Protestantism, then Catholicism again under Mary followed by the return of Protestantism under Elizabeth, the English were understandably hesitant to permanently embrace either religion. Haigh notes that there were popish ornaments and images hidden in Anglican churches in Sussex, ready to be set up for Catholic Mass again. "There were persistent rumors of a change in religion about 1580 (which led one candidate to postpone his ordination and a minister to shave off his beard in expectation of becoming a priest), and fears and hopes in the 1590s that the death of Elizabeth would bring the restoration of Catholicism" (Haigh 236). In the mid 1580s, there were still reports that English communicants believed in the transubstantiation catechism they had been taught as children (238). Haigh asserts that it was difficult to teach Protestant doctrine concerning justification by faith and predestination to England's commoners. Although Elizabeth mandated in 1559 that Anglican ministers teach Protestant catechism, few congregants came to hear the lessons. On their only day off from work, English subjects were more interested in spending their leisure in ale houses or village greens than in listening to lessons in a church (246-49).

### **Marriage between England and Spain?**

A decade into his reign, James had virtually bankrupted England, and Parliament would no longer provide him with all the money that he requested. Because Spain was a

wealthy country at this time, James decided to procure a dowry by marrying his only living son, Prince Charles, to Spain's Infanta, Donna Maria. From 1618 until the year of James's death in 1625, there was a noticeable lull in the persecutions of Catholics, and imprisoned priests were allowed to venture out into the city during the day (Semper 46). Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador to England, arrived in 1613 and seemed most eager to assist in this nuptial merger between Charles and the Infanta, believing that Charles would agree to convert to Catholicism. For nearly a decade, the marriage treaty was touted by both sides. In 1623, James secretly sent his favorite, Buckingham, along with Charles to Spain in order to finalize the negotiations. When the secret trip became public knowledge, the English feared for the safety of their throne's heir (Howard-Hill 13). England remembered the earlier marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip of Spain in 1554. Since Mary was the daughter of Catharine of Aragon and Philip was the son of Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella, England was heavily under the influence at that time of two Catholic monarchs.

Following Mary's death, the English remembered the continual advances of Philip upon Elizabeth. When Elizabeth refused his numerous marriage proposals, tension between their countries eventually culminated in the English naval defeat of the formidable Spanish Armada in 1588. Elizabeth's rejection of Philip's advances served to strengthen the English stand against Spain and Catholicism. Under James's rule, however, public anxiety abounded at the thought of a Spanish alliance which would once again open the door to Catholicism in England. When Charles and Buckingham returned from Spain without a bride, English citizens rejoiced in the streets, and a national day of thanksgiving was celebrated in St. Paul's Cathedral. James quickly arranged an alternate

marriage with France's Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII. Although France was also officially a Catholic country, it was less zealous in its religious affiliation. England's escape from James's proposed alliance with Spain was perceived as a patriotic victory similar to the defeat of the Spanish Armada (Howard-Hill 13, 16).

Steeped in this religious and political tension, Webster writes his play, *The White Devil*, and incorporates conventional, exclusive Catholic practices such as the Inquisition as anti-Catholic propaganda. As Patrick Collinson explains in his essay, "From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: the Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation," England was in a "cosmic struggle with the gigantic, foreign enemy of the popish Anti-Christ" (280). Anti-Catholic and anti-papist literary rhetoric was the accepted norm, and any story set in Italy was immediately recognized by the English audience as taking place in a strong Catholic country with its archetypes of the courtesan, the Machiavel, the corrupt pope, and the criminal thug (Jones 259). Midpoint in the text of his Jacobean revenge tragedy, Webster inserts an inquisitional trial of his principal character, Vittoria Corombona, who has been charged with the crime of heresy by adultery; at the end of her arraignment, she is convicted and sentenced to imprisonment in a house of penitential whores. At first glance, this Inquisition scene seems unnecessarily lengthy and out of place in Webster's narrative. In a closer look, however, Webster's Inquisition serves as merely one more piece of his text's pyramid of political and religious commentary. Ascertaining the history and parameters of the Catholic Inquisition will bring light to this scene's purpose. For the character of the inquisitor, Cardinal Monticelso, Webster melds two historical popes—Paul IV and Sixtus V. The historical careers of these two men were instrumental in the growth of the Church's Inquisition. After understanding the influence

of both Paul IV and Sixtus V, the insertion of Vittoria's Inquisition into the text becomes meaningful in conveying England's anti-Catholic, anti-papist agenda.

Webster follows the historical source story throughout the majority of *The White Devil*. His text contains a fictional scene, however, in which Cardinal Monticelso (a variation of the surname Montalto) attacks Vittoria via an Inquisition in order to seek revenge for the murder of his nephew. Why would Webster devise such a fictional scene, which clearly deviates from the source story? In the historical account, it is true that Cardinal Montalto was the uncle of Francesco Peretti, first husband to Vittoria Accoromboni. It is true that Montalto was angered at the news of his nephew's murder and the hasty marriage of Vittoria to Paolo. It is true that Montalto supported Gregory XIII's decision to end this rash marriage and send Vittoria to a nunnery in Castel Sant' Angelo in 1582. Finally, it is true that Montalto approved of Vittoria's release after Paolo's promise to Gregory never to see her again (Boklund 17). Upon being elected Pope Sixtus V in 1585, the historical Montalto, unlike the fictional character Monticelso, expressed no continued desire to enact revenge upon the couple as justice for his nephew's murder (Boklund 85).

In Webster's play, the fictional character Monticelso is also elected pope, but rather than choosing the name of Sixtus V, Webster dubs the new pope Paul IV, a pontiff who was also a true, historical figure. Both Paul IV and Sixtus V historically were instrumental in the restructuring of the Roman Inquisition. Why would Webster choose to include an inquisitional scene led by the vengeful Monticelso? Why not quietly send the fictional Vittoria to the House of Penitential Whores in the same manner that Pope Gregory XIII sent the historical Vittoria to the nunnery in Castel Sant' Angelo? The

answer lies in the imperial nature of the Inquisition, the careers of these two historical popes, the growing animosity between James and the papacy, the anti-Catholic sentiment of the English Protestants, and the continued fear of Catholicism's possible return to England.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANTI-PAPAL SENTIMENT**

#### **Inquisition**

Pope Paul III called for Cardinal Carafa, who would later become Pope Paul IV, to head a commission in 1542 to restructure the Roman Inquisition. Six cardinals were appointed by this commission to serve as Grand Inquisitors and were given full power with only one exception—the pope alone had the power to absolve the sins of condemned victims (Kington-Oliphant 47). By its very nature, the Catholic Church's institution of the Inquisition is a microcosm of absolutism. First, the Grand Inquisitor in charge of the proceedings is chosen by the pontiff who is believed by the Church to be ordained by God. Therefore, the appointment to Grand Inquisitor is divine in nature, claiming its lineage and justifying its authority through the papal legacy back to Peter who was commissioned by Christ to build the Church, then to Christ who was the professed son of God, and finally to the Trinity which links Christ to the Godhead. With the Grand Inquisitor's authority, he is judge and jury of the accused. He asks the questions, decides guilt or innocence, and administers a punitive sentence that he deems appropriate.

The Inquisition as an institution was already two centuries old when Paul III commissioned its restructuring. In the thirteenth century, the Catholic Church was compelled to create a legal procedure to investigate heretical depravity. The Inquisition differed from civil proceedings in that it only investigated crimes against Church doctrine, and punishment was issued in order to absolve the condemned offender's sins.

Often the cases involved clerical misconduct such as marrying or engaging in sexual activity. Robert Grosseteste, the Bishop of London in the thirteenth century, defined heresy as “an opinion chosen by human faculties, contrary to the Holy Scripture, openly taught, and pertinaciously defended” (Peters 485-87). The usual punishment for heresy was excommunication and exile. By the sixteenth century, though, the primary threat to the Church consisted of encroaching Protestant reform. In response to this threat, Paul III’s restructuring established the Roman Inquisition in 1542 after failed attempts to reunite Catholics and Protestants under Charles V and Francis I respectively at an ecumenical Council at Trent in May of 1542 (Haliczer, Introduction 2). Inquisition scholar Nicolas Davidson speaks of Rome’s insistence that it would prevail in its religious war upon heresy: “The church, protected by the saints and strong in its Catholic faith, will repel the assaults of all its enemies” (19). Davidson elaborates in his discussion that the inquisitor’s job as a spiritual physician is to investigate anyone suspected of heresy and having found him to be a heretic, to persuade and correct him, “giving him that beneficial medicine and penance which will enable him to return to the flock of the faithful” (20). In the Renaissance popes’ endeavor to successfully repel heresy, they chose inquisitors of impeccable orthodoxy to serve (Schutte 26). Although the Inquisition’s mission seemed noble, its results were often questionable. Historian Lord Acton wrote in an 1887 letter to Mandell Creighton, the current Bishop of the Church of England, that these sixteenth-century popes instituted the Roman Inquisition as a system of persecution. “They carefully elaborated, and developed, and applied it. They protected it with every sanction, spiritual and temporal. They inflicted, as far as they could, the penalties of death and damnation on everybody who resisted it” (“To Mandell” 361). It



was in this same letter that Acton spoke of the Counter-Reformation popes and coined the phrase: “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority” (“To Mandell” 364). Acton’s letter was in response to Creighton’s petition for Acton to review a draft of a book outlining a history of the Church which included the Inquisition as well as the Counter-Reformation popes. Creighton’s text excused any adverse behavior by rulers reasoning that absolute rulers by their very nature are good. At these remarks, Acton was compelled to respond that there is no greater heresy than a ruler who believes himself to be above the law, and the ruler’s villainy, especially in the case of crimes committed by the Catholic popes’ Inquisition, are an abomination in the sight of God.

In January 1557, Pope Paul IV, formerly Cardinal Carafa, appointed Cardinal Montalto to serve as Grand Inquisitor of Venice. Montalto was commissioned to apply maximum pressure upon the Venetians to follow Paul IV’s mission to eradicate heresy (Grendler 118). As a result, Montalto proved quite unpopular with the Venetians. Upon Paul IV’s death in 1559, Montalto fled Venice. In 1560, Pope Pius IV intended to reinstate Montalto as Inquisitor of Venice, but the Venetians vehemently objected, arguing that Montalto was foreign, ambitious, and severe; that he conducted irregular inquisitional trials; and that he held preliminary hearings of evidence without laypeople present (Grendler 126). Consequently, Montalto was recalled to Rome. In 1565, Montalto was dispatched to Toledo, Spain in order to review a heresy case against the Archbishop of Toledo. Later, as Pope Sixtus V, he heavily financed Spain’s Armada to fight England in order to defeat the Protestant heretic Elizabeth (Campbell 197-98). Examining

Montalto's background and actions reveals the essence of the fictional Monticelso's character as the antagonist in the play and offers an explanation for his open attack upon Vittoria. Boklund refers to Webster's portrayal of Monticelso as the "well-established Elizabethan stage tradition of presenting a Catholic priest, and a Cardinal to boot, as a villain" (89).

The career and reputation of the historical Paul IV were more sinister than that of Sixtus V. At the first session of the Council of Trent, Paul IV, known at the time as Cardinal Carafa, assumed a vigorous suppression of heresy (Wagner 346). When Paul III ordered the restructuring of the Inquisition, he called upon Carafa to serve. In 1550, Carafa was appointed to a task force commissioned to create a papal Index of Prohibited Books. Known for being an imperious leader and an implacable foe of heretical literature, Paul IV's mission was to expunge the names of all heretics from print. Across Italy, people protested the severity of Paul IV's Index, but to no avail. Even cardinals were afraid to speak against him for fear of being tried in an Inquisition (Grendler 101, 117). In his endeavor to eradicate heresy, Paul IV established a class of crimes against Church doctrine which would be punishable by death (Monter 156). Rather than rejoicing at the conversion of new converts, Paul IV mistrusted and loathed all Spanish Marranos as potential heretics and was heard to say that they should all be burned (Davidson 30). Perhaps the most heinous action of Paul IV's career involved using the confessional to ferret out heresy. He commanded that as part of the required rite of confession, all penitents be asked in the sacred confessional if they had knowledge of anyone committing heretical acts. If so, they were to report the heretic to the Holy Office before they could receive absolution for their sins. Paul IV demanded that this inquisitional

blackmail be preached from the pulpit as well (Schutte 38). When Romans heard the news of Paul IV's death in 1559, they rejoiced in the streets, toppled his statue, set fire to the Holy Office, and stormed the Inquisition prison to free its prisoners (Grendler 125).

### **Webster's Inquisitional Scene**

The Italian Inquisition experienced its height during the period of 1580-1610 (Monter 132). Therefore, Webster and his audience would have had some knowledge of this often brutal institution. Iser explains that the boundaries of reality and fiction cross over to create the world of the fictive. Webster creates the fictive for his audience by crossing the boundaries of a Catholic Inquisition and the English judicial system so that his audience will recognize and accept this Inquisition as a court proceeding. Catholic Church historian R. Po-chia Hsia comments that throughout Protestant sections of Europe, "Europe was mesmerized by the images of this Iberian Catholicism: the secret procedures of the Holy Office of the Inquisition" (43). Inquisitional councils existed in areas throughout Italy, and all answered directly to the Holy Office in Rome, officially known as the Congregation of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition. Although the inquisitional process varied according the region which it represented, Protestants erroneously clumped them together as a single, evil institution. The historical Vittoria was Roman, and if she had committed an offense worthy of an Inquisition, she would have been tried through the Roman Inquisition. The historical Cardinal Montalto, however, was associated with the Venetian Inquisition as its Grand Inquisitor. Since Webster's fictional Vittoria is Venetian, she appropriately would have been tried by a Venetian Inquisition, so Webster's fictional Inquisition trial seems to follow Venetian principles. Venice's Inquisition was unique in some respects from other Italians

provinces. For instance, if a severe heretic was sentenced to death in Venice, the execution was not performed publicly; instead, the convicted heretic was secretly drowned at night. Also, the Venetian Inquisition rarely sentenced condemned females to death; instead, lesser punishments were delivered in an effort to prevent them from repeating their offense (Schutte 98). The most unique facet of the Venetian Inquisition, though, was its insistence on elected representatives of the community, called the Council of Ten, to act as powerful lay deputies to work with the inquisitors during the proceedings (Grendler 42).

These lay representatives are present in Webster's *The White Devil* Inquisition. Among the people entering the courtroom at the opening of act 3 scene 2 are six lieger, or "resident" ambassadors (Webster 59). Vittoria exclaims that she would accept the verdict of her guilt or innocence from these lieger ambassadors as fellow countrymen but refuses to accept any verdict from Monticelso (3.2.130-39). In addition to the lieger ambassadors, Webster includes both a French and English ambassador to attend the proceedings. When Cardinal Monticelso lays out his case against Vittoria, it is the English ambassador that comes to her aid, commenting that the Cardinal is too bitter (3.2.107). Is this lone Englishman the corporeality of the English voice of reason amid Italian exoticism? As Ann Rosalind Jones comments, to Renaissance England, Italy was "another country, a country of others, constructed through a lens of voyeuristic curiosity" (251). Jacqueline Pearson refers to the English ambassador as the representation of moderation and sanity (81). In addition to the ambassadors present in the play, Webster includes Francisco de Medici and a prosecuting attorney. Why would Webster's character Francisco, the Duke of Florence, play such a leading role in an Inquisition? In a historical Inquisition,

Francisco could have been called as a witness, but he would never have participated in the judicial proceedings themselves. In addition, Inquisitions did not involve lawyers in the initial days of trial. The inquisitor handled all interrogation. Defendants were only allowed the aid of an attorney if they refused to confess guilt; a lawyer would then be summoned to encourage the defendant to realize the importance of confessing.

Rather than incorporating a civil trial familiar to his English audience, Webster chooses to have his fictional Vittoria tried for heresy. Inquisition scholar Giovanni Gonnet explains, “Heresy can exist only when a certain authority decides to repress the opinion or behavior they find at variance with the established order” (200). Vittoria’s behavior of remarrying immediately after becoming widowed is deemed inappropriate behavior by Webster’s Cardinal Monticelso. An inquisitional trial is a uniquely Catholic proceeding, and although Webster’s audience would have had knowledge of it, the actual premise of an Inquisition would have been a foreign concept. Instead of finding a defendant guilty or innocent and then issuing an appropriate punishment as is done in a civil court proceeding, the defendant of an Inquisition is assumed guilty of sin from the onset and must confess, pay penance, and then receive absolution of the sin in order for his soul to be saved from eternal damnation. Davidson explains that the role of the inquisitor was to investigate those suspected of heresy, persuade them to confess, correct their infirmity, and administer the medicine and penance which would allow the heretic to rejoin the faithful community (20). In Webster’s play, Monticelso and Francisco try Vittoria for adultery and murder. A heresy trial for adultery was quite unusual. Out of 1229 cases tried in the Venetian Inquisition between 1547 and 1585, only three were for adultery (Monter 144). During this period, the vast majority of the inquisitional trials

dealt with Protestant heresy charges. Moreover, murder was not even a heresy offense but rather a civil offense. In the play, Francisco questions whether there is enough evidence to prove Vittoria's complicity in Camillo's murder. Monticelso seems confident, however, that lechery will be quite simple to prove, commenting: "Next the devil, Adult'ry, / Enters the devil, Murder" (3.2.108-09).

At the conclusion of Vittoria's arraignment in the play, Monticelso immediately imposes sentence:

MONTICELSO. Here's your sentence,—you are confin'd

Unto a house of convertites

.....

