

THE DANGEROUS EDGE OF THINGS

John Webster's Bosola in Context & Performance

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I, John F Buckingham hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J F Buckingham', written over a horizontal line.

Date: 18th May 2011

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that there is an enigma at the heart of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*; a disjunction between the critical history of the play and its reception in performance. Historical disquiet about the status of the play among academics and cultural commentators has not prevented its popularity with audiences. It has, however, affected some of the staging decisions made by theatre companies mounting productions. Allied to other practical factors, these have impacted significantly – and occasionally disastrously – upon performances.

It is argued that Webster conceived the play as a meditation on degree and, in aiming to draw out the maximum relevance from the social satire, deliberately created the multi-faceted performative role of Bosola to work his audience in a complex and subversive manner. The role's purpose was determined in response to the structural discontinuity imposed upon the play by the physical realities of staging within the Blackfriars' auditorium. But Webster also needed an agent to serve the plot's development and, in creating the role he also invented a character, developed way beyond the material of his sources. This character proved as trapped as any other in the play by the consequences of his own moral choices. Hovering between role and character, Webster's creation remains liminally poised on 'the dangerous edge of things.'

Part One explores the contexts in which Webster created one of the most ambiguous figures in early modern drama - subverting stock malcontent, villain and revenger - and speculates on the importance of the actor, John Lowin in its genesis. It includes a subsequent performance history of the role. Part Two presents the detailed

analysis of a range of professional performances from the past four decades, attempting to demonstrate how the meaning of the play has been altered by decisions made regarding the part of Bosola.

John F Buckingham

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*To my mum and dad, Norah & Ernie.
To teach a love of learning is in itself an act of love.*

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ILLUSTRATIONS	8
INTRODUCTION	16
PART ONE: CONTEXT	19
<u>CHAPTER 1: BOSOLA'S PERSPECTIVE</u>	
1.1. Ideology and Audience	20
1.2. Why Degree?	27
1.3. Why Bosola?	29
1.4. Bosola as Malcontent	35
1.5. Censorship?	47
1.6. Webster's Chosen Audience	53
<u>CHAPTER 2: BOSOLA, THE ACTOR & THE AUDIENCE</u>	
2.1. From Flamineo to Bosola	56
2.2. Characterisation	60
2.3. Bosola and Social Satire at The Blackfriars	66
2.4. The Actor & the Role	71
<u>CHAPTER 3: BOSOLA AND THE MALFI ENIGMA</u>	
3.1. Editing the Text	83
3.2. Whose Tragedy?	86
3.3. Discontinuity or Inconsistency?	91
<u>CHAPTER 4: WHAT HAPPENED TO BOSOLA?</u>	
4.1. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.	98
4.2. The Nineteenth Century	109
4.3. The First Half of the Twentieth century	121

PART TWO: PERFORMANCE	132
<u>CHAPTER 5: PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS</u>	133
5.1. Methodology	134
5.2. Director's Interpretation	139
<u>CHAPTER 6: 'UNCUT' HISTORICISED PERFORMANCES</u>	
6.1. Manchester Royal Exchange Company (1980-81)	143
6.2. The Royal Shakespeare Company (1989-90)	159
6.3. Differences and Similarities	186
<u>CHAPTER 7: INTERIORITY AND PSYCHOLOGY</u>	
7.1. BBC TV "Play of the Month" Broadcast 10-10-1972	191
7.2. Cheek by Jowl 1995/6	213
<u>CHAPTER 8: IMAGE AND EFFECT</u>	
8.1. The Royal Shakespeare Company 2000	265
8.2. Royal National Theatre 2003	298
<u>CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION</u>	
9.1. Past and Present	337
9.2. The Proliferation of Productions	340
APPENDICES	
1. A production revisited (Teddington Theatre Club 1986)	368
2. Large blocks of text often cut in modern productions	375
3. Discrepancies in text between prompt book & performance (RSC 1989/90)	377
4. Re-ordered dialogue segments in Carl Miller's adaptation (RNT 2003)	379
5. Professional productions in the UK between 1998 and 2010	381
BIBLIOGRAPHY	382

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Page**
- 76 *John Lowin, engraving by Thomas Holloway from an original painting in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England, (Doran 48).*
- 77 *Patrick Wymark as Bosola.* Angus McBean © Royal Shakespeare Company, 1960.
- 93 *Michael Byrne as Alencon in "Henry VI Pt 1."* BBC Shakespeare, 1983.
<<http://www.aveleyman.com/TVEpisode.aspx?FilmID=437&Episode=16>>
Accessed 16/02/2011.
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Accessed 15/09/2009.
- 104 *The Queen's Theatre Haymarket, after the alterations of 1707-8.* (A scale reconstruction by Richard Leacroft. *The Development of the English Playhouse* [Leacroft 105]) © 1973, 1988 Methuen.
- 106 *Frontispiece of "Theobald's The Fatal Secret" 1735,* (The British Library). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* Gale. Royal Holloway, University of London.
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- 107 *James Quin (1693–1766).* William Hogarth, c.1739. *Eighteenth Century Worlds (1660 – 1830).*
<<http://www.jimandellen.org/18thcentlit.list.html>>.
Accessed 17/02/2011.100
- 110 *Part of Playbill for Phelps's 1850 production.* Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).

Page

- 114 *George John Bennett* (1800–1879) as Cassius in “Julius Caesar.” William Sharp, after G. F. Stroehling, 1831 © National Portrait Gallery.
<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw41692/George-John-Bennett?sText=George+Bennett&submitSearchTerm_x=8&submitSearchTerm_y=13&search=ss&OOnly=true&firstRun=true&LinkId=mp52251&role=sit&rNo=0>. Accessed 25/03/2011.
- 115 *Front Cover of “Dick’s Standard Plays Number 350” showing Bennett’s Bosola disguised as an old man* . Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 125 *Roy Graham as Bosola and Joy Bland as the Duchess*. The Embassy Theatre Production. Uncredited photograph. *The Daily Telegraph* 15/01/1935. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 126 *Canada Lee dons ‘white-face’ ... to play Bosola*. New York & Boston, 1946. Museum of the City of New York & Wisconsin Center For Film & Theater Research, (Smith 270-271).
- 144 *Programme Cover*. Mike Hazledene. Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre, 1981.
- 146 *Dramatis Personae in categories defined by their social class*. Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre Programme. Mike Hazledene (Roundhouse, 1981).
- 147 *Bob Hoskins. Helen Mirren*. Programme photographs. © Kevin Cummins. Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre, 1981.
- 149 *Bosola and the Duchess*. Uncredited photo. Helen Mirren Appreciation Society Website <<http://www.helenmirren.com/performance>> Accessed 11 /02.2005.
- 152 *The Duchess eats the apricocks*. Uncredited photograph. *Country Life* 23/04/1981.
- 155 *Bosola carries the dead Duchess*. © Kevin Cummins. Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre, 1980 (MacLuskie 175).
- 164 *Fotini Dimou’s set for 2. 2., RSC 1989*. © Ivan Kyncl.
- 165 *Programme cover*. Ginny Crow. Stratford: Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989.

Page

- 166 *Image from programme.* Ginny Crow Stratford: Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989.
- 168 *Auditorium of The Swan Theatre.* RSC Brochure. Stratford: Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989.
- 169 *The 'eye' motif in the centre of Fontini Dimou's ironwork galleries.* RSC 1989. © Ivan Kyncl.
- 175 *Nigel Terry as Bosola.* RSC 1989. © Ivan Kyncl.
- 176 *Bosola and the Duchess (3.2.)* RSC 1989. © Ivan Kyncl.
- 182 *Bosola as Tombmaker/Bellman (4.2.).* RSC 1989. © Ivan Kyncl.
- 183 *Items on the coffin (4.2.).*
From a sketch in the production record for *The Duchess of Malfi*, Swan Theatre Stratford, 1989 (Shakespeare Centre Archive, Stratford).
- 194 *Chastleton House: Jacobean Manor.* © Andy Hope.
<<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/2505625>> accessed 14/03/2011.
- 195 *Chastleton as it appears in the recording.* BBC TV, 1970 (British Film Institute).
- 196 *Eileen Atkins as the Duchess.* BBC TV, 1972 (British Film Institute).
- 196 *Elizabeth I, The Armada Portrait* c.1588 George Gower (National Portrait Gallery, London).
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Queen_Elizabeth_I_by_George_Gower.jpg> accessed 14/03/2011
- 196 *Charles Kay as Ferdinand.* BBC TV, 1972 (British Film Institute).
- 196 *King James I of England and VI of Scotland, after John De Critz the Elder, c.1606* (National Portrait Gallery, London).
<http://www.shafe.co.uk/crystal/images/lshafe/de_Critz_James_I_1605-6.jpg> Accessed 14/03/2011
- 198 30 video-grabbed images between pages 198 & 210 are taken from a VHS tape of the BBC TV production, 1972 (courtesy of the BFI).

Page

- 211 *Michael Bryant as Mathieu* in "The Roads to Freedom" BBC TV, 1970 (Radio Times).
- 213 *Proscenium from upper circle, Wyndham's Theatre, London, 1990.* © Ian Grundy (Theatres Trust).
<<http://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/resources/images/show/7928-proscenium-from-upper-circle-wyndham-s-theatre-london-1990>>. Accessed 29/03/2011.
- 215 *The Duchess (Anastasia Hille) and Antonio (Matthew Macfadyen).* © John Haynes. *Theatre Record*. 1-14./01/1996.
- 219 *George Anton.* © John Haynes. Programme (Cheek By Jowl). 1986.
- 232 *Stage positions (2.1).* sketched from Theatre Museum video recording (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 239 *Stage positions for Antonio's arraignment (3.2).* sketched from video recording. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 241 *Stage positions after Antonio's departure (3.2).* sketched from video recording. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 243 *Stage positions (3.5).* sketched from video recording. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 251 *Bosola and the Duchess (4.2.)* Uncredited photograph. Cheek By Jowl website. <http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/the_duchess_of_malfi.php>. Accessed 29/03/2011.
- 252 *The 'performative' Duchess (4.2).* © Neil Libbert. *Observer* 07/01/1996.
- 253 *The Duchess and executioners (4.2).* Uncredited photograph. *The Times* 29/12/1995. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 255 *Bosola and the dying Duchess (4.2).* Uncredited photograph. *Time Out*. 10/01/1996. Theatre Museum (Victoria & Albert Museum).
- 257 *Julia (Nicola Redmond (5.2.)).* Uncredited photograph Cheek By Jowl website. <http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/the_duchess_of_malfi.php>. Accessed 29/03/2011.
- 260 *Stage positions (5.5.)* sketched from Theatre Museum video recording (Victoria & Albert Museum).

Page

- 263 *Programme Cover*. Iain Lanyon. Wyndham's Theatre, London. Cheek By Jowl, 1996.
- 267 *Programme Cover*. Alistair Thain/IPG. RSC. Barbican Theatre, London, 1996
- 271 *Semi-permanent proscenium setting for Barbican and Stratford performances*. From a sketch in the RSC Promptbook for *The Duchess of Malfi*, 2000. Shakespeare Centre Archive, Stratford.
- 272 *The Court (1.1.)*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company,
- 272 *Waxworks (4.2.)*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company,
- 273 *Madmen (4.2.)*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company,
- 276 *Neil Dudgeon*. Uncredited photograph. Neil-Dudgeon.net <<http://www.neil-dudgeon.net/>> accessed 23/02/2011.
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- 277 *Tom Mannion as Bosola*, Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 291 *Bosola and the dying Duchess*, Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 292 *The dead Duchess robes Bosola*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 294 *The dead Duchess*, Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company,
- 294 *The death of Antonio*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 295 *Bosola kills Ferdinand*. Geraint Lewis © Royal Shakespeare Company.
- 298 *Programme Cover*. (RNT), 2003.
- 304 *Major Hewitt and Princess Diana*. © Camera Press. Programme (RNT), 2003.

Page

- 309 *Cranitch as Beck*. The Unofficial Cracker Website.
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- 312 *Opening (1.1.)*. Sketch from production video (RNT Archive).
- 312 *Ferdinand interviews Antonio with a microphone*. Sketch from production video (RNT Archive).
- 313 *The Duchess 'reflects' in front of the glass screen*.
nationaltheatre.org.uk/download: 'The Duchess of Malfi'.
<<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/download.php?id=4439>>
accessed 17-03-2011.
- 318 *Bosola positioned as an outsider*. Diagram from RNT video.
- 320 *Bosola's entrance and exit (3.2.)*. Diagram from RNT video.
- 321 *Positions for Antonio's dismissal (3.2.)*. Diagram from RNT video.
- 322 *Bosola wins the Duchess's confidence*. National Theatre Education." 2003. *nationaltheatre.org.uk/download: 'The Duchess of Malfi'*.
<<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/download.php?id=4439>>
accessed 17-03-2011
- 326 *Waxworks*. Diagram from video. RNT Archive.
- 328 *Bosola behind the Duchess, flanked by executioners.(4.2.)*.
Diagram from video. RNT Archive.
- 333 *Assembly of the dead.(5.5.)*. Diagram from video. RNT Archive.
- 344 *Flyer*. BlackSun, 2009.
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- 345 *James Rose as Bosola*. Uncredited photograph.
<<http://www.blacksuntheatre.com/#/the-duchess-of-malfi/4533521473>>. Accessed 26/02/2011.
- 347 *Flyer*. © Sebastien Pons. Have Your Cake Theatre, 2009.
<<http://www.haveyourcaketheatre.co.uk/productions.html>>
Accessed 26/02/2011.

Page

- 348 *Alan J Mirren as Bosola*. © Sebastien Pons
<<http://www.haveyourcaketheatre.co.uk/images/gallery/big/2/5.jpg>>
Accessed 26/02/2011.
- 350 *DVD cover*. Stage on Screen, 2010.
- 351 *The Court (1.1.)*. Stage on Screen DVD, 2010.
<<http://www.stageonscreen.com/the-duchess-of-malfi-gallery.php?gallery=32>> Accessed 28/03/2011.
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- 356 *James Sobol Kelly*. IMDB.Uncredited photograph.
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Page

- 366 *The Duchess (Irena Kuljak) haunts Bosola (Kyle McDonald)*. Public domain. "Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi (Short Film)." Dir. Kyle McDonald, 2010.
- 368 *Programme Cover*. Andrew Wale. Teddington Theatre Club, 1986.
- 369 *The Isle of the Dead (3rd version 1883)*. Arnold Böcklin. <(Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Arnold_Boecklin_-_Island_of_the_Dead,_Third_Version.JPG> . Accessed 28/02/1011.
- 370 *Set* © Martin Stonelake, 1986.
- 370 *1.1. Court*. © Martin Stonelake, 1986.
- 370 *4.2. The Duchess and executioners*. © Martin Stonelake, 1986.
- 371 *2.1. The Duchess at court...and 4.1.as prisoner*. © Martin Stonelake, 1986.
- 373 *2.1. Bosola as Provisor of the Horse*. © Martin Stonelake, 1986.
- 374 *Bosola with scar and ...spectacles*. © Martin Stonelake, 1986.

INTRODUCTION

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist.

(Browning 396-8)

The aim of this thesis is to examine issues that have emerged both historically and recently in stagings of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. My research has focussed specifically on the role and character of Bosola and, in undertaking this, I am conscious that the choice of such narrow focus may require both elucidation and justification. If I were to embark upon a study of (say) Hamlet in the play which bears that name, there might appear less need for either; Shakespeare's prince is so obviously the protagonist of his own tragedy and, with a super-abundance of productions both historically and currently, for better or worse, the figure has achieved an iconic status independent of the play.

However, as Jonathan Miller has remarked, "We will never be, and no one ever has been introduced to Hamlet" (Berry 38), a statement which now appears obvious, coming long after the modernist critical assault on the work of Bradley.¹ Since then, the notion of 'character' as an area for critical analysis has been markedly unfashionable. Yet, as Jonathan Crewe has recently suggested, "'Character' is an extraordinary robust category of literary cognition and analysis; it shows no sign of disappearing" not least because, as he adds, "building or performing a 'character,' or getting inside one, remains the bread and butter of acting" (35, endnote 1). Because this thesis is rooted in theatrical practice it is therefore inevitable that "character" should feature strongly within it.

¹ Including his discussions of Hamlet (A.C. Bradley 102-41).

Of course, the belief that one can somehow separate character from play is a delusion and if this is true for a character as familiar yet enigmatic as Hamlet how much more so for Bosola? For this reason I hope throughout to distinguish the word 'role', with its implication of function within the frame of the play, from theatrical 'character', implying the distinctive qualities of an individual personality with the illusion of an autonomous existence. I hope this is indicative of my belief that all the components of a play ultimately serve one end: the communication of meaning to an audience in performance. That such meaning can never be unitary is self-evident, since it is dependent on the complex chemistry that comprises any single performance, ephemerally rooted in time and place; a context which works against the transmission of a single immutable intent.

The question remains, 'Why Bosola?' To help frame a response I have used the lines above from Browning's *Bishop Blougram's Apology* to try to encapsulate the enigma that I believe Webster's creation presents. Graham Greene cited the same lines as "an epigraph for all the novels I have written" (117), a statement of some relevance as at least one critic of a recent production of *The Duchess of Malfi* has drawn a parallel between Bosola and the tortured protagonists of some of Greene's novels (Taylor *The Duchess of Malfi*). At first glance, Browning's eponymous cleric and his sophistry seem to have more in common with Webster's Cardinal than with his malcontent assassin. But, in his dramatic monologue, Blougram expounds his philosophy (a variant on Pascal's wager on the existence of God) as a treacherous balance between faith and calculation. This brings us closer to Bosola, who is torn between his roles as the "speculative man" and the man of action. Blougram's

metaphysical metaphors¹ call to mind Bosola's "another voyage" and the etymological root of his name² is suggestive of his fundamental quest for moral direction. In essence, the quotation applies well to the territory occupied by Webster's play. The designation "tender murderer" to Bosola and his positioning on "the dangerous edge of things" is apposite, and Browning's lines point to the powerful attraction of liminal themes and enigmatic figures. The character of Bosola is not only enigmatic in himself, but his role in the play raises so many unanswered questions about *The Duchess of Malfi* as a piece of theatre that any attempt to answer the former will hopefully illuminate the latter. I contend that, by placing such a challenging and enigmatic figure so close to the heart of his drama, Webster creates a paradigm of the enigma of the play itself.

Of course, my very assertion of Bosola's status in the drama is contentious in itself, and it might be said that - in spite of the length of the role and his involvement in the action of the drama - he remains essentially a 'tool villain', albeit one with pretensions to higher status. It is my contention that historical and ongoing uncertainty about the role of Bosola by actors, directors, audiences and critics has had a significant bearing upon the way the play is often staged today. To test this, I have undertaken the detailed analysis of a range of recent performances, with a view to demonstrating how the meaning of the play has been altered, particularly by decisions made in regard to Bosola. Before this, however, it will be necessary to address some issues arising from the play in the context of the period in which it was written and first performed.

¹ 'We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life.' (100-1)

² 'Bossola' is Italian for a mariner's compass.

PART ONE: Context

CHAPTER ONE: BOSOLA'S PERSPECTIVE.

..for places at court are like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower, and lower.

*(The Duchess of Malfi 1.1.66-8)*¹

...a guilty conscience
Is a black register, wherein is writ
All our good deeds and bad, a perspective
That shows us hell!
(4.2. 355-8)

1.1.Ideology and Audience

Unquestionably, the playgoers of the early seventeenth century inhabited a world vastly different to that today. Principally affecting their perceptions of performed drama would be the beliefs and ideologies permeating their society. To define what this might mean, I will accept Althusser's assertion that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"(17). He states that ideology "has a material existence" (19) in the sense that it impels action in conformity with the belief held. So, for example, belief in God may lead to action connected with religious observance; a concept of duty may lead to service to others. Where a belief is sincerely held but does not engender action, a corresponding sense of transgression or moral guilt may follow. To the extent that an ideology permeates the society, it may not even be perceived as ideological at all but simply 'commonsense.' As Alan Sinfield writes,

The strength of an ideology derives from the way that it gets to be commonsense: it "goes without saying". For its production is not an external process, stories are not outside us, something we just hear or read about. Ideology makes sense for us - of us - because it is already proceeding in the world, and we come to consciousness in its terms (64).

¹ All quotations are from the 1997 edition edited by John Russell Brown.

For as long as an ideological assumption remains 'commonsense', it is likely to remain unchallenged within public discourse. Yet, it is also true that material changes in society will impact upon its underlying ideological assumptions, making such challenges inevitable.

In this context, many commentators have seen in *The Duchess of Malfi* strong evidence of a discourse reflecting the widespread current social changes threatening to undermine a formerly dominant ideology. James L. Calderwood, for example, asserts that the play is "among other things, a powerful and subtle articulation of a thoroughly Elizabethan (sic) theme – the relationship between individual impulse and societal norms, specifically the religious and political doctrine of Degree..." (134). Of course, arguments connecting this play and the doctrine of degree have been well-rehearsed by a number of critics, some of whom argue that the Duchess's allegedly transgressive marriage to a social inferior may not necessarily have violated Jacobean mores (Wadsworth 394-40).

The doctrine of degree derives from the concept of a complex but divinely ordered hierarchical universe which was a legacy of the Middle Ages. This was embodied in works such as Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*.¹ It was comparable to the medieval concept – derived from the classical world - of the 'Great Chain of Being'. This posited a number of hierarchical links in creation from the foundational inanimate material of rock, through the corporeal animal world to that of pure spirit, with God and the Angels at the top of the Chain and 'Mankind' uniquely at the intersection of flesh and spirit. This benevolent and harmonious structure, it was held, was created by God specifically for the benefit of humankind.

¹ Essentially in Part 1 of this work which propounds the relationship of God, Man and Angels.

The spirit was seen as constant and permanent, but flesh was mutable and subject to change, and therefore any disruption to Divine Order would be attributable to human agency or, in Christian theology, through the intervention of the Fallen Angels who challenged God's Order. The idea of degree emerges precisely because it is unthinkable to change one's place in the 'Chain' without challenging Divine Order. Because of the symbiotic nature of all creation, such disruption on a microcosmic level would be held to impact disastrously upon the macrocosm. Therefore, one could not climb up the "Great Chain of Being" like a ladder.

Because the system was analogous as well as hierarchical, it was effective in validating the authority of monarchs, who derived legitimacy from a correspondence between their role as ruler of their subjects and God as ruler of all creation. As Julia Briggs states,

It is scarcely surprising that a highly hierarchical and structured society should have conceived the universe in its own image, nor that its formulation was subsequently used as an argument to bolster up that social structure, the elaborate ramifications being invoked as evidence that an arbitrary social system was in fact essential or inevitable (12).

Throughout Europe, the mechanisms by which the "inevitable" was reinforced were manifold and ubiquitous, and available in a publicly demonstrable form. Foucault has established, for example, how the spectacle of public torture and execution in Early Modern France - for diverse offences as well as treason - was developed as a theatrical ritual to demonstrate and reinforce the prevailing hegemony in keeping with this ideology (32-69). Such was also true of England, where the linkage between God and Monarch had been further consolidated by the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which established Henry VIII as Head of the Anglican Church. It would find its most extreme expression in the articulation of 'The Divine Right of

Kings’ in the *Basilikon Doron* of James I, published in Scotland in 1599 and again on James’s accession to the English throne in 1603. The promotion of the doctrine of degree in this explicit manner supports the proposition that a discourse on an ideology only truly emerges when that ideology ceases to command universal belief.

The doctrine was already in decay when it received its most famous dramatic presentation in the speech of Ulysses from Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*.

O, when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows! (1.3.101-10)

Here context is all. *Troilus and Cressida* is a play which explores cynicism and betrayal in a world of *realpolitik*. The exposition of the doctrine of degree within the play, on the lips of one whom Briggs calls “a political fixer” (13) who has no intention of deferring to his military superiors to achieve his goal, reflects the extent to which the concept of degree has ceased to be commonsense by 1604, and has entered public discourse. By the time of the first performances of *The Duchess of Malfi*, a decade later, Webster is able to explore the theme with great acuity.

Calderwood suggests that Webster explores the theme of degree through a structural use of ceremony which, he alleges, mitigates the inconsistencies of action, motivation and character for which the play is often faulted. As examples of this ceremonial form he cites firstly the forewarning of the Duchess’s brothers regarding remarriage as the expository ceremonial presentation of a moral thesis:

This is essentially an argument from Degree: the reliance upon private choice, especially when that choice descends upon an inferior, constitutes an infringement of the rigidly established social hierarchy and is, ultimately, an attack upon cosmological order (135).

His expression of a social and religious position, of course, masks Ferdinand's private desires, which may lean toward incest. The Duchess's subsequent courtship of Antonio - suggests Calderwood - is an antithesis, another staged "ceremony-in-reverse, a form of deceremonialisation by which she divests herself of the responsibilities of her social role" (137). That she speaks of this leading her into "a wilderness" is telling, implying a removal from societal norms.

Calderwood suggests that the presentation of the Duchess's "violation of Degree" produces some measure of "communal sanction" on the part of early modern audiences for the Act Four scenes of her torture and murder. There would at least (one supposes) be some recognition of the Duchess's culpability in defying convention. Foucault, however, alludes to the many times that tension caused by the perceived injustice of execution practices evinced hostility to the authorities and sympathy for the victims on the part of the spectators (59-69). Something similar happens here. In the harsh treatment of the Duchess, the nexus of crime and punishment is threatened by the disproportionate retribution fuelled by Ferdinand's personal agenda. Both Ferdinand and the Cardinal speak of the Duchess's transgression in terms of her "infected blood", which, of course, they share. According to Calderwood, the ceremonial purgation of her murder is, effectively in Ferdinand's case, an attempt at a sublimated purgation of his own guilt. He has hinted as much earlier, when he says to his brother,

... I could kill her now,
In you, or in myself, for I do think
It is some sin in us, Heaven doth revenge
By her.

(2.5.63-6)

Unlike the conventions of the traitor's scaffold speech,¹ with which theatre audiences would be familiar, the Duchess's final words omit any admission of personal guilt, but project the conventional Christian virtues of humility, fortitude and the hope of heaven. She does not pray for her brothers but, with not a little irony, hopes that her removal will enable them "to feed in quiet." The dramatic use of the conventions of scaffold speech has been examined by Rebecca Lemon. She notes that in an earlier play, *Macbeth* (1606), Shakespeare had already subverted the conventions. Drawing a parallel between the scaffold death of Cawdor ["Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it" (1.4.7-8)] and Macbeth's on the battlefield, ["before my body/ I throw my warlike shield" (5.8.32-33)], she discerns both a defiant assertion of courage and a tacit acknowledgement of damnation:

...he challenges the relation of the spectator and actor that operates on the scaffold by forcing us to examine our own generic expectations for repentance and restoration even as we gaze at him. As with Perseus's triumph over Medusa, Macbeth turns his spectral shield to the audience, opposing the conventions for pious death and allowing himself, momentarily, to triumph (43).

The Duchess's death scene must have also thrown down a challenge, qualitatively different but just as real. It is probable that, as with today's audiences, those at the Globe and Blackfriars would have been moved by the representation of her fate, seeing it as the tragic consequence of her own and Ferdinand's unruly passions, and the colder machinations of the Machiavellian Cardinal. Unlike us,

¹ Whether contrived for publication or genuinely spoken, these served to validate the monarch and control the audience. They usually comprised a public admission of guilt, and a prayer for divine forgiveness (a substitute for the then forbidden Roman Catholic sacrament of confession), followed by a warning to the public not to enter into treasonous behaviour.

however, they would presumably be more sensitive to the presentation of live contemporary arguments concerning the issue of degree, and therefore more susceptible to feelings of ambivalence over the justice of her fate.

There are principally five characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* through whom the issue of degree is explored. In a recent essay, Barbara Correll (85-6) has identified them as existing within a pattern of triangulation in which the Duchess presents the apex of an aristocratic triangle with her two brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal. This is mirrored -and effectively subverted - by the Duchess's simultaneous position at the apex of another triangle with her two servants, Antonio and Bosola. Her central position reflects her centrality as the initiator of the challenge to degree that her marriage to Antonio constitutes, incorporating as it does challenges to both class and gender role assumptions. Although all parties, in both triangles, suffer as a consequence of that action, the others essentially only react to it. However, the challenge does more than simply destroy the participants; I suggest it also enacts power transformations that are calculated to provoke the audience, for whom they have been staged, into confronting their own ambivalence and making a decision over the issues presented. There is only one character in the play that is presented as directly sharing these feelings of ambivalence with the audience, and that is Bosola. His involvement in the Duchess's murder is countered by an awakening sense of injustice that ultimately defies the dominant ideology. I suggest that Webster conceived Bosola as an essential vehicle to help the audience frame a response to the Duchess's challenge to degree in the play. This is an assertion that provokes two questions: firstly, why did Webster choose to explore degree and, secondly, why did he choose Bosola as key to this purpose?

1.2. Why Degree ?

I believe a partial answer to the first of these questions is rooted in Webster's own likely experience of a society in transition. As an aspiring and ambitious playwright from a bourgeois trade background, yet educated in law, issues of merit, degree, status and contract would have been personal realities in his life.

Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861) was the first treatise to propose a model of the transformation of society created by the shift from laws based upon status to laws based on contract. In the earliest societies, an individual's role and identity would be determined by position and birth. Legitimacy would not only determine inheritance, but – more significantly – one's whole role and function in society. Reinforced, by the hierarchical strictures of 'The Chain of Being', the granting of honours, titles and privileges would also be within the gift of the monarch or liege-lord. But in a world based upon contract, one's identity and function are based upon legal agreements voluntarily made with others. In Marxist terms, this is defined as a process associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie, who reduced status to a commodity to be bought and sold:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment' (Marx; Engels).

A notorious paradigm of this transformation was the sale of honours and titles by James I in the early seventeenth century. Initially, in the euphoria of his succession in 1603, during his Great Progress south, it was rumoured that James intended to create a thousand knights in emulation of the Court of King Arthur. This seemed, at first, to be a reinforcement of the feudal ideal, and by December 1604

England could boast of 1,159 new knights, where Elizabeth I, during her whole reign, had created only 878. However, there were already precedents under Elizabeth for offices, monopolies and favours to be granted by the Queen to her courtiers for resale. In the new reign, James's desire to please courtiers and clients - plus the obvious financial incentives involved - eventually led him to succumb to the temptation to make knighthood a saleable commodity. This was simply the start:

The minimum total profits to Crown and courtiers for the sale of all honours between 1603 and 1629 come to about £620,000, a figure which should be compared with the total gross receipts of the Court of Wards of about £800,000... (Stone, 64).

In the thirty-nine years from 1603 to 1641 the first two Stuarts created 3,281 knighthoods alone, the resultant inflation bringing such titles into contempt while increasing the market demand for higher titles such as 'Baronet'. In consequence,

...The great earls no longer towered over rural society in lonely splendour, for they were faced with growing numbers of rich, educated, self-confident men now demanding a share in political power and social prestige (Stone, 65).

It was not so much the rich who were the problem, but the educated and self-confident young men whose aspirations could not be met by the *status-quo*. Mark H. Curtis cites the philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in hindsight of the Civil War in characteristically dyspeptic fashion, "The core of the rebellion...are the universities" (qtd., 25). Curtis agrees, but maintains it was not (as Hobbes believed) the political insights afforded by a study of classical history and philosophy, nor the inculcated superiority of the emerging Puritan divines, but rather the success of the universities in producing huge numbers of ambitious young men when there were insufficient positions available for them to fill.

The success of the universities thus became a double-acting acid within early Stuart society: in the first place it exposed the depths of abuse in the old corruption and hence made it less tolerable than ever and at the same time it precipitated an insoluble group of alienated intellectuals who individually and collectively became troublemakers in a period of growing discontent with the Stuart regime (28).

This is part of the political, economic and social background to the court in Webster's world; it illuminates some of the issues informing both the courts and the courtiers depicted in his plays.

1.3. Why Bosola?

Significantly, Webster breaks with convention and places Bosola's name at the top of the 1623 cast list. Keith Sturgess claims "...it is part of Webster's own radical cast that a servant-turned-spy and a woman stand at the front of his play" (99). He finds it significant that Bosola describes his guilty conscience - painfully awakened after the murder of the Duchess - as "a perspective that shows us hell" (4.2.357-8). He points to the recurrence of imagery in the play connected to optical devices and describes Bosola, as "...Galilean man, adrift from the old certainties" noting that,

Amongst his various backgrounds has been a spell at Galileo's university of Padua (Flamineo is another alumnus) where as a "fantastical scholar"... he has pursued his studies to gain the name of "a speculative man", someone who plumbs the mystery of things (97).

He notes also the etymological significance in Webster's adjustment of the source name, 'Bozola' to a new spelling that references the word "Bossola"; the Italian for a mariner's compass, pointing up the irony that Bosola's own "final journey is directionless, away from justice" (97). Such hints are suggestive that Webster

fashioned the role of Bosola with a crucial function in mind for the presentation of his themes, but they do not tell us why. The best answer is to ask who Bosola is. If we can understand the figure that Webster was trying to present, and the sources from which it sprang, we are better placed to understand the function of the role.

Bosola, like Webster's earlier creation, Flamineo, is representative of the ambitious university-educated, alienated intellectuals of whom Curtis writes. Desperate for employment that will advance his career; he is recruited into the intelligence services where he falls prey to powerful men, ready to exploit his willingness to undertake actions of dubious morality in their service. State intelligence agencies have operated in this manner consistently down the centuries. But, from the start of the play, Webster presents Bosola's employment as a fall from grace, the system he serves as corrupt, and potentially fatal to those who serve it.¹

But if Bosola is really Webster's contemporary, so is the world in which he moves. The court depicted in *The Duchess of Malfi* is in the same state of flux as the court of King James. Both Antonio and Bosola are caught half-way, striving to survive and prosper in a society that - like early seventeenth century England - has not fully evolved from status to contract. Antonio criticises Bosola for responding, of necessity, to those very conditions that the court in fact invents. He dismissively condemns him for hypocrisy, criticising his "railing" against the court's "flattering sycophants" when he truly

Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud
Bloody, or envious, as any man,
If he had means to be so.

(1.1.26-8)

¹ Compare the fate of the brilliant, Cambridge-educated Marlowe, whose work as a spy for Walsingham was probably linked to his Deptford murder, cutting short the career of one of the most talented of Webster's near contemporary playwrights.

Bosola's dilemma is reflected in his own awareness of the contradiction in both the court and in himself. Trapped in this interstitial space, he begins to dispute the general assumption that only one set of consistent rules governs the world. Hired for cash, and given a court title, which is in reality a cover for his real work as a spy, he is aware that the conditions of his employment work against another aspect of the predominant ideology:

These cursed gifts would make
You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor,
And should I take these they'd take me to hell.
(1.1.263-6)

Yet Bosola also seems to misunderstand the new ideology, regarding Ferdinand as a traditional feudal liege-lord, when his liege-lord sees him merely as an employee. This is reflected in the continuation of his loyalty beyond the boundaries of his conscience. He complains of Ferdinand's later disapprobation almost in terms of betrayed feudal fealty:

Let me know
Wherefore I should be thus neglected. Sir
I served your tyranny, and rather strove
To satisfy yourself than all the world:
And, though I loathed the evil, yet I loved
You that did counsel it, and rather sought
To appear a true servant than an honest man.
(4.2.326-32)

But, even as an employee, Bosola faces betrayal, because Ferdinand has no intention of honouring his contract. Insane or not, Ferdinand also mistakes their relationship, regarding breach of contract as the prerogative of the feudal tyrant, and fails to recognize the world has changed. Ultimately, this will bring down both his dynasty and his class at the hands of his servant just as, within forty years of the publication of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the son of James I would succumb to rebellion and regicide by his own subjects. Once the monarch's ability to bestow power was

no longer ascribable to divine authority but rather to the money which paid for it, the normative ideology which sustained the whole structure was fatally undermined.

Frank Whigham says of *The Duchess of Malfi*

I believe that this play was written, at least in significant part, to dissect the actual workings of the normative ideology set before us at its beginning. Far from providing criteria for the judgment of the heterodox characters (as criticism, seduced by power as order, has often presumed), this ideological frame and those who pose and endorse it are themselves to be judged by the "heterodox" (*Sexual and Social Mobility* 182).

Although Whigham is speaking here essentially of the outcast Duchess, *Bosola* should also be included as one whom the same ideological centre defines as the "heterodox."

Like the other characters, *Bosola* is concerned to govern the grounding of his identity. As an employee he presents one of the most intricate examples of the Renaissance problematic of self-shaping. This representation is initially adumbrated through a dense blend of the predicates of counselor, malcontent, have-not, henchman, and aesthete, roles all marked by alienation. (176).

"In examining *Bosola's neglect*," writes Whigham, "Webster offers us the first tragic figure whose isolation is formulated in terms of employment by another" (*Sexual and Social Mobility* 176). Yet he does this in full knowledge of some key dramatic conventions of his time, and the use which his contemporaries made of them. Webster was also undoubtedly aware of the theatrical treatment of degree in the work of other playwrights.

Barbara Correll has suggested an interesting genesis for the character Webster chose to explore the theme. She refers to Shakespeare's treatment of the steward Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (65-92). Drawing on Muriel Bradbrook's biographical research (28) which places Webster as a member of the Middle Temple in 1598, she

airs the not unreasonable possibility that he may have been in the audience for *Twelfth Night* - known to have been performed at the Middle Temple on 2nd February 1602. She suggests that we might,

...imagine that the talented and ambitious coachmaker's son, pursuing his legal career and theatrical interests, was provoked and impressed not only by the comedy's craft and its conflicts of identity and misrecognition but also by Malvolio's humiliation and scapegoating in a punitive spectacle, much like that of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, in which the social outcast's abrupt departure haunts an otherwise-celebratory conclusion (73).

She hypothesises that Webster effectively created "a transgeneric afterlife for Malvolio in ...*The Duchess of Malfi*."

Social erotic fantasies foregrounded, Malvolio reappears as Antonio, the estate steward wooed by his aristocratic mistress. Sinister potential developed, he becomes Bosola, the brooding intelligencer delegated to manage Ferdinand's malevolent desires—that is, to steward information—in Webster's tragedy (65).

Correll's evidence for a specific link, implying a conscious influence by the earlier play on Webster, is circumstantial. However, Webster clearly knew and alluded to Shakespeare's plays in his own work and, even if the circumstantial evidence is unconvincing, there is no gainsaying that they share a mutual interest in certain themes, defined by Correll as "class transgression and female agency".

...we could hypothesize a conversation on power, class, gender, and genre arising from those interests; and we should be impressed by how Webster further develops those concerns in his treatment of the steward figure (73).

Of course, Correll's assessment very much hinges on the duality of the steward figure of whom Bosola is only one half. Yet, we cannot weigh the role of Antonio as of equal importance as he remains a significantly passive figure throughout. Whether the actor playing the role interprets Antonio's response to the

Duchess's wooing with alarm or equanimity (it has been played both ways), the role is essentially reactive. His only really self-initiated action, the futile attempt to reconcile himself to the Cardinal, becomes merely an ineffectual and fatal blunder. It is only Bosola's radical action in defiance of degree in the last Act of the play that matches the radical actions initiated by the Duchess in the first and follows through with any effective change.

To achieve this, Webster radically developed the character of Bosola from his sources. In Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (3-43), - translated via the French of Belleforest from the Italian of Bandello - the original character of Daniel de Bozola does not enter the narrative until after the death of the Duchess. Described by Painter as a "bloody beast" and "new Iudas", this Lombard captain is hired to assassinate Antonio, a task he duly performs, ambushing him outside a church in Milan. Webster enlarges this role to create a malcontent outsider with a shadowy criminal background, brought in by Ferdinand, on the advice of his brother, to act as a spy on his sister. From here Bosola's path escalates to murder, setting in train a process that will lead to eight deaths including his own.

In Bosola's case we are presented with an equivocal character with seemingly ambiguous, even conflicting motives. In spite of this - perhaps because of it - Bosola is crucial, not just to a critical reading of this play, but to the play in performance. Through Bosola, Webster expounds a powerful social and political critique, as well as producing one of the most compelling psychological creations in the drama of the period. Yet all this stems essentially from the reworking of a stock figure; the malcontent.

1.4. Bosola as Malcontent

It is a feature of the traditions contributing to characters on the early modern English stage that they frequently involve the use of dramatic stereotypes. With *Bosola* it is possible to discern a variety of these. For example, in common with villains fond of direct audience address, such as Richard of Gloster and Iago, *Bosola* seems to owe much to the medieval 'Vice'. He also seems to possess some attributes of the stereotypical 'Machiavel', the satirist, and the blunt soldier. But the most significant contribution to the composition of *Bosola* (as also of *Flamineo*) is the malcontent stereotype.

Misleadingly, the term malcontent has become almost synonymous with 'melancholic'. This is in part the legacy of writers like Stoll (*Malcontent Type*, 281-303), who compared the melancholy man, as described in Robert Burton's Elizabethan treatise, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, with Marston's Malevole, who also gives name to the title of the play, *The Malcontent*. Of course, *The Duchess of Malfi* compounds the confusion with its ubiquitous reference to melancholia; at different points in the play, all the major characters are described as melancholy. *Bosola*'s melancholy is described by Antonio as a form of affectation, like a garment worn as a fashion accessory,

Because you would not seem to the world puffed up with
your preferment, you continue this out-of-fashion
melancholy. Leave it, leave it.

(2.1.88-90)

Antonio is indeed correctly alluding to a fashionable melancholia, common in English court circles in the 1580s, which by the second decade of the new century, would have been distinctly *passé*. For Ferdinand, *Bosola*'s melancholy is equally a

garment to be doffed or donned at will, and eminently exploitable as a mask for an intelligencer:

Be yourself:
Keep your old garb of melancholy; 'twill express
You envy those that stand above your reach,
Yet strive not to come near 'em.¹
(1.1.277-80)

In both quotations, there is an assumption of hypocrisy on Bosola's part, which places him on a par with any of the others competing for preferment in a corrupt court.

...I observe his railing
Is not for simple love of piety:
Indeed he rails at those things which he wants,
Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,
Bloody, or envious, as any man,
If he had means to be so.
(1.1.23-8)

This is not just a way of denigrating him, but effectively a device that those inside the court use to deny him objectivity, allowing them to dismiss his criticisms of the court as being far from impartial. Yet, Antonio also expresses concern that what seems merely external appearance could in time become Bosola's inner reality:

This foul melancholy
Will poison all his goodness, for – I'll tell you –
If too immoderate sleep be truly said
To be an inward rust into the soul,
It then doth follow want of action,
Breeds all black malcontents, and their close rearing,
Like moths in cloth, do hurt for want of wearing.
(1.1.75-81)

Antonio considers Bosola's malcontentedness a product of his melancholia not vice versa. In fact, Bosola's melancholia has been sparked by a malcontented sense of grievance and injustice, which by the end of the play goes much deeper than a railing

¹ In many productions these lines are taken to suggest Bosola should literally retain his existing costume rather than becoming a liveried servant.

against the court. The man whose last pessimistic words invoke "this gloomy world" has come to experience an existential melancholy and might well answer, with Hamlet, that he should be defined by more than just his "inky cloak" ; that he also has "that within which passeth show/ These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.85-6). There are three clear melancholics in *The Duchess of Malfi*; Ferdinand, the Cardinal and Bosola, but of the three Bosola is the only true malcontent.

Theodore Spencer may have been the first to draw some distinction between the melancholic and the malcontent (525-35), categorising the former as either natural (suffering through misfortune, tending towards solitariness and contemplation and rarely taking action), the diseased (a product of physical illness) and the artificial (melancholia as fashion statement). By contrast, he regards the malcontent as defined by action; this is an individual who feels displaced within the social order, and whose consequent anger at his condition compels him to promote and sustain disorder.

James R. Keller has provided one of the few complete studies to focus entirely on the malcontent stereotype in early modern English drama, finding its predecessors stretching back more than a millennium to Thersites in Homer's *Iliad* (ca.900-800 B.C.) and the Biblical Job (*The Book of Job* 5th century B.C.). Focussing upon what he terms the "politic" malcontent, Keller observes in the dramatic figure something considerably more than social misfit or fashion statement, maintaining that

...the renaissance playwrights requisitioned a very old literary archetype, empowering (sic) it with a contemporary relevance and allowing it to speak for the troubled populace of a society in transition (33-4).

