

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Incest and Class in Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

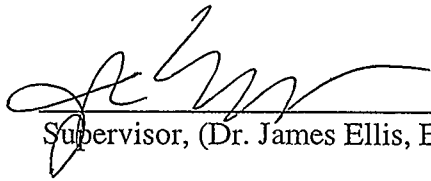
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AUGUST, 2003

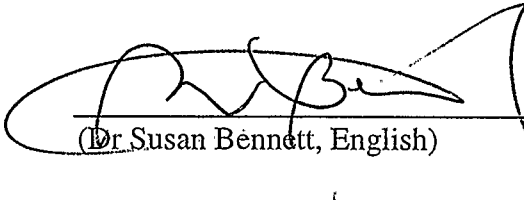
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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of three Jacobean revenge tragedies: John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. In focusing on representations of incest, this study takes the psychoanalytic approach that incest, like all other desire, is social, or non-essential, and thus an aspect of revenge tragedy germane to an analysis of early modern hierarchical social structures and the essentialist ideology on which they depend. Understanding ideological fantasy as homologous to the symptom in that it points to a cultural disturbance without directly comprehending it, this thesis analyses the ideological fantasies that are being played out in these three plays. Specifically, it asks, what fantasies of essentialism do these works play out through representations of incest?

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Introduction

In discussing depictions of incest in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Terri Clerico argues that Giovanni's association of incest with an Edenic state of pre-culture intimates the views of Levi-Strauss and Durkheim; that incest is a "natural" desire and that its prohibition constitutes the founding instance of culture (417). According to this argument, in constructing a highly personalized ideology in which nature is separate from and superior to culture, "Giovanni stands for an interior logic that consciously refutes the possibility of an historical, social or political examination of incest" (417). Clerico argues that because Giovanni separates nature from culture and associates incest with a state of nature that precedes culture, incest in *'Tis Pity* represents nothing more than a rejection of culture, and hence a rejection of, rather than an engagement with, political ideology. Clerico's argument points to a theoretical position that is central to this thesis. When, following Freud, Lacan takes up Levi-Strauss and Durkheim's argument that incest is a natural inclination that exists prior to the subject's entrance into culture, he nevertheless defines it not as "natural" but as a socially motivated impulse. According to Lacan, all desire is social. Our existence in the register of the real is an existence without lack and therefore without desire. We experience ourselves as unified with our surroundings. It is not until the child goes through the mirror stage and, by recognizing itself in the mirror, recognizes itself as an independent entity, that it realizes the possibility of separation from its (m)other. From this point on, the child's existence first in the imaginary, then the symbolic register is marked by lack, a condition that compels it to posit an object as the object of desire. All desire, then, is social. In contrast to Clerico's claim that psychoanalytic theory forecloses the possibility that incest can be used to

represent social or political issues, psychoanalytic theory is productive to a social and political examination of incest in revenge tragedy. Further, if psychoanalysis suggests that desires that are thought to be natural or essential, such as incest, are socially produced, then psychoanalysis provides a theoretical approach germane to the focus of this thesis—essentialist notions of gender and class. This theoretical approach suggests the reason revenge tragedies would employ incest as an agent of an exploration of class and gender ideologies—in theorizing incest as something socially constructed, psychoanalytic theory opens up the possibility that gender and class are also non-essential.

Representations of incest as indicative of the breakdown of the ideology of essentialism and the hierarchical social structures that depend on this ideology for their support will be the subject of this thesis. The three plays that comprise the subject of this investigation are John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, first performed in 1612, Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, first performed in 1622, and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, first performed between 1629-33. While *'Tis Pity* is thought to have been first performed four years after Charles I usurped control from James I, and thus technically falls outside of the Jacobean period, it is often considered to be a Jacobean revenge tragedy. I have chosen to follow the critical tradition of classifying *'Tis Pity* as Jacobean due to its structural and thematic similarities with the tragedy of this period. The breakdown of the hierarchical social structures, specifically those of class, that this thesis posits as the subject of revenge tragedy and that resulted from the end of the feudal system roughly two centuries earlier became the site of intense conflict during the Jacobean period. Christopher Hill points out that during the Jacobean period the rising upper class, specifically the economic power that the members of the House of Commons posed, became a threat to the monarchy that

resulted in ideological dispute over the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which proved to be inadaptably to these new economic circumstances (54). Though I follow critical tradition in classifying *'Tis Pity* as part of the crisis that is epitomized by the reign of James I, I use the terms Jacobean and Elizabethan elsewhere in this thesis to indicate the specific chronological period these terms imply. Thus, this thesis investigates three plays span the period during which revenge tragedy developed as a genre. Significantly, each of these plays depicts an incestuous relationship that progressively increases in explicitness. This thesis will see incest as a symptom, that is, as something that points to a general cultural disturbance that it does not directly comprehend. In order to understand how incest works in revenge tragedy, an understanding of the genre as a whole will be useful.

Revenge tragedy is a category of tragedy that depicts vengeful retribution for crimes or acts thought to be unjust, and emerges and develops during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. As a genre, revenge tragedy draws upon the Senecan tradition in many respects. The ghost motif, according to Fredson Bowers, is a direct result of this tradition since in Seneca, “the revenge is personal, and in cases of true blood-revenge takes on the sense of a religious duty, [and hence] may be prompted by a ghost” (44). Another characteristic of Senecan tragedies is that the revenge is not limited to the offender but may be inflicted on his family as a collective, and the violence of revenge always greatly exceeds the original injury. Bowers further notes that, “innocent or deceived accomplices are sometimes used to help the revenge but never to consummate it” (45). That most revenge tragedies, including the three discussed in this thesis, are set in Italy resulted from the negative view of the Italians held by the English during the early modern period. Italians were thought to be extreme both in their desire to inflict personal revenge, and in the violence their vengeance produced. Thomas

Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, first performed between 1587-89, is thought to be the first tragedy in which revenge is central to the tragic action, and, according to Bowers, "the twenty years after Kyd may be distinctly set apart as the first period in the development of the Elizabethan tragedy of revenge" (109). Bowers defines the prototype initiated by Kyd's play as, "a tragedy whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the deaths of the murderers and often the death of the avenger himself" (62), but many later instances of the genre depart significantly from this formula and the critical definition of the genre has evolved to account for these later modifications.

Hallett and Hallett define the genre narrowly, specifying the binary pair of the revenger with the villain-revenger as its essential feature. In this formulation, the revenger is an essentially moral individual who is driven to the insanity of revenge by the unjustness of the crimes committed against him, in contrast to the villain-revenger, who does not attempt to restrain his "natural" urge to commit revenge. Hallett and Hallett write: "This dichotomy of hero-revenger versus villain-revenger has considerable symbolic importance for the genre. The hero-revenger is one who is led (one might almost say dragged) to revenge by forces outside himself. The villain-revenger is a man prompted to his actions by nothing more than his own cravings" (6). While Hallett and Hallett exclude plays not structured by this dichotomy from the genre, Fredson Bowers proposes a definition that include less traditional plays. Bowers divides the genre into two categories: a pure form and a less pure form. In the unadulterated form, the protagonist vows to revenge an unjust murder and the main action of the play is comprised of his fulfilment of this promise, so that the final catastrophe directly results from the protagonist's vow. Bowers notes: "'Revenge Tragedy' customarily (but by

no means necessarily) portrays the ghosts of the murdered urging revenge, a hesitation on the part of the avenger, a delay in proceeding to his vengeance, and his feigned or actual madness. The antagonist's counter-intrigue against the revenger may occupy a prominent position in the plot" (63-4). In Bowers's broader definition, revenge does not have to constitute the main plot (which may instead be comprised of the tragic situation that necessitates revenge), but revenge must be the cause of the final catastrophe. Further, this broader definition includes plays in which not only the protagonist but also the antagonist seeks revenge, as well as plays in which the revenge is carried out by accomplices acting in the interests of the revenger. The motivation for revenge, "may range from blood-vengeance to jealousy, resentment of injury or insult (real or fancied), or self-preservation" (Bowers 64). Finally, Bowers's second category includes plays in which circumstances rather than the desire of the revenger are primarily responsible for the deaths: "In some few plays, however, the theme of heavenly vengeance results in the destruction of the murderers or injurers either through their machinations against one another or through circumstances not consciously engineered by the revenger" (64). This last point is significant in relation to two of the plays included in this thesis, Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Middleton's *Women Beware Women*. In each of these plays, the final killing spree is part intentional murder and part accidental slaying, and circumstances rather than an individual are responsible for most of the deaths. Since the final play is the most typical of the genre, all three of the plays fall into the revenge tragedy genre.

The first play this thesis will discuss, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, features a Duke (Ferdinand) seeking revenge for his sister's (the Duchess's) marriage. His revenge is motivated by the fact that she marries a man who is her social inferior, as well as by the fact

that Ferdinand desires his sister himself and so would have her remain a widow. When Ferdinand and his brother the Cardinal order a courtier and social upstart, Bosola, to capture, torture, and kill the Duchess, rewarding his service only by pardoning the murder they had themselves commanded, Bosola in turn seeks revenge on the brothers. In his attempt to murder the brothers, he accidentally kills Antonio, the Duchess's husband, which initiates a series of accidental murders that leaves all of the main characters dead.

Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, which will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, takes place in the court and streets of Florence, as well as in the home of one of its working-class citizens, Leantio. *Woman Beware Women* begins just as Leantio returns home after having married Bianca, a noblewoman, without her family's consent. Not surprisingly, Leantio's unsanctioned inter-class marriage proves unstable when the Duke gazes upon Bianca and she becomes the object of his desire. This plot is intertwined with the marriage of another noblewoman, Isabella, to an idiotic but rich Ward, and her incestuous, adulterous relationship with her uncle, Hippolito. Having been rejected by Bianca, Leantio accepts the protection of Hippolito's sister, Livia, forming another inter-class alliance that proves volatile when Hippolito discovers their relationship and kills Leantio. The theme of inter-class marriages that are fated to end unhappily connects *Women Beware Women* to the play that will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis, which offers a very different depiction of inter-class marriage.

John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* depicts class conflict that takes place in the streets and homes of Parma. The cause of this conflict is Annabella, the marriageable daughter of the merchant Florio and, it seems, the universal object of male desire. By the time Florio arranges Annabella's marriage to the nobleman Soranzo, she has already secretly

married her brother, Giovanni, whose love for her is the central issue of the play. Soranzo's discovery of his wife's secret attachment to her brother and the pregnancy it has produced incites him to revenge, but Giovanni forestalls Soranzo's revenge by killing Annabella before dying himself, along with most of the other characters.

I choose these three plays because each of them involves a representation of incest, a topic that, as mentioned above, is germane to an exploration of essentialism. Ferdinand's desire for his sister in *The Duchess* motivates not only his revenge killing of her but also Bosola's attempt to revenge both Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Though it has been convincingly argued that Ferdinand has no wish to actually consummate his desire for the Duchess¹, his desire is nevertheless a prominent aspect of the play. While being relegated to a subplot, the incestuous relationship between Isabella and Hippolito in *Woman Beware Woman* is characterised by deferential child/authoritative parent power relations that are mirrored in the play's other relationships. As well, the Duke's relationship with Bianca is incestuous in that, as the figurative father of the dukedom, she is his child. Finally, in *'Tis Pity*, Giovanni and Annabella not only consummate their incestuous desire, but their union is central to the play's action, as well as the event in which we are most interested. Not only do these three plays depict incest with an increasing degree of explicitness, but they also progress from court drama to city drama. *The Duchess* takes place almost entirely in the court, *Women Beware Women* is split between the court and the city, and *'Tis Pity* takes place entirely in the streets and homes of Parma. That these plays encompass both court and

¹ See Frank Whigham, "Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*," *The Duchess of Malfi: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan. (London: Macmillan Press, 2000) 167-200.

city is interesting with respect to a political reading of them, as well as in relation to the central question of this thesis: what kind of ideological fantasy is being played out in these plays through representations of intra-familial sexual desire? If, as I have argued, representations of incest likely have to do with essentialist notions of subjectivity, then we might rephrase the question: what fantasy of essentialism is being played out through representations of incestuous desire?

In attempting to answer this question, a discussion of competing discourses of essentialism in the early modern period will be useful. Dollimore writes that Jacobean drama emerged at a time when essentialist beliefs were temporarily displaced from the dominant ideology. In the Jacobean period, Christian essentialism was becoming a less dominant ideology, mostly due to the influence of scientific, inductive reasoning. If the soul was thought to have a divine essence, then positivism's replacement of the soul with quantitative qualities as the basis of its essence not only displaces the soul from the centre of man, but also displaces the soul's binary opposite, God. Dollimore maintains that when man (his soul) became severed from its binary opposite, God, humans were not immediately thought of as essentially autonomous and unified but instead, for a period in the early seventeenth century, were thought of as subjects of their social conditions. In this respect, early modern ideology prefigures Marxist materialist ideology, which theorises humans not as beings with an essential nature that transcends the conditions of their existence, but as subject to the modes of production that determine their social conditions. Secular or metaphysical essentialism eventually replaced Christian essentialism, but this did not happen until the end of the seventeenth century. Dollimore maintains that the Jacobean period, while effecting a transition between these two formulations of essentialism, was characterised by a dominant

ideology that approximated anti-essentialism. Dollimore writes: “during that period the essentialist conception of man was in a vulnerable state of transition being, roughly speaking, between its Christian/metaphysical formulations and the later secular/Enlightenment mutations of these” (155). He maintains that the commonly held idea of Renaissance individualism is the result of misattributing metaphysical essentialism to early seventeenth-century thought: “the far-reaching material and ideological changes in Elizabethan and Jacobean England—in particular the break-up of hierarchical social structures and its corresponding increase in social mobility—have been erroneously interpreted in terms of Enlightenment and Romantic conceptions of individuality” (175). These two events were related not to the idea of autonomous individuality but rather in a subjectivity that is divided and heterogeneous. Dollimore writes, “it seems more useful to talk not of the individualism of this period but its self-consciousness, especially its sense of the self as flexible, problematic, elusive, dislocated—and, of course, contradictory: simultaneously arrogant and masochistic, victim and agent, object and effect of power” (179). Thus, during the early seventeenth century, a subjectivity conceived of as lacking a centre, as subject to, and constituted by, social conditions contended with Christian essentialism for ideological sovereignty.

In accepting Dollimore’s interpretation of history in which the Jacobean period is marked by a rejection of essentialism, I am not suggesting that essentialist ideology disappeared. Its residual presence is evident in at least one aspect of the social reality depicted in the plays that will be discussed here—that social rank reflects essential worth. Although this essentialist version of the class system was in the process of decline, its dissolution can neither have been simple, nor immediate. This is because while metaphysical

essentialism functioned as the theoretical underpinning of the class system, it also functioned to regulate early modern England's hierarchical social structures, of which the monarchy was a part. Dollimore contends that the idea that the social hierarchy reflects the order of the universe and God, "survived neither untouched nor as an anachronism, but rather "in significant and complex ways—that is, as an amalgam of religious belief, aesthetic idealism and ideological myth" (6). He argues that it can be invoked in some situations while being denied in others. Further, Jim Ellis has suggested that the deterioration of status categories had more to do with the properties of the self or of the ego than with property in the legal, material sense (1035). He points to Žižek's contention that the fetishization of "intersubjective relations [of submission and domination that characterise feudal society] come to be reified as status, which is experienced by the subject not as a relation, but rather as a property of the self or the ego" (1036). In other words, just as skin and hair colour are properties of the self, social status was experienced as a property of the self. As such, social class was part of the constitution of the ego and renouncing it would have been extremely difficult.

While essentialist notions continued to structure social reality, the emerging conception of the subject as dislocated, fractured, and subject to social conditions, Dollimore argues, necessitates a literary criticism that attempts to discover what is at stake in this drama's depiction of conflicting images of "reality". Dollimore suggests that the internal contradictions and unrealistic quality of revenge tragedy reveal a conflict between opposing conceptions of reality vying for dominance (8). He contends that we analyse revenge tragedy's contradictions in order to see how "Jacobean tragedy discloses ideology as misrepresentation; it interrogates ideology from within, seizing on and exposing its

contradictions and inconsistencies and offering alternative ways of understanding social and political process” (8).

Recent criticism has taken up Dollimore’s critical perspective. Dymphna Callaghan, for example, argues that,

Renaissance tragedy is certainly an arena of an ideological turbulence in which orthodox political, social and religious assumptions of the culture are reproduced, questioned or even contradicted. Tragedy is a political space, and the contradictions generated there are produced by the very terms in which orthodox notions are expressed. These contradictions become the subject matter of tragedy, serving to reinforce, problematise or distort various aspects of the cultural horizon. All this posits a complex relationship (both dynamic and dialectic) between tragedy, ideology, power and the social order. (*Women and Gender* 9)

Relevant to the arguments presented in this thesis is criticism that suggests that Jacobean tragedy reveals contradictions between early modern England’s hierarchical social structures and the essentialist theories of human nature that underpin them. The hierarchical social structures that are ideologically predominant in this period construct the family as a microcosm of the state: just as the father is the natural ruler of his wife and children, the king is the natural ruler of the state. Underpinning this ideology is a belief in the concept of right reason. Douglas Bush describes right reason as,

not merely reason in our sense of the word; it is not a dry light, a nonmoral instrument of inquiry. Neither is it simply the religious conscience. It is a kind of rational and philosophic conscience which distinguishes man from the

beasts and which links man with man and with God. This faculty was implanted by God in all men, Christian and heathen alike, as a guide to truth and conduct. (Bush qtd. in Hallett and Hallett 48)

Hallett and Hallett further explain that right reason was not only the capacity to distinguish good from evil, but even more importantly, the capacity to apply this knowledge to daily life. Hierarchical social structures, then, naturalize moral judgement and action as male qualities, and in attributing these qualities to men while denying their existence in women, it equates women with children in their incapacity for both logical thought and self-control. In other words, it instantiates the capacity for reason as being central to the constitution of sexual difference. Dymphna Callaghan points out the untenable construction of masculinity that results from this ideology:

The dominant ideology of Jacobean England is profoundly hierarchical. It affirms the legitimacy of a patriarchal society in which power emanates from God the Father down through king and lord, to every man whose domain is woman, beast and nature. Such a hierarchy involves a highly conceptualised system of subordinations supported by the providential hand of God himself. Crucially, within this universal hierarchy *man* held a central, if precarious place. (*Women and Gender* 9)

By bringing into question masculinity and thus sexual difference, Jacobean tragedy threatens to undermine the entire hierarchy.