VITTORIA. A house of convertites, what's that?

MONTICELSO. A house

Of penitent whores. (3.2.263-64, 266-67)

The irony of this passage is that the Inquisition had not come to a successful close. In other words, the judges had not taken time to review the evidence/testimony, and the defendant had not yet confessed. Subsequently, Monticelso's sentence is punitive rather than salvational. Contrary to the sacred purpose of the Inquisition, Monticelso is more concerned with his own personal revenge against the murder of his nephew Peretti and the shame brought upon their family than he is with the salvation of Vittoria's soul.

If Vittoria had in fact confessed adultery, Monticelso's sentence of confinement would have been appropriate in an actual Venetian Inquisition. An Inquisition was a system of moral justice, not legal justice. Therefore, Venetian Inquisitions were known for imposing light sentences such as forced gifts to charity, public penance, fines, and/or

imprisonment for a few years (Grendler 60). Imprisonment could consist of confinement in a religious house, in the condemned person's own home, or in the home of someone willing to ensure that the sentence was carried out (Schutte 40).

Near the end of the arraignment in the play, Vittoria accuses Monticelso of desiring to take away her possessions:

But take you your course, it seems you have beggar'd me first  
And now would fain undo me,—I have houses,  
Jewels, and a poor remnant of crusadoes,  
Would those would make you charitable. (3.2.213-16)

Ironically, it was the historical Vittoria's property that was her ultimate undoing. When Paolo Giordano died of natural causes, he left a will stipulating that Vittoria would inherit the duchy of Bracciano. The Medici and Orsini families were outraged that their land, wealth, and title of nobility would transfer to a commoner the likes of Vittoria, especially since there were surviving children from Paolo's first marriage to Isabella de Medici. These prominent families tried in vain to force Vittoria to relinquish her inherited property. When she would not relinquish, Lodovico Orsini and a group of bandits ambushed her home and stabbed her to death (Bokund 18). With respect to property rights in the play, Webster's decision to have Monticelso take possession of Vittoria's property is inaccurate. Since Paolo left his property to her in a will, the only true way that this property could pass to Isabella's children would be through Vittoria's consent or death. A true Inquisition in Venice could not confiscate her property as punishment for heresy (Monter 132), so Webster deviates here from factual inquisitional proceedings.

Within an inquisitional proceeding, if a defendant was thought to be mad, this created difficulties for the inquisitor. In Webster's play, Vittoria's brother Flamineo makes a deliberate decision to behave erratically and speak nonsense in hopes of diverting any attention of guilt or complicity away from him. In an aside, Flamineo states, "I do put on this feigned garb of mirth / To gull suspicion" (3.1.30-31). This feigned garb of mirth presents an interesting problem in an inquisitional hearing, especially in the mid-1580s when magic and sorcery were rapidly replacing Protestantism as the most popular charge of heresy in Inquisitions. Pretense, as opposed to genuine madness, could prove difficult to evaluate in an investigation. If the defendant's madness was a result of demon possession, an exorcism would need to be performed before the Inquisition could continue its work in saving the defendant's soul. Flamineo's feigned mirth could also be misinterpreted by the inquisitors as an innocent imbalance of humours or as a perilous sign of demon possession. In Webster's play, though, it does not seem imperative to ascertain the cause of Flamineo's mirth, and so he is spared an exorcism. To an English audience, exorcism had a disturbing effect (Greenblatt 102). Anglican priests in 1604 eliminated the rite of exorcism performed according to the previous Catholic ritual practice, calling it corrupt and inadequate, but did not replace it with anything. At the time of the historical Bracciano/Vittoria event, Samuel Harsnett, chaplain to the Bishop of London, claimed that there was no such thing as demon possession; instead, it was a Catholic illusion involving exorcists who performed their carefully scripted act only when a crowd gathered to watch (Greenblatt 99-100). Webster's audience, then, would see Flamineo openly confess to feigning madness, a confession that would satisfy the Anglican assessment of demon possession and madness.



As the arraignment begins in the play, Monticelso dismisses the charges against Vittoria's brothers Flamineo and Marcello, choosing to prosecute Vittoria alone even though Francisco had warned that there might not be enough evidence to convict her for murder. The title page of the 1612 quarto first edition of *The White Devil* describes Vittoria as "a famous Venetian Curtizan" (Webster lxii). Jones comments that the Venetian courtesan is the "feminine counterpart of the politic Machiavel, a sizzling and frightening figure at once" (254). Venetian courtesans were typified by their deviousness and violence against men through irresistible temptation. Jones goes on to explain that Vittoria is a literary construct of English fantasies of Italian excesses, an unstable personification of Venetian vice and allure (256). It is easier to prosecute Vittoria than Flamineo or Marcello simply because she is a woman and therefore more vulnerable to attack. Another factor that would have influenced dropping charges against the two men while maintaining the charges against Vittoria is that by this point in history, trials for heresy had moved from thwarting Protestantism in which most convicted heretics were male, to trials for heresy to eradicate magic, sorcery, and witchcraft in which most convicted heretics were female. Church theologians of the time believed that magic, both good and bad, could only come from a pact with the devil. Such magic included all medicines, which were generally created and administered by women. Therefore, medical healing was prohibited by the Church (O'Neil 92-98). Any woman who was viewed as exotic, such as a Venetian courtesan, could be named as a sorceress or witch and convicted of heresy because of her alleged sexually deviant allegiance to Satan. Thus, Italian heresy became feminized (Schutte 97).

In Webster's *Inquisition*, Vittoria never confesses to adultery or murder. She never receives absolution. Her soul is never cleansed. Instead, she retaliates against Monticelso as the true fiend in this proceeding, calling him a rapist of justice:

VITTORIA. A rape, a rape.

MONTICELSO. How?

VITTORIA. Yes you have ravish'd justice,

Forc'd her to do your pleasure. (3.2.274-75)

Following this passage, Vittoria invokes death and damnation upon Monticelso, "That the last day of judgement may so find you, / And leave you the same devil you were before" (3.2.279-80). Is Webster's *Inquisition* scene moral justice, civic justice, or a travesty of justice? The only evidence in the play against Vittoria is a letter from Paolo suggesting that she profited from their affair when he gave her a thousand ducats prior to her husband Peretti's death. A historical Inquisition would require the judges to consider all the evidence presented before either deciding to withdraw the charges due to lack of proper evidence or proceeding with sentencing based on either a confession or a preponderance of evidence—neither of which seems to have been afforded to Webster's Vittoria who has been forced to fight the evil Catholic Inquisition system alone.

The English feared both shifts in religious doctrine and their monarch's justice system which possessed the power to impose heinous sentences of public execution such as burning at the stake, beheading, and hanging and quartering. Under the reigns of both Mary and Elizabeth, Englishmen witnessed hundreds of their countrymen burned for heresy, most of whom were lower class citizens who could not defend themselves or afford to escape via exile (Wagner 288). The very year that Webster wrote *The White*

*Devil*, James himself ordered two Anabaptists burned at the stake. English law defined heresy as an obstinate persistence in holding or preaching an opinion or belief that denied or contradicted official Church doctrine. Under heresy law in England, sheriffs arrested and imprisoned heretics, municipal authorities aided the Church in fighting heresy, trials were open to the public, and the Crown confiscated the heretic's property (Wagner 232).

No matter how the English feared their judicial system, they feared the return of Catholicism, the Antichrist, more. Carved into a beam in the main room of the Venetian Inquisition prison was a phrase which translated read: "Anyone in here who mounts a defense will stay here ten years longer. Anyone in here who doesn't mount a defense will get out of here more quickly" (Schutte 244). Webster's Inquisition scene is an anti-Catholic propaganda scare tactic to the audience. Much of what Jacobean Englishmen knew of the Inquisition, however, was myth. In reality, the Venetian Inquisition used torture in only 2-3% of their trials; inquisitors were polite, thorough, and persistent, but not deceitful; and out of 1560 trials in the sixteenth century, only fourteen convicted heretics were put to death (Grendler 54-55). Compared to hundreds executed under the English Crown in the same century, a heretic stood a much better chance of surviving under the auspices of the Catholic Inquisition. Albeit myth-based, the English feared a return to papal rule.

### **Conclave**

In addition to the Inquisition as a microcosm of absolutism, the papal conclave to elect a new pope follows as well. Divine right absolutism for the papacy depends upon its lineage via the papal election within the conclave which occurs when a pope dies. William Fanning writes in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Immediately on the canonical

election of a candidate and his acceptance, he is true pope and can exercise full and absolute jurisdiction over the whole Church. A papal election, therefore, needs no confirmation, as the pontiff has no superior on earth.” The Catholic Church professes that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God and equal member of the Trinity Godhead, appointed his disciple Peter to build the Church. Therefore, Peter’s successors are considered to be divinely appointed as well. The process of electing a new pope has evolved, but the premise of a sacrosanct and divinely inspired election holds firm. Catholic doctrine holds that the pope is God’s most divine presence on earth. Before casting their votes for a new pope, cardinals recite an oath: “Testor Christum Dominum qui me iudicatures est me eligere quem secundum Deum iudice eligi debere et quod idem in accessu præstabo (I call to witness the Lord Christ, who will be my judge, that I am electing the one whom according to God I think ought to be elected)” (Dowling). The Church believes that the one elected is chosen through divine inspiration.

When a pope dies, the cardinal camerlengo takes charge, declares the pope officially deceased, and breaks the Fisherman’s Ring and papal seals. Then the Church’s cardinals are notified of the pontiff’s death. They are allowed ten days for travel to the place where the pope died in order to elect a new pope. Those who arrive early take part in coordinating the funeral arrangements. On the tenth day after the pope’s death, the cardinals present are sealed into a common room conclave, and the city’s officials are responsible for the safety of the sealed conclave; the Marshall of the Conclave is charged with guarding the door. No messages are allowed in or out of the conclave by any parties upon threat of excommunication.

There are four holes in the wall through which food may be passed; these holes are guarded on both sides of the wall by the Marshall and by appointed cardinals to insure that no messages are passed. While inside the conclave, the cardinals are only permitted to speak with one another in the common room; private conversations are prohibited. At night, the cardinals retire to cells adjacent to the common room.

There are four possible methods of electing a pope. Scrutinium involves a secret ballot vote for which a two-thirds majority must rule. The cardinals convene in the Pauline Chapel for Mass and prayer and then move into the Sistine Chapel to vote. Their ballots are placed into a chalice on the altar, and cardinals chosen by lot read aloud the names written on the ballots while counting them. If a two-thirds majority is not attained, the ballot papers are burned along with straw in a chimneyed furnace to produce a thick, black smoke which can be seen by those waiting outside the conclave. The cardinals vote each morning and evening until a pope is chosen. The second method of electing a pope is known as accessus, a second balloting that allows a cardinal to change his original vote. The third method is quasi-inspiratio, a Holy Spirit-filled proclamation that moves the cardinals to spontaneously and simultaneously call out the same name. Finally, the fourth method is compromissum; should the College of Cardinals find they are unable to reach a decision, they agree to appoint a delegation from among themselves to meet and make the choice (Dowling).

Once a candidate is chosen, the cardinal camerlengo asks him if he accepts the position. If so, the cardinals then adore him, and he chooses a new name from which to be known, receives the Fisherman's Ring, dresses in papal garb (immantitio), and is

introduced on the balcony of St. Peter's overlooking the piazza. The following Sunday, he is coronated.

### **Webster's Conclave Scene**

When Webster wrote *The White Devil*, he included a papal conclave scene within his text. There were two published accounts of the election of Sixtus V available in London that Webster could have read, one by John Florio and the other by Jerome Bignon. Florio published "A Letter Lately Written from Rome, by an Italian Gentleman, to a Freende of His in Lyons in Fraunce" in 1585. In Italy, Englishman Florio reported news of his travels to members of Elizabeth's Privy Council. This particular letter recounted news events that he had seen and heard for the past two months in and around Rome. I find this letter particularly interesting because it opens with pasquill that Florio saw posted on the streets of Rome immediately after Pope Gregory XIII's death. Allegedly, Gregory had two sons. The first, Lord Giocomo, was born before Gregory became a cardinal. The second son, Lord Philip Buon Compagni, was born three years after Gregory was elected pope. Florio comments that Philip's mother was a country wench whom Gregory kept in a villa outside Rome. Philip died at the age of three. The pasquill that Florio reports sarcastically discounts the rumor that there was no religion to be found in Rome, for the Holy Trinity was certainly abiding there. The pasquill explains that Gregory, as pope, is God; Giocomo, as the only son, is Christ; and Philip, the deceased son, is the Holy Ghost. This letter's opening pasquill illustrates the English tone toward papal authority.

Florio's letter continues on to address the procedure of Gregory's funeral and the papal conclave which elected Sixtus V. Florio describes Gregory's body as clothed in

white vestments and a covered with a white and gold pall while it lay in state for three days. The cardinals, dressed in purple, parade past the corpse to kiss its feet. Each morning, Mass is said to honor Gregory and the popes who preceded him. On the ninth day of the mourning observances, the Dean of Cardinals sings the Holy Ghost Mass and the cardinals proceed into the conclave. Florio recounts that two thousand armed Italian soldiers guarded the conclave. Inside, the conclave consisted of a common room to be shared by the cardinals and their attendants and sixty adjoining cells for the cardinals to sleep. Each day of the conclave, the cardinals draw lots to determine who will help in what capacity for that day. Italian and Swiss guards inspect and taste the food that goes into the conclave for the cardinals. All table place settings are scrutinized for hidden messages. Florio comments that tight security keeps vigil, guarding the conclave's gates and doors. Outside the conclave, the armed Swizers guard St. Peter's Palace.

At the moment that Cardinal Montalto is elected Pope Sixtus V, servants break two windows that overlook the piazza to shout out his name to the waiting crowd. When the news of a new pope's election reaches beyond Rome, there is an odd tradition observed in the hometown of the new pope. The people of that town storm his dwelling and abscond with all his possessions as souvenirs.

Florio explains that there was political intrigue involving this papal conclave to elect Sixtus V. Evidently, when Pius V died in 1572, the King of Spain wrote to Cardinal Farnese expressing wishes that Farnese be named the next pope. Just before it was time for the cardinals to enter the conclave, Cardinal Granuela presented Farnese with yet another letter from the King advising him to withdraw his name from consideration. The King would rather Farnese become pope later. Farnese reluctantly agreed and Gregory

XIII was elected pope. Farnese campaigned for the papal crown while Gregory was alive, an action which did not sit well with the other cardinals. So, when Gregory died, the College of Cardinals elected someone other than Farnese to be their next pope. Instead, they voiced the name of Cardinal Montalto. Farnese was foiled.

As Catholics came to Rome to adore the newly elected Sixtus V, Lord Paulo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (the subject of Webster's play), came to kiss Sixtus's feet. Sixtus received him courteously, which people found odd because they knew of the scandal only a few years earlier involving Bracciano and the murder of Sixtus's nephew as well as Bracciano's marriage to the deceased nephew's beautiful widow. Cardinal Medici, Bracciano's brother-in-law, along with the powerful Medici and Orsini families had previously asked Gregory not to condone Bracciano's marriage to the widow. Gregory had threatened Bracciano with excommunication, but Bracciano continued to pursue this widow. Rome believed that Sixtus, as pope, would finally seek revenge for the death of his nephew, but he surprisingly received Bracciano as warmly as all who came to greet him as the new pope.

In the last part of his letter, Florio explains the pedigree of this new pope who was born Felice Peretto. Sixtus's father sent him to live with friars. Studying philosophy, he became a great arguer, which led to his later appointment as an inquisitor in Venice. Although Florio believed that Sixtus would be a strong pope, he also felt that Farnese would have been a strong pope as well.

In addition to the letter published in London by Florio, Webster could easily have read the more recent 1605 letter from Jerome Bignon, also published in London. Upon the death of Pope Clement VIII, Bignon wished to explain the papal election process. His



letter begins with a brief history of the papal selection, beginning with Peter. Then Bignon tells of a fight in AD 359 when the papal vote was tied between Damasus and Ursicinus. Many people were killed in this brawl until Emperor Valentinian interceded. Bignon comments that fighting happened several times in the Church's history of selecting popes. During the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon for nobles and royals to try to influence the papal selection, so in 1274, the Second Council of Lyons instituted a cardinal conclave in which no messengers or correspondence could be allowed entrance during the election process.

Bignon's treatise then focuses on describing the current process of papal election. He mentions that armed guards protect the conclave and that Rome is the central location now for cardinals to meet in conclave. Like Florio, Bignon explains the mourning observance process including the body of the deceased pope dressed in pontifical garb and laid out in the chapel so that mourners might process by and kiss the pope's feet. Then Bignon describes the cardinals saying the final Holy Ghost Mass for the pope before retiring to the conclave where the gates and windows are all sealed to prevent outside communication. Bignon points out that although only cardinals who are bishops, priests, or deacons may vote, the Cardinal of Austria was evidently allowed entrance and voting privileges during the conclave which elected Sixtus V. Bignon does not elaborate, however, on the significance of the development. He goes on to describe in detail the voting process. Once the pope is named, adored, dressed, and introduced, he may entertain requests and supplications from his subjects, grant absolution, and offer benediction. Like Florio, Bignon describes the strange tradition of stealing the newly elected pope's possessions, even mentioning that the possessions inside the conclave are

pillaged as well. Several days following the election, the new pope is crowned on the porch of St. Peter's with the jeweled triple crown.