He goes further than Spencer in fully distinguishing between the early modern malcontent & the melancholic.¹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he maintains, the word carried the connotation of 'rebel', thereby agreeing with Spencer's assertion that the malcontent is someone displaced from the social order, who therefore delights in disorder. However, Keller also distinguishes the malcontent from the 'Machiavel' (both real and theatrical) and the stage satirist. The real life Machiavellian prince (according to Machiavelli) is motivated by self-preservation and civic responsibility; his 'virtù'² is activated by a combination of the survival instinct and neglect. The stage 'Machiavel', however, is simply spurred by unadulterated ambition and love of intrigue. The stage satirist has points of similarity but - as with the melancholic - a penchant for satire is an aspect of the malcontent, not a definitive characteristic. He often has the same targets (e.g. Lust, women, social climbing) but, whereas the satirist is motivated by human folly and corruption, the malcontent's motives are more personal (bitterness, envy, desperation). Keller ultimately provides his own definition:

The malcontent ...is a character who specifically represents the political disaffection of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century...who is embittered because he has suffered a demotion in social or political position or because he has been thwarted in his attempts to attain the rewards of which he deems himself worthy. The frustration resulting from his disappointment causes him to rail indiscriminately at all that repulses him and to take action... and seize, either through force, guile, or manipulation, those things that he desires (12-13).

¹ He maintains that contemporary works, such as Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie* were the first texts to form an association between the two types. He goes on to cite five recent critics who maintain the confusion. Of these, only Theodore Spencer's *The Elizabethan Malcontent* makes any form of distinction.

² This is Machiavelli's term to describe the vigour, pride, courage, strength and ruthlessness comprising the chief determinants of political success.

Keller's portrait of the malcontent is valuable for this almost unique distinction from the ubiquitous melancholic. But, he has gone further and provided a virtual taxonomy of the type. He identifies three classes of malcontent, defined by their political action, claiming they conform to Machiavelli's three goals of political action (i.e. conservation, reform and revolution) as identified by Neil Wood (33-58). Keller's three types are the malcontent prince, the malcontent soldier and the malcontent rogue. He limits his definition of Bosola solely to that of malcontent rogue, although there is clearly a case for him also to be seen as a malcontent soldier. Although Bosola cannot really be defined as a malcontent prince, there are nevertheless some aspects of Keller's criteria for this figure which are surprisingly applicable. To justify this, it is worth examining Keller's definitions and exemplars in more detail.

Keller states, firstly, that the actions of the disaffected figure of the malcontent prince are generally framed to assist in the "maintenance of an order already founded" – (i.e. conservation). He finds examples of the dramatic type in Feliche and Andrugio,¹ Hamlet,² Altofronto/Malevole,³ Antifront/Fleire,⁴ and Prospero.⁵ These figures mirror discontent at the limited preferment available at the Elizabethan and Jacobean Courts, where the monarch alone was the fountainhead of wealth and influence. There, only favoured individuals could solicit benefits for other suitors and be paid (i.e. bribed) by them. In the consequent competing factions, a courtier needed

¹ Marston, *Antonio & Mellida* (1599).

² Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. (1601). Too often Hamlet's melancholy is given prominence over his grievances. There is ample justification to see his motivation as political.

³ Marston, *The Malcontent*. (1604). A malcontent prince poses as a malcontent villain.

⁴ Sharpham, *The Fleire* (1607).

⁵ Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (1611).

subtlety, cunning and sometimes treachery to survive. Bosola might be loosely considered for inclusion simply because, although he is admitted into Malfi as a servant rather than a courtier, he is afforded considerable (albeit relative) power and status.¹ It is worth noting that the title "Provisor of the Horse" bestowed upon Bosola is strikingly similar to the title "Master of the Horse" that Elizabeth I bestowed on her favourite, Robert Dudley. Dudley subsequently rose into greater favour as the first Earl of Leicester. Leicester moved in and out of favour during his life, but Keller cites the fate of his stepson, the Earl of Essex, as a paradigm of the rise & fall of a malcontent prince. From his youth, Essex replaced Leicester as Queen Elizabeth's favourite and gained much honour and wealth under her patronage. She admired his outspokenness, but this undid him eventually. He was prone to sulk to blackmail her into giving way. He gained title of Earl Marshall & was awarded the monopoly of sweet wines (customs duty). The latter was the main source of his wealth but, after he failed militarily in Ireland Elizabeth removed it, ruining him financially. His abortive rebellion led to capture, trial and execution for treason. Keller sees theatrical resemblances to Essex in Bolingbroke,² Alcibiades,³ and Hamlet.

These portraits display shared qualities. They are all "politically conservative figures pitted against a world in a state of transformation and flux"(70); they employ Machiavellian "virtu" (i.e. decisive, courageous, well- considered action) to "attempt to militate against the dissolution of the old order, in which princes had a divine right

¹ It is interesting that Webster seems deliberately to blur the distinction between the status of high ranking servants, such as Antonio and Bosola, and courtiers, such as Delio and Castruchio. The friendship of Antonio and Delio seems to be one of equals and, sardonically, Bosola even offers advice to Castruchio about how to improve his standing as a courtier.

² Shakespeare, *Richard II* (1595). This was controversially commissioned by Essex to be revived on eve of his abortive rebellion.

³ Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* (1605).

to govern regardless of their injustice”(70). Experience may teach them a degree of cunning and deviousness in pursuing this, but essentially “they lament the collapse of traditional values, perceiving clearly the world’s growing corruption” (70).

Bosola, at the start of the play, is allied to the old feudal order, and certainly gives full expression to his perception of the “world’s growing corruption”. Yet, his cynicism means that he is, at best, semi-detached from the prevailing power structure, and events in the course of the play eventually turn him violently against it. The most significant aspect of Bosola’s association with the dramatic malcontent prince is in the way in which his expressions of discontent with the changing times play with the audience. His satire, like that of the malcontent prince, is

well tailored to fit the emotional needs of the...audience, a society experiencing change on a vast scale... The displaced princes... participated in the social metamorphosis by voicing the anger and fear of the populace, by revealing their dissatisfaction with the accelerating change (70-1).

Keller maintains that the socio-political implications of most playwrights’ use of this figure was conservative, and here there seems to be a sharp separation from the way Webster employs Bosola:

...Playwrights might have sought to contain...change by providing paradigms of the reinstatement of the old order...a legitimisation of the dominant culture.
...dramatic action was a pattern for obedience demonstrating that the destruction of order and degree led to social chaos and moral degeneration (71).

Although the malcontent prince is always forced to compromise his integrity, “his rule is still preferable to that of the usurper” (71). Keller speculates that the audience might be expected “to experience remorse for the ...prince’s ethical decline, to regard it as a symptom of the sickness of an immoral age?”(71). Bosola’s trajectory is the opposite – truly “another voyage”. Appearing, initially, as one whose

conscience can be bought, he seems to have little or no integrity left to compromise, until he rediscovers it by an act of apparent treason.

A more obvious figure referenced by *Bosola* is the malcontent soldier, yet even here he presents a shift from the conventional. Keller believes the actions of this figure, in plays of the period, are conventionally framed to promote the “renovation of an order already established” (13) (i.e. reform); Webster’s *Bosola* really seems to function towards a different end.

At the end of Elizabeth’s reign, discharged soldiers became a considerable social problem, impacting upon the incidence of vagrancy and crime and presenting even a potential threat to the peace of the realm. In spite of this, the period saw a proliferation in the number of plays representing them sympathetically. Keller cites as an example, the opening scene of Marlowe’s *Edward II* (1592) which presents an “angry, poverty-stricken, and outspoken soldier... and the influential man’s indifference to the soldier’s sacrifice” (73).

He finds examples of the malcontent soldier stereotype among Alcibiades,¹ Virginius,² Maximus,³ Jacamo,⁴ Archas⁵ and Belgarde.⁶ They reflect contemporary causes of discontent among the military: soldiers deprived of pay, victuals and

¹ Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* (1605).

² Webster, *Appius & Virginia* (1608). The date of writing is uncertain. Unpublished until 1654, and now regarded as a collaboration with Thomas Heywood, the simplistic morality of the play is uncharacteristic of the Webster of *Malfi* and *The White Devil*.

³ Fletcher, *Tragedy of Valentinian* (1612).

⁴ Beaumont & Fletcher, *The Capitaine* (1613). This is a comic variant of the type.

⁵ Fletcher, *The Loyal Subject* (1618).

⁶ Massinger, *The Unnatural Combat* (1621). This is another comic variant.

adequate shelter and clothing; high-ranking officers denied influence and preferment because they were absent from court while on campaigns; a military wage system corrupt at every level; private suppliers, who failed to deliver when not paid.

These soldiers share a sense of injured merit and anger resulting from deprivation; a propensity for treachery, if loyal service fails to provide sufficient food and clothing for the commoner, power or recognition for the nobleman; a belief their actions will lead "to a more virtuous court, one that has respect and gratitude for those who maintain it". Interestingly, Keller points out that "The common soldier often functions chorally...stressing he is a social type rather than an individual" (81). While expressing resentment at their inability to share the luxuries of the court that they have helped generate, ironically, they often also protest idleness, hoping for the action and glory of foreign wars. They are equally concerned about the status of their commanders, expressing discontent to the point of mutiny over their maltreatment.

While Bosola is as vociferous as any of the above on the subject of the injustice to soldiers, it is more the unrewarded servant than the discharged soldier that Webster uses him to invoke. Although quick to identify with, and thereby define himself as "a blunt soldier", Bosola is really a privateer or 'soldier of fortune' and, in a sense, more unjustly treated than those who have fought more openly for monarch and country. Suborned to commit murder and having paid for the crime in the galleys, his lack of reward is presumably now accompanied by the status of criminal. He is doubly now a stranger in his own land, lacking even the camaraderie of fellow neglected soldiers. As Whigham aptly puts it, "He will not rise in the pub or feast his friends on Saint Crispin's Day" (*Sexual and Social Mobility*, 177).

In spite of this, his valour is recognised by Antonio as concomitant with his neglect (1.1.74-77), something which places him above the status of the braggart soldier, Pistol¹ or even the corrupt murderer, Pedringano². In Antonio's exclamation, "Tis great pity" there is the recognition of Bosola's thwarted potential; being in service at a time when merit is not rewarded. It is this quality that led Jonathan Miller to describe his vision of another neglected villain-soldier, Iago, as one who might, "had he lived in the society that succeeded the one in which Shakespeare wrote, have been a Major General in Cromwell's New Model Army" (149). Given the sympathetic status awarded the neglected soldier in the plays of the period, it is likely that this was utilised by Webster to illicit some measure of sympathy for Bosola among his audience – especially at the Globe. It is also likely that his 'ex-con' status would not alienate him entirely from the sympathies of at least a portion of the same audience. This leads us to the title that hangs most comfortably about his neck: malcontent rogue.

Keller sees the actions of the malcontent rogue as intending to lay the "foundation of a new order of things"(13), i.e. revolution. He believes the figure has its roots in socio-economic factors such as the unemployment generated by the transition from an agrarian to an industrial state, and land enclosures leading to vagrancy and the movement of rural gentry to the city. Social mobility both opened up the opportunities for advancement of the lower classes while simultaneously increasing the competition for it.

The texts Keller explores in the context of this figure are relatively more familiar to a modern audience than those cited for the other two malcontent types,

¹ Shakespeare, *Henry IV 1 & 2, Henry V*.

² Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*.

suggesting that this may be the most enduring representation of the stereotype. Iago, Vindice,¹ Bussy², Flamineo³ and Bosola are his principle exemplars. Although dramatic rogues are commonplace, they are often peripheral to the action; these are central.

As with other malcontents, these rogues share certain qualities. They are frequently caustic satirists, reserving especial venom for flatterers. Paradoxically, they also have an inflated sense of self-righteousness, rationalizing their own immoral actions as the product of economic necessity or compulsion by their employers. However, Keller validly discerns a progressive spiritual evolution in their representations. Interestingly, this seems to follow the chronology of their creation, each portrait developing an increasing moral complexity, culminating in that of Bosola, whose ultimate actions suggest a kind of anagnorisis.

Keller attributes the popularity of such figures to his belief that the period was "perhaps the 'most psychically disturbed era in European history'," ⁴ and that most of the anxieties this produced originated from social change. By demonstrating the often-extreme responses of the malcontent to issues of contemporary concern, the plays in which the figure appeared served both the needs of the general populace and the authorities, by suggesting the benefits of a moderate reformist response to change. But the figure could just as readily present a subversive agenda, as I believe it does in the case of Bosola. Here, as in the finest of these plays, the malcontent

¹ *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607). Keller attributes authorship to Tourneur, although this is disputed by most recent authorities, who prefer Middleton.

² Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois* (1607).

³ Webster, *The White Devil* (1612).

⁴ He is here quoting from. Kinsman, *"Folly, Melancholy, and Madness": A Study in Shifting Styles of Medical Analysis and Treatment 1450-1675* (1974).

figure embodies the moral argument or, as Keller puts it, "is generally the focal point of the ideological struggle" (163). In this context Bosola could be seen as

... a paradigm of the courageous, if unethical individual who meets the vicissitudes of inexorable fate with daring and resourcefulness.....a vicarious mouthpiece for the troubled masses who could not voice their individual complaints (31).

But Keller adopts the critical methodology of historicists who argue "the literary text not only *exists as a function, or articulation of context* but also intervenes in the historical conditions that it represents"(15) and there are good reasons for believing that Webster was aware of the risks involved in such a creation. One such historicist, Jonathan Dollimore, for example, cites the State's inquisitorial and censorious response to the company staging the revival of *Richard II* at the time of Essex's rebellion.

...what made Elizabeth I so anxious was not so much a retrospectively and clearly ascertained effect of the staging of *Richard II* (the uprising was, after all, abortive and Essex was executed) but the fact of the play having been appropriated - been given significance for a particular cause and in certain 'open' contexts. This period's pragmatic conception of literature meant that such appropriations were not a perversion of true literary reception, they were its reception (9).

He cites the playwright, Fulke Greville's destruction of one of his own plays for fear it would be recognised as "personating...vices in the present Governors, and government" (qtd. 9). He also quotes Raleigh who, in his *History of the World*, warns the would-be writer of too much contemporary relevance which, in consequence, "may happily strike out his teeth" (qtd. 9). When Dollimore states that "Those like Greville and Raleigh, knew then that the idea of literature passively reflecting history was erroneous" (9-10), it is reasonable to assume that their contemporary, Webster was one of that "like" who shared this knowledge. In practice, of course, it is

probable that Greville's position as a courtier made him more vulnerable than a theatrical professional. Nevertheless, in this context Webster may have regarded Bosola as more than just a mirror of society in transition but - more dangerously through his actions - as an agent affecting the audience's perceptions and attitudes.

1.5. Censorship?

The survival of *The Duchess of Malfi* in the repertory of theatres worldwide - albeit not without discontinuity since its first performance - points to its ongoing success with audiences. What is surprising, however, is that the play's popularity seems to exist independently of its critical reputation and, for that matter, of the diverse interpretations that have been made of the play's meaning. One might expect the history of the play's reception in performance to have been at least as fractious as its critical heritage, although for different reasons. On the contrary, from its first performance in 1614, not only was *The Duchess of Malfi* a notable success for The King's Men, prompting several revivals within its first two decades, but it also appears in the schedule of performances before Charles I at the Cockpit-in-Court for 26th December 1630 (Bentley 1.96). This surprising success story and the play's easy assimilation into the regular repertory of The King's Men no doubt facilitated its survival after the theatrically catastrophic interruption of the Civil War and the period of Parliamentary rule. Its association with the monarchy no doubt assisted the sporadic revivals after the Restoration in 1660, but perhaps also contributed to the somewhat 'schizophrenic' nature of the play's critical reputation to this day. It is after all curious that many still regard as intrinsically conservative a play which, in the final analysis, allows a murderer successfully to cull an entire noble family, thereby performing a *de facto* (albeit involuntary) *coup d'état*. It is not that the *coup d'état* was unfamiliar fare in plays on either Elizabethan or Jacobean stages (the most

famous example being *Hamlet*)¹ but that, with Webster's play, the revolution is enacted, not by a member of the nobility themselves, but by a treacherous commoner who defies fealty to turn murderously on his temporal and spiritual masters.²

The unhindered performances of such plays may help to validate the theory of early modern theatrical "powerlessness" first advanced by Paul Yachnin (*Powerless Theatre*),³ and, in the context of the early performance history of *The Duchess of Malfi*, this is worthy of some detailed consideration. Yachnin contests the critical notion of the subversive nature of the early modern stage as advanced by cultural materialists such as Dollimore and Sinfield. He challenges the alleged "imposition" on some early modern texts of "their putative contribution to the subversion of the ideological *status-quo*, which arguably eventuated in the Civil War" (51). While acknowledging that the earlier Tudor ruling classes may have held justified fears of the power of the performed play to influence audiences in profound ways, he asserts that such fears had largely evaporated by the 1590s to be replaced by the concept that the theatre was not just powerless but, indeed, "irrelevant to the system of power" (50). This alleged condition, (which prevailed until the accession of Charles I in 1625) was achieved thanks to the relative political stability of the period, but it was also, he suggests, due to the activities of the players' companies themselves, who sought and won from the government, "a privileged, profitable and powerless

¹ Closer in time to *The Duchess of Malfi* is another singularly risqué example, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where two revengeful brothers put paid to a whole dynasty. With its 1606 performance, sandwiched neatly between the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the Midland Revolt of 1607, it was possibly more than accident that left the name of the playwright (probably Middleton again) off the title page of the published text.

² Perhaps rendered slightly more palatable to the offices of the Protestant English State by their presentation, in this instance, as both Italian-Spanish and Roman Catholic!

³ The essay was later reprised as the first chapter of his book, Yachnin, Paul, *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, the Making of Theatrical Value* (1997).

marginality" (50). Yachnin points to the transfer of patronage to the monarch from that of aristocrats with an active political or religious agenda as a key factor in the players' achievement of this status. Elizabeth I's concerns were always less about the activities of the players than of the use to which they could be put by their aristocratic patrons. She appears to have been consistently supportive of the players, and her inclination to regard them merely as hirelings seems to have worked to their significant advantage. In one key example, with the most notorious politico-theatrical conjunction of her reign, Essex's pre-rebellion commission of *Richard II*, the monarch's punishment did not descend on the heads of The Lord Chamberlain's Men with the same intensity that it fell on those of the Earl's supporters.

The same seems true of the operation of the libel laws. After 1600, the monarch's support seems decisive in neutralising the opposition of the City authorities to the players. By limiting the playing companies to two, under direct royal patronage, licensing powers were transferred to the Office of The Master of the Revels. As a significant consequence, although several writers suffered under the libel laws during Elizabeth's reign, not one well-known playwright was similarly prosecuted. Ostensibly, the same seems also true of her successor's reign,

Between 1603 and 1625 libel was a significant element in no fewer than 577 Star Chamber cases...Yet the fact remains that during King James's reign as in Elizabeth's not one prominent poet or playwright was punished for libel (Finkelpearl 124).

Finkelpearl attributes this leniency to a combination of bureaucratic inefficiency and (surprisingly) King James, himself, "who numbered among the many discordant elements in his makeup a curiously modern-sounding, if inconsistent, respect for the

freedom of speech.”(132).¹ There are so many instances of well known playwrights breaching the libel laws with impunity, that one might conclude “that it was almost impossible for a Jacobean dramatist to become a martyr for free speech”(137). Finkelpearl avoids the temptation of describing the undoubted dissidence in James’s court as evidence of an embryonic ‘Oppositionist’ party, anticipating the anti-royalism of the Civil War. However, he does feel justified in using the term *factions* to describe the “...various groups of nobles and other courtiers ruthlessly jockeying for power and influence and differing on the key issues of the day...” (134). Theatre may not have been a matter of total indifference to these parties.² It may have served to present sharp opinions under the mask of playful frivolity, and perhaps the court could regard the players simply as all-licensed fools.

But Webster did not write *The Duchess of Malfi* for a court performance, nor is he likely to have assumed it would ever receive one. Although it was eventually performed at court in 1630, this was sixteen years after the play’s first performances at the public and private venues of the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses, and some five years into the reign of a new monarch, Charles I. For public or private performances, as Yachnin suggests, “the sheer ‘lowliness’ of commercial plays made them *a priori* less important than either court closet drama or court masques” (*Powerless Theatre* 56). This effectively enabled the smuggling of potentially

¹ Such tolerance did not extend to non-dramatic texts such as Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*; all available copies of which were burned on James’s accession in 1603.

² Finkelpearl cites (128) the engineering of the extraordinary nine performances of Middleton’s anti-Spanish *Game at Chess* which took London by storm in 1624. It resulted in a fine for the Master of the Revels Office, suggesting some behind the scenes geopolitical manipulation, as possibly evidenced by the intervention of the Lord Chamberlain on behalf of the Players. Perhaps, even more interestingly, Finkelpearl also cites (127) the 1620 commissioning of a play (now lost) for performance before James by his son Charles, which presented filial betrayal and royal murder. Whatever Charles’s motivation, this real life echo of the play scene from *Hamlet* evidently “moved the King in an extraordinary manner, both inwardly and outwardly.”

explosive material into plays. In the unlikely event that the authority's suspicion of subversive intent resulted in an accusation, the players could always shelter under the umbrella of 'invading interpretation'. This term, coined by Ben Jonson in his Epistle Dedicatory to *Volpone*,¹ shifted the production of potentially offensive meaning "from their own texts to the 'malicious' imaginings of their audiences" (*Powerless Theatre* 57). This strategy was especially useful with texts containing topical resonances; topicality being one ingredient that could greatly assist popularity and boost the chance of a play's commercial success. The illusion of "powerlessness" was a small price for the players to pay for this.

'Invading interpretation' seems to have played a considerable part in *The Duchess of Malfi*'s performance history, and one that probably contributed both to the play's survival and its success; different audiences seem to have had different expectations of the play, and produced diverse responses to what they were seeing and hearing. This historically parallels the play's confused and disputed critical reception. In the same area - and in keeping with Webster's afore-mentioned fondness for wrong-footing his audience - Yachnin writes of a deliberate "functional ambiguity," a safeguarding device employed by the companies in the writing of plays and their presentation. This would enable them to deal directly with political issues, effectively de-politicised "by virtue of being bifurcated, or two-faced." This, Yachnin argues, is what undermined Essex's use of *Richard II*, which was rendered ineffective propaganda in the actual political conflict by virtue of the ambiguity of its meaning (*Powerless Theatre* 66).

¹"... but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or give leave to these invading interpreters, to bee over-familiar with their fames, who cunningly, and often, utter their owne virulent malice, under other mens simplest meanings." Jonson, Epistle Dedicatory 7.

The argument of *The Duchess of Malfi* is not so much "bifurcated" as diffused; but, for the same reason, it is equally incapable of direct political use. The argument is misted by the Italianate setting which seems to deflect the gaze away from home (although this was a common device that a sophisticated audience could probably see through).¹ Next, the clear sympathies of the audience are complicated by the wilful folly of the Duchess, the malevolence of her brothers but, above all, by the presentation of Bosola, who embodies both the crime and its punishment. Contradictorily, the play then also lends itself to the argument - common to other contemporary Revenge Dramas - that it conservatively reaffirms the *status quo*; an argument suggested by the deaths of both protagonists and antagonists in the process of the destruction of the corrupt old order. Moreover, it appears to end conventionally with the installation of a legitimate ruler, in the manner of a Fortinbras or *The Revenger's Tragedy's* Antonio, and the hope (at least) of stability. Seen thus, it suggests a reinforcement of the existing institutions of power and, by implication, Divine Justice. With such a perspective, ultimately even a villain such as Bosola is seen as acting in the service of a higher power; a point he makes himself, when standing with sword drawn over the Cardinal:

When thou killed'st thy sister,
Thou took from Justice her most equal balance,
And left her naught but her sword.
(5.5.39-41)

Yet, the play does not end with any of the reassurance of 'business as usual'. Rather, it ends with the presumed succession to power of a child; something that history plays would have taught was fraught with danger, underlined perhaps by the audience's memory that this is also the child for whom Antonio's horoscope

¹ In this case assisted by specific references in the text to contemporary London locations such as the Blackfriars glass-making works, and the "Barber-Chirurgeons 'Hall" where the public could view a display of dissected cadavers.

signified "short life". Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, the end presents the tainting of an aristocratic bloodline, because the child is Antonio's; questionably legitimate and technically a commoner.¹

Such ambiguity in presentation and outcome is wholly characteristic of Webster's approach. With an unsophisticated audience for *The White Devil* at The Red Bull, this ambiguity would have emerged as a weakness; with a more sophisticated one for the *The Duchess of Malfi* at Blackfriars it was a strength. For this, and other reasons that I will indicate, I believe Blackfriars rather than the Globe would have been Webster's venue of choice.

1.6. Webster's Chosen Audience

In his Epistle to *The White Devil*, Webster spells out the reasons for that play's failure at The Red Bull. At root, his comments highlight the disadvantages of a public venue, with its downmarket audience. He was, by implication, conscious of the advantages of a private one like the Blackfriars with a more select clientele.

Keith Sturgess has made an informed assessment of the audience composition of the second Blackfriars Playhouse from 1608, based, in the first instance, on its catchment area (11-26). Although not in such close westerly proximity to the court and the Whitehall heart of government as some other private theatres, its position in the City to the north of the Thames was ideal for access from the homes of the merchant classes and the students of the Inns of Court.² To this extent it could count

¹ It seems Webster had also – perhaps deliberately - forgotten the legitimate offspring of the Duchess's former marriage.

² Although, being the winter home of the pre-eminent Company of The King's Men, might have given it the edge with some courtiers, over and above closer venues, such as The Phoenix (Cockpit), The Whitefriars, or (after 1629) The Salisbury Court.

among its patrons not only the comparatively wealthy, but also the educated intelligentsia. The chief indicator of the affluence of the audiences would be the admission charges;

The private theatre audience paid substantially more than its public theatre counterparts. A seat in the top gallery cost sixpence (and late in the period one shilling - the top price in the public playhouse); a seat in the middle or lower gallery cost one shilling; a seat in the pit (no standing) cost two shillings; a place on stage cost two shillings and sixpence, plus, extra for a stool; and a seat in a box cost three shillings (or the whole box could be hired). For his money, the patron received various kinds of comfort and convenience not available in the public house (15).

Andrew Gurr mentions the lack of evidence from his research to indicate the presence of large numbers of the very affluent among audiences in the private playhouses in general (*Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* 70), but this does not undermine the idea of Blackfriars providing Webster's ideal target audience; their common characteristic being an aspiration to rise in wealth and status in a rapidly developing society.

Webster, of course, could claim personal links with these parties. He had been born 1578/9 into an ambitious family of cart makers, which had achieved wealth and status by upgrading to the sale and hire of luxury coaches to the wealthy. It is likely that Webster family vehicles were contributors to the Playhouse-related traffic jams that Sturges mentions were a feature in the Blackfriars' vicinity (16).¹ In 1617, this aspect of Webster's class affiliation had him led to be famously satirised by Henry Fitzjeffrey in his *Notes from Blackfriars* as "crabbed Websterio,/ The playwright-cartwright (whether either!)" (qtd. in Moore 32). Ten years after the first

¹ Unlike Gurr, Sturges suggests these coaches provide evidence of the wealth of many of the Blackfriars' patrons.

performances of *The Duchess of Malfi*, there are strong suggestions that he was still closely allied with the concerns of the family business. His father, a self-styled 'gentleman' was a member of the Company of Merchant Taylors and it was this same Company that in 1624 celebrated the election of one of their members to the post of Lord Mayor by commissioning Webster to write a pageant *Monuments of Honour*. As stated previously, Webster had probably also studied Law at Middle Temple.

Such biographical details tend to ally Webster strongly with the interests of those commercial parties who sought to advance their position through legislation and parliamentary reform. Although there is no evidence to suggest Webster shared their political demands, he was obviously aware of them. Ellis Sharp has suggested that Webster's awareness and his critique of his society is implicit in

his clusters of imagery, which evoke landscape of stagnation, winter and darkness. As the fourth madman remarks, "I have made a soap - boiler costive – it was my masterpiece." This is a joke about constipation: the last person to suffer should be a soap -maker, since soap was used in suppositories. The problem, in short, was one of blockage. What the Duchess represents is revolutionary change, in a rigid society (Sharp).

Such details, he contends, reinforce the argument that the satiric thrust of *The Duchess of Malfi* – and one to which its Blackfriars' audience would be most sensitive - was its implicit demand for social mobility and reform.¹ Now, with the creation of *Bosola*, Webster had devised a role cleverly suited to the transmission of that agenda.

¹ In the same essay, Sharp goes further by quoting from a parliamentary speech made in 1610 by Thomas Wentworth MP, railing against royal taxation spent on homosexual court favourites: "what purpose it is for as to drawe a silver streame out of the country into the royall cisterne, if it shall dayly runne out thence by private cocks." Sharp points out the parallel between this and Antonio's Act I 'fountain' speech.

CHAPTER TWO: BOSOLA, THE ACTOR AND THE AUDIENCE

BOSOLA: ... and lastly, for myself,
That was an actor in the main of all...

(5.5.84-5)

Webster seems to have recognised that winning the ear of his audience was the key to the success of *The Duchess of Malfi*. He had honed his practice in *The White Devil* but responded practically to the failure of that play with its audience. In his responses he reveals a mastery of some well-established theatrical conventions, radically coupled with a readiness to subvert their strengths in order to re-invent them. These reinventions relate especially to the way that he uses *Bosola*.

2.1. From Flamineo to Bosola

In his introduction to the published edition of *The White Devil* in 1612, Webster was outspokenly critical of some of his own contemporary audiences. After the poor reception for the play at the Red Bull in Clerkenwell earlier that year, he hurriedly oversaw the play's publication as a counter to the failure. He was unambiguous in apportioning blame to the poor timing of the performance (during "so dull a time of winter") and the structure of the theatre ("so open and black a playhouse, that it wanted [that which is the only grace and setting out of a tragedy] a full and understanding auditory"), and famously went on to deride that audience as follows:

...most of the people who come to that playhouse, resemble those ignorant asses (who visiting stationers' shops, their use is not to inquire for good books, but new books)... for should a man present to such an auditory, the most sententious tragedy observing all the critical laws...yet after all this divine rapture...the breath that comes from the incapable multitude is able to poison it (*White Devil* 30).

Elizabeth M. Brennan detects something conventional in Webster's address, suggesting parallels with - if not plagiarism from - Jonson's attacks on the audience in the publication of *Sejanus*, seven years earlier.¹ Jonson is praised - along with other playwrights such as Shakespeare - in the conventional encomium with which Webster's address ends. Moreover, as John Russell Brown suggests in the introduction to his edition, Webster would have been familiar with the composition of the audience at The Red Bull and, coming from a prominent local family of coach makers, may even have been known to some of the tradesmen and apprentices who comprised the majority of its members. Russell Brown even suspects Webster of attempting to please his audience by including some significant populist elements in the play:

The Red Bull had a reputation for providing clowns, fights (on stage and off) and spectacle; and Webster, for all his artistic ambition, seems to have gone out of his way to provide a full quota of these. "The White Devil" has its comic cuckold, crazy doctor and grotesquely loquacious lawyer. It has a ghost, an apparition, two dumb shows, several processions, celebratory fights at the 'barriers', weird disguises, rituals, murders, cold-blooded torture. There are two mad-scenes and another pretended one, a sensational trial and the election of a corrupt cardinal as Pope with all appropriate formalities (2).

Alexander Leggatt agrees that the content of Webster's play displays an understanding of the type of playhouse for which he was writing. He describes it as "...a large scale playhouse, demanding big scale acting" (20) citing a contemporary reference to Red Bull actors as "terrible tear-throats". "Battle scenes were a Red Bull

¹ *Sejanus* had also been a notable flop at its first performance, evoking a Jonsonian description of the audience as "...those common torturers that bring all wit to save the rack; whose noses are ever like swine, spoiling and rotting up the Muses' gardens..." (qtd. in Brennan 6). Webster echoed the porcine simile but concealed it more decorously in a Latin tag from Horace, "Haec hodie porcis comedenda relinques" ("What you leave will be for the pigs to eat today").

speciality; so were clown routines...old fashioned, broad clowning, with the clown working directly on the audience”(21). In a later section, “The Failure of *The White Devil*”, Leggatt suggests the play failed not because it was too complex, sophisticated or satiric for the house, but simply because of what Webster chose to do with his material: “The story itself keeps cheating expectation...The popular plays...regularly provided handy summaries to keep the audience abreast of the action; *The White Devil* keeps catching them off guard” (125). Leggatt also considers the way that Webster employed the role of Flamineo to work the audience, but detects a failure to employ this resource conventionally. Initially he “seemingly has a close relationship with the audience, keeping in touch with a constant flow of asides and soliloquies” but cites several examples where the relationship is undermined by Flamineo’s inconsistency or lack of clarity in his intention (127).

Leggatt’s conclusions are debatable, not least because it is hard to determine whether or not his comments derive from just reading the text, observation of these scenes in performance, or both. This consideration apart, his conclusions draw attention to an ambiguity in presentation that is somehow characteristic of Webster; a characteristic claimed as a vice by some critics but a virtue by others. What is sometimes deemed as carelessness or contradiction on the page can also be seen as providing complex but inspirational material for the actor in performance. Leggatt clearly tends toward the former position, discerning in *The White Devil* the apprentice strokes that would be refined in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

By contrast with *The White Devil*, the performances of *The Duchess of Malfi* played by the King’s Men at the Globe and Blackfriars were well received, it seems, and this may be attributable to the lessons Webster learned at The Red Bull. As Leggatt concludes,

At the crudest level, he learned not to offer a play to the wrong playhouse; but it is worth noting that the action of *The Duchess of Malfi* is more concentrated and easier to follow than that of *The White Devil*, and its moral sympathies are clearer (128).

Equally significant - although unmentioned by Leggatt - in the later play, Webster also refines the way in which the roles function. However, he does this without sacrificing his ability to form the distinctive and complex characterisations that uniquely and enigmatically populate both plays. Of these characterisations, possibly the most distinctive is also the one that he chose to relate to his audience in a complex and radical manner; Bosola.

Kathleen McLuskie and Jennifer Uglow have perceptively considered how some aspects of the role may have been a key to the play's success in its first outing. I believe this may have been partly attributable to the performance of its first interpreter, John Lowin, whose importance I will assess in detail later. While McLuskie and Uglow note that we have no evidence to justify speculation upon the style of Lowin's delivery (How much passion? How much irony?), they observe that Webster's use of staging conventions helps establish both Bosola's character and role, permitting some degree of guesswork into the nature of Lowin's performance:

Bosola is in continuous contact with the audience. Situated on the edge of the apron stage, he could have simply dropped his frequent asides into the audience surrounding him there, making them fellow conspirators in his excitement at finding the horoscope for the Duchess' baby, and sharing with them his delight at his own skill as 'the devil's quilted anvil'. More than any other actor in the play, Lowin held the audience's attention in soliloquy, and his original audience would have recognised the special status as confidant and spokesman which that mode of address conferred. It made him their centre of consciousness, the interpreter if not the judge of the action, and it helped sustain the interest of the play into the final act, when his fate is revealed (8).

But, Bosola dominates in other more obvious ways. With the most lines in the play, he was clearly conceived as playing a major role in the drama. His name appears at the top of the cast list, above all the aristocrats, in the 1623 quarto, defying the contemporary convention of a hierarchical display. He enters a mere twenty-two lines from the start of the play and dies fifteen lines from its end. Of nineteen scenes, he appears in fourteen. More than any one other single character, he is, as McCluskie and Uglow assert, the audience's principal - although not sole - guide to (and commentator on) the world of the play.

It might seem eccentric for Webster to have chosen Bosola to fulfill this function: he is hardly an objective commentator and is increasingly instrumental in furthering the action of the play as it develops. But, clearly it is a carefully considered choice. If Webster had wanted a more distanced observer,¹ he might have developed the role that Delio performs to a greater degree. Bosola seems to have been deliberately chosen and developed precisely *because* of the degree of his involvement in the action of the drama.

2.2. Characterisation

It has been has been argued by Peter Thomson (*On Actors and Acting* 3-15), that the first shifts in acting, from the presentational (explicitly acknowledging the presence of an audience) to representational (studiously ignoring its presence while absorbed in-character) were occurring during the late sixteenth century. If so, it was a phenomenon that seems to have emerged before any vocabulary existed to describe it

¹ In the next section, I will argue - with reference to the work of Keith Sturgess - that in the staging at The Blackfriars at least, Webster was striving for a distancing effect through discontinuity. This does not, however, preclude the operations of a commentator like Bosola who is strongly involved in the action.

adequately. The word "character", if it applied to anything, would have been to the formation of letters in handwriting and not theatrical impersonation. "Purpose," Thomson suggests, "is a much more useful word than character to define the enactment of conflict on the Elizabethan stage." He sees the creation of Hamlet as a kind of watershed signalling the change and states, "I am forced to admit that Shakespeare created dramatic characters before there was a reliable word to describe his creations" (5). Involved in this is the idea of a complexity - even ambiguity - in the creation that seems to exceed the purely functional requirements of the role for the drama, and one which Thomson sees, in the context of the time, as specifically Shakespearian.

It scarcely needs saying that if Marlowe or Ben Jonson – anyone but Shakespeare were our chosen model, the idea of character in Elizabethan drama would be apprehended quite differently. Lunatic, lover and poet would in Jonson, have been three people rather than Hamlet (5).

Thomson might legitimately apply the same attributes to Websterian drama; Flamineo's ambiguity of purpose could be regarded as leaning in the same direction as Hamlet's, and Bosola provides a subtler successor to the role and function of Flamineo. Attempting to define him in terms of a single attribute becomes as futile as with Hamlet in Thomson's example. Bosola can legitimately be described as malcontent, soldier, scholar, wit, counsellor, villain, murderer and revenger. Some critics, such as C.G. Thayer, have even pondered if he is worthy the designation of tragic hero (162-171).¹

In his introduction to his edition of Webster's plays, F.L. Lucas makes some generalized statements about Webster's characters,

¹ I will explore this idea in the next chapter.

... we may say that they are painted with a broad brush that does not exclude, now and then, a sudden delicacy of touch. They fill an adequate place on his canvas, though they seldom step out of the frame into the world, to continue existing with all the reality of living people we have known, as does a Falstaff or a Hamlet... (1.27).

Whether or not one can see any value to a drama in the extra-dramatic existence of its characters, the comment is curious. In relation to the same passage Travis Bogard says, whatever their limitations, "at any given moment on the stage, the characters have all the life and reality which a drama requires" (80). In fairness to Lucas, he goes on to commend qualities in Webster other than his characterization. But one is left with the distinct impression that what he is challenging is belief in the characters' realism.

Recalling Leggat's comments upon the tendency of some of Webster's characters to behave in ways that defy dramatic expectations, it could be suggested that in this they behave precisely like real people. Here, M. C. Bradbrook makes perhaps the best assessment of the principal characters of Webster's two masterpieces with the following statement:

Vittoria and her brother Flamineo, like the Duchess of Malfi and Daniel de Bosola, belong heroically with the people that things are done to – yet, in their moodiness, their quick response to threats, their ironic self-appraisal, they exemplify and expand that freedom to be a self first met in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (*John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist* 119).

Webster's writing of Bosola surely presents us with sufficient ambiguity and complexity to give full potential for as much or little psychological plausibility as an actor or director or an audience today may deem necessary. A good example of this is provided by the multiple roles Bosola adopts in Act Four. Calderwood describes them as follows:

Bosola engages in his own form of depersonalisation, assuming the role of bellman both to conceal and to dignify his participation in what he has come to regard as an extravagant cruelty... Ironically enough, the ceremony designed to purify Ferdinand has served to purify Bosola, for by experiencing the duchess' integrity of self it is he who has metamorphosed from an impersonal agent of Ferdinand's malice to a responsible individual capable of the independent action he performs in the last act of the play (145-6).

Although Bosola's actions within Ferdinand's horrific Masque and Anti-Masque can thus be interpreted as consistently serving the development of his role within the play, it is probably more important for the actor playing him today to find some consistency in the characterization. It therefore might help the actor to imagine Bosola as uncomfortable with the self-perception that his involvement in the Duchess's murder forces upon him. Seen thus, his attempts to distance himself through elaborate role-play can be justified psychologically, aiding consistency in characterisation.

In spite of this, Bosola can appear extraordinarily ambiguous, not just in character, but also in his role's unique positioning with the audience. Both the role and the character of Bosola occupy liminal territory and, with his repeated use of the tropes of "actor" and "acting" in relation to himself, it sometimes seems the audience is expected to view him with a kind of 'double-vision.' I believe there are grounds for assuming that an early modern audience may have found him to be a mixture of the familiar and the innovatory, both fascinating and disturbing. If, as Leggatt claims with *The White Devil* (and the role of Flamineo in particular), Webster continually wrong-foots the audience, so Bosola's words and actions seem to fulfil a similar function, setting up and defying expectations. Clearly, Webster felt this was something which the audiences of The Blackfriars and even The Globe (presumably

more sophisticated than The Red Bull's) could take.¹

When in Act 2, Bosola launches into a radical attack on degree derived from Montaigne, he questions the whole principle of respect for lineal authority:

Say you were lineally descended from King Pepin, or he himself, what of this? Search the heads of the greatest rivers in the world, you shall find them but bubbles of water. Some would think the souls of princes were brought forth by some more weighty cause than those meaner persons – they are deceived; there's the same hand to them.

(2.1.102-8)

The sentiment expressed is reminiscent of the famous levelling couplet, "When Adam delved and Eve Span/ Who was then the gentleman?" associated with the radical priest John Ball, executed for sedition during the Peasants Revolt of 1381. In all probability, despite the possibility of theatrical censorship and potentially worse forms of state coercion, neither the audience nor the authorities would have been unduly surprised or alarmed by Bosola's expression of these sentiments, and not simply because of the "invading interpretation" argument previously outlined. Although their appearance in a different context might have been regarded as dangerous, such sentiments were not unexpected in the mouths of theatrical malcontents. It seems likely that everything about Bosola - including his probable appearance – would, in the first instance, conform to expectation. Ferdinand's reference to Bosola's "old garb of melancholy" conventionally suggests black clothing which would serve to distinguish him from the fashionable apparel of the courtiers. His demeanour would echo this, as when Antonio characterizes his detachment as "this out of fashion melancholy". In effect, Ferdinand's opinion that

¹ Despite also being a public playhouse like The Red Bull, The Globe's audiences presumably contained more sophisticated elements, or at least members who had a greater tolerance of material presented. For example, as early as 1603, The Globe had taken as generically unclassifiable a play as *Troilus & Cressida*, which wrong-foots its audience as much as *The White Devil* and, in its uneasy ending, fails to satisfy any sense of natural justice.

Bosola should retain his "old garb" as an effective front for a subversive, has a deeper significance; it also permits Webster deliberately to mislead the audience's expectations of the role. Additionally, Bosola's opinions on degree would be even more discredited by being spoken by one cast in the role of villain and murderer.¹ In essence, I argue that Bosola seems to have been an effective 'Trojan Horse' through which Webster could convey sentiments with which he may have been in sympathy.²

To do this, he seems to have given Bosola several strategic functions: firstly, to relax and reassure the audience with a presentation of the familiar; next, to provoke a dynamic response from them in the contrast between his words that attract (his wit and his straight-talking), and his actions that repel (his betrayal of the Duchess). Then, at the point when the confusion of the audience is most mirrored by Bosola's own, comes Webster's *coup-de-théâtre*; Bosola changes sides. On the most basic level, by satisfying the desire to see justice enacted, Bosola wins back the sympathy of the audience. But, underlying this, his actions ultimately win them to a realisation that, for all his faults, his beliefs and assumptions may mirror their own. With the added perception that, inside the framework of a Christian ethos, Bosola's transformation has connotations of the redemption of the repentant sinner, the impact of this realisation must have been profound. In an age when the concept of degree held considerably greater significance than today, it may have been devastating.

¹ Black costuming for Bosola would also be appropriate here and would finesse his later morbid incarnations as the tombmaker, bellman and as the final avenger of Act 5.

² There is no proof of such sympathies, but Webster's published dedication of the play to Baron Berkeley contains a line which is suggestive. It is similar in content if not in tone to Bosola's sentiment, when he writes, "I do not altogether look up at your title; the ancientest nobility being but a relic of time past, and the truest honour indeed being for a man to confer honour on himself."

hath had two children more, a son and daughter" (3.1.6-7).¹ So that we are left in no doubt of Webster's ironical spoofing of the conventions of theatrical time in this sequence, he allows the actor playing Delio metaphorically to smile knowingly at the audience with his reply,

Methinks 'twas yesterday. Let me but wink,
And not behold your face, which to mine eye
Is somewhat leaner: verily I should dream
It were within this half hour.