As the base on which the entire structure of social relations is constructed, sexual difference supports the fantasy of essentialism. Consequently, its fragility renders the entire structure volatile, and, since other categories such as class and race were imbricated in this

hierarchy, its fragility also renders their place unstable. Though the plays in this thesis do not present issues of race, all of them engage with issues of class. Class problematized gender since a lower-class man could be superior to an upper-class woman. Callaghan argues that gender is central to all other binary oppositions, intensifying them rather than subsuming them: “An important facet of the centrality and extensibility of the gender opposition is that all subjugated groups are structurally situated in a similar relation to the dominant one, especially since neither gender nor race nor class is a mutually exclusive category” (*Women and Gender* 11). The ultimate effect of a rupture in the ideology of sexual difference is the destabilizing of the monarchy. This explains Hallett and Hallett’s observation that many revenge tragedies (including the ones in this study) depict the highest political authority present in the play, such as a Duke, as tyrannical. Hallett and Hallett write:

The rift is internal and the source of the disturbance is in each case the organ that should be the fountainhead of order and stability, the one person in the state who stands for more than himself. The king, whose only justification for his authority to rule is that he is God’s steward on earth, makes a mockery of the symbol of kingship by using the sacred office to legitimize tyranny, and thus undermines the whole symbolic structure of the civilization. (104)

The effect of rendering categories of gender and class volatile, then, ultimately undermines the authority of the monarchy; this dissolution of hierarchical social structures as a whole was a crucial ideological cause of the civil war that erupted in 1642. Dollimore posits a connection between the undermining of the established institutions of state and church and “a theatre in which they and their ideological legitimation were subjected to sceptical, interrogative and subversive representations” (4). The plays I have chosen to write about all

undermine royal authority by making explicit certain contradictions within this dominant ideology and the essentialist theory of human nature on which it depends. They effect this rupture in ideology by questioning its material basis: all three of the plays, I will argue, play out a fantasy of essential difference only to reveal the contradiction upon which it is based. In arguing this, I am not suggesting that the plays have little to do with the ‘real’ social and political conditions of the time, but rather argue, as Slavoj Žižek does (in a discussion of Kafka) that literature plays out “not a ‘fantasy-image of social reality’ but, on the contrary, the *mise en scène of the fantasy which is at work in the midst of social reality itself*” (36). Žižek’s conception of ideological fantasy, I would like to suggest, will be productive to an understanding of how the fantasies played out in these three revenge tragedies functioned to regulate the social reality of the period. It should be noted that although the theorists I use in this thesis all build on the work of Lacan, I do not directly reference Lacan. This is because Lacan is a notoriously unsystematic writer and often contradicts himself. Consequently, theorists such as Kaja Silverman and Slavoj Žižek reference specific, consistent strains of thought that run through Lacan’s work. Due to this factor as well as to length constraints, I have chosen to reproduce their interpretations of Lacan, as well as sometimes referring to Elizabeth Grosz’s interpretation, which is consistent with that of Silverman and Žižek, in order to provide a foundation to the theory presented here.

Psychoanalytic theorists argue that what we perceive as objective “reality,” is in fact ideological fantasy. According to Žižek, ideological fantasy is homologous to the symptom: its effectivity requires the misrecognition of its underlying form. If we become aware of why it takes the form it does, ideology, like the symptom, dissolves (Žižek 21). Žižek points out that Lacan “locates this discovery [of the symptom] in the way Marx conceived the *passage*

from feudalism to capitalism” (23). Marx maintains that, in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the fetishization of relations between individuals becomes transferred onto commodities. In feudal society, relationships between subjects were fetishized; properties that resulted from the network of symbolic relations between subjects were misrecognized as properties of individual subjects. For example, the quality of submission in the serf and domination in the landowner, while resulting from the structure of intra-subjective relations of which both serf and landowner are elements, appeared to be qualities that each element possessed independently of its relation to the other. In capitalism, a homologous misrecognition occurs, but instead of subjects being thought to possess qualities which are in fact a result of the structure of the network of symbolic relations of which they are a part, these qualities are now transferred onto commodities. Subjects are thought to be free of symbolic relations, that is, to be equal, free agents able to participate in the exchange market. Commodities are thought to have, among properties pertaining to their use-value, the property of value, and an object’s value is misrecognized as a property of that object a priori to its relation to other commodities (Žižek 23-6). This model of the symptom based on commodity fetishism is germane to an analysis of essentialism in revenge tragedy because, just as value is misrecognized as a property of an object in commodity fetishism, qualities such as gender or class are misrecognized as properties of the self in early modern essentialist ideology.

The transition between the feudal system and capitalism, or between the attribution of value to subjects and the attribution of value to objects, is still taking place during the early modern period. Žižek writes that, “The point of Marx’s analysis . . . is that *the things*

(commodities) themselves believe in their place, instead of the subjects” (34). Žižek explains belief as follows:

[The notion that belief is external] seems also to be a basic Lacanian proposition, contrary to the usual thesis that a belief is something interior and knowledge something exterior (in the sense that it can be verified through an external procedure). Rather, it is belief which is radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people. (34)

Žižek differentiates between belief and rational thought: “we find reasons attesting our belief because we already believe; we do not believe because we have found sufficient good reasons to believe” (37). In other words, we do not consciously decide what to believe; belief is social and takes place in the register of the unconscious, which is exterior. Among many examples of belief, Žižek cites Pascal’s example of religious conversion, which Althusser, in his essay “Ideology and the ISAs,” paraphrases “Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe” (158). Similarly, when Ferdinand orders the Duchess to be murdered in The Duchess of Malfi, he believes that she should die as a punishment for marrying outside of her social class, even though he seems not only to be unaware of having ordered her death, but also to question his own authority to do so: “Was I her judge?” (IV.ii.293). Žižek differentiates Pascal’s theory that one can change one’s ideological beliefs by changing one’s actions from behaviourist theories by maintaining that behaviour itself constitutes belief and that, “the final conversion is merely a formal act by means of which we recognise what we have already [unconsciously] believed” (40). Thus, Ferdinand’s act of ordering the Duchess’s death constitutes belief and when he becomes conscious of his act, he simply recognises what he already believes.

Belief, then, occurs in the psychic register of the unconscious. Freud, in *The Project for a Scientific Psychology*, “defines belief as a ‘judgement’ or attribution of ‘reality’” (Freud qtd. in Silverman 17), and maintains that belief exists outside of consciousness. Again, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud suggests that the centre of subjectivity is the unconscious, where reality is established, rather than in consciousness where reality exists in worked-over forms (Silverman 18). In other words, belief functions at the site of the unconscious to determine what we experience as real. Freud’s characterization of the unconscious as external is the basis for Lacan’s characterization of the unconscious as an automaton. Lacan’s definition of the unconscious is “ ‘the automaton (i.e. the dead, senseless letter), which leads the mind unconsciously [sans le savoir] with it’ ” (Lacan in Žižek 37). This explains why Ferdinand seems automated, ordering his will to be carried out by others and even speaking through others.

Locating belief in our material existence, according to Žižek, places it in what we do rather than what we know. In commodity fetishism, people know that money is only the embodiment of a network of social relations, that “there are relations between people behind the relations between things,” but they act as though they do not know (31). Žižek writes, “What they ‘do not know’, what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity—in the act of commodity exchange—they are guided by the fetishistic illusion” (31). Thus in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, when Giovanni enacts upper-class manners, he knows that he belongs to a merchant-class family, but he acts as though he does not know. He misrecognizes that his actions are guided by belief, by an overlooking of the fact that he is a member of the merchant class acting as though he is upper class. Žižek writes, “The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is

structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*” (33). Giovanni’s ignorance of the fact that his aristocratic status is only an illusion is the model of all ideological fantasy or symptom.

To return to the example of commodity fetishism, in identifying this shift, in which what was in feudal times misrecognized as a property of individuals becomes misrecognized as a property of commodities, Marx identified the symptom. Žižek writes:

With the establishment of bourgeois society, the relations of domination and servitude are *repressed*: formally, we are apparently concerned with free subjects whose interpersonal relations are discharged of all fetishism; the repressed truth—that of the persistence of domination and servitude—emerges in a symptom which subverts the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on. This symptom, . . . is precisely the ‘social relations between things.’ (26)

In acting as though the value of a commodity, such as work, is an essential feature of that commodity rather than derivative of its place within the network of symbolic relations between elements, we support the fantasy or symptom of commodity fetishism. An analysis of why the symptom takes the form it does, the form of the fetishisation of commodities, would dissolve the symptom—it would reveal that what we believe to be relations between things are actually relations between people (Žižek 26). A homologous situation occurs in the plays that will be discussed here; in playing out an ideological fantasy, each of these plays draws attention to the form the fantasy takes, to the unconscious, overlooked illusion on which the fantasy is based, which ultimately functions to dissolve the fantasy. Thus, the

“reality” depicted in these plays is what Žižek describes as, “a being which can reproduce itself only in so far as it is misrecognized and overlooked: the moment we see it ‘as it really is’, this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality” (28).

Based on this conception of ideology, Žižek proposes an analysis of ideology that attempts to identify the ideological fantasy that underpins social reality. Since ideological fantasy, like the symptom, dissolves when we understand why it takes the form it does, understanding fantasy’s form is the aim of this analytical approach. Žižek writes: “In contrast to the usual ‘criticism of ideology’ trying to deduce the ideological form of a determinate society from the conjunction of its effective social relations, the analytical approach aims above all at the ideological fantasy efficient in social reality itself” (36). Each of the three plays I have chosen plays out the ideological fantasy of essentialism only to then reveal the unconscious, overlooked illusion on which this fantasy is based.

In the first chapter, I argue that *The Duchess of Malfi* plays out the fantasy of sexual difference as essential only to reveal Ferdinand as a subject of the gaze, or as produced by, rather than a producer of, the symbolic order. While some of the play’s many repetitions function to integrate contingent events into the symbolic order, others repeat traumatically. Repetitions of the first type function to produce the Duchess’s death as a historically necessary, though unjust, martyrdom, as well as to produce Ferdinand and his brother the Cardinal as tyrants whose death constitutes retribution for the Duchess’s murder. While these repetitions effect a cursory reconstruction of the social order, Ferdinand’s incestuous desire repeats traumatically, preventing the complete restoration of the social order by remaining external it. Ferdinand’s incestuous desire is embodied in his transformation into a

lycanthrope, a figure that was then a recognisable icon of the jealous lover. As a lycanthrope, Ferdinand turns the gaze that he had previously directed towards the Duchess upon himself, urging others to cut him open to reveal his inverted state—the hair that grows on the inside of his body. *The Duchess* thus undermines the fantasy of essentialism by drawing attention to the illusion on which it is based—that males produce the social order while females are products of it, or the illusion of sexual difference. Once this illusion is made conscious, that is, once it is revealed as the traumatic kernel underlying essentialist theories of gender, the fantasy of essentialism dissolves.

The second chapter discusses Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* as a play that performs the interrelated fantasies of patriarchal power and aristocratic status as reflecting innate social worth. The analogous relationships of the father to his family and the king to the state form a nexus of patriarchal and aristocratic power structures. *Women Beware Women* depicts a court and city in which patriarchal and aristocratic power reign in the absence of the incest prohibition—the event on which phallic power is presumed to be based. The play contains four intertwined plots depicting relationships that, at the very least, have incestuous undertones. In revealing phallic power as specious, *Women Beware Women* unveils the illusion that legitimizes phallic power—that the prohibition of our “natural” desire for incest is the event that founds culture. The threat that the revelation of the unconscious illusion on which patriarchy is based poses to patriarchal and aristocratic power in *Women Beware Women* is evident in phallic power's resistance to its own dissolution. Rather than dissolving, phallic power legitimizes its force by enacting it, much like the reproduction of power enacted in the masques that take place in each of its acts.

Finally, John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* plays out the fantasy of producing the material support of the class system, endogamy, as historically necessary. Giovanni is delusional in that he identifies with the aristocracy by enacting aristocratic manners in spite of his merchant-class status. This interpretation of Giovanni as functioning under the delusion of his upper-class status argues for a reading of his incestuous desire as a commitment to endogamy, the only marriage pattern that preserves the purity of aristocratic blood. His idealization of his incestuous love for his sister, as well as his misrecognition of it as unavoidable, produce it as historically necessary. Like the fantasies previously discussed, this one comes under the threat of dissolution when Giovanni cuts out Annabella's heart and enters the banquet with her heart on the end of his dagger. His act discloses the illusion upon which the fantasy of class essentialism is based. Not only is her heart not marked with evidence of her aristocratic status, but further, it lacks any markings of essential worth. In playing out an ideological fantasy only to then dissolve it, these dramas do not dissolve ideology into nothingness but instead transform the ideological fantasies into other fantasies. They replace one social reality with another one, which then becomes subject to the same kind of analysis and eventual rupture.

Chapter 1: The Traumatic Dissolution of the Gaze in *The Duchess of Malfi*

In *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Moretti attributes to Jacobean tragedy a subjectivity that invokes the Lacanian ego as automaton: “At the heart of Jacobean tragedy we find a consciousness devoid of autonomy, an agency devoid of freedom” (Moretti qtd. in Coddon 15). While the characters in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* at first seem able to act autonomously, by the end they seem to be motivated by something beyond themselves. Ferdinand denies having ordered the Duchess’s death; Bosola, desiring revenge on behalf of Antonio, accidentally kills Antonio; the Cardinal ensures his own death by unconsciously predicting and effecting its circumstances. The Duchess, because she transgresses her society’s social codes, is the character most capable of self-directed agency, but she becomes the play’s tragic hero and her death in the fourth act seems to signify the demise of any possibility of individual will. In the court she leaves behind, the remaining characters exact a series of revenge killings that, while leaving everyone dead, are entirely accidental and misdirected. In his compulsion to repetitively dig up graves in order to reveal his own guilt for having murdered his sister, the character who should exert a positive influence over the rest of the court, the duke, Ferdinand, is most devoid of agency. His consciousness seems to become subject to the lycanthropia with which he becomes affected. The character that should “reduce both State and people / To a fix’d order” (I.i.5-6) through his innate capacity for superior reason acts without reason at all, that is to say, he believes rather than reasons. As a subject of ideology, he blindly enacts ideological beliefs. He thus acquires a subject position theoretically incompatible with the hierarchical social structure that positions him as the member of society most capable of reason.

Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* is structured through repetitions that are textual, visual, structural, and conceptual. Not only do phrases reiterate with slight changes throughout the play, but visual images or scenes iterate again and again. As well, the action of the play returns, mid-play, to where it began, then repeats, depicting an analogous sequence of events. These repetitions function to present certain events as parallel, and more importantly to set up a contrast between two types of repetition: events that repeat with the effect of achieving integration into the symbolic order contrast with traces of Ferdinand's incestuous desire, which repeats traumatically, or resists integration into the symbolic. The presence of traumatic repetitions in *The Duchess of Malfi* indicates that an unrepresentable social trauma is played out through Ferdinand's incestuous desire. In other words, Ferdinand's desire for the Duchess represents the traumatic injunction that the fantasy structuring social reality in *The Duchess* is structured to efface.

The Duchess of Malfi depicts a social reality in which political rule is tyrannical and chaotic. First performed in 1612, it was both written and initially performed in England under the rule of James I. Elizabeth Brennan explains that Webster based his play on events that took place in Italy during the late fifteenth century, where a woman named Giovanna d'Aragona, upon the death of her husband, became the duchess of Amalfi ruling as regent for her son ("Introduction"ix). The events of the Giovanna d'Aragona's life recorded in various sources, (the earliest English version being William Painter's *Second tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (1567)), approximate the events of Webster's play. Webster takes from these sources not only the conditions of her accession to the duchy but also her secret marriage to one of her servants, and the necessity of hiding her marriage and the birth of three children from her brothers. Webster also mirrors the events recorded a century earlier in his depiction

of the Duchess and her husband, Antonio, being driven into exile by her brothers, who then imprison, and eventually kill, the Duchess and her children (except in the play the oldest of the Duchess's and Antonio's children escapes with Antonio and survives, returning at the end of the play to rule the duchy). While the only evidence recorded that Giovanna d'Aragona was killed while in prison was that she was never seen again, Webster depicts the torture of the duchess by Bosola, the play's malcontent courtier, under the direction of Ferdinand. In Webster's play, the Duchess dies in the fourth act and the events of the final act, a series of revenge killings that miss their intended victims yet kill all of the play's main characters, seem to be Webster's own invention.

Brennan points out that the following aspects of *The Duchess* position it within the revenge tragedy genre: a dumb show scene, which functions to depict two important developments (the Cardinal's official conversion from church official to soldier, and his banishment of the Duchess); the echo from the Duchess's tomb, which fulfils the function of a ghost in that it warns Antonio that he is in danger and reveals that the Duchess is dead; the play's ending, in which almost everyone dies; the presence of madness, which is evident in Ferdinand, The Duchess, Bosola, and in the madmen Ferdinand deploys in his attempt to torture the Duchess; and an allusion to the masque in the madmen's acting out of their madness in the above scene ("Introduction" xiii-xiv). Further, *The Duchess* depicts the usual revenge tragedy motif of the advancement of courtiers, and of the court itself as corrupt and filled with hypocrites and sycophants.

In *A Winter's Snake: Dramatic Form in the Tragedies of John Webster*, Christina Luckyj writes that early modern drama's, "use of repetition was not only a way of mirroring, and thus connecting, different parts of the play, but also a way of emphasizing and

intensifying the development of the tragic action” (xv). She differentiates this strategy from the more recent narrative strategies underlying many critical approaches to early modern drama: “This kind of strategy moves the drama forward, not through a conventional emphasis on the logical progression of the “story,” but through a heightening of its underlying dynamics” (xv). As mentioned above, *The Duchess* is structured by repetitions of which there are two kinds: those that function to integrate the repeated act or event into the symbolic order, and those that repeat without sublimating the event to the symbolic. The first type of repetition functions, I argue, according to Hegel’s theory of repetitions in history. Žižek writes that Hegel developed this theory in relation to Julius Caesar’s death:

When Caesar consolidated his personal power and strengthened it to imperial proportions, he acted ‘objectively’ (in itself) in accordance with historical truth, historical necessity—the republican form was losing its validity, the only form of government which could save the unity of the Roman state was monarchy, a state based upon the will of a single individual; but it was still the Republic which prevailed formally (for itself, in the opinion of the people) To the ‘opinion’ which still believed in the Republic, Caesar’s amassing of personal power . . . appeared an arbitrary act, an expression of contingent individual self-will: the conclusion was that if this individual (Caesar) were to be removed, the Republic would regain its full splendour. But it was precisely the conspirators against Caesar . . . who . . . attested the Truth (that is, the historical necessity) of Caesar: the final result, the outcome of Caesar’s murder, was the reign of Augustus, the first *caesar*.

(Žižek 60)

Caesar's death at the hands of his murderers retroactively confers historical justification on what seemed at the time like an unjustifiable seizure of power. In their reappropriation of political power, his conspirators make Caesar's original usurpation, which had up until the instance of its repetition remained resistant to symbolization, appear as though it was historically necessary. Which is to say that the repetition of Caesar's act, which resulted in the institution of the title "caesar," positioned Julius Caesar's contingent act in the symbolic register.