Bignon explains that Clement VIII was known for piety, devotion, charity, and prudence in management of affairs. During the ensuing conclave to succeed Clement, Cardinal Baronius was allegedly the frontrunner, but divine inspiration changed the vote to elect the Cardinal from Florence of the Medici family. The new pope took the name Leo XI, but died soon after. Bignon writes that he believes Leo was poisoned to death. Bignon's epistle ends with a list of the cardinals involved in this conclave, including a Cardinal Montalto, nephew to Sixtus V.

Assuming that the papal election is a divinely inspired process as the Catholic Church professes it to be, one wonders how there could possibly be fights like those described by Bignon, why such security is needed to seal the cardinals into a conclave, and whether the conclaves were open to non-divine interference? If so, what effect would that have had on the belief of divine right of absolute power of the pontiff? Act 4 of Webster's play, *The White Devil*, includes the conclave of Cardinal Montalto-Sixtus V. In the play, the character is Cardinal Monticelso, a spelling variation of Montalto, who takes the name of Paul IV after being elected. In keeping with tradition, civic leaders are employed to guard the safety of the conclave. Webster, however, chooses a civic leader not from Rome but from Florence, Francisco de Medici, Duke of Florence, to appoint the guards. Francisco's first appointee is Lodovico Orsini, a known pirate who earlier had been banished for his crimes including murder. "So, my lord, I commend your diligence. / Guard well the conclave, and, as the order is, / Let none have conference with the cardinals" (4.3.1-3). Lodovico is certainly an unseemly person to give charge of papal

security. Accompanying Lodovico are knights from various Catholic orders such as Rhodes, St. Michael, the Holy Ghost, and the Annunciation—all terms which Webster’s audience would have identified as being Catholic.

As servants bring trays of food for the cardinals in the conclave, Francisco places Lodovico in charge of checking the food.

LODOVICO. Stand, let me search your dish.—Who’s this for?

SERVANT. For my Lord Cardinal Monticelso.

LODOVICO. Whose this?

SERVANT. For my Lord Cardinal of Bourbon.

FRENCH AMBASSADOR. Why doth he search the dishes?—to observe  
What meat is dressed?

ENGLISH AMBASSADOR. No sir, but to prevent

Lest any letters should be conveyed in

To bribe or to solicit the advancement

Of any cardinal

.....

No man may speak with them. (4.3.20-27, 32)

Lodovico clearly has the opportunity, under the guise of security officer, to gain access to the food trays of cardinals including the evil Cardinal Monticelso. After passing Lodovico’s inspection, he orders the windows in the wall opened for the food trays to pass. Before this action is accomplished, though, Webster compresses the story timeline to announce that a new pope has been chosen. A Conclavist stops the incoming food trays and says:

You must return the service; the lord cardinals  
Are busied 'bout electing of the Pope.  
They have given o'er to scrutiny, and are fallen  
To admiration. (4.3.35-38)

In the play's opening scene, Lodovico was the first character that the audience saw onstage; they associate his face with piracy, murder, and banishment. Now the audience sees him supposedly checking the cardinals' trays for incoming messages. Ralph Berry's essay, "Masques and Dumb Shows in Webster's Plays," comments on the visual impact of this scene with Lodovico presiding to secure the integrity of the papal election process as expressing "corrupt splendour, tainted pomp" (131).

Using the dramatic convention of time compression, Webster asserts that the pope was elected upon the first balloting. Webster's character, the Cardinal of Aragon— noticing the reference to Spain as a Catholic country—appears on the balcony and pronounces, "Denuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Reverendissimus Cardinalis Lorenzo de Monticelso electus est in sedem apostolicam, et elegit sibi nomen Paulum Quartum (I bring you tidings of great joy. The Most Reverend Cardinal Lorenzo di Monticelso has been elected to the Apostolic See, and has chosen the title of Paul IV)" (4.3.43-45).

The text states that Monticelso enters "in state." He is arrayed now all in white as the pontiff. This is the only reference in Webster's text of a character wearing white. Since the play's title is *The White Devil*, this significant visual code indicates the identity of Webster's white devil. Monticelso/Paul IV's first words spoken onstage are in Latin: "Concedimus vobis apostolicam benedictionem et remissionem peccatorum (We grant you the Apostolic blessing and remission of sins) (4.3.59-60). This certainly sounds like a

statement that a newly elected pope would make. Monticelso, however, then directs his attention to Francisco and the situation and whereabouts of Vittoria and Bracciano. Monticelso somehow knows that Bracciano has freed Vittoria from the House of Convertites and that they have fled the city. So, Monticelso orders the excommunication of them both and their banishment from the city. This set of events is far different from the true, historical version chronicled by Bignon of the historical Sixtus warmly receiving Bracciano. We must remember, however, that his fictional pope is Paul IV, a very different man than the historical Sixtus V.

Monticelso, as the newly elected pope, expresses concern that Lodovico is planning to avenge the deaths of Isabella, whom he secretly loved, and Camillo by murdering Bracciano and Vittoria. Lodovico literally confesses this to Monticelso who is then bound to silence as Lodovico's confessor. Monticelso warns Lodovico that this revenge will damn him. Immediately after this conversation, Francisco retains a servant to deliver a thousand ducats to Lodovico, saying that they are from the new pope. We are never certain if the money actually originated from Monticelso, but it is plausible for just earlier it was Monticelso who had given a black book of criminal names to Francisco to arrange the murders. The thousand ducats may also be a ruse by Francisco to make Lodovico believe the new pope supports their endeavors. Nevertheless, this alleged about-face causes confusion for Lodovico, for first he believes that Monticelso does not wish these deaths, and then Lodovico is led to believe that Monticelso is monetarily rewarding him for their fruition. Lodovico comments on the hypocritical countenance of the clergy suggesting that they are demure like brides at the wedding dinner but then lustful when midnight approaches (4.3.144-49). Given Monticelso's earlier behavior and

complicity with Francisco in seeking revenge, it is doubtful that Monticelso has changed his vengeful plumage after becoming pope.

### **Paul III**

In order to understand the Renaissance popes' evolution toward secular, absolute power, it is helpful to examine several of the popes during this period. One of the early Counter-Reformation popes of the Catholic Church was Paul III who reigned from 1534-49. He was a member of the Italian Farnese family, and although guilty of frequent instances of nepotism, he was popular with both clergy and Romans who mourned his death, a feat that Catholic historian Kington-Oliphant calls "a rare event in the papal annals" (30). One of Paul's priorities as pope was to reform the papal courts (curia) by instituting a committee comprised of cardinals such as Reginald Pole, Giovanni Caraffa, Gasparo Contarini, and others with the mission of establishing a tribunal which would combat heresy and stop the spread of Protestantism in Italy. Trying to reunite the Catholic Church with its splintering Germanic Lutheran areas, Paul III and Emperor Charles V summoned a council to meet in order to iron out their differences. Paul wanted the council to meet in Rome, and Charles wanted it to meet in Germany. In a compromise, Trent was chosen as a central/neutral location, and the Council of Trent convened in 1545. Paul III sent Cardinals Pole, del Monte, and Marcello Cervini to represent Rome's position. Topics to be discussed in the early days of the Council were the Vulgate versus vernacular Bible translations, the concept of original sin, and the doctrine of justification by good works versus by faith alone—a key contention of Luther. When the Council of Trent finally ended in 1563, years after Paul III's death, it had failed

to reunite the Christian world under one Church, but it had addressed and/or reformed abuses that Luther had pointed out.

#### **Paul IV**

Paul IV was born Gian Pietro Carafa in Sant 'Angelo a Scala, Italy on June 28, 1476 to the noble Carafa family of Naples. As a young priest moving his way up the Church administrative ladder, he was known for his rigid views, ascetic lifestyle, and adherence to scholastic rather than Humanist views. He was also known for sharing his family's inherent distaste for Spain (MacCaffrey 190). After entering the priesthood, Carafa served under Pope Leo X as papal legate to England, 1512-14, during the reign of Henry VIII. Pope Paul III summoned Carafa to Rome to become a cardinal, and later Cardinal Farnese endeavored to position Carafa as a viable candidate for pope.

Upon election to the throne of St. Peter, Carafa was surprised that someone as unpopular as himself was elected and believed that it must have been the work of God alone (Kington-Oliphant 36). Carafa was extremely unpopular within the Church body and was feared for his extremism. For example, Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus/Jesuit Order, had previously worked with Carafa in Venice. When Loyola heard the news that Carafa had been elected pope, Loyola commented that his very bones quaked (Bireley 51). Furthermore, papal historian Ludwig von Pastor referred to Paul IV's papal reign as a "regime of terror" (Bireley 52). Carafa was seventy-nine years old when he became pope, and it was hoped that he would continue in his predecessors' work to reform the Church. Catholic Church historian Hsia comments that Paul IV's "zeal for reform was marred by a harsh sense of righteousness . . . In his zeal to combat Protestantism, he unleashed a regime of repression" (17).

Before much reform could be accomplished, however, war broke out with Spain. Known for nepotism, Paul IV advanced his young, inexperienced nephew, Carlo Carafa, to cardinal and chief political advisor. Not only was Carlo unqualified for the position, he was a known murderer (Kington-Oliphant 36) who lived a scandalous life of luxury; when ascetic Paul learned of Carlo's lifestyle, Paul publicly condemned his nephew but allowed him to continue in his administrative capacities. Late in 1555, Emperor Charles V abdicated the throne to his son, Philip II, King of Spain and husband to England's Queen Mary. Carlo Carafa took it upon himself to encourage France to break its truce with Spain, for the Carafa family loathed Spain, Charles, and Philip. France's Queen Catherine, however, was an ally of the Carafa family. Therefore, Carlo aligned the papacy with France. When Philip went to war against France, Paul IV discovered that Carlo had engineered an alliance between Rome and France against Spain. Rome was now obligated to take up arms against Spain, a Catholic nation. Philip, himself a devout Catholic, felt unsure of his right to bear arms against the papacy, but he was compelled to defend his own country. To avoid this war among Catholics, French envoys came to Rome, urging Paul to write a new truce, but Paul's acerbic warning ended any possibility of a peaceful solution with Spain:

Your king would never fail me, if it were not for certain traitors who aim at a peace; this is an invention of the Devil to favour schismatical heretics, enemies of God and the Church. If I hear that you take part in such measures, I swear to you by the eternal God that I will make your heads fly off your shoulders; then I shall write to your King and say what I have done. I will send him a hundred heads such as yours. I will have an eye in



my back upon you, if I detect you in false Latin. An accursed truce has once been given me, but woe to him who shall bring me a peace the second time. (Kington-Oliphant 38)

As Spain surrounded Rome, Paul IV was defeated by imperial forces in 1557 and forced into forging a truce with Spain. Paul exiled his nephew Carlo from Rome.

Paul IV's zeal for the Inquisition resulted in animosity from Roman citizens. When he set up the first Roman Inquisitions as a cardinal under the behest of Paul III, Paul IV leased a house which he renovated into a prison complete with chains and dungeons. His instructions to the jailers were, "No man must debase himself by showing toleration towards heretics of any kind, above all Calvinists" (Kington-Oliphant 47). With all his duties as pope, Paul IV never missed attending a single Congregation of the Inquisition. Furthermore, he granted power to the institution to torture its victims in order to discover the identity of accomplices. In the final year of his papacy, Paul mandated that confessors ask their penitents in the confessional whether they themselves or anyone they knew propagated unorthodox ideas, read prohibited books, or engaged in any sorcery or magic. Penitents were then to report these offenses to the Holy Office before they could receive absolution for their sins. This policy was mandated to be preached from the pulpit as well (Schutte 38). In essence, a penitent was given the option of self-incrimination followed by being subjected to Paul's Inquisition, or maintaining silence and eventually burning in eternal hell. As a cardinal, Carafa attempted to establish an Inquisition in Naples with troops supplied by Emperor Charles V, but the nobles and city officials rose up in opposition, claiming that an Inquisition in their town could give any man the opportunity to steal away the life and property of his personal enemy. Naples

prevailed against Carafa/Paul IV, but two thousand Neapolitans died in the struggle (Kington-Oliphant 48).

One of the Inquisition's principal duties, mandated by Paul IV, was the creation and enforcement of the Index of prohibited books to repress the spread of Protestant ideas disseminated through the printing press. The Index banned all works of certain authors such as Erasmus (which is ironic because as a young man, Paul IV corresponded with Erasmus), all anonymous works, all works dealing with subjects such as astrology, divination, or the occult, all works with lascivious and obscene subjects, all works written, translated and/or printed by heretics, all Bibles written in vernacular, and all books deviating from Catholic teaching in the areas of math, science, and politics. Thousands of books were banned and damned to hell (Hsia 173-76). As a result, Renaissance ideas, especially throughout Italy, were stunted by the Church. Jesuit Peter Canusius complained in Germany at the time that the Index's severity was "a scandal" (Bireley 52).

Other stains upon Paul IV's career include his Index Librorum Prohibitorum in 1555, which demanded that all Roman Jews wear a distinctive badge on their outer garments and live in a ghetto community. Paul particularly hated Spanish Jews. By its very nature, the Inquisition could not apply to Muslims and Jews because its mission is to save the souls of Christians. Once Spanish Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism, however, they were fully subject to the arms of the Inquisition if they reverted to practicing their former religion (Peters 489-90). Converted Spanish Jews were referred to as marranos. The precedent for hatred of marranos was cast in Spain under Inquisitor-General Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Sisneros, confessor to Queen Isabella. Rather

than rejoicing in the conversion of these Spanish Jews to Christianity, Cardinal Ximenes instead reportedly ordered the burning of over 2500 marranos (Katz 4). Paul IV wished for marranos to be burned as well because he would not accept their conversion as a genuine act. Paul was known to spend long hours drinking wine and cursing Spaniards, “the evil brood of Jews and Moors” (Kington-Oliphant 36). Because of the Carafa family’s disdain for Spain, relations were strained between Paul IV and Philip II, King of Spain and husband of England’s Queen Mary. This deep animosity presented difficulties in attempting to reconcile England and Rome under the reign of Mary Tudor.

Paul IV mistrusted any individual who might possibly wrest away his absolute power. Utilizing the Inquisition as a weapon, Paul IV imprisoned the well-respected Cardinal Marrone in 1557 for one year on charges of alleged heresy. Paul summoned Cardinal Reginald Pole as well on heresy charges, revoking all Pole’s legate powers, but Mary Tudor informed Rome that Pole was too ill to travel to answer the Inquisition summons. Paul IV had worked with Pole many years earlier under the direction of Paul III to set up the Inquisition, and Pole had worked with Mary Tudor to reestablish England as a Catholic nation. A few days after Mary Tudor died, Pole also died; therefore, Paul was unable to have him thrown in prison for heresy as well. Paul’s action to incarcerate these powerful men in the Church as heretics was unfounded and shocking.

When Paul IV died, Roman hatred of this man and the Carafa family exploded onto the streets where rioters burned the Inquisitional offices, stormed the Inquisition prison and freed its prisoners, and toppled Paul’s statue at the Capitol to vent their anger at his tyranny (Hsia 18).

## **Pius IV and Pius V**

Pius IV was left to clean up the debris following the death of Paul IV. After Paul IV had exiled his nephew Carlo Carafa, Carlo apparently committed another murder. In response to the aftermath of the fiasco caused by Carlo, Pius IV ordered him arrested, imprisoned, and executed.

Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth and called for her to be deposed after he tried in vain to reconcile Elizabeth and England with the Catholic Church. Pius V offered absolution to any Christian who would assassinate a heretical monarch.

## **Sixtus V**

Sixtus V was born Felice Peretti at Grottammare, near Montalto, Italy on December 13, 1520/21. Although the majority of the Counter-Reformation popes were exclusively Italian and reared from noble families like the Medici, Farnese, Carafa, and Orsini families, Peretti was born to a poor farming family. After he entered the Franciscan order, he became known for his ability to preach and to teach theology and philosophy. It was during this period that he came to meet Cardinal Carafa. When Carafa became Pope Paul IV, he sent Peretti as a counselor to Venice in 1557 to serve as Inquisitor. Peretti was highly unpopular with the Venetians (John, "Sixtus V"), so when Paul IV died, Peretti fled Venice to return to Montalto. Pope Pius IV reappointed him, however, to serve again as Inquisitor to Venice in 1560. Because Peretti was too stern an inquisitor, it became necessary to recall him from Venice. Because of Peretti's reputation as a zealous inquisitor, he was sent to Toledo, Spain to head the trial of Bartolomé Caranza, the Archbishop of Toledo, who had been accused of heresy (Penuti 358).

In 1570, Peretti was named Cardinal Montalto and then was unexpectedly elected pope in 1585. One of his first actions as pope was to reduce the bandits ubiquitous to the countryside, so he ordered that they be caught, beheaded, and their heads posted for all to see on the Sant 'Angelo Bridge. In his attack on banditry, he paid informants and forbade bordering states to offer asylum to fleeing bandits. With Sixtus's growing reputation throughout the region for aggressive action and intolerance for criminal behavior, when Roman children misbehaved, their mothers would frighten them into good behavior with the simple mention of the name of Sixtus V (Kington-Oliphant 89-90).

Sixtus is better known, though, for organizing the Vatican Press and funding massive building efforts throughout Rome including the University of Rome, the Lateran Palace, the dome of St. Peters, the Vatican Library, new streets and aqueducts, and Egyptian obelisks erected around Rome as symbols of Christian victory (Hsia 162). As pope, his first order of business was to restore order, centralize government affairs, and replenish the papal treasury (John, "Sixtus V"). He restructured the College of Cardinals in 1586 to make their work more efficient and fixed the number of cardinals to seventy. In his restructuring, some cardinals were assigned to address temporal duties such as food supplies, taxes, universities, and road and bridge construction, and other cardinals were assigned to address spiritual duties such as the Inquisition, establishment of new churches, the Index, printing, and the Council of Trent.