(3.1.8-11)

In this context, Sturgess's description of Antonio as "technically speaking, a comedian caught up in a tragic world he never understands" (103) is very apposite. The playing of Antonio in a more serious heroic vein might generate greater sympathy for him and the Duchess, but this does not seem to be Webster's primary intention. Sturgess believes Webster wanted the Blackfriars' audience to experience the drama in a more distanced manner, as this quasi-alienatory sequence seems to suggest.² Webster's principle agent for generating this perspective, however, was not Delio or Antonio, but Bosola.

In his re-imagining of the first performances at Blackfriars, Sturgess maintains that "Disjunction, not continuity is at the centre of both Webster's spiritual vision ... and his practical stagecraft" (105). For example, the imagined gaps of months and years between the first three acts, accelerate to weeks and finally days, between the last two, so that "experience, like the audience's perception of time, jumps from

¹ Concern about misplaced laughter may seem unnecessarily trivial, but some comparatively recent editors continue to see it as problematic. Elizabeth Brennan, for example, in her edition of the play referring in a note to these lines of Antonio, comments upon the positioning of an interval before Act 3 in the 1960 RSC production, and comments, "Productions which do not follow this example do Webster a disservice by rendering these lines unintentionally farcical". Perhaps the comment does Webster a disservice by making unwarranted assumptions about his intentionality.

² It also casts an interesting light on Brecht's ongoing fascination with the play.

frame to frame of a time-lapse camera" (105). The play also repeatedly gives its audience shifting perspectives, as in 1.1., with the comings and goings at the court, accompanied by Antonio and Delio's 'voice-over'. Similarly, there is a counterpart in 3.3., where Bosola delivers the crucial news to Ferdinand of the identity of his sister's lover. He is unheard by the audience, who instead listen to courtiers gossip and speculate on events, of which they – unlike the audience – are ignorant. These structural elements are disorienting yet characteristic of Webster's two finest plays. They encourage the recurrent motif of the audience's sense of alienation from the events of the play as – in another example given by Sturgess (111) – where the solemn ritual of the Cardinal's dignified instalment as a soldier is demystified by the audience's knowledge of the nature of the man beneath the robes. At other moments, in scenes where empathy appears possible, it is undermined by Bosola's cynical and distancing commentary; the one character, whose role Webster specifically created to continue this demystification.

Sturgess calls *The Duchess of Malfi* "in part a tragedy of scandal" (109) and this is a fitting description of a play in which the audience is at times encouraged to feel like voyeurs. In the 1989 RSC production, the galleries of The Swan theatre, extending around the back of the stage, helped the audience as unobserved observers (like the servants who also hovered in the shadows) to become complicit in an act of surveillance and thereby strongly identify with Bosola, the spy who spoke directly and at length to them. I believe the same dynamic would have operated strongly for the Blackfriars' audiences who may, for example, have responded with amusement to Bosola's cynical asides about the Duchess's inadequately concealed pregnancy (2.1.112-63). Indeed his asides would undoubtedly echo their own thoughts, as they observed the artifice of the Duchess's public exchanges with Antonio, with a

perspective more advantaged than Bosola's; with the privileged position of voyeurs, they had just observed the secret liaison between the lovers in the previous Act.

However, yet another factor may have operated for the Blackfriars' audience, which, I also observed in the powerful social dynamics of the in-the-round 1980/1 Manchester Royal Exchange production; namely an audience's awareness of its own physical presence in its interaction with the drama. Although artificial lighting would have been used, it would not have been employed technically in the same manner at Blackfriars as in a modern theatre. Candle light would be unfocussed and not responsive to swift changes upon cue. Also, because the convention of dimming the auditorium during a performance did not appear until the nineteenth century, one can assume the presence of an audience considerably visible and self-aware. Clearly, the seventeenth century actor of *Bosola* could engage in a relationship with the audience completely different from the one in the darkened auditorium with which we are familiar today.

To take just one scene, routinely cut in today's performances; the exchanges between Bosola, Castruchio and the Old Lady (2.1. 1-65) take on a totally new dynamic when we consider the occurrence of stage-sitters at the Blackfriars. According to Gurr the practice of allowing important or wealthy patrons to sit on stools on the stage was inherited from the first boys' companies as early as the 1570s (*Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* 36). With the sightline difficulties it posed due to the height of the stage, it was a practice never permitted in outdoor Playhouses such as the Globe and we see, as early as 1604 in his Induction to *The Malcontent*, that Webster had a clear awareness of its potential for social satire. When Bosola lectures Castruchio on the appropriate mode of dress and behaviour to permit him to

"be taken for an eminent courtier", we may picture this dialogue taking place in the midst of an assembly of gallants, any one of whom Bosola might employ as a model for Castruchio to emulate. Similarly, according to Gurr, women playgoers would have been most likely to occupy the boxes adjacent to the stage (36); perhaps, close enough to have received, by association, some of the misogyny directed by Bosola at the Old Lady. When he speaks of women's make-up as "scurvy face-physick" or states,

I would sooner eat a dead pigeon, taken from the soles of
the feet of one sick of the plague, than kiss one of you
fasting.

(2.1.41-3)

one can imagine the potential for mocking laughter generated by a simultaneous glance into an adjacent box. Both men and women in his vicinity would be open targets for his grim misanthropy, when describing diseased and lice-eaten bodies hidden "in rich tissue".¹

Gurr describes another significant characteristic of the stage-sitters thus,

Sitting on stools to display their fine clothes and smoking to show their wealth were not the only marks that distinguished gallants at playhouses. By no means the least obtrusive feature of any Elizabethan gathering was the headgear. Hats were worn indoors as well as out, and there is no reason to suppose that a gallant ...would bother to lower his feather for the sake of the multitude behind him. Hats were worn in an ascending social order of obtrusiveness. Gallants wore crowned hats with feathers which might be as broad and opaque as an ostrich plume...Generally, the higher your status the higher your hat (46).

Against this backdrop, the exchange between the Duchess and Antonio on the merits or otherwise of a hat-wearing protocol at court (2.1.122-32), with its echoes of

¹ This calls to mind the comments of an actor playing Vindice in a production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* I directed in 2006. When asked to play certain lines directly to specific individuals in the audience, he commented, "It feels like playing stand-up!"

Hamlet and Osric, enters a new and immediate dimension. What this reminds us is that, not only does Webster frame his social satire to the physical possibilities of his chosen performance space, but that the play's examination of social status and degree is presented in a manner that continually reminds its audience of the relevance of these issues to themselves.

As this last example demonstrates, Webster does not use *Bosola* alone in his treatment of the audience in this way, but clearly his role is the principal device by which the audience is guided to reflect upon the events of the play and – by implication – the operation of social status and degree within their own lives. It also seems to me that Webster, in using *Bosola* in this way, depended greatly on the unique relationship of a well-known actor with his audience.

2.4. The Actor and the Role

Surprisingly, Webster appended an epistle to the end of the published text of *The White Devil* which appears to exonerate the actors of The Queen's Company from culpability in the play's flop and (perhaps significantly) heaps praise upon his friend, Richard Perkins, who may have played Flamineo.

For the action of the play, 'twas generally well, and I dare affirm, with the joint testimony of some of their own quality, (for the true imitation of life, without striving to make nature a monster) the best that ever became them; whereof as I make a general acknowledgement, so in particular I must remember the well approved industry of my friend Master Perkins, and confess the worth of his action did crown both the beginning and end (168).

We can only speculate about the qualities that Webster discerned in Richard Perkins as an actor that fitted him so well for Flamineo. Certainly, as a leading actor at the Red Bull and later the Cockpit, he embarked on a range of roles, most notably - and much later in 1633 - as Barabas in a revival of *The Jew of Malta*. On this occasion,

Perkins's acting was praised by Thomas Heywood in a newly written prologue and epilogue, in which the actor is favourably compared with the famous originator of that role, Edward Alleyn. Marlowe's murderous comedic villain has, of course, some similarities with Webster's; at the very least, both demand the ability to work an audience energetically, charming and repelling them by turns. Speculation must surely leave little doubt as to Perkins' histrionic talent in this capacity.

Such roles are distinguished for us today by their extraordinary performativity, defying post-Stanislvskian naturalistic illusion in a conscious acknowledgement of (and relish for the presence of) the audience. They also suggest a simultaneous awareness by the audience of the role enacted and the personality of the player enacting it which, in the light of Thomson's comments regarding presentation and representation, requires some consideration. Thomson, of course, is not suggesting an immediate and universal transformation of performing styles post-*Hamlet*, pointing out that Shakespeare himself continued to write roles that lean toward the presentational mode, such as The Duke in *Measure for Measure*. Nor is it inevitable that a representational style of performance would eliminate awareness by the audience of the actor behind the role. In this respect William E. Gruber refers to some early modern theatrical commentators who

...when they describe their reactions to histrionic performance, frequently indicate an awareness simultaneously of the character and of the actor's degree of impersonation or metamorphosis. This awareness by no means distances them critically from the performance. Even when they describe empathic responses (what one would nowadays call "identifications") to a character, Tudor and Stuart theatre-goers – unlike modern audiences- not only tolerate visible contradictions between actor and role, but apparently they consider them to be the affective basis of spectating (33).

Pauline Kiernan has documented and evaluated the recent experiences of actors in performances during the first two years of the newly-constructed Shakespeare's Globe. She suggests that these might provide insights into the development of illusionistic modes of drama in the early modern period. She observes that the pattern of extemporizing associated with clowning (which foregrounds the gap between actor and role) has not been limited to the comedic, nor is it totally eliminated from performances which tend toward the representational or illusionistic. Extrapolating from this, she proposes

If the clown's stand-up comic routine was going out of fashion even before the 1590s, the audience's perception of the actor behind the role, on which the humour of his extradramatic addresses so depended, may have continued strongly alongside the emerging fashion for self-contained dramatic illusion (52).

She supports this with some examples of self-referential elements in well-known texts, where the actors jog the audience into recalling roles enacted by themselves in recent previous performances. For example, when Polonius tells Hamlet that he once played the role of Julius Caesar and was killed by Brutus, the audience would be coaxed to remember that the actor playing Hamlet (Richard Burbage) had also played Brutus at the same theatre, a matter of months previously.

Burbage is also one of three actors who were scripted to appear as themselves in Webster's Induction to Marston's *The Malcontent* when it was revived at the Globe, following performances by The Children of the Queen's Revels at Blackfriars. Prior to his appearance in the title role of the *Malcontent*, Malevole – a role that is itself a masquerade, being a guise for the protagonist, the dispossessed Duke Altfronto – Burbage enters with other Company members Henry Condell and John Lowin to remonstrate with two audience members (played by fellow actors Will

Sly and John Sinklo). They have been arguing with the tire-man about their right to sit upon the stage during the performance in the manner to which they have been accustomed "at the private house." There is an evident knowing playfulness in the manner in which Sly and Burbage reprise the business over a feathered hat that, as Osric and Hamlet, they had only a couple of years before played to Globe audiences; likewise Sly's (in-role) demand to speak to himself (the actor Sly) is a joke worthy of Stoppard, which on another level opens fascinating pre-Pirandellian possibilities in the way that the actor's role and actor's persona may have been perceived.¹ Several arguments have been advanced about the function of the Induction² but, at the very least, it demonstrates, as Andrew Gurr suggests, that "Nobody can doubt that the audiences knew the players well by name and fame" (*Shakespeare Company* 16).

If Webster's insights into the behaviour and expectations of actors and audiences as expressed in his published addresses in *The White Devil* are reliable, it would be surprising if, after the failure of his first play, he should not seek to advance the success of his second by applying the lessons learned. Having ensured a more sympathetic venue and refined the material for greater clarity, he then set about creating a key role that would engage, yet challenge, the audience both intellectually and emotionally. Whatever else, amidst a varied cast of characters, it is apparent that Webster had considered the role of Flamineo, in this respect, as vital to *The White Devil*. The same was now true of *Bosola*. From his words about Richard Perkins, it seems that Webster valued the importance of the right choice of actor for the role. So

¹ The idea of a constructed public persona for an actor enacting themselves is an old idea which continues to fascinate. For example, in the film *Being John Malkovich*, the actor John Malkovich plays the character John Malkovich. However, the constructed nature of the character's persona is hinted at through the device of giving the real actor and the character different middle names.

² Some of these are explored by George K. Hunter in his edition of the play. It may, for example, have offered a substitute for music and dancing introducing the boy company's performance.

for Bosola, he would have sought a performance by an actor able to win an audience by his personality. I believe it is inevitable that Webster, having once demonstrated his readiness to exploit an actor's publicly perceived persona in his Induction to *The Malcontent*, was fully attuned to its potential as a tool in his playwrighting armoury. We can take this further and ask did Webster then create Bosola with the persona of a particular actor in mind?

Of the three actors who played themselves in Webster's Induction to *The Malcontent*, the most surprising inclusion was that of John Lowin. In 1604, Burbage and Condell were well-established members of the King's Men's Company; Lowin was at best, a very recent arrival on the scene,¹ yet ten years later, in 1614, he would present the first Bosola. There are suggestive elements in the public persona of this actor that may have been crucial in the casting if not in the writing of this role.

Lowin's inclusion in Webster's Induction suggests, at the very least, something remarkable about this young actor;² in a very short space of time, he had achieved either sufficient standing with the company, or enough popular recognition by audiences, to represent himself on stage. It is likely that both possibilities are true, although the latter would be the key element, since the Induction relies for success on not just an effective stage presence but, essentially, the audience's recognition of a highly distinctive stage persona.

¹ An entry in Henslowe's diary (Henslowe 212 [113v]) suggests that Lowin had performed for the Company of Worcester's Men on a provincial tour in March 1603 and, although his name does not appear in the official company lists of the King's Men in May 1603 and March 1604, it does appear in the published cast list for Jonson's *Sejanus* (1616) which it is believed they performed at court in late 1603. Possibly, Lowin had joined the company as a hired man, which makes his appearance as himself in the Induction all the more remarkable.

² In 1603, Lowin would have been 27 years old.

The only known portrait of Lowin, an anonymous painting later reproduced as an engraving, dates from 1640, when he would have been in his 64th year. John H. Astington describes it as



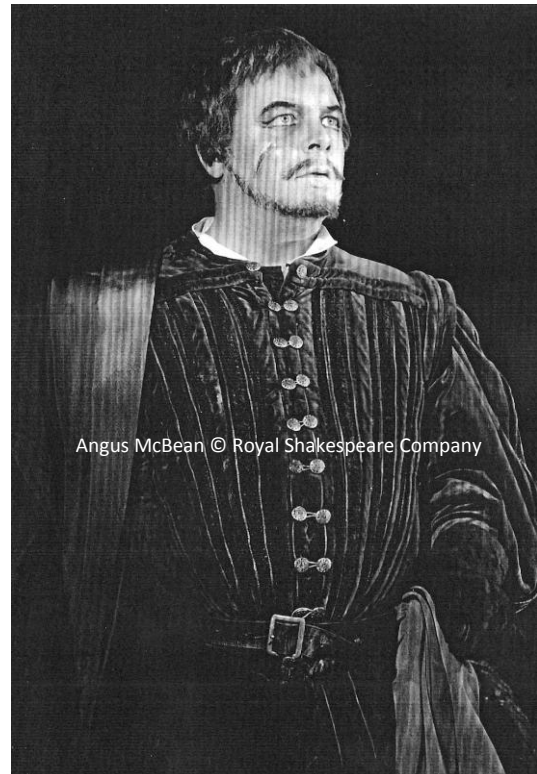
John Lowin

...one of the very few good and attested paintings of English actors from before the Restoration... The sitter not dressed for the stage, but as a respectable, prosperous, and well-established citizen of London (22).

Rick Bowers quotes the description of the portrait given by the twentieth century classical actor, Robert Speaight, who wrote that Lowin “looks every inch a king of the theatrical establishment – indeed rather more established than theatrical, in his sober Caroline attire” (62-3).

Of course, by 1640, Lowin actually was a veteran of the theatrical establishment, and the actor who had proved the longest serving member of The King's Men. After the death of John Heminges in 1630, Lowin, in partnership with Joseph Taylor (Burbage's successor as principal tragedian), effectively took over the business management of the company. During the Caroline period, he enacted a range of powerful and commanding roles including Volpone, Melantius, and Domitian.¹ His reputation survived Parliament's closure of the Theatres in 1642, only to be resurrected in memory after the Restoration. Although dead by 1659, as late as 1690 he was remembered as part of a theatrical tradition, for having revived Falstaff and created Henry VIII; the latter allegedly under instruction from Shakespeare, with his insights into the role passed on to Davenant (Bentley 2.502-506).

It is not too hard to imagine these last two roles enacted by the figure in the portrait, which does not, perhaps, sit so readily with our expectations of Bosola. Latterly, these are more likely to find incarnation in the lean and hungry physiognomy of a Nigel Terry or a Michael Bryant, rather than the ample frame of a Robbie Coltrane or a Richard Griffiths. Yet we should remember that the same actor who



Patrick Wymark as Bosola

¹ In Jonson's *Volpone*, (1607), Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* (1619) and Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1629), respectively.

presented Falstaff throughout the 1620s and 1630s - and who had in all probability enacted Henry VIII in 1611 - also trod the boards in 1614 as Webster's self-doubting intelligencer. If the physical expectations of a role can assume conventional status, it should also be remembered that the inheritors of Bosola's "garb of melancholy", Betterton and later Quin, were also big men. Within living memory, the role was undertaken by the far from slender actors, Patrick Wymark (Stratford Memorial & Aldwych Theatres, 1960) and Anthony Douse (Sheffield Playhouse 1966). According to one reviewer, the latter "...looked capable of pulling the whole galley single handed and his bewildered gropings toward virtue after the death of the Duchess seemed doubly moving by contrast with his massive physique" (Potter 172).

John H. Astington maintains that in all probability "Lowin was a big man, though not, on the evidence, excessively fat; probably, like many actors since, he padded up to play the fat knight" (22). He points out that like all The King's Men, he would have held the title of 'Groom of the Chamber in Ordinary' but that he specifically also held the additional – and honorific – court post of 'Groom-Porter'. This was conventionally awarded to people of more than average size and strength as it was the royal porters' job to carry the king's household stuff from place to place.

So maybe it was simply Lowin's outstanding physical presence that was recognised by the Globe audience in 1604, and perhaps it was simply this that Webster called upon to impress them in the *Malcontent* Induction. If so, then the comic potential of his physical presence may be a factor that is not apparent from the page alone. Bowers gives a reading of this "presence" in his description of the action of the Induction as follows:

Lowin has very little to say in the dialogue ... and this reinforces his character as decidedly dour and somewhat threatening. He makes some gruff and mildly accusatory comments in the direction of Sinklo. Clearly a straight man, he is content near the end of the Induction to help the two gallants off the stage. But his attitude appears to be one of fractious impatience and restrained violence. How this translates into his role in the play itself, or into his usual line of performance, is a matter of pure conjecture. It is clear, however, that Lowin had attained a public personality by this point (47-8).

Returning to the portrait, certain qualities of the actor seem to survive and have been remarked upon. Astington notes "The face and the manner...have a kind of weather-beaten truculence that one can imagine Lowin putting to use in his art" (22). Bowers describes Lowin's image as follows:

The subject, clearly a heavyweight, clutches his cape in a dramatic fashion to project a look of determination that is also vaguely forbidding (62).

Astington makes a similar observation, but reserves judgement in the knowledge that our perceptions of the truth are hidden in the conventions of the representation:

As a representation of gesture, right hand grasping the edge of the cloak in a manner at once aggressive and defensive, the portrait might be read as suggesting something about individual character, or about actors, those secretive, exhibitionist people. It might also be taken, in its period, however, as simply a representational mannerism: the display of the hand was a popular motif of portraiture from Van Dyck onwards (22-3).

The enigmatic quality of the portrait is peculiarly appropriate for Lowin, who, beyond his obvious presentation as a stage 'heavy', goes on with a stage career that suggests an elusive persona of far greater complexity.

T.W. Baldwin, proposing the likelihood of casting to type (or 'line' as he calls it) amongst the King's Men, extrapolates from the roles that Lowin was known to have presented, a range of other roles that may theoretically have fallen to him.

With Falstaff would go to Lowin the military braggarts Parolles, and Lucio. For the soldier and king as represented by Henry VIII, we have as counterparts the incestuous Kings Antiochus, and Claudius; the

racy Earl of Gloucester, of whose pleasant vices the Gods did make instruments to plague him; but an honest, downright, outspoken noble nevertheless; the noble and impressive general Banquo; a second is treacherous Aufidius; another treacherous soldier is "strong Enobarb"; and ending the quartet, "honest" treacherous Iago, of Lowin's own age. This is the "honest" soldier of the Beaumont and Fletcher plays; but usually less "merry," and more dignified. On the more bitter side, *Bosola* finds an own brother in Apemantus, and no distant relative in Caliban. Finding their places in this comico-villainous assemblage are also, "honest," jaundiced Iachimo, and possibly roguish Autolycus. This then is Lowin's line of true or pretended military characters, bluff of bearing and plain of speech, this downrightness taking either an honest or villainous, serious or comic turn (248-9).

This is of course pure speculation and might be judged unwarranted, but a few suggestions are persuasive; I find some plausibility, for example, in Lowin's playing of Iago; a role in which much of *Bosola*'s relationship with the audience is pre-echoed, just as Burbage's violent and (possibly) jealous Ferdinand also hints at his earlier Othello.¹ The possible reprise of actors in specific combinations is certainly attractive, and it is also interesting to see how three of the four from Webster's Induction to *The Malcontent* - Lowin, Burbage and Condell - resurface ten years on as the unholy trinity, *Bosola*, Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Ultimately however, the extent of Baldwin's hypothesising is reductive and limiting. Although the exigencies of scheduling and throughput may well have required recourse to casting systems of the sort he suggests amongst the company, the theory assumes too much and credits Lowin's talents too little. I rather lean towards the belief that, given the roles we can be reasonably certain he undertook, Lowin must have been a remarkably versatile actor. As Bowers says, "Although clearly the 'heavy lead', Lowin was a consummate player in a variety of roles" (53). Certainly the demands of the role of *Bosola* alone suggest recourse to an actor of considerable range and experience:

¹ Sturges even suggests that "Burbage's well proven tragic intensity" in that earlier role may have led Webster to deviate from his sources to give Ferdinand greater prominence than the role of the Cardinal.

Lowin's performance would have required an ironic self control together with the vocal and emotional range to handle both the jeering self contempt of his first encounter with Ferdinand and the reluctant tears which flowed for the murdered Duchess. His ten years with the King's Men would have stood him in good stead (McLuskie 8-9).

By 1614, ten years after their appearance in *The Malcontent* Induction, Lowin, with his fellows, Burbage (Ferdinand) and Condell (the Cardinal), would have been recognized as an older generation of actors in the Company of the King's Men. As we know from the 'star system' today, audiences have expectations of well-known and popular performers derived from their previous roles. Speculating, we may guess that, for the Blackfriars - and also the Globe - audience, Lowin brought to the role of Bosola, something of their relationship with a scoundrel like Volpone or a personable rogue like Falstaff; and even, – if he had indeed, played the part – something of the mask of honesty with which Iago hides his treachery. Presumably, he would also have brought something of the personality of Lowin himself; that ineffable quality that every well-known and admired actor brings to an enactment and which seems to operate in the minds of the audience independent of any characterisation on offer.

In the limited biographical knowledge we possess of Lowin, there is enough to suggest a complex and possibly even conflicted individual. Most enigmatic of all is the only surviving work attributed to him, the curious *Conclusions upon Dances*. Published in 1607 and signed "I.L Roscio" (after the Roman actor Roscius), the work is a treatise making biblical reference and censuring most forms of dancing as profane. Given his artisan roots (originally an apprentice to a city goldsmith), the work's Puritan sentiments may be a true reflection of the actor's inner convictions, but their expression at that time in his career seems decidedly odd. At least, they suggest hidden depths in an individual with an ostensibly different public persona.

It seems to me that, in creating Bosola, Webster sought an actor popular with audiences. This was certainly Lowin. He would also have had in mind the image of an actor with a propensity for the unlikely combination of both menace and humour. This was also Lowin. The bonus was that he may have also found in Lowin an individual of inner complexity and contradiction so singularly appropriate for his creation. With the role of Bosola, the specific audience relationship afforded by the Blackfriars, and this particular actor, I believe elements were capable of fusing, producing a powerful chemistry that would strongly engage the audience. Although the *character* of Bosola and his actions might momentarily attract or repel individuals in the audience, I believe Lowin's enactment of the *role* would have won the audience's tacit collective consent to go along with the ride. They could not, of course, have predicted where it was going to lead them.

CHAPTER THREE: BOSOLA & THE MALFI ENIGMA

In my introduction, I made reference to an enigma at the heart of *The Duchess of Malfi* and associated this with the role of Bosola. The enigma, as I see it, stems from an apparent disjunction between the critical history of the play and its reception in performance. By and large, the latter has been pretty straightforward. However, even a cursory inspection of the former reveals a large amount of historical disquiet about the status of the play among academics and cultural commentators. Although this has not impacted to any significant degree on the general popularity of the play with audiences, historically, it has affected some of the staging decisions made by theatre companies mounting productions. In conjunction with some more practical factors, these have impacted significantly – and, occasionally disastrously – upon the role of Bosola.

3.1. Editing the Text

The more practical factors, to which I refer, stem from concern over performance running times. The sheer length of the play opens an invitation to cut the text and, from the very first performances, this invitation has been taken up. In the first instance, this is invariably done simply to reduce the running time. In Appendix 2 I have listed those larger blocks of text frequently cut in modern productions, although this list by no means exhausts the potential for cutting the play for length. Indeed, it should be noted that the Cardinal/Julia subplot (2.4; 5.1; 5.2) has been completely excised in several productions, although historically the decision is sometimes less about economy than moral disapproval. More often, on top of the above-mentioned cuts, recent productions have frequently cut piecemeal segments of text thought to present comprehension difficulties for a modern audience. Since the

longest part in the play belongs to Bosola, the cuts have tended to fall disproportionately on this role.

Here, another external factor encouraging the reduction of the role has been the historical development of the English playhouse. As the thrust stage of the early modern playhouse slowly retreated into the end stage, and - ultimately - behind the proscenium arch of the nineteenth century, the relationship between actor and audience inevitably changed. A role such as Bosola – dependent upon intimate and close-up interaction with an audience - loses some viability with physical distance and starts to appear verbose, thereby justifying trimming. This may not have been felt in earlier stagings and, for this reason, I believe fewer cuts may have fallen directly upon Bosola at either Blackfriars or the Globe in 1614.

Historically, what we seem to observe in the editing process is a gradual change of purpose whereby cutting, with the simple aim of reducing the running time, evolves into editing to improve supposed flaws. Cutting, re-ordering and, ultimately, rewriting the text is the logical progression, initially in order to simplify the narrative, then to iron out perceived anomalies in structure, characterisation, themes or even morality.

The perception of Webster's play as structurally flawed and in need of textual 'improvement' has been with us all the way from Theobald's 1733 rewrite, *The Fatal Secret*, to Carl Miller's 2003 adaptation for the RNT, and beyond. Even Poel, whose researches into early modern staging made great play of historical integrity, could not resist significant amendments and interpolations in his 1892 production. Earlier, the significant Webster apologist, Charles Lamb, really only sought to reclaim the play as literature to be read rather than drama to be performed, and during the nineteenth

century, as a whole, there was significant condemnation of the play's perceived faulty structure and inconsistent characterisation by critics such as William Archer. One of Archer's principal criticisms was that the death of the Duchess in Act 4 and the survival of her brothers, Antonio and Bosola into Act 5, left the play anti-climactic and "broken-backed". Similar assertions have been encountered in criticisms since the nineteenth century, but the critic, William Watson, took the lead in the piquancy of his distaste for the rendering of Act 5:

The play... drags its festering length through another act, in the course of which several more or less unpleasant persons are suitably 'removed,' until the reader, satiated with such gruesome fare, is left to digest, if he can, his ghoulish banquet (qtd. in Moore 149).

The outpouring of moral opprobrium and downright hostility to what was seen as the play's corrupted aesthetics by minor critics such as Watson, completely outguns the milder distaste for the play expressed by more notable critics like Archer. Where, for example, the highly critical Archer could at least concede, "On the whole, I am inclined to think that Webster came very near to creating in Bosola, one of the most complex and most human villains in drama..."(qtd. in Moore 142), Watson's perceptions were much more two-dimensional: "Bosola is a kind of human gangrene infecting the whole body of the play. His putrid fancy is ingeniously loathsome, and leaves a trace of slime upon all objects it traverses..." (149).

Significantly, Watson refers to the "reader" rather than the "audience", thus highlighting a key to much of the difference in reception between the study and the theatre. It seems that plot implausibility and structural weaknesses impact less forcefully (or are, perhaps, more readily excusable) in performance than on the page. But whether in the study or on stage, the pressure to be definitive about Bosola has tended to limit or narrow appreciation of the role.

3.2. Whose Tragedy?

The front page of the 1623 edition describes the full title of the play as *The Tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy*. However, the increasing frequency of productions since the start of the twentieth century has led several critics to re-evaluate the designation of tragic status solely to the play's title character. Sturgess, for example openly leans toward the proposition that the play is as much Bosola's tragedy as the Duchess's.

Earlier critics expended much energy weighing the same proposition by pondering Bosola's heroic status; unfortunately, too often holding him up for comparison against some notional template of the Aristotelian tragic hero and thereby finding him wanting. For example, he receives short shrift from C.V.Boyer, who asserts that Bosola fails as "Villain-Hero" because "his struggle with the moral law is not of sufficient magnitude; he has goodness in him but no grandeur of soul" (162). There is something almost class-based in Boyer's judgements:

Now, Bosola is not a man of extraordinary talents. He has been able neither to build up his fortunes, nor to fortify his soul against the bitterness of poverty. He struggles against the cramping circumstances of his life, but until the time of his revolt his life has been a gloomy rather than a tragic failure. He desires nothing higher than a comfortable income and social recognition, but is unable to attain even these without selling himself. What is there in such a man to awaken profound admiration? What is there in his struggle to shake us with terror? The struggle is interesting, excites sympathy, but hardly rises to tragic dignity because of the squalid motives underlying the man's conduct (163).

Similar arguments might be advanced to question the tragic status of Büchner's *Woyzeck* or Miller's *Willy Loman*, citing their alleged failure to conform to an Aristotelian definition of tragedy. Harking back to notions of the nobility of the "tragic hero", Boyer reserves such designations for *Macbeth*, concluding of Bosola

that we are led "to form an opinion of him which is not consistent with tragic dignity" (162).

Later critics have taken a broader perspective. Travis Bogard, for example, while not too concerned about Bosola's tragic dignity, sees him as vital in the projection of that quality in the Duchess. In Bogard's view, Bosola, (unlike Flamineo who has arrived at an accommodation with the necessity of his villainy) is a moral man from the start and does not *develop* into one. His transformation "from a thing of evil to a man filled with remorse, is in fact no more than a return to what he essentially is" (78). Recognizing the futility of resisting Ferdinand's will, Bosola makes an accommodation of a different sort. Bogard suggests he strives not to *save* the Duchess's life but to promote and preserve her spirit of greatness by a calculated masquerade. His guises as tomb-maker and bellman, grim though they are, are designed to bring not pity but - as he says - "comfort"; he leads her through the acceptance of her mortality to the recognition that she is "Duchess of Malfi still." After her death, there is no real independence of action for Bosola because the last act merely "shows forces of horror spending themselves in destruction, beyond human control" (79). There is certainly no redemption for Bosola, and in this,

He fares no worse than the other characters, for in Webster's world there is no justice, no law, either of God or man, to mete out punishment for evil and reward for good...

... Evil and good are dragged down together in death, just as they are meshed together in life. The only triumph comes when, even in the moment of defeat, an individual is roused to assert his own integrity of life (79).

At the end, according to Bogard, all that is left "is the memory of the Duchess' greatness" (79).

There is little to distinguish Bogard's analysis from that of C.G. Thayer save some semantic juggling over the word 'redemption'. When Thayer – unlike Bogard – awards redemption to Bosola, he is effectively also the first critic to award him full tragic status. In *The Ambiguity of Bosola* (162-171) he argues that Bosola's initial appearance as an "impressive villain" (162), his transformation after the murder of the Duchess, Cariola and the children, and his successful exaction of revenge on the real villains, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, are obvious facts that "do not, of course, *prove* that Bosola is designed as a tragic protagonist, but they are suggestive" (162). He claims that Webster had a serious technical problem with the passivity of the Duchess, and that "In order to end the play with any semblance of tragic justice, it may well have been necessary to create, or at least develop, an active tragic hero" (163). The figure that emerges "is ambiguous, but not nebulous" (164), and one whose tragedy is essentially framed in existential terms. Thayer presents Bosola as one so used to enacting roles in his life that he has lost his own identity; he insists however, that in tragic terms, his transformation is fully redemptive.

With respect to his own tragedy, Bosola's emergence may be described as follows: as a kind of cynical act of rebellion against an evil universe, he pursues an evil course himself, rationalizing it in terms of gratitude and devotion to Ferdinand. He learns, through observing the suffering of the Duchess and through his other experiences, the virtue of her passiveness and a somewhat more masculine, active concept, which is that even in an evil universe one must remain virtuous - true to himself - and actively labor for what appears right (171).

Thayer argues that by eventually knowing what he must do and electing to do it, Bosola joins the company of many established tragic heroes; after acting (and prospering) in the tragedy of the Duchess, he "must step forward and be the

protagonist in his own tragedy" (168). Such status is essentially predicated upon self-knowledge:

Faustus and Macbeth and Hamlet know what they should do but are psychologically unable to do it. Brutus knows what he should do and does it. Lear and Gloucester learn what they should have done. Coriolanus learns what he should do. And Bosola learns what he should do. Another way to put this, without the riddling language, is to say that tragedy is somehow concerned with the problem of self-fulfillment, of achieving one's destiny (170-1).

By universalising Bosola's condition, Thayer elevates his status way beyond Boyer's limiting definitions, yet places possibly no more than an aesthetic gloss on Bogard's similarly existential reading:

Bosola emerges then as a kind of baroque figure, struggling against an unyielding, darkly beautiful universe which produces evil, insists on virtue, but ultimately destroys evil and virtue alike. For Webster and for others, this is certainly man's tragic fate (171).

Although I am not so concerned about arguments relating to Bosola's precise status as a tragic hero as determined by academic critics, I personally find Thayer's arguments persuasive, especially because they are echoed by the assessment of an experienced theatrical practitioner, Harriet Walter. She commented on Bosola's tragic status after repeated performances as the Duchess in the 1989 RSC production. There the part of Bosola was delivered, almost totally uncut, on a stage in which the physical relationship with the audience bore comparison with that of the original performances.¹

However, the proposition that the play is as much the tragedy of Bosola as the Duchess effectively raises the more fundamental question of whether it is really meaningful to refer to the tragedy of any single character within a play, or whether one should really only use the term 'tragedy' as the generic descriptor for a dramatic

¹ Walter's comments are presented in my analysis of that production in Chapter 6

form. The former strikes me as problematic in a way that I described in my opening chapter. There, I maintained the use of the term 'character' sometimes implied the distinctive qualities of an individual personality with an autonomous existence in some way detachable from the life of the play. In this sense, to describe the play as Bosola's - or even the Duchess's - tragedy suggests the possibility that these characters might have a separate existence in a play with an alternative plot, offering different endings to their stories. Of course, the audience's perception of the possibility of alternative happier outcomes frustrated by the action of the play may well contribute to their appreciation of what is dramatically tragic. But, it is unwise to equate the seeming options of a constructed stage character with those of a real human being. The audience's perception of the alternative choices for a stage character can have no reality beyond that created by the playwright within the framework of the existing work. As Barthes says, "the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices" (178). In effect, each stage character is simply defined by his or her existence within the play or - more precisely - by its ending. Bert O. States suggests that, as an audience,

...ontologically, we envy all dramatic characters, good and bad alike - not that we want to be in their shoes; we would simply like to *coincide* as they do. We would like to have the slack of indeterminate being taken up, to arrive at something, to *be* rather than to be forever becoming. It is the old irritation of being in time...

...the ending of the play, whether happy or unhappy, is the equivalent of a death in Sartre's existential sense that at the moment of death we *are*: becoming has slipped entirely into the past (*Dramatic Character* 87-8).

He sees a dramatic character as

first and foremost, an intensified simplification of human nature: he is a Personality with a Character - someone who appears and behaves in a certain way and who carries within him a certain *ethos*, or disposition with respect to moral conduct and choice. This disposition may be shallow (Osric) or complex (Hamlet), but apart from maids carrying drinks or extras swelling a crowd, it may be seen in any character the dramatist has bothered to make an important agent in his *action* (*Theory* 91).

A character, such as Bosola, who plays a considerable part in the action of the play, is judged simultaneously on two levels by both audiences and critics, and may fail to satisfy on both. Firstly, when set against some notional template of what constitutes appropriate behaviour for a tragic figure, he may well be found lacking, as critics such as C.V.Boyer have concluded. Secondly, the character may simply fail to convince as *believable*, and herein resides an apparent contradiction.

3.3. Discontinuity or Inconsistency?

If, as States, suggests, a dramatic character is an “intensified simplification of human nature” (*Theory* 91), then the more complex and contradictory the representation, the closer to reality it should appear; yet, ironically at the same time, it may move further away from satisfying dramatically. It is this contradiction that presented such a problem for William Archer, who clearly felt that Webster’s weakness was to create in Bosola a character full of inconsistency:

This “moody and mocking man of blood” is certainly not, like the ordinary melodramatic villain, hewn of one piece. There is an appearance of subtlety in his character because it is full of contradictions. But there is no difficulty in making a character inconsistent; the task of the artist is to show an underlying

harmony between the apparently conflicting attributes. Bosola seems sometimes to revel in his infamy, at others to be the unwilling instrument of a power he cannot resist. "And though I loathed the evil," he says to Ferdinand after the massacre, "yet I loved you that did counsel it." But this is the first and last we hear of any sentimental devotion on the spy's part towards his employers; nor can we find the smallest grounds for such a feeling (qtd. in Moore 141).

Archer's remarks might have some weight if we disregard the perception that many present-day actors seem to relish the 'carte-blanche' such inconsistencies afford them in discovering – if not inventing - a plausible psychology for their own Bosolas. For example, Cheek By Jowl's George Anton took considerable pains in his performance to provide a detailed presentation of precisely that "sentimental devotion" that Archer deemed missing in the text, to the extent of discovering an unspoken homosexual subtext in Bosola's service of Ferdinand. Indeed, the most notable thing about the six/seven recent Bosolas that I have examined in detail in this thesis is the considerable difference in their individual characterisations. Some might simply attribute this to the prevalence of the Stanislavskian system which remains the bedrock of our contemporary acting tradition, but I believe it is also greatly assisted by the open and often ambiguous nature of the material that Webster, like Shakespeare, offers actors. Present day actors and directors are inevitably keen to mine this material for innovative interpretations, yet sometimes they cut the cloth to suit, discarding what doesn't quite fit the interpretation. I will cite one relatively recent example.

Michael Byrne is a familiar character actor, known for a range of roles on stage and screen, often villains and Nazi military types. The following is the description of his performance of Bosola in a production by director Jane Howell for the Oxford Playhouse in 1983.



*Michael Byrne as Alencon
in 'Henry VI Pt 1.'*

...Michael Byrne's calm Bosola. He walked softly and very watchfully through the play smiling at vice rather than railing at it, and suggesting not a desperate hunger for advancement but the equanimity of a man who has already seen a great deal of life and judges that its rewards must come to him sometime. This was not a malcontent, not a Machiavel, and not a tormented anti-hero. He was resourceful, handsome, and gently disarming; he regretted what was happening but was not shocked by it. Only his hands betrayed him, for they worried constantly with the laces of his shirt and suggested tensions nothing else expressed. But when Ferdinand denied him, out came the helpless disappointment of a baffled child. This Bosola was perhaps seeking an object of loyalty; he became Antonio's wholehearted ally, evidently forgetting his own guilt entirely, and his inability to effect a happy ending to the play was the second huge surprise of his life (Howard 95).

The performance described here arrests attention by an apparently original take on the characterization. However, the critic immediately undermines the promise of the interpretation with the following qualification:

Byrne's unmalicious Bosola could never have murdered Antonio's servant, so this was cut (96).

The comment gives a relatively mild example, yet it is somehow characteristic of the textual trimming that has attended Bosola's stage history. Actors and directors have found in Bosola sufficient material to produce sometimes strikingly original interpretations; yet faced with Webster's apparently inconsistent treatment of the character, many have too often resorted to Procrustean solutions. The cut here referred to is particularly interesting since there are a variety of possible reasons for its use. It is as likely as not to be employed in modern productions and it is worth briefly considering why this may be. Firstly, the servant may be deemed as simply unnecessary to a modern staging. At Blackfriars and the Globe, an extra pair of hands would be needed to carry a lantern signifying night and to enable, with his temporary exit, the return of the suggested darkness in which Bosola mistakenly stabs Antonio. He would also enable the shift of scene to the Cardinal's lodging to take place by carrying Antonio's body out through one door in the frons and back in through the other, while simultaneously allowing Bosola to re-enter unencumbered, confronting the Cardinal from the start, sword in hand. In the 1623 text, the servant in question is the last listed character in Act 5, at the start of both scenes 4 & 5.¹ He is not specifically referred to as Antonio's servant although for 5.5 he is described as "Servant with Antonio's body." It is likely that Webster intended him to be understood as a servant in the employ of the Cardinal who is sympathetic to Antonio's cause and has the means to assist him. As he says,

I brought him hither
To have him reconcil'd to the Cardinal.

(5.4. 73-4)

¹ This is the standard way characters are introduced throughout the edition. There are no specific entrances or exits for characters referred to anywhere within the scenes of the play.

This reading provides a plausible motive for Bosola's suspicion of the servant's loyalties and a rationale for his elimination before Bosola turns his lethal attentions toward the Cardinal. Such is simply one interpretation, but it serves to exemplify the Stanislavskian 'justifications' that modern actors and directors may seek to provide psychological consistency to stage characters.

Lawrence Danson cites examples of Shakespeare's most familiar characters who act, "from one moment to the next in ways so radically different that the transformation challenges our ordinary standards, if not for authorial competence, then for the integrity of the self..." (217). It may be possible, for example, to see external justification for Hamlet's transformation ("...Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it/Who does it then? His madness." [5.2.236-39]) or to suggest that Prince Hal "is at the beginning precisely the person he will be at the end, and the problem of the discontinuous personality dissolves into the mechanics of theatrical role-playing" (219). But, what is one to make of *The Taming of the Shrew's* Kate, who "is unusual, even among Shakespeare's characters, for the apparent absoluteness of her transformation" (217)?

Of course, in Bosola's case, it could be argued that inconsistency is what most truly characterises him. When States writes that a dramatic character "carries within him a certain *ethos*, or disposition with respect to moral conduct and choice", it would be fair to say that, in Bosola's case, Webster seems to have predicated his *ethos* on the basis of his apparent transformation. Or - to view that transformation from a different perspective - perhaps Bosola's underlying *ethos* is present but hidden from the start and simply awaits discovery through the events of the play. This is certainly the view Bosola appears to hold of himself, describing himself in the

final instance as "...an actor in the main of all/ Much 'gainst mine own good nature..." (5.5.85-6). If Bosola's radical personal transformation, on some level, represents the recognition and potential realisation of an ethical identity, in this he follows the Duchess. Between them, they embody the play's argument that revolutionary change for the better - personal, social and political - may indeed be possible, even if it is not fully realised for the characters in the play.

In the context of consistency or inconsistency of character, States makes an illuminating point which provides a useful way in which we might consider character development:

...how does character "develop" in the course of a play? Do we add up a character's traits as we move from scene to scene? What exactly is development? I suggest that what we mean by the word is largely the development of our intimacy with the character (98).

This is helpful because, with Bosola, in the final analysis, considerations of character development are really of less importance than the function of the role in relation to the audience. What ultimately counts is not his consistency or inconsistency, nor the believability or otherwise of his transformation, but simply the relationship with the audience that accompanies it. Bosola's view of himself as "an actor" is consistent with the audience's perception of him for most of the play, and conforms with Sturges's view that Webster throughout makes a deliberate use of structural discontinuity. He uses Bosola to mediate the responses of the audience, and in doing so, gives his actor a multiplicity of roles.

Lowin would have found here a conspicuously diverse set of roles to play, like a series of music hall acts - comedian, showman, master of ceremonies. Again, a discontinuous style of playing ... is appropriate as the actor of Bosola shuffles through a pack of identities. If, unlike the others, the character learns something of his own moral nature during the play, he is most

appropriately seen as a macabre point of view. For Lowin, Bosola was a great role but not, in the realistic manner the expression suggests, a great character (Sturgess 122).