Hegel's theory of repetitions in history, I argue, can be usefully applied to an analysis of repetitions in *The Duchess*. Examples of this type of repetition can be found in Ferdinand and the Cardinal's speech in the play's first Act. Their speech contains inchoate traces of what will later become the action of the play. The brothers warn the Duchess not to remarry. The Cardinal says:

You may flatter yourself,
And take your own choice: privately be married
Under the eaves of night— (I.ii.236-8)

The Cardinal's subjunctive voice is ostensibly hypothetical but will turn out to be performative. The Duchess does follow her desire to marry Antonio and they do get married in seclusion. The meaning of the Cardinal's truncated utterance becomes fixed by Ferdinand's interruption: "observe: / Such weddings may more properly be said / To be executed, than celebrated" (I.ii.241-3). Ferdinand's warning that her clandestine wedding will be executed rather than celebrated contains an element of truth in that her wedding will initiate the events that lead to her death.

The brothers then prophesise what will result from the Duchess's as yet hypothetical secret marriage. The Cardinal says, "The marriage night / Is the entrance into some prison" (I.ii.245-6). Since Ferdinand's suspicion of the Duchess's sexual activity is confirmed by evidence of her pregnancy, the Duchess's marriage night ("I would have you lead your fortune by the hand, / Unto your marriage bed" [I.ii.408-9]) does cause Ferdinand to imprison her. This iteration continues when, as Kay Stockholder writes, "The Duchess begins courting Antonio by referring to making her will, so that the scene's structure anticipates the plot's movement, in which her marriage will lead directly to her death" (141). Further, Angela Woollam claims that Ferdinand and the Cardinal,

waver between a supra-realist notion of language that holds that words represent absolute things or concepts and [a notion of language that prefigures Derridian deconstruction in its endless deferral of meaning,] . . . [and bring] those semantic assumptions to bear on the act of naming, particularly the naming of the Duchess, in ways that indicate their disbelief in the authenticity of her life and that ultimately deny her being. Her murder thus enacts what has been symbolically rehearsed on a semantic level. (12-13)

While Woollam's comments may well be an accurate description of the play's linguistic aspects, they also describe a process similar to the one I am describing, in which the Cardinal's and Ferdinand's speech produce semantic traces that take on greater signification when they are repeated in the action of the play.

The signification these repeated elements take on, through a series of repetitions that culminates in the Duchess's death, vitiates and even effaces the transgression caused by the Duchess's marriage to Antonio. Christina Luckyj asserts that Webster uses structural

repetition to build expectation rather than surprise. Luckyj writes: "It is clear that the first two acts trace a sequence of events that is largely repeated in the third act. The general outline of both sequences is strikingly similar, and the visual repetition in performance can even be more evident" (21). Although Luckyj's argument is too detailed to reproduce here, she elucidates the following points: the beginning of Act I and Act III parallel each other in that each begins with the meeting of Antonio and Delio, indicating the beginning of a new cycle (18-19); Antonio and Delio's meeting is followed, in each cycle, by a court scene that gets interrupted; each court scene is followed by a private exchange between Ferdinand and Bosola during which a key is presumably exchanged; these scenes are followed by a private, intimate scene between the Duchess and Antonio; each of these scenes is followed by a manifestation of the threat Ferdinand poses to the Duchess; both scenes end with a similar sequence of pursuit to which the Duchess responds by inventing a lie (in the first Act, in order to evade the suspicion that she is sick because she is giving birth, the Duchess lies about her jewels being stolen, and in Act three the Duchess misrepresents Antonio as a thief in order to hide that he has fled the court); both of the Duchess's lies are unsuccessful, and actually give away information (evidence of her child, then the identity of her husband) that leads to her capture and death (20-1). For Luckyj, this reiterative structure functions to lead us to expect the Duchess's death: "The fate of the Duchess is entirely predictable and inevitable, since the machinery of the play has twice put her through the same motions. Her fate is finally sealed in III.iv, the banishment scene, and the whole focus of the audience's interest is now not on what will happen, but on what must happen" (Luckyj 24). In shifting the focus from whether the Duchess should or will die tragically to the ineluctability of her

tragic death, Webster draws attention to the tragedy of her death. The inevitability of her death makes it all the more tragic.

In suggesting that the Duchess's death is, through a series of repetitions, produced as tragic, I am not suggesting that her death would not have elicited an ambiguous moral response. Neither am I suggesting that her character should be read as being exempt from seventeenth-century misogyny which, as Dymphna Callaghan suggests, defines her as sexually incontinent and aberrant (in relation to male normalcy). Callaghan asserts that, "Pregnancy in particular becomes evidence of monstrous sexual desire, and was, as Peter Stallybrass points out, punished as criminal deviance" (*Woman and Gender* 143). Bosola's reaction to the Duchess when he suspects that she is pregnant reveals his repulsion, a response the audience would have at least to some extent shared: "I observe our Duchess / Is sick a-days, she pukes, her stomach seethes, / The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue, / She wanes i'th' cheek, and waxes fat i'th' flank" (II.i.66-9). The ambiguous nature of the Duchess's transgression is evident in the contradiction between the misogynist discourse that constructs her throughout the play and the sympathetic response her death nevertheless elicits. Callaghan writes, "The pregnant woman is implicitly set against the norm, man, and only later redeemed as the good mother in order to sentimentalise the Duchess's death" (*Woman and Gender* 145). Her stoic acceptance of her fate during her imprisonment sentimentalises her death. Even her murderer recognises her virtue and laments killing her. Immediately after her death (which is in itself a repetition because she appears to die, briefly wakes up, then actually dies) Bosola laments: "Oh sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps / On turtle's feathers: whilst a guilty conscience / Is a black register" (IV.ii.349-51). By the time the Duchess dies, she has effected the transition from transgressor to saint.

While the Aragonian brothers are obviously corrupt, the Duchess's reification secures them as tyrannical. Nicholas Brooke points out that the Duchess's death in act four is repeated in act five (6-61). The Duchess's dying words, "What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut / With diamonds? (IV.ii.14-15), are echoed in Ferdinand's dying words, "My sister! O! my sister! there's the cause on't: / *Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust / Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust*" (V.v.71-3). This repetition sets up an antithetical parallel between the Duchess's death (which functions to produce her as tragic victim) and Ferdinand's death (which functions to pay for the immoral murder of the Duchess). Just as the repetitions ending in the Duchess's death constitute her as tragic, a series of repetitions ending in the deaths of the Aragonian brothers produces their deaths as retribution for the Duchess's unjust murder.

The Cardinal, attempting to prevent the servants from entering Ferdinand's chamber so that he can, first, have Bosola remove Julia's body, then kill Bosola, categorically prohibits the courtiers from entering Ferdinand's chamber that evening:

CARDINAL. You shall not watch tonight by the sick Prince;

His Grace is very well recover'd.

. . . .

And though you hear him in his violent fit,

Do not rise, I entreat you.

PESCARA. So sir, we shall not—

CARDINAL. Nay, I must have your promise

Upon your honours, for I was enjoin'd to't

By himself; and he seem'd to urge it sensibly.

....

It may be to make trial of your promise

When he's asleep, myself will rise, and feign

Some of his mad tricks, and cry out for help,

And feign myself in danger.

MALATESTES.

If your throat were cutting,

I'll'd not come at you, now I have protested against it. (5.4.1-2, 6-10,13-17)

This section echoes in the events of the play when Bosola, knowing that the Cardinal plans to kill him, enters the chamber to kill the Cardinal. Ferdinand, confused about what is happening, does kill both the Cardinal and Bosola in a violent fit. About to have his throat cut by Antonio, the Cardinal's calls for help are useless. His cry, "The sword's at my throat!" solicits only the response, "You would not bawl so loud then" (V.v.26). While some of the courtiers actually do attempt to rescue the Cardinal, their decision to enter Ferdinand's chamber is delayed by the Cardinal's injunction and they arrive too late.

Luckyj points out that Bosola's killing of the Duchess in Act IV, scene ii repeats in Bosola's killing of Antonio, then of the Cardinal in the final scene:

As Antonio dies, Bosola likely assumes a kneeling position beside Antonio's prone body that visually recalls his position at the deaths of the Duchess and Julia. . . . As Bosola had told the Duchess of her family's survival, he tells Antonio of his family's death. Visual and verbal echoes link the two scenes, as Bosola again finds himself in the position of an involuntary murderer. In the second action, following the Cardinal's vision of hell, Bosola stabs the Cardinal. . . . the Cardinal's death at Bosola's hands echoes that of the

Duchess. He cries 'Mercy' to Bosola, as the Duchess had done earlier, and he appears to drop to his knees at the moment of death, again like the Duchess.

Bosola's words ['thou fall'st faster of thyself, than calamity / Can drive thee' (V.v.42-3)] imply that the Cardinal kneels, then falls. (Luckyj 98-9)

The point of this repetitive structure, for Luckyj, is to depict the Duchess's murderers as, "men who cannot but mechanically repeat their crimes, even as they attempt to redress them" (99). Repetition functions in *The Duchess* to make this final repetition, the death of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, historically necessary in order to, at least superficially, restore order.

This repetition functions in binary opposition to the Duchess's torture and death. Just as the repetitions that end with her death produce the Duchess's merit, the death of the remaining characters produce their rule as tyrannical. In both cases, the deaths seem historically necessary. The deaths of the Duchess's oppressors restore the fantasy that regulates the social reality of the play—that power is not contingent. That their death is a sacrifice necessary to restore social reality is evident in the scene's multiple references to the idea that immoral acts must be paid for: The Cardinal, dying, says, "Oh Justice: / I suffer now for what hath former bin / *Sorrow is held the eldest child of sin*" (5.5.52-54); Ferdinand, also dying, says, "*Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with out own dust*" (71-2); and the Cardinal points out that Bosola is also paying for his acts with his life: "Thou hast thy payment too" (73). If their deaths achieve anything, it is the restoration of the symbolic order through the appearance of justice.

Bosola's last words affirm that the debt is to the symbolic order:

It may be pain: but no harm to me to die

In so good a quarrel. Oh this gloomy world,
 In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness
 Doth, Womanish, and fearful, mankind live?
 Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
 To suffer death or shame for what is just." (5.5.98-103)

Bosola's willingness to die is not that surprising since, according to McCloskey, "Having come tardily to a complete and complex reading of the Duchess, he responds to the heroism of her death by committing himself to her cause: "somewhat I will speedily enact / Worth my dejection" (IV ii 374-75). He enters the fifth act of the play a moral agent" (48). Bosola's surprising statement that he does not mind dying because his individual sacrifice serves the greater good can be interpreted as meaning that his death works to sustain ideological fantasy. Yet the restoration of ideological fantasy achieved through the deaths of the Duchess's murderers is, at best, specious. Theodora Jankowski writes of the ending: "By foregrounding the male characters, [Act V] attempts to contain all of the subversive aspects of the Duchess's rule and restore patriarchal order. And yet the containment is far from complete because the restored order is so dubious" (244). Even the deaths of three people fail to contain the Duchess's subversive act and tragic death.

The resistant kernel that prevents the restoration of patriarchal order is represented by the repetition of Ferdinand's incestuous desire. While the majority of the play's repetitions function to sustain ideological fantasy, its series of repetitions suggesting Ferdinand's incestuous desire for the Duchess effectively undermine that fantasy. Unlike the repetitions discussed up until this point, Ferdinand's incestuous desire for the Duchess resists integration into the symbolic. In its refusal to accede to the symbolic order, Ferdinand's incestuous

desire is a traumatic repetition. Freud explains the process of traumatic injunction in his

Introductory Lectures:

An experience which we call traumatic is one which within a very short time subjects the mind to such a very high increase of stimulation that assimilation or elaboration of it can no longer be effected by normal means, so that lasting disturbances must result in the distribution of the available energy of the mind. (275)

The ego, assaulted with more information than it can process, prevents its own dissolution by refusing to process information. Instead, the information or event enters the unconscious uncognized. Although the experience has occurred, the subject has no memory of it, but instead experiences apparently unrelated symptoms. These symptoms result from the uncognized experience repeatedly resurfacing in an attempt to enter the subject's consciousness.

Like a repetition caused by psychic trauma, Ferdinand's incestuous desire surfaces over and over again in the play but never repeats in actions nor even receives direct expression in language. Its failure to achieve integration into the symbolic order suggests the traumatic repetition's failure to enter the victim's consciousness. Instead, it remains trace-like by remaining deeply submerged in the figure of lycanthropy. Citing historical precedent, Elizabeth Brennan claims that Ferdinand's Lycanthropia identifies him as the Duchess's jealous (would be) lover: "In *Theatrum Mundi*, which first appeared in English circa 1566, Pierre Boaistuau declared that if lovers were jealous they became mad and played the lycanthrope. In his *Erotomania*, published in France in 1612, Jacques Ferrand wrote of lovers becoming wolf-mad" ("Brother and Sister" 494). Given that Ferdinand's incestuous desire,

figured as lycanthropia, takes the form of traumatic repetitions, the obvious question that arises is, what sort of trauma is represented by Ferdinand's desire? In looking at the question, I would like to suggest that Lynn Enterline's discussion of Ferdinand's failure to master the scopophilic drive will be productive.

First, however, it will be useful to look at the traumatic repetition of Ferdinand's desire. Enterline points out that Ferdinand's lycanthropic activity begins as melancholia and turns into lycanthropia. Consequently, the repetition of his lycanthropic acts begins before his conversion into a lycanthrope: upon discovering that the Duchess is pregnant, he "anticipates his lycanthropic nocturnal activity among the dead by exclaiming, 'I have this night digg'd up a Mandrake . . . And I am growne mad with't' (II.v. 1-3)" (Enterline 111); then, after the duchess dies, Ferdinand says, "The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up: / Not to devour the corpse, but to discover / The horrid murther" (IV.ii.303-5). The Duchess's death, over which Ferdinand grieves in this last example, seems to be the event that causes his conversion into a full-blown lycanthrope. When we first hear of Ferdinand after the Duchess's death, the doctor relates that the duke's condition causes him to, "Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night, / And dig dead bodies up" (V.ii.10-11). Enterline writes:

Ferdinand's nocturnal activity at the grave . . . seems to signify his crime and also to be a way to suffer over that loss Psychoanalysis would characterize Ferdinand's return to the grave to 'discover' his sister's body again . . . as evidence of a trauma. While these repetitions could be read simply as his way to symbolize, and thus to master, the wounding event, psychoanalysis has, since Freud, questioned the notion that repetition enables

such mastery. Rather, Ferdinand is condemned to keep feeling his pain over and over again. (104-5)

While Ferdinand's lycanthropia is ostensibly caused by the guilt he feels about killing the Duchess, as well as his unfulfilled incestuous desire for her, the way that lycanthropia functions in the play reveals what is at stake in Ferdinand's trauma.

Ferdinand's lycanthropia is presented as the effect of a crisis involving the scopic drive. Webster's connection of Ferdinand as the Duchess's lover to a crisis in the scopic field makes sense in relation to the belief prevalent in the early modern period that one's love object infected the lover's eyes. In the context of a convincing discussion of *The Duchess's* depiction of "a crisis of not enough difference in sexual difference" (91), Enterline discusses how images of looking and being seen in *The Duchess* reveal Ferdinand's failure to master the scopic drive. Since Enterline's argument relies on Lacan's mirror stage, a brief explanation will be useful. Elizabeth Grosz explains that the mirror stage inscribes the child in the social field. A child around six months old will begin to recognise its mirror image as the reflection of itself. Upon this recognition, children, unlike their animal counterparts, experience jubilation. This jubilation, however, coincides with the child's recognition of lack or absence in that once it recognises its appearance as a unified entity, the child understands itself as an entity that can be separated from other entities, such as its mother. In contrast to its existence in the register of the Real where the child, not knowing where its body ends and the external world begins, experiences unity, the mirror stage inserts the child into the imaginary register, "the order of images, representations, doubles, and others" (Grosz 35) where it begins to form an image of its own identity by comparing its image to the images of others. Grosz writes:

The mirror stage relies on and in turn provides a condition for the body-image or imaginary anatomy, which in turn helps distinguish the subject from its world. By partitioning, dividing, representing, inscribing the body in culturally determinant ways, it is constituted as a social, symbolic, and regulatable body. It becomes the organizing site of perspective, and, at the same time, an object available to others from their perspectives—in other words, both a subject and an object. (37-8)

While inscribing the child within language as both subject and object, the mirror stage's reliance on the visual field creates the impression that a separation between subject and object exists.

Since the child's identification with its mirror image requires it to accept its visual image over all other sensory and proprioceptive information, the visual field assumes a position of primacy in relation to the functioning of the ego. Further, the visual field is unlike other sensory mechanisms in that it allows a complete separation of subject from object. Grosz writes: "Of all the senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object" (38). Consequently, the visual field effectively dominates other sensory information. The concept of space provided by all other senses is, according to Lacan, "hierarchically organized and structured in terms of a centralized, singularized point-of-view by being brought under the dominance of the visual" (Grosz 38). The effects of vision's dominance over all other sensory perceptions becomes most significant when the child passes through the Oedipus complex. At this point, the child visually differentiates between those who have a phallus and those lacking it, and understands that those with the phallus occupy a primary place within the symbolic order. Grosz writes: "Lacan's

ocularocentrism—his vision-centredness—in complicity with Freud’s, privileges the male body as a phallic, virile body and regards the female body as castrated” (Grosz 39). While Ferdinand should assume the proper male subject position of viewer in relation to the Duchess who becomes the object under view, Enterline contends that, in contrast to the normative male subject, Ferdinand fails to master the scopic drive: by positioning the Duchess as both subject and object of the gaze, he fails to reduce the Duchess to a subject characterized by lack.

The scopic field initially depicted in *The Duchess* reproduces the traditional male as subject/female as object division in subjectivity. Enterline writes: “Indeed, from this first figuring of her as a mirror, the Duchess appears as a body *everyone* is trying to look at. And the figures Webster uses for the body veiled in a woman’s dress circle around possible states in which she might be viewed: during sex, pregnant, or dead” (86). Although only an image conjured in his imagination, Ferdinand sees her during sex when he receives Bosola’s letter informing him that the Duchess is indeed pregnant:

Methinks I see her laughing,
Excellent hyena! Talk to me somewhat, quickly,
Or my imagination will carry me
To see her in the shameful act of sin. (II.v.38-41)

The interior of Duchess’s pregnant body becomes something that Bosola and Ferdinand try to see. Bosola attempts to discover the interior of the Duchess’s body by purging it. He gives her apricots, a fruit that, according to Dymphna Callaghan, was thought during the seventeenth century to “potentially operate as an abortifacient” (*The Duchess* 17). Having failed in his

attempt to purge her body, Bosola describes wanting to see beneath the Duchess's clothing, and, as Enterline suggests, her skin:

How greedily she eats them!