Following his predecessors' attempts to destroy Protestantism, Sixtus encouraged Spain to destroy the French Huguenots and aligned Philip II against the Huguenot Henry of Navarre, who later became Henry IV. In addition, like Pius V, Sixtus had no luck bringing Elizabeth and England back into the Catholic fold. In response, Sixtus aided the

financing of Spain's Armada for war against England (Campbell 197-98). With the support of the papacy in this struggle against England, a devoutly pious Philip believed his Armada's mission was divinely inspired.

Sixtus is also known for his mission to create a new Vulgate. Martin Luther had appealed for the scriptures to be written in the people's vernacular, and this appeal had spread across Europe, including England, during the early 1500s. The Latin Vulgate of the Catholic Church was known to be the product of so many translations, that there was some question as to whether or not it was indeed the Word of God. Sixtus V initiated a revision that would include both an orthodox and a revised version. In 1587, the Sixtine edition was printed in three volumes with Sixtus himself working on the translation. To insure the stability of the Vulgate text, Sixtus wrote a bull following its printing that forbid any future editions of the Vulgate. The Sixtine edition, however, contained numerous printing errors and Pope Clement VIII was later forced to recall all copies of the Sixtine Vulgate. Historian David Katz comments that "Pope Sixtus V therefore virtually caused the death of the Roman Catholic scholarship on the Vulgate until the modern period, as any such activity would have been in direct violation of the papal bull which established his edition as authoritative for all time" (14-15).

In the last year of his reign, 1590, Sixtus resurrected Paul IV's earlier policy of requiring parish priests to question congregants in the confessional about their knowledge of matters pertaining to heresy and superstition. If congregants had any such knowledge, absolution of their sins would be withheld until they had confessed such knowledge to the Holy Office (O'Neil 92). Sixtus's zeal to use the Inquisition as a weapon was analogous to Paul IV's.

### **Clement VIII**

Clement was the sitting pope when James ascended the English throne. Prior to Elizabeth's death, Clement tried unsuccessfully to proselytize James while he was King of Scotland. Under James's rule as King of England, Clement allowed Catholic English subjects to swear loyalty to both pope and king, and in return, James tolerated Catholicism in his country as long as it was practiced in private. During this early period of Jacobean toleration, though, Clement supported the establishment of English colleges in Valladolid and Seville to train priests to continue serving quietly in England (John, "Clement VIII" 355-56).

### **Paul V**

Paul V led the Catholic Church into the seventeenth century and continued the Renaissance popes' efforts to secularize papal power. Catholic Church historian Kington-Oliphant comments that Paul V "held the most exalted notions as to the power of the Papacy" (110). A law student, Paul V, formerly Cardinal Borghese, began his priesthood as an envoy to Spain's Philip II in 1593 and tried to improve relations between the House of Habsburg and the Catholics in the Empire. Cardinal Borghese was elected pope in 1605, only two years into James's reign, and would serve as pope throughout most of James's reign.

Paul V became pontiff six months before the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 by Catholic insurgents attempting to kill James and destroy the English Parliament; both James and Parliament believed the assassination attempt was supported by Paul V. After the incident, Paul wrote to James in 1606 congratulating him on his ascension to the English throne and expressing relief at James having escaped mortal danger. Paul asked that if

James would agree to tolerate England's Catholic subjects, in return Paul would encourage these Catholics to refrain from any acts considered unlawful by God (MacCaffrey 214). In response, James demanded a new oath of allegiance from his subjects denouncing papal claim to depose a ruler (Casey 26). Paul V condemned this oath which claimed his power was impious, heretical, and damnable in doctrine (John, "Paul V" 375). In addition, Rome's Cardinal Bellarmine insisted that the pope possessed the divine right to depose kings and that English subjects had the right to rebel against heretical rulers. The chief political/military hostility during Paul V's reign was the Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants in Germany.

Paul V was somewhat successful at uniting the Italian Papal States under the umbrella of absolute power, but he was unable to influence Venice. Under the leadership of Servite friar Paulo Scarpi in 1606, Venice rebelled against the pontiff's unification efforts and won. Scarpi asserted that Christ did not wield temporal power and therefore could not have handed this power down to popes. In response, Paul V excommunicated Venice and summoned its leaders to report to Rome to face the Inquisition. Of course, none answered the summons. When Scarpi was attacked on the streets by assassins, Venetian leaders swore out arrest warrants for Paul V's henchmen. This incident caused much embarrassment for Paul who withdrew his forces. Venetians openly celebrated their success in resisting papal tyranny (Kington-Oliphant 111-14).

Paul V's realm of absolute power reached into the scientific community as well in order to control advances in scientific and mathematical knowledge. In 1610, the year before Webster presented *The White Devil*, Galileo published *The Starry Messenger* which chronicled his work on the use of the telescope combined with his support of



Copernicus's concept of helio-centricism. In response, Paul V and Cardinal Bellarmine condemned the work, asserting that it contradicted scripture that the Church professed as the inerrant word of God. Paul V and Bellarmine summoned Galileo before the Inquisition and placed him under house arrest. When Galileo would not recant, Paul V excommunicated him.

With respect to Webster's play, Paul V permitted the Capuchin order of friars to become a distinct branch of the Franciscan order, and in the play, the evil characters Lodovico and Gasparo disguise themselves as Capuchin priests to administer extreme unction to Bracciano whom they had just fatally poisoned.

### **Seventeenth-Century Anti-Papist Rhetoric**

Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Culture* considers the nature of religion and its role in society: "The tracing of the social and psychological role of religion . . . is a matter of understanding how it is that men's emotions, however implicit, of the 'really real' and the dispositions these notions induce in them, color their sense of the reasonable, the practical, the humane, and the moral" (Geertz 124). The splintering of Protestant denominations from the Roman Catholic Church created passionate responses from both factions. Catholics believed Protestants to be heretics and blasphemers of the Gospels, certainly slated for eternal damnation. The Catholic Church's mission was to stem the tide of the Reformation and bring the lost back into the sheaves of the truly faithful. Protestants, on the other hand, viewed the heavy political administration of the Vatican as usurping scripture and the power of God's grace for all Christians. To Protestants, the pope became an icon for Rome and Catholicism and was frequently referred to as the Antichrist. Similar to the spine of the medieval morality play, Catholics

and Protestants believed that they were fighting for the very salvation of every man's soul.

The analogy of the papacy and the Antichrist had been established well before Webster and Jacobean drama. Catholic Church historian Hsia comments that Protestants believed that the Roman Babylon honored ambition above faith, laws above conscience, and letters and arts above the word of God (11). The idea of the pope as the Antichrist was well entrenched in literature and social commentary by the early seventeenth century. Patrick Collinson states that England was in a "cosmic struggle with the gigantic, foreign enemy of the popish Antichrist" (Collinson 279). One mysterious publication in London in 1606, believed to have been authored by T. Brampton, was purposefully attributed in error to Geoffrey Chaucer and his *Canterbury Tales*. This piece, titled "The Ploughmans Tale: Shewing by the Doctrine and Loves of the Romish Clergy that the Pope is Antichrist," begins its first several pages with what appears to be a tale from the *Canterbury Tales*, but then abruptly starts over again to open a discussion of popes, cardinals, prelates, parsons, monks, friars, priors, and abbots. An interesting comment in the piece is an assertion that anyone who claims that he is higher than kings and emperors is not a man of God. "Christ for us that shed his blood / Bad his priests no maistership have" ("Ploughmans Tale" 53). The author continues with thoughts concerning the nature of excessive pride as demonstrated by the glittering, gold array of Catholic clergy garb, particularly those who wear pearled miters on their heads which cause them to look like queens (14). The author comments that priests regularly keep wenches, widows, and wives hidden on the side and that God never ordained this behavior (30, 39). When St. Peter was given the keys to heaven and hell, the author says

that Peter did not take any money as bribes, but Catholic clergy take money in exchange for absolution of sins. Therefore, the author accuses priests of being employees of Lucifer and asserts that the pope makes the holy church a whore.

A truly damning anti-papist piece was written in 1616 by Leonell Sharpe and published in London titled “A Looking-Glasse for the Pope Wherein He May See His Owne Face, the Expresse Image of Antichriste.” This piece principally targets the work of the Council of Trent under the direction of Pius IV and Paul V, commenting that Paul V intends to recover Great Britain as a Catholic country and is incorporating Jesuits to accomplish this goal, for Jesuits profess rebellion and treason as articles of their faith. Sharpe warns that the articles covered in the Council of Trent serve to strengthen the power of the Church as a governing body. He accuses the Catholic Church of enlarging the scriptural canon by including the Apocryphal books, of diminishing scripture with traditions, of feigning miracles, and of using Jesuits for treason against the kingdom. In order to remind his audience of the presence and purpose of the Antichrist, Sharpe refers to the Book of Daniel and its description of the Antichrist. Sharpe then applies this description to the pope, explaining that the Antichrist “sitteth as God . . . carrying himselfe like God, forgiuing sinnes, redeeming soules, making new articles of faith, the Iudge of all men, himselfe judged by no man. That although hee call not himself God, yet he makes a shew as if he were God. . . . The Pope therefore is Antichrist” (Ch 7). Referring to the symbolic Keys of St. Peter given to the pope when elected, Sharpe indicates that these keys open the bottomless pit and that the key keeper, the pope, is the keeper of hell. Finally, Sharpe pleads for the kings of France and Spain to reject the pope

and join with James, England, and the Reformed Church to form a holy league that can eventually overthrow Rome.

George Downame, a doctor of divinity, wrote a treatise in London in 1603 titled “A Treatise Concerning Antichrist” which he writes as a commentary addressed directly to James, England’s new king. Downame believes that James was chosen by God to be England’s monarch in order to guard England in its fight against the Catholic foe.

Therefore, Downame charges James with the responsibility of defending the English faith and the Gospels and fighting the Antichrist who would do them harm:

Upon most iust and weighty considerations, you and your people renounce all communion with the Pope and Church of Rome, and by all good meanes doe set our selues against them. For if the Pope be Antichrist (which is proued in this Booke) and consequently the church of Rome, the whore of Babylon, and synagogue of Antichrist: the papists, (who call themselues Catholicks, and vs Heretiques) . . . it followeth necessarily, that Christian princes are not to tolerate either the religion of the papists of their persons within their dominions . . . For they teach that all Christian Princes who acknowledge not the Pope for their supreame head and Lord, (as no true Christians doe) . . . that the Pope hath authoritie to depose them, and to absolve their subjects from their allegiance: and that the Pope when he proceedeth to the sentence of excommunication and desposition of them (as he did against your sister of blessed memorie Queene Elizabeth).

Like Sharpe, Downname refers to the discussion of the Antichrist within the Book of Daniel. Echoing the same opinion as that of Luther, Downname explains that the Antichrist is the office of the papacy as an entity rather than a single, individual man as pope. Downname justifies his position of the pope as the Antichrist by pointing out the element of pride, claiming that anyone who takes upon himself the thought that he is the same as God must, therefore, be the Antichrist. Downname accuses the pope of lifting himself above all kings and emperors and angels in heaven. Because the Romans crucified Christ in the holy city of Jerusalem and since the center of the Catholic Church is situated in Rome, Downname reasons it follows that the Catholic Church is the Whore of Babylon and Rome is the seat of the Antichrist. Downname refers to religious paintings of Jesus seated below Mary's garments as proof that the Catholic Church puts others, including Mary, above Jesus in the divine hierarchy. Only the Antichrist, the antithesis of Christ, would portray Jesus below other humans.

Downname asserts that the pope as Antichrist creates and sustains his own power and dominion. Downname says that the pope believes "that all the right of the kings dependeth on him, so he challengeth authority and power to translate kingdoms, to create and depose Kings, to translate the Empire from nation to nation, and to giue the fame to whom it pleaseth him." Downname offers specific acts of the papacy as his evidence of the pope's advancement of his absolute power. For instance, the pope alone can canonize a saint, and the pope controls the Eucharist bread. Moreover, the pope carries the cross as his mace of authority, and when he sits, the cross is placed on the floor at his feet. This last piece of evidence is a crucial, visual image illustrating that the pope places himself

equal to God. Since only Christ is truly equal to God, Downname rationalizes that the pope must therefore be the Antichrist.

James, himself, also wrote against the papacy. In his public letter to his son Henry, *Basilikon Doron*, James comments that he refuses to read the Apocryphal Books of the Bible because they are papist. For the good of England, James also warns Henry neither to pray with papists nor to side with papists or Anabaptists.

### **Anti-Papist Iconography**

Protestant extremists, such as Puritans, refuted any rite or ceremony that was connected to or similar to Catholic rites and ceremonies on the grounds that it was an idolatrous show. This refutation extended to rites and ceremonies practiced by the Anglican Church such as baptism. In 1611, the same year that *The White Devil* was produced, Protestant minister Richard Rowe at Bunbury in Cheshire refused to mark the baptized with the traditional sign of the cross on their forehead. Some parishioners wondered whether their children were completely baptized. Rowe also refused to baptize anyone on days other than Sundays. This disregard for ceremony was distressing to most parishioners, especially to grieving parents whose children died unbaptized as a result of Rowe's resolve (Maltby 263).

Most Elizabethan and Jacobean Bibles have no illustrations due to the late sixteenth-century campaign against false images: "The drastic polarisation of the mind which tended to extrapolate popery from any trace of theological deviance or weakness made it hard to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable images" (Collinson 297-99). When Charles I was crowned, the King James Bible was introduced to Scotland in 1633. Protestants there objected to illustrations that had been added to this edition such

as images of crucifixes, the Virgin Mary, and the Passion of Christ. Scots feared that these illustrations were evil, papist pictures imported from France. Michael Sparke wrote during the time concerning these illustrations as a Catholic conspiracy, commenting that “their wicked designs to set up, advance, and cunningly to usher in Popery; by introducing pictures to the Holy Bible” (Katz 46-47). Although the Archbishop of Canterbury officially condoned these pictures, Puritan William Prynne called for these popish Bibles to be rounded up and burned (48).

### **Anti-Papist Sentiment in Webster’s Colleagues’ Writings**

Early seventeenth-century Protestant England remembered all too well its battle against Spain’s Armada in 1558 and the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Spain and Catholicism were ripe for portraying as the enemy. Barnabe Barnes, a fellow dramatist of Webster in the Kings Men company, wrote the play *The Devil’s Charter* in 1607 which was performed before James for the occasion of Candlemas, the liturgical day of the church year which celebrates the light of Christ warding off powers of darkness. For the source material of Barnes’s play, he chose the story of Rodrigo Borgia, who reigned as Pope Alexander VI from 1492-1503. Alexander VI was notorious for his naughty behavior both before and after being elected pope such as playing cards, eating and drinking excessively, and spending lavish amounts of money. This behavior earned him a reprimand from Pope Pius II. Alexander VI, however, was also known for his ability to administrate effectively, and he was beloved by Rome’s citizens.

Barnes’s play fuses the historical account Alexander VI with the fictional narrative of Marlowe’s earlier play, *Dr. Faustus*. Barnes opens *The Devil’s Charter* with a prologue promising a bloody tragedy that will include murder, foul incest, and

hypocrisy from Rome, the “strumpet of proud Babylon, / Her cup with fornication foaming, full / Of God’s high wrath and vengeance for that evil, / Which was impos’d upon her by the Devil” (Barnes 5). Following the prologue, Barnes incorporates a powerful dumb show scene in which the main character Cardinal Roderigo, the fictionalized Alexander VI, enters the stage and begins to conjure devils. One devil in particular “ascends in robes pontifical, with a triple crown on his head, and cross keys in his hand” (6). The audience then witnesses Satan enter and offer a contract to Roderigo which he signs with his own blood, following which devils present him with a triple crown, cross keys, and a magical book. Through this pantomimed dumb show, Barnes suggests that the papal conclave is corrupted by Satan’s golden bribes. Like Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, Alexander VI’s soul is summoned by Satan at the end of the play and his body is ripped into pieces by devils.

The blood-signed contract and the “times-up” ending are the only traces, though, of Marlowe’s Faustian tale in Barnes’s play, for the character of Cardinal Roderigo/Alexander VI is pure evil in the Jacobean tragic sense. Act 4, scene 2 succinctly lists Alexander’s sins: selling his soul to the Devil to become pope, using bribery and usury within his office, murdering six cardinals to acquire their wealth, committing incest with his daughter and then arranging her murder to silence her, accepting money to arrange political assassinations, and seducing a young man before murdering him. Whereas Marlowe’s Faustus knew when his time was drawing nigh, Barnes’s Alexander is duped by Satan through a fine-print clause in their contract. Written in Latin, Alexander unfortunately mistranslates the contract’s expiration date. Webster would undoubtedly have known about this play, for it was written only five years before *The*



*White Devil* by a colleague and performed by his own theatre company of players before James at Court.