But, for this Webster had to pay a price. If, in *Bosola*, he created powerful and varied roles for Lowin at the expense of character, the price, I believe, was paid historically, when the critics began to focus on inconsistencies in the character without understanding the function of the role, thereby concluding that both character and play were structurally flawed. I feel that the enigma of the disjunction between the critical and performance legacies of the play is largely attributable to this confusion.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT HAPPENED TO BOSOLA?

Bosola has been a significant casualty of the changes in performance practice brought about by transformations in fashion and theatre design. Although such changes are to an extent historically inevitable (and consequently appropriate in meeting the theatrical demands of each period), there is the sense that, in this case, they have assisted a diminution in the potential and range of the role that Webster created; in some instances it has effectively destroyed the function of the role entirely.

4.1. The Seventeenth & Eighteenth Centuries

Although both play and role were well established in the stock repertory of The King's Men by the time of the closure of the theatres in 1642, changing tastes were in evidence well before this time. For example, Shirley's 1641 play, *The Cardinal*, while borrowing elements from Webster's plot, changes the names and locations, streamlining and simplifying the characters and their relationships. In the play, Hernando bears some superficial resemblances to the Bosola of Act Five, as he acts in the service of the Duchess Rosaura, avenging the murder of her lover, Alphonso, by another suitor, Columbo. Hernando kills Columbo in a duel and puts in train a sequence of actions that bring about the downfall and eventual death of Columbo's Machiavellian uncle, the eponymous Cardinal, who has been Columbo's chief promoter and protector. Hernando dies in a scuffle in which he wounds the Cardinal, preventing him from raping Rosaura, and both these parties also die.

Although *The Cardinal* in no sense displaced *The Duchess of Malfi* in the repertory of The King's Men in the Caroline period, its appearance arguably points to a trend for simplification in audience tastes that would continue up to

and beyond the Civil War and the closure of the theatres in 1642. Julie Sanders, however, suggests it would be wrong to underestimate the sophistication of some of the plays of this period. Although *The Cardinal* was written when Shirley was no longer performing as a regular playwright for Queen Henrietta's Men, and was first performed at the Blackfriars, Sanders points out that his "links with the court and the aristocracy were considerable throughout his career...(and)...this association...had a considerable degree of influence on his drama" (7). She notes the significance of his choosing a court setting (albeit an 'Italianate' one) for his plays, in the manner of Webster or Middleton, observing,

The court, deception, and indeed violence were being inextricably linked in the audience's minds. The absolving explanation might always be that none of these plays were set in the English court...but criticism of court behavior must surely have been implicit (23).

However, Shirley's characters are distinctly two-dimensional by contrast with Webster's; Rosaura is essentially a pure victim of male power and nowhere near as pro-active as the Duchess, and Hernando as avenging hero totally lacks Bosola's moral complexity. In respect of characterization at least, the charge of a trend towards simplification in this instance has some truth.

After the re-opening of the theatres in 1660, performances of *The Duchess of Malfi* maintained some popularity. It re-appeared as a stock tragedy, repeatedly between 1662 and 1668 in the repertory of The Duke's Men at their new playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where allegedly it "was so exceedingly Excellently Acted in all Parts; chiefly Duke Ferdinand and Bosola: it filled the House 8 days successively..."¹

¹ The Company's prompter, John Dennis (qtd. in Downes 24).

The Duke's Playhouse itself had been constructed by Sir William Davenant from a pre-existing indoor tennis court; creating a prototype for the structure and staging practices of English theatre for the next three centuries. The model was, of course, no longer derived from the pre-war public and private playhouses for which the play had been written. Rather it emerged from Davenant's personal experience of masque production at the Whitehall Court theatre in the 1640s and seventeenth century continental theatres to which an exiled Court had been exposed during the period of the Commonwealth. Principally, this would have involved the introduction of scenic representation with the actors performing in front of stock painted flats, moved by stage machinery to transform the location. McLuskie and Uglow maintain the impact on the relationship of audiences and actors would not have been significantly altered, because the actors performed on the extended forestage in front of the proscenium in order to be lit by the candles in the auditorium. Consequently, "Bosola's asides and soliloquies would have been as appropriate here as they were on the stage of the Globe" (15). However, the scenic innovations were symptomatic of a trend that would progressively serve to draw audiences towards visual spectacle and away from a focus on any meaning generated by their interaction with a complex and morally ambiguous commentator.

At The Duke's Playhouse, *Bosola* was played by the distinguished actor, Thomas Betterton, and, with the arrival of women on the stage, Betterton's wife, Mary played the Duchess. McLuskie and Uglow speculate of Betterton's performance that, because *Bosola* had been Lowin's part, "it is not too fanciful

to suggest that he may have retained Lowin's style and interpretation" (13). The prospect of such theatrical continuity is indeed plausible, yet more significant is the very *choice* of this role by the leading actor of his day. This may have much to do with the status of Lowin as the last surviving major actor of the King's

Men (he had died only as recently as 1659) and his association with the role. Equally, it might be assumed that Betterton – an actor also associated with Burbage's former leading roles, notably Hamlet – might have taken on the role of Ferdinand. Yet, Bosola was more obviously



Thomas Betterton

Betterton's natural role. McLuskie and Uglow cite the playwright, Colley Cibber's description of his acting style:

...though Betterton never wanted Fire and Force when his character demanded it, yet where it was not demanded he never prostituted his power to the low ambition of a false applause...Betterton had a voice of that kind which gave more spirit to Terror than to the softer Passions, of more strength than melody (13-14).

They suggest that "The part of Bosola with its long meditations, its wry cynicism and its final horrified recognition of guilt would have been well served by Betterton's skills" (14). I would go further and suggest that Betterton's

choice is significant, implying that, even in revivals as late as the 1690s,¹ Bosola was regarded, along with the Duchess, as the key role of the play.

Within a few decades this had changed significantly. For a performance retitled, *The Unfortunate Duchess of Malfy or the Unnatural Brothers*, given at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket in 1707, the leading heroic actor, Barton Booth, played Antonio, suggesting that this character had begun to emerge as the principal male role, romantically partnering the tragic heroine of the title, played by Mary Ann Porter.

The Bosola for this production was John Mills, an actor who seems highly regarded if purely financial criteria are applied; allegedly, "his weekly wage of £4 matched Betterton's and caused Colley Cibber to comment that in his lifetime no actor had ever earned so much" (Batty). Despite this, Mills was effectively only second principal male actor



John Mills

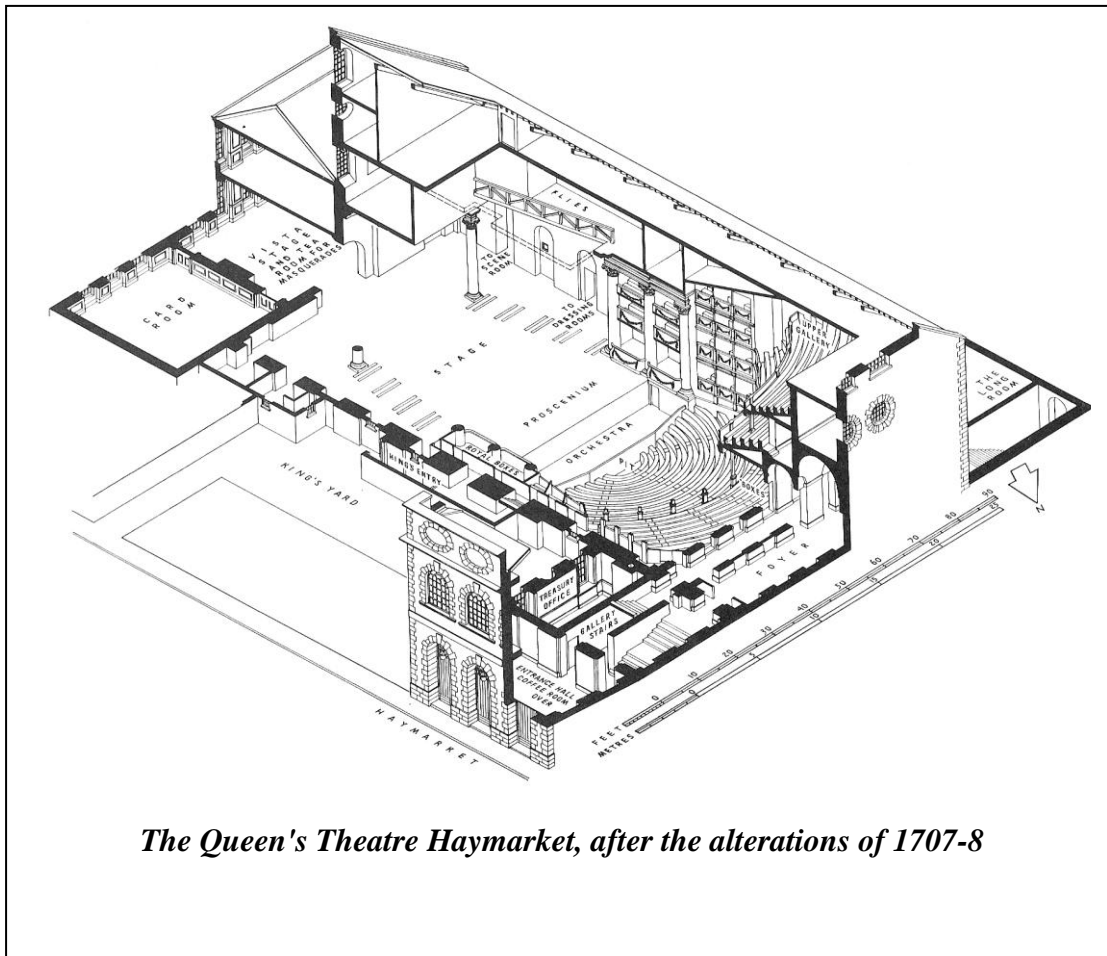
¹ Betterton seems to have stuck with the role for all its revivals, including a Court performance at the Hall Theatre, Whitehall in 1686, by the United Company. This was an amalgamation of the Duke's and King's Companies. Betterton returned to Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1695, where another revival, advertised as "Not Acted these Five Years" appeared with a new title "An Unhappy Choice or The Duchess of Malfy." By then it seems to have been regarded as a period piece.

in the company as many of his roles attest (e.g. Buckingham in *Richard III*; Horatio in *Hamlet*; Banquo in *Macbeth*). His casting as Bosola reflects the altered status of the role and this was echoed in a text apparently edited for reasons of propriety. The Duchess's pro-active sexuality was curbed and Ferdinand's crazed imaginings cut. Along with the removal of any explicitly sexual references, Bosola's misogynistic disgust over the old lady's make-up also disappeared. McLuskie and Uglow suggest the effect of these edits was

... to remove the precision and particularity of Webster's characters. Without the vivid reminder of the physicality of the flesh, Bosola's meditation on death became merely commonplace (18).

Given the leading actor, Booth's somewhat po-faced performance¹ - performed in an inappropriate "high tragic style" - they conclude, "the 1707 production might have seemed a staid affair" (20). However, this may have been a style well-suited to the distant performance space afforded by the Queen's Theatre where, having undergone alterations in 1707-8, an increasingly cavernous stage was now separated from the auditorium by an orchestra pit. The pattern for the future was set, with more drastic transformations to be enacted both architecturally and textually.

¹ Booth "thought it depreciated the Dignity of Tragedy to raise a Smile in any part of it, and therefore cover'd those kind of Sentiments with a scrupulous Coldness, and unmov'd Delivery, as if he fear'd the Audience might take too familiar notice of them." Cibber (qtd. in McLuskie 18-19).



In the 1730s, Lewis Theobald, the Shakespearian scholar and editor set about a rewrite of Webster which Don D. Moore describes as “a triumphantly wrong-headed example of imposing the classic unities and decorous rhetoric upon a dark play never meant for such illumination” (45). In *The Fatal Secret*, the Duchess is secretly married before the start and survives to be reunited with Antonio and their son at the end. To avoid any sexual impropriety, the Julia subplot vanishes and there is no incestuous subtext to Ferdinand’s motivation; he is simply concerned that the Duchess has married beneath her. But it is Bosola’s role that is most substantially altered by the reworking. When employed by Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess, this Bosola displays an unquiet

conscience over his task from the start. He expresses this in a soliloquy, evidently partly on loan from *Macbeth*:

BOSOLA: I'm here in double trust: yet, to be faithful
Must one way break my Faith; and leave the Path
Of simple Virtue, which was never made
To seem the Thing it is not...

(2.1.1-4)

Theobald liberally re-allocates Webster's text with the basic aim of simplifying the characterizations; so, for example, Bosola is no longer the "fantastic scholar"; instead he himself employs these words to describe

...The grave *Antonio*, who was wont to study
How many Knots made rough th'Herculean Club
And knew what Colour *Hector's* Beard was of...

(2.1.67-9)

With the same aim, Bosola's Act Four exchanges with the imprisoned Duchess are given to two new characters, Ferdinand's Secretary, Urbino and an unnamed Officer, who adopts the role of Tomb-maker. More drastically, it is this reframed Bosola who is instrumental in faking the Duchess's offstage murder and apparently displaying her body, but in fact cheating

Her credulous Brother with a waxen Image:
That beauteous Waxen Image so admir'd
Fram'd by *Vincentio di Laureola*
When her Grace married first.

(5.3.349-52)

Because the audience is also tricked by this subterfuge, it is Bosola who is responsible for the *coup-de-théâtre* by which the Duchess is restored at the end. Consequently, it is the wholly villainous Cardinal and Ferdinand who mistakenly kill each other, dying "In a Mist" (5.5.94.) in the Act Five climax; Bosola survives as a reformed benefactor.

The play received performances at Covent Garden on 4th & 6th April 1733, and the scene of Bosola presenting the confined waxwork of the Duchess's body to Ferdinand forms the frontispiece of the published edition of 1735. This is purely an artist's impression of the scene, probably derived simply from a



*Frontispiece of Theobald's
"The Fatal Secret"*

reading of the text; it is unlikely to be intended as a reproduction of the stage performance as the figure of Bosola on the left bears no physical resemblance to the portly actor, James Quin, who enacted the role. Quin, like Lowin before him was also a notable Falstaff, and it is interesting to note that in spite of all the

other changes that had been made, there was at least some continuity in the accepted physical appearance of the role.



James Quin

Peter Thomson states that "... between the death of Robert Wilks in 1732 and Garrick's London début in 1741, Quin was England's leading actor" ("James Quin"). If this is true, the enactment of *Bosola* saw him at the start of this pre-eminence. Yet, such success did not extend to Theobald's play; not only did its failure signal its own demise, but it effectively banished Webster's play from the stage for almost 150 years.

Moore's assessments of Theobald's efforts are damning: "...simplicity replaces complexity, and the Duchess is allowed to live. Webster's play in the process dies" (45). They receive a more sympathetic response from McLuskie and Uglow who suggest Theobald's motivation may have stemmed from his "concern to influence a theatre which was turning increasingly to more trivial forms of entertainment" (22). They judge that, in the context of his time,

Theobald recognized that his own audience demanded clarity of conception, decorum of style and, above all, the satisfaction of seeing virtue rewarded. Webster's play could provide none of these in its original version (23).

There is some irony here in the way a lesser playwright like Theobald was undone attempting to service the perceived demands of audience taste, whereas a greater one like Webster, sensitive to the fashionable trends of his own day, was subtly able to subvert expectations and turn them to his own advantage. On this point, Martin Wiggins makes the following significant observation:

Webster wrote *The Duchess of Malfi* during a period when tragicomedy was in fashion; more specifically, at a time when the genre had become familiar and a sophisticated audience could be expected to second-guess the surprise *dénouement*...

... (This) has a bearing on Webster's play, and on *Bosola*. The nature of tragicomedy is averted tragedy; but *The Duchess of Malfi* is averted tragicomedy. That is why Act IV is so important. In a formal tragicomedy, Act IV is the point of greatest tension...that danger could involve seeming death, provided that the character could be brought back in time for the Act V resolution...But, in this Act IV, the Duchess undergoes both danger and death, despite the teasing coda in which, Desdemona-like, she recovers only to die again...

...By invoking and frustrating the audience's tragicomic expectations of the Duchess's revival at this point, Webster underlines the fact that Bosola's deed is final, cannot be undone (178-82).

At one point, Webster seems to anticipate Theobald, ironically placing into Ferdinand's mouth the wish that Bosola might behave in the same tragicomic manner as Theobald makes him behave:

Why didst thou not pity her? What an excellent
Honest man mightst thou have been
If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!

(4.2.272-4)

But, as Wiggins also observes of Bosola,

The irony is that he did pity her, but he lacks the moral perspicacity, and the independence, to act on it. And that is the play's tragedy (179).

Contrasted with Webster's subversion of the expected, Theobald's *coups-des-théâtres* are shallow and formulaic, but, with or without his intervention, not even these would be available to audiences for the next century and a half.

4.2. The Nineteenth Century

When *The Duchess of Malfi* eventually returned to the stage it was once more in a revised form and, although the alterations were not as radical as Theobald's, they once again changed the tone and emphasis of the original to suit the taste of the time. The great Actor-Manager, Samuel Phelps, having very successfully revived much of the Shakespearian repertoire at the Theatre Royal, Sadler's Wells, in 1850 embarked on a presentation of the play in a new adaption by R.F.Horne.

THEATRE ROYAL,
Sadler's Wells.
Lessons, MONSIEUR GREENWOOD and PHELPS.

UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF
Mr. PHELPS.

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 20, THURSDAY, 21, FRIDAY 22 & SATURDAY 23, / 8
Will be produced, a Tragedy in Five Acts, by JOHN WEBSTER, (1611) entitled *The*
DUCHESS OF MALFI

Re-constructed for Stage Representation by R. H. HORNE.
WITH NEW SCENERY, DRESSES & DECORATIONS

"The *DUCHESS of MALFI* is distinguished by the same kind of beauties as the Author's *Fitness Corambona*, and clad in the same terrors. This is not the bandying of idle words and rhetorical common places, but the writhing and conflict, and the sublime colloquy of man's nature with itself."—*Harriet*.

"He (John Webster) had no pretensions to the inexhaustible wit of Shakspeare, but he had the power of approaching the terrible energy of his passion, and the profoundness of his pathos, in characters which he took out of the great muster-roll of humanity, and placed in fearful situations."—*Charles Knight*.

"To move a horror skilfully—to touch a soul to the quick—to lay upon fear as much as it can bear—to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeit—this only a Webster can do."—*Charles Lamb*.

PREVIOUS TO THE PLAY,
A PROLOGUE, written by R. H. HORNE, will be spoken by Mr HOSKINS

Ferdinand, (*Duke of Calabria and Lord of Tarragona*) Mr PHELPS
Cardinal Gragiani, (*his Brother*) Mr GRAHAM
Malatesta, - (*Prince of Albano*) - Mr H. MELLON
Antonio Bologna, (*Steward to the Duchess*) Mr WALLER
Delio; - (*a Friend of Antonio*) - Mr C. WHEATLEIGH
Bosola, (*a Man of desperate Fortunes*) Mr GEORGE BENNETT
Silvio, (*a Nobleman of Rome*) Mr C. FENTON

Castruccio, (*an old Lord*) } *Courtiers attached to the Household* { Mr WILKINS
Grisolan, } *of the Duchess* { Mr C. STILT

Physician to the Court, Mr KNIGHT
Servant to the Duchess, Mr FRANKS Executioner, Mr MEAGRESON
Lords, Pages, Ladies, Servants, Executioners, Soldiers, &c. &c.

Marina, (*Duchess of Malfi, Sister of the Duke and the Cardinal*) Miss G L Y N
Guiseppe, (*a Lady of the Court, Wife of Castruccio*) Mrs ARCHBOLD
Cariola, (*Confidential Lady Attendant on the Duchess*) Mrs GRAHAM
The Two Children of the Duchess, Master and Miss HARVEY.

N.B.—A Lapse of Two Years between the First and Second Acts.

Part of Playbill for Phelps's 1850 production

Phelps had built up an audience for Shakespeare restored from the First Folio, discarding the eighteenth century alterations of Cibber, Tate and Garrick. He did not however extend this generosity to Webster, and the revival must have been deemed somewhat risky to judge by the way he employed commendations and Shakespearian comparisons on the playbill from three literary big names; Lamb, Knight and Hazlitt. The risk paid off and the play proved a resounding success, especially for its leading actress, Isabella Glyn, who became so identified with the role of the Duchess (re-named Marina) that she toured it intermittently for the next eighteen years. Glyn's success rested largely on the nature of Horne's adaptation, which transformed the play into a vehicle for a leading actress at the expense of most of the other roles, including that of Bosola.

Horne's stated aim, however, was slightly different. In his Preface to the published edition, he writes of the necessity of going beyond "the erasure of ...unnecessary scenes, and a little revision of certain objectionable passages", towards "reconstructing the whole" as if restoring "a grand old abbey – haunted, and falling into decay..." (qtd. in Moore 78). This sentiment is reminiscent of Declan Donnellan's description of his director's task as metaphorical picture restorer.¹ Although Donnellan's textual changes are nowhere as extreme as Horne's, both metaphors of restoration are self-deceptive to the extent that they imply that somehow the integrity of the original work is being restored, rather than merely reframed to accord with contemporary taste. In Victorian terms this meant a typically

¹ Donnellan's claim is cited and examined in my analysis of his 1996 production in Chapter 7, page 216.

sentimental treatment (the dying Ferdinand holding the dead Antonio's hand to beg forgiveness), and the removal of anything - as Horne put it - "like a shocking *reality*" (the masque of madmen and the Duchess's strangling taking place offstage).¹

Don D. Moore summarizes the adaptation as follows:

...a play of tight construction, fluent and unmemorable Fletcherian verse, and a tone not of moral ambiguity but of melodrama, sentimental and black and white. Minor characters disappear, and major characters constantly inform us as to their intentions (14).

We can recognize in this reworking of Webster's play the familiar and often repeated response of adapters in every century to tidy up and simplify. In Horne's terms,

It...became apparent that if this great tragedy was to be exhumed from its comparative obscurity, by representation on the stage, all the characters must be made consistent with themselves, and all the events proper to them – all the parts must be made coherent – and all this to be built with direct relationship to the whole, and direct tendency to the final events (79).

Moore cites one example from the Act Four dialogue between Bosola and the Duchess which illustrates this imposed consistency in operation:

BOSOLA: Thou art an over-ripe fruit, that not being duly gathered, art fallen to rot on the soil. There's not a hand shall take thee up.

DUCHESS: (Looking upward) A hand will take me up! – A fallen fruit? No; I am a seed, whose mortal shell must lie and rot i' the earth before the flower can rise again to the light. (*Looking round as on her prison*) Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? – such is the soul in the body. The world is like its little turf of grass; and the heaven o'er our heads, like its looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison (15).

Moore comments the following:

¹ Although she was brought back onstage to expire with the final word "Mercy"!

We realise something is dreadfully awry here: the author has horned in and given to the Duchess Bosola's original lines, thus completely reversing Webster's meaning (15).

It is impossible to impose such narrowly defined consistency upon the play without severe damage to character, role and ultimately the meaning of the work. Horne prepares the audience to some extent for Bosola's eventual conversion by demonstrating his good qualities early on, but in this scene he is simply reduced to a *grand-guignol* villain and the Duchess his saintly but transcendent victim. In essence, what the audience experiences becomes (perhaps) more dynamically intense, but the range and complexity of possible responses to what is being enacted are severely diminished. Of course, Victorian audiences were scarcely aware of – nor unduly concerned about – such a loss. Horne's *Duchess* proved a success, especially for Isabella Glyn. Yet, some of the critical acclaim seems to have rubbed off on George Bennett's Bosola.

Bennett appears to have been regarded at the time as a none-too-subtle actor of an older tradition – although this undoubtedly constituted a recommendation to many in the audience! McLuskie and Uglow suggest that Bennett, "...an actor well-known for his Kemble-style dignity and stiffness, seems to have created a rather straight-forward, if effective, melodrama villain"(28).

Despite the fact that Horne's reworking, like Theobald's, built up the role of Antonio as tragic hero, Phelps chose to play not him but Ferdinand. Interestingly, according to his biographer, Shirley S. Allen,

Phelps would have preferred to act Bosola, but he realized that the success of the play depended upon making Duke Ferdinand credible, both in his malignity and in his madness, and that this required a finesse that Bennett did not have (260).

In other words, Bosola was now deemed the more straightforward of the two parts and therefore more appropriate for the attentions of a cruder actor. The decision paid off; even the critic George Henry Lewes – who to judge by his review in *The Leader* clearly loathed the play – states that “George Bennett, in Bosola, was suited to a nicety” (qtd. in Moore



George John Bennett

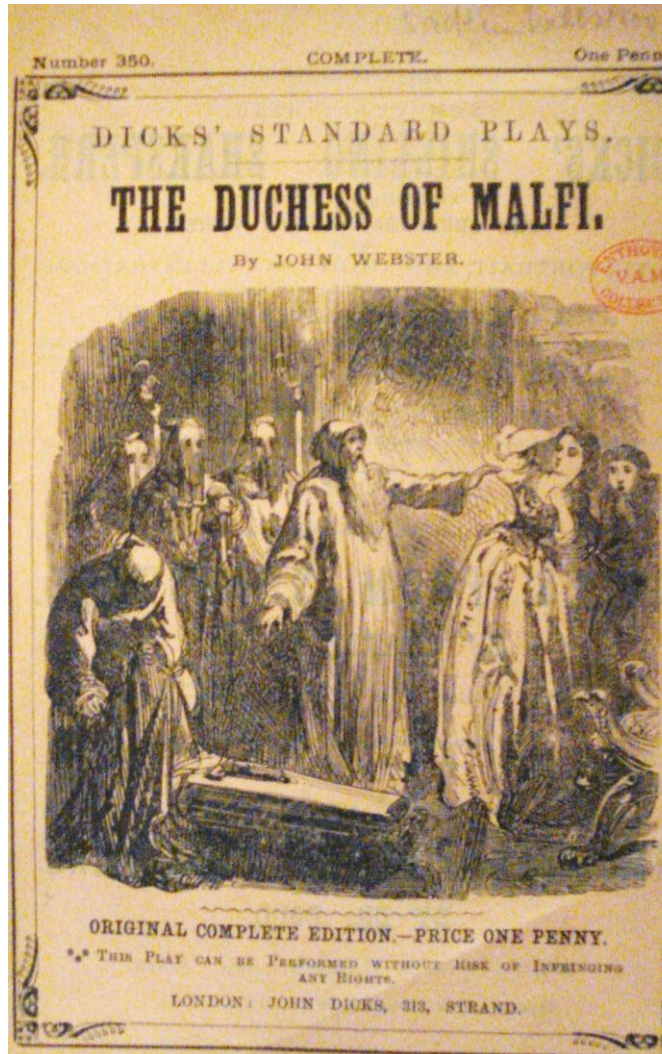
88). And, according to a review in *The Athenaeum*,

The Duke’s agent Bosola, is the strongest and most efficient character. It was properly confided to Mr G.Bennett, who performed it with great force, and that old feeling for the histrionic art which few modern professors seem to understand (qtd. in Moore 82).

Impressions of a key moment in Bennett’s performance have survived in two forms: in a description by Westland Marston, in a historical survey of Victorian actors where he describes the impact of Bennett’s voice and movement in Act 4, when he appears in the guise of an old man:

...there was something in his servile appearance in his deep sepulchral tones, slow movements, and watchful, deliberate revelation of the coming horror, that seemed as if he himself had had such near commerce with Death as to be the fit representative of his terrors to the living (2.61).

The same moment finds representation in an illustration on the front cover of one of several published performing editions (Dicks Standard Plays Number 350), which appeared for public consumption in the wake of the success of the production. These were effectively souvenir editions that purported to include from productions, “Full



Front Cover of “Dick’s Standard Plays Number 350” showing Bennett’s Bosola disguised as an old man

stage directions, exits and entrances, relative positions, cast of characters, costumes etc.etc.” This particular edition gives copious evocations of the detailed scenic representations that were a key feature of Phelps’ production (eg. For Act 1 Scene 1, “Set Picture of the Gardens of a Palace, overlooking the Port of Malfi, with the Sea in the Distance”), and helpfully informs us that Bennett’s Bosola had three costume changes.¹

The Duchess – as in the production – is named in the cast list as Marina, and Julia appears in parenthesis as Guiseppa. Yet, astonishingly, the text provided in this

¹ “Grey Jacket and trunks, trimmed with black – slouched hat and feather – dark hose and boots. *Second dress*: Green ditto, puffed with crimson and trimmed with gold *Third dress*: Long dark and rope girdle – long gray wig and beard – large disguise cloak and mask.”

edition is not exactly Horne's rewrite as it was staged, but a revised version, slightly closer to the original Webster, although still marginally trimmed for clarity and good taste. Even at this point, it seems that the disjunction between the play as a literary piece to be read and as a theatrical piece performed continued. Nevertheless, Horne's text seems to have provided the basis for all subsequent productions over the remaining half century, including the American tour with Emma Waller as the Duchess. There was, however, one significant exception when, in October 1892, William Poel mounted two performances of his own adaptation with The Independent Theatre Society.

Poel is sometimes credited with the first sustained experimental attempts to restore Elizabethan theatre practice, with semi-open staging and performances of uncut Shakespeare. In so doing he laid the foundations for much twentieth century rethinking of early modern drama. His treatment of the Webster, however, although significantly different from what had preceded it during the last half century, was still tainted by the irresistible urge to clarify the obscure, expunge the unpleasant, and tidy up the inconsistent. The first urge was met with by minor textual amendments and (flying in the face of his own established staging practice), as Poel's biographer, Robert Speaight comments, "The play was given with scenery, since Poel felt the plot was too incoherent for pure Elizabethan treatment" (7). In respect of the second urge, despite going along with the general flow of opinion, Poel surprised those familiar with his work, as this critic in *The Nation*, attests:

I venture to say it would be absolutely out of the question to give an unrevised version of the *Duchess of Malfi*, although this fact does not excuse the Independent Theatre Society's unexpected squeamishness in suppressing some of the more vigorous Elizabethan passages (348).

So, for example, it was in the tradition of the 'good taste' exhibited by Phelps and Theobald that Poel, like them, required that the Duchess be borne into the wings to be strangled before re-entering to expire. By way of compensation, perhaps for what was lost, Poel added some controversial sensationalism with a "Dance of Death" with luminous skeletons painted onto the backs of the madmen; a device considered by some to have derived from an "effect well-known...in the music-halls"(*The Times* 6).

But, it was inevitably in the search for consistency that Poel demonstrated a lack of faith in the original play that was, in itself, consistent with previous adaptors. Predictably, this lack of faith impacted most significantly upon *Bosola*. Yet, interestingly, some critics seemed prepared to accept the inconsistencies (albeit as a signifier of Webster's inferiority as a dramatist) in the manner of the audience's acceptance of non-naturalistic staging conventions. Thus the critic in *The Nation* writes that, just as one "accepts the screen in the modern society play, or the convenient arrangement of doors in the modern farce," in much the same way,

The motives of *Bosola*, the hired murderer, discoursing of pity, singing the dirge, as it were, of his own victim, was another problem for which one did not seek the solution (349).

Revisions occurred predominantly in the final act, with cuts and major re-ordering simplifying the sequence of action. Consequently, *Bosola* is spared the necessity of killing Antonio's servant, since the latter only reappears after the demise of Antonio, the Cardinal and Ferdinand. More remarkably, *Bosola* himself survives the play to surrender his sword at the end of Act Five. As Delio speaks of the

establishment of the Duchess's son "in his mother's right", the Duchess's ghostly echo repeats his words, and the final page of Poel's prompt book¹ concludes thus:

Bosola at the sound of the Echo gives a slight shudder and makes the sign of the cross

Bos. (To Delio) Farewell. Mine is another voyage.

(As Bosola is going out guarded, the figure of the Duchess² is seen between the cypress trees at the back. She is looking sadly towards her son. Music of Canzone a Ballo³ is heard in the distance as the Curtain falls.⁴

Poel has changed the ending; in a simple and reductive manner, the reformed malcontent villain finally does the right thing. Webster's Bosola says that he has simply sought revenge for the Duchess, Julia and last of all, himself. But, by surrendering his sword and crossing himself, Poel's Bosola also surrenders the existential identity given him by Webster. Implicitly, Poel wants to reconcile him to society. Unlike Webster's creation, Poel's Bosola resigns himself at the end to the authority of God and State, and his dangerous anarchy is diminished to a manageable conformity.

Whether in spite of this - or, perhaps because of it - Murray Carson's Bosola received more critical acclaim than Mary Rorke's somewhat insipid Duchess,

¹ This exists in two forms in the Enthoven Collection Box at the Theatre Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum: a typewritten master copy with full stage directions and set descriptions, and exercise books with their individual parts handwritten in pencil for each actor.

² Poel was not the first nor last to 'resurrect' a ghostly Duchess in Act Five. She is as likely as not to appear in today's productions, although probably not in the manner of the American tours of the late 1850s where she was depicted "riding to Heaven, in white muslin." (qtd. in Wadsworth *Webster, Horne & Mrs Stowe* 158).

³ Poel appears to have used music thematically to establish a kind of dialectical tension between the secular and religious worlds of the play; the worldly *Canzone* alternated with a pious *Miserere* throughout.

although the critical reception of the play as a whole leads Moore to suggest that "both perhaps regretted their involvement" (128). According to *The Nation*, Carson as Bosola "had some thrilling and impressive moments"(349), while Clement Scott's praise suggests that – as with Bennett's 1850 performance – there may have been something a bit old-fashioned about his performance compared with others in the Poel company:

...head and shoulders above all the rest was the Bosola of Mr. Murray Carson. He was like a bit of old Sadler's Wells, and it is a pity that one who has such a fine stage face, such a rich and ringing voice, and such an admirable elocutionary method should have been born in an age that discards not only tragedy but the whole range of poetic drama...And oh! what a treat to the tortured ear to hear good poetry declaimed like this, without a trace of bombast in it, but with just emphasis, nice balance, and true feeling! It was a musical as well as a dramatic treat (539).

However, the same performance could be perceived very differently. After savaging the performances of the rest of the cast, *The Nation* reviewer continues,

...to me it was Bosola (Mr Murray Carson) who was the chief offender, because of his greater pretensions. He began at that high pitch where the wise tragedian leaves off; he spoke with his eyes, his nostrils, his forehead; he writhed and grimaced so unrestrainedly that by the end of the first act he had exhausted his resources, and could but begin and go through the same tricks all over again (349).

Carson's Bosola, in itself, was certainly not pointing the way to the future but, so vastly different are these responses, they suggest that audiences were simultaneously resisting and adapting to the transitions in performance style under Poel. But – more pertinent to this study – Poel's intervention indicates a shift in the positioning of Bosola in the performance history of *The Duchess of Malfi*. In response to Archer's wholesale condemnation of the play and Poel's revival, Poel published a riposte in which a major focus is a defence of Webster's creation of Bosola. Archer, writing in

1893 in response to the production, harps once more on themes of consistency and clarity, condemning the role because,

...the fatal lack of clearness ruins everything. We cannot help feeling from time to time that the poet is writing for mere momentary effect, and has suffered the general scheme of the character to slip out of sight. All we can say with confidence is that, artistically, Bosola is worth a score of Flamineos (qtd. in Moore 142).

Poel's reply is considered, presenting a holistic reading of Bosola that is both informed and insightful:

Bosola is a masterly study of the Italian 'familiar', who is at the same time a humanist. He is refined, subtle, indifferent, cynical. A criminal in action but not in constitution. A man forced by his position to know all the inward resources of his own nature, passing or permanent, and the consciousness of a very brief period of power and influence (qtd. in Moore 145).

The view of Bosola expressed in this passage seems a long way from any interpretation seen on the stage in the previous two centuries. Although, he may not have fully realized it in his adaptation – or in Carson's performance – Poel did much to restore Bosola's status as leading male role after the previous hyper-inflation of Antonio as romantic hero. His restoration of the bulk of Webster's text helped prepare the way for increasingly frequent revivals in the twentieth century, and his championing of Bosola (on paper, at least), with all of the role's cynicism and ambiguity, began to make more sense in a world that was emerging as darker and more uncertain than anything hitherto known .

4.3. The First Half of the Twentieth Century

It was not until after the horrors of the First World War that the new productions emerged. Firstly, in 1919, The Phoenix Society mounted two performances¹ at the Lyric, Hammersmith to a mixed response. The programme provided a detailed overview of the play's performance history, deriding the adaptation by Theobald ("puerile and sugary sentiment") and, in the fulsome condemnation of Horne's version, gives some idea of how far the reassessment of Webster's play had come in under seventy years:

Where he anaemically differs from Webster is merest shoddy (sic), and evinces throughout an almost incredible lack of poetry and imagination. It must be patent that anyone who is temerarious enough thus to tamper with one of the world's supreme tragedies can thereby only demonstrate the folly of his own fecklessness (Summers).

In spite of this robust assertion of the play's worth, there was still something dramatically tentative about the initiative. The spectacular staging seems to have impressed but not the performances (*The Spectator*). William J. Rea's *Bosola* elicited little press comment and Cathleen Nesbitt's *Duchess* was damned by faint praise. Interest focused largely upon Robert Farquharson who attempted to imbue Ferdinand with a degree of psychological plausibility (*The London Mercury* 368). There was praise for the educational value of the revival, but doubts were expressed by T.S.Eliot, who wrote a review essay (7) suggesting it was inappropriate for the actors to seek to interpret the roles rather than just deliver the lines. His remarks might draw sympathy in the light of this contemporary review of the treatment of deaths in the last scene:

¹ On 23rd & 24th November.

They interrupted the rolling period of the dying speeches made by each of the eight persons who are murdered on stage by realistic splutters and gurgles. They tried to individualise every “item” in the massacre by each dying in a different attitude. Having exhausted every other possible posture, the Duke Ferdinand was reduced to expiring upside down, his head on the ground and his feet over the back of an armchair (*The Spectator*).¹

McLuskie & Uglow suggest there was collective confusion about the acting style appropriate for a play of this kind.

Eliot had hit upon an enduring problem. The play had appealed in the twentieth century because of its apparent modernity of theme, but the conventions within which its themes were enacted have only and with difficulty been assimilated to contemporary acting and design (36-7).

This was perhaps affirmed by the wholesale cuts made by Nugent Monck for his Maddermarket production² in 1922, because they were deemed “as being unsuitable for modern popular presentation” (*The Morning Post*). This largely affected the playing of Act 2, but also involved the total removal of the part of Julia. She was also missing from James Fernald’s production at the Embassy Theatre in 1935, expendable according to the programme as she merely constituted part of an “embryonic sub-plot.”

The press reports for the latter production suggest that – even a decade on – an acting style deemed universally appropriate was still proving elusive. Writing for the *Daily Telegraph* in a special feature, Sydney W. Carroll reflected upon the issue.

Webster calls for a power in the acting of the kind that present-day players have been trained to despise. They style it “ranting,” “barnstorming,” “ham,” whatever they think of to mark their contempt of it. *The Duchess of Malfi* cannot be handled with satisfaction by anyone gingerly and with light voices.

¹ Moore notes that William Archer was in the audience, and comments sardonically that it “was all Archer needed” (132).

² Monck notably attempted a somewhat ideocentric interpretation of Elizabethan original theatrical practices with his amateur stagings of Shakespeare. Despite its mixed reception, he retained an interest in *The Duchess* and revived the play in 1926 and 1933.

The production's Bosola had been accused of a particularly grave offence in the newspaper's own review a few days earlier: "Roy Graham's quietly sinister Bosola was effective when it was audible..." (Darlington). Carroll now pronounced the verdict:

If it is an offence to be inaudible in the theatre it is a double-dyed crime to be so with this tragedy, which calls for a boldness, a clearness, a legibility appropriate to its pattern and its method...

...Our current naturalism has much to answer for. It is weakening our stage elocution, destroying the careless raptures of theatrical passions. Drinking Hot Blood is not the pastime of the moment...

In tones reminiscent of Eliot's criticism of the style of the 1919 production, he concluded that the whole performance reminded him of a cocktail party in which, "the cocktails were all of thin tomato juice."

The case was wittily taken up by Ivor Brown in a detailed assessment in *The Observer*. After lavish praise for Webster's creation, he launched into the hapless Graham:

Bosola, a blackguard capable of conscience, is one of the richest parts in Jacobean drama. He ranks with Iago in villainy's dialectic, and praise could go no further than that. What do we know of him? Webster is usually explicit about his characters, and never more so than here. Bosola has served seven years in the galleys for a notorious murder; he has "oblique character" in his face; he immediately likens himself to a blackbird, and I think the chosen colour is significant. In short he is a black-avised Renaissance ruffian, sinister and sinuous; Mr. Roy Graham made him look like a pale young curate with a pinch of knavery in his composition, one, we may say, who has drifted into "defrockery" and membership of a Bad Set. A week in the galleys would have finished him.

Several critics commented on the stylistic gulf between classical tragedy and modern naturalistic acting which – allegedly unappreciated by the Embassy Company – produced risible results. "Audience Giggles at Horrors" headlined one review, qualified by the sub-heading, "But the acting was partly to blame" (*The Daily*

Express). The same article went on to opine that the role of Bosola would have been better served by an actor "with a relish for morbid psychology", like Charles Laughton. Ivor Brown, in *The Observer*, gave a clear picture of why the end of the play, assisted by the casting of Bosola in particular, created such mirth:

Graham did his best...and, in his mortal throes, ended up with a gallant fall backwards down the steps. But the good will of the actor could not overcome so vital an error in casting. Bosola must be formidable in physique as in force of guilt; otherwise the murders at close become farcical. We had to watch Mr. Neil Porter, a puissant Cardinal, groveling helpless for mercy before a stripling Bosola whom he could have disarmed with a slap on the wrist, and then have flicked through the window with his little finger.

Yet, the condemnation was not unanimous, and there was a discernible undercurrent of opinion that could see something subtler in Graham's reading of the part that might have been better evinced in a different context. *The Times's* critic, for example wrote "...in Mr Roy Graham's study of Bosola are clearly exposed the several fascinating sides of that philosophic cut-throat's character." And James Agate was impressed by the image of Bosola as

...a fair haired rogue, a slippery thing of naught with diamonds in his ears...by an ingenious disposition of the ruff, the head seemed ...to be sunk so low into the shoulders as to connote dishonesty (89-95).

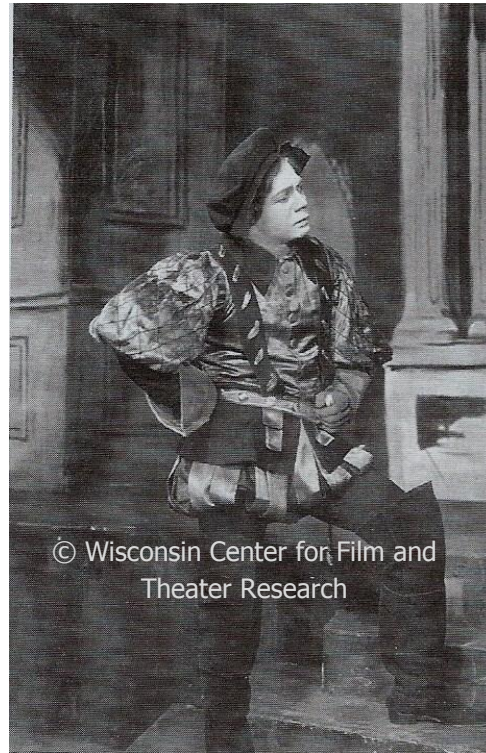
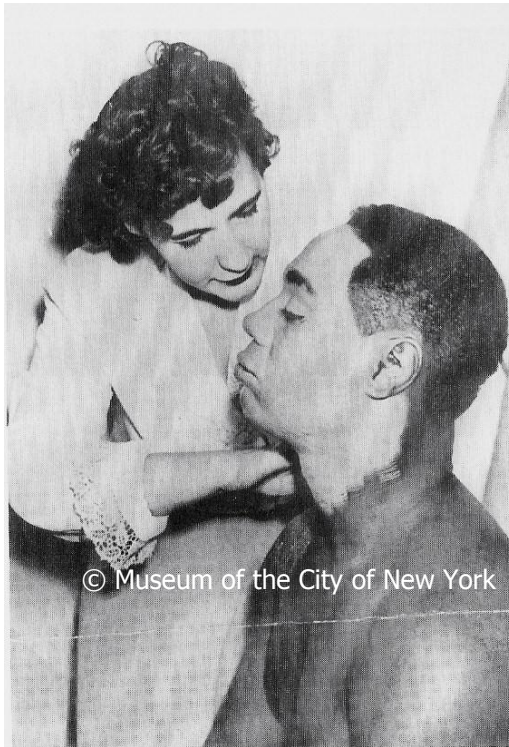


Roy Graham as Bosola and Joy Bland as the Duchess

Certainly one has only to look at the photograph of Graham to recognize that by the twentieth century the physical image of Bosola had evolved into something radically different from the heavyweight figure of a Lowin, Betterton or Quin. For this we must presumably thank the increasing importance of the interpretive role of the director, characterizing the revival of early modern drama on the stages of the twentieth century.