A whirlwind strike off these bawd farthingales,

For, but for that, and the loose-bodied gowne,

I should have discover'd apparently

The young springal cutting a caper in her belly. (II.i.152-6)

Enterline reads this episode in the context of the earlier events of this scene, in which Webster sets up the idea that the skin is another layer, beyond clothing, that lies between the viewer and the Duchess's interior. This idea is first alluded to in Bosola's jokes about a woman being flayed. After criticising an old woman's cosmetics (which is another scopic image since cosmetics were suspected in the Jacobean period of concealing the truth of a woman's underlying appearance) he tells her, "There was a lady in France, that having had the smallpox, flayed the skin off her face, to make it more level" (II.i.28-9). Bosola's depiction of a woman flaying her own face suggests that the skin itself hides the true "level" appearance of her face. This idea surfaces again when, "In the lines that preface his speculation about the Duchess's pregnancy, Bosola imagines the skin as the diseased '*outward* forme of man'—as a kind of veil itself lying beneath the further veil of '*rich tisswe*' (2.I.46-60)" (Enterline 87). This depiction of the scopic drive as violent continues in the next scene when it takes as its object the torture and death of the Duchess.

Enterline's argument that Ferdinand fails to master the scopic drive focuses primarily on his prison theatre, where "Ferdinand stages a variety of spectacles for his sister that conclude around the spectacle of his sister" (83). She describes how we watch the Duchess,

sometimes through Ferdinand's eyes, and the Duchess in turn watches the "tedious theatre" that Ferdinand stages for her (IV.i.83). Since the Duchess is both object and subject of looking, the traditional hierarchy that depicts the male as the subject and the female as the object of the gaze reveals itself as more complicated. Further, the Duchess usurps the position of viewer from Ferdinand, who now refuses to see the duchess at all, and avoids doing so by only entering her prison chamber in the dark. As Enterline writes:

For the Duchess to see or be seen at all in her twin's prison-theater tinges seeing with a distinctly sexual hue. Standing next to her in the dark, Ferdinand understands her desire in visual terms: 'indeed / You were too much i'th'light' (4.1.50). As Bosola also informs her, the Duke has refused to see her out of shame: 'Cause once he rashly made a solemne vowe / Never to see you more; he comes i'th'night' (27-28). The very lights on Ferdinand's stage go out because her sexuality has made it impossible for him to look at her. . . . Ferdinand turns them up again only to illuminate his punitive spectacles: a "dead-mans hand" and 'the artificiall figures of Antonio and his children, appearing as if they were dead' (4.I.61-71). (93)

Ferdinand's failure to master the scopic drive becomes most evident in his inability to look at the Duchess's dead body. In response to Bosola's order, "Fix your eye here" Ferdinand replies, "Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle" (IV.ii.255, 259). Ferdinand's sexual desire for the Duchess has, by this point in the play, effaced the presumed separation between viewer and viewed.

Enterline then suggests not only the breakdown but also the inversion of the traditional hierarchy of looking. This inversion occurs when the Duchess's death produces an

effect upon her primary viewer by effectively turning him into a lycanthrope. According to Enterline, “A dynamic interference defines the play’s visual register: while a masculine ‘viewpoint’ may be shaping and controlling the terms by which the Duchess is represented in his play (as something to be looked at), that viewpoint is itself distorted by the pressure of the object on which it looks. . . . Immediately after telling Bosola to cover the dazzling face of his dead sister, Ferdinand predicts the consequences for his own form” (95):

Bosola Who shall dare
 To reveal this?
 Ferdinand. Oh, I’ll tell thee:
 The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up;
 Not to devour the corpse, but to discover
 The horrid murder. (IV.ii.301-4)

As though to make clear that his transformation into a beast has resulted from the previous scene’s undermining of the illusion of scopic mastery, Ferdinand, having just been diagnosed as a lycanthrope, exclaims, “I have cruel sore eyes” (V.ii.62). While Ferdinand’s prison theatre, like visual perception, manifests as a means to control others from a distance (in this case the Duchess), Ferdinand finds himself involved in his own spectacle. Enterline writes: “Webster suggests through the female subject something like Lacan’s understanding that the gaze inscribes the subject in a larger social field. Looking is a ‘lure,’ a condition in which the subject that believes itself master is in fact ‘subjected,’ caught up in a visual as much as a linguistic field that no person controls” (97-8). To think back to the question raised earlier in this section of what kind of social trauma is represented through the repetition of Ferdinand’s incestuous desire figured in his lycanthropic condition, I argue that the realisation that he is

object as much as subject to the symbolic field constitutes the trauma depicted here. In rejecting the belief that certain members of a society control the social field while others are subject to it, early modern subjects were left with universal subjection to ideology, or with the realisation that instead of being in control of ideology, ideology controls us. While Enterline's discussion of the scopic drive ends with Ferdinand's "cruel sore eyes," I argue that extending it to include the effects of Ferdinand's subjection to the visual and linguistic field "that no person controls" can explain the automated behaviour that characterises Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola in the last act of the play.

In the image of the Duke, the highest level of social hierarchy, turning into a beast, the lowest level, and of Ferdinand's lycanthropic body as hairy on the inside, Ferdinand's lycanthropy signifies inversion, primarily, the inversion of the scopic drive upon himself. But rather than just affecting Ferdinand, the effect of this traumatic knowledge spreads, seeming to affect all of the play's remaining characters by turning them into characters that seem to have a "consciousness devoid of autonomy, an agency devoid of freedom," as described by Moretti (qtd. in Coddon15). (Given that gender differentiation positions men as subjects and women as objects, it may be significant that all of the characters that remain alive after Ferdinand's conversion, except for Julia who quickly dies, are male.) The inversion signified by Ferdinand's lycanthropy is evident in the repetition of the desire to see within the Duchess's pregnant body, as well of the images of flaying. Now Ferdinand urges those looking at him to cut him open with their swords in order to gaze upon the "hairy" interior of his body:

two nights since

One met the Duke, 'bout midnight in a lane

Behind St. Mark's church, with the leg of a man
 Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully:
 Said he was a wolf: only the difference
 Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
 His on the inside: bad them take their swords,
 Rip up his flesh, and try. (V.ii.12-19).

The image of flaying resurfaces again when Ferdinand claims that he wants to flay the doctor, "I will stamp him into a cullis; flay off his skin, to cover one of the anatomies" (V.ii.75-6). In contrast to the desire to see within the female body that dominated the play up until the Duchess's death, here the desire to turn the interior of the body into a spectacle affects male bodies.

Having come to understand his lack of mastery of the visual field, Ferdinand's eyes no longer seem to function; the Cardinal says of Ferdinand, "The noise and change of object in his eye / Doth more distract him" (V.iv. 4-5). Further, Ferdinand's displacement from a position of mastery in relation the scopic drive and the symbolic order explains the darkness in which the final scene takes place. If Ferdinand's belief that he is in control of the gaze figures as his ability to control the lighting in the Duchess's prison theatre, the ideology to which Ferdinand has become subject is signified by the darkness in which the final murders take place. Antonio, having been accidentally slayed by Bosola, replies to Bosola's question, "What art thou?" (V.iv.47) with, "A most wretched thing / That only have thy benefit in death, / To appear myself" (47-9). A servant brings in a lantern at this point to reveal Antonio, who, it seems, can only be seen once dead. Ferdinand, not knowing that Bosola has entered his room, reveals that he plans to kill Bosola in the dark: "it must be done i'th' dark"

(V.iv. 36). Bosola kills Ferdinand, but acts as the agent of some force external to himself, which he calls, "it." When the Cardinal discovers that Bosola has entered into his chamber, Bosola tells him, "Thus it lightens into action: I am come to kill thee" (V.v.10-11). The darkness in which all of the final characters kill each other signifies their lack of autonomy. The Cardinal intends to kill Bosola, and Bosola intends to kill the Aragonian brothers, but while each of these characters die, all of the murders occur in a way that deprives the murderer of agency. As Bosola kills Antonio under the assumption that he is one of the Aragonian brothers, Bosola says, "Fall right my sword" (V.iv.44), depicting the sword rather than himself as the agent of murder. The Cardinal deprives himself of agency when he orders the servants not to respond to his calls for help. He has lost the ability to speak, or, more accurately, to be heard. Ferdinand has lost agency through his madness. He delivers the fatal wound to the Cardinal, believing that the Cardinal is a threat to him: "The Devil? / My brother fight upon the adverse party" (V.v.50-1). Ferdinand also kills Bosola, but in a scuffle rather than with intent.

Bosola explicitly announces the lack of agency that affects them. He states that they, "are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded / Which way please them" (V.iv.53-4). Dollimore points out that Webster alters his source material here in order to depict the remaining characters as automatons: Dollimore writes, "As Alan Sinfield has shown, the important point [in the tennis ball borrowing] is what Webster declines to take from his source material, namely the explicit reassurance that what appears arbitrary is in fact divinely ordained" (67). The divine ordination that underpins hierarchical social structures entirely disappears in *The Duchess*.

Since Ferdinand represents the king in the play's microcosmic version of the state, his vacuousness is most indicative of the consequences of the traumatic knowledge that the social order controls us. This is evident in Webster's depiction of Ferdinand as consistently acting through others. Frank Whigham's interpretation of Ferdinand's behavior is analogous to my contention that he attempts to visually control a social order that, the play eventually reveals, controls him. According to Whigham, Ferdinand attempts to control and thus distance himself from his social inferiors by "eschewing participation and employing prosthetic agents: 'He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's suits / With others' ears' (I.i.122-3)" (171). Ferdinand's attempt to distance himself, however, fails because by constantly having to reinforce his distance, he becomes dependent on them: "His embattled sense of excellence insists on ontological separation from those below, but his frenetic iteration of the motif suggests a strategic failure" (172). In his attempt to distance himself from the lower classes and women, Ferdinand inserts himself as an object into the symbolic field occupied by those of lower status. This occurs when he orders the death of the Duchess, then seems to be himself subject to a greater power:

Ferdinand. By what authority did'st thou execute

This bloody sentence?

Bosola.

By yours—

Ferdinand:

Mine? was I her judge? (IV.ii.292-3)

Ferdinand's failure to master the scopic and linguistic fields position him as a subject of a social order over which he lacks control, that is, as a subject characterized by Lacan's unconscious as automaton. That even Ferdinand (symbolically the king) is subject to, rather than possessor of, the phallus ("part, which, like the lamprey, / Hath n'ev'r a bone in't" that

becomes the “smooth tale” of a “neat knave” (I.ii.255-8)) unveils political power as contingent.

The contingency of political power, then, is the knowledge represented by the traumatic repetition of Ferdinand’s lycanthropy throughout the play. By contrasting repetitions that function to integrate events into the symbolic register versus those that repeat traumatically—resisting sublimation into the symbolic—*The Duchess* draws attention to this traumatic knowledge. Repetitions function to produce the Duchess as a tragic heroine and the brothers as tyrannical rulers. Consequently, the death of the Aragonian brothers ostensibly functions to restore political order. Yet rather than effecting a seamless restoration of the play’s power relations by paying for the crime of the Duchess’s murder with the deaths of her murderers, this resolution is revealed as superficial by the traumatic repetitions that continually plague it. The trauma represented by Ferdinand’s incestuous desire for his sister and figured as lycanthropy plays out in his failure to master the scopic drive. As a lycanthrope, Ferdinand inverts the scopic drive by turning it upon himself. Instead of assuming the privileged position of object of the gaze, Ferdinand, and consequently the play’s other male characters, becomes subject to the visual and symbolic registers. The darkness of the final scene, as well as the quality of automation that characterises the remaining characters as they accidentally kill each other, depicts them as suffering the consequences of failing to secure sexual difference through the mastery of the scopic drive. *The Duchess*’s failure to secure sexual difference reveals that power is contingent. Ferdinand is disclosed as being not naturally in possession of the qualities of an ideal ruler but neither is anyone else in the play. Thinking back to the way that Hegel’s theory of repetitions in history function in *The Duchess*, it is evident that political power is legitimised simply by the

repeated exercise of it. Repetitions function to make events that, in the first instance of their occurrence, appear contingent, appear upon their repetition as though they are historically necessary. Power, then, is derived not from some latent content (metaphysical ordination) behind its manifest content, but from why its manifest content takes the form it does. This idea will be returned to in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: The Failure of the Incest Prohibition and The Reproduction of Patriarchal Power In *Women Beware Women*

In Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* Isabella, about to be married to a violently phallic idiot, says, "no misery surmounts a woman's! / Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters" (I.ii.177-8). Middleton's depiction of Isabella's situation is both compelling and modern, and many critics have commented on Middleton's compassionate depiction of his female characters, as well as the number of prominent female characters in his plays. Middleton's empathic understanding of women not only portrays them as conscious of their status as subordinate to men, but also as aware of their role as objects to be exchanged in the relations between men. Isabella marries the rich Ward, yet enters into an incestuous relationship with her uncle, Hippolito, and her description of the Ward as a "cater[er]" who "provides / All for another's table" (III.iii.41-2) reveals her status as a commodity: the Ward purchases her without knowing that Hippolito actually consumes her. The empathic understanding of women that has been noted by critics, then, says as much about the effects of patriarchy on men as on women.

The male characters Middleton depicts in *Women Beware Women* wield a patriarchal power that is totalizing and oppressive. Fabritio is solely concerned with the price he can get for the marriage of his daughter, Isabella; Hippolito is driven by incestuous desire; Guardiano is cold and machiavellian; Sordido plays the role of a slave trader in Isabella and the Ward's marriage negotiations; the Ward's idiocy masks violent misogyny; the Cardinal is seemingly vapid in his exercise of patriarchal authority; and the Duke is a rapist. It seems that the end of the power they effect is the exploitation of their social inferiors. Middleton's depiction of the

self-interested exercise of power does more than just reveal the potential for its abuse inherent in hierarchal social structures; it exposes the underlying conditions of patriarchy. Freud argues that patriarchy requires first, the introduction of sexual difference (that the male child recognise his position as a producer of culture, and the female child recognise hers as a product), and second, that both male and female children renounce their primary love-object, the opposite sex parent. *Women Beware Women* depicts a social reality in which the first of these conditions has been effectively reproduced while the second has not. The resultant splitting of the underlying conditions of patriarchal power, I argue, is crucial to understanding *Women Beware Women*; patriarchal social structures reproduce the spectacle of their power while revealing themselves as void of authority.

Like *The Duchess*, *Women Beware Women* retells a story alleged to be based on events that took place in Italy and that were recorded in Malespini's *Ducento Novelle* (Gill xv). The play begins with Leantio, a lower-class citizen, having just returned to Florence from Venice with a "gentlewoman" Bianca, whom he has just married without the permission of her family. Leantio leaves Bianca in the care of his mother while he returns to work as the servant of a nobleman. While watching a procession of the Duke and his brother, Lord Cardinal, Bianca catches the Duke's attention and admiration, and from this point on, despite the objections of the Cardinal, the Duke conspires to make Bianca his mistress, which he eventually achieves through raping her. This plot intersects with one that involves members of the Duke's court. Fabritio plans to marry his daughter, Isabella, to the Ward, a foolish but rich man. Fabritio's brother, Hippolito, reveals to Isabella that he is in love with her, and although she rejects on moral grounds the idea of an incestuous relationship at first, she changes her mind after her aunt, Livia, lies to her, telling her that she is not related to

Hippolito through blood because her mother committed adultery. Isabella concedes to marry the Ward in order to hide her relationship with Hippolito, but eventually the truth is revealed, leaving not only the Ward and his guardian, but also Livia (whose lover, Leantio, has been killed by Hippolito) desirous of revenge. While having less of the typical markings of revenge tragedy than *The Duchess* (there are no ghosts or madness), two revenge tragedy motifs are repeatedly juxtaposed throughout the play: incestuous desire and the spectacle of the masque (and other masque-like court entertainments), the final masque resulting in the genre's usual mass killing of its participants. By juxtaposing these two plot elements, Middleton relates them in a very specific way. If the masque represents the reproduction of power through its performance, then incest connotes something about the power that is being reproduced. In this chapter, I argue that patriarchal power is unveiled in a particular way; *Women Beware Women* plays out a fantasy in which patriarchal power is reproduced, yet reveals that the reasoning on which it is based is empty. Kaja Silverman's analysis of specular and structural identification will be productive in understanding how *Women Beware Women* exposes the speciousness of patriarchal power structures.

Silverman relies on Lacan's contention that all subjects are based on lack. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the child's entrance into the imaginary register, a transition that takes place through the mirror stage, marks the child as a subject of lack. Having gone through the mirror stage, the child no longer experiences the unity that characterised its existence in the real. Silverman points out that this subject of lack "which Lacan calls the '*je*'" is antipathetic to the ego, and, "is devoid both of form and of object; it can perhaps best be defined as pure lack, and hence as 'desire for nothing'" (Lacan qtd. in Silverman 4). In contrast to the *je*, which exists in the real, the *moi* is fictive and imaginary.

Silverman writes: “The *moi* is the psychic ‘precipitate’ of external images, ranging from the subject’s mirror image and the parental imagoes to the whole plethora of textually based representations which each of us imbibes daily” (3). In recognising itself in these images, the ego actually misrecognises itself. Yet, while the ego is fictive, it nevertheless determines what we experience as real.

No longer existing in the real, which Lacan defines as “the lack of lack,” (Lacan qtd. in Grosz 71) the subject is marked by undirected desire, which the ego attempts to satisfy by positing an object as the object of its desire. The ego allows us to live the *je*’s desire for nothing through fantasy, or by providing a matrix by which an object can be posited as the object of our desire. The ego, or the subject’s own bodily image, is the model for all objects that occupy the position of the object of desire, hence Lacan’s statement, “it is ‘one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level’” (Lacan in Silverman 4). For Lacan, fantasy involves not only images in relation to which the ego can recognise itself, but also a structure within which the fantasy can play out. Laplanche and Pontalis call this tableau that corresponds to the subject’s world as a whole the *fantasmatic*. Silverman defines the *fantasmatic* as, “the unconscious prototype for all dreams and fantasies, and . . . the structuring scenario behind symptoms, transferences and other instances of repetitive behavior” (3), and maintains that the ego and the *fantasmatic* are mutually defining; the ego allows us to form a body image, which becomes a model for the object of its desire, and also allows us to take up a position within the social register, and the *fantasmatic* determines the position within the social register from which the ego lives its desire. Silverman points out that Laplanche and Pontalis emphasize not only the specularity of the scene through which the subject appropriates the Other in the *fantasmatic*, but, more

importantly, that the ego finds and plays out a subject position (5-6). Silverman argues that both the ego and the fantasmatic are “synonymous with the compulsion to repeat certain images and positionalities, which are relinquished only with difficulty” (6). One set of images and positionalities that play out again and again, not only in *Women Beware Women* but throughout history, are those surrounding sexual difference. Their privileged place in ideology results from the fact that sexual difference commands belief at the level of ego formation.