Thomas Dekker was not only a colleague dramatist of Webster, he was also a chronicler of the times. In 1606, Dekker published an allegorical poem titled “The Double PP: A Papist in Arms. Bearing Ten Severall Sheilds. Encountered by the Protestant. At Ten Severall Weapons, A Jesuite Marching Before Them.” In this poem of a sort, the Pope and his army lay siege against the Protestant and his army. Dekker describes the Pope as “couchant—His arms are open wide—one to embrace you and the other to stab you in the heart” (Dekker 172). Dekker continues to explain that the papist springs from the brood of the arrogant Jesuit in order to sow sedition in men’s hearts (175). The allegorical vice characters who comprise the pope’s army consist of: fawner, plodder, spy, changeling, run-away, Pope’s Husbandman, ambusher, cut-throat, underminer, and hanger-on. These vice characters are depicted as puissant but wild, headless, the false Catholick. (190). The allegorical virtue characters of the Protestant’s army consist of: nobility, Council of Estate Clergy, Judges of the Land, universities, martialists, merchants, mariners, husbandman, and artificers. These virtuous characters are depicted as squared, valiant, brave, and never first to strike. Dekker arms the Protestant’s army with Justice and the Sword Vindicative. The Protestant ultimately wins. Dekker’s last line, “Ours is the Field, Gods is the Victory” (191), resonates with English optimism of its divine supremacy against the foe that is Rome.

In addition to Barnes and Dekker, Thomas Middleton was another playwriting colleague of Webster. In 1604, Middleton published a satirical pamphlet titled *The Blacke Booke*, which he encouraged virtuous people to read so that they might be able to discern

the mischievous and pernicious practices of villains. He referred to his piece as *A Morall*. “Now is Hell landed here upon the Earth . . . . There are more Divells on Earth then are in Hell.” Lucifer appears upon a stage to stir contention among plowmen and make them leave their honest work in the fields to spend time instead in the mead halls. This way, Lucifer can insure that the fields will lie abandoned and consequently famine will take the land. Middleton’s satire ends with Lucifer’s Last Will and Testament which he claims is legally valid as long as there are villains upon the earth. Lucifer encourages people to fight over this inheritance, preferably using the English legal system in order to overload and bog down the courts and jails. Lucifer’s list of inheritors include: panderers, bawds, whore, cutpurses, and anyone else who advocated cheating, stealing, murder, adultery, and spending all night in an ale house. Middleton’s piece interests me especially in light of the black book in Webster’s *The White Devil* which the newly elected Pope Paul IV gives to Francisco to arrange Bracciano and Vittoria’s murder. To link this concept of a “black book” with Lucifer and the pope is a powerful connection. Thomas Dekker mentioned in his 1608 “English Villainies Discovered by Lantern and Candlelight” that “Beelzebub keeps the register book of all the bawds, panderers, and courtesans” (Dekker 233). Later literature utilizes this concept of Lucifer’s black book list of servants on earth in pieces such as Washington Irving’s *The Devil and Tom Walker* (1824), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953).

After Webster’s *The White Devil* was produced, Middleton wrote another play titled *A Game at Chess* (1624), which he called a satire. This play was performed by the King’s Men at the Globe and was the largest box office success of the Jacobean period, earning £100-160 in income each day (Cook 210) and running an unprecedented nine

days until James ordered it closed and issued a warrant for Middleton's arrest for portraying the reigning monarchy onstage. Outraged by this play, Spanish Ambassador Gondomar wrote a complaint to James stating that the smallest audience for this play was over three thousand people (Heinemann 151). Using the audience number in Gondomar's complaint and multiplying it by a nine day run, over 27,000 audience members would have seen *A Game at Chess*. The play allegorizes a chess match between England as the White House and Spain as the Black House. The plot relates the story of James's scandalous marriage proposal of his only living son, Charles, to the Spanish Infanta, Donna Maria. To Middleton's audience, the Black House was understood to include the King of Spain as the Black King, the Spanish ambassador to England, Gondomar, as the Black Knight, and the Order of Jesuit priests as well as their militant Society of Jesus as the Black Bishop's Pawn. On the other side of the chess board, James was represented as the White King, Prince Charles as the White Knight, James's favorite Buckingham as the White Duke, and the Church of England as the White Queen's Pawn who is seduced in the play and then raped by the Black Bishop's Pawn. Middleton's prologue for the play presents a speech spoken by a fictional characterization of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Society of Jesus. This fictional Loyola comments that he was convinced that his Catholic disciples would have covered more countries around the globe, but that they seem to be lacking in this country, meaning England. England's "truth and goodness" had yet to be "deflowered" (Induction, line 10). When the White Queen's Pawn tries to explain to the White King that she was almost raped by the Black Bishop's Pawn, the White King comments:

The pride of him that took first fall for pride  
Is it to be angel-shaped, and imitate  
The form from whence he fell; but this offender,  
Far baser than sin's master, fixed by vow  
To holy order, which is angels' method,  
Takes pride to use that shape to be a devil. (2.2.136-41)

The White King understands that because of pride, the Catholic priest, dressed in holy garments, is guiltier than Lucifer when he fell from heaven. By trying to rape a young maiden, this Jesuit is baser than even Lucifer. Since the White Queen's Pawn is an allegorical representation of the Church of England, Middleton is making quite a serious comment about the Catholic Church trying to forcibly take honor and purity from the Anglican Church.

When the White King questions the Black Knight (Gondomar) about this alleged rape attempt, the Black Knight lies and says that the Black Bishop's Pawn was not even in the country at the time. Then, the Black Knight secretly arranges for the White Knight and the White Duke to come join the Black House, mirroring Gondomar's invitation to Charles and Buckingham to visit Madrid. The Black Knight tries in vain to convince the White Knight of the wonders of the Black House. When the Black Knight realizes that he has been unsuccessful at converting the White Knight and is thus checkmated, the White King and Queen enter and declare victory. Honor is mysteriously restored to the White Queen's Pawn, and the White House is safe once again.

In the year 1605, playwright Thomas Heywood produced a politically charged play titled *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie: Or, the Troubles of Queene*

*Elizabeth*. This historical play chronicles the treatment of Princess Elizabeth at the hands of her older sister Mary Tudor, Queen of England. In the play, Mary's Catholic advisors believe Elizabeth to be popular with anti-papist insurgents and responsible for the Wyatt rebellion. They urge Mary to behead Elizabeth so that she cannot succeed the throne should, God forbid, Mary leave the throne of England heirless. Rather than beheading Elizabeth, Mary imprisons her in the Tower. Some English nobles in the play, such as Sussex and Lord Howard who are loyal to Mary, express their concern at such treatment, for even though Elizabeth is a Protestant, she is still a member of the Tudor bloodline. Sussex and Howard intercede on Elizabeth's behalf and convince Mary to merely keep Elizabeth on house arrest. Throughout the ordeal, Elizabeth confirms that she is a true and loyal subject to the Crown but fears for her life. Heywood voices English public sentiment toward Elizabeth through characters who are commoners. Poor Man #2 states: "They say she's such a vertuous Princess, that she'll accept a cup of cold water; and I have euen a nosegay for her Grace" (Heywood 222). Soldier # 1 comments:

Well, firs, I haue two sisters, and the one loves the other, and would not send her to prison for a million. Is there any harm in this? Ile keep my selfe within compasse, I warrant you; for I do not talke of the Queene; I talk of my sisters. Ile keepe myself within my compass, I warrant you. (209-10)

These men of England clearly adore Elizabeth. As she processes through the town on her way to face Mary's summons, the town bells ring and all come out to catch a glimpse of her passing.

A character in this play who I find of special interest is the Constable of the Tower who will not condone any comforts extended to Elizabeth such as a walk in the

garden or the opening of her prison windows to allow for fresh air. The Constable defends his cruel position in the name of obeying his queen's instructions. When he speaks privately, however, he scorns Elizabeth and mistreats her solely because she is a Protestant: "Cause she an alien is to vs Catholikes: / Her bed should be all snakes, her rest despaire; / Torture should make her curse her faithlesse prayer" (Heywood 217). At the end of the play, Mary Tudor dies and Elizabeth ascends the English throne. As she entertains bequests of her subjects and grants titles, the Constable comes to her and apologizes for the way he treated her in the Tower, saying that he was only serving his queen's orders. Elizabeth forgives him because his loyalty to the throne is unwavering. Absent from the text, however, is any statement by the Constable embracing the Church of England and Protestantism which leaves me to wonder if Heywood is utilizing this character to represent his country's Catholics who publicly confess loyalty but privately scorn their monarch as heretical.

### **Other Anti-Catholic References in Webster's Works**

Early in his playwriting career, Webster co-wrote *Sir Thomas Wyatt* chronicling Wyatt's martyrdom in the fight to keep Spaniards out of England during the time of Mary Tudor's reign and her subsequent marriage to Spain's Prince Philip II. Webster's play offers pro-Protestant bias and colors the Catholic characters as the enemy of England. Within this play, Webster incorporates the Catholic and Protestant struggle for the English crown between the characters of Lady Jane Grey and Mary Tudor. Grey was the Protestant successor chosen by Edward VI when he died, and Mary was the Catholic first-born daughter of Henry VIII. After reigning only nine days, Grey was deposed by Mary and executed for treason.

Soon after Webster completed *The White Devil*, he wrote another Jacobean revenge tragedy titled *The Duchess of Malfi*, which commented on the nature of widowhood in Jacobean society and the question of who is capable of running a government. Based on an historical source, *Duchess* tells the story of a woman who becomes a widow and then successfully runs her duchy alone. She has two brothers who try to usurp her authority, one of whom happens to be a Catholic cardinal. The early seventeenth-century Catholic Church demanded that widows lead a chaste life. The widowed Duchess, however, secretly marries her trusted servant, Antonio, and bears his children. When her brothers learn of this clandestine marriage, they set out to destroy the new family. While the Catholic Church discouraged widows from remarrying, almost half of the marriages in England at the time *Duchess* was written were remarriages involving widows (Kinney 560). English attitudes toward marriage were clearly at odds with the Catholic Church's position. Marrying beneath your station in England, however, was punishable by imprisonment (559). So, while Webster's English audience would have sympathized with the Duchess at her defiance of Catholic authority in remarrying, they most certainly would not have approved of her choice of a servant as her new husband. Her act of marrying Antonio invites doubt about her ability to rule.

Like *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi* addressed abuses caused by Catholic authorities and the association of Catholic clergy with the devil. The Duchess's brother is considered by the other characters in the play to be an evil man despite his status as a cardinal in the Church. Arthur Kinney's introductory notes in his dramatic anthology, *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*, describes Webster's Cardinal character as "a total Machiavellian, a connoisseur of evil and villainy" (563).

Servant character Bosola tells us in the opening scene that the Cardinal is so evil that he could possess the greatest devil and still make him worse (1.1.47-49). Throughout the plot, the Cardinal is seen arranging murders including that of his married mistress. The Cardinal forces her to kiss a poisoned book, and then he tosses her dead body in a ditch so that people will not suspect foul play but will assume instead that she died of plague. Given the Cardinal's well-known wrath, the Duchess's new husband Antonio fears for the lives of his new family. Antonio comments, "Where he is jealous of any man, he lays worse plots for them than ever was imposed on Hercules, for he strews in his way flatterers, panderers, intelligencers, atheists, and a thousand such political monsters. He should have been Pope" (1.2.88-93). Near the end of the play, the Cardinal renounces his cardinal robes for those of a soldier and uses his military power to banish the Duchess from her kingdom. Then the Cardinal seizes her land and possessions and gifts them to the pope. At the play's close, the Cardinal says that he is no longer able to pray because the devil has taken his heart (5.4.27). In the last lines of the text, the Cardinal's brother, Ferdinand, directly calls him a devil (5.5.51).

In 1617, Webster presented his play *The Devils Law-case: Or When Women Goe to Law, the Devill is Full of Business, A New Tragicomedy*. Like *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, this play takes place in a Catholic country, but this time the setting is Spain. The King of Spain has decided to arrange a marriage between Ercole, a gentleman, and Jolenta, the sister of a rich merchant. The problem is that Jolenta is already in love with Contarino. We learn that Jolenta's brother, the rich merchant Romelio, has impregnated a nun. Clearly, Webster has no qualms impugning the honor of Catholic nuns. Disguising himself as a Jew, the rogue Romelio is able to steal money, corrupt



ladies, and injure Christians. He lies, manipulates, and brutally attacks people who stand in the way of his own gain. Through the plot, the true reason for Romelio's malicious behavior is revealed when we discover that he was actually a bastard child born from an extramarital affair between his mother and an attorney. The focus of this play, with respect to James's reign, is the idea that bastardry will upset the traditional balance of nobility, titles, and holdings. James bases his justification of divine absolutism on lineage, and Webster's play mirrors this concern for legitimacy.

## CHAPTER 5

### SECULAR POWER—THE MACHIAVEL

#### The Italian Other

It was not permissible for English playwrights to write specifically about the English monarchy or their government system, for those plays were banned and/or censored by the Master of Revels well before they were presented onstage or published. If, however, plays were set in Spain or Italy, two countries whom the English people heavily identified as Catholic, then the action and dialogue of these characters commenting on the political arena would be allowed, perhaps even expected, on the English stage. To set a play in a Spanish or Italian locale was apparently limited to the dramatic convention of English playwrights, for other European playwrights set their plays within their own countries. Lara Bovilsky's article, "Black Beauties, White Devils: The English Italian in Milton and Webster," explains the allure of an exotic setting:

For English dramatists in particular, Italian subjectivity was depicted in as charged a discourse of otherness as the English xenophobic imaginary had to offer. Italy represented a nation among whose most famous identity effects were Popery, atheism, sodomy, murder and poison, deceit, 'practice,' erotic obsession, and sexual promiscuity, and a preternatural propensity for revenge, any and all of which were available for the playwright's use in plot devices that both shocked and titillated. (627).

Ann Rosalind Jones writes as well about the Italian other in her essay “Italians and Others: *The White Devil* (1612)” that Italy was “another country, a country of others, constructed through a lens of voyeuristic curiosity through which writers and their audiences explored what was forbidden in their own culture” (251). The world of Webster’s play centers around popes, cardinals, dukes, vicious noble families, Moors, and Inquisitions—all exotic images and concepts to an English audience. Webster offers to his audience what Jones calls a “horde of Italian types: the courtesan, the Machiavel, the corrupt pope, the criminal thug” (259). Under the guise of an Italian setting, Webster may safely comment on issues of political leadership, class struggle, religious doctrine, and absolute power.

In 1603, ambassadorial relations resumed between England and Venice after a forty year lapse (Goldberg 75). Venice had deemed it necessary to separate from both Rome and the Vatican during the Renaissance in order to become its own republic in the spirit of its ancestral Roman republic. This separation came as the result of numerous struggles with the papacy. Venice had been assigned Sixtus V, then Cardinal Montalto, as its appointed Grand Inquisitor under the direction of Paul III, and the experience for the Venetians was so negative that Montalto fled to Rome immediately after Paul’s death. Venice struggled again with Paul IV regarding printing and receiving shipments of books prohibited by the Index. Moreover, during the period that *The White Devil* was performed and published, Paul V had excommunicated Venice and summoned its religious leaders to appear before the Inquisition in Rome. Still Catholic, Venice had declared its independence from papal rule.

Venice offered English playwrights an Italian setting but one that was accessible to Englishmen. Sir Henry Wotton, England's ambassador to Venice, sent letters back stating that Venice was a locale filled with intrigue and describing the entire town as an allegorical character representing greed. Wotton's myth of Venice was eagerly accepted by England (Goldberg 75). In addition to Wotton, Englishman Thomas Coryat traveled throughout the continent and kept logs of his experiences. When he returned to London, Prince Henry helped him publish his travel logs titled *Coryat's Crudities* in 1611, a year before *The White Devil* was produced. Coryat traveled extensively throughout Italy, and his material concerning Venice is quite interesting in light of Webster's play. The historical account of Vittoria and Bracciano took place in Rome and Padua, but Webster chooses to place this story in Venice instead. The original 1612 title page read of Webster's play read, *The White Devil, or, the Tragedy of Paulo Giordano Ursini, Duke of Brachiano, with the Life and Death of Vittoria Corombona, the Famous Venetian Courtesan*. The historical Vittoria was widely known for her beauty but was neither a Venetian nor a courtesan. So why then would Webster choose to change the story's setting? Coryat's travel logs offer a glimpse into information that would have been available to Webster at the time.

Coryat loved Venice above all other cities that he visited in Italy, calling her an exotic courtesan, the "Queen of Christendome" because of her magnificent buildings and her exceeding wealth (303). At times though, Coryat's English bias manifests itself in his journal. In the center of the city, near the Duke's Palace and the church of Saint Markes, Coryat describes a walkway with portraits of politically important figures hung on pillars. Such portraits include the Duke of Venice, Philip II of Spain, Henry IV of France, and

James of England. Coryat explains that James's portrait was placed in the center of this walkway, and he surmises that this placement was chosen because of the importance of James as a monarch (425). Coryat also praises the work of Wotton, England's ambassador to Venice. This English ambassador figure is featured in *The White Devil* when Italian Cardinal Monticelso is viciously assaulting Vittoria in the Inquisition, and the English ambassador character comments that Monticelso is a bit out of line with this zealous prosecution.

According to census figures, Coryat's book explains that there were approximately 500,000 people residing in the greater-Venice area at the time (426), and that the socio-economic makeup of the people consisted mainly of patricians and plebeians. Patricians controlled the government and plebeians performed manual labor with no voice in government. Therefore, the center of the Venetian power structure lay within wealthy, noble families (414-15). Venice was attempting at the time to return to the political ideology of the Republic which their Roman ancestors had established at the beginning of the Roman Empire. In the spirit of a republic, the primary governing body of early seventeenth-century Venice was called the Council of Ten and was comprised of members who were elected by the city's nobility. Coryat refers to this Council as the strength of the Venetian Empire (418). Not everyone in Venice was Catholic. There were between five and six thousand Jews living in Venice's Jewish ghetto. The pope had ordained that any Jew who converted to Catholicism would have all his possessions confiscated by the Church so that the new convertite could no longer possess ill-gotten goods. Because of this ruling, Coryat explains that, understandably, very few Jews converted to Christianity (370-74).