After, the Second World War, George Rylands directed the play, famously in England with Peggy Ashcroft (1945), and notoriously in New York (1946) with Elizabeth Bergner (1946). Canada Lee played Bosola, becoming the first black actor in America ever to don make-up as a white character. In its own historical context, this was a bold move; generally regarded as progressive (although contentious) at the time. According to Lee's biographer, Mona Z Smith

Newspapers from coast to coast and in the West Indies reported this historic event, the "first time in theatrical history a producer has selected the man he considered the best actor for a role regardless of color" (218).



Canada Lee dons 'white-face' (left) to play Bosola, (right).

Boston, where the play opened, was a segregated city, which created demands to know why a white actor had not been cast. *The Boston Post* – (somewhat dubiously) replied:

The answer seems to be that there are no white actors now available on Broadway capable of playing it properly. It was *necessary* to hire Canada Lee. *Bosola* is one of the scurviest wretches in the whole gamut of drama. Talent isn't enough for the actor who would play him: He must have the capacity to suggest utter villainy (qtd. in Smith 220).

With support as questionable as this, it is scarcely surprising that Lee developed cold feet and missed the first two days of the opening. The play's director, George Rylands, was compelled to take on the role at short notice.

When the play opened and transferred to New York (Broadway's first *Duchess*) it was a signal failure. Independent of the controversy surrounding Lee's

casting, the play had experienced a fractious gestation period, with disputes over the adaptation and treatment, which had clearly impacted on the production. The reviews were uniformly dire, with Howard Barnes summing up that "the John Webster melodrama makes a cogent plea for being left in the library" (qtd. in Smith 224). Lee, however came in for some praise,

The London Daily Telegraph called Lee the most interesting feature in the whole production...*The New York Times Theater Review* expressed "delight" over this proof that Lee "had acquired mastery over the stage" (qtd. in Smith 224).

But it was the novelty of his "whiteface" performance which occupied most column inches and, ironically, saved the show at the box office in the face of the poor press. The majority opinion dismissed it as a cheap trick that had backfired, but, a few critics felt that Lee had transcended this impediment:

Jr. Barnes called his face paint a "stunt" as unsuccessful as the play itself. Atkinson agreed, but more charitably: "He counterfeits a white man about as successfully as a white man in burnt cork counterfeits a Negro - which is hardly at all. But that is only an amusing detail by comparison with the intelligence, ease and scope of Mr. Lee's acting." Ward Morehouse sniped: "He presents a rather comical figure, although his lot is one of tragedy. His extraordinary make-up consists of flesh-colored grease paint, a thick wig, bushy eyebrows, a goatee and a putty nose." Richard Watts Jr., completely disagreed, calling Canada's appearance in whiteface a "tour-de-force" (qtd. in Smith 224).

Lee himself had regarded this performance as landmark (which, in a sense, it was).

Smith quotes him as follows:

Playing *Bosola*, he said, "can open up vast fields to the Negro actor whose parts previously have been limited by color."

"I hope it will be a long step toward being 'actor Canada Lee,' not 'Canada Lee, Negro actor,'" he told the press.

With hindsight, we might regret that Lee's times would not have tolerated a *Bosola* performed as racially black; with the character's sense of grievance and alienation, one can anticipate the electricity potentially generated by this added dimension.

As we have seen from its performance history, the text of this play has been repeatedly cut, re-ordered and rewritten and it is not just editors undertaking this, but also playwrights. In the twentieth century, the most notable of these was Bertolt Brecht. Brecht was drawn to early modern drama in the development of his own theory and practice of non-empathetic drama. Richard Halpern draws an interesting comparison between him and William Archer in this respect,

Brecht remarks that later ages, unable to endure the immense suffering of Shakespeare's great tragedies, would describe them as "drama for cannibals"...Archer...attacked Renaissance plays on the same grounds that constituted their appeal for Artaud and Brecht. "The great mass of Elizabethan...plays have nothing to say to modern audiences," he insists, "because they exemplify primitive and transitional types of art" (25).

While agreeing that it might be difficult, Brecht also felt there was much to harness for a modern audience and consequently devoted much energy to re-working Marlowe, Shakespeare and Jonson, as well as Webster. Despite this, Brecht's *Malfi* treatment remains something of a theatrical curiosity. Commissioned in 1946 by the German actress Elizabeth Bergner, Brecht's fellow exile in America, the play was written in somewhat fractious collaboration, initially with H.R.Hays and, subsequently, W.H.Auden. It was scheduled for the same production which cast Canada Lee as Bosola, but, due to the intervention of the director, George Rylands, there was an eventual reversion to (largely) Webster's original text and Brecht's name did not appear in the programme.¹

Because Brecht's version was written and revised according to the developing (and often conflicting) demands of the various involved parties, there is no definitive

¹ Brecht was scathing about the production suggesting Rylands' direction was characterised by a nineteenth century "old style declamation." In his own view, the correct model for the production should have employed the alienation effects of the Broadway musical.

text. The Brecht/Hays' version¹, subtitled an "Adaptation for the Modern Stage" presents the play in three acts and includes several "deviations" (Brecht's term) or new scenes as follows:

- i. (2.1.) Two years after the event, Bosola brings news of the Duchess's motherhood to Ferdinand on the Cyprus battlefield. In explaining the reasons for his delay, Bosola gives a picture of the demands of his employment:

Your Grace, I was pitifully misdirected. I have been robbed, lain in prison, took sick of the plague and like to have died only to bring you intelligence shall earn your ingratitude. I am like a raven of ill omen that endures a score of tempests, two score snowstorms, eludes the hawk and the fowler, to croak a message against which all would stop their ears. Thus I am very industrious to work my own ruin.

- ii. (3.1.) Ferdinand murders the Cardinal, whom he believes has shamed their family by publicly denouncing the Duchess.
- iii. (3.5.) On Ferdinand's orders, Bosola kills the Duchess by getting her to kiss a poisoned bible. A remorseful Ferdinand commits suicide by doing the same. Bosola confesses and is led off to be hanged.

In a revision, Brecht added a prologue using dialogue from Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, to make explicit Ferdinand's incestuous leanings and also, from *The White Devil*, employed elements of Vittoria's trial for the Duchess.

Brecht's version uses a Marxist agenda to emphasise the historical context of the play, stressing its economic and social themes. Surprisingly perhaps, he reduces Bosola's pivotal role to a bald demonstration of the exploitation of the working classes through financial bribery and the promise of advancement. The

¹ Published in Brecht. *Collected Plays*.vol 7.

characterisation is also less satisfactory, substituting confusion for complexity.

According to John Willetts in his editorial to the text,

The proper use of Webster's extensive psychological analysis of Bosola, puzzled Brecht throughout his work. Eventually, Bosola becomes a much less fully developed character, almost purely the Duke's tool; lingering traces of Webster's treatment occasionally blur his characterization in Brecht's versions (Brecht 426).

Brecht is actually less interested in Bosola's psychology than Ferdinand's, so his Bosola is not especially remorseful at the end. According to M.S.Barranger's analysis of the play,

Brecht has revised Webster's...Bosola to create a portrait of a man habituated to mercenary choices, which finally entrap and destroy him. When he accepts employment from Ferdinand as a spy in the Duchess's household Bosola says, "I am your creature," thus summarizing Brecht's external and concrete approach to the psycho-social gest or overall attitude of the character (66).

McLuskie and Uglow suggest that the Brecht adaptation might have made a powerful play in the hands of the Berliner Ensemble. However, its rejection by Broadway meant that it remained essentially unperformed until an amateur production at the University of San Diego in 1976. Then, as now, it tended to be regarded as a curiosity.

Professional, amateur and academic productions of Webster's original play appeared increasingly frequently over the next few years. John Bury tackled it for the Theatre Workshop, Stratford East in 1956, and in 1960, the Royal Shakespeare Company chose the play (again with Ashcroft, now directed by Donald McWhinnie) as the inaugural production for its London base at the Aldwych. Subsequently, the

frequency of major revivals and the eventual inclusion of the text on schools' examination syllabuses¹ afforded the play canonical status.

But, as I claimed at the start of this chapter, there remains an air of disquiet about the play's exact status (which arguably forms part of its fascination). Not insignificantly, the period of the play's establishment as a classic has been accompanied, not just by a growth in the role of the director, but also that of the 'directorial concept', and the proliferation of productions since 1945, has been accompanied by an equally diverse number of directorial approaches, not least in the treatment of *Bosola*. My detailed analyses of the six major productions which now follow, spanning the period 1972-2003, attest to this diversity.

¹ It still appeared as a set text on the Cambridge 'English A Level Syllabus' (9695) for 2010 and 2011.

PART TWO:

Performance

CHAPTER FIVE: PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

My aim in the second part of this thesis has been to analyse the treatment of Bosola in a range of performances, attempting to demonstrate how the meaning of the play has been altered by decisions made regarding the role. For this I have undertaken the detailed analysis of professional performances selected from the past four decades. Professional, amateur and academic productions of *The Duchess of Malfi* have proliferated since the mid twentieth century, contrasting radically with the paucity of productions in the previous three centuries, so any choice will inevitably be selective. I have chosen enactments of Bosola by actors within the following productions, listed here chronologically:

1. Michael Bryant. Directed by James McTaggart. BBC TV, 1972.
2. Bob Hoskins. Directed by Adrian Noble. Manchester Royal Exchange Company, 1980-1.
3. Nigel Terry/Stephen Boxer. Directed by Bill Alexander. Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989-90.
4. George Anton. Directed by Declan Donnellan. Cheek –by-Jowl, 1995-6.
5. Tom Mannon. Directed by Gale Edwards, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2000-1
6. Lorcan Cranitch. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Royal National Theatre, 2003.

I have selected these productions for the following (largely pragmatic) reasons:

- a. They were productions which used the basic text of the play, albeit edited, and were not radically rewritten responses to it.¹

¹ I have therefore excluded, for example, a production such as Hidden Grin's' *The Suburbs of Hell*, which I saw at the ICA in 1986. This was a dystopic futuristic fantasy, drawing both its themes and its

- b. They were stylistically varied productions, both in terms of their staging and the ideologies seemingly underlying them.
- c. There are available video or audio archives of the performances.
- d. There are available prompt books or production records.
- e. There are available photographs of the productions.
- f. There is access to a significant quantity of critical reviews from the press, and occasionally academic evaluation.
- g. They were productions that I saw live onstage.

Of the six productions analysed, all met criteria a-f to a greater or lesser degree; four met the last criterion and one was a television broadcast, which I accessed on videotape courtesy of the BFI. Unusually, and significantly, two productions were performed with almost complete texts based upon the first quarto of 1623. The other four edited the text (some in ways which strongly suggested a directorial agenda) to emphasise or exclude certain elements.

5.1. Methodology

Delio caricatures Bosola as a “fantastical scholar”¹, seemingly obsessed by minutiae in his studies but, in respect of performance analysis, there is a positive virtue in Bosola’s method, because the devil is truly in the detail. I have sought to examine these productions in the sort of detail that a director or actor might employ when exploring the text to support their reading of a role. I have also attempted to

title from Webster. I have, however, in a final chapter given some consideration to the ongoing practice of rewriting the original, in the time-honoured tradition of Theobald and Brecht.

¹ ...a fantastical scholar, like such who study to know how many knots was in Hercules’ club, of what colour Achilles’ beard was, or whether Hector were not troubled with the toothache: he hath studied himself half blear-eyed to know the true symmetry of Caesar’s nose by a shoeing-horn: and this he did to gain the name of a speculative man. (3.3.41-7)

apply a consistent methodology to my analysis in order to guarantee some validity to my conclusions. This methodology is not drawn from any one theoretical position although it may reference several. Rather, it is drawn from my own analytical understanding as a theatre director,¹ recognizing the creative processes and structures by which other actors and directors have sought to realise Webster's text. The validation of performance as analysis, or even "three-dimensional literary criticism," is a notion I advance as a corollary to the following notable assertion by Simon Russell Beale:

I see text work as three-dimensional literary criticism. Acting is creating an argument, and to do that, you need to get it all from the texts, to treat them with care and respect... A *lot* of the work I do in my rehearsal process is not on the floor. I spend a *lot* of time around the table, thrashing it out. I really find academic study emotionally exciting (O'Donoghue).

Essentially, I have reversed this process, regarding the performance as the "argument" realised and examining it in conjunction with the text to see how it has been constructed. For each of the productions, although I have tried to employ an analytical methodology which is consistent, I have varied the sequence in which I have employed each component as I have deemed appropriate. For each performance, I have done the following:

1. I have framed an initial intuitive response in respect of some significant feature of the production, either drawn from within the production itself or something related, such as a comment by the director in an interview or in a programme note. The aim has been to find a distinguishing marker unique to each production of the play. If it was a production I saw onstage, I have tried to recall key elements that initially impressed me as distinctive.

¹ I have outlined an early directorial approach I took to the play in Appendix 1

2. I have considered casting decisions, particularly in respect of Bosola. Each of the seven actors who enacted Bosola in these six productions brought not only individual physiognomies and personalities to the role but, sometimes, associations and expectations based upon other roles they have enacted. Consciously or unconsciously, directors sometimes exploit this dimension and, where I suspected this had been the case, I explored it in the hope of illuminating the director's choices. Even when not explicitly referenced, an actor's previous roles can be revealing.

3. I have examined the prompt book to see if and how the text has been edited. On its own, this is, of course, an unreliable source of evidence, as cuts are sometimes made or restored in rehearsal without emendation to the prompt book¹. Here video or audio recordings of performances have proved especially informative. Textual cuts, re-orderings and interpolations in a prompt book can strongly indicate the emphases placed by a director from the start. My working practice has been to mark up (solely for my own use) a copy of the text as used in each production, drawn from the details provided by the prompt books. Although I have not reproduced each version in its entirety, I have cited many of the changes made in these copies and these have been a key element in my analysis.

4. I have viewed or listened to video/audio recordings at least twice but usually three times. An initial viewing refreshed the memory of performances previously seen live and, in one case, provided the only way of experiencing

¹ This proved especially true in the case of the 1989-90 RSC production, where virtually all the initial prompt book cuts were restored for the initial Stratford production, although some were retained when it later transferred to The Pit in London.

(albeit vicariously) an otherwise unseen production. A second viewing helped correct any alterations to the performed text that did not appear in the prompt books. A third viewing allowed a closer focus on the details of performance, especially for the actors playing Bosola. The principle limitation is the poor quality of most of these videos;¹ recorded on VHS tape, invariably using one fixed-focus camera, positioned at a distance to capture action over the whole stage without close-ups or any compensatory lighting for filming. The sole exception is the Theatre Museum's video of the 1996 *Cheek By Jowl* production which, although only using one camera, employed high quality tape and followed the action closely throughout by panning and scanning. This enabled that staging to be examined in more detail than others. However, this virtue becomes problematic on another level, as the selective nature of the camera operator's decisions imposes a viewpoint necessarily different from that of individual audience members in a series of live performances. These recordings are therefore simply a moving 'snapshot' of the production at a particular time and place and give no indication of its possible evolution during an extended run. This limitation was especially true of the *Cheek By Jowl* production, which was designed to play in a range of different venues and to develop continuously during the whole of its international tour.

5. Where available, I have utilised production records, stage managers' logs, ephemera and programmes to clarify the thinking behind each production and the technical means by which it was realised. Photographs have helped considerably in understanding the look of productions.

¹ Such recordings are usually well below commercial standards, to meet the concerns of the actors' union, Equity, about unlicensed reproduction and marketing.

6. Press reports (either archived, in collected editions such as the *London Theatre Record*, or sourced through the Internet), although essentially subjective, can sometimes bring out otherwise unnoticed objective features of a production. They can also give some impression of the overall critical response to productions. This is rarely unanimous, frequently subject to personal bias and, in its components, often mutually contradictory. At best, however, press reports can be a good indicator of the clarity and effectiveness of a directorial concept in performance.

7. Finally, some performances have acquired a more thoughtful and detailed academic critical legacy, and I have consulted several works which reference them.

This methodology has produced an analysis distinct from the perception of an audience member; but it has not been my intention to critique these performances as an audience member, nor even as a theatre critic. Rather, stemming from my understanding as a director, my purpose has been to evaluate how other directors have realised their own responses to the text. Because my focus has been essentially upon Bosola, I have extended this evaluation to the responses of the actors tackling that role. This process assisted, for example, my conclusions on George Anton's 1996 Bosola for Cheek By Jowl. Although I saw his performance twice onstage, and was intrigued by director Declan Donnellan's radical re-interpretation of the play, I was bemused (and not a little disappointed) with the reading of Bosola. Using the methods described, I now have a clearer understanding of a reading which I found

unclear in performance; I can now accept its validity, and can even speculate upon what might have helped it to work more effectively in performance.

The Bosolas of these productions alone have ranged from Bob Hoskins' witty proletarian cockney chancer to Michael Bryant's solemn existential loner; from Tom Mannion's ferociously misogynistic Scot to Lorcan Cranitch's Irish alcoholic depressive; from Nigel Terry's coldly efficient soldier to George Anton's pious servant, desperate for an object for his love and loyalty. The significant diversity of the characterisations displayed here gives testimony, not only to the skill of the individual actors, but also the rich vein of possibilities Webster gives them to excavate. These days, that diversity is often encouraged by a director's personal approach to the play.

5.2. Director's Interpretation

My first question is to ask not how has a director presented the play but why?

In this context, the director Peter Stein points to a very basic responsibility of the job:

I always say that the real power of a director is at the very beginning of the show, because that is when he (sic) decides what he shall direct. Sometimes he is not free to make that decision, especially if he is young. Nevertheless he has the power to refuse (Delgado 254).

All of the directors of *The Duchess of Malfi* I have considered here have worked under the aegis of a corporate organisation; either a theatrical repertory company or (in one case) a film production company. Ultimately, the exigencies of programming in such organisations may be determined by a play's canonical status, with the box-office as bottom-line demanding performances of examination set texts. But, even where those constraints operate, it is heartening to recall the words of Peter

Hall to Trevor Nunn on his assumption of the role of Artistic Director of the RSC in 1968:

...he insisted upon one simple rule: that whenever the Company did a play by Shakespeare, they should do it because the play was relevant. Because the play made some demand upon our current attention. Obviously there's a great danger that the demand for a play to be 'relevant' very quickly becomes a demand that the play should be topical. Nevertheless he urged us all to consider each of the plays in the canon as if that morning it had dropped through the letterbox to the front doormat: and therefore, what had the play got to say, that very day. This was an approach which I personally found immensely refreshing and important (Berry, *On Directing Shakespeare* 61).

For each of the productions I have explored, there is evidence that experienced directors have engaged with the text and sought some degree of 'relevance' - a word I interpret as widely as their varied results demonstrate. For some, such as Adrian Noble and Bill Alexander, this was achieved with negligible amendments to the text; for Phyllida Lloyd the exercise required the engagement of a writer to edit and considerably re-order the text to meet her needs. Declan Donnellan seems to have cut the text largely to reduce the time pressures on a successful touring company. His approach depended less on edits (although these were still considerable) than on what appeared a radical subversion of the text; playing it for unexpected meanings and never regarding the performances as fixed. James McTaggart, working to the demands of another medium (and the constraints of television scheduling and American marketing), employed an intelligent teleplay by Rosemary Hill, which professed a clear line, with a strong visual narrative compensating for the loss of text. Only with Gale Edwards's production, did I experience confusion as to overall intent, and this in spite of some powerfully effective moments. The fairly substantial cuts she employed in no way illuminated this.

All of these directors exercised sufficient autonomy in realising their responses to the text to produce distinctive readings. Analysing these readings using the methods I have proposed has, in most cases, revealed an underlying theoretical approach which might not be immediately obvious in performance. Here, I suggest, the more efficient the director, the less obvious is the theoretical skeleton beneath the flesh of their productions; and several directors seem keen to reject an over dependence on theory. Jonathan Miller, for example, is eloquent on the subject of his relationship with it:

I have never directed a Freudian interpretation or a structuralist interpretation, but when I work I always have a toolbox which, as a child of the twentieth century, I have inherited from thinkers of the last eighty years or so. In this box are bits and pieces that can be used to unpick and unbolt the play to see how it works. I would feel very upset if someone were to think that my work was simply Freudian or structuralist although I admit that when working on a play I will sometimes take advantage of insights that the structuralists have provided, but these are ways of thinking about a play and not models for production (139).

In similar vein, speaking about directing Shakespeare, Adrian Noble issues a warning against a limiting and reductive dependency on single methodologies or philosophies, even where they may emerge from the work of another playwright:

We have a tendency nowadays to closet Shakespeare, because since Shakespeare wrote, one or two other gentlemen have written: Strindberg, Ibsen, Freud, people who have examined human behaviour... There is a danger for us directors in being over-attracted to one element of the play, and thereby, through the lack of water, allowing another element of the play to wither and die (Berry 167).

Miller states his aim as follows

The point is that when you have a toolbox and you employ the tools no one should be able to tell from the reconstructed engine which tools you have used; they should not characterize and dominate the structure that emerges in the end (Delgado 139).

Essentially, the skill of the director, Miller implies, is to effect a distinctive realization of the text without leaving the director's fingerprints all over it, or worse

still regarding the text as simply material for the self-aggrandizing advancement of a theoretical argument. Stein is more explicit about the progressive disempowerment of the director, although the implication of his conclusion is that this disempowerment is ironically, in itself, directorial sleight-of-hand:

When the work starts, it is absolutely clear and necessary that the director, who was so strong at the beginning in organising everything, slowly disappears. And at the very end, he has no power, because the show is going on. What can he do with the venue? He has no function. He can say, "Do it better! Come on! Come on!", but nothing concrete. The audience should have the impression that it was all invented by the actors, even the text. It's fantastic if you can create this illusion (Delgado 253).

The directors, whose work I have undertaken to explore, have succeeded in this illusion to greater or lesser degrees.¹ Significantly, I believe those who have succeeded most have found it necessary to cut Webster's text the least. Not that cutting in itself renders a performance illegitimate, but it is usually the first decision of a director intending to narrow the focus of the text to draw out specific meanings. This is then followed by further focusing decisions about characterization and *mise-en-scène*. In all of these decisions it is possible that an audience may sense a strong impetus drawing attention to the direction rather than to the play. Although, viewed subjectively, this perception is as likely to enhance as much as detract from the overall experience, it is qualitatively a different experience from one in which the director maintains a lower profile. Some of the directors examined here have achieved this more than others; it is surely a measure of the greatness of this work that it not only supports diverse and even conflicting readings, but that it has survived some of the high-concept directorial approaches in evidence here, while continuing to project a sense of its own unique identity as a drama.

¹ Ironically Stein is perhaps one director unlikely to achieve this illusion, as his work has often had a conscious political agenda.

CHAPTER SIX: **'UNCUT' HISTORICISED PERFORMANCES**

Manchester Royal Exchange Company (1980-81) **Royal Shakespeare Company (1989-90)**

The use of the word 'uncut' in this context is relative. Of all recent productions, these two alone have employed almost complete versions of the 1623 text, virtually unedited with only minor cuts. Apart from some re-ordering, the MRE production cut only the Pilgrims' scene (3.4.) and the madmen's song (4.2.62-73); the RSC performed the text almost uncut in Stratford, but made a few more cuts for the London transfer. While neither production could be called specifically Brechtian, both had clearly defined historical settings, stressed the social context of the tragedy and contained powerful gestic moments. Both employed non-proscenium stagings: arena in Manchester/London and thrust in Stratford.

6.1. Manchester Royal Exchange Company (1980-81)

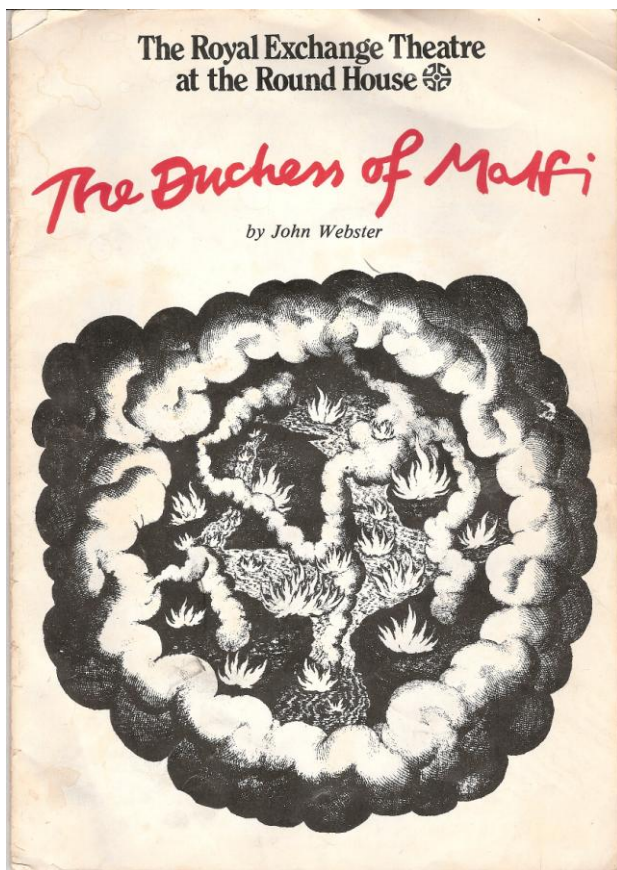
The Duchess: Helen Mirren
Bosola: Bob Hoskins
Directed by Adrian Noble

The programme for the Royal Manchester Exchange Theatre production is revealing for the light that it casts on the issue of class. This is partly achieved by positioning material to present a dialectical opposition, and much of this is related to the figure of the malcontent. Of most significance is the inclusion of a section on "Melancholy". As noted previously, there has been an almost universal critical confusion between the roles of early modern dramatic malcontent and melancholiac, and this is partly repeated here. The programme included two substantial quotations from Andreas Laurentius (*Of Melancholike Diseases*. Circa 1607) and Henry

Peacham the Younger (*The Worth of a Penny*). There is a tension in these two quotations between melancholy as a humour,

The melancholic man...is...out of heart, fearful and trembling... he is afraid of everything...a terror unto himself... he would run away and cannot go, he goeth always fighting, troubled with...an unseparable sadness which turneth into despair...disquieted in both body and spirit (Laurentius).

and the malcontent's melancholia as an expression of social/financial oppression: "He that wanteth money is for the most part extremely melancholy in every company or alone by himself (Peachum)." This dialectical approach permeates all the other sections of the programme. For example, the cover focuses upon the metaphysical world, with a rendering of a woodcut *The Chaos of the Elements* by the alchemist,



Programme Cover

Robert Fludde (1574–1637), suggesting perhaps by its positioning, the dominance of cosmic factors in the playing out of the tragedy. Yet, this is challenged inside the programme by the juxtaposition of quotations asserting metaphysical order with other quotations denying it. For example, a section entitled "The Monarchy" quotes from James I:

The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne but even by God himself they are called gods.

James I's 1610 speech to Parliament.

This assertion of James's divine status as monarch is immediately followed by an extract from the speech in which Bosola questions the difference between the motivations of prince and commoner:

Some would think the souls of princes were brought forth by some more weighty cause than those of meaner persons - they are deceived; there's the same hand to them: the like passions sway them, the same reason that makes a vicar go to law for a tithe-pig and undo his neighbours makes them spoil a whole province and batter down goodly cities with the cannon.

(2.1.105-111)

This, in turn, is followed by an example of the advocacy of cynical political pragmatism by rulers in an excerpt from Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

... contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles.

The implication of this positioning of excerpts suggests that a significant theme in the play is socio-political challenge to seventeenth century metaphysical assumptions. This perception is reinforced in the programme by the editorial decision to present the play's *Dramatis Personae* in categories defined by their social class. They are classified as "The House of Aragon", "The Court" or "The Professional Classes". Essentially ambiguous, this can be read as either a statement of a microcosmic hierarchy in keeping with Divine Order, or as a political recognition of class as a principal social determinant.

The Duchess of Malfi

by John Webster

The cast:
THE HOUSE OF ARAGON
 The Cardinal, brother to the Duchess and Ferdinand Julian Curry
 Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, brother to the Cardinal and twin to the Duchess Mike Gwilym
 The Duchess of Malfi, their sister, a young widow, later wife to Antonio Helen Mirren

THE COURT
 Count Malatesta Alan McMahon
 The Marquis of Pescara Raymond Llewellyn
 Lord Silvio Richard Cubison
 Lord Roderigo Robert Reynolds
 Castruchio, an old lord, husband to Julia George Raistrick
 Delio, a courtier, friend to Antonio Bosco Hogan
 Julia, wife to Castruchio, mistress to the Cardinal Sorcha Cusack
 Cariola, waiting woman to the Duchess Diana Hardcastle

THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES
 Daniel de Bosola, returned from imprisonment in the galleys following service to the Cardinal Bob Hoskins
 Antonio Bologna, steward of The Household to the Duchess; later her husband Peter Postlethwaite
 Old lady — a midwife Barbara Keogh
 The Doctor George Raistrick
 Officer Albie Woodington
 Officer Nigel Cooke
 Attendants, madmen, soldiers, executioners Richard Cubison
 Nigel Cooke
 Raymond Llewellyn
 Alan McMahon
 Robert Reynolds
 Albie Woodington

The children will be played at various performances by:
 Rupert Baderman Siobhan Hayes Charles Rendall
 Sarah Chatwyn Luke Hope Naomi Russell

There will be one interval


directed by Adrian Noble
 designed by Bob Crowley
 lighting by Geoffrey Joyce
 music by George Fenton
 David Easterbrook and Colin Goddard
 sound by Malcolm Ranson

lights by

For this production:
 Deputy Stage Manager Jonathan Hewlett
 Assistant Stage Manager Dona di Stefano
 Acting Assistant Stage Manager Scott Thomson
 Peter Miller
 Sound Operator Jane Foshaw
 Bays to the Props Department Alan Murray
 Set constructed by Sally Cox
 Props made by Judy Deaney
 Mike Hubbard
 Ellen Cairns
 Assistant Costume Supervisor Lucy Nye
 Wardrobe Assistant Vera Joksimovic
 Wardrobe Mistress Margot Foster
 Head Dresser Denise Monsecolombi
 Hair supervised by Janet Archibald
 Wig Mistress Joanna Taylor
 Additional costumes made by Wallace & McMurray and David Healey
 Jewellery made by David Short
 Helmets made by Elaine Garrard

Assistant Director Gregory Hensov

We are grateful for the help given by John G. Ashton & Co., General Director, Altrincham.

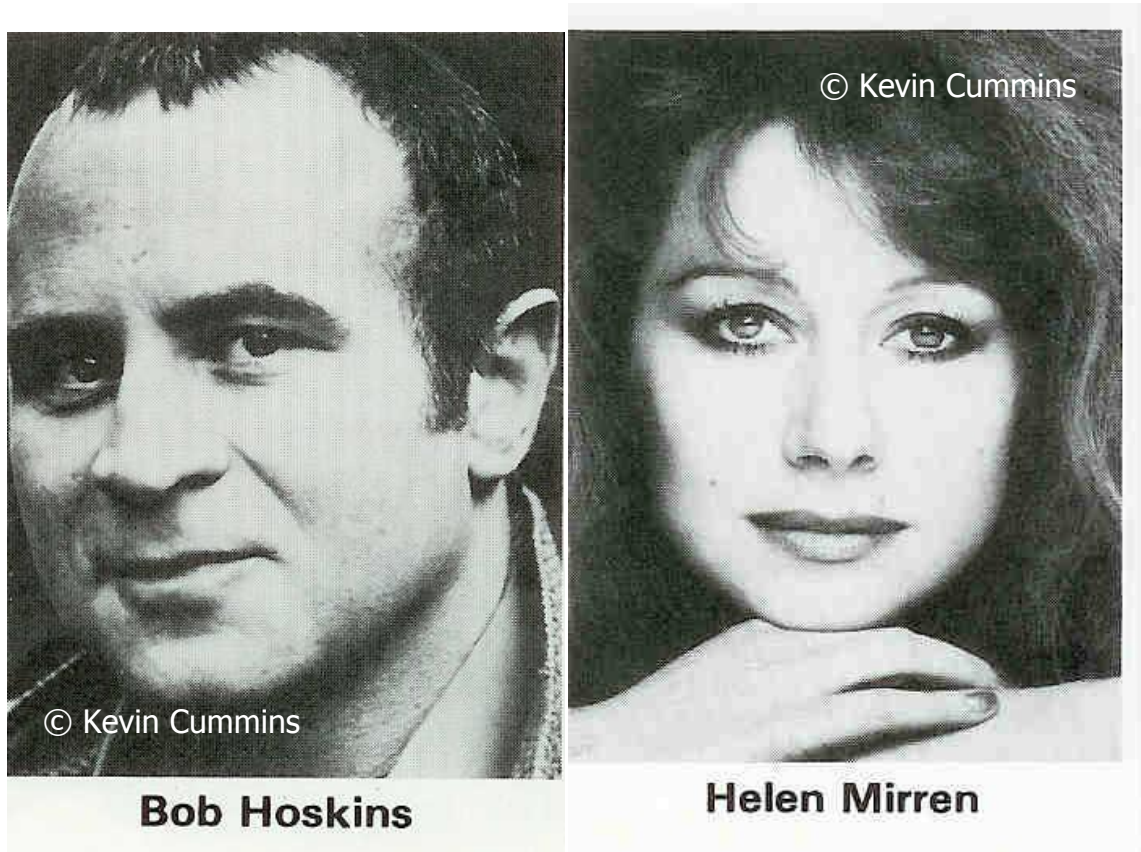


Dramatis Personae in categories defined by their social class.

Choice of cast as recorded in the programme suggests that the director, Adrian Noble, regarded the play's class agenda as significant, and this was later confirmed in an interview he gave for a biography of the play's *Bosola*, Bob Hoskins:

You have to make "class" work in the play, which is why you start with the Duke and Duchess. Those people had a sense of received power and they had an individual, recognizable, emotional set that was very, very different. And then you have to cast the two outsiders – people from a different class. I went quite strongly to people with working-class roots. Peter Postlethwaite (Antonio) was absolutely against type...Likewise with Bob. I didn't cast him till towards the end (Moline 130).

On page 11 of the programme, the convention of out-of-role cast photographs is observed. The ordering is alphabetical, not hierarchical according to role or star-status, stressing the ensemble ethos of the company. In spite of this, there seems to have been a subtle exploitation of the star system in the casting.



Programme Photographs

A key selling point of Adrian Noble's production was the partnering of Hoskins and Helen Mirren in the respective roles of Bosola and Duchess. This seems to have been fortuitous rather than planned, and may be related to their simultaneous involvement in another project. In 1979 the two had completed leading roles in John

McKenzie's British gangster film, *The Long Good Friday*. Due to disputes over the edit and distribution, the film did not receive its first UK release until late 1980 in the midst of the *Malfi* rehearsals. The timing created a tension that might have easily upset the theatre project, and some passages in Hoskins's biography are indicative of the actor's initial disquiet in taking on *Bosola*. *Malfi* was due to open in Manchester on September 16th 1980 but he and Mirren attended the film's premiere in Edinburgh on August 23rd.¹ The film's producer, Barry Hanson is quoted as follows,

'Bob and Helen were both rehearsing *Malfi* in Manchester... and they turned up halfway through this press conference...Bob didn't want to go back to rehearsals. I told him he's got to do all these interviews, so we would concoct a story for this guy Adrian Noble. I'd not yet heard of him and thought he was some idiot from Manchester – until I saw his work. "He's got me sussed out," Bob said. "He can see me coming. I can't go back. I'll say there was a snowdrift." "But Bob," I said, "it's only August." Bob went back (Moline 12-3).

The film, scripted by Barrie Keefe, ostensibly a crime thriller, was also a subversive critique of Thatcher's new 'entrepreneurial' Britain, and made much of the class tensions between Hoskins' ambitious proletarian gangster and his upper class girlfriend, played by Mirren. It became an immediate critical and commercial success and this, in turn, assisted the reception of the play. The reprise of Hoskins and Mirren in the casting of *The Duchess of Malfi* - although pure happenstance - did not feel accidental at the time because it gave a very immediate contemporary resonance to the issue of class in the play.

¹ Mistakenly dated as 1983 in Hoskins's biography (Moline 129).



Bosola and the Duchess.

Certainly, a number of critics felt that Hoskins's *Bosola* was the key to a class-oriented reading of the play. Benedict Nightingale, for example, in the *New Statesman* wrote

...our own age can hardly disown high-placed hypocrisy, greed, guile and spite, especially when their agent is someone as thoroughly recognizable as our own Bob Hoskins.

Myself, I kept expecting this squat gristly figure to burst out with a "bloody 'ell" or a "sod that" as an importunate but ungrateful nob-class manoeuvred him into perpetrating still greater outrages on its behalf.

Irving Wardle, in the *TheTimes*, seemed to agree

The casting of Bob Hoskins as *Bosola*, the unlikeliest possible embodiment of a silky Jacobean malcontent, is one clear guide to the show's intentions. At first sight, Hoskins does seem to be straight off the galleys...The ironies he derives from the part derive more from his underdog sympathies than from the torments of conscience; as where he springs passionately to the defence of the dismissed Antonio, and then immediately shops him to the vengeful brothers...

or John Elsom in *The Listener*,

The care in this production is shown by the casting, sometimes a little against type, sometimes supremely for it. Bob Hoskins is not a conventional choice for *Bosola*, the devil's factor, because he is neither suave nor sinister. But Hoskins can capture that other side to *Bosola*'s nature, a brute honesty turned vicious by mistreatment.

while for Ian Stewart, in *Country Life*,

...it is *Bosola*, the spy who comes in from the cold, who really personifies the play's shifting emphases. The husky-voiced, black-leathered Bob Hoskins exemplifies his dynamic restlessness and suggests the desperate opportunism with which he kills as he is ordered and adjusts to the wickedness and innocence of the world as these are borne in upon him, even to the point of having misgivings about the carnage.

For some critics, the class-based reading was too strong meat. While applauding Hoskins' performance "of masterful vigour and attack", Francis King in *The Sunday Telegraph* asked,

...would this squat, toad-like East End gang-boss not be hanging around the Duchess's kitchens, rather than mixing with her courtiers?

He continues by expressing regret "that Mr Hoskins's Cockney inflections destroy much of the poetic beauty of the lines." These sentiments help to explain the insecurity that Hoskins evidently felt in embarking on the project and yet they go to the heart of the power and authenticity of his performance:

"We've got to cut the verbals," Bob told Pete Postlethwaite during rehearsals. "We'll never be able to make people fuckin' understand this – I can't understand it meself!"

"This is his drawback," Noble remarked, "in the sense that he'll read five lines of blank verse, and he'll say, 'Does this mean, Come here, you cunt, or I'll smash you in the teeth?' and you say, 'Yeah, sort of,' and he'll deliver the five lines as if he's saying just that. To a degree you have to finally wave goodbye to a perfectly spoken verse form anyway. He'll give you the *rhythm* of that, which is a distortion of Webster's rhythm, but the *intention* is so alive and dramatic that it's riveting, and therefore works as theatre (Moline 131).

The focus on class and the social critique embodied in the casting of Hoskins, was established through many details of the production. The Manchester Royal Exchange is a theatre-in-the-round and the performance - which subsequently played its London tour at the Roundhouse – fully exploited the social dynamics of this configuration. Benedict Nightingale commented further on how this worked for him:

Whether because it's performed in a smallish ring formed by the audience's knees and boggling faces, or because of the directness and clarity yet imaginative boldness of Adrian Noble's production, or because my own feelings of political paranoia were riding high at the time, Webster's sanguinary Duchess struck me last week as an altogether less remote experience than recent revivals had left me remembering.

Although he cannot distinguish which factor has contributed most, Nightingale acknowledges the importance of the choice of staging; something that I endorse from my own recollection. I would say that all three factors that he cites applied and that the immediacy of the production stemmed from a combination of staging proxemics, directorial clarity and imagination, and a perception of the contemporary political relevance of the performance.

The dialectical opposition employed to explore class issues in the programme, also characterized Adrian Noble's approach to the staging. The visibility of the audience, for example, served to accentuate the performative aspects of the play, and the arena staging promoted the use of entrances rather than discoveries.¹ Irving Wardle noted the performative element, acknowledging also the dialectical effect:

...its main achievement lies in the combination of theatrical opposites. In one sense, it is much rougher and down-to earth than the usual pageant of exquisite cruelties. In another, Mr Noble has realized the play's ceremonial elements: the fact that its Guignol element often approximates to a waxwork show.

¹ Even the Cardinal's bed was wheeled on with Julia "rising sexually in red velvet in a cloud of incense...on top of the manacled coolly perverse Cardinal" (Coveney).

As an example, he cites at some length the opening court scene,

...where private conversation gives way to a blaze of light and magnificent Monteverdi-like fanfares (by George Fenton) for the Duchess's first entrance. It is immediately followed by another brilliant contrast, when the stage reverts to a shadowy gallery and the courtiers freeze into so many brocaded dolls, as Antonio fatefully anatomizes the Aragon household.

Performativity was again evident as the sycophantic courtiers over-zealously applauded most of the public statements of the aristocrats; Bosola's gift of the apricots and the Duchess's subsequent verdict, "I thank you, Bosola, they were right good ones..." was prematurely treated with this - appropriately in the circumstances - nauseating obsequiousness.



The Duchess eats the 'apricocks'

Robert Cushman, in *The Observer* writes of the potency of these images, which continually stressed the dialectical opposition of the forces in the play, a key one being,

The Duchess's courtiers surrounding her in a tight sycophantic circle while the honest villain Bosola stands contemptuously outside.

Bob Crowley's design seemed predicated on the same principle of striking contrasts. Through the deep perspectives of the performance space in the first half, a long furry white carpet, the length of a cricket pitch radiated across the coloured marble tiled floor from the perimeter to a central ducal throne. In the second half, this became "...a bloodied path (leading to a prison chair – almost an instrument of torture) on which the assailants disport themselves with knives, swords, blood capsules and, in the case of Ferdinand, bare teeth" (Coveney).

The directorial clarity and imagination transmitted by these simple but powerful images caused many critics to imbue them with significance. John Elsom found a dialectic between temporal and spiritual power:

As the entrances and exits proceed along this line, we feel that the carpet has some kind of arm to a balance, with material power and splendour weighed against the spiritual values of the afterlife.

Similarly, the white beauty of the Duchess's bedroom (in this production, also a nursery) contrasted powerfully with the steely horrors of her Act Four incarceration and strangling, and the almost lavatorial bloodletting of Act Five.¹

Ian Stewart felt that Adrian Noble was setting out "to highlight the contrasts in a play that is...concerned...with the suffering and tragic consequences of the evil portrayed" while Michael Billington, in the *Guardian*, maintained that "where this production scores is in preserving the Websterian balance between decadence and tenderness."

¹ My memory of the visceral impact of the final slaughter was confirmed by recently listening to the British Library Sound Archive recording, where the gasps and wincings of the audience are distinctly audible.

Of course, Bosola, more than any other character in the play, is capable of embodying this dialectical conflict and, to my thinking Hoskins achieved this more than any other actor I have seen tackle the role. As a film actor, he has long been able to project a persona, either brutally thuggish or sensitively vulnerable (sometimes both simultaneously¹). Noble showed extraordinary perspicacity in casting him in this role and was clear about what had made Hoskins the right choice:

What Bob can bring to something like *Malfi* is a quality that's totally authentic and logical, because you can really quite easily wander off the path on Bosola – it's a very seductive role. You can get interested in the sensitive melancholia bullshit, but it's only bullshit in the sense of it being involved with the creation of something that's alive and happening and present. And of course it wouldn't occur to Bob to wander off the path (Moline 130).

These comments suggest that, of the two opposing descriptions of the malcontent in the programme, Noble inclined towards the socially-constructed figure. In keeping with this, Hoskins's Bosola gained by being rooted in personal experience:

He approaches stuff from the actions of the character, *inwards*, which is quite proper for him. Let's say you get a basic credibility: here's a man who has been in the galleys for years, therefore *that* has to be visible, photographable, when he walks on stage. It's a *fact*. He is a man who is famed and notorious for his ability to execute. Bob is a great translator of experience, which is good. In rehearsals, we were talking about relating the play to an actual murder as opposed to *acting*, and then Bob pipes up – of course he's one of the few people who's witnessed a real murder in his life. So he starts to tell us this astonishing scene that he witnessed as a kid in Finsbury Park, his manor – these gangland killings. You get this amazing sense of presence there that's rather alarming (130).