As mentioned in the last section, the child, having gone through the mirror stage, remains in the imaginary order. The child still defines itself in relation to its mother. This binary relationship forecloses symbolic transactions. Elizabeth Grosz writes, “This relation does not provide the conditions for social, linguistic, and economic exchange relations, although it provides some of their preconditions (67). In order for exchange to take place, a third party must disrupt the mother-child relationship, and this third party is the child’s father. Grosz writes that the father represents, “law, order, and authority for the child. It is not, however, the *real* or generic father, but the *imaginary father* who acts as an incarnation or delegate of the *Symbolic Father*” (68). The father’s intervention takes the form of the Oedipus complex and occurs differently for male and female children.

Lacan accepts Freud’s account of the positive Oedipus complex. The male child, seeing that his father possesses the phallus whereas his mother does not, assumes that his mother has been castrated (this assumption depends entirely on visual perception, as discussed in the last chapter). Fearing castration himself, the child renounces the love of his mother and identifies with his father. Grosz writes: “This renunciation is only temporary; he gives up the mother in exchange for the promise (a ‘pact’ between father and son) of deferred

satisfaction with a woman of his own. This pact . . . founds patriarchy anew for each generation, guaranteeing the son a position as heir to the father's position in so far as he takes on the father's attributes" (68). In exchange for repressing his oedipal attachment to his mother the child inherits a place as a producer of the social field. His repression of his love for his mother and internalisation of the symbolic father's authority form the superego, or "found . . . the unconscious through the act of primal repression" (Grosz 68). Lacan calls the imaginary father the-name-of-the-father in order to signify that the incest prohibition forbids sexual relations with those with whom one has the same name. As will become evident, the male characters in *Women Beware Women* have become producers of the symbolic order without having renounced their incestuous desire.

As Grosz points out, Freud's conception of the negative Oedipus complex that affects female children is much less convincing and more problematic than the positive Oedipus complex. The female child also visually recognises her mother's lack of a phallus and believes that she and her mother have been castrated. She repudiates her oedipal attachment to her mother (even though, unlike the male child, she no longer has a reason to fear castration) and takes the father as her love-object. Grosz writes, "She comes to accept, not without resistance, her socially designated role as subordinate to the possessor of the phallus, and through her acceptance, she comes to occupy the passive, dependent position expected of women in patriarchy" (69). She too submits to the name-of-the-father, but her submission accommodates her to a position of inferiority within culture. For both male and female subjects the resolution of the Oedipus complex results in the child's interpellation into culture, which requires submission of the child's desire to the incest prohibition. Female subjectivity in *Women Beware Women* is inversely homologous to male subjectivity; the

female characters have acceded to their position as products of the symbolic order, but have not repudiated their desire for the father.

While for Freud and Lacan the Oedipus complex inserts the subject directly into the symbolic order, Kaja Silverman argues that subjects are accommodated to the symbolic through ideological facilitation, which occurs through fantasy. Silverman theorises “the ideological reality through which we ‘ideally’ live both the symbolic order and the mode of production as the ‘dominant fiction’” and posits “the positive Oedipus complex as the primary vehicle of insertion into that reality” (2). Further, she argues that, “even in the most normative of subjective instances the psyche remains in excess of that complex, and that in other cases desire and identification may actually function as mechanisms for circumventing or even repudiating the dominant fiction” (2). In other words, imaginary identification and fantasy effect a subject’s ideological facilitation to the symbolic order, but in such a way that our psychic drives are neither totalized, nor entirely contained by symbolic captation.

The images with which the ego identifies, as well as the images that structure the fantasmatic, are external. Silverman writes: “the images within which the subject ‘finds’ itself always come to it from outside” (6). As well, there are two kinds of incorporation from the outside: the ego maintains itself through specular, imaginary identifications; and the fantasmatic is formed through symbolic identifications, which function at the structural level. Imaginary identification, which Silverman defines as “that incorporation through which the *moi* is formed, and upon which the fantasmatic draws for its images of ‘self’ and other” (7) consists of the series of identifications for which the mirror stage is the founding instance. Conversely, symbolic identification, or, “that through which the subject assumes a position within the *mise-en-scène* of desire” (7), is founded by the Oedipus complex. These two kinds

of identification are, for Silverman, mutually determining and function to bring the ego and the fantasmatic into closer alignment. Yet it is also possible for imaginary and symbolic identification to come into conflict with each other, and this results in sites where male identification and desire is reconfigured, which in turn undermines sexual difference. Silverman explains that the ego might unconsciously identify with something that the fantasmatic rejects: “a particularly imaginary identification might conform to unconscious desire at a structural level, but bring with it values capable of shifting the ideological significance of the fantasmatic, and so of altering its relation to power” (7). I will argue that this is what occurs in *Women Beware Women*. The four couples in the play unconsciously identify with something that the fantasmatic rejects—incest. These imaginary identifications conform to unconscious desire at the structural level in their acceptance of sexual difference, but their prurient nature brings “with it values capable of shifting the ideological significance of the fantasmatic, and so of altering its relation to power” (Silverman 7). That these two types of identification define each other through antithesis rather than through alignment undermines masculinity, and ultimately suggests a lack of authority underlying patriarchal power.

The structural identifications in *Women Beware Women* conform to patriarchal subject positions. Patriarchy’s hegemony is evident in the effectivity of hierarchical social structures that depend ideologically on sexual difference: not only do fathers rule daughters and husbands rule wives, but the Duke, as father of his dukedom, rules all those below him. This later configuration of patriarchy is one which James I endorsed in support of the divine right of kings, writing: “Kings are . . . compared to Fathers of families: for a King is trewly *Parens patriae*, the politique father of his people” (307). Since the Duke is metaphorically

the father of his dukedom, patriarchy is inextricably intertwined with the power of the aristocracy in *Women Beware Women*. Laura Bromley observes: "Class lines are loosely drawn in *Women Beware Women* But power is still rooted in money and rank—in the aristocracy" (316). That patriarchy structures all of the characters's interactions suggests a configuration of the fantasmatic in which sexual difference has been secured through the resolution of the Oedipus complex. In other words, the tableau in which subjects act out their desire in *Women Beware Women* produces male characters as having the symbolic order and female characters as being the symbolic order.

In Middleton's court of Florence, fathers successfully command their daughters, and daughters naturally seek patriarchal authority. Fabritio exerts his patriarchal power by commanding Isabella's actions and emotions, and if he fails to determine the later, it is his ability to force her actions that is significant here. He tells Isabella, "this is your husband. / Like him or like him not, wench, you shall have him, / And you shall love him" (I.ii.130-2). Isabella's desire for Hippolito is the desire for the paternal authority and protection that her father fails to provide. This is evident in the first words we hear Isabella speak to Hippolito: "What, are you sad too, uncle? / . . . / Where shall I go to seek my comfort now / When my best friend's distressed?" (I.iii.185, 187-8). Jillian Beifuss expands on this point: "the similarities between the way Livia describes the Marquess and the way other characters describe Hippolito suggest . . . that her union with him is a consequence of her desire to have this ideal father" (17). Like Isabella, Bianca also unconsciously seeks male government.

Bianca submits to the Duke's will because he wields more patriarchal power than Leantio, and thus her obligation to him supersedes her obligation to her husband. Bromley suggests that Bianca feels a compulsion to submit to the Duke on a personal rather than a

political level: "It is not only economic and social insecurity, but the need for a personal relationship with a stable authority figure that finally ties Bianca to the Duke, as it ties Isabella to Hippolito and Leantio to Livia" (318). That Bianca falls in love with her rapist suggests that she, at least unconsciously, justifies his treatment of her. Ingrid Hotz-Davies interprets this, as well as the fact that the depiction of the Duke's rape suggests that, "forced intercourse is not in principle different from 'normal' sexual intercourse, for it obviously does not leave a lasting traumatic effect behind," as evidence that, "The Duke, who is both socially and personally superior to Leantio, is Bianca's ideal mate" (37). I would add to this that the Duke's rape of Bianca functions not to depict the effect that sexual violence has on women but rather to depict the exchange of property in the machinations of patriarchal power.

While there is a recent critical debate over whether the Duke rapes or forcefully seduces Bianca², Jocelyn Catty points out that legal theory in early modern England considered adultery to be rape whether or not the woman consented. T.E.'s *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632), described by Catty as, "a compendium of laws relating to women . . . distinguishes between adultery with and adultery without consent, the woman's volition affecting her role in the litigation; but both cases are defined as 'rape'" (13). Catty explains that while legal conceptions of rape in England before the sixteenth century did acknowledge the act as a sexual one, the Norman Conquest brought with it the conception of rape as primarily a property crime. It was not until the sixteenth century that rape began to be

² For a discussion of the argument that the Duke rapes Bianca, see Murray Bigg, "Does the Duke Rape Bianca in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*?" *Notes and Queries* 44 (1997): 97-100. For an evaluation of and counter argument to Bigg's argument, see Mark Hutchings, "Middleton's 'Women Beware Women': Rape, Seduction—or Power, Simply?," *Notes and Queries* 45 (1998): 366-7.

thought of again as separate from abduction. Catty writes: “Nazife Bashar points out that the statutes of 1555 and 1597 treated rape separately from abduction, and argues that this shows the emergence of the legal definition of rape as a ‘crime against the person’” (13). If we accept 1622, not long after these statutes, as the date *Women Beware Women* was first performed³, then it is likely that the Duke’s rape of Bianca would primarily have been interpreted by early modern viewers as his appropriation of her as property, and that the play’s representation of Bianca’s violation, such as her reaction to the rape, “I’m made bold now, / I thank thy treachery; sin and I’m acquainted, / No couple greater” (III.i.50), is of secondary importance to the transference of Bianca from Leantio to the Duke.

If the rape scene represents the appropriation of property by its “rightful” owner, then whether the Duke forces Bianca or Bianca accedes to his will on her own is less critical than the underlying relations of patriarchal power played out in this scene. This is to say that the Duke’s rape of Bianca depicts power relations between men rather than between a man and a woman. In her essay, “Women on the Market,” Luce Irigaray describes how women become products of exchange between men. She argues that the social order relies on the circulation of women by men, or on the incest taboo: “The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo” (170), and that, “heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man’s relations with himself, of relations among men” (172). Further, the relegation of women to

³ See Roma Gill, Introduction, xiv.

the status of a commodity with a use value that is reproductive of children and of the labour force excludes them from the exchange in which they participate, and they cannot be compensated for their production because doing so would undermine their status as commodities. Bianca, then, is a commodity that Leantio could not afford, so had to steal; he describes his appropriation of her as, “the best piece of theft / That ever was committed” (I.i.43-4). Chakravorty writes: “If Leantio had looked upon his conquest as ‘the best piece of theft’ (I.I.43), then the Duke’s capture of Bianca is merely a more professional conducting of ‘love’s business’ (2.2.365). What for Leantio is piracy is for the Duke trade legitimized by power” (135). The Duke’s appropriation of Bianca serves to reproduce the patriarchal order by asserting his dominance over the lower class, feminised, Leantio. The Duke secures his position as father of the state by reaffirming the class structure upon which his power is based. That Bianca, like all of the women in *Woman Beware*, is a commodity is evident not only in the metaphor of marriage as an economic transaction that pervades the play, but also in Leantio’s reference to Bianca, after having lost her: “Oh my life’s wealth, Bianca! (III.ii.309).

The Duke’s appropriation of Bianca as an exchange affirming relations between men (the Duke and Leantio) explains the Duke’s non-discreet compensation of Leantio during the banquet scene by awarding him the position of captainship of the fort. This position is an appropriate exchange item for Bianca because neither it nor Leantio’s marriage to Bianca secures financial compensation. Upon returning home with Bianca, Leantio tells his mother, “View but her face, you may see all her dowry” (I.i.54). Similarly, the position that the Duke offers Leantio will provide him with status, but with no mercenary benefits. Contemplating the position offered to him by the Duke, Leantio says:

I'm rewarded

With captainship o'th'fort! a place of credit,

I must confess, but poor: my factorship

Shall not exchange means with't; he that died last in't,

He was no drunkard, yet he died a beggar

For all his thrift. (III.ii.344-9)

This entire transaction, the Duke's appropriation of Bianca for which he compensates Leantio with a worthless position, reveals the hegemony of patriarchal power, and reveals it as the structuring mechanism of the play's symbolic identifications. Leantio's attempt to live a desire that disregards patriarchal social structures fails, suggesting the dominance of these structures. In relation to patriarchal/aristocratic power, Leantio cannot escape the low, and hence feminine, position he occupies. His feminised position is represented by his position as a servant to an aristocrat, the fact that he brings Bianca back to a matriarchal household, and his father's inadequacy as a representative of the-law-of-the-father. Leantio's eventual submission to Livia, a position that parallels Bianca's relationship with the duke in its allusion to prostitution, even more obviously suggests his impotence in relation to the aristocracy.

Although we never actually see Leantio's employer, his position as a servant is one of the first things we learn about Leantio. He laments having to leave Bianca so soon after marrying her: "That pleasure should be so restrained and curbed / After the course of a rich workmaster, / That never pays till Saturday night!" (I.i.158-60). Dymphna Callaghan notes that while many men sought to establish their masculinity by attaining a place at court, the role of courtier is effeminate in that it involves both feminine servitude and complete

submission to an aristocrat or sovereign. Callaghan writes: “The courtier is a particularly important category of masculinity since young men often aspired to political ascendancy through recognition at court Indeed, as the servant of the head of state, the role of the courtier is necessarily feminine . . . since being bound to serve and obey a ruler is analogous to serving and obeying a husband” (*Women and Gender* 158-9). Leantio’s vocation, then, positions him as an aristocrat’s wife.

Leantio’s matriarchal household emasculates him even further. Leantio’s mother asserts a strong presence as his matriarchal authority. Not only does the play begin by establishing the relationship between Leantio and his mother, but also further, it begins with her chastising him for having thought he could satisfy Bianca. When his mother finds out that he has married Bianca, she says, “Y’re too blame / If your obedience will give way to a check, / To wrong such a perfection” (I.i.56-8). Ann Christensen points out that the fact that Leantio brings Bianca back to a matriarchal household would have been seen in the seventeenth century as problematic: “In beginning the play with the couple’s return to Leantio’s *maternal* home, Middleton eliminates the old patriarch and thus centers the main plot in the newly settled household from whence emerges the conflict between professional and domestic obligations” (497-8). Leantio is torn between his feminine household and his feminine position as servant to an aristocrat.

As if this were not enough to depict Leantio as feminine, his father is an inadequate authority figure. When the Duke sends a servant to Leantio’s home to bring Bianca back to the court, Leantio tries to hide his “treasure” (III.i.247), Bianca, in a corridor where his father hid when he was accused of manslaughter: “At the end of the dark parlour there’s a place / So artificially contrived for a conveyance / No search could ever find it—when my father /

Kept in for manslaughter, it was his sanctuary" (III.i.243-6). This passage depicts Leantio's father as an inadequate representative of the law-of-the-father. Finally, Leantio's relationship with Livia secures his femininization—even in relation to Livia, Leantio is emasculated. The pact that seals her seduction of him makes it evident that he is a commodity that Livia purchases: he echoes her proposal, "Do but you love enough, I'll give enough" with, "Troth then, I'll love enough and take enough" (III.iii.376-7). As lower class and feminised, Leantio functions as a subject of patriarchal power, and as such he functions like the female characters rather than as a male character.

Patriarchy not only affects each of the relationships in the play, but it exerts a fatalistic force. Bianca believes that fate has restored her status as an aristocrat: "How strangely woman's fortune comes about! / This was the farthest way to come to me," (IV.i.23-4). Similarly, while Livia's lie frees Isabella from the will of her father, she nevertheless submits to it by marrying the Ward. Beifuss writes "while the freeing of Isabella from her father's authority seems to her to be an enlargement of her condition, the idyllic companionate relation she believes she has constructed is an illusion; the result of her rebellion is that she becomes an obedient and dutiful daughter, cheerfully agreeing to marry the Ward" (18). Leantio too passively accepts his unfortunate fate. Roma Gill sees Leantio as characterized by passivity: "Proverbs, or phrases with a proverbial ring, abound in his speeches; he talks and feels in cliché. After his one decisive action, the 'theft' of Bianca, Leantio can do nothing but accept. The captainship of the fort, the fine clothes, and at last his death are all received passively, with a mixture of surprise and resentment. Hippolito has an unfair advantage in the duel, and Leantio dies in sad confusion" (xx). Leonardo Buonomo also describes Leantio as fatalistically accepting his fate: " 'Fatalistic' is an adjective which, I

believe, can . . . be used to describe Leantio's attitude during and after the banquet at Livia's house. Confronted with the devastating effect that the world of the court has had on his marriage, Leantio seems to let go, to surrender to an iniquitous reality" (24): "Here stands the poor thief now that stole the treasure, / and he's not thought on" (III.ii.91-2). The inescapability of the effects of patriarchal power in *Women Beware Women* suggests that the fantasmatic, the scene within which imaginary identifications are played out, conforms to oedipal normalcy in its structural identifications.

Imaginary identifications in *Women Beware Women*, however, are incestuous, and as such come into conflict with the play's symbolic identifications, or fantasmatic. The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex inscribes both male and female subjects within the-name-of-the-father, the order of culture, which prevents incestuous desire. Accession to the patriarchal social structures that fatalistically determine all of the characters in the play should, then, have shattered all incestuous attachments. Instead, almost all of the characters in *Women Beware Women* posit a family member as the object of their desire. In doing so, they enact imaginary identifications that are incestuous. The most obvious incestuous relationship is between Hippolito and Isabella, but the Duke, as symbolic father of the state, figuratively commits incest with Bianca. Bromley writes, "Leantio finds himself cuckolded by his surrogate father, who engages in a kind of symbolic incest that is obviously related to the actual incest of Hippolito and Isabella" (316). Bromley also argues that, Guardiano, Hippolito, and Livia all help the Duke acquire the object of his incestuous desire: "Guardiano, who has pandered for the Duke before, tells us that the Duke's lust is dominant and willingly served by Hippolito, Livia, and himself" (319). Yet *Woman Beware Women* goes even further in suggesting incest.

Stephen Wigler argues that every sexual relationship, actual or implied, in *Women Beware Women* resembles a parent-child relationship. He points out the significant age difference in all three of the play's couples, the Duke and Bianca, Hippolito and Isabella, and Livia and Leantio. He reads the couples's age differences in conjunction with the fact that "the older partners in the relationships seem to possess parental stature while the younger partners seem to share the status of children" and suggests that, "One might naturally expect such overtones in the case of the explicitly incestuous Isabella and Hippolito, but their presence in the other two affairs suggests that the pattern of love in *Women Beware Women* is ultimately something very close to incest" (184). As mentioned above, Wigler interprets Bianca's attraction towards the Duke as an inclination towards a figure of parental authority. As well, he argues that the parade scene in which the Duke first sees Bianca suggests this aspect of their relationship. When the Mother and Bianca watch the parade, Bianca inquires about the Duke's age, and the Mother replies, "About some fifty-five" (I.iii.92). What is significant about this exchange for Wigler, is Bianca's remark, "That's no great age in man, he's then at best / For wisdom and judgement" (I.iii.93-4). Given that Bianca "has just been abandoned by a young husband," and "The Duke is a man who is old enough to be her father, Bianca is immediately attracted to such a *mature* man's 'wisdom and judgement'" (Wigler 186). Wigler also argues that the rape scene emphasises the Duke's paternal character and Bianca's childishness, and maintains that Bianca behaves more like a child after this scene. He suggests that both Bianca and Leantio are portrayed as children in Act IV, scene i, when Leantio catches sight of Bianca at the window of her new lodgings and they enter into an argument. After her argument with Leantio, at the end of which he threatens to kill her, she defers to the Duke's protection as he puts her to bed:

Duke. Do not you vex your mind; prithee to bed, go.