Coryat devotes quite a bit of time in his travel log to discussing the concept of the exotic Venetian courtesan. He comments that there were 20,000 courtesans in and around Venice. Their houses resembled palaces, and they adorned themselves in jewels, makeup, perfume, and elaborate dresses. He refers to them as queens and goddesses of love much like Venus (403-04). Like sirens, Venetian courtesans enchanted and lured their customers into their lairs with music and eloquent rhetoric (405). Venetian courtesans were accepted by Venetian citizens because their services preserved the chastity of Venetian wives who were kept at home under lock and key, rarely ever allowed to venture out onto the city's streets (403). As an Englishman, Coryat states that he finds this cultural phenomenon of sanctioned harlotry disgusting and immoral:

At least twenty thousand, whereof many are esteemed so loose, that they are said to open their quivers to every arrow. A most ungodly thing without doubt that there should be a tolleration of such licentious wantons in so glorious, so potent, so renowned a city. For me thinks that the Venetians should be daylie affraid least their winking at such uncleannesse should be an occasion to draw upon them Gods curses and vengeance from heaven, and to consume their city with fire and brimstone, as in times past he did Sodome and Gomorrha. (402)

Coryat expresses hope that these courtesans will eventually turn away from their sinful ways and repent to God for forgiveness (408).

In order to receive protection, Venetian courtesans hired ruffians for personal security. If a customer attempted to cheat a courtesan, her ruffian would cut the customer's throat or throw him in jail until he paid what he owed. This is a surprising

show of power in a society where women, as with all plebeians, had little or no power. When Webster presents his femme fatale Vittoria as a Venetian courtesan, he empowers her with the ability to seduce Bracciano, to manipulate the murder of her husband Camillo and Bracciano's wife Isabella, to fight in defense of her own rights in her inquisitional trial, and to usurp the inheritance of the duchy of Bracciano away from its legitimate heir, Giovanni. Given the English Renaissance dramatic convention of cross-gender acting, the character of Vittoria was intended to be played by a man onstage dressed as a woman. Nevertheless, Webster writes very strong female characters such as Vittoria and the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi*. To consciously create them as Italian women is to thinly disguise them as the Italian other in the eyes of an English audience.

### **Machiavelli and Secular Political Power**

With the advent of the Renaissance, sixteenth-century Italy experienced a shift in political ideology, primarily from religious to secular. Florentine Niccolo Machiavelli, the father of modern political thought, commented on these changes. While Machiavelli confirmed religion as a stabilizing force in a community, he viewed religion as only one cog in the dynamic of a political system based on his years of observation as a political ambassador and advisor. Prior to the early modern era, the reigning world view was that of St. Augustine, who hailed a cosmic, hierarchical world order with God as First Cause and all world events occurring as subsequent result of that First Cause. Emerging from the Middle Ages and carrying on into the early modern era, Augustine's world view supported and defended the idea of divine right absolutism of both monarchy and papacy. In *Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), Erasmus explained to Prince Charles, who would become Emperor Charles V, that the relationship of the prince and his state is

analogous to the relationship of God and his Universe. Decisions concerning the people must be made with reason and judgment instead of emotion (Raab 10-11). John Aylmer wrote *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewwe Subjects* in 1559 in defense of Elizabeth, a woman, as England's monarch. Aylmer asserted that God loves his creation so much that he will provide order and leadership even if the leader is female (Raab 13-14).

In his book *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700*, Felix Raab discusses the notion that Tudor Englishmen considered their society to be a product of Divine Will. If a political polemic presented itself, it was phrased as: does God want this? or does God want that? Regardless of the outcome, though, the question was still framed as Providence-oriented. When making a convincing argument for change to the masses, it had to be introduced in such a way as to insist that this change was God's will (Raab 8-10). Machiavelli, however, commented on a secular political system, and his writings were read among Englishmen with varying reception. Reginald Pole, who was residing in Padua, responded to Machiavelli's ideas with "Apologia ad Carolum Quintum" in 1539 in which he attacked Machiavelli's work as satanic. Pole reasoned that to conceive of a political system outside of God's will is to speak of an absence of God. To be absent from God is atheism. Therefore, Pole surmised that Machiavelli was an atheist. Pole espoused the Augustinian world view and believed in Divine Will (Raab 30-32). Following Machiavelli's assertion that a political system can exist through human efforts outside of Providence, Raab argues that a Christian state by its nature offers no allowance for corruption or conflict of interest, and therefore cannot be used as a realistic or practical approach as the sole foundation of a political system (11).



Whether Renaissance readers agreed or disagreed with Machiavelli's writings, or even understood them, the name of Machiavelli became synonymous with heresy, and the Reformation provided fodder for both Catholics and Protestants to sling the amoral title of Machiavellian at each other. Catholics used the term because they believed Protestants to be heretics outside the one true Church, and Protestants used the term because they believed the Catholic Church's administration, specifically the papacy, to be the Antichrist. Protestants especially enjoyed using the term Machiavellian when speaking of Jesuits whom they believed were responsible for turning religion into policy (Raab 59). In England, the term Machiavellianism was bandied about by extremist Protestants such as Puritans to describe the actions of Parliament. Ironically, the idea of a secular state was frightening to all regardless of their religious affiliation (Raab 61). The ideology of secular government as governance of the people, by the people, and for the people was only in its infancy. When *The White Devil* was produced, the birth of secular government theory was still a half century away with its advent of the Age of Enlightenment which would emphasize reason over emotion in governing the people. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, though, Raab states that Machiavelli's ideas horrified, instructed, and entertained Englishmen "over the whole attraction/repulsion spectrum through which basically new concepts are often seen in times of rapid social change" (67).

It is paradoxical that Englishmen misread the intention of Machiavelli's work, for if they had truly understood his ideas, they would have realized that he offered them hope of autonomy within a strong, central government. Despising tyranny, Machiavelli espoused a democratic republic to be the best form of government. According to Federico Chabod's book, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, Machiavelli believed his entire country

to be the most corrupt of nations (82). For a country to be strong, Machiavelli insisted that it must have a militia comprised of its citizens who would fight to the death to preserve their native land. Clearly, England would have accepted this precept. Elizabeth built England's naval forces into a formidable militia. Focusing on leadership, Machiavelli encouraged religion as a stabilizing force but accused the papacy of being the cause of Italy's corruption (Chabod 93-94). Through Machiavelli's diplomatic travels to other countries in order to observe and report on their political systems, he noticed that man was the only animal on earth capable of astonishing acts of cruelty against his fellow humans and that man was the only animal who desired eternity (Bondanella x). At the time that Machiavelli served Florence as a diplomat, Pope Julius II's papal militia attacked the defenseless Florence in 1512, drove the French forces from the area, and reinstated the previously exiled Medici family into power. Believing that Machiavelli might take part in a revolt, the Medici imprisoned and tortured Machiavelli before granting his release a year later. To appease the Medici and perhaps regain his employment as a government employee, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* as advice on how to become a greater prince and dedicated the work to Lorenzo de Medici.

Machiavelli's *The Prince* contained practical advice that would have served James well had he read it and followed its suggestions. For instance, Machiavelli explained that a new prince is first held in high esteem by his newly conquered people, but if he does any harm to them, his people will become resentful, and he will find it increasingly difficult to hold onto his power. James was a new prince to England, for he was a Stuart rather than a Tudor, and a Scot rather than an Englishman. While the English were leery of this Scot on their throne, they were at least relieved that he was married and

could produce a stable heir to the English throne. Machiavelli commented on the reign of Pope Alexander VI, the same pope that was discussed earlier in this dissertation regarding the Jacobean revenge tragedy written by Webster's colleague, Barnaby Barnes. Machiavelli believed that Alexander VI was mighty because he commanded a fierce papal militia. James preferred to build peaceful negotiations, such as the marriage proposal between his son Charles and the Spanish Infanta, rather than militarily attack an enemy country. Although Alexander appeared to care for his people, he continually deceived them. Machiavelli advises that a prince must show himself to be extraordinary. He must appear to possess the qualities of mercy, faithfulness, humanity, trustworthiness, and religious piety. It is not necessary, though, for the prince to actually hold these moral qualities. Again, these words would have been applicable to James, for he wrote in *Basilikon Doron* that the king is a public spectacle who must carefully script his words, gestures, and actions for the people to see and hear. James would write of noble deeds, but his personal actions did not mirror the moral compass of his writings.

In *The Discourses* which was written shortly after *The Prince*, Machiavelli explains that it is the nature of people to want to live free from domination. Again he mentions the importance of religion in stabilizing the people. Machiavelli asserts that areas where religion is observed by its people will easily form armies and discipline, and wise rulers will revert to divine authority to persuade others to submit to them. This action is, of course, exactly the path that James takes to build his justification of divine right absolutism, for although England continues to struggle with Protestant and Catholic doctrine, it is firm in its Christian beliefs. Machiavelli turns his attention next to criticism upon the Catholic Church. He explains that the Church of Rome is no longer religious,

adding that the evil papal court of Rome has “destroyed all piety and religion in Italy” (Machiavelli, *Discourses* 151). Furthermore, he blames the Church for Italy’s inability to unite as one country. Finally, Machiavelli discusses actions which would result in a king’s loss of his throne: disregarding the law and disregarding the country’s traditions and customs. James not only disregarded human law, he refused to acknowledge that it pertained to him. Divine right absolutism offered him the justification that he was above human law and answerable only to God’s law. As for customs and traditions, James’s sale of titles and land tracts eroded England’s tradition of inherited wealth.

In his introduction to *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, Max Lerner explores the English Renaissance perception of Machiavelli and the emergence of the Machiavel. He comments that the English were simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Italians (xxxix). Although Machiavelli’s works were read in England at the turn of the seventeenth century, they were not translated into English until the mid 1600s. Lerner proposes that Elizabethans learned of Machiavelli through a book by Innocent Gentillet titled *Anti-Machiavel* that distorts Machiavelli’s views and then presents them as fact. Elizabethans became entranced with this notion of Machiavelli as an Italian atheist who writes of political power outside of the realm of God, an atheist who promotes free will as equal in power to Providence in government, and an atheist who dedicates his writings to members of the evil Medici family. Lerner comments that the figure of the Machiavel dominated the minds of Tudor dramatists:

Webster, Massinger, Ford, Marston, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare—they were all fascinated by the image they constructed of subtle cunning, of treachery, of the gap between outward seeming and inward being, all of

which they thought of as Machiavellianism. To the Tudor imagination, which has in turn so influenced our own, Machiavelli was the symbol that stood for the decadence, the corruption, the unfathomable depths of Renaissance Italy. It was probably due to the fusion of the influence of church and stage that Machiavelli became associated in the popular mind with the Devil himself. (xxxix)

Webster ascribes to this construct of the Machiavel—one who uses devilish cunning and cold-blooded ruthlessness to achieve and maintain power. While James and the pope claimed divine right absolutism as their justification for achieving and maintaining power, the Machiavel method of attaining power was available to the common man, and Webster incorporates this method of climbing the power structure with many of his characters in *The White Devil*.

### **Fight to Attain Power among Common Characters—the Machiavel**

Felix Raab comments in *The English Face of Machiavelli* that the Machiavel figure, as one who is antireligious or irreligious, flourished on the Jacobean and Carolinean stage “more sinister than ever” (77). Most Englishmen heard the name Machiavelli from the stage rather than by reading the Florentine’s actual writings, so the English equated the name with “politic villain” (57).

The simplest, the most vocal and by far the most widespread reaction to the teachings of Machiavelli among Elizabethan Englishmen was horror, and the most spectacular manifestation of this horror—the loudest, and the one which most impressed contemporaries and later generations—was in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean drama. The Machiavellian villain

strutted the stage in innumerable guises, committing every conceivable crime, reveling in villainous stratagem to the horrified enjoyment of audiences and the profit of theatrical entrepreneurs. (Raab 56)

As Machiavelli became divorced from his writings in England, his name became synonymous with corruption abuse in a godless society (77). On the stage, the Machiavel was associated with crimes that were elaborate and ingeniously plotted. Raab continues:

It is true that the stage Machiavelli was saddled with crimes and misdemeanours to which no reference can be found in any of the Florentine's works. But a stage figure, as a stage figure, has a life and development of its own, often completely divorced from its origins. (Raab 56)

The grotesque stage form of the horrifying Machiavel mirrored the horror of this Jacobean generation which saw its traditional cosmic worldview seriously and validly challenged with the advent of Humanism and the Age of Enlightenment (70).

One of several Machiavel characters in Webster's *The White Devil* is the femme fatale character of Vittoria. A. L. Kistner and M. K. Kistner comment in their article "Free Choice in *The White Devil*" that in the world of *The White Devil*, everyone must choose what he is to be (264). Vittoria may be married to Paolo, Duke of Bracciano, but she begins the play as the wife of commoner Camillo Peretti. Anne Jacobson Schutte's book *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-1750* explores the area of gender during this time period and cultural context; Schutte comments that women often chose sorcery as a viable means of attaining power: "By making contact with supernatural beings more powerful than their earthly

superiors, they sought to overcome the handicaps of economic, social, and sexual subordination” (110). Women of the sixteenth century had little autonomy. Choosing to enter a convent was one way that they could receive an education and honorably avoid the terrible mortality rate associated with childbirth. As a courtesan, Webster’s Vittoria is not bound for the convent. She chooses to seduce the Duke of Bracciano and use the pretense of dream interpretation to suggest that he should arrange the death of their respective spouses so that they can be free to marry each other. Schutte explains that widowhood was also a means for a woman to gain personal power. Vittoria believes that she can be liberated if her husband Camillo dies. Schutte goes on to explain that any women who relished sexual fantasies were deemed demon-possessed and needed exorcism (105-07). Vittoria uses her sexuality to convince Bracciano to kill her husband, and she uses her gender to shame her inquisitor, Monticelso, as she accuses him of rape.

Machiavelli asserted that power does not come from Providence or lineage, but rather from strength and cleverness. Common characters in the plays of the early seventeenth century embody this method of acquiring power, conning and gulling their way to the top. The Machiavel is part morality vice and part stock character in the tradition of the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence. In Jacobean plays, however, there is no longer a clear protagonist. Villains never possess noble motives and virtue is never in fashion at Court. Lee Bliss remarks in *The World’s Perspective: John Webster and the Jacobean Drama* that there are no easily identifiable heroes and that Webster’s protagonists are victims of their own distorted ideals and their oppressive environments. Webster’s villains have no noble motives. Bliss refers to them as “cogs in the political

machine whose power they hope to share” (97-98). Bliss cites Flamineo and Lodovico as common characters in *The White Devil* who exist in an inequitable world where the nobles and the privileged control everything. According to Bliss, both Flamineo and Lodovico will do whatever is necessary to climb the power scale even if their climb involves immoral behavior; they believe that “bolder perversions of justice will sanction” their actions (118). Bliss refers to the world of *The White Devil* as “a world where egoist detachment allows a calm acceptance of any misfortunes but one’s own and where men, like animals, helplessly yet ruthlessly pursue appetite’s satisfaction” (101). Flamineo ruthlessly prostitutes his sister, Vittoria, in order to satisfy the lust of his new employer, the Duke of Bracciano. In act 5, when Bracciano is dead and Francisco, the Grand Duke of Florence, wants Vittoria dead as well, Flamineo quickly offers to kill his sister in order to secure his place in the new power regime. In the same manner, Lodovico kills and pirates to gain wealth and power. At the beginning of the play, he is banished for the crimes of for pirating and murder. Later, though, he is hired by Francisco and Paul IV to murder Vittoria and Bracciano. Flamineo and Lodovico actively choose to assume personal responsibility for their own successes or failures. In the Machiavellian tradition, prizes in *The White Devil* go to the clever, not the good (Bliss 109).



## CHAPTER 6

### ANTI-CATHOLIC REFERENCES IN *THE WHITE DEVIL*

#### The Black Book

As discussed earlier in chapter 4, Middleton published a satire in 1604 titled *The Blacke Booke* that outlined Lucifer's last will and testament, offering instruction to his heirs concerning the dispensation of his property. Lucifer wished, however, that his heirs would fight over the inheritance and thus bog down the court system with endless litigation. This black book contains a listing of Lucifer's heirs such as panderers, bawds, whores, cutpurses, thieves, murders, and adulterers. Middleton's piece interests me especially in light of the black book in Webster's *The White Devil* that the newly elected Pope Paul IV gives to Francisco in order to arrange Bracciano and Vittoria's murder.

FRANCISCO. It is reported that you possess a book

Wherein you have quoted, by intelligence,

The names of all notorious offenders

Lurking about the city,—

MONTICELSO. Sir, I do

And some there are which call it my black book.