Moline goes on to quote Postlethwaite, who claimed that "Bob sort of played it as himself...like a man from that part of the world, trying to be himself, move himself up, and get going"(130-31). To some extent, this involved the exploitation of the

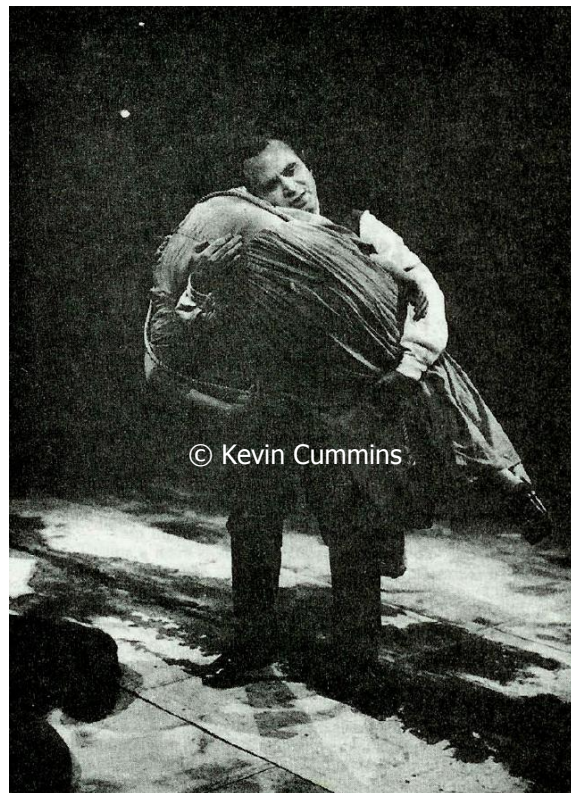
¹ A good example is his 1986 role in Neil Jordan's film *Mona Lisa*

persona that Hoskins was also beginning to develop so successfully elsewhere in his film career, and Noble was clear that this assisted his extraordinary talent to communicate:

Bob has an enormous immediacy, an immense gift as a vulgarian, in the real sense of the word, in that he can translate very complex emotions and language into intelligible experiences for the ordinary person (131).

In this way, Hoskins won a rapport with the audience. He fully exploited the wit of

Bosola's sardonic melancholy by essentially translating it into his own. He played his story of the French lady with small pox (2.1.29-32) directly to them like stand-up comedy¹ and achieved a good laugh. His graveyard humour as, with his short squat frame, he prepared to lift Julia's corpse, "I think I shall/Shortly grow the common bier for the churchyards!" (5.2.310-311) was



Bosola carries the dead Duchess.

similarly well received. Yet, this was ironical, since this very action seemed to parody the powerful sorrow he earlier displayed when tenderly bearing off the dead Duchess. Hoskins had achieved the difficult display of remorse at the end of Act Four with heartbreaking sincerity.

¹ Noble helped the humour by providing the Old Lady with grotesque wig and make-up.

In spite of an ability to arouse humour and sympathy in equal measure, Hoskins also conveyed a powerful sense of menace that grew in intensity throughout the play. Partly this was achieved by the gruff baritone quality of his voice (contrasting especially with the light high registers of Mirren's Duchess and the gentle tenor of Postlethwaite's Antonio) and partly with his occasionally startling use of it. For example, as he gently cradled the dying Antonio, his line "Break heart" was alarmingly shouted as an almost impatient order. In the second half, as Bosola attempted emotionally to distance himself from his murderous task by physical transformation (first a half-mask, then with monk's cowl and grotesque rubber mask) Hoskins added vocal transformation. He lost his Cockney accent, lightened his vocal register and rounded his vowels. The effect, amplified by George Fenton's echoing acoustic, was uncanny. Finally, as he approached the climax of his vengeance against the brothers, Hoskins achieved the apogee of a sense of danger, first casually hamstringing the Cardinal with a single professional sword swipe then, when mortally wounded¹ conspiratorially joining the lunatic Ferdinand in maniacal laughter as they both died.

At the time, it was thought by some critics² that this production had been presented uncut. In fact this was not the case but, unlike some more recent productions that have cut the text injudiciously, Noble's amendments were minor but effective.

"I knew it needed a bit of surgery, because it gets a bit long, especially in the middle," says Noble. "I gave it a very strong structure by actually limiting certain scenes and by giving extra value to certain things" (Moline 129).

¹ Noble acknowledges it was Hoskins's idea that the Duke should tear out Bosola's throat like a wolf (Moline 132). With the aid of a neck prosthesis, this made for terrifying theatre.

² Principally Michael Coveney

I will cite two examples, which further the thematic argument I have identified in the production. In one, Noble left uncut what is frequently cut; in the other, he has reinforced the power of an idea with the removal of a few words.

In an article exploring the moral structure of the play, R.S. White focuses on the importance of the madmen's appearance before the Duchess. This scene is invariably played heavily cut or textually adapted to suit some directorial point. White's argument is that the madmen

are, significantly, representatives of respectable professions - a lawyer, a doctor, a priest and an astrologer - as if the apparently respectable occupations of such people have some latent but endemic madness within their very core, just as Ferdinand's lycanthropy is, with the benefit of hindsight, an appropriate significant of his formerly rapacious motives (205).

Noble chose to play the madmen as mentally retarded rather than mentally ill, but left the text here uncut, reinforcing his reading of the play as social critique.

For the other example - also noted by McCluskie and Uglow (155), we return to Bosola and his internal conflict, which embodies so much of the play's dynamic. At the height of this, Bosola and Ferdinand exchange these lines concerning the Duchess:

BOSOLA: Must I see her again?

FERDINAND: Yes.

BOSOLA: Never.

FERDINAND: You must.

BOSOLA: Never in mine own shape.

(4.2.133-4)

Noble cut two words: Ferdinand's "You must", leaving a tense pause, in which Hoskins's Bosola struggled internally with the dilemma of directly challenging his

master's authority. "Never...never" he replied quickly, then - as if struck by a failure of will – after a long pause "never in mine own shape."

The meticulous attention to detail, that this last textual edit displays, characterized the production as a whole. This was a landmark production that conveyed an intelligent and insightful dialectical reading of socio-political issues, in a manner that made for exciting theatre. It contained remarkable performances from all its principal actors and, I felt, a benchmark one from Hoskins.

6.2. Royal Shakespeare Company

The Swan 1989/90

The Pit 1990

The Duchess: Harriet Walter

Bosola: Nigel Terry (Stratford)/ Stephen Boxer (London)

Directed by Bill Alexander

In his exploration of audience laughter in the scenes of slaughter at the end of *The Duchess Of Malfi*, Martin White states the following:

Some productions, fearful of such laughter, have made a number of cuts to remove the possibility. The RSC 1987(sic)¹ production, for example, cut Antonio's lines in the following exchange (5.4.57-9), removing the jolt that Webster clearly intended:

BOSOLA: Thy fair duchess And two sweet children –

ANTONIO: Their very names

Kindle a little life in me.

BOSOLA: Are murder'd.

Such tampering seems to me unjustified. Why should there be a problem with audience laughter at such moments? (186)

While agreeing with the last sentiments, I note that White has made an illuminating error. An examination of the prompt books for both *The Swan* and *The Pit* performances confirms the existence of this cut on the page but, for the performances, the missing lines were restored.² The video recording of the Stratford performance clearly confirms this, and more besides. Where both prompt books clearly indicate that extensive textual cuts had been planned, - presumably in the pre-rehearsal period - in the majority of cases, these cuts were restored in performance suggesting that a major rethink took place during rehearsals.

¹ There was no RSC production of this play (or by any other major British professional company) in 1987. White is referring to the 1989/90 RSC production which is the subject of this chapter.

² Stanley Wells suggests that "those who have worked with theatrical materials will not be 'amazed to death' by this. Promptbooks are not infallible evidence of what happens at each performance" (Wells, 109).

Cuts to this play are commonplace and usual in production, frequently it would appear, to ease audience comprehension difficulties with some of the more obscure passages, but more often, simply to reduce the running time. The programme for this production lists the total running time as three and a half hours including a twenty minute interval. The video has a running time of 3hrs 28mins, but lists the first half as a very lengthy 1hr 52 minutes, presumably putting some pressure on the director to prune the text for reasons other than the purely dramatic.¹ If so, Bill Alexander seems to have successfully resisted the pressure, even if the response of some critics might have been anticipated:

...there are times when one churlishly feels that Bill Alexander is being almost too reverential. Three-and-a-half hours is half an hour too long and, as cruel sub-editors are fond of remarking, the text would cut like butter (C. Spencer "Genuine Bloodbath").

In Appendix 3 a chart lists the proposed cuts as they appear in both prompt books and compares it with the ones that were made in performance. Some interesting points emerge. The two most substantial cuts in the prompt books are whole units of dramatic action (Nos. 13 and 17); first, the whole Loretto scene, and second the scene in which Pescara resists Delio's request and offloads Antonio's dishonourably forfeited land onto Julia. It is fair to say that both passages can be (and frequently are) pruned from productions without undue harm to the narrative structure, if the director has an eye on the clock. Yet both scenes contribute thematically to the presentation of the exercise of tyrannical power and injustice in the play. That Bill Alexander chose to restore both scenes suggests he felt their importance outweighed the disadvantage of a lengthier performance.

¹ I came under such pressure when I directed the play in 1986.

A common feature of the majority of the remaining cuts is their use of classical allusion. Here, the issue was presumably concern about audience comprehension and/or their presumed lack of familiarity with the references. In spite of this, a decision appears to have been made to restore most of the cuts.

Interestingly, the role taking most of the proposed cuts was Bosola's. Out of the seventeen cuts appearing in the prompt books, eight are passages of his. This may, of course, simply reflect the fact that Bosola's is the longest part in the play. Because much of the dialogue illustrative of Bosola as malcontent is often deemed marginal to what is considered the central narrative, many other productions (e.g. the most recent RNT production in 2003) have resorted to this simple expedient and cut his lines. Indeed, it is not uncommon for cuts of Bosola's text to extend far beyond what was initially proposed here.¹ What is significant, however, is the restoration of virtually the whole of his part in performance: of the proposed eleven cuts to lines of characters other than Bosola, only four were restored; with Bosola, seven out of the eight proposed cuts were eventually restored in performance. In other words, only one cut of two lines (See Appendix 3 - No.6) from the whole of Bosola's text was made.² Clearly, it was considered important to retain the role virtually intact, a very rare thing indeed in recent performances.

¹ A frequent victim is the Act 1 Scene 2 dialogue between Bosola and Castruchio and later the Old Lady. In this production only two cuts were initially proposed for this scene and neither was implemented. Ironically, the latter of these two (lines 47-64) were the only survivors in the 2003 National Theatre production, which cut the rest of the scene in its entirety and treated Bosola's lines as a soliloquy.

² These lines 2.3.53-4 simply cover a piece of stage business; Bosola's use of a lantern to locate and find the horoscope that Antonio has dropped.

In his analysis of two chronologically close but very dissimilar productions,¹ John Russell Brown highlights what he sees as a common fault in the presentation of the role of Bosola.

...in both (productions), Bosola failed to make a strong impression...With his speeches pruned of any farfetched or not strictly necessary detail and with some of his speeches removed altogether. Bosola did not stand a chance of offsetting the play's extraordinary events with an inward turned consciousness, nor could he present clearly his change from malcontent to revenger, cynic to moralist, hired intelligencer to surrogate protagonist (332-3).

Yet, ironically by reducing Bosola to an essentially functional role, they had also lost a key to the moral vision of the play. Michael Billington was not alone in noting the shift that had taken place in Alexander's production:

...a point I had never considered before: that Bosola, the eternal outsider and masterless man, is not simply some rogue assassin but the author's moral spokesman (*Guardian* 9/12/89).

This is a position I have long believed to be true, but in order to test its veracity, it is necessary to examine the moral world created by the production in performance. What the two productions reviewed by Russell Brown gained in speed, they appear to have lost in complexity. Yet ironically, the refusal of the Alexander production to cut out apparently extraneous material seems to have led to a greater overall clarity. It was a decision that, for example, provided answers to some perennial questions about the motivation of the Aragonian brothers and, by making Bosola more central to the drama, resolved the difficulty of what some have seen as a structural anomaly in the play after the death of the Duchess.

What the fuller text does immediately is to historicise the events of the play, setting them in a precise world: this is Naples in 1504 under the rule of Catholic

¹ Productions by Greenwich Theatre (1995) and Cheek By Jowl (1996).

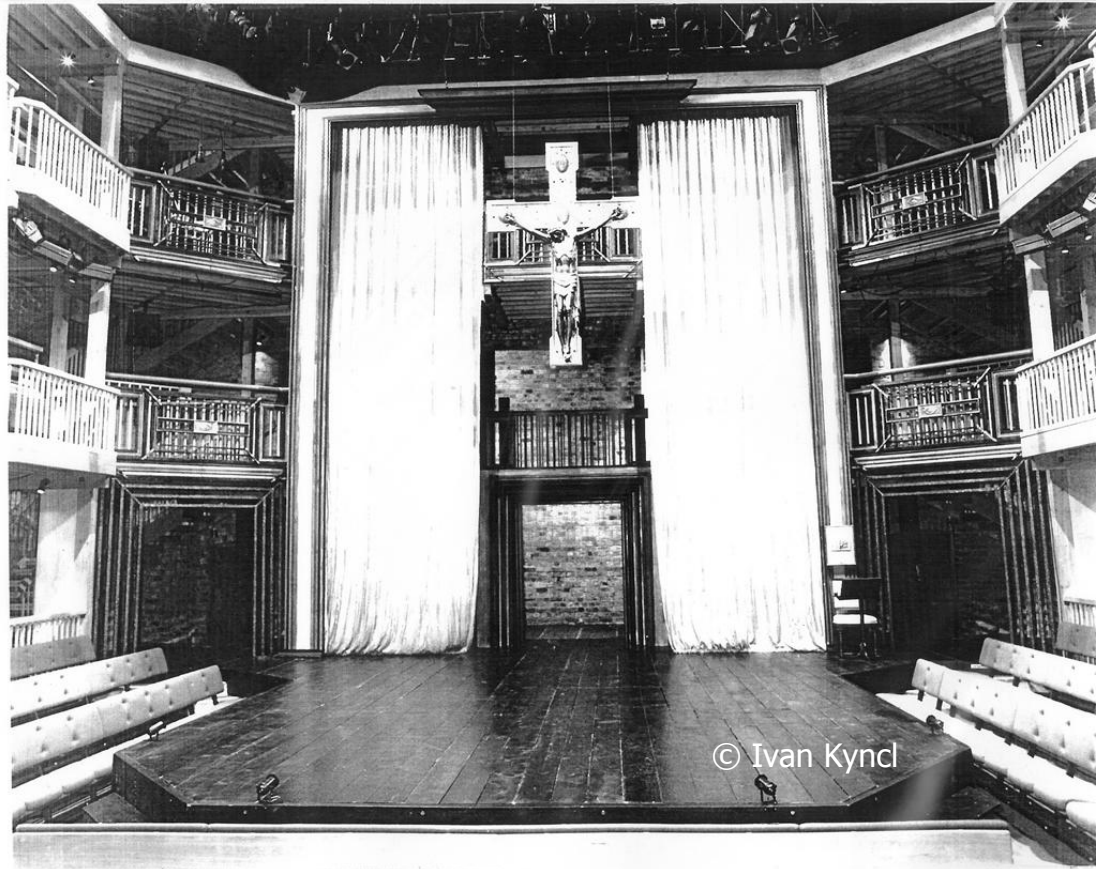
Spanish overlords. The retention of numerous (easily cut) references to real contemporary historical personages reinforces this. So, for example, we learn that Bosola was released from his service in the galleys "By the French general, Gaston de Foix" (1.1.72); there are references to Charles de Lannoy, the Viceroy of Naples (3.3.5), and the artist Michelangelo (3.3.52).¹ There are conversations alluding to the imminence of military activity (1.1.90-110) and naming of Antonio as the duchess's husband, by Bosola to Ferdinand is played unheard as background to a scene of military banter, where the courtiers survey plans for new fortifications at Naples.

Our attention is first drawn to the play's context in a detailed essay in the programme by Lisa Jardine, which states that such historical precision "is characteristic of John Webster":

...the Kingdom of Naples was partitioned as spoils of war between France and Spain, and Naples was grudgingly ceded to the cadet line of the House of Aragon. In 1504, Spanish rule under Ferdinand of Aragon was finally secured, as the outcome of a military campaign... So Aragon imperialism is important to the plot - the Duchess comes of a powerful dynastic line, and her marriage alliance is a matter of national, as well as family significance... As far as the Aragon brothers are concerned, the death of Malfi (the marriage alliance previously arranged for their sister - no word of grief or regret is voiced by the Duchess for her first spouse) gives them back their heiress sister to be played as a card in the marriage-stakes a second time. The brothers' implacable anger against their sister and Antonio is the direct consequence of her betrayal of what they see as absolute dynastic obligations, their revenge is for the Duchess's dishonouring of the family by introducing Antonio's base blood into it; 'Shall our blood the royal blood of Aragon and Castile, / Be thus attainted?'

¹ However, the creator of Ferdinand's macabre waxworks, Vincentio Lauriola (4.1.114) appears to be an invention, and the Cardinal's astronomical analogy involving Galileo (2.4.16-19) is a conscious anachronism drawing on the contemporary knowledge of Webster's audience.

Within this framework, the production emphasized the Catholicism and *Spanishness* of the House of Aragon in details as small as the Spanish-sounding galliard to which the Duchess entered in 1.1., or as big as the giant jewel-encrusted crucifix that dominated the Cardinal's scenes.



Fotini Dimou's set for 2.2.

Fotini Dimou's set for the thrust stage of *The Swan* emphasised a world of public display and covert surveillance. Three doorways at the back of the stage were edged like picture frames, suitable for the presentation of carefully wrought masques by which the House of Aragon emblematically signalled to the world changes in the political positioning of its members. Such a moment, as written by Webster, is the Cardinal's transformation from priest to soldier (3.4.), but the production created a new one.

A gilt door-frame encloses a Goyaesque tableau of the Duchess hugging her black widows weeds tight around her. Suddenly, with a flamenco-dancer's flounce and a flashing smile, the tableau bursts into life and the Duchess peels off the veil to reveal a merry widow, a Titian-haired temptress with a passionate need to love (G.Brown).

The court applauded the transformation, suggesting formal recognition of the Duchess's change of status from a widow who has just emerged from a period of mourning to attractive single woman, and implicitly a marriageable pawn in the Aragonian political chess game.¹

The important theme of this transition was fore-grounded for the audience, even before the play began, in the programme cover, which displayed the face of the Duchess, peering warily from behind a veil.

Georgina Brown's review (albeit for the revival of the production at The Pit) cites a further use of the stage's picture frames:



Programme Cover

¹ The production records suggest an earlier idea for this opening where a child pulled off her "long black silk wrap" to reveal a dark red dress beneath. Another note mentions an earlier thought "One idea for the opening of the play, is to have the three children performing a marriage ceremony, watched by the company." RSC Production notes 20/10/89.

The frame is used to great effect again in the tableau which opens the second part of the play and presents another aspect of the Duchess's character – as the devoted mother of three. Together, the director and Harriet Walter are intent on making this Duchess as sympathetic and human as possible.

Here the emblematic masque device employed to convey the power agenda of the Court, as if in a mirror to itself, is subverted to convey another image entirely to the audience. This image of warmth and goodness is all the more meaningful because it is covert and forbidden. The use of this framing device therefore takes on gestic power to convey a dialectic central to the play's moral agenda.

The only other image in the programme was equally weighted, and reinforced the emblematic emphasis characteristic of this production. It showed a funerary figure that called to mind the image evoked by the Duchess during her wooing of Antonio, reminding him that she "is flesh and blood" and "not the figure cut in alabaster /Kneels at my husband's tomb" (1.1.453-4). It was also strongly evoked during Bosola's protracted role play as the Duchess's tomb-maker in 4.2.



Image from Programme

Integral to this presentation of the public and private faces of the Duchess are the class relations which support the former and are undermined by the latter. Here the role and the loyalties of the servants of the court are fundamental and - as I have

previously argued that one cannot consider Bosola in isolation from the milieu in which he operates - I will now turn to the way the production represented them.

There was a clear delineation between the servants and their masters in the use of the stage in this production. When Ferdinand held court in 1.1., he paced restlessly around a well-lit centrally placed chair; his courtiers hovered at the edges in the shadows. A similar protocol operated in relation to the carpet which dominated the Duchess's bedchamber floor in 3.2. The effect was one of focus, an implied suggestion that the nobility hold the centre of attention just as they command the centre of the stage. The underlying assumption, that the nobles are therefore chief actors in the world as on the stage, is decisively subverted in the course of this play. The corollary to the view of the nobility as main performers is that the servants become the spectators and even commentators.

In this production, the dynamics of this relationship were enacted from the start in the expository dialogue where Antonio and Delio discussed their masters. Antonio's moral position was explicit from the start where his recognition of the source of court corruption was blatantly clear as he pointed directly at the Cardinal on the lines,

But if't chance
Some curst example poison't near the head,
Death and diseases through the whole land spread
(1.1.13-15)

The action gave full gestural weight to the rhetoric of Webster's *sententia*. In a way that subverted the very power that their statuesque presence sought to project, Antonio objectified the Cardinal and Ferdinand, walking unrealistically close to his subjects, pointing at and talking about them as if he were invisible to them.

The decision to stage the play in *The Swan* was a great bonus here. The standard configuration of The Swan Theatre auditorium is a thrust stage surrounded by two galleries, creating for this play something of a cross between the audience/actor proxemics of the Globe and the atmospherics that lighting might have induced in an indoor performance at the Blackfriars.



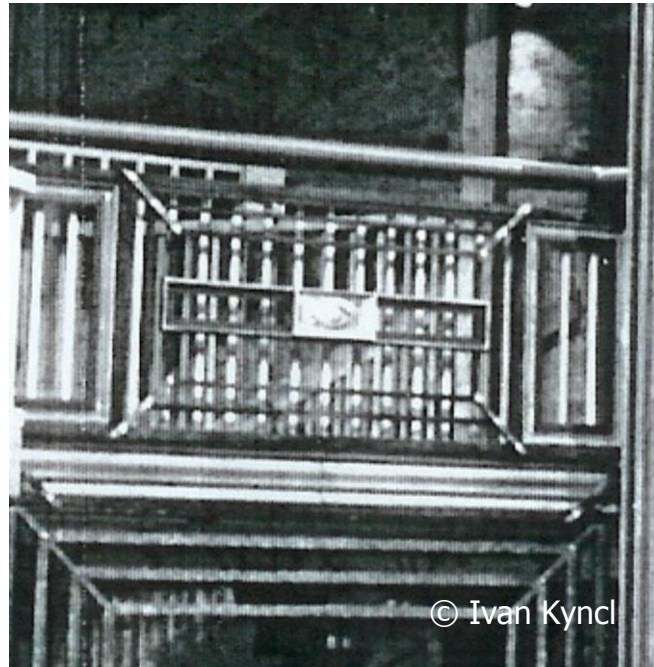
Auditorium of The Swan Theatre, Stratford.

By positioning (both physically and metaphorically) his servants as observers and commentators, Webster invites audience empathy with them, since the audience also are observers and commentators like them. The relationship of audience to actor in *The Swan* reinforced this empathy (as it must have done at both Blackfriars and Globe) by facilitating commentary through soliloquy and asides while the object of

comment was fully visible. One critic recognised how the role of Bosola and this stage shape worked together:

He is a richly cynical anti-hero, and in the Jacobean theatre, with the audience on three sides, would have carried them with him in the manner of Mr Punch (Williams).

The galleries of The Swan, from where the audience watched and listened, extended round the back of the stage to become spaces from which the servants/courtiers did the same.¹ The dimming of the auditorium enhanced this still further. The audience as unobserved observer (like the servants who hovered in the shadows) were made complicit in the act of surveillance; in one sense, they took on the role of spies. In this they were strongly invited to identify with the Bosola, the spy who spoke directly and at length to them. A design motif in Fotini Dimou's set reinforced the conspiracy:



The 'eye' motif in the centre of Fotini Dimou's ironwork galleries

¹ The courtiers listened to what they believed to be the feigned death-cries of the Cardinal (5.5.19-33) from the top gallery above the stage.

Whisperers loitering in the dark corners of this corrupt court and the open gilded eyes that stare unblinking from the door lintel and the ironwork gallery...will ensure, however, that every indiscretion will be discovered (G.Brown).

Webster's decision to begin the play with a discussion by courtiers/servants on the moral climate of the court and the characters of their masters, not only sets a moral agenda, but clearly leads to assumptions about the values of the courtiers/servants themselves. This was especially clear in this production. But, in this play - just as the Duchess is untypical of her class - so there is no uniformity of moral integrity among the courtiers/servants. Delio, throughout presented as a loyal and generous friend to Antonio - and who is given the final sententious couplet of the play - is also shown, in his scene with Julia (2.4.46-76) as being as lustful and as ready to bestow bribes to achieve his ends as the Cardinal. The corrupting power of the court is signalled here, also lending weight to the argument that elsewhere, in the case of Bosola, "Webster depicts a potentially good man corrupted".¹ Once again, the production's decision to retain the often-cut Julia/Delio dialogue enhanced the complexity of not just one role but the reading of another.

Much the same process is at work in the depiction of Antonio and Bosola. As I have observed elsewhere, these two roles are deeply interconnected. The importance centres on the tension generated by their simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity. They share a common identity as servants of the Duchess, and it is perhaps this that provokes their initial rivalry. Yet, on another level, there is a conflict of moral integrity; the difference between the one who "Would be as lecherous, covetous or proud/ Bloody or envious, as any man,/ If he had means to do so"(1.1.26-8) and the other who has "long served virtue/ And ne'er ta'en wages of her"(1.1.439-40)

¹ Harriet Walter (qtd. in M. White 96).

suggests a conflict at a deeper level. It is not until almost the end of the play that they begin to recognise a common interest; Antonio reveals some of the malcontent's contempt for the "courts of princes" and Bosola seeks some integrity in his life. Ironically, this is fatal to them both.

Mick Ford as Antonio and Nigel Terry as Bosola displayed strongly contrasted personalities and both were strikingly different realisations from those of other productions. Here Bosola was distinguished by an apparent cool detachment from events, strongly at odds with Antonio, who throughout displayed a nervous insecurity manifesting itself in unpredictable outbursts of panic and occasional anger. It is worth exploring these differences in the detail of performance in several scenes.

In the scene in which the Duchess wooed Antonio (1.1.), a sense of insecure intimacy was created when, left alone with Cariola, the Duchess created her chamber by drawing mustard-coloured curtains¹ across the back of the stage. When Antonio said, "I'll fetch your grace/ The particulars of your revenue" (370-1), he walked backward from her, reflecting an adherence to formal court etiquette.² The positioning of the two in the subsequent dialogue, where they playfully sparred on the theme of marriage (385-403), undermined this formality and the social class relations it embodied. Her body language strongly conveyed a sexual subtext, as they stood face to face (this scene is often played with the Duchess seated). It suggested a dialogue of equals which persisted until she passed Antonio her ring. At this he bowed his head to her as if uncertain of the protocol involved. "To help your

¹ According to the stage manager's reports these curtains were problematic for the cast and jammed on several occasions.

² This pattern of formal movement subsequently characterised Antonio's servant status in all the court scenes, and was markedly different from his relaxed body language when in the Duchess's bedroom (3.2.).

eyesight" (409) was her almost chiding remark criticising his slowness, and his reaction as he realized her intentions produced audience laughter. Antonio knelt, as the text implies (415), as if attempting to restore their former class relations and, by now, appeared genuinely confused and frightened. His exclamation, "O my unworthiness!" (430) was shouted as if in panic. Her further chiding at 453-4, reminding him that she "is flesh and blood" and "not the figure cut in alabaster /Kneels at my husband's tomb" called to mind the funerary image from the programme, reinforcing the emblematic emphasis characteristic of this production. Antonio was prompted by "This you should have begged now" (465) to kiss her a second time, but he was tentative and seemed again to be confused about protocol, provoking her response about children fearful to devour sweetmeats. When he nervously mentioned her brothers (468), she forcefully embraced and kissed him as if in defiance of them. He recoiled fearfully when Cariola entered.

The grouping for the *Per verba de presenti* exchange of vows was formal and consciously emblematic as the text implies

That we may imitate the loving palms
Blest emblem of a peaceful marriage
That ne'er bore fruit divided (485-7)

Of course this is true of that moment in most productions, but here the ritual formality of the image was enhanced by what had preceded it; namely the masque of the Duchess's unveiling in the opening scene.

Antonio's nervousness continued with his alarmed starting at the reference to "marriage bed" (496), ensuring that her subsequent reassurance, "We'll only lie, and talk together..." (497) provoked audience laughter. However, because of the way that this production was historically contextualised, the immediacy of the dangers

involved in the Duchess's flouting of class and political protocols by wooing Antonio, seemed greater than in many other productions. The steward's nervousness and insecurity throughout this scene, although humorous and engaging, also seemed calculated to underline these dangers in the minds of the audience. Harriet Walter commented on the relative confidence of the Duchess and Antonio's nervousness, thus,

She is better acquainted with her brothers and with what is at stake than he is, by virtue of being born and bred into their world...I'd like to say that in the original story it was expected that Antonio as the outsider would receive the brunt of the punishment – the Duchess being somewhat protected by her noble blood and kinship (M.White 95).

The nervous tension that Antonio displayed was briefly - but only temporarily - relaxed in the domestic scene with the Duchess and Cariola. (3.2.) The Duchess's chamber was simply defined by a carpet, circular dressing table and chair. The proximity of children was suggested by the presence of a miniature toy horse on wheels, which Ferdinand, on his later entrance, kicked. The use of the carpet throughout this scene, illustrated the subtle manner in which this production conveyed an omnipresent sense of class and court protocol.

In a period in which the royal courts of northern Europe still spread their dirty stone floors with straw...at the courts of Castelnuovo and Castelcapuano¹ and the noble palaces of Naples, the floors were clean and often decorated with precious majolica tiles or luxurious rugs; the walls adorned with priceless tapestries; the bedchambers draped with rich silk brocades and satin... (Amendola 14-15).

In keeping with this, the production retained historical accuracy and made dramatic use of an image of considerable wealth. Antonio- at his most relaxed so far seen - lay stretched out on this carpet. Yet even here, the holstered gun he wore on his left

¹ The Naples residences of Giovanna d'Aragona, the historical Duchess of Amalfi on whose story the play is based.

shoulder signalled his sense of insecurity. This was the weapon with which he later threatened Cariola and, in all other productions I have seen, it does not appear until after Ferdinand has exited, in conformity with the later stage direction, "Enter Antonio with a pistol" (3.2.141).

It was noticeable that Bosola, on his first entrance in this scene (160) and the Officers, when they assembled for Antonio's disgrace (181), did not step onto the carpet but hovered in the shadows at its edges. Yet, none of them seemed prone to copy Antonio's meticulous attention to protocol when, following his dismissal, he once again exited ostentatiously backward. It was significant that Bosola, in particular, never seemed to adopt this mannerism. For Antonio, at this point it assumed gestic proportions, adding exemplary weight to his exit lines:

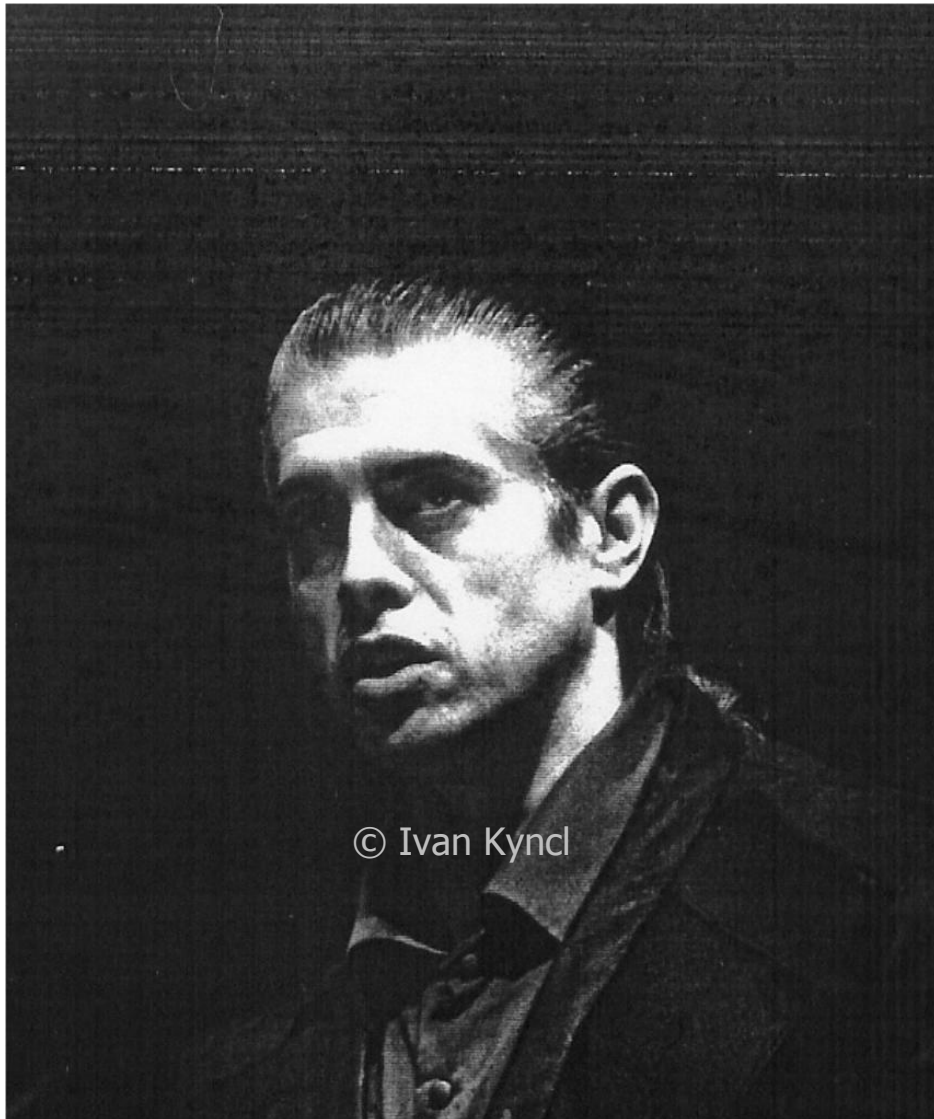
You may see, gentlemen, what `tis to serve
A prince with body and soul
(208-9)

After the Officers' exit, Bosola edged around the carpet before stepping onto it for his denunciation of their hypocrisy (230-42). At this point the Duchess was off the carpet. She stepped onto it on "But he was basely descended" (261) and moved towards Bosola on "O, you render me excellent music" (277). Apart from a generally courteous demeanour, this Bosola showed no formal displays of court etiquette. It was not until after the lines

No question but many an unbeneficed scholar
Shall pray for you for this deed and rejoice
That some preferment in the world can yet
Arise from merit.
(286-9)

that he knelt to her. Here the gesture seemed to arise from the heartfelt honesty of his sentiment; an irony, given that it is at this moment that he is possibly at his most treacherous.

This brings us to the representation of Bosola in this production. The critics were not unanimous in praise of the interpretation by Nigel Terry,¹ although most recognised that there was something different from usual here. Initially, there was recognition that his appearance was consistent with the historically precise tone of the piece and appropriate for the action of the play.



Nigel Terry as Bosola

¹ Stephen Boxer took over for The Pit transfer after Terry sustained a back injury.

Terry's (sic) time in the galleys is indicated by the ferocious triple plait into which his hair is wrenched, allowing him to unpin and subside into the elderly death dealer later on (*Financial Times*).



Bosola and the Duchess (3.2.)

However, there was considerable surprise at this Bosola's apparent detachment and *sang-froid*, considering he is such a significant participant in a world of intrigue and horror, and because the characteristic bitter cynicism of the malcontent in other productions was invariably more emotionally expressive.

Nigel Terry's Bosola, his braided hair the sole concession to foreignness, is a plain-spoken serviceable malcontent. He watches with detached scientific interest, the wounding effects of his quietly-spoken morbidities (Gibson).

For some the restraint of the performance de-energised the play. As is often the case, the reviewers frequently contradict each other; was this Bosola sinister or not?

Nigel Terry's Bosola lacks a certain edge and devilry, but is greyly sinister and serenely untroubled by guilt... (Financial Times).

Especially lacklustre here is Nigel Terry's Bosola, the Machiavellian spy. Hair plaited and with a bogus blimpishness to both his voice and the set of his jaw, Terry communicates well the aura of fraudulence surrounding this adventurer, but he completely misses what is sinister or unnerving. (Taylor, "Paste jewels in the Crown").

Not every review felt the performance under-energised, but many felt something was missing.

I think Nigel Terry's brooding vigorous Bosola lacks something important, which is the character's bitter self-loathing: his earlier scenes would be more authentic if he played them that way. As it is, this side of Bosola does not emerge until the end... (Sunday Times).

Here, the playing style led the critic into a questionable assumption about the role, which I would guess is based on a familiarity with more heavily cut performances.

...it is as if Terry were crediting Bosola with a sense of real character development which Webster was not interested in and which was perhaps not in his power. (The fact that someone is disillusioned, becomes bitter or goes mad, is not a change in their character but only something that happens to them.) (Sunday Times)

It is curious that this critic writes that "Webster was not interested" in "a sense of real character development", while suggesting the early scenes were not "authentic", presumably due to Bosola's implausible psychology. In a production which was at pains to locate the action so precisely, it seems reasonable that the representation of Bosola as a survivor of the galleys, cunning intelligencer and ruthlessly efficient assassin, could plausibly be based on his capacity to hide genuine feelings while transmuting them into expressions of detached cynicism.

Evidently, the criticisms that attached themselves to the production's interpretation of Bosola were not exclusively down to Nigel Terry's performance, since many of them resurfaced in reviews of performances at The Pit, when Stephen Boxer took over the role. Again they were a mixture of favourable and unfavourable:

As Bosola, the Duke's spy, Stephen Boxer gives a carefully judged, understated performance which deliberately eschews the glamorisation of villainy that invariably attends Edmunds, Iagos and Richard IIIs, revealing instead a deprived soul, plausibly soured by years in the galleys. His expression is that of a whipped cur: he stands apart, ready to seize an opportunity to perform a task and receive his reward (G.Brown).

This is an interestingly understated performance, dead-pan, watchful, cool, with dislike, a bespectacled apparatchik disposing of cadavers when necessary, but occasionally erupting into lupine snarls (wolf imagery looms large with Webster's darkling muse) of anger and self contempt.

The actor uses a naturalistic technique successfully (Hoyle).

Stephen Boxer, who has taken over the role of malcontented and riven Bosola is another symptom of the production's fuzziness. He is too sleekly bland. He lacks the relish for the role's spectacular nihilism, for its moral detachment shading into melancholia (Jongh, "More banal than brutal").

There is much to be said for a coolly detached Bosola. This one not only acted as an effective foil to the nervous Antonio, but allowed his gently persuasive manner to insinuate itself and gain influence at all social levels, not just with the Duchess. One production detail will serve as an example: At 2.2., having run his test on the Duchess with the "apricocks", Bosola is assured that she is pregnant. According to the stage directions he enters and confides this to the audience in a few lines of soliloquy,

BOSOLA: So, so: there's no question but her tetchiness and most
Vulturous eating of the apricocks are apparent signs
of breeding.-

(1-3)

At this point the stage directions require the Old Lady to enter, presumably to tend on the Duchess, perhaps as midwife. In this production, the Old Lady entered early and – extraordinarily – Bosola appeared to deliver the latter part of his comments to her. This initially seemed a misjudgement, in which the spy gives the game away. Perhaps it was just a repetition of the convention, established in the Antonio/Delio dialogue at the start of the play where some characters are deaf to others, but there is a more interesting alternative; by treating the moment as a piece of ‘below the salt’ gossip, it raised all sorts of possibilities about Bosola’s machinations behind the scenes and suggested that he had formed covert alliances with other servants to serve his purposes. The idea of Bosola’s confidences being apparently shared with both audience and fellow servants once again reinforced the perception of the common ground between both parties.

Certainly, the issue of class identity is present in many of Bosola’s cynical remarks and, in this production his alienation from the class he served was stressed in the disdainful manner in which he was treated by both Cardinal and Ferdinand. When, for example, Ferdinand bought his service with gold in 1.1, the haughty aristocrat slowly spilled the coins (some 30 pieces according to production notes!) contemptuously on the floor.¹ Bosola did not retrieve them till Ferdinand ordered him away (line 288), when he was compelled to kneel and forage for the coins on all fours.

¹ For once justifying Bosola’s riposte “Never rained such *show’rs* as these/ Without thunderbolts in the tail of them.” (1.1.247-8)

Bosola's easy manner with both characters and audience was much commented on and seen as a significant weapon in his armoury as both spy and later assassin:

Nigel Terry had some fine moments early on, confiding his own villainy to us like village gossip, and later, in the strangulation scene, drawing his victim into this amusing game like an old friend... (Williams).

Nigel Terry is brilliant throughout as the hard-bitten Bosola, whether he is playing the sardonic household spy or slipping into a low-keyed bedside manner as he persuades his victims to get ready to die (*Sunday Telegraph*).

Certainly, his disarming and insinuating manner made winning over the Duchess's confidence in 3.2. extremely plausible. Clearly this is a turning point in the play and, as I have maintained elsewhere, it is crucial for any actor to assess to what extent Bosola is dissembling in his praise of the disgraced Antonio.

Harriet Walter has written at length about how she and Nigel Terry worked on this scene (M. White 95-7). They began with Bosola assuming that the Duchess is using Antonio's alleged financial malpractice as subterfuge to dismiss her bawd. Bosola's praise is, therefore, simply a ruse "forcing from the Duchess some clarification of the situation and with luck the name of her husband" (95). Yet this scenario was problematic since audience is not let in on the secret, and Terry was unhappy with it. Instead he proposed a version in which Bosola, aroused to suspicion by the indictment of a man he knows to be honest, begins to notice double meanings in the Duchess's interchange with Antonio, intuitively "sniffs out some of the chemistry between them" (96) and responds with his expression of sympathy for Antonio. If one takes the line that Bosola is "a potentially good man corrupted" (96), the speech could be seen as a mixture of the genuine and the calculated:

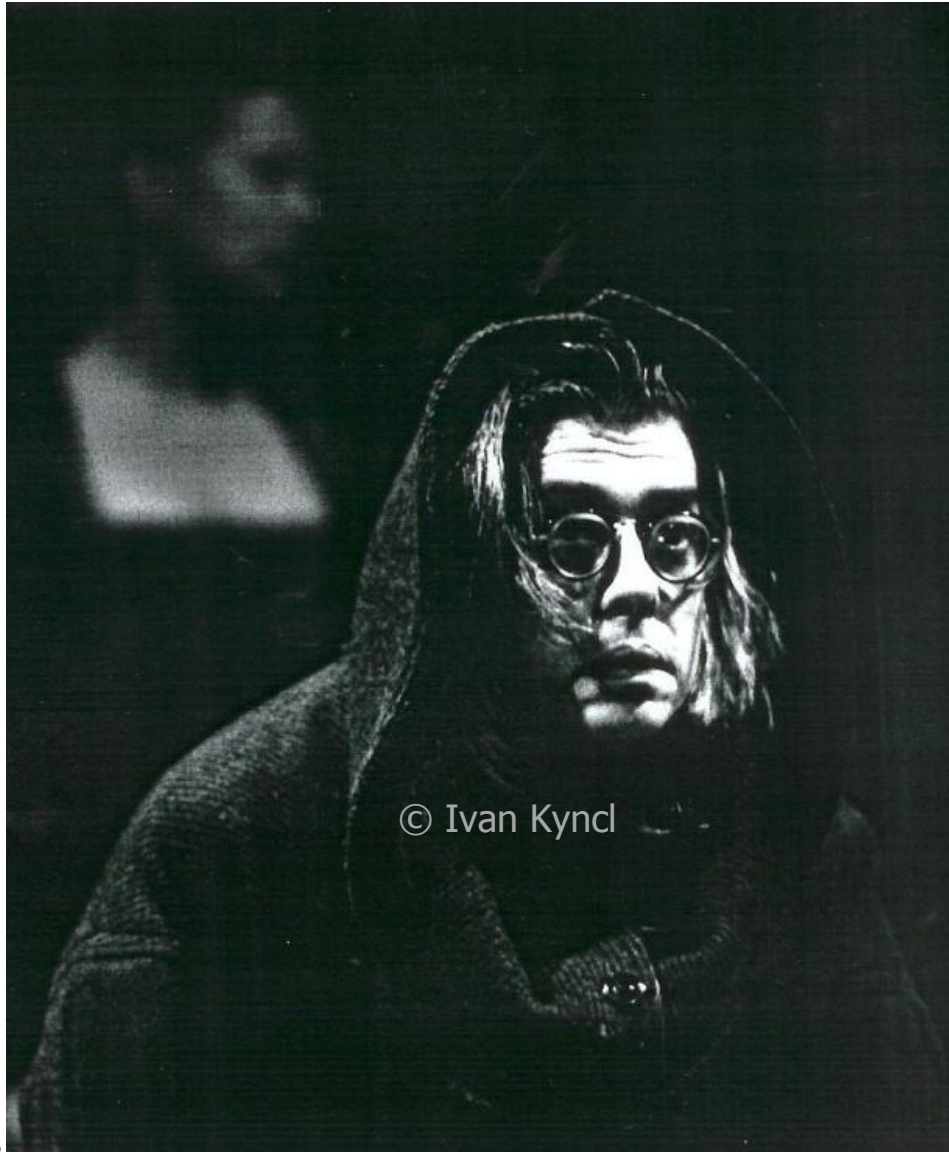
We pursued the idea that Bosola fuelled his 'performance' with genuine feeling, much as an actor does; that he identifies with the social standing and ambitions of Antonio and that this lends him a mixture of envy and approval. Spying the way into the Duchess's heart, and genuinely impressed by what he has learnt, Bosola provokes the Duchess's confession and has to feign total surprise. As I saw it, his speech after the Duchess's confession comes so close to the manifesto she would have written herself in order to justify all her actions, that it either suggests a similar credo deep within him, or that his insight into her is inspired. Either way she cannot resist him and puts total trust in him (96).