All shall be well and quiet.

Bianca. I love peace, sir.

Duke. And so do all that love; take you no care for't.

It shall be still provided to your hand. (IV.i.123-6)

For Wigler, this scene epitomises the Duke and Bianca's relationship: "we have seen that the two lovers seem particularly attracted to the roles determined by the quasi-incestuous dynamics of their relationship" (189). In reproducing the dynamics of this relationship, Wigler argues, all of the other sexual relationships in the play allude to parent-child incest.

While Isabella and Hippolito actually commit incest, Wigler characterises their relationship as father-daughter incest rather than uncle-niece incest. He suggests that Isabella's actual father, Fabritio, is easier to associate with the Ward than with Isabella because he is linked to the Ward through their shared idiocy. By contrast, Hippolito offers Isabella much needed comfort as she faces her inevitable marriage to the Ward, which will position her as the object of his, "exaggerated and violent geniality" (Wigler 192). Livia's role as surrogate mother to Isabella, and the suggested sexual relationship between Livia and Hippolito, which at the very least consists of desire on Livia's behalf, depict Hippolito and Livia as parental substitutes for Isabella. Wigler writes: "Isabella's choice of Hippolito suggests that it is a return to a female child's first love object—her father" (194). He suggests that Leantio's "neurotic sexual jealousy" (194) over Bianca resembles a male child's pre-oedipal love of his mother, and that Leantio's vulgarity and his boasting of his virility in the first scene can be explained as inadequacy in relation to his father, or fear of castration. Wigler writes: "In comparison to the Duke—who is, as we have seen, a father figure—

Leantio does indeed prove sexually inadequate" (196). Wigler further argues that Livia occupies a maternal position in relation to both Hippolito and Leantio. He accepts Roma Gill's interpretation of Livia's lie to Isabella as an attempt to procure a replacement for herself through which she can live her own incestuous desire, but adds that, "Livia's sexual feelings seem complicated by maternal tendencies to protect, comfort, and nurture" Hippolito (197). For Livia, Leantio then becomes Hippolito's replacement. Her initial attraction to him is love mixed with maternal pity: she, "[n]ever truly felt the power of love / And pity to a man till now I knew him" (III.ii.64-5). As Wigler's psychoanalytic interpretation of the morass of incestuous relationships that play out in *Women Beware Women* makes clear, the play stages a series of imaginary identifications, each of which position an incestuous other as the mirror image of the ego.

If the Cardinal is the only major character that is conspicuously missing from Wigler's mapping of the play's incestuous relationships, then it is significant that Richard Levin contends that the Cardinal, like his brother, desires Bianca. Like the Duke, the Cardinal is heir to the dukedom (hence his title, Lord Cardinal), and as part of the dynastic family, the Cardinal occupies a position that could potentially make him the symbolic father of the state. Levin emphasises this point by arguing that the Cardinal has political ambitions that he plans to fulfil by killing his brother and taking his place as Bianca's lover. Levin constructs an argument that, he claims, reads the Cardinal in the context of the contemporary stage tradition of scheming, politically ambitious, lustful, and even sadistic cardinals. Levin writes that the conversation that introduces the parade, and consequently both the Duke and the Cardinal, suggests, "that the parade has a role to play in the city's illicit sexual life" (204). This conversation includes a citizen's suggestive claim that a "standing for [his]

mistress” “ ’Twas a thing [he] provided for her over-night, / ’Tis ready at her pleasure.” (I.iii.75, 77-8). Levin then interprets the Cardinal’s attempts to morally instruct the Duke as covert attempts to entice his brother to neglect the “serious business” (II.i.18) of politics, which will presumably create a situation that the Cardinal can take advantage of. He suggests as well that Bianca’s understanding of the Cardinal’s ambitions motivates her to plan his death. Though some parts of Levin’s argument are more convincing than others, it is significant in that it completes a pattern wherein every major character in the play can be read as aspiring to fulfill incestuous desire.

Since, according to Freud, “fantasy rather than history . . . determines what is reality for the unconscious” (qtd in Silverman 18), the antipathy between incestuous love and patriarchal power, or between imaginary and symbolic identifications in *Women Beware Women* would have brought “reality” into question for seventeenth-century. The play’s depiction of patriarchal power functioning in the absence of its underlying structure, the incest taboo, brings male authority into question. Silverman argues that masculinity is a crucial site for reformulating our reality, and that reconfiguring male identification and desire would “render null and void virtually everything else that commands general belief” (2-3). But rather than depicting female subjects less marked by lack, *Women Beware Women* continues to project lack onto its female characters by depicting patriarchy as rigidly fatalistic, determining all of the events of the play even in the absence of the discursive system that supports it. In *Women Beware Women*, patriarchy functions as an uncontested mechanism of power in order to foreclose the knowledge that the condition that secures its reproduction each generation—the incest taboo—is absent. *Women Beware Women*, then,

depicts patriarchal social structures that exert power without authority, or depicts essentialism without its rational justification.

Jonathan Dollimore explains how the essentialist social hierarchy functioned during the early seventeenth century in the absence of its underlying rationalisation. First he points out that, “In the early seventeenth century older ideas of the universe and of society as functioning on a metaphysical principle of hierarchy and interdependence were being displaced, as was the related idea of identity as metaphysically derivative” (Dollimore 158). Dollimore notes the difficulty of making the particular signify independently of the universal, and claims that this is why Christian essentialism was not immediately replaced by essentialist humanism. He argues that for a period of time between the decline of Christian essentialism and before eighteenth-century enlightenment’s metaphysical essentialism that, in rejecting essentialism, foregrounded materialist conceptions of ideology. Yet, Dollimore claims, even with this evidence for anti-essentialism, it can still be argued that what is commonly called individualism (an idea of identity that was based on secular essentialism) existed (174-5). This idea of essentialism functioning in the absence of the rationality that supports it can be seen in *Women Beware Women*; essentialism is still functioning but cut off from its Christian or metaphysical justification.

The absence of authority underlying patriarchal power is evident in the play’s depiction of fathers exploiting their children. Bromley writes, “Far from being a ‘good father,’ Fabritio is a parody of the protective father arranging a marriage to secure the economic and social well-being of his daughter” (314). And further, “Hippolito is the ‘good father’ Isabella has missed, an uncle with power, authority, and, from Isabella’s point of view, the wisdom and love to use it properly,” yet he is actually a ‘bad father’ because he

knowingly corrupts her (Bromley 315). Yet by far the most disturbing exercise of contingent patriarchal power is the Ward.

The Ward represents phallic power devoid of socialisation or culture. He expresses his intention of becoming a patriarch when he tells Isabella: "I never mean to part with thee, sweetheart, / Under some sixteen children, and all boys" (III.iii.125-6), and his virility, by which he will accomplish this, is vaguely psychopathic. He consistently enters the stage with his (trap)stick and boasts about the violence he does with it, which, it seems, is aimed at everyone, especially his mother. He tells his servant, Sordido, that he would beat his mother with his "stick": "When I am in game, I am furious; came / my mother's eyes in my way, I would not lose a fair end— / no, were she alive, but with one tooth in her head, I should / venture the striking out of that" (I.ii.99-102). That he is consistently associated with playing children's games and has a child's mentality infantilises him in relation to Isabella, suggesting yet another instance of parent-child incest. He exudes a desire that is not only incestuous but destructive: "I mar'l my guardiner does not seek a wife for me; I protest, I'll have a bout with the maids else, or contract myself at midnight to the larder-woman in presence of a fool or a sack-posset" (I.ii.114-17). The scene in which he assesses Isabella's potential to become the object of his phallic virility by examining her as though she were a horse is suggestive of what kind of a patriarch he will be. If this scene suggests that Isabella, in becoming his wife, will turn into a beast, then we can assume that his government will have the same effect on the rest of his subjects/ family. Read through Freud's equation of the incest taboo with culture, that the Ward's virility is directed at everyone, including his (dead) mother, is suggestive of the threat that his patriarchal right poses to culture.

Freud consistently maintains that incest is an antisocial desire. He writes:

“Society must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family; and for this reason, in the case of every individual, but in particular of adolescent boys, it seeks by all possible means to loosen their connection with their family” (*Three Essays* 91). Incest becomes a threat to civility if familial bonds are not weakened by successful passage through the Oedipus complex. Freud writes: “the catastrophe to the Oedipus complex (the abandonment of incest and the institution of conscience and morality) may be regarded as a victory of the race over the individual” (“Some Psychological Consequences” 677). The Ward symbolises the reverse, the individual’s victory over the race. *Women Beware Women* suggests that it is possible for patriarchal social structures to function in the absence of the authority that presumably justifies their existence, but the Ward reveals the possible consequences of power without authority.

The formal ceremonies that repeat in each act allude to the legitimisation of power through its assertion and visually parallel the separation between power’s form and its content played out in *Women Beware Women*. “[J. B.] Batchelor . . . notes that the play is punctuated by five scenes of spectacle, one in each act: the State Procession (I.iii), the chess scene (II.ii), the banquet (III.iii), the wedding procession (IV.iii), and the masque (V.ii)” (Bruzzi and Bromham 253). Dollimore explains that, “The masque was just one of several symbolic and ritualistic celebrations of royal power; others included the royal progresses and their associated entertainments. As Stephen Orgel, Stuart Clark and Louis Montrose (among others) have shown, their capacity to legitimate the power structure was considerable” (26). Orgel accounts for the masque’s assertion of royal power through its performance: “The masque presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its center is a belief in the

hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization. Philosophically, it is both Platonic and Machiavellian; Platonic because it presents images of the good to which the participants aspire and may ascend; Machiavellian because its idealizations are designed to justify the power they celebrate” (Orgel 40). Charlotte Spivack observes that Middleton’s final masque justifies the marriage it celebrates. She notes that the god of marriage, Hymen, is present only in the anti-masque, while Juno, who “signifies the genuine meaning of marriage is present only in the masque: “in *Women Beware Women* Hymen functions without the spirit of Juno. . . . Here the double masque ritually separates the wedding from the marriage, the formality from the felt and enduring affective relationship” (53-4). In confirming the institution of marriage despite its separation from affection, Spivack suggests, *Women Beware Women* justifies marriage, and the patriarchal microcosm it functions to reproduce, by celebrating it.

More recently, Martin Butler, while recognizing the significance of Orgel’s work, warns that it, as well as other New Historicist work on the masque, reduces each performance to a formulaic and transhistorical reproduction of aristocratic power by seamlessly aligning political significance with aesthetic form. According to Butler, Orgel analyses the masques as functioning to contain discontinuities in ideology, yet by equating content to form he effaces the material history of each individual performance. Butler proposes that the masques staged other kinds of negotiations, “which did not simply reproduce an ineluctable oscillation between resistance and authority, but which were more in the nature of symbolic transactions between those who were competing for position in and around the courtly arena[,] . . . transactions that served to shift, manoeuvre and reshape the forms in which power circulated” (26). This is interesting in relation to Levin’s contention that the Cardinal ambitiously plots to usurp the Duke’s position. Since the Duke’s death during the final

masque of *Women Beware Women* leaves the Cardinal as the only surviving member of the ruling family, it resolves any struggle over power that might have existed between the brothers by installing the Cardinal as Duke. Whether or not we accept Levin's reading, the masque does function to position the Cardinal into the highest strata of patriarchal social structures—the father of the state. In this way the masque functions to reproduce the power it celebrates. He founds patriarchy anew; but like the now dead male characters in *Women Beware Women*, his power is contingent. This accounts for Moretti's statement that, "The political dimension of tragedy does not consist in illuminating the displacements of power . . . ; it lies rather in posing the question of whether a *cultural foundation* of power is still possible, and in answering it in the negative" (64). In revealing how power is reproduced without being legitimated, *Women Beware Women* does more than point to abuses of power; it depicts that the conditions that produce power as contingent.

The masque, and perhaps to a lesser extent the other formal ceremonies, rehearse on the conceptual level the dramatic movement of *Woman Beware* as a whole: the production and negotiation of the form of patriarchal power. In depicting patriarchy, or the relations between men, as something that determines the action of the play, even for characters such as Isabella, who believes herself to be free of patriarchal rule, *Women Beware Women* produces patriarchy as the structuring principal of the fantasmatic. Yet the incestuous desire that marks every character's identification with their love object suggests ego identifications that unconsciously identify with something that the fantasmatic refutes. In depicting feminised characters that naturally defer to those in possession of patriarchal power, the play's imaginary identifications conform to the fantasmatic at a structural level, but ultimately threaten the fantasmatic by undermining the conditions of its existence. Thus, by bringing

imaginary and symbolic identifications into conflict, *Woman Beware Woman* reveals patriarchy to be founded on a void. The threat to the social order that this knowledge represents is signified by the Ward; his phallic violence suggests the consequences of contingent power. The masques, like the play itself, renegotiate and reproduce power, resulting in the Cardinal's inheritance of patriarchal power. If he has not been a convincing authority figure throughout the play, his vacuous statement at the end of the play is suggestive of the nature of the power he inherits:

Sin, what thou art, these ruins show too piteously!

Two kings on one throne cannot sit together

But one must needs down, for his title's wrong:

So where lust reigns, that prince cannot reign long. (V.ii.220-3)

His statement ostensibly contains the events of the play, but not very convincingly. Like the masque that has just produced him as ruler, he now instantiates political power. Patriarchy is reproduced but its legitimisation has been revealed as specious.

Chapter 3: The Evisceration of the Fantasy of Class in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

Some critics have argued that John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore's* setting in the streets and homes of Parma forecloses its engagement with issues of class. Nathaniel Strout, for example, contends that, "*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* differs from Ford's other independently composed plays in not being set at court. Indeed, as Nicholas Brook points out, distinctions of social rank are simply not stressed" (164). It could be argued, however, that the civic setting of *'Tis Pity* provides an environment conducive to eruptions of class conflict, and that this accounts for the play's atmosphere of social anarchy. The second scene of the play depicts a street fight between Vasques, the servant of Soranzo, and Grimaldi, Soranzo's rival suitor for the love of Annabella. While this brawl gets broken up by Florio, who protests the violence right outside his doors, the Roman gentleman and soldier, Grimaldi, later slays his social inferior, Bergetto, while attempting to kill Soranzo, a noblemen over whom Grimaldi also claims superior status. These attempted and actual murders do not require plotting or subterfuge but instead are overtly ventured and committed. Also contributing to the chaotic milieu are the banditti, random servants and officers, that first torture Putana, then kill Giovanni. Thus while the layers of class distinction may be subtle in *'Tis Pity*, the conflicts that they give way to pervade all levels of society.

The cause of Parma's inter-class violence, is Annabella, a merchant class maid, who is desired by Soranzo, a noblemen; Grimaldi, a gentleman and soldier; and Bergetto, nephew to the doctor, Donado. Somewhat perplexing is that Florio, Annabella's father, leads each of the suitors to believe they will succeed. Even more surprising is that Annabella loves and secretly marries her brother Giovanni. Eventually, her father tires of waiting for her to make

a decision, or perhaps perceives that she has become pregnant, and arranges her marriage to Soranzo. Their wedding banquet involves a masque where Hippolita, a noble woman that Soranzo had promised to marry (even though she is married to Richardetto, who is now in disguise as Annabella's physician), attempts to poison Soranzo, but since Vasques has betrayed her trust by switching the cups, poisons herself. Soon realising that Annabella is pregnant, Soranzo discovers her incestuous relationship with Giovanni and plots his revenge against both brother and sister. In a final banquet scene in honour of Soranzo's birthday, Giovanni, ostensibly mad, kills Annabella in order to prevent Soranzo from killing her in revenge, but also because he has vowed that he will "Love [her], or kill [her]" (I.iii.252), then eviscerates her and enters the banquet with her heart on the end of his dagger. The mass killing that follows not only involves most of the play's characters, but also banditti, who have been hired to kill Giovanni. This final scene can be described as mannerist⁴ in comparison to the endings of other revenge tragedies. While criticism of revenge tragedy has always commented on the artificiality of the genre, the final scene of *'Tis Pity* effects an exaggeration of both the affected quality and the violence usually implied by the genre. The mannerist excess of this final scene, I would like to suggest, is germane to the dissolution of ideology it represents. *'Tis Pity* plays out the ideological fantasy of producing the material support of the class system, endogamy (represented by incest) as historical truth. The fantasy that supports the social reality of the class system dissolves, however, when the sublime

⁴ Michael Neill mentions, "Ford's mannerist delight in startling revisions of his predecessors" (234). Raymond Powell writes: What sets [Ford] apart from his contemporary dramatists is an interest in genres and their potential for transformation" (7). Lisa Hopkins points out Ford's many references to earlier revenge tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

object of ideology, Annabella's heart on the end of Giovanni's dagger, reveals the traumatic kernel upon which this ideological fantasy is based.

'Tis Pity plays out the fantasy of producing the historical necessity of isolating the noble class through endogamy. In suggesting this, I am suggesting that the presence of fate in *'Tis Pity* can be accounted for as historical truth. While functioning as the driving force of Giovanni's irrepressible compulsion to commit incest that results in him slaying Annabella, as well as his own death, fate in *'Tis Pity* remains a vaguely defined notion. Brian Morris writes: " 'Fate', to [Giovanni], is simply a word he clings to at moments of high tension, and it is a word which has to do with ideas of control and responsibility" (xv). Similarly, Foster writes, Annabella and Giovanni's "tragedy is morally and psychologically inevitable" (196), but what she means by "morally and psychologically inevitable" remains unclear. In order to understand how fate functions as historical truth in *'Tis Pity*, it will be useful to look at Lacan's notion of transference.