Well may the title hold; for though it teach not

The art of conjuring, yet in it lurk

The names of many devils. (4.1.29-36)

Why would a cardinal possess such a book? Is this a list of the people he tried as a Grand Inquisitor? Theoretically, a list of this nature would be impossible because the Inquisition did not try civil and criminal cases, only heresy cases. Did Monticelso keep a list of all who confessed their crimes to him in the confessional? If so, as a priest, Monticelso is forbidden to discuss any confidential information rendered through the confessional. To give Francisco a list of confessed sinners would break the sanctity of the confessional. Drawing upon Middleton's *The Blacke Booke*, is Webster then suggesting that Monticelso is in league with Lucifer and thereby has access to Lucifer's list? This would be a damnable (no pun intended) link between the Devil and Monticelso, thus confirming the pope as the play's white devil. After Monticelso leaves to fetch the black book, Francisco comments that he will never personally trust Monticelso with any secrets outside of this revenge pact of theirs, even those told in the confessional.

When Monticelso returns with the black book, he gives it to Francisco to begin the process of avenging Isabella and Camillo's murders. Monticelso's book contains names of intelligencers, pandars, pirates, rogues, bawds, usurers, lawyers, etc. Webster's list sounds eerily familiar to Middleton's list.

MONTICELSO. Some of them

You'd take for honest men.

.....

Here is a general catalogue of knaves.

A man might study all the prisons o'er,

Yet never attain this knowledge.

FRANCISCO. Murderers.

Fold down the leaf, I pray,—

Good my lord, let me borrow this strange doctrine.

MONTICELSO. Pray use't, my lord. (4.1.46-47, 63-68)

The subject of a satanic black book was also used earlier by another of Webster's playwriting colleagues, Thomas Dekker, who mentioned in his 1608 "English Villainies Discovered by Lantern and Candlelight" that "Beelzebub keeps the register book of all the bawds, panderers, and courtesans" (233). Later Western literature continued this concept of the black book list of Lucifer's servants on earth in pieces such as Washington Irving's *The Devil and Tom Walker* (1824), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953).

### **Visual Catholic Imagery within *The White Devil***

In *The Interpretation of Culture*, Clifford Geertz defines religion as:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

(90)

In keeping with Geertz's concept of religion as a system of symbols, Webster utilizes a visual system of traditional Catholic symbols in *The White Devil* in order to tap into the English Protestant consciousness of all things Catholic such as the rite of extreme unction, the election of a new pope, the Inquisition, and the order of Capuchin friars. As Geertz notes, religion employs visual symbols to cue mood and motivation, producing an aura of the realistic. Webster's Catholic imagery cues possess this aura of reality for his

Protestant audience. He selects, however, Catholic images which possess a negative aura to conjure a mood of trepidation, suspicion, and loathing in his audience. In other words, Webster's images sculpt the silhouette of the collective English enemy.

A prominent Protestant propaganda strategy employed in the early modern period to battle Catholic iconography, according to Stephen Greenblatt, was the "reinscription of evil onto the professed enemies of evil" (98). Catholic priests profess themselves to be soldiers of Christ and enemies of Satan; Greenblatt's reinscription of evil theory is applicable to the Protestant portrayal of Catholic priests as the antithesis of holy men. In order to paint the portrait of the enemy, Webster not only presents his story and message via dialogue, he also presents specific images to his audience that were heavily associated with Catholicism and then positions them within a dramatic environment laced with evil. For example, in order for Webster to portray the enemy white devil as the pope, images associated with papal garb are essential. When the Catholic Church in England converted to the Anglican Church, Catholic priestly vestments such as capes, albs, amices, and stoles were sold to stage players and theatre companies because of their symbolic value with the audience (Greenblatt 112-113). Webster's pope, cardinals, Jesuits, and Capuchin priests wear appropriate garb onstage, and thus visual verisimilitude is achieved.

Near the conclusion of the play, when Lodovico and Gasparo poison Bracciano, they return in disguise as Capuchin priests to feign delivering last rites to Bracciano. They carry a crucifix, a visual symbol of Catholicism set apart from Protestantism. The Catholic Church celebrates the crucified Christ as the sacrifice for the world's salvation from the power of sin. The Protestant church, however, celebrates an empty cross

symbolizing the Resurrection as God's promise for eternal life. Therefore, to an Anglican audience, any cross depicting Jesus's crucifixion was perceived as a Catholic icon.

### **Visual Imagery via the Dumb Show Convention**

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin note in their article "Remediation" that the audience's desire for immediacy has had a long history, dating back to at least the Renaissance (318). In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Bolter and Grusin define immediacy as the goal to make the spectator forget the presence of the medium and believe he is in the presence of the objects of representation (272). Their comment is especially true in light of the English Renaissance dramatic convention of the dumb show often incorporated by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights as a template within their text. The *OED Online* defines a dumb show as: "In the early drama, a part of a play represented by action without speech, chiefly in order to exhibit more of the story than could otherwise be included, but sometimes merely emblematic." The action of the mimed dumb show offers both the visual power of gesture over dialogue and an aesthetic of immediacy.

At times a silent scene can be delivered more effectively than one spoken. Webster scholar Jacqueline Pearson notes that Elizabethan theatrical self-consciousness flowed directly into the Jacobean plays. The characters onstage were always being watched (Pearson 71), creating a layering of frame within a frame which Bolter and Grusin refer to as hypermediacy which they define as reminding the spectator of the medium (*Remediation* 272). In the two dumb show sequences of *The White Devil*, the audience watches Bracciano watch the murders of his wife Isabella and his lover's husband Camillo. *New York Times* reviewer Matthew Gurewitsch comments after

viewing this layering of frames in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's production in New York, "Brachiano hires a magician to let him relish from afar the spectacle of the murders of his and Vittoria's inconvenient spouses. His composure at the death of Isabella, poisoned as she kisses his portrait, especially chills the bones" (Gurewitsch 1). Silence coupled with the excessively violent nature of the dumb shows in *The White Devil*, promotes the hypermediate nature of this frame within a frame. Bolter and Grusin's aesthetic of hypermediacy desires to get past the limits of representation and achieve the real (Bolter, *Remediation* 53), allowing us to view Webster's macabre dumb shows in *The White Devil* as a window within a window through which the audience is shown the scope of Bracciano's brutality resulting from his absolute power as duke, much like the absolute power demonstrated in James's reign with respect to orders of execution versus pardon. In the play's conclusion, Bracciano is killed as revenge for his actions. James is immune, however, to retribution for his actions in the name of divine right absolutism.

Shakespeare incorporated the popular dramatic convention of dumb shows within several of his plays including *Hamlet*. The instructions to the players of act 3 scene 2 comment that groundlings are capable of nothing except dumb shows and noise. Webster's *The White Devil*, in contrast, illustrates the power of the dumb show's meta-theatricality to present otherworldly scenarios. If a group of people were to witness two heinous murders, they would naturally be horrified, but by presenting two murders onstage via the dumb show convention, Webster creates aesthetic distance and effectively alienates the audience from experiencing the emotion it would certainly feel if witnessing two real murders. Webster scholar Lee Bliss follows Bertolt Brecht's alienation thread when he explains that alienation for the Jacobean audience member was a means of

coping with his increasingly violent and impersonal world in which honesty and virtue were superseded by ambition and greed. The Jacobean feeling of alienation was often accompanied by despair (Bliss 20). Although Webster's murder scenes are performed through mimed dumb show sequences, they paradoxically evoke more visual horror, for in Webster's dumb shows, there is no sense of hope, no opportunity for the victims to survive.

Another component of the metatheatricality of the dumb show is the heightening of standard gestures by the actor to compensate for the absence of dialogue in the scene. B. R. Pearn's essay "Dumb-Show in Elizabethan Drama" explains that Elizabethan audiences demanded movement and action on the stage (387). Jacobean actor Edmund Gayton wrote about his own experience playing Don Quixote onstage in a dumb show scene:

The businesse . . . was a dumbe shew, where the Don swels, looks big, menaces with hand and shaken Javelin, disdains side noses, claps his own hands, and bounds with Rosinante; the other part shrug, sneeze and blurt, neglect, make mouths, and flout in Spanish postures, and so exeunt.

(McNeir 258-59)

Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences desired spectacle through magnificent costumes, props, and special effects, and heightened action by the actors in Webster's mimed murder dumb shows scenes would certainly have added to the spectacle and aura of metatheatricality.

Theatre historian Dieter Mehl comments in his book, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention*, that the absence of dialogue separates the

dumb show from the standard play within a play convention (xiii). Descending from the medieval pageantry of the tableaux vivant, the dumb show appeals to the eye. Mehl explains that the Renaissance English audience desired showy spectacle in all aspects of performance—secular, spiritual, and popular. English dumb shows appeared in court masques, royal entries, city pageants, and Lord Mayor’s shows (7-9). The dumb show convention offered the playwright a vehicle to add more action into the play than traditional dialogue could allow. Bolter and Grusin posit that a moving picture is more realistic than a static image (*Remediation* 37), so for Webster to show these scenes as silent moving pictures offers a theatrical language to snatch the audience’s attention. In act 2 scene 2, at the stroke of midnight, Bracciano hires a magician to show him the progress of his commissioned murders of Isabella and Camillo. Ironically, the conjurer that Bracciano hires is known for his ineptness, so again, we the audience are not sure if what we are seeing is real. However, we do see Bracciano witness these scenes, and later we learn that Isabella and Camillo were indeed murdered. Webster’s text of the dumb show is as follows:

A dumb show. Enter suspiciously, JULIO and another; they draw a curtain where BRACCIANO’s picture is; they put on spectacles of glass, which cover their eyes and noses, and then burn perfumes afore the picture, and wash the lips of the picture; that done, quenching the fire, and putting off their spectacles, they depart laughing. Enter ISABELLA in her nightgown as to bed-ward, with lights after her, Count LODIVICO, GIOVANNI, and others waiting on her; she kneels down as to prayers, then draws the curtain of the picture, does three reverences to it, and kisses it thrice; she



faints and will not suffer them to come near it, dies; sorrow expressed in GIOVANNI and in Count LODOVICO; she's conveyed out solemnly.

(2.2)

At the sight of this conjured dumb show, Bracciano expresses his pleasure as the Conjurer verbally explains the mimed action that the audience has just witnessed. Then the plays moves immediately into the second dumb show.

A second dumb show. Enter FLAMINEO, MARCELLO, CAMILLO, with four more as Captains; they drink healths and dance; a vaulting-horse is brought into the room; MARCELLO and two more whispered out of the room while FLAMINEO and CAMILLO strip themselves into their shirts, as to vault; compliment who shall begin; as CAMILLO is about to vault, FLAMINEO pitcheth him upon his neck, and with the help of the rest writhes his neck about, seems to see if it be broke, and lays him folded double as 'twere under the horse, makes shows to call for help; MARCELLO comes in, laments, sends for the Cardinal [MONTICELSO] and Duke [FRANCISCO], who comes forth with armed men; wonder at the act; [FRANCISCO] commands the body to be carried home, apprehends FLAMINEO, MARCELLO, and the rest, and [all] go as 'twere to apprehend Vittoria. (2.2)

At the completion of the second dumb show, Bracciano again seems confused, so the Conjurer explains verbally what they and the audience have just witnessed and then unexpectedly adds that the authorities are now traveling to Vittoria's home to arrest her for complicity in this murder. Because this surprising twist of events was not part of

Bracciano's Machiavel plan, the audience witnesses his startled reaction to the news that his lover's arrest is imminent. Mehl explains that via Webster's dumb shows, Bracciano is allowed to watch his own machination like a play within a play. The scenes increase the tempo of the play and serve to point out Bracciano's undoubted guilt in these hideous crimes (Mehl 140). Mehl also points out that Webster places these two dumb shows in sequential order which allows the second murder to exceed the first in sadistic cruelty (24).

Ralph Berry comments on the sheer theatricality of Webster's mimed murders in a production he saw of *The White Devil* produced in 1969 at London's Old Vic theatre. In his conference paper "Masques and Dumb Shows in Webster's Plays," Berry explains that in the first dumb show, the audience sees Isabella as a saint-like figure kissing the icon of her personal God, the same God who turns out to be her killer (Berry 126). Berry goes on to comment on the visual sensory impact of Camillo's murder. "The elaborate, courtly exchanges; the unbearably exciting rhythms of a muffled drum, followed by dead silence; the click, heard distinctly throughout the theatre, as Flamineo bent back Camillo's neck . . . is an amalgam of beauty—the allure of Court, art, athletic prowess—and death" (126-7). Presenting the murder as a dumb show rather than as a traditional scene combining dialogue and action increases the metatheatricality of the crimes.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Faced with the growing Reformation, Renaissance popes clutched fiercely to their waning power in Europe. Their control grew increasingly secular in nature, complete with armies and judicial courts to maintain absolute power. Contributing *Catholic Encyclopedia* author William H. W. Fanning writes that “the pontiff has no superior on earth.” Divine absolutism presumes Providence is the source of chosen leadership and the basis of authority granted to the leader. During the height of the Catholic Church’s control in the Middle Ages, this presumption was unquestioned by its subjects. With the advent of the Renaissance, however, the mere act of questioning became fashionable, including the questioning of leadership, both religious and secular. A maelstrom of reform was brewing across Europe.

Church reformer Martin Luther, a Catholic priest and theologian, questioned the Church’s position on issues such as the doctrine of salvation through good works and the sale of indulgences. Catholic leadership was becoming increasingly secular over spiritual, ruling nations and militias rather than adhering to the spiritual needs of the people. In his reexamination of the nature of religious leadership, Luther began to question the pope’s claim of divine absolutism. In Article IV of Luther’s *The Book of Concord: The Smalcald Articles*, published in 1536, he asserts that the pope is not a divinely appointed head of Christendom but rather merely a fellow Christian in the body of Christ. Luther called the Renaissance pope’s assumed power malicious, blasphemous, and arrogant; he accused

the pope's powers of having been raised up by the devil; and he professed that the pope would be the ruin of the Christian Church. "The Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God." Because the pope demanded that people obey him in order to be saved, Luther reasoned that the pope had fashioned himself to be the equal and superior of Christ as God on earth. Luther comments again in the *Smalcald Articles*, "Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or Lord. For to lie and to kill, and to destroy body and soul eternally, that is wherein his papal government really consists." Luther believed that Church leaders should be elected rather than presupposed as divinely appointed. If an elected leader failed to perform his duties properly, then Luther encouraged men to depose the leadership. Finally, Luther called for Christians to neither listen to the Emperor nor to kiss the feet of the Pope, but rather to stand and say, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Luther's actions eventually garnered his excommunication from the Church, but his ideas quickly spread throughout the region, and other theologians entered into the discourse of examining the relationship between Providence and church leadership. The Vatican's absolutist stronghold was crumbling.

Renaissance England undoubtedly presented a challenge of its own to Rome's effort to squelch the tide of Protestantism and reunite the "one, true catholic church." Jerome McGann explains in his book *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* that poems are acts of representation, created and "carried forward in specific socio-historic circumstances" (131). The medium of English Renaissance dramatic literature,

considered poesy for its heightened language, presented the current environment's socio-historic circumstances for its audience to consider. In Middleton's play *A Game at Chess*, the allegorical character of the Black Bishop's Pawn is commissioned to seduce and "take"—by force if necessary—the White Queen's Pawn. The Black Bishop's Pawn represents Spain's Catholic Church and its Jesuit clergy officials, and the White Queen's Pawn represents the Church of England. When the Black Bishop's Pawn repeatedly tries to seduce the White Queen's Pawn, he speaks these lines concerning his mission to win England for Rome, believing that if he cannot have her, "The whole Society suffers, and in that / The hope of absolute monarch eclipsed" (2.1.125-26). Absolutism depends upon absolute power over all, and Renaissance England was unwilling to yield to papal absolutism.

To combat the assault upon the Church's insistence on unquestioned obeisance, the pope wielded the threat of excommunication as his weapon against potential heretics as well as Catholics who had already left the Church. In 1639, Pope Urban VIII wrote "Bull in Coena Domini, etc." concerning the peril of sure excommunication and called for this topic to be published and preached from the bully pulpit at least once a year. "We excommunicate and anathematize, in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and by the authority of the blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by our own, all Wickliffites, Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists, Hugonots, Anabaptists, and all other heretics, by whatsoever name they are called" (Gavin 392-93). In England, excommunication had been sentenced as a punitive measure when Henry VIII seceded from the Church. Since Henry was the reigning monarch, the excommunication extended to England's entire

citizenry as well. With one fell swoop, an entire country was condemned to eternal damnation for challenging the authority of the pope.

While the Renaissance popes were struggling to maintain absolute power, King James was struggling as well. Renaissance drama scholar Arthur Kinney comments that Webster's play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, questions whether a political state should be governed by traditional nobility or by those who can best manage state affairs (562). Absolute monarchy hinges on lineage for its authority as leader of the government. James was neither an Englishman nor a direct heir to the English throne. His position on the family tree as next in line for the throne was tenuous at best. The concept of absolute monarchy provided James with the justification he needed to rule England, claiming that it was God's divine will that a Stuart should rule. As James continued to lavishly spend tax monies and sell titles of nobility, English tempers flared and James's method of quoting of biblical scripture would no longer validate blind obedience. The English looked to James's first born son, Henry, to lead them toward a brighter future. When Henry died in early adolescence, Charles I became the heir apparent. After James's death, Charles spouted the same rhetoric of divine right absolutism. But by mid 1600s, the English were no longer responsive to such an argument, and civil war erupted. Under the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell and Parliament, Charles was beheaded, his family was exiled, and the monarchy was abolished.