But in this reading, Bosola does not remain unchanged by the events. Whilst feeling compelled to complete his obligations to Ferdinand regarding the betrayal, arrest and detention of the Duchess, Bosola is by now attempting to sway Ferdinand from his course. Walters suggested a further possibility that underpinned the production's reading of Bosola:

Perhaps also he has discovered his love for her and genuinely sees beauty in her now she is completely a victim. (It is not until she is dead and no danger that he can completely release his compassion – the only good Duchess is a dead duchess?) Bosola also needs to believe in the Duchess, to recognise good in someone else is to find some good in himself. She mustn't let him down. He needs her to act according to his iconic picture of her. When during Act 4, scene 1 both Duchess and actress exercise their autonomy and become an ugly, cursing 'thing so wretch'd as cannot pity itself' it upsets Bosola's interpretation. 'Fie despair! Remember you are a Christian', is perhaps said as much for himself as for her (97).

The vizard he wears for her arrest and the disguise adopted during the Duchess's incarceration are obviously indicators of a desire to distance himself from his actions. But, in this production, his appearance as the tombmaker/bellman in 4.2. almost suggested the alter-ego that Bosola sought for himself. Was this faintly ludicrous figure in a monk's hood and pebble glasses an image of Bosola, the "fantastical scholar" (3.3.41) who "hath studied himself half blear-eyed" (44-5)? Could it be that

he was presenting here a grotesque reading of his inner self? This was certainly an aspect of the character that those critics who valued the performance commented on:



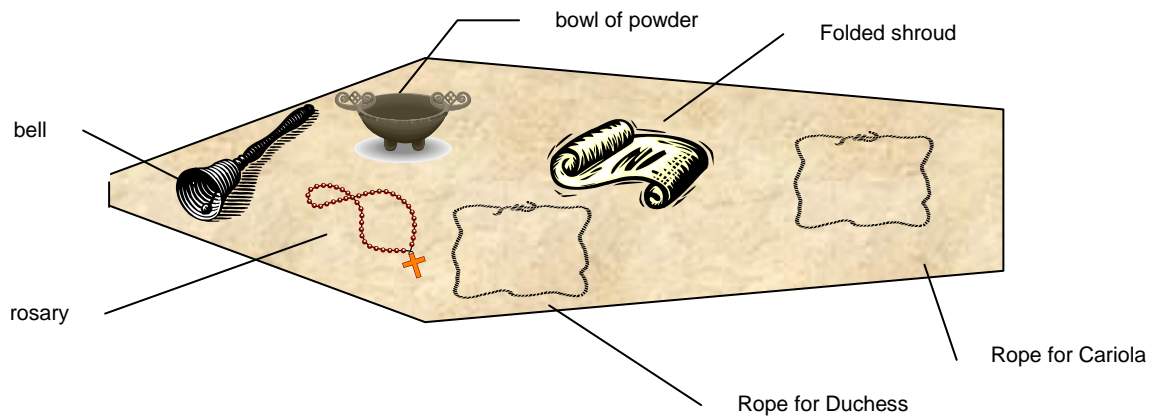
3

Bosola as Tombmaker/Bellman (4.2.)

Bosola is a frigid but obsessive connoisseur of human behaviour. "I will no longer study in the book of another's heart," he promises himself, but it is a promise he is powerless to keep (C.Osborne).

For a time, he is able to distance himself from the painful truth that he reads in that book, distancing himself not just by disguise but also ritual.

The Duchess's coffin, brought on from the front by four cowed and masked figures was ritually set with the following objects on its lid.¹



Items on the coffin (4.2.)

It was consistent with the gestic images of robing and disrobing in this production that when, during his common bellman chant Bosola told her to “don her shroud”, strew her “hair with powders sweet” and let a crucifix “bless her neck”, he did just that, using these objects, placing the shroud round her shoulders, powdering her hair and placing the crucifix around her neck. This, in what Michael Billington called “a soft-spoken scholar obsessed with mortality”, was the figure who assumed a quiet and apparently sympathetic “bedside manner”, sitting astride a chair and leaning closely toward the Duchess for his “worm-seed” speech. But later, with the Duchess murdered and all pretence passed, and after her false recovery, who was the Bosola who sat at her feet and wept? His former coldness made these tears more emotionally powerful than I can recall in other performances.

Something of the same quality permeated the final act, as Bosola, now turned avenger, enacted the downfall of his enemies with the same detached efficiency that

¹ The source is a sketch in the RSC production records.

he had employed in their service. It was left to the responses of his victims to provide any emotional frisson; Ferdinand charging about with a kitchen knife, wearing an armoured nightgown and carpet slippers, and the Cardinal shrieking in terror, as they met their respective ends. Like the intensity of the tears he had shed in Act 4, it was not until the words, "Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi..." that Terry energised his speech to allow Bosola perhaps his most assertive and emphatic moment in the whole play.

John Russell Brown writes of the delivery of some of the lines in the 1995 Greenwich production as symptomatic of an approach by modern actors trained in a Stanislavskian discipline:

The principal actors were given their heads so that they could think through everything they had to say, rather than letting the words take their own course...

Eg. "Give my little boy...(PAUSE....THINK) some syrup for his cold."

At best, this was a convention that

brought the thrill of actuality to many moments.., However,... often the text suffered and the play's characters with it...

... A broken and slow delivery changed the effect of Bosola's last lines:

Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
To suffer death or shame for what is just –
Mine is another voyage.

To say "Mine (long pause) is another (short pause) voyage" is to make the process of his death into something quite different, emotionally and, perhaps, intellectually... (J. R. Brown).

One critic described the performance style of the RSC 1989 production as "naturalistic" and "conversational", wishing that Terry "would lose a habit of pausing after prepositions and articles like a BBC announcer" (C.Osborne). In spite

of this, Nigel Terry's delivery of his final lines was brisk and unbroken, in keeping with the predominantly unemotional characterisation throughout.

This was a production in which the best thing was, as Michael Billington wrote, "its scrupulous attention to meaning". Harriet Walter claimed to have discovered in rehearsal that the best way to proceed was to "Play each scene for its face value and Webster will provide you with a later opportunity to express the under-layer" (M. White 96). Bill Alexander's approach was instinctively to trust Webster, and this impelled his decision to cut a minimum of the text. As Russell Brown also said, "The naturalistic pulse of Webster's dialogue is easy to cut...but it's like removing a few heartbeats." Many of those heartbeats were Bosola's, and retaining them enlivened the play. Michael Billington was one critic profoundly impressed and wrote two separate reviews:

...the performance of the evening comes from Nigel Terry, who makes Bosola not some coarse villain but a precise scholar who looks as if he is writing a thesis on the nature of Evil. A play that can easily dwindle into blood & thunder here acquires moral weight (Billington, *Country Life*).

Nigel Terry plays him most intelligently, not just as a mercenary hit-man but as a soft-spoken scholar obsessed by mortality. His gravitas, offset with a flickering irony, gives the production a strong moral centre (Billington, *Guardian* 9-12-89).

The provision of "a strong moral centre" somehow transcended the specific interpretation of the role. Even where the critic disliked the interpretation, the point was still recognised:

The play's real centre piece, Bosola is almost a side-kick in the shadow of the Duchess. Villain though Bosola is he is also the play's moral voice and the one character who could achieve tragic status – were he able to earn a living out of virtue he might have been a good man (Conway).

The anonymous *City Limits* critic felt "Harriet Walter's Duchess and Nigel Terry's *Bosola*...both achieve tragic status" (14-12-89). Harriet Walter herself went further.

With characteristic thought and generosity, she concludes, as do I:

So, a closing thought. The Duchess of Malfi is not the tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi for she does not need to learn the lesson of the play. Ferdinand and the Cardinal die in the dark. The play is perhaps the tragedy of *Bosola*. For me, anyway, he emerged as a kind of Everyman, who undermines his own capacity for good through cynicism, and comes to enlightenment too late. It is his story, it seems to me, that must arouse our pity, terror and-moral anger (M. White 100).

6.3. Differences and Similiarities

Both Noble's and Alexander's productions were strikingly different in performance, but there were some significant points of connection between them. Noble's production was set in the early seventeenth century, the period of writing, while Alexander's located it a century earlier, the period identified in both the text of the play and in Webster's historical sources. Both productions were therefore historicized, although in different ways. When interviewed by Ralph Berry several years later, Noble seemed ambivalent about a specifically historicized interpretation:

AN What's exciting for me about theatre is that each event creates its own rules. No two theatrical events will be the same... For example, you will go on a journey in a Shakespeare play and you may well *en route* visit paradise, briefly. You may well visit Dante's purgatory. The world changes in the course of the evening and has its own rules.

It's so for most of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Take Webster, in *The Duchess of Malfi*. When the Duchess goes into prison, in the fourth act, he creates a purgatory on stage for her, through the imagery of the language, through the way in which he makes the audience's imagination work. He takes us into the very heart of despair.

RB But he does this through a particular image, does he not, which is specifically social and early seventeenth century. I mean, here is the Duchess of Malfi, a very great lady, in her court, sitting on what is probably, on stage, the only chair, and she is present at a levee of madmen. It is a caricature of court order, but it is the court order of - all right, an Italian, but you could also say an English, society of the seventeenth century. Specifically that.

AN Yes, I think that's true. When I did *The Duchess of Malfi* I did it in period. But I don't think the deduction from what you say is that 'period' is the only way of doing it. The point is not so much to do with the social order that Webster is evoking, it is the imaginative world he creates in the audience's mind, in the whole of that section of the play. One's job, when directing, is to create a world that is logical for that event (*On Directing Shakespeare*, 165-6).

In spite of his reservations about it not being “the social order that Webster is evoking”, Noble stressed the thematic importance of class relations by his casting decisions and his focus on dialectical opposition in the staging, and grouping characters in the programme’s cast list according to their class identity. The representation of the social order in this production was historically contextualized and could even be described as Marxist.

In 1988, the same year he interviewed Noble, Berry also interviewed Bill Alexander; a year before his RSC *Malfi* - although at the time he did not know he was to direct it.¹ Alexander seemed to echo Noble’s argument that a director’s task “is to create a world that is logical for that event” but acknowledged his own input as formulator of that logic. In Alexander’s words,

For me, it all boils down to this: how can I reveal this play, how best can I release my own perception of the play, my feeling of what it’s about, and what it says and why he wrote it (178).

¹ He concluded the interview by declaring his passion to next direct *The White Devil* in The Swan. This was somehow changed to *The Duchess of Malfi*. Webster’s earlier play was not to come to The Swan until 1997, and then was directed by Gale Edwards.

He differed from Noble in the importance he was prepared to admit to ascribing to the social and historical context of the play. He had recently directed two of Shakespeare's Elizabethan plays and significantly relocated the setting for the historical periods of both; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1986) was moved to 1950's England, and *The Merchant of Venice* (1988) to a Jacobean timeframe. While insisting that a specific period setting was not necessarily appropriate for all plays (*King Lear*, for example), he justified the appropriateness of changes for these two, by reference to the importance of social context. He cited the cruelty in *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, as his reason for his production's time-shift to the 1620s:

The whole of the social context is vital to unleashing the themes in the play. Anything else would obscure it. I know that sounds dogmatic, but I'm convinced that's right and I think anyone who sees the production will accept that point of view (182).

He applied a similar logic to *The Duchess of Malfi*, a year later but, on this occasion, concluded that "unleashing the themes of the play" was best served by using the historical context provided by Webster in a virtually full version of the text. Alexander's decision to precisely set and costume the play in Naples in 1504 under the rule of Catholic Spanish overlords, was surprisingly rare, and his inclusion of what other directors deemed as extraneous, led to a greater overall clarity. It provided answers to some perennial questions about the motivation of the Aragonian brothers and, by making Bosola more central to the drama, resolved the perceived structural anomaly in the play after the death of the Duchess.

It is unsurprising that Bosola seemed more central in both the Noble and Alexander productions; for one thing, having the longest part in the uncut text, he was simply onstage for longer. Because of this, the actors in the role had more to

play with, resulting in more complex creations than in cut versions. In spite of this - or perhaps because of it - the interpretations were strikingly different and it would be hard to imagine two Bosolas with personalities more different than Nigel Terry and Bob Hoskins.

Unlike Terry, Hoskins made an unconvincing academic-turned intelligencer, but there was no doubting his lively mind and quick wit, seen in his ability to reduce the audience to fits of laughter. Hoskins also had the useful ability to convey a powerful physical menace with an underlying vulnerability, capable of eliciting sympathy. The exploitation of these elements, known to the audience from his screen persona, proved a significant bonus for the role, and an undoubted factor in the casting. To my mind, it crucially echoes something of the use that Webster may have made of Lowin's stage persona to work his audience.

For Alexander, it must be remembered that two actors took on the role consecutively, with Stephen Boxer following Nigel Terry for the London run. What surprised some critics was the apparent detachment and *sang-froid* that both actors brought to the role, considering Bosola is such a significant participant in a world of intrigue and horror, and because the characteristic bitter cynicism of the malcontent in other productions was invariably more emotionally expressive. Not only was this an interpretation markedly different from Hoskins's, but there were inevitably subtle distinctions between the performances of Terry and Boxer. In an interview (Sato), Alexander himself felt the distinction between the two was that, where Terry emphasised the soldier, Boxer stressed the scholar; the emotional objectivity of the interpretation was, however, appropriate to both. Ironically, although Alexander thought Boxer's performance was "easier for the audience to follow", he felt Terry's

was both more "dangerous" and "poetic". In his performance especially, the intensity of Bosola's grief over the body of the Duchess gained in impact through his previous emotional coldness.

By focussing upon the social and historical elements in the play, these two productions were notably different from the majority of more recent ones, which have often seemed more interested in the psychopathology of the characters (frequently presented in tones of expressionistic excess). Instead, it was the class relations of the characters that both Noble and Alexander sought so strongly to foreground. Consequently, while their productions felt closer in spirit to the seventeenth century with its interest in degree, both ironically achieved a sense of immediacy and even topical relevance. This was assisted by the arena and thrust stagings each respectively employed, where the audience members could not only see each other during performance but were subject to direct address by the actors. The element of audience self-awareness that this practice generated was one which presumably characterised early modern performances of the play. Because of these staging decisions and the fullness of the texts they employed, I believe these two productions may have offered their audiences experiences in some ways comparable to those of the play's first audiences at The Globe and Blackfriars. This is less true of the other four productions which complete this research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PSYCHOLOGY & INTERIORITY

BBC TV *Play of the Month* 1972 Cheek by Jowl 1995/6

The text for both of the productions discussed in this chapter was cut to focus on the psychology of the characters. While both loosely adopted a Stanislavskian approach to characterisation, their treatments were radically different: the first employed conventional naturalism within a film framework; the second adopted a highly stylised approach to the staging.

7.1. BBC TV *Play of the Month*

**Broadcast BBC2 10-10-1972
The Duchess: Eileen Atkins
Bosola: Michael Bryant
Directed by James McTaggart**

One always dies too soon – or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it ready for the summing up. You are – your life, and nothing else.

Sartre: *In Camera*

This adaptation of the *The Duchess of Malfi* was produced in 1972 by Cedric Messina, who later went on (between 1978 and 1980) to produce the first two years of *BBC Television Shakespeare* series. Some of Messina's stylistic fingerprints are evident in the look of all these works. Although by no way uniform in presentation, some of his contributions to the Shakespeare cycle achieved a reputation for a staid conservatism. From the time, I recall a pejorative description of their being set in 'Messina-land', a generic Elizabethan landscape allegedly filtered through the heritage-orientated imagination of the typical American tourist.

Although somewhat harsh, there is a grain of truth here. At the time, it was felt the Shakespeare cycle required an American partner to guarantee access to the US market, a factor deemed essential for the series to be financially viable. Time-Life Television agreed to participate, but controversially insisted that the productions should be 'traditional' interpretations of the plays in appropriately Shakespearean period costumes and sets. They also wanted each play to fit a two-and-a-half-hour time slot. While Messina successfully resisted the prescriptive time limits, he did not really avoid the stylistic straightjacket. *Henry VIII*, for example, was shot entirely on location, in Leeds Castle, Penshurst Place and Hever Castle with costumes sourced from Tudor paintings (notably Hans Holbein's famous framework portrait of Henry). According to the BFI, "*Henry VIII* was acclaimed as one of its best productions (and was specifically cited as such by the Shakespeare Association of America)" (M. Brooke). It remains unclear to what extent such plaudits were attributable to the stylistic framework

Time-Life Television also sponsored the earlier *The Duchess of Malfi* and a 123-minute VHS cassette of the production (no longer available) was distributed by Time-Life Video. In some ways, the production is almost a pilot episode for the *BBC Television Shakespeare* cycle. Similar sponsorship conditions to the Shakespeare series seem to have prevailed in the editing of the text to fit a reduced running time.

The teleplay makes numerous omissions from the text; the following are among the more significant from just the first three acts:

1. Antonio's extolling of the virtues of the French court (1.1.1-29)
2. Bosola's cynical dialogue with Castruchio and the Old Lady (2.1.)

3. Bosola's exposition (borrowed from Montaigne) to Antonio on "the souls of princes" (2.1.98-111).
4. The Duchess and Antonio's debate about the protocol of hat wearing in the French court. (2.1.122-132)
5. Bosola's ongoing baiting of the Old Lady (2.2.5-28)
6. Antonio's ominous nosebleed causing him to drop the horoscope (2.3.); he loses it instead while dismounting from his horse.
7. Delio's wooing of Julia (2.4.)
8. The courtiers discussing the character of Bosola as a student. 3.3.)
9. The courtiers' slander of Antonio to the Duchess after his disgrace.
10. The Duchess's arrest and her subsequent "salmon & dogfish" fable; we simply see the arrival of the guard on horseback to stop her train.

Textual amendments also involve interpolations where antiquated words and phrases make the meaning obscure to the modern viewer. For example, "pimp" replaces "bawd", "coulters" become "ploughshares" and for Antonio and the Duchess, Ferdinand threatens to "boil their bastard *in a stew*" instead of "to a cullis"(2.5.71).

Sponsorship conditions also seem to have determined the location-based shooting. It was filmed at Chastleton House in Oxfordshire. On the National Trust website, Chastleton is described as "One of England's finest and most complete Jacobean houses." It was actually completed in 1612, which makes it roughly contemporaneous with the first performances of the play. The house has been continuously inhabited over the past 400 years and has therefore been well

maintained and looks "lived in". Its gardens have a typical Elizabethan/Jacobean layout and considerable use was made of these in the production.



Chastleton House: Jacobean Manor

The overwhelming stylistic effect of the use of locations, the costly period costume and the filmic editing is a strong sense of realism. Yet, in one respect, this realism is challenged by the very precise sense of place. In no way could Chastleton House pass for a Neapolitan palace of the Renaissance - it is far too English! Clearly, historical 'authenticity', as in Messina's *Henry VIII*, was not intended, or the filming might have been studio-based or (more expensively) moved to locations in Italy. However, the use of a single location provides a schematic unity in which the House of Aragon (like that of Usher¹) takes on the double meaning of both dynasty and building.

¹ The increasingly oppressive interiority of the production also invoked echoes of the Poe short story.



Chastleton as it appears in the recording

Presumably, budgetary constraints, combined with an American appetite for English stately homes, produced a pragmatic solution; not a realistic rendition of the historical location of the play but (perhaps almost accidentally) a representation of the immediate world that may have provided some of Webster's inspiration for it. This seems to be much more a setting for the story of Arbella Stuart or Frances Carr than Giovanna d'Arragona and there are minor textual amendments to stress this.¹ As the following illustrations show, there are even certain physical resemblances between the appearance of Eileen Atkins's Duchess and images of Elizabeth I, while Charles Kay's Ferdinand does not seem so far away from her successor, James I.

¹ Not least the alteration of the date in which the play is set by a century. When Bosola reads the horoscope Antonio has unwittingly dropped, he announces the date as 1604, not 1504 as the text states (2.4.57).



Eileen Atkins as the Duchess



Elizabeth I



Charles Kay as Ferdinand



James I of England & VI of Scotland

Such resonances may be unintentional, simply stemming from the sources used for costume design. They seem to have no specific bearing on the interpretation beyond a generalised recognition that Webster, like any playwright, writes about his own time no matter what the historical setting of his play. In this respect, one begins to consider the events of the play in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean court intrigue, corruption and the widespread use of surveillance, espionage and assassination by the secret service of the day. After all, according to the text, Webster's spy, Bosola, was formerly a student of Padua University,¹ as was its more distinguished real life alumnus, Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham.

Ironically, the casual viewer would be unable to make that specific connection since not only those lines of text, but the whole scene from which it is drawn fell victim to the editor's scissors, presumably in an attempt to meet Time-Life's scheduling demands. However, the pressure imposed to severely prune the text also led to an interesting shift of focus. Because it was used to produce a teleplay, where camera positioning augments the varied use of location, angle, choice of shot and the pace of editing, this focus shift is radically different from that which occurs when the text of a theatrical performance is cut. In a theatrical performance (as I have observed elsewhere), textual cuts have invariably been made at the expense of the character of Bosola. Curiously, in this production, the choice of editing and the emphasis of the teleplay, have sharpened the importance of the role considerably. To begin with, the edited teleplay now gives Bosola, both the first and last lines of the play, and the

¹ SILVIO: What's that Bosola?
DELIO: I knew him in Padua – a fantastical scholar..." (3. 3. 40-1)

video editing invariably foregrounds him for the viewer in relation to the other characters. The opening sequence¹ serves to illustrate this point.



Long-shot. Immediately after the opening credits, two courtiers (Silvio And Castruchio) enter into a crowded chamber.



Mid-shot. The camera pans left following the two until they stop in front of another door

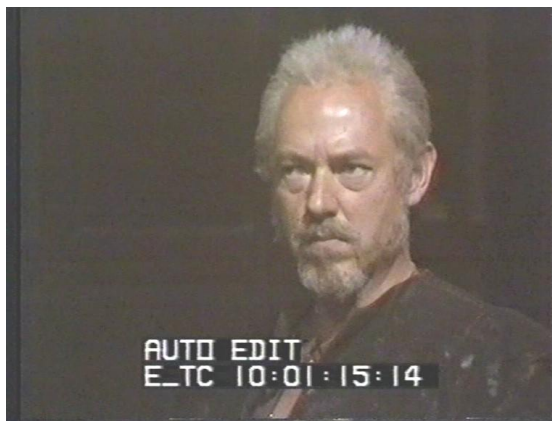


Mid-shot. They greet Antonio and Delio who enter through this second door. The camera now follows these two as they move right until...

¹ All the production stills in this chapter are taken from a VHS tape, with editing time-code, courtesy of the BFI.



Mid-shot. They stop in front of an open blazing fireplace. Antonio mops the sweat from his neck after his recent sporting success.



In the first **Close-up** of the play, Bosola enters and observes the scene. His eyes dart left and right.



Long-shot. The Cardinal enters in haste, inattentively blessing all and sundry until...



Mid-shot. He spies an attractive woman. He reaches out a hand to her. She kneels to kiss his ring.



Mid-Shot. Suddenly, Bosola interrupts and speaks the first line in this production,

“I do haunt you still.” (1.1.29)

Here the use of one close-up, amidst the mid and long shots, effectively establishes the importance of Bosola, while simultaneously separating him from the rest of the court. His eye movements instantly signal his crucial role as observer and spy while the viewer immediately identifies him as an outsider to the world of the court.¹ The viewer - also an outside observer of this world - latches onto this figure even more directly than in a stage performance, because of the positioning and pace of these images.

¹ The editing pattern of a mid shot of others in conversation, followed by a close-up shot of Bosola watching and listening, is employed throughout the play and reinforces this signification.

Vocally, apart from a brusque delivery, Bosola's accent is no different to other courtiers, but he is also signified as an outsider by a costume that isolates him in class from the others; in contrast to the ruffs and velvets of the courtiers, he wears an open-necked leather jerkin.



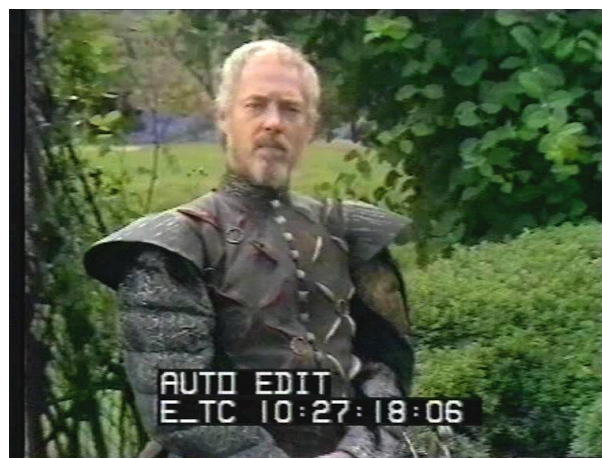
The visual contrast is at its most extreme in his first encounter with Ferdinand. Charles Kay conveys a youthful, apparently well-controlled but slightly effete aristocrat. His costume is a resplendent silver and black with an immense bejewelled ruff. Ferdinand lays out the coins, with which he buys Bosola's services, on a long table that separates the two men. It seems another signifier of the other divisions between them - class and age.



Bosola's cropped hair, suggestive of his recent release from the galleys, is grey. Other than Castruchio, he appears the oldest in the court. Ferdinand's standing behind the table also suggests a defensive posture on his part; we notice from Bosola's sleeves that he wears chain mail beneath the leather, a reminder that he defines himself as "a soldier". This is clearly a man, with a reputation for murder, who carries a deep smouldering anger with him. When Ferdinand mentions Bosola's "old garb of melancholy" (1.1.278) he can see it literally displayed in the clothes of the man in front of him.



His transformation to Ferdinand's intelligencer, under the nominal guise of the "provisorship of the horse" also involves a physical transformation.



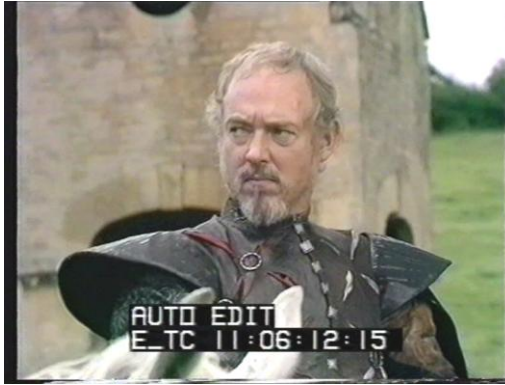
The clothing is now that of a courtier, although the black leather separates him from the colourful silks and velvets of the other courtiers. Nor does he wear a ruff.



Within the realistic framework that the production establishes, this costuming has an air of practicality about it. Leather is an appropriate material for a horsemaster's clothes, and the production reminds us that this is Bosola's 'cover' as an intelligencer when we later see him handling Antonio's horse in 2.3.



Something of the function of his role may be suggested by this costume but, at a deeper level, the black leather also seems to signal toughness and durability; it is the carapace of a survivor.



Michael Bryant convincingly conveys this exterior toughness with a public face that seems neutral but impenetrable. All the more powerful, then, are the displays of interior emotion that he reveals in private as the play develops.

Undoubtedly, as I have said, much of this is due to the way that the edited teleplay has foregrounded *Bosola* from the start by use of close-up. Yet, by the time of the garden scene (2.2.) a new device has enhanced this: *Bosola*'s asides concerning the apricots and the Duchess's probable pregnancy become *voice-overs* on the soundtrack. This is a cinematic device that has been adopted in film adaptations of classical plays in the past, most notably for soliloquies in the Olivier film versions of *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. In those films, allowing the audience to hear (as it were) the thoughts of the protagonist reinforced the centrality of his viewpoint and invited sympathy for his position. Here, the device is limited to *Bosola*'s asides; his soliloquies are voiced conventionally.¹ I believe the decision in this production, in the treatment of both asides and soliloquies, was pragmatic and intended to enhance a realistic approach.

It might appear contradictory to suggest that the wholly non-realistic convention of the *voice-over* should be intended to enhance realism, yet one only has

¹ I am using the term 'soliloquy' to represent speech (either self-directed or directed to an audience) delivered in private. The term 'aside' is the same but delivered in company.

to ask what would have been the impact if an alternative strategy had been employed. To cut the asides completely at this point would have undermined, not just the tension of the scene, but also comprehension of the plot. Yet, to have voiced them openly, as in the theatre, would introduce an obvious stage convention that would jar in a way that the cinematic convention of *voice-over* does not. Here, whatever causes the least surprise best maintains the realistic illusion. When Bosola soliloquises alone, however, he does so aloud, which might seem to contradict the above. Yet even here, the naturalistic convention is better maintained by the plausible device of someone talking to himself aloud in private, rather than the intrusion of the disembodied voice. The fact that Bosola's voiced reflections are delivered as if to himself rather than to camera reinforces this.¹

In truth, for the soliloquies - unlike the asides - either strategy could have been successfully employed. What becomes unavoidable, however, is that this enforced intimacy with one character increases the developing sense of interiority in the production. Ironically, for a production that seems to have been predicated upon external scenic effect, this interiority gradually begins to dominate the second half of the play from the incarceration of the Duchess to the death of Bosola.

For example, one cinematic genre in which the use of *voice-over* abounds is *film-noir*.² This genre is also characterised by the use of chiaroscuro and oblique camera angles. The streets and corridors of the noir-ish film are filled with shadows and menace, an appropriate metaphor for an uncertain world of treachery and

¹ In Olivier's third Shakespeare film, *Richard III*, the realistic convention is effectively overturned by a very theatrical direct address to camera.

² A genre which, as I have explained elsewhere, has been frequently linked critically to performances of *The Duchess of Malfi*

murder; a device to reinforce the psychological intensity and – possibly - the existential isolation of the protagonist.

Chastleton's Jacobean carved wooden interiors are dark and claustrophobic.

Most of the second half of the play seems to be set at night. Candlelight and hearth fires provide tenebrous illumination. This is a serious humourless place in which characters are often in transit between rooms and levels.



Staircases are important as locations for conspiracy, confidences,



surveillance, overheard remarks and mischance (e.g. a). the first conversation of Delio & Antonio. b). Courtiers above listening to and ignoring (what they assume) are Cardinal's faked cries of distress c). Bosola's accidental killing of

Antonio: he looks down from the top of the stairs and sees the Cardinal. He descends, dagger drawn and stabs the ascending figure, only for torchlight to reveal...

... it is Antonio he has killed.



As I have said before, the close-up of Bosola, intercut with mid or long-shots of the object of his gaze, remains the image of choice for a large part of the first hour, but, in the second half this undergoes a metamorphosis. Following the masque of the madmen in 4.2., Bosola, disguised as the tomb-maker, prepares the Duchess for death. Here, the sequence is introduced by a synthesis of mid-shot and long-shot, with a significant reversal of focus.



A cowled Bosola dominates the foreground with the Duchess in long-shot looking at him. His gaze, however, is now away from her.

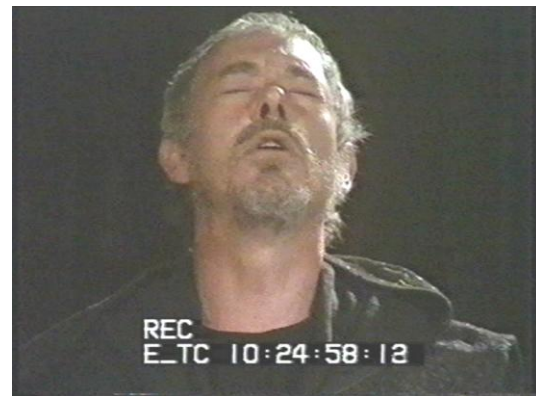


As the chilling power of his "worm-seed" speech grows, the frame of his cowled face switches to close-up.



Only to be challenged, in turn, by a close-up of the Duchess on her line, "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.141).

The way is opened for the increased use of close-ups from here to the end of the play, invariably displaying intense emotion.



Bosola's reactions after his murder of the Duchess and subsequent betrayal by Ferdinand (4.2.)

So predominant is this trend toward interiority that even the extensive final bloodbath is played with a camera focussed on the faces of the victims, reacting with fear, pain or surprise to the fatal blows which are struck out of the frame.



Bosola stabs the Cardinal.

Ferdinand stabs Bosola



Bosola stabs Ferdinand



The final image of the play is not a long-shot of the massacre but a close-up of Antonio's son, looking back at the horror as he is led from the room.



Delio's summative moralising, however, is cut, and the final words - like the first - are given to Bosola. Pouring with sweat, he concludes his existential odyssey with a naturalistic, broken delivery of his final line, which even contains a false start and repetition...



“Mine...is a...is another...voyage” (5.5.105).

In the previous chapter I referred to John Russell Brown's condemnation of what he sees as the wrongheaded practice of a naturalistic, or even conversational style of verse speaking, in which he refers to the broken delivery of this specific line

in a production (322).¹ It is, perhaps, a measure of the extent of transformation wrought by a televisual/cinematic presentation, that where I might normally agree with Russell Brown, here I found Bryant's naturalistic delivery perfectly consistent and appropriate.²

My final thought relates to the choice of Michael Bryant for this part. It is perhaps significant that Bryant's previous major television appearance, two years before the *Malfi* broadcast, was in David Turner's 13 part adaptation of Sartre's *The Roads To Freedom* trilogy.³ Bryant played the role of Mathieu, the Parisian intellectual who, incapable of action in the months before the outbreak of the Second World War, undergoes a transformation when the war begins. He makes a decisive choice that leads to his death in a church bell-tower, fighting against the invading Germans. Mathieu's death occurs about two thirds of the way through the last book in the trilogy, but in a parallel with Bryant's *Bosola*, Turner's teleplay ends with Mathieu's death, Bryant uttering his final word, "Freedom!" While it might stretch plausibility to draw too



***Michael Bryant as Mathieu in
"The Roads to Freedom"***

¹ Robert Glenister's *Bosola* in the Greenwich Theatre production, 1995.

² It would be only fair to acknowledge at least one other notable dissenter (Moore 20), who comments "In a recent television production, presented naturalistically, *Bosola* seemed lost in a structural mist and took longer to die than Bottom's Pyramus."

³ David Turner, *The Roads To Freedom* adapted from the trilogy by Jean Paul-Sartre, Director: James Cellan Jones. 13 x 45 minute episodes broadcast BBC2 4 October - 27 December 1970 (BFI).

much of a comparison between the roles, it is noteworthy that both characters undergo a striking peripeteia towards the climax of each drama. It is not inconceivable that director, James McTaggart, in looking for a Bosola with intellectual presence and emotional intensity, hit upon Bryant who had previously demonstrated a Sartrean act of 'good faith', so effectively.

7.2. Cheek by Jowl 1995/6

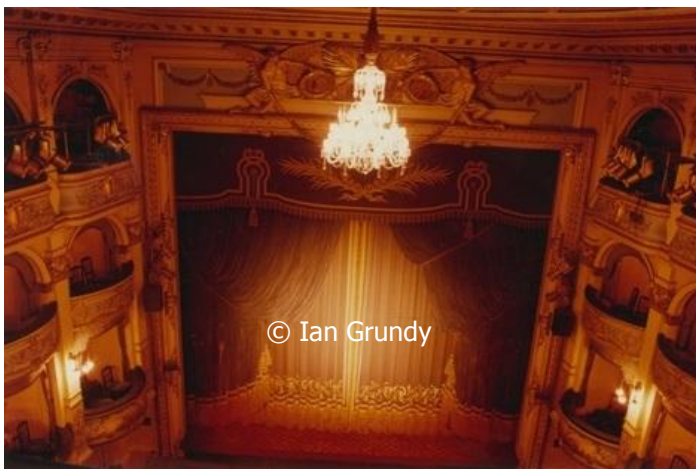
Touring 1995/6

The Duchess: Anastasia Hille

Bosola: George Anton

Directed by Declan Donnellan

Taking a purely phenomenological view, there was a feeling of site-specificity about this *Duchess of Malfi*, when I first saw it at London's Wyndham's Theatre in 1996. The feeling is, if anything enhanced by the opening shots of the Theatre Museum's archive video of the production. With its camera position somewhere on the right (SL) of the dress circle (possibly a box), the play began with a lowered curtain and a full view of the Wyndham's ornate Victorian proscenium. At a time when, in London's West End theatres, the theatrical convention was invariably to have the proscenium curtain already raised before the start of the play, the manner of its use here was worthy of note. It recalled the 1992 Stephen Daldry production of *An Inspector Calls*, which had even constructed a completely false proscenium and working curtain to create both Brechtian and Pirandellian resonances. On this occasion, as the houselights dimmed and a frock-coated Antonio appeared before the proscenium curtain, signalling it to rise, I sensed a direct allusion to the Daldry



Proscenium from upper circle, Wyndham's Theatre, London, 1990.

production which began with child actors entering before the curtain rose. Here, in these surroundings, the actor might have been an MC preparing to introduce a period Music Hall. Yet, as he stooped to pass beneath

the rising curtain, the stage now revealed a prospect much more sombre. On a vast chequerboard,¹ the whole cast stood, arranged geometrically like pieces in the game about to be played.

Any notions of site-specificity were, of course, fortuitous but accidental, because Declan Donnellan and his designer Nick Ormerod devise the productions of *Cheek By Jowl* for international touring. This production, travelling to places as diverse as Romania, Australia, Italy and Japan, would have been required to adapt to venues far less historically appropriate than the Wyndhams' stage, venues possibly without the provision of the proscenium curtain that was raised here to such a striking effect. Yet this very accidental fortuitousness seems to go to the heart of Donnellan's approach to his work with *Cheek By Jowl*. This is summed up in a *New York Times* article, previewing the New York opening in December 1995:

When CHEEK BY JOWL opens its production of "The Duchess of Malfi" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Majestic Theater on Wednesday, the play will be in rehearsal. And it still will be when the company returns to its native England two weeks later.

Indeed, the director, Declan Donnellan, and his actors will be meeting at least once a week to try out new ideas and make changes throughout the last six months of a world tour that began in September (Nightingale, "Duchess of Malfi in Permanent Rehearsal Arrives").

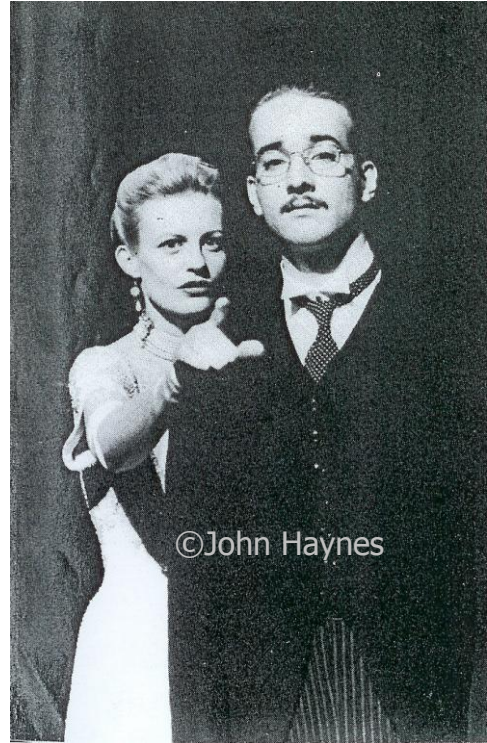
Although the idea of "permanent rehearsal" suggests a desire on their part to keep the performances 'alive' and in the present, Donnellan and Ormerod did not choose a contemporary setting to seek out contemporary relevance. The critics were able to seek out and find this on their own:

As the current Princess of Wales can testify, marrying into a royal family brings its own set of nasty problems: confusing intrigues,

¹ The chequerboard was not, as I remember, visible from the Wyndhams' stalls but is clearly visible on the video. It was not the first time this design motif had been employed for the play. It was also used for John Bury's Theatre Workshop production at Stratford East in 1965 and, more recently, at Greenwich in 2010.

spying courtiers, double-agent spin doctors, secret sexual liaisons, the confusion of private and public lives and of course those imperial whims of iron (Brantley).

Rather than using design to evoke these sorts of associations, Donnellan and Ormerod chose an oblique approach that dislocated the play from its conventional historical context but instead created a new one. Costumed in a style described as “twentieth century transitional” (qtd. in Nightingale, “Dramatic restorers at work”), which in practice meant the long dresses and suits from the era of Edward VII or George V, this was in its own way a production as historicized as that of the RSC in 1989. Being set in Italy, the presence of the Catholic Church was strongly evoked, but so was the spirit of fascism, suggested by a Bosola dressed like one of Mussolini’s Blackshirts. Although it removed the renaissance wars and politics and carefully avoided specific date references – for example, cutting the words “Anno Domini 1504” (2.4.57.) from Bosola’s reading of Antonio’s horoscope – it conveyed a tangible sense of period, focussing on the domestic tragedy in a way which seemed to comment obliquely on the fate of any number of aristocratic dynasties in the first quarter of the twentieth century. As one critic observed, this interpretation, true to the play, linked the personal to the political:



The Duchess (Anastasia Hille) and Antonio (Matthew Macfadyen)

We are watching a family of beasts in a kingdom of beasts, and Cheek by Jowl's director, Declan Donnellan, makes them modern 1920's beasts presiding over an Italian court where pomp and fascism reign.

How could it be otherwise? Fascism is as much a family psychology as it is a social ideology (Jefferson).

In keeping with the chequerboard image that greeted the audience as the curtain rose, the movements of the actors were sometimes dictated as if by the rules of a board game. This offered the audience a metaphor not only for the workings of fate and death in the play but also for the rigidity of the class system that governed the lives of the characters, and the religious and military ethos underlying it.¹

Donnellan has alleged that

...it is an article of faith with him to enter the rehearsal room knowing the text extremely well but without any fixed notion of how the characters are to be interpreted..."We have to acknowledge we're on a path of discovery," he says, "and that at the heart of every great play there's something mysterious. We're not a group of experts producing something of which we're completely in control. So our productions are always works in progress" (Nightingale, "*Duchess of Malfi* in Permanent Rehearsal Arrives").