Slavoj Žižek argues that Hegelian dialectics are fundamental to transference in that they provide a model for the way that knowledge is based on contradiction as its internal condition. It will be useful to remember, then, the first chapter of this thesis in which Hegel's theory of repetitions in history explained how imaginary traces take on symbolic significance through their repetition in *The Duchess of Malfi*, a play that influenced Ford's writing of *'Tis Pity*⁵. Žižek elaborates on Hegel's theory of repetitions by looking at Lacan's theory of transference, which posits not only repetitions but also the initial misrecognition of an event

⁵ Michael Neill asserts that, "Ford's admiration for Webster's [*The Duchess of Malfi*] is a matter of record: he contributed encomiastic verses upon its publication in 1623; and that it was among the many plays in his mind as he worked on *'Tis Pity* has already been demonstrated through the various echoes noted by Dorothy Farr" (242).

or sign as crucial to its production of meaning. In the relationship of transference, the analyst embodies what Lacan calls the subject-presumed-to-know, the Other present in the symbolic order that possesses knowledge about our symptoms. But that the analyst is in possession of this specific information is an illusion. Knowledge of the meaning of the patient's symptoms actually results from the illusion that the analyst knows, that is, from the occurrence of transference. In transference traces of the patient's unconscious, events that have been traumatically repressed, emerge and become assimilated into consciousness through the dialectic between patient and analyst. The symptom depends on a lack of awareness of their cause, so that knowledge of why it takes the form it does dissolves the symptom, and the dissolution of the symptom retroactively confers meaning onto the patient's knowledge of the past. Žižek writes:

The analysis is . . . conceived as a symbolization, a symbolic integration of meaningless imaginary traces; this conception implies a fundamentally *imaginary* character of the unconscious: it is made of 'imaginary fixations which could not have been assimilated to the symbolic development' of the subject's history; consequently, it is 'something which will be realized in the Symbolic, or, more precisely, something which, thanks to the symbolic progress which takes place in the analysis, *will have been*.'" (Lacan in Žižek 55)

Knowledge "*will have been*" in the sense that the knowledge of why a symptom takes the form it does not only dissolves the symptom but produces historical truth, causing events that

occurred in the past to take on the meaning that they already, though it went unacknowledged, possessed.

In assuming that meaning derives from the Other, we overlook the fact that meaning results only from our assumption that the Other exists. We assume the source of this meaning to be the subject-presumed-to-know, some Other present in the symbolic order itself to which we attribute the possession of knowledge. However, Žižek notes,

This knowledge is an illusion, it does not really exist in the other, the other does not really possess it, it is constituted afterwards, through our—the subject's—signifier's working: but it is at the same time a necessary illusion, because we can paradoxically elaborate this knowledge only by means of the illusion that the other already possesses it and that we are only discovering it.
(Žižek 56)

The illusion of transference, then, is a positive condition of the production of knowledge; rather than being inimical to the illusion, knowledge can only be produced only when mediated by the illusion. Lacan writes: “Transference is, then, an illusion, but the point is that we cannot bypass it and reach directly for the Truth: the Truth itself is constituted *through* the illusion proper to the transference—‘the Truth arises from misrecognition’” (Lacan in Žižek 57). The production of historical truth through transference will become clear by returning to the example used in the first chapter of this thesis, the death of Caesar. Caesar's consolidation of power constitutes the traumatic event that gets repressed to the unconscious and which causes the symptom. The misrecognition of this event as contingent, as a mistake that must be corrected by removing Caesar and reestablishing the republic, is not the result of objective truth but rather of the subject-presumed-to-know (embodied by the

analyst in therapy). Although the murder of Caesar was committed with the intent of reversing his contingent act by restoring the state to a republic, it instead resulted in the production of his seizure of power as historically necessary, as is indicated by his symbolic reinstatement (Augustus as caesar) following his death. The repetition of Caesar's contingent act with the accession of *caesar*, then, dissolved the symptom, the public opinion that a mistake had been committed when Caesar seized power. What is crucial here, according to Žižek, is that not only the traumatic nature of the initial event, but its misrecognition (here Caesar's appropriation of power as unjust) causes the repetition that functions to produce the event as historically necessary (61). Žižek writes: "The time structure with which we are concerned here is such that it is mediated through subjectivity: the subjective 'mistake', 'fault', 'error', misrecognition, arrives paradoxically *before* the truth in relation to which we are designating it as 'error', because this 'truth' itself becomes true only through—or to use a Hegelian term, by mediation of—the error" (58-9). The original misrecognized event in *'Tis Pity* is Giovanni's incestuous desire, which he, as well as the Friar, misrecognizes as fatal.

The play opens with the Friar's reaction to Giovanni's transgression. The Friar, shocked by what we find out has been Giovanni's revelation of his love for his sister, attempts to repress the event by preventing it from entering the symbolic order:

Dispute no more in this, for know, young man,
 These are no school-points; nice philosophy
 May tolerate unlikely arguments,
 But Heaven admits no jest. (I.i.1-4)

The Friar goes on to tell Giovanni that his desire for his sister, if not repressed, will likely lead to his death ("death waits on thy lust" (I.i.59)), and damnation ("wits that presumed / On

wit too much, by striving how to prove / There was no God, with foolish grounds of art, / Discovered first the nearest way to hell” (I.i.4-7)). Not only is Giovanni’s incestuous desire traumatic, but it is also misrecognized as inevitably destructive. The first scene of the play ends with Giovanni’s proclamation to the Friar that he will pray “Three times a day, and three times every night. / For seven days” (I.i.77-80), but if this does not mitigate his passion, then he will let fate control him: “All this I’ll do, to free me from the rod / Of vengeance; else I’ll swear my fate’s my god” (I.i.83-4). Thus, fate is the symptom of Giovanni’s misrecognition of his desire as pre-determined, a belief that drives Giovanni’s actions throughout the play.

That the Friar’s advice to pray proves unsuccessful for Giovanni is evident when he enters the next scene saying, “Lost. I am lost. My fates have doomed my death” (I.ii.139). And later in the same scene, when he tells Annabella that he loves her, he says,

I have spent
Many a silent night in sighs and groans,
Ran over all my thoughts, despised my fate,
Reasoned against the reasons of my love,
Done all that smoothed-cheek virtue could advise,
But found all bootless: ’tis my destiny
That you must either love, or I must die. (I.ii.219-25)

Here he misrecognizes his desire as a choice between love and death, a mistake that is repeated just fifteen lines later when he confesses his love to Annabella and asks her, “Must I now live, or die?” (I.ii.240), and again when they recite wedding vows:

Annabella. On my knees,

Brother, even by our mother's dust, I charge you,

Do not betray me to your mirth or hate,

Love me, or kill me brother.

Giovanni. On my knees,

Sister, even by my mother's dust, I charge you,

Do not betray me to your mirth or hate,

Love me, or kill me sister. (I.ii.249-55)

Annabella similarly misrecognizes her desire as being determined by fate. She claims that fate determines that she will love Giovanni when, just after her father has arranged her marriage to Soranzo, he asks her,

Soranzo. Have you not will to love?

Annabella. Not you.

Soranzo. Whom then?

Annabella. That's as the fates infer.

Giovanni.

[*Aside*] Of those I'm regent now. (III.ii.118-20)

In a logical progression of Giovanni and Annabella's wedding vows, Giovanni believes that fate drives him to murder Annabella. When Giovanni arrives at Soranzo's birthday celebration to find his sister repentant, he tells her, "I hold fate / Clasped in my fist, and could command the course / Of time's eternal motion, hadst thou been / One thought more steady than an ebbing sea" (V.v.11-14). (This is a repetition of Giovanni's statement to the Friar in the first scene that, "It were more ease to stop the ocean / from floats and ebbs than to dissuade my vows" (I.i.64-5).) In the final scene, as Giovanni enters with Annabella's

heart on his dagger, he announces, "Fate or all the powers / That guide the motions of immortal souls / Could not prevent me" (V.vi.11-13). Boehrer's observation is consonant with my suggestion that the misrecognition of love as fate is the event that produces the lovers's deaths as historically necessary: "All real decisions have been made when Giovanni determines alone, "I'll tell her that I love her, though my heart / Were rated at the price of that attempt" (I.ii.161-2). The play's catastrophe, like the heart "in which is mine entombed" (V.vi.27), lies here already, implicit and unavoidable in these lines" (366). Interspersed with the repetition of their love as necessitating their destruction are images evisceration, the specific method of Annabella's destruction.

Like references to fate, images of evisceration are present from the opening scene of the play and are inextricably interconnected with Giovanni's claim that he is ruled by fate. In Act one, scene one, he tells the Friar,

Gentle father

To you I have unclasped my burdened soul,
Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart,
Made myself poor of secrets; have not left
Another word untold, which hath not spoke
All what I ever durst, or think, or know; (I.i.12-17)

Here Giovanni metaphorically disembowels himself, but from this point on the images become more visceral. When Giovanni tells Isabella that he loves her, he hands her his dagger: "And here's my breast, strike home. / Rip up my bosom, there thou shalt behold / A heart in which is writ the truth I speak" (I.ii.205-7). And again, when Soranzo wants to find out who Isabella's lover is, he threatens, "I'll rip up thy heart, / And find it there." (IV.iii.53-

4). Finally, Giovanni cuts out Annabella's heart during the final banquet scene, and tells the disbelieving banqueters, "Here I swear / By all that you call sacred, by the love / I bore my Annabella whilst she lived, / These hands have from her bosom ripped this heart" (V.vi.57-60). If transference produces Giovanni's desire as fatally destructive, then, fate embodies the subject-presumed-to-know, the Other in the symbolic order that has destined their love as fatal, and this illusion causes the repetitions that make the tragic destruction of the lovers in the final act seem inevitable.

Giovanni and Annabella's fate parallels the tragedy of Oedipus, except that, unlike the Greek tragic hero, Ford's lovers are not horrified by incest. According to Žižek, Oedipus's fate to love his mother and kill her father is produced through transference:

We find the same structure [of transference] in the myth of Oedipus: it is *predicted* to Oedipus's father that his son will kill him and marry his mother, and the prophecy realizes itself, 'because true', through the father's attempt to evade it (he exposes his little son in the forest, and so Oedipus, not recognizing him when he encounters him twenty years later, kills him . . .). In other words, the prophecy becomes true by means of its being communicated to the persons it affects and by means of his or her attempt to elude it: one knows in advance one's destiny, one tries to evade it, and it is by means of this very attempt that the predicted destiny realizes itself. Without the prophecy, the little Oedipus would live happily with his parents and there would be no 'Oedipus complex'. (58)

Ford depicts Giovanni, then, as the inverse of Oedipus; Giovanni attempts to fulfill his incestuous desire rather than avoid it, but for both Oedipus and Giovanni the misrecognition of their future as inexorable makes it such.

To say that these repetitions produce incest as historically necessary, or as something that must occur in order for historical events to take on meaning, is to say that they function to subject Giovanni and Annabella's incestuous transgression to the Name-of-the-Father by assimilating the traumatic, misrecognized event into the symbolic order. Žižek writes, "the repetition announces the advent of the Law, of the Name-of-the-Father in place of the dead, assassinated father: the event which repeats itself receives its law retroactively, through repetition" (61-2). The Law in *'Tis Pity* is itself based on contradiction. The conflict that emerges in the first scene of the play between Giovanni and the Friar in which they find their objectives irreconcilable and both refuse to negotiate their positions is still present at the end. Boehrer maintains that Giovanni's "and Bonaventura's viewpoints represent a double ethical standard that is never resolved in the play" (357). Agnew notes that the Friar's resistance to any involvement in a rational discussion that would directly meet the needs of Giovanni, "establishes a pattern in which the friar consistently removes himself from the scene each time he finds himself unable to cope with the situations that arise" (60). She also points out that this pattern ultimately leads to the Friar's permanent departure due to his powerlessness to change the situation (Agnew 62). While the outside world condemns their love, for Giovanni and Annabella transference has produced their relationship as supernatural. Not even Annabella's marriage to Soranzo can mar Giovanni's view of the celestial nature of their relationship: "She is still one to me, and every kiss / As sweet and as delicious as the first / I reaped . . . O the glory / Of two united hearts like hers and mine!" (V.ii.8-112). It has

long been a part of critical tradition that the opposition between Giovanni's view of their union and the world that condemns it results from Giovanni's rejection of the law-of-the-father and his solipsistic creation of a new law based on reason. Carla Dente, for example, sees Giovanni as subject to his own law: "Giovanni accepts no rules at all, nothing above and beyond the imperatives of individual judgment" (35). The sympathy towards the lovers that has also been consistently remarked upon in criticism suggests that Giovanni does partially succeed in altering the symbolic order so that, when "after-times . . . hear / Of [their] fast-knit affections, . . . / . . . [their] love will wipe away rigour / Which would in other incests be abhorred" (V.v.68-9, 72-3). Giovanni's view of his situation, however, is highly personal—even Annabella rejects it as sinful just before their deaths—and the rest of the characters in the play react with horror.

Giovanni's attempt to inhabit a new social order does not successfully inscribe him as the Law-of-the-Father; instead, Vasques occupies this position. While Soranzo's violent rage against Annabella and the retribution he intends to seek appear to represent the social order inscribing its law onto incest, the real agent of the law in *'Tis Pity* is Vasques, who incites Soranzo to revenge and even carries it out on his behalf. Twice at the end of the play, Vasques claims to be the figure of the Law: first, "I have paid the duty to the son which I have vowed to the father" (V.vi.112-13); then, "I am by birth a Spaniard, brought forth my country in my youth by Lord Soranzo's father, whom whilst he lived I served faithfully" (V.vi.117-19). He enacts the Law when he punishes Hippolita by promising to help her revenge Soranzo for defaulting on his promise to marry her by giving her, instead of Soranzo, the cup with poisoned wine. As Hippolita dies, suffering intensely, Vasques explains to the banqueters that she was attempting to kill his master, and that he has, "fitted

her with a just payment in her own coin" (IV.ii.84), in response to which everyone replies in unison, "Wonderful justice!" (IV.ii.87). This odd response confirms that in opinion of the people, or the-subject-presumed-to-know, Vasques is the Law and consequently can justly mete out retribution. This pattern continues with Vasques's punishment of Putana.

Immediately after Putana reveals to Vasques that Giovanni is the father of Annabella's child, Banditti enter and take her away while Vasques orders them, "Come, sirs, take me this old damnable hag, gag her instantly, and put out her eyes" (IV.iii.223-4). Putana again becomes the object of a disproportionate degree of punishment at the end of the play when the Cardinal finds out that she knew about the incest and sentences her to, "be ta'en / Out of the city, for example's sake, / There to be burnt to ashes" (V.vi.134-6). That the Cardinal's retribution directly follows Giovanni's revelation of incest to all of the banquet guests suggests that the severity of the punishment inflicted on Putana can be seen as a consequence not only of her endorsement of incest, ("if a young wench feel the fit upon her, let her take anybody, father or brother, all is one" (II.i.44-5)), but also of the fact that she publicised the traumatic event by revealing it to Vasques. Gauer writes: "As a representative of the Law, Vasques is perfectly aware of [Putana's ignorance of the incest taboo]: as soon as he finds out the truth about Annabella's mysterious lover, he inflicts upon Putana the Œdipal punishment, by having her eyes gouged out—thus reaffirming without the least ambiguity the power of the Law (of Taboo, and of Culture)" (49). Clerico's interpretation differs slightly:

A conflation of Tiresias and Oedipus, Putana has her eyes put out as a punishment for giving voice to the crime of incest. The entire dramatic movement of the play is contained in the mini-drama of Putana's enucleation.

Her confession, like Annabella's pregnancy, announces—delivers—incest into the free speech of the people; as punishment for this crime of articulation, Vasques' sadistic mutilation of Putana foreshadows the punishment Annabella will sustain for a similar 'confession'. (422)

In any case, Putana's revelation of the contingent event subjects it to the Law-of-the-Father, represented by Vasques. Since none of the characters that we would assume to be associated with the law wield legitimate authority, the split between Giovanni's solipsistic vision and the Law that condemns him never gets resolved in *'Tis Pity*. But that their incest remains ambiguous does not prevent it from being produced as historically true.

In producing incest as historically necessary, *'Tis Pity* plays out the fantasy of maintaining the purity of the upper class through endogamous marriage patterns. Clerico writes:

In the seventeenth century the upsurge in the practice of exogamy—exogamy here defined as marrying outside one's class—occurred in the late 1620s and 1630s, a period contemporaneous with the production of *'Tis Pity*. . . . Viewed in this light, the incestuous union between Giovanni and Annabella can be appreciated as a defensive act designed to fend off the implied conditions of exogamous alliances. Incest comes to emblemize the desire to congeal class allegiances, to conserve the purity of class membership. (416)

That incest represents the desire to maintain the blood's purity explains Giovanni's reference to incorporating Annabella's heart through digestion. Just after re-entering the stage with her heart on his dagger, he tells the banqueters:

You came to feast, my lords, with dainty fare;

I came to feast too, but I digged for food
 In a much richer mine than gold or stone
 Or any value balanced; 'tis a heart. (V.vi.24-7)

Digesting her heart would have the same effect as incest—to mix her blood with his own. If Giovanni's drive towards incestuous love represents a drive towards the preservation of a class system that privileges the upper classes, then we might ask why, as a member of the merchant class, would he commit himself to such a strategy? Why would he not favor inter-class marriage, exchange relations that would allow his family to ascend in status? (This effect is evident in Annabella's marriage to Soranzo; Hippolita deridingly calls Annabella "Madam Merchant" (II.ii.48) before she is married to Soranzo, then at the marriage feast renounces her claim to Soranzo out of, "duty to [Annabella's] noble worth" (IV.i.50).) This question can be answered, I argue, by reading Giovanni as delusional about his class status.

Recent criticism has read Giovanni's adoption of noble-class manners as a parody of his merchant-class status. Christopher Hill points out that the gentry were becoming wealthier than the noble classes during the first part of the seventeenth century:

In the decades before 1640 land was passing from the crown and the peerage to the gentry. Contemporaries believed that an important section of the gentry was rising in economic status; and these were the men represented in the House of Commons. In 1628 a peer observed, with disapproval at the way times were changing, that the Lower House could buy the Upper house three times over. (12)

Since wealth no longer distinguished the upper classes, their alterity rested entirely on codes of behavior. Jephson and Boehrer argue that the gentry's dependence on manners for their

identity explains why Bergetto's derision of a noblemen for taking the wall solicited a beating: "Bergetto's insult in *'Tis Pity* quickly provokes the passing gentlemen, who had taken the wall as a privilege or rank; his refusal to draw because he 'had more wit than so' (II.vi.76-7) angers the gentleman even more because it attacks aristocratic etiquette—perhaps the last bastion of social bifurcation" (18). They go on to explain that the merchant class's response to this situation was to "mirror them and thereby insinuate themselves into the ranks" (19). While, as Jephson and Boehrer argue, this situation would suggest an interpretation of Giovanni's imitation of upper-class manners as parodic, this interpretation is not entirely convincing.

Clerico also argues that Giovanni's adoption of aristocratic class manners and behavior is a parody of the attempt of the mercantile class, of which Giovanni and his family belong, to adopt noble mores, but this argument breaks down in light of some of the evidence offered. Clerico maintains that, "Giovanni's sophistical account of incest reflects a literalism that parodies mercantile pretensions to aristocratic manners and education as it also, rather unwittingly, skewers the artificiality of these same social conventions" (421). This second effect, I argue, is not an unwitting effect on Ford's part but rather the inevitable result of Giovanni's adoption of manners that are becoming increasingly ambiguous because preformed by middle classes as well as nobles.