Webster's play *The White Devil* investigates the nature of papal and monarchal absolutism. Wolfgang Iser calls for examining a piece of literature in terms of what action it is accomplishing. This dissertation has endeavored to examine John Webster's play *The White Devil* in terms of its action before a Jacobean audience, its ability to

mirror the Jacobean frame of mind, and its use as anti-Catholic propaganda to ward off attempts to realign England with the Catholic Church. Jonathan Goldberg posits, “Language constitutes the reality of politics and history; the articulation of events is itself a historical event; words themselves participate in the life of society” (116). Webster’s play *The White Devil* presents a microcosm of his world in terms of the struggle to acquire and maintain power by king, pope, nobility, and commoner. Political contemporary Francis Bacon, who was influenced by many of Machiavelli’s ideas, commented that man needs to be acquainted with evil and that virtuous men must know evil in order to be able to correct evil men (Raab 74). Webster’s play invites his audience to transgress the boundary of this fictional, evil, Italian plot of duke, pope, Venetian courtesan, and Machiavel with the boundary of their real world of James, the Vatican, the deterioration of aristocracy, and the emergence of a professional class complete with elected civic leadership. When Webster chooses to replace Pope Sixtus V in his play with Paul IV, he stirs up national fear and anger among his audience. Iser explains that the liminal area connected between the real and the fictive is the imaginary, a world in which the audience is invited to observe, consider, and possibly even participate. English historian John Wagner comments that thanks to works such as John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, written in response to the Marian exiles and persecutions of Protestants, “the faith and suffering of the Marian martyrs lingered in the English national memory for hundreds of years, creating a deep and lasting hatred of the pope and Roman Catholicism” (288). Iser offers the “as if” proposition; the audience members witness the murder and mayhem of Webster’s corrupt system of government built on the premise of absolute power, and they are then invited to consider the repercussions of their current

system of leadership shift *as if* England were to rejoin the papal nations. How might their limited political power be altered and could it possibly even be effaced?

Early seventeenth-century England experienced a shifting socio-economic, political, and religious environment. The nature and role of power was being reevaluated and those wielding it fiercely clutched to protect it. James ascended the English throne though he was neither a direct heir of the preceding monarch nor an Englishman, but rather a Stuart and a Scot. In order to substantiate his claim to authority, he invoked divine right absolutism as his justification. The Roman Catholic Church elected Paul V as its pontiff at the time that James ascended the English throne. Like James, Paul V also invoked the claim of divine right absolutism to justify his rule. Since England was officially a Protestant country, English Catholics were torn between which absolute leader to swear their allegiance. Protestants, on other hand, feared the possibility of their country's return to Catholic control. While king and pope struggled for absolute power, the rising professional class of England elected civil leadership and began the process of self-governance. King, pope, and citizen benefited from power and were unwilling to relinquish it.

John Webster's play, *The White Devil*, incorporates this triune power struggle in its plot. The king is represented by the dukes who fight to retain the land, wealth, and titles of their families. The dukes seek vengeance upon anyone who dares to usurp their familial control and use assassins as their weapon to maintain control. The pope is represented by Pope Paul IV who seeks vengeance upon anyone who harms his family members. In the name of the Church, he utilizes the Inquisition as his weapon to punish those who cross him. Excommunication and eternal damnation are his tools to maintain



control. England's citizens are represented by the commoners who seek to steal pockets of power anywhere they can find it. Using the Machiavel weapons of wile, cunning, and deceit, these commoners attempt to outwit their opponents in order to ascend in social power status. Although they will never be seated at the same table as the dukes and the pope, these Machiavels may manage to earn the right to stand in the same room.

By choosing the revenge tragedy genre and its dramatic structure, Webster presents the futility of man's fleeting struggle for power. Death will come to all; even kings and popes are mortal. Webster's play mirrors the corruption of power built on any premise less than a moral compass, for such power is ineffective and momentary. James speaks of being God's lieutenant on earth, but his actions include sodomy, selling titles and vast portions of land to the highest bidder, bankrupting the country's coffers, and arranging a marital alliance between his Protestant heir and Spain's Catholic Infanta. Paul IV speaks of being St. Peter's successor, but his actions include burning marranos, blackmailing congregants in the confessional, banning books he deems heretical, and arresting reputable cardinals gaining in popularity with the people. Torn between allegiance to monarchy and allegiance to the papacy, English Catholics joined their Protestant countrymen to commence self-government. English nobility built the stability of their power upon the inheritance system of land and wealth. As James eroded the foundation of the aristocracy's claim to power by selling land and titles to anyone who offered money, the aristocracy was rendered impotent and became parasitic members of Court. They retained their titles, but they possessed no wealth or land. Ergo, their titles could offer only vain comfort. Snubbing the newly rich professional class may have offered solace, but without money in the aristocrat's pocket, the words were empty. The

professional class built wealth and elected civic leaders, but they were not invited to Court or to serve in Parliament. Their money and purchased titles of nobility did not secure a place at the table with the aristocracy. Furthermore, their elected laws were fleeting as well. Laws can be repealed as quickly as they are created, and elected rulers can be deposed by the enemy. Finally, the street urchin built his power structure upon skills of ingenuity, cleverness, and agility. Feeling a sense of having nothing else to lose, the Machiavel would con, steal, and kill to survive.

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## APPENDIX A

### NAME CHANGES FROM HISTORICAL PEOPLE TO WEBSTER'S CHARACTERS

<b>Character Name</b>	<b>Historical Name</b>
Vittoria Corombona	Vittoria Accoramboni
Count Lodovico	Lodovico Orsini
Camillo (nephew to Cardinal Monticelso)	Francesco Peretti (nephew to Cardinal Montalto); Vittoria had a brother named Camillo
Isabella de' Medici/Duchess Bracciano	Isabella de' Medici/Duchess Bracciano
Paolo Giordano Orsini/Duke of Bracciano	Paolo Giordano Orsini (Ursini)/ Duke of Bracciano
Francisco de' Medici/Duke of Florence	Francesco de' Medici/Grand Duke of Florence/Tuscany
Giovanni	Giovanni Pietro/Virginio Orsini
Marcello	Marcello Accoramboni (actual brother who served the Duke)
Flamineo	Flamineo Accoramboni
Cornelia	Tarquinia Accoramboni
Zanche	Caterina
Dr. Julio	Dr. Giulio Borgarucci

Cardinal Lorenzo di Monticelso

Pope Paul IV

Cardinal Felice Peretti Montalto/Pope Sixtus V

Cardinal Giovanni (Gian) Pietro Caraffa/Pope

Paul IV

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TIMELINE OF EVENTS, 1532-1624**

- 1532 Carafa/Paul IV works in Venice and writes about heresy among the clergy and laymen
- 1538 Paul III excommunicates Henry VIII
- 1542 Paul III establishes the Roman Inquisition after failing to reconcile Catholics and Protestants
- 1545 First session of the Council of Trent begins  
Carafa/Paul IV leads a hard-line faction at Trent for the suppression of heresy  
Carafa/Paul IV believes Cardinal Reginald Pole to be a heretic
- 1547 Henry VIII dies  
Edward VI ascends the English throne  
Edward Seymour, on behalf of Edward VI, repeals England's heresy acts
- 1550 Carafa/Paul IV appointed to a task force to create a papal Index of Prohibited Books
- 1553 Edward VI dies  
Lady Jane Grey ascends the English throne but is overthrown by Mary Tudor  
Mary I ascends the English throne  
Mary repeals the Protestant legislation of her brother Edward VI  
Cardinal Reginald Pole is named papal legate  
Cardinal Pole works with Mary to restore Catholicism to England

- 1554 Mary I marries Prince Philip II of Spain—no children  
English Church is reconciled with Rome via Cardinal Pole  
Mary I reinstates England's heresy acts
- 1555 Paul IV elected pope  
John Rogers is the first of approx. 300 English martyrs publicly burned for heresy
- 1557 Paul IV appoints Montalto/Sixtus V to be Inquisitor of Venice
- 1558 Mary I dies  
Elizabeth I ascends the English throne  
Paul IV, aligned with France, finds himself caught in a war between France and Spain
- 1559 Elizabeth abolishes papal authority and heresy laws  
Paul IV mandates that the confessional be used to ferret out heresy  
Paul IV dies and Roman citizens celebrate, burn the Holy Office, and free Inquisition prisoners  
Montalto/Sixtus V flees Venice
- 1560 Pius IV reappoints Montalto/Sixtus as Inquisitor of Venice, an unpopular ruling with Venetians
- 1563 Final session of the Council of Trent ended, no reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants
- 1565 Montalto/Sixtus V sent to Spain to try the Archbishop of Toledo for heresy
- 1573 Vittoria Accorombani marries Francesco Peretti, nephew to Cardinal Montalto/Sixtus V

- 1576 Isabella de' Medici, wife of Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, is  
murdered
- 1580 Italian Inquisition is at its height  
Bracciano meets Vittoria
- 1581 Francesco Peretti is murdered  
Bracciano and Vittoria marry in secrecy  
Pope Gregory XIII learns of the marriage and orders it to be ended; Vittoria is  
first sent home and then later placed in a nunnery in Castel Sant' Angelo
- 1582 Bracciano promises Gregory XIII not to see Vittoria again; Vittoria is released
- 1583 Bracciano and Vittoria are quietly married again, this time in the Church
- 1584 Bracciano's health begins to fail
- 1585 Bracciano publicly announces his marriage to Vittoria  
Gregory XIII dies  
Bracciano and Vittoria marry a third time with a large public wedding  
Cardinal Montalto is elected Pope Sixtus V  
Bracciano dies of natural causes  
Lodovico Orsini and a group of bandits murder Vittoria and her brother Flaminio  
After 1585, magic replaces heresy as the most common charge in the Venetian  
Inquisition (heresy becomes feminized)  
John Florio publishes *A Letter Lately Written from Rome* in London which  
contains information about the story of Bracciano and Vittoria and the  
papal conclave proceedings of Sixtus V

- 1586 Sixtus V orders the beheading of Vittoria's brother Marcello  
Sixtus V decrees all occult to be investigated via the Inquisition
- 1587 Sixtus financially helps Spain build its armada to fight Elizabeth I/England  
Elizabeth defeats the Spanish Armada  
Sixtus V aligns with Spain against Protestant Henry of Navarre  
Sixtus founds the Vatican press  
Sixtus V commissions a new papal Index of Prohibited Books  
Elizabeth executes cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, for treason
- 1588 Sixtus V reorganizes the Papal Curia
- 1590 Sixtus V personally helps to write and publish the Sistine Vulgate  
Sixtus V dies
- 1603 Elizabeth I dies  
James I ascends the English throne  
Renewal of diplomatic relations between Rome and England for the first time in  
forty-five years under Paul V  
James writes *Basilikon Doron* to Crown Prince Henry on the divine right of kings,  
blessings of absolute obedience, and dangers of rebellion  
James writes *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, using scripture to defend a  
monarch's absolute power
- 1604 Middleton publishes *The Blacke Booke* about Lucifer's list of heirs in London
- 1605 April, Paul V becomes pope  
Nov., Guy Fawkes's Gunpowder Conspiracy against James I and the English  
Parliament is discovered

- 1606 James's Oath of Allegiance to the crown, renouncing papal authority  
Paul V's condemnation of James's Oath of Allegiance  
Henry Garnet, Jesuit provincial superior in England, is publicly executed
- 1607 Barnabe Barnes's revenge play *The Devil's Chamber* is performed for James by  
the King's Men on Candlemas, Feb 2, 1607
- 1610 Henry IV of France is assassinated
- 1611 *King James Bible* is published  
Thomas Coryate publishes *Coryat's Crudities* in London about his travels in  
Venice in 1608 in which he calls Venice a Courtesan
- 1612 James joins the Union of Protestant Princes  
John Webster's *The White Devil* is performed by the Queens Men at the Red Bull  
Theatre—not well received  
James I orders two Anabaptists burned for heresy  
James's son Prince Henry dies; Webster writes an elegy in praise of him as the  
people's hope  
T. de Fougasses publishes *The General Historie of the Magnificent State of  
Venice* in London containing the stories of Sixtus V and Vittoria  
Accoramboni  
Rev. Thomas Adams preaches a sermon called "The White Devil" about religious  
hypocrisy; his sermon text was John 12:15
- 1615 Calvinist Frederick V, Elector of Palatine, marries James's daughter, Princess  
Elizabeth Stuart

- 1616 James's favorite Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, and his wife arrange the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower; James pardons the Somersets
- Middleton writes *The Witch* based on the Somerset scandal
- 1618 Thirty Years' War begins between Catholics and Protestants in Germany, involving Frederick V, King of Bohemia
- 1623 James secretly sends his favorite Buckingham with Prince Charles to Spain to arrange a marriage between Charles and the Spanish Infanta
- 1624 Middleton writes *A Game at Chess* based on the marriage scandal; it becomes the longest-running box office hit of Jacobean theatre until James shuts it down
- The marriage arrangement between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta is Voided
- 1625 James I dies and Charles I ascends the English throne



## APPENDIX C

### HOUSE OF TUDOR, HENRY VII THROUGH ELIZABETH I

- Jan 28, 1457 Henry Tudor is born.
- Aug 7, 1485 Henry Tudor defeats Richard III at Bosworth Field and becomes Henry VII.
- Jan 18, 1486 Henry VII marries Elizabeth of York.
- Sept 1486 Arthur, Prince of Wales, is born to Henry and Elizabeth.
- 1491 Prince Henry VIII is born.
- Nov 1501 Arthur marries Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand V, the first King of Spain, and Queen Isabella.
- Apr 1502 Arthur dies, childless.
- Feb 1503 Elizabeth of York dies in childbirth; the baby (Katherine) dies several days later.
- Apr 1509 Henry VII dies.  
Henry VIII becomes king.
- Jun 1509 Henry VIII marries Catherine of Aragon.
- Feb 1516 Catherine of Aragon gives birth to Mary.
- Feb 1532 Henry VIII makes himself head of the English Church; severs ties with Rome.
- Jan 1533 Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn. Catherine of Aragon is ordered to renounce her title as Queen but she refuses.
- May 1533 Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon is proclaimed invalid. Anne Boleyn is crowned queen.

- Sept 7, 1533 Anne Boleyn gives birth to Elizabeth I.
- Jan 7, 1536 Catherine of Aragon dies.
- Jan 27, 1536 Anne Boleyn miscarries a baby boy.
- May 1536 Anne Boleyn is arrested for adultery and incest.
- May 19, 1536 Anne Boleyn becomes the first English queen executed by her own country.
- May 20, 1536 Henry VIII is engaged to Jane Seymour.
- May 30, 1536 Henry VIII marries Jane Seymour.
- Oct 12, 1537 Jane Seymour gives birth to Edward VI.
- Oct. 24, 1537 Jane Seymour dies.
- Dec 1539 Henry VIII marries Anne of Cleves.
- Jul 1540 Henry and Anne are divorced.
- Dec 1540 Henry VIII marries Katherine Howard.
- 1542 Katherine Howard is executed for treason and adultery.
- Jul 12, 1543 Henry VIII marries Katherine Parr.
- 1547 Henry VIII dies.
- Edward VI is crowned at age nine. He is betrothed to his cousin Mary, Queen of Scots.
- 1548 Katherine Parr dies in childbirth.
- 1553 Edward VI dies unmarried. He had previously removed Mary and Elizabeth from the line of succession and named Lady Jane Grey as his successor.
- Jul 10, 1553 Lady Jane Grey is proclaimed Queen of England and rules for nine days.

Jul 19, 1553 Mary I is proclaimed Queen of England. Lady Jane Grey is imprisoned in the  
Tower of London.

Feb 12, 1554 Lady Jane Grey is beheaded for treason.

Jul 25, 1554 Mary I and Prince Philip II of Spain are married.

Nov 17, 1558 Mary I dies of cancer, childless.

Elizabeth I is proclaimed Queen of England.

1603 Elizabeth I dies, childless, and the Tudor line is ended.

## APPENDIX D

### HOUSE OF STUART, JAMES I TO THE INTERREGNUM

- Jun 19, 1566 James I is born to Mary, Queen of Scots, and Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley.
- 1567 James becomes King of Scotland when his mother abdicates the throne.
- Nov 23, 1589 James I marries Anne, daughter of Frederick II, King of Denmark.
- Feb 19, 1594 Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales, is born to James and Anne.
- Nov 19, 1600 Charles I is born to James and Anne.
- 1603 Elizabeth I, Queen of England, dies.  
James I is proclaimed King of England.
- Nov 1612 Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales, dies
- Mar 27, 1625 James I dies.  
Charles I is proclaimed King of England.
- Jun 13, 1625 Charles I marries Henrietta Maria of France (who was Catholic), daughter to Henry IV, King of France, and sister to Louis XIII.
- May 13, 1629 Charles II is born to Charles I and Henrietta Maria.
- Jan 30, 1649 Charles I is executed for treason.  
Henrietta Maria and infant Charles II flee to France.  
Interregnum—Oliver Cromwell and Parliament take control.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **LIST OF POPES AND DATES OF THE REIGN FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE TUDOR LINE TO THE INTERREGNUM**

Innocent VIII (1484-92)

Alexander VI (1492-1503)

Pius III (1503)

Julius II (1503-13)

Leo X (1513-21)

Adrian VI (1522-23)

Clement VII (1523-34)

Paul III (1534-49)

Julius III (1550-55)

Marcellus II (1555)

Paul IV (1555-59)

Pius IV (1559-65)

Pius V (1566-72)

Gregory XIII (1572-85)

Sixtus V (1585-90)

Urban VII (1590)

Gregory XIV (1590-91)

Innocent IX (1591)

Clement VIII (1592-1605)

Paul V (1605-21)

Gregory XV (1621-23)

Urban VIII (1623-44)

Innocent X (1644-55)