That *'Tis Pity* presents the merchant class's adoption of noble manners as having the effect of rendering their performance unreadable makes sense in terms of its audience and conditions of performance. Jephson and Boehrer point out that *'Tis Pity* was first acted by The Queen's Men who belonged to the royal court and consequently had an interest in

presenting their objectives as commensurate with those of the court of Charles I⁶, even though the relationship between the monarchy and the theater had always been antagonistic (21). That the court protected the theatre from the city fathers renders the relationship even more complex. But the conditions of the theatre and the audience it attracted, as well as the fact that not all plays were ever preformed for royal spectators, nevertheless suggest that the merchant class audience also exerted its influence. Clerico points to Martin Butler's indication that, "Blackfriars, Salisbury Court, and the Phoenix [the theater in which *'Tis Pity* was first acted], all playhouses conventionally associated with the Court, were, in fact, only irregularly supported through royal patronage" (411). The Phoenix was itself a site of contested class relations. The Phoenix was built nearer to the court than its predecessors, and, by having fewer seats for spectators as well as higher ticket prices, attempted to attract "what contemporary advertisers would call a restricted upscale market" (Jephson and Boehrer 22). But, Jephson and Boehrer admit, this attempt was largely unsuccessful. It was the merchant classes rather than the noble classes who could afford to pay the inflated ticket prices: "a principal element of the new playhouses' social filtering-mechanism—the cash demanded for admission—was rapidly becoming alienated from traditional landholders and gentry and being re-invested instead in London's emergent merchant sector" (22). The new playhouses, then, depended on the merchant class's patronage. While Jephson and Boehrer argue that the playhouse's inclusion of both classes in its audience likely caused the theatre to indulge the desire of the upper class to see the lower classes degraded, it is possible that the theatre's dependence on the merchant class would have prevented this. The ambiguity of the evidence

⁶ Brian Morris suggests 1629-33 as the dates between which *'Tis Pity* was first performed (viii).

that the middle-class adoption of upper-class manners was parodied in drama for the amusement of the upper class, I argue, suggests that the behaviors themselves had become unreadable. If the upper class and the middle class are performing the same acts, even though each performance has a slightly different effect, then eventually these acts become unreadable. As an alternative to these arguments, I suggest that Giovanni is deluded about his class status. Believing that he belongs to the upper class, he plays out the fantasy of isolating the upper class through endogamy.

Giovanni's delusion is evident not only in his endorsement of endogamy, but also in his desire for social isolation. Just as Giovanni does not want his to mix his blood with that of anyone outside of his family, neither does he want to have social contact with others. Verna Foster points out that,

Giovanni, by his education and his interests, is virtually excluded from the busy, mundane social environment that Ford creates for Annabella. Giovanni rarely talks to anyone except the Friar and his sister until he is drawn into the turmoils of Parmesan society by the consequences of his incestuous love. In II.i, for example, he leaves before Philotis and Richardetto arrive, and in II.vi. he comes home after Donado, Bergetto, and Poggio have left. It is not until the wedding feast in Act IV that Giovanni begins to mingle with other members of his society; and he becomes one with it, ironically, only in the violence of the play's conclusion. (194)

It is also significant that Giovanni's presence in many of the play's scenes, such as those that involve Florio's negotiations with Annabella's suitors, is marked by his constant use of asides, depicting him as removed from the other characters even while he is present.

Giovanni further acts out his delusion of nobility by emulating of the cult of Neoplatonism. Clerico points out that, "Giovanni's explanation of the dynamics of incest reflects the rhetoric of the courtly Platonic vogue endemic to the late 1620s and 1630s" (420), and that in this context, "Giovanni's literalist interpretation of neoplatonism transforms him into an imperfectly realized imitation of the prototypical courtier prefigured by Henrietta Maria's court" (421). Further, Giovanni's delusion causes him to enact what Clerico refers to as the disenfranchised second son of in aristocratic "system of primogeniture that favored the patrimonial claims of the eldest son" (423). Giovanni constructs himself as incapable of carrying out Florio's dynastic ambition. Florio's thinly veiled ambition that he hopes to achieve by marrying his children into the upper class, as well as Giovanni's inability to fulfill his father's desire, is evident in the following passage:

I will not force my daughter 'gainst her will.
 You see I have but two, a son and her;
 And he is so devoted to his book,
 As I must tell you true, I doubt his health:
 Should he miscarry, all my hopes rely
 Upon my girl; as for worldly fortune,
 I am, I thank my stars, blest with enough. (I.iii.3-9)

Clerico points out the incredibility of Florio's claim that he has enough worldly fortune, especially as followed by his claim that, "all his hopes rely / Upon" Annabella, which leaves

us to wonder what he hopes for. Clerico also notes that in the seventeenth century “miscarry” connoted, “to be delivered, prematurely, of a child” (OED), and suggests that Giovanni’s impotence, the result of his devotion to books, will result in the miscarriage of Florio’s dream of social advancement (423). Ford persistent reminds us that Giovanni belongs to a merchant-class family, yet Giovanni believes himself to be noble. In overlooking the fact that his actions are guided only by the belief that he is upper class, he enacts the ideological fantasy of class as essential, which is to say that he produces the symptom of class. Thus, in its depiction of Giovanni as affected by the delusion that he is noble, and in its production of the lovers’s incestuous relationship as historically necessary, *’Tis Pity* plays out the fantasy of enforcing the class system through endogamy’s restriction of exchange relations to within class boundaries. Yet while enacting the fantasy underpinning social reality, *’Tis Pity* also reveals the real impossible kernel around which this fantasy is constructed to conceal.

Giovanni’s delusion dissolves when he cuts out Annabella’s heart. When Giovanni slices Annabella from the womb up to the heart, cuts out her heart, and enters the banquet with Annabella’s heart, “trimmed in reeking blood” (V.vi.9), skewered on his dagger, her heart becomes a sublime object of ideology. For Žižek, the sublime object of ideology is the kernel of real that ideological fantasy attempts to hide through transference:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualized by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as ‘antagonism’: a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized). (45)

The sublime object of ideology is the traumatic event that must be misrecognized in order to repeat itself in transference. Because traumatic, it is resistant to meaning, yet at the same time it becomes oversaturated with metaphorical significance. Žižek points out that, for Lacan, knowledge is the opposite of enjoyment (68). For example the ego is formed through a series of misrecognitions that give it a fictive identity resulting in *jouissance*, or enjoyment. Consequently, knowledge is possible in psychoanalysis only at the cost of *jouissance*, at the cost of the dissolution of the ego. The sublime object of ideology, Žižek writes, is the Thing “in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover, the materialization of the terrifying, impossible *jouissance*” (71). It takes on excessive meaning in order to disguise its meaninglessness, which causes it to become filled with enjoyment. As an object that is fascinating in its specularly, Annabella’s heart functions as a sublime object of ideology.

In misrecognizing something that is actually contingent and meaningless, Giovanni’s incestuous desire, as fatally destructive, transference constructs the fantasy that endogamy is historically true. Transference functions to conceal the fact that it is based on the error of attributing meaning to something that is meaningless. Annabella’s heart represents the material leftover of the void upon which the ideological fantasy of class difference is based. Her heart conceals its own vacuity of meaning by becoming a site of excess meaning, an effect that is well documented by critics. Most basically, Laurel Amtower writes: “Giovanni’s emblematic wielding of Annabella’s heart before him signals his identity as lover, commemorator, and avenger” (7). Michael Neill discusses the excess of metaphorical signification that converges in the image of the heart. Neill says of Giovanni’s entrance with the heart on his dagger, “For audiences and readers alike this is the most shocking, eloquent and unforgettable of all the play’s stage pictures; and the frantic scrutiny to which it is

subjected by the baffled onlookers at Soranzo's feast makes it inevitable that it be read in metaphoric terms" (231). Neill points out the "curious double existence enjoyed by the human body in early modern culture: it was both a biological entity and an assembly of emblematically arranged parts each with its own allegoric meanings" (233), which necessitates a metaphorical interpretation of the heart, as it also explains the metaphor of the heart as the site of truth when Soranzo claims that he will discover Annabella's lover by eviscerating her: "I'll rip up thy heart, / And find it there" (IV.iii.53-4). Neill notes that its metaphorical signification includes the saint imagery that has developed throughout the play: "Pray, Annabella, pray; since we must part, / Go thou, white in thy soul, to fill a throne / Of innocence and sanctity in Heaven" (V.v.63-5). He maintains that in hagiography the heart symbolized love and piety, and a pierced heart represented repentance and devotion under trial. Neill notes the repetition of Annabella's dying question "What means this?" (V.v.83) by the Cardinal, who is the first of the banqueters to voice a response to Giovanni's act, and Giovanni's response which invokes a multitude of conflicting meanings including the following: a mere "idle sight" (V.vi.18); a sign of "the rape of life and beauty/ Which I have acted" (V.vi.20-1); a symbol of profane sacrifice ("The glory of my deed / Darkened the mid-day sun, made noon as night" (V.vi. 22-3)); "a sacramental offering that turns the banquet into a bizarre erotic parody of the eucharist" (Giovanni's claim, "I came to feast too, but I digged for food / In a much richer mine than gold or stone" [V.vi.25-6]); a symbol of petrarchan passion; "a 'glorious executioner's' bitter quotation from the spectacular imagery of public justice"; and a sign of Giovanni's envy of Soranzo over Annabella (236). Neill describes the effects of Giovanni's pleonastic answer in terms that invoke Žižek's sublime object of ideology: "The greater the load of alternative meanings heaped upon it, the more

the heart seems to assert its atrocious physicality, driving a wedge between sign and signification, word and thing” (237). Denis Gauer also notices the heart’s simultaneous emptiness and superfluity of meaning: “In so far as it serves a definite rhetoric of love, it becomes seeped in a certain vapidness: for it is meant to express conventional feelings and affected clichés, and in this function is nothing but a pure abstraction, a pale symbol, a derisive icon” (52). Gauer goes as far as to read the heart as death: “the heart here shows the same fatal effect as blood when it becomes visible: so that, far from any rhetorical preciousness, the naked heart delivers but one single message, that of mortality. Its basic truth is not that of amorous signs or jealous wrath, but of the dissecting table” (55). Because it is a symbolically overdetermined, yet meaningless, physical presence, the heart functions as the sublime object of ideology.

While Annabella’s heart itself lacks specific signification, Giovanni’s removal of it signifies his search for essentialist truth. Critics such as Gauer and Boling argue that *’Tis Pity* aligns Giovanni with nature and the Friar with culture, effecting a separation that was not common to early modern thought. By separating nature from culture, *’Tis Pity* depicts incest as natural, aligning it with essentialism. Boling writes: “As Robert Ornstein observes, ‘the friar admits what had never before been admitted on the Jacobean stage: namely, that incestuous desire is natural, though forbidden by divine law’” (3). Further, if Giovanni is the agent of the fantasy that class is essential, it makes sense to read his mutilation of Annabella as a search for proof of essential worth. Contextualizing the last scene as the final event in a series of images of evisceration that begins with Giovanni’s confession to the Friar, “To you I have unclasped my burdened soul, / Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart . . .” (I.i.13-14), Neill reads the final scene as a literal repetition of this figural evisceration, as

Giovanni's search for something on the inside of Annabella's body that corresponds with her social status:

For Giovanni in particular the truths of the self are something hid within the centre, as though the heart of his mystery were something inalienably bound up with the physical sources of life itself. It is an assumption which underlies his entire performance in the final scene—where, however, he carries it to the point of an insane travesty that ends by decisively undermining the very metaphysic of identity it means to express. He forces open the heart of her mystery to find there is *nothing there*. (241)

Neill's analysis of this scene parallels the fantasy that *'Tis Pity* plays out as a whole. In cutting open Annabella's body and removing her heart, Giovanni reveals the traumatic kernel that underlies the ideological fantasy of class difference: that essentialism is based on an absence, on the misrecognition of an object as more than it is. By revealing why the fantasy takes the form it does, the heart dissolves the fantasy of class difference. Žižek writes: "We find [in ideology], then, the paradox of a being which can reproduce itself only in so far as it is misrecognized and overlooked: the moment we see it 'as it really is', this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality" (28). The fantasy in which Giovanni, under the delusion that he is upper class, enacts the historical truth of class difference dissolves when he cuts open Annabella in his search for essentialist truth and reveals that it is not inscribed onto the center of her being. His discovery has jarring effects on essentialist social structures, or on the Law.

The traumatic kernel that underpins the Law is the fundamental characteristic of the superego; it cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe of the subject so is repressed to

the unconscious (37-8). According to Žižek, “What is ‘repressed’ then, is not some obscure origin of the Law but the very fact that the Law is not to be accepted as true, only as necessary—the fact that *its authority is without truth*” (38). The contingency of the law explains why Vasques, the most malignant, vengeful character, goes unpunished. The Law’s lack of authority explains why the only character that lacks a personal motivation for retribution stands in symbolically for the Law-of-the-Father. Powell comments on Vasques’s lack of personal motivation: “If Vasques was indeed motivated all along by no more than a disinterested concern for his master’s best interests, all one can say is that his concern proved to be a means of achieving an enviably high level of job satisfaction and personal fulfillment” (4).

The law of which Vasques is a symbolic representative, then, is produced through transference. The misrecognition of Giovanni’s incestuous desire as necessitating the destruction of him as well as those around him causes this traumatic kernel to repeat until it achieves assimilation into the symbolic order. The image of fate as being in control of Giovanni’s passion produces his desire as unavoidable. If, as there is much evidence to suggest, incest represents endogamy, then Giovanni’s misrecognition of incest as predestined constructs endogamy as historically necessary, ideologically providing the material prerequisite for maintaining class segregation. Intertwined with fate, the image of evisceration reiterates throughout the play, until Giovanni literally cuts out Annabella’s heart in search of the essentialist truth underlying the class system. He discovers that her heart is nothing more than an organ, or rather that it is an object that, because it lacks essential meaning, becomes the site of an excess of metaphor—that it is the sublime object of ideology. Revealing itself as the contingent kernel upon which the fantasy of class difference

is based, Annabella's heart dissolves the ideological fantasy of which it is the center.

Thinking back to the first chapter of this thesis where, through Hegel's theory of repetitions, the form that repetitions take produces meaning, it becomes evident that this is also the case in transference. Vasques' surprising comments just after witnessing the slaughter of the final scene allude to the form of the play: "I rejoice that a Spaniard outwent an Italian in revenge" (V.vi.97).

Conclusion

Each of these three works play out a Lacanian fantasy or symptom: they reveal why ideology takes the form it does and consequently dissolve it. *The Duchess of Malfi* plays out the fantasy of sexual difference as essential, but then reveals Ferdinand as a subject of the gaze, or as produced by, rather than a producer of, the symbolic order. While some of the play's many repetitions function to integrate contingent events into the symbolic order, others repeat traumatically. Repetitions of the first type function to produce the Duchess's death as a historically necessary, though unjust, sacrifice, as well as to produce Ferdinand and his brother the Cardinal as tyrants, creating an equilibrium in which their deaths pay for the Duchess's murder. But this restoration of the social order is superficial. Its shallowness is made evident by the traumatic repetition of Ferdinand's incestuous desire. Embodied in his lycanthropy, Ferdinand's incestuous desire causes him to turn the gaze that he had previously directed towards the Duchess upon himself, urging others to cut him open to reveal his inverted state—the hair that grows on the inside of his body. *The Duchess* thus undermines the fantasy of essentialism by exposing the vicariousness of the illusion on which it is based—the construct of sexual difference.

The second chapter discussed Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* as a play that enacts the interrelated fantasies of patriarchal power and aristocratic status as essential. In its depiction of four relationships that are either metaphorically or actually incestuous, it reveals phallic power in a specific way. *Women Beware Women* depicts the successful reproduction of patriarchal and aristocratic power in the absence of the rationality on which it

is based—the incest prohibition. In revealing phallic power as specious, *Women Beware Women* makes explicit the unconscious knowledge on which the fantasy of phallic power is based—that the prohibition of incest is the event that founds culture. But rather than dissolving, the fantasy of phallic power reasserts itself even though it has been revealed as specious.

The final chapter discussed John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* as playing out the fantasy of producing the material support of the class system, endogamy, as historically necessary. In interpreting Giovanni as being under the delusion that he belongs to the upper-class, I argued for a reading of his incestuous desire as the desire for endogamy, or for the preservation of the purity of what he believes to be his aristocratic blood. His misrecognition of his incestuous desire for Annabella as pre-determined produces it as historically necessary. Like the fantasies previously discussed, this one dissolves when Giovanni eviscerates Annabella. His act discloses the illusion upon which the fantasy of class essentialism is based. Not only is her heart not marked with evidence of her aristocratic status, it is not marked with any meaning at all.

Giovanni's discovery is still being made today, or rather, it is being made again today, though not as part of the dominant ideology. While most people would not consider social class an essential characteristic, many people would consider race essential, or at least would have up until half a century ago. In light of the Marxist supposition that race is inexplicably intertwined with class, it could be said that we have not completely renounced essentialist theories of class. It is also interesting in relation to the inextricability of gender and class in early modern essentialism (in which gender is one step lower than, and thus the ideological basis of, class on the hierarchy of social structures) that essentialist theories of

gender today remain so present while homologous theories of class have evolved into other ideologies. This question can be answered in part by returning to Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. According to Marx, the displacement of essentialist theories of class caused the fetishization of people to be transferred onto the fetishization of objects. We might then ask if displacing notions of gender similarly led to the creation of a new symptom, and further, what form does this symptom take?

These questions suggest that the discourse on early modern essentialism taking place in these plays is extremely relevant to contemporary anti-essentialist discourse. That anti-essentialism has recently resurfaced, if only as a subordinate ideology, leads to the question of what caused the reversal of this ideology that occurred with the onset of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This question is especially significant since the main historical antecedents of anti-essentialist decentring have occurred since the Elizabethan/Jacobean period. Dollimore summarises these developments: "Darwin showed that the human species is not the *telos* or goal of that universe; Marx displaced man from the centre of history while Freud displaced consciousness as the source of individual autonomy. Foucault adds the decentring effected by the Nietzschean genealogy . . . : 'What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is a disparity'" (269-70). The present study could be extended into an analysis of the chronological development of the discourse of anti-essentialism in early modern drama in order to see how this discourse developed and to examine the process of its transformation into another ideology. If, as Žižek claims, the dissolution of one fantasy results in its replacement by another fantasy, what new subjectivities replace the essentialist subjectivities that these plays abrogate?

The ultimate question that this study and the critical discourse of which it is a part raises in relation to contemporary anti-essentialist discourse is, what kernel of the real does essentialist ideology diachronically function to conceal? That is, why does essentialism continue to remain the dominant ideology even though the essence it posits as the centre of man or woman changes? If, as Dollimore claims, the Jacobean period was one in which anti-essentialism was prominent, then a further examination of its decline in this period might tell us something about the traumatic kernel that the fantasy of essentialism functions to conceal.

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