To this end, he makes extensive use of improvisation in rehearsal, which suggests that with his actors he is striving for honesty - or, more cynically perhaps, for innovation - in his treatment of established texts. He has compared the work of Cheek by Jowl to that of "picture restorers, stripping away the veneer of sentimental varnish that plays have accrued over the year" (Nightingale, "*Duchess of Malfi* in Permanent Rehearsal Arrives"). However, the metaphor may be disingenuous, as it does not describe elements of personal input in Donnellan's processes. For a start, the text here was considerably cut - which somewhat undermines the restoration metaphor - and in ways that seemed to pursue an agenda of the director's own. Noticeably, many of Webster's sententiae were lost and, since *Bosola* delivers the

¹ The stylized movement established here carried similar religious and militaristic connotations to the stylized slow funereal marching that opened the 1985 production by Philip Prowse for the National Theatre.

majority of these, the function and impact of his role was significantly altered. Positioned, as they usually are, in couplets at the end of scenes, the *sententiae* conventionally allow for the audience's momentary reflection on the action witnessed. Their loss seemed calculated to set the action in a moral vacuum, leading the audience to search elsewhere for meaning. Here the comments of Margo Jefferson are especially apposite:

The couplets and passages that were cut from this production invite us to sit back and briefly moralize, but even with them, Webster's world is harsh and single-minded in a way that Shakespeare's isn't. Program notes are often more decorative than insightful, but the words of St. Augustine that Cheek by Jowl chose came through with terrible exactness in the end. Augustine said: "There is no such thing as evil, just the gradual removal of good until none is left." That void is what remains for us.

If the characters moved in a moral void, it was an environment heavily laden with hypocrisy, since the production was imbued with the religiosity of the Catholic Church. The company frequently appeared dressed in cassocks and cottas; the smell of incense permeated the stage; and scenes were punctuated with *a capella* choral renditions of the liturgy of the Tridentine Mass (*Credo, Agnus Dei*) etc. This *mise-en-scène* seemed consciously constructed as a veneer concealing the darkness of the cruel and empty world beneath, as if the Cardinal's hypocrisy now extended to all.¹

The actors were now compelled to develop their characterisations in response to this agenda, and an extensive use of improvisation resulted in an extreme focus on the psychology of the characters. These emerged as a parade of the psychologically damaged, the superstitious, the world-weary, the cynical and the vicious. Even those,

¹ Another programme note quoted *The Book of Ecclesiastes*: "Vanity of Vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

like Delio, in whom some optimism might have been expected to reside, did not remain untouched by the all-pervading pessimism.

Most critics noted the consequent novelty in the interpretation of Anastasia Hille's Duchess,¹ which made a strong impact because it resulted in the very unconventional playing of key familiar scenes.² Another programme quotation from *The Book of Ecclesiastes*: "All things are full of weariness", seemed to sum up her sense of cynicism and ennui. The Duchess's transgressive marriage was presented as a neurotic response to her entrapment in a dysfunctional family. Consequently, even before the intervention of her brothers, it appeared a disaster area, igniting her frustrations to powerful effect. With some justice, Donnellan himself commented of this Duchess, "At times, she's a screaming termagant", adding "I never foresaw how far we'd go down that road" (Nightingale, "*Duchess of Malfi* in Permanent Rehearsal Arrives").

John Russell Brown was not over-happy with George Anton's Bosola. As

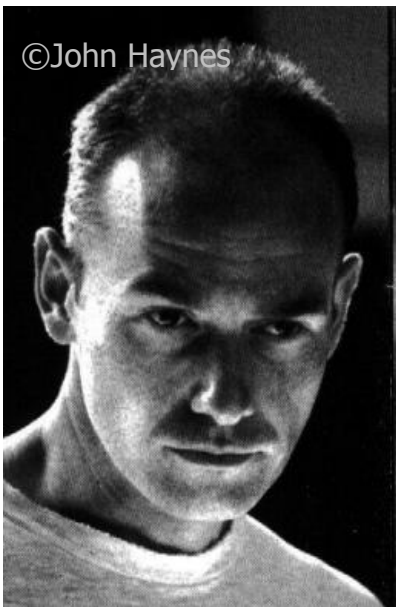
¹ For example, described by Clive Hirschorn in the *Sunday Express* as "a sexy, worldly, hard-drinking, chain-smoking manipulator" which he felt, like all the roles, was well acted, although "more Donnellan than Webster."

² Benedict Nightingale in *The Times* described at length the action of Act 3, Scene 1 in performance, and his response to it. At the moment that Ferdinand has secretly entered the Duchess's bedroom and holds a knife to her throat. Suddenly,

...Hille's Duchess slaps Ferdinand to the floor, leaps onto him, menaces him with the dagger, then laughs, coolly pours herself a Scotch, continues doing her hair, and makes mocking monkey noises while he wildly blusters and bangs into the furniture. Then the mood switches, and she is cuddling and comforting him before it switches again, and he makes a blundering exit, haplessly mouthing promises never to see her again. Incredible, absurd, an extreme, example of the way contemporary directors impose 20th-century psychology on Jacobean melodrama? Well, go and see for yourselves. It may sound as if Donnellan is more trick cyclist than responsible producer; but that is far from the effect in the theatre. Rather, you feel you are witnessing the half-comic, half-horrifying death throes of a dark, deep bond that perhaps only twins can fully understand. What Donnellan does is substitute human richness for theatrical stereotype.

already noted, he compared this production to the one at Greenwich Theatre the previous year, and observed, "...in both, Bosola failed to make a strong impression" (332). He noted that Donnellan had made extensive use of improvisation "as a means of involving the actors' own instinctive reactions in performances and making their own individualities more adventurously and strongly present" (332). He deplored Bosola's loss of "about half his lines" and as a result of both factors, felt that this Bosola played "against the dominant style of the production by standing coldly apart and seeming to lack a personal instinct toward action" (329).

George Anton is a Scot and his Bosola was distinguished by the actor's retention of his native dialect. This served to present him as an outsider when



George Anton

heard next to the 'cut-glass' English accents of the Arragonian court. However, it was not as severe a contrast as the ferocious Glaswegian dialect adopted by Tom Mannion in a later production.¹ In the latter, it served to underline not just Bosola's difference but also his sense of scalded alienation. Anton's Bosola was by contrast, a conformist. Dressed, as I have indicated, as an Italian Fascisti completely in black, with army shirt, breeches, jackboots and occasional forage

cap and greatcoat, this Bosola was clearly a soldier. In a radio interview (P. Allen), designer, Nick Ormerod, indicated that the concept for this costume came from George Anton himself. It evolved with the development of the character in rehearsal

¹ RSC 2000.

and, in keeping with the "permanent rehearsal" brief, was evidently still evolving during the run of the play. For example, there are indications from reviews of the earliest performances that Anton was scar-faced and wearing an eye-patch at the start of the run.¹ By the time I saw it a few days later, both had vanished and neither are in evidence on the video recording.

But, as well as a soldier, Anton's Bosola also had the distinct air of a scrupulous servant. Formal bows as well as sharp military turns framed almost every interaction with his employers, and his bearing, when not simply military, seemed noticeably servile. It was characterised by the avoidance of eye contact with his superiors, a characteristic common both to the soldier (face forward and standing to attention) and the servant (head bowed and body stooped). What was lacking in this interpretation, by dint of cuts from the text, was the malcontent whose cynicism and critical intelligence begin by attacking social inequity and injustice and end in a metaphysical pessimism. Apart from an element of apparent spiritual questing, absent also was "the fantastical scholar" or even, to any real extent, the subtle intelligencer. Certainly, the action of the play requires Bosola to earn his keep as a spy, and to advance his position by cunning, all of which Anton's Bosola performed. Yet, so strongly stated was the soldier/servant role that it was the perception of Bosola as victim that predominated, to the extent that at some moments the figure of Büchner's Woyzeck came into my mind. His moments of success, such as the ploy with the apricots, were characterised by an almost manic euphoria, implying more luck than judgement in the ruse. In this perfectly legitimate reading of the role, Bosola unwittingly laid the traps in which he himself became ensnared. What was

¹ - "Bosola...with his Scottish accent, his eye patch and scars" (Jongh 3/1/1996).

- "Bosola...played as a scarred Scottish squaddie" (Taylor 4/1/1996)

added to the role (or uncovered if one believes Donnellan's picture-restoration metaphor) was the sense of Bosola's spiritual desperation impelling him on a quest to transform himself.

George Anton's Bosola was in many ways as original an interpretation as that of Scott Handy's Ferdinand and Hille's Duchess, although it is fair to say that this came over less memorably in performance. When I first saw the production twice on stage in 1996, like John Russell Brown, I was disappointed with his presentation. Now, having revisited it many times since on video-tape, I feel that my disappointment was attributable more to the striking originality of the interpretations of the Duchess and Ferdinand which threw Bosola into the shade. That this happened in performance was undoubtedly a fault of Donnellan's editorial decisions. But the recorded production enables many of the subtleties of Anton's performance to emerge for analysis. For example, it is now interesting to observe that, although his lines were severely cut, the morally ambiguous environment of the production was entirely congruent with Bosola's liminal status in the play. He no longer had the lines to operate fully as moral commentator through direct audience address, yet the original touches in the development of his character compensated for this. They may have been more Donnellan than Webster, but they allowed Bosola's passage through the play to encapsulate a moral quest.

For clues as to what might constitute the aim of this quest, we can return to the quotations in the programme. Those quoted so far seem to suggest the absence of any Manichean certainties of good or evil in the world of the play. Elaborating on this, there is a quotation from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* ("If the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and

likeness”), which may be an argument for humanising the play’s characters, as Donnellan chose, by due attention to their psychology. The psychology seemed at times consciously calculated to surprise or even shock, not least in the graphic sado-masochism that found its way into some scenes. As if Webster had potentially not provided enough of this, Donnellan added some of his own, generously extending it to new recipients besides the Duchess. His justification is interesting:

“The play is about humiliation we must welcome into our lives if we’re to discover who we really are,” says Mr. Donnellan. “The Duchess must lose all her vanities, and for her that’s a crucifixion” (Nightingale, “*Duchess of Malfi* in Permanent Rehearsal Arrives”).

If it is a journey through humiliation to the self, it seems that in Donnellan’s reading, Bosola as well as the Duchess makes the trip.

A line in the programme from *Macbeth* may be the most telling of all: “All is the fear and nothing is the love” (4.2.12). As an image of the relationships of the Duchess and her brothers, the Duchess and Antonio, and even that of Julia and the Cardinal, this sentence encapsulates not just Webster’s “gloomy world”, but more so Donnellan’s bleaker reading of it. It is ironical that in Donnellan’s reading - and Anton’s performance - it is not the Duchess but Bosola, the liminal outsider, who seems to be consciously striving for goodness. Consequently, he is the only figure of spiritual hope in the play, even if this hope is finally destroyed. It is this that I will now try to elucidate, through a detailed analysis of Bosola’s journey through the play. I hope to show:

- Firstly, that it was a performance decision to highlight Bosola’s fundamental sincerity (in spite of his role as intelligencer and murderer) in his search for spiritual love in a world of fear.

- Secondly, that the relationships of *all* the characters in the play are shown to be blighted, but that Bosola's quest underpins his relationships with many of them, principally Ferdinand, the Duchess and Antonio. It even seems to present moments of potential positive transformation for them also.

Act One

Bosola's first entrance disrupted the formality and pace of the figures on the chequerboard. He moved with purpose, but unlike the others who walked at a measured pace, he literally ran on. Where they kept to the squares (either backward/forward/left/right/diagonal, as in chess moves, or in simultaneous whole company automata-like turns) his directions observed no rules but simply followed the object of his search (at this point, the Cardinal). Contrary to Russell Brown's assertion that he "stood coldly apart", to me Anton's Bosola seemed energised by a desperate urgency. He approached the Cardinal, not as this moment is usually played, with menace and suppressed anger, but as a supplicant, body bowed and hands joined together as if in prayer. This almost became a default mode for Bosola at certain moments throughout the play, and the idea was followed through in the dialogue:

CARDINAL: Would you could become honest.

BOSOLA With all your divinity do but direct me
 The *way* to it

(1.1.39-40)

Here Bosola's lines were played without a trace of the irony with which they are customarily delivered. Anton placed a stress on the word "way" which suggested that Bosola genuinely sought reformation. Taking this further, at the moment he uttered the word, he knelt before the Cardinal and clasped his hand. Giving an interesting

pre-echo of his final words, "Mine is another voyage" (5.5.105), this Bosola seemed to regard himself as a pilgrim, seeking not just reformation but redemption. Although perhaps not naïve enough to believe that the Cardinal as a man could offer him redemption, kneeling to him suggested that Bosola retained a faith in the sanctity of the Cardinal's office. His genuflection appeared to acknowledge the Catholic doctrine that a priest's authority to convey forgiveness does not come from himself, but from Christ, and suggested that this particular Bosola's conscience was rooted in a conventional Catholic theology.

His slighting did not involve the physical exit of the Cardinal, who instead simply turned back into the statuesque containment of the chequerboard, his movement echoed by a simultaneous turn in unison by the whole automata-like company, and Bosola's exclamation, "Are you gone?" This interesting convention was subsequently deployed throughout the play: while characters were momentarily active outside the limiting confines of the chequerboard, they were able to refer to, point at, and even touch the characters that remained like statues within it. So Bosola, while continuing his conversation with Antonio and Delio - literally pursuing them between the stationary 'chess-pieces' of the court - could point at the actual figures he passed to illustrate his court/hospital analogy:

...where *this*
man's head lies at *that* man's foot, and so lower and
lower
(67-8)

In this context, even his use of the word "geometry" seemed to refer to the nexus of relationships established by the chequer board.

From the moment of the Cardinal's "slighting" the pattern of movement clearly established Antonio as "lord of the ascendant" (as Bosola later

addresses him); where Antonio led round the board, Bosola followed until, his declaration finished, Bosola did not exit, but was himself absorbed within the chequerboard, and in turn objectified by Delio who pointed at him and commented,

I knew *this* fellow seven years in the galleys
For a notorious murder.

(69-70.)

Antonio's reply,

'Tis great pity
He should be so neglected: I have heard
He's very valiant.

(73-5.)

was similarly delivered staring at the 'waxwork' exhibit of Bosola. The waxwork remained in position until re-animated by Ferdinand's mention of Bosola to the Duchess at 1.2.

FERDINAND: Sister, I have a suit to you.

DUCHESS: To me, sir?

FERDINAND: A gentleman here, *Daniel de Bosola*,
One that was in the galleys –

DUCHESS: Yes, I know him.

FERDINAND: A worthy fellow h'is: pray let me entreat for
The provisorship of the horse.

DUCHESS: Your knowledge of him
Commends him and prefers him.

(213-18)

At the mention of his name, Bosola broke from his fixed position and moved first stage left, then upstage round the perimeter of the chequerboard, before finally approaching the Duchess from upstage centre and standing to attention in time with the completion of her last line. Something similar occurred a few lines further on when the Cardinal urged Ferdinand,

Be sure you entertain that *Bosola*
For your intelligence: I would not be seen in't. (224-5)

Once again, as his name was spoken, Bosola sprang to life; on this occasion executing a military half-turn to face the two brothers. Both movement sequences, involving Bosola responding like an automaton to voices unheard by himself, became a powerful metaphor for his manipulation by his masters and suggested the limitations of his personal freedom of action at this point in the play.

Ferdinand's interview with Bosola, seeking to employ him as a spy (231-291), threw up some interesting and original ideas, exploring the power and sexuality of both men. It began with an assertion of superiority by Ferdinand who moved off while talking, requiring Bosola to follow. The impression was conveyed - contrary to at least the surface of the dialogue - that Bosola was once again suing for office. The dialogue was crisply edited and the resulting brief responses gave an undercurrent of aggression to the exchanges. For example, at the line, "There's gold" (246), Ferdinand threw the moneybag contemptuously at Bosola's feet; Bosola's riposte about metaphorical showers and thunder was cut leaving just the curt reply, "Whose throat must I cut?" (249) Ferdinand's subsequent instruction concerning the required observation of the Duchess, and his comment, "She's a young widow:/I would not have her marry again." (255-6) led to a brusque and understated, "No sir" (256) from Bosola. But, he accompanied it with a half-turn away from Ferdinand, which the latter clearly read as an implied mocking knowingness on Bosola's part. Ferdinand's response was an immediate and shocking display of anger with the lines,

Do not you ask the reason: but be satisfied
I say I would not (257-8)

...which were screamed at Bosola in such uncontrolled petulance that the audience might assume it stemmed from Ferdinand's sense of guilt and inner insecurity. The

action was sufficient to arrest Ferdinand's progress around the stage and to give the initiative to Bosola who now approached him quietly with the words,

It seems you would create me
One of your familiars (258-9)

...while looking at the surrounding chequerboard figures as though they were the others who currently fulfilled that role. Given this Bosola's previously-established religious sensibilities, his citing the likelihood of damnation as a reason to reject the princely bounty was, for once, believable and succeeded in discomforting Ferdinand with an apparent assertion of moral authority, as Bosola accompanied the rejection by kneeling and offering back the moneybag. Ferdinand's petulance transformed to sulkiness as he refused to take it back, almost inferring by the word "you" stressed in the lines following, that Bosola was a spoilsport after the trouble that Ferdinand had taken specifically for him:

FERDINAND: There is a place that I procur'd for *you*
This morning, the provisorship of (my sister's¹) horse.
Have you heard on't?

BOSOLA: No.

FERDINAND: 'Tis yours: is't not worth thanks?
(268-70)

What followed Bosola's acceptance and submission was the introduction of a surprising piece of directorial subtext. As he broke away and repeated his new job title, Bosola made the words "The provisorship of the horse" sound like the euphemism for some bizarre sexual practice. He then turned back to Ferdinand and, after uttering the words, "say, then my corruption/Grew out of horse dung" (286-7) reached out his hand and extraordinarily caressed Ferdinand's cheek. Ferdinand responded to this simultaneous sexual approach and breach of social etiquette with a

¹ The words underlined were interpolated into the text.

reflex thrusting away of Bosola's hand with his own, which still held the moneybag. But Bosola then subverted this action by retaining hold of Ferdinand's hand, simultaneously, grasping the moneybag with his other hand, while kneeling to kiss the captured hand with the words, "I am your creature" (287).

This sequence was executed in the blink of an eye, but contained a wealth of dramatic and thematic possibilities that, as I will later explain, were developed in the subsequent encounters of both men, and in the interaction of each with several other characters in the play. The flirting with sexual and class taboos encapsulated in this moment echoed the central taboo broken by the Duchess in her wooing and wedding of Antonio. Ferdinand, while rejecting (as if by reflex) this advance by his servant, in a later scene used a similar approach to Bosola. Ferdinand's confused sexuality - which many productions more often explore in relation to incestuous longings for his sister - was here given a fresh and interesting twist.

On one level, Bosola's sexual approach towards Ferdinand might be seen as that of a cynical chancer. On another, it could be seen as another part of his quest for love; the "corruption" in this context only stemming from the association of this affectionate gesture with a bag of money. The interplay between sexuality and power that Bosola demonstrated in this scene with Ferdinand was further explored in the sexual encounters of Bosola and Julia, and these, in turn, echoed the arena of dangerous, and ultimately fatal fetishism between Julia and the Cardinal. Essentially, a heady mix of sex and power was thematically central to Donnellan's interpretation of the play. Additionally, the notion of a homosexual subtext to Bosola's relationship with Ferdinand also cast a refracted light on the former's interactions with Antonio.

Other productions have acknowledged the way in which Webster positions Antonio and Bosola to make their situations parallel one another, but this is conventionally limited to the social position of both men as servants and confidants of an aristocratic mistress. Perhaps Donellan - as a gay man – envisaged another level on which this parallel could be seen to operate. Certainly a feature of this production was an ambiguous tension in the scenes in which the two men interacted, and an apparent increasing emotional closeness between them as the play progressed. For this reason I feel it necessary also in this analysis to focus on the presentation of Antonio, especially in his relationship with the Duchess, since this impacts on his relationship with Bosola.

For example, Act One crucially concludes with the Duchess's wooing of Antonio (1.2). This production featured one of the bleakest readings of their marriage that I can recall. Played as the disastrous emotional response of an assertive woman to a claustrophobic and repressive family environment, it depicted her and Antonio as socially and psychologically incompatible from the start. Even in their wooing he appeared repressed and aloof and she slightly mocking and superior. One might assume from what we saw that, even without the cruel events that follow, this marriage was doomed. As the progressive souring of the relationship between the Duchess and Antonio developed, the closer seemed the parallels in status between Antonio and Bosola. This point was not lost on at least one of the critics. Commenting on the Duchess, James Christopher writes,

In some respects, she uses Matthew McFadayan's unremarkable Antonio in the same vein as her brother Duke Ferdinand uses George Anton's scarfaced and equally unremarkable Bosola. Like Kleenex (Christopher).

Act Two

There were significant cuts and textual re-ordering in this act. Bosola's first scene dialogue with Castruchio¹ and the Old Lady vanished and, with it, not only Bosola's social irony and caustic misogyny but also all of his malcontent musings on mortality, decay and human vanity (2.1.1-65.). The loss was significant in that the latter would presumably have sat well with Anton's reading of Bosola as someone fundamentally seeking metaphysical rather than physical advancement. I suspect that the lines, which advance character but not plot, were cut to assist running time. Their loss, in itself, does not suggest that Donnellan weighed this aspect of Bosola's role as less significant than other thematic issues.

A seamless link was achieved between the conclusion of the scene in the duchess's chamber (1.2.) and Bosola's presentation of the "apricocks" (2.1.) Instead of an exit the duchess remained onstage embracing Antonio, and then stripped from her gold sheath dress to just French knickers and elbow-length white gloves. Then, as Bosola appeared downstage and directly addressed the audience with his description of how the Duchess,

...waxes fat i' the flank;
And, contrary to our Italian fashion,
Wears a loose-bodied gown...
(69-71)

members of the company visibly assisted her into amply-padded gown, as described. Her subsequent first steps were of a woman so obviously well advanced in pregnancy that it immediately provoked audience laughter.

¹ The character of Castruchio was completely cut from the play.

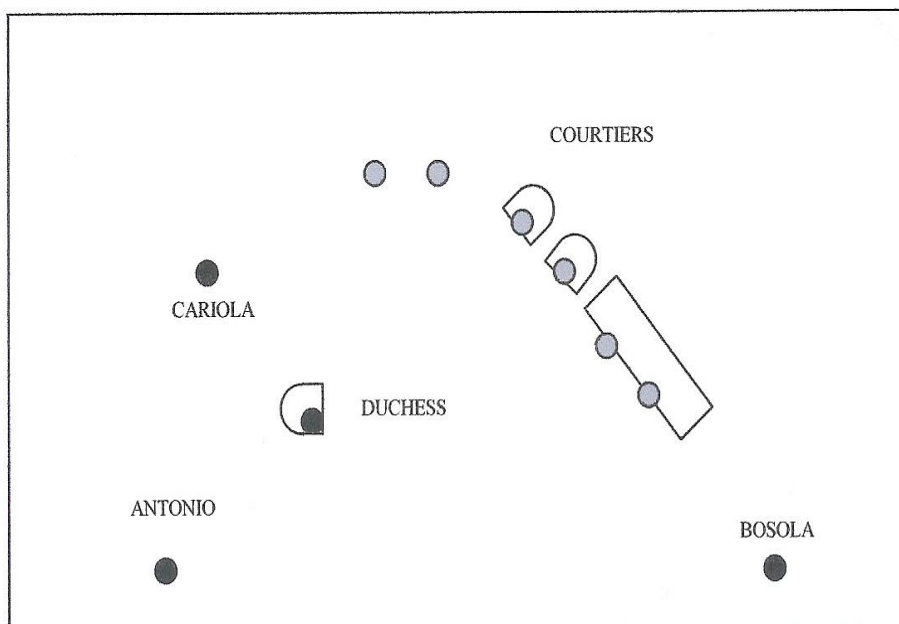
The assembling company simply but effectively created the Duchess's Presence Chamber, with a bench and chairs in line for courtiers¹ on a diagonal USC to DSL. The Duchess sat on a chair CR facing them with Antonio and Cariola behind her. Bosola stood formally at the downstage end of the courtiers' chairs, like a butler bearing the tray of apricots. There was a palpable tension between the Duchess and Antonio in the dialogue over the protocol of hat wearing at court (122-32). Her boredom and irritation with what she saw as Antonio's unadventurous conservatism, showed a growing disillusionment in the marriage even at this early stage. Bosola intervened, stepping forward and bowing low to present the "apricocks," drew an unconvincing sycophantic "aahh!" of admiration from the courtiers as he unveiled the fruit. Returning to his former position but remaining at attention, he timed his interjection about them being ripened in horse dung, stopping the Duchess chewing with her cheeks full. After a tense moment, her raucous laughter relieved the atmosphere and gave the cue to the rest of the court to join in. When a po-faced Antonio declined her offer of a taste, a number of courtiers' hands shot up, like schoolchildren anxious to be chosen by the teacher, and she threw the fruit to them.

The performative quality of court etiquette as a kind of game was clearly evoked, with Antonio apparently reluctant to participate.² Bosola, on the other hand was keen to show himself a player. Because of the retention of some of his Act I

¹ As with most modern productions, there was a blurring of the distinction between noblemen courtiers and officers of the household.

² If only the production had retained Antonio's Act I critique of the court and its "flattering sycophants" (1.1.5-22), a different gloss might have been placed on his reticence; for the Duchess's courtiers took their cue for laughter from her in a manner that Ferdinand would surely have approved, and Antonio, following his own injunction, might then have been seen to be performing the "noble duty" "to instruct princes what they ought to do". Lacking this, Antonio's response seemed merely dyspeptic, signalling his personal alienation from the Duchess but not necessarily from her court.

critique of the court, ostensibly his position could be seen as hypocritical as any of the other courtiers surrounding him. Yet his actions were not those of the “flattering pander”. The formality of his stance throughout the scene signalled that he was an employee, standing not seated like many of the others. Likewise, the “jest” over the horse-dung was tuned to be simultaneously participatory yet mocking. In different ways, both Bosola and Antonio stood aloof from the Duchess. Their respective stage positions, mirror-like DSL and DSR reflected this.



Stage positions. (2.1.)

After Bosola’s ruse with the apricots and the Duchess’s precipitous exit into labour, the relationship between Bosola and Antonio was further explored, with Delio as another figure in the equation. As Antonio addressed Bosola and the Officers, Delio sat on a chair in their midst and calmly lit up a cigarette. Antonio’s nervous insecurity was accentuated when one of the officers stifled a laugh at his order that they all were to be locked into their chambers and, after their dismissal, Antonio took

I have been setting a figure
For the Duchess' jewels. (20-1)

Bosola, advancing the intimacy, moved towards him and confidentially enquired into the findings, but this overstepped the mark in both protocol and body language. Antonio attempted to reclaim his authority by grabbing the torch and shining it in Bosola's face interrogating him about his presence. For once, given this Bosola's sensibilities, the explanation that he had come to say his prayers was just plausible. Antonio's subsequent anger and voiced suspicion that Bosola may have poisoned the Duchess, elicited a curiously deferential insult from Bosola, which almost sounded as if it should have been prefaced, "Please forgive me for saying this, but..."

You are a false steward. (35)

Antonio responded aggressively, dropping his books –and with them the horoscope – and pushing Bosola forcefully back against the SR edge of the proscenium. He was stopped, not as the text dictates by a sudden nosebleed – this was cut – but by what appeared a sudden change of thought. He let go of Bosola and, in another extraordinary interpolation from an earlier scene, spoke the single line,

I do understand your inside (2.1. 86)

In its proper context, the line is elucidated by Antonio's following explanation and injunction:

Because you would not appear to the world
Puffed up with your preferment, you continue
This out-of-fashion melancholy. Leave it, leave it. (2.1.88-90)

It is possible that this is what Antonio meant but, transposed to this new context, it was impossible to tell, because nothing but Antonio's single line was included in the performance. If anything, the heightened emotional temperature at this point, and Bosola's ambiguous body language, threw a different and greater significance onto

the line. It became evident that Donnellan intended the audience to make a strong connection between Antonio and Bosola at this point. More significantly, from then on, the two men were also aware of it, because with Bosola's next line "Do you so?"(87) he knelt to Antonio like a supplicant. Whether this gesture was genuine or not, it fitted the pattern Bosola had established earlier in kneeling first to the Cardinal then to Ferdinand. On both previous occasions, a conventional gesture of obeisance to a liege lord had been infused with something else. With the Cardinal it had accompanied an expressed desire to be shown the true way to an honest life; with Ferdinand it had been accompanied by an apparent sexual advance. What this same gesture now made to Antonio meant was unclear. Was it a simple attempt to wrong-foot the steward and win his trust, or a genuine gesture of allegiance? Antonio seemed confused, staring at Bosola for some seconds before clicking his fingers to move him away, then turning slowly to exit. Bosola immediately sprang up and used his torch to find the dropped horoscope.

Donnellan's re-working of the text in this scene strongly suggests he was pushing an agenda of his own in the development of the relationship between Antonio and Bosola. Yet, it is hard to see exactly what was being expressed at all, since their relationship remained inchoate and their words and gestures ambiguous. What the intervention did do quite effectively, however, was to convey some of the confused emotions that both men undoubtedly possessed towards each other at this juncture. In this respect, Donnellan's instinct to intervene textually was perhaps justifiable, as the changes illuminated features consistent with his interpretation of both characters so far, and they did not undermine or contradict anything that we learn about them elsewhere in the text. Although it is possible to imagine that Donnellan might have been able to suggest what he did without textual intervention,

in this way the expression was starker; less an example of restoring an old picture than lighting it in a new way.

Act Three

This act further explored the cross tensions in the relationships of the Duchess Ferdinand, Antonio and Bosola, often playing scenes in counterpoint. Significantly, Bosola provided the foil for each of the others as the action in 3.1. clearly demonstrates: as the Duchess left Ferdinand, Bosola announced his presence with a bow and, in response to Ferdinand's request, reported the rumour that the Duchess "hath had three bastards" (59). Suddenly energised, Ferdinand made to pursue the Duchess (who had by now exited upstage) but was stopped by Bosola, who ran after and physically restrained him. The remainder of this scene was played with pace and energy, and a physicality which reprised the sexual undercurrents of the earlier encounter of the two men.

As soon as Bosola touched Ferdinand, the latter turned and grabbed him, continuing the interrogation very closely, almost embracing him. Seeming to want to dilute Ferdinand's anger toward the Duchess, Bosola introduced the possibility that she had been bewitched. At the reference to sorcery, Ferdinand gently touched both of Bosola's cheeks, then released him and walked DC. He stopped and turned towards Bosola, questioning his belief in the power of charms. Antonio's Bosola, of course, clearly had a profound belief in such supernatural powers, and with the words' "Most certainly" (69), he knelt to Ferdinand to persuade him of this conviction. Ferdinand again grabbed the kneeling Bosola, cupping his hands around his cheeks. Bosola stood, and Ferdinand, retaining his grasp, walked him backwards, pronouncing his denial of the power of charms to "force the will" (73). Suddenly, he

stopped, pulled Bosola towards himself and, in an extraordinary piece of stage direction, kissed him full on the lips. There was a long pause before Ferdinand pushed him away and announced,

The witchcraft lies in her rank blood (78)

quickly walking USC pointing off to indicate "her". Continuing the convention of simultaneous but separate action, the Duchess immediately re-entered and sat CR, followed by Antonio stripped to the waist standing CL, drinking scotch. They formed a cross in their positions between Ferdinand and Bosola, as Ferdinand announced his intention to "force confession from her" (79) and enquired of Bosola about his "false key/Into her bedchamber" (80-1). As Bosola handed over the key, he asked Ferdinand's intentions, but when rebuffed, bowed submissively then stood to attention facing UC. Ferdinand continued, walking toward the Duchess and looking fixedly at her,

...He that can compass me, and know my drifts,
May say he hath put a girdle 'bout the world
And sounded all her quicksands.

BOSOLA: I do not

Think so.

FERDINAND: What do you think then, pray?

(84-7)

Bosola broke from the formality of his military stance and stepped forward gesturing his wish to tell the truth without giving offence.

BOSOLA: That you
Are your own chronicle too much, and grossly
Flatter yourself. (87-9)

Furious, Ferdinand pushed him back violently, but seemed to change his mind. He stopped himself, and stepped back, asking for Bosola's hand. Bosola slowly extended his arm at shoulder height. Ferdinand took his hand then knelt, abasing himself to Bosola, kissing his hand.

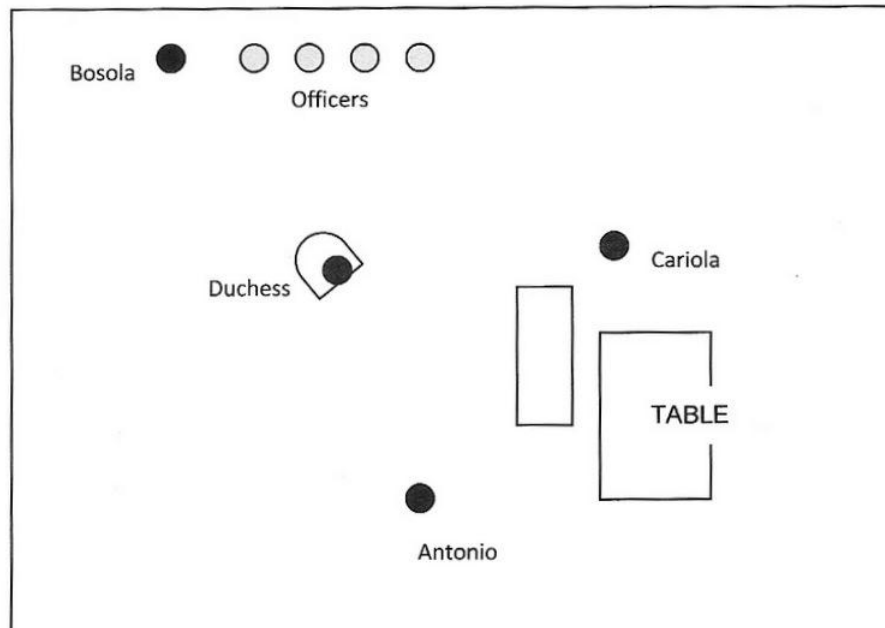
...I thank thee.
I never gave pension but to flatterers,
Till I entertained thee. (89-91)

At this point, the Duchess came in with the first line of the next scene (3.2.), cutting Ferdinand's "Farewell" and his sententious couplet to Bosola.¹

The convention of simultaneous but separate action in this scene, and the positioning of the actors (literally bisecting the other pair's performance space) was clearly another attempt to underline parallels in the two relationships. It served not only to link the Duchess with Ferdinand, but once again reinforced the closeness of Antonio and Bosola. This deliberately played against the physical action between Ferdinand and Bosola. The suggestion that Ferdinand might respond positively to Bosola's sexual overtures, and especially his abasement in recognition of the integrity of his spy, now increased the tension considerably. The conflict in Bosola's loyalties was now explicit; he was impossibly torn between his liege lord and potential lover, and the other to whom he had also knelt and who had professed to "know (his) inside" (2.1.86).

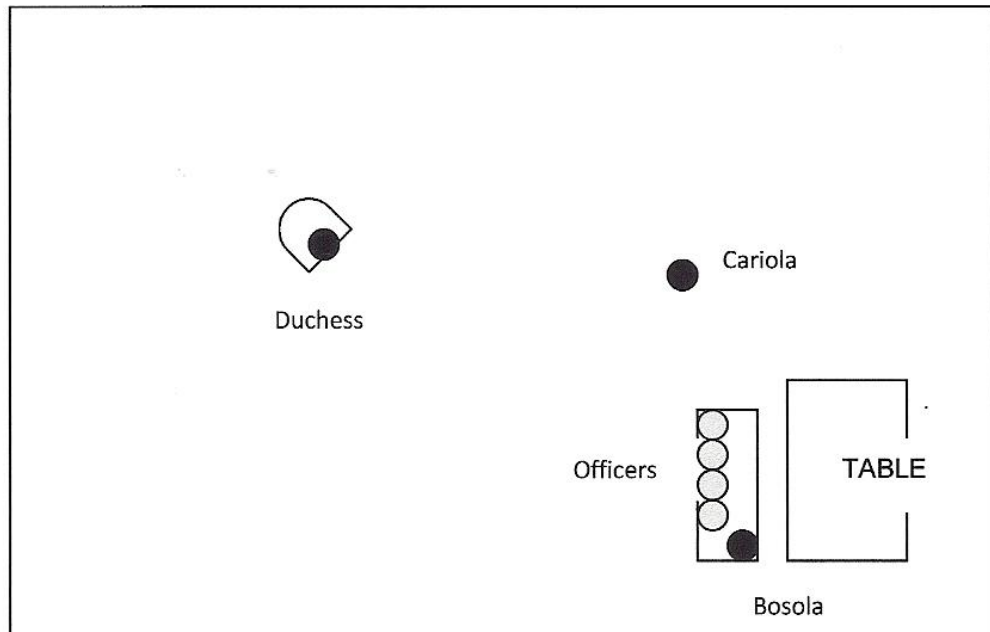
The scene at night in the Duchess's bedchamber (3.2.) proceeded briskly, given the previously established tensions between her and Antonio. After the crisis of discovery and Ferdinand's exit, Antonio and the Duchess barely had time to assimilate the danger before Bosola knocked. His response to the tale of Antonio's alleged treachery was muted, until the Duchess's command to call up the officers. His earlier aside, "This is cunning." (171) was transposed to just before his exit, where it gained in emphasis.

¹ That friend a great man's ruin strongly checks
Who rails into his belief all his defects. (92-3)



Stage positions for Antonio's arraignment (3.2.)

Antonio's dismissal in front of the assembled officers was immediately followed by the Duchess's sounding of the officer's for their opinion of Antonio, gesturing for them to sit on the bench to her left. Their responses fully confirmed the previously intimated impressions of court competition and sycophancy, as they verbally almost fell over each other in their attempts to denigrate their fallen steward. Bosola, who sat facing downstage at the end of the bench, was physically close but psychologically separate from them. Their litany became almost a canonic chorus, until they were stopped by the Duchess's shrieked command, "Leave us" (227). Stopping Bosola alone to ask his opinion of the departing officers, he replied condemning them as rogues and impugning their motives. At "Alas poor gentleman" (241) he bowed his head as if in a courteous gesture to the absent Antonio.



Stage positions after Antonio's departure (3.2.)

DUCHESS: Poor? He hath amply filled his coffers. (244)

On her line the Duchess moved upstage of Bosola, circling him cautiously finally ending USR. He continued looking front in his soldier/servant stance.

BOSOLA: Sure
He was too honest...
...Let me show you what a most unvalued jewel
You have, in a wanton humour, thrown away,
To bless the man shall find him. (244...251-3)

“Let me show you” was uttered as a request with an implied question mark. He broke momentarily from his rigid military stance, to half-turn upstage to face, seeking her permission to proceed. She consented with an interpolated, “Proceed” and he turned again to the front, stepping forward as if to a mark the delivery of a formal speech prepared by rote. The speech was heavily cut.¹ What remained, however, became an

¹ Presumably, the reference to Antonio as a soldier was lost because it did not sit so well with the character as presented, or with the period setting. After her interjection about Antonio's degree, Bosola's next two lines were also cut, and with it some of the effrontery of his response.

effective riposte because of its economy; Bosola simply turned briefly upstage, looked at the Duchess and challenged her with the single line,

You shall want him (264)

Sensing its effectiveness, he immediately turned back and continued his oration. So seemingly humble and understated was the delivery that, for only time I can recall, the surreal cynicism of some of Bosola's imagery¹ did not raise a single laugh in the audience. Instead, the Duchess was plausibly overwhelmed, and in a tremendous surge of emotional release went to him and grabbed his hands then hugged him as she explained,

This good one that you speak of is my husband. (278)

He pulled away shocked, then stooped, bowing his head, as if suddenly granted an unexpected honour. Emphatically she declared,

I have had three children by him. (283)

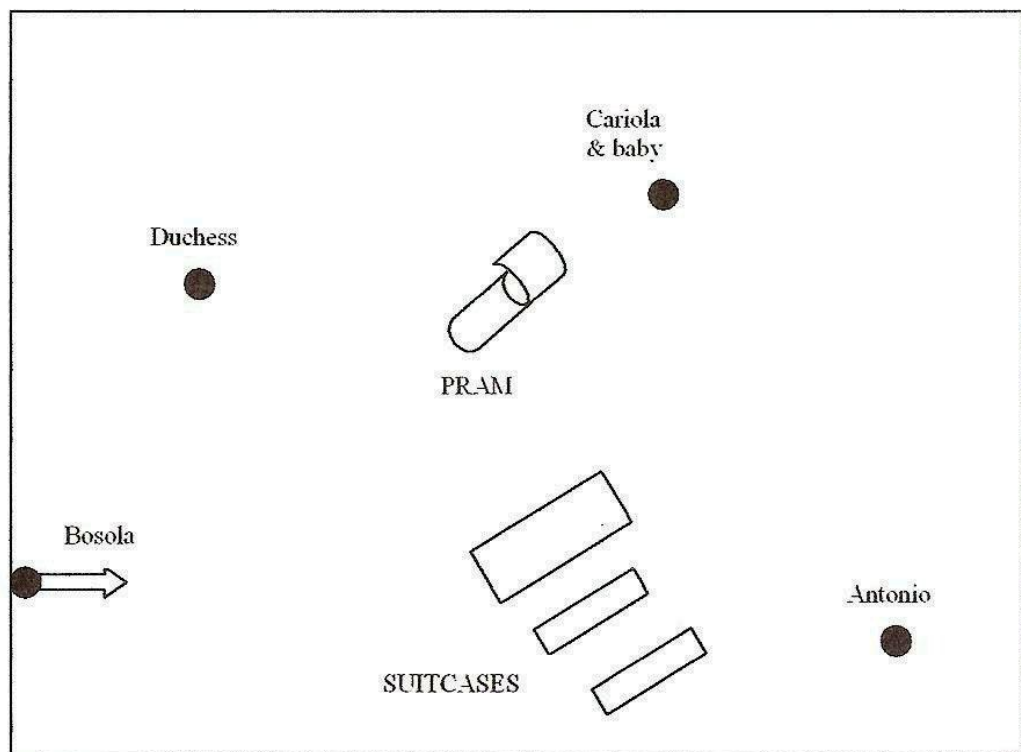
He knelt as though overwhelmed, at first holding both her hands, then with his hands around her waist, as – in a gesture reminiscent of Ferdinand's earlier one with Bosola - she cupped his upright face in her hands, and he began (in another heavily cut speech)² to praise her.

¹ I would sooner swim to the Bermudas on
Two politicians' rotten bladders, tied
Together with an intelligencer's heartstring,
Than depend on so changeable a prince's favour (269-72).

² The cuts to Bosola's outpourings are worth some comment. The reference to an "unbenificed scholar" (286) was not missed with a Bosola whose academic background - due to other cuts - was referred to nowhere else. His reference to the conversion of the Moors and his heraldic conceit concerning Antonio's fame similarly were probably deemed too period-specific or obscure. A bigger loss was his comment on the Duchess's sense of meritocratic justice (287-9), an abiding issue for him and one that linked him strongly with Antonio.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Delio's reminiscences of Bosola as the "fantastical scholar" (40) from Padua were not considered important enough to retain. This was a pity, since the portrait would not have been inconsistent with the character obsessively searching for a spiritual and moral identity that George Anton had created.

The road near Loretto (3.5.) was established simply by props and costumes. All characters wore outdoor coats; suitcases and trunks were visible, a pram was



Stage positions (3.5.)

prominent centre-stage, and Cariola carried a baby in her arms. The Duchess and Antonio were physically far apart from the start, their manner tetchy and irritable, reflecting the continuing decline in their relationship. The Duchess moved erratically from the agitated (nervously chain-smoking throughout) to the self-consciously performative, almost as if she was satirizing her own role as Duchess of Malfi, enacting her own tragedy in the grand manner.

As soon as Bosola (wearing greatcoat, scarf and forage-cap) entered, Antonio ran to him, pulled out a pistol and held it at his head. Bosola prostrated himself on the ground, holding up the letter he carried for the Duchess. His message delivered and cynically received, he exited the way he had entered. The news did nothing to draw the Duchess and Antonio together. At the line "O be of comfort!" (72), he attempted to embrace her but she angrily pushed him away with the response,

Must I, like to a slave-born Russian,
Account it praise to suffer tyranny? (76-77)

Her words, in this delivery, were less the condemnation of a general injustice than an expression of individual aristocratic hauteur; they put Antonio firmly back in his place. At their parting kiss, she even turned what is usually played as an expression of sorrow, or even a premonition of death, into a rebuke for all the insecurity, hesitation and reserve that he had displayed throughout their relationship.

Your kiss is colder
Than that I have seen an holy anchorite
Give to a dead man's skull. (89-90)

These lines gained significance by being quoted in the programme. Donnellan was clearly treating them as the defining image of a cold and loveless marriage.

After his departure, her line, "My laurel is all withered" (93) was taken literally to refer to a buttonhole flower. If it had any symbolic significance, it may have signified the end of their relationship in her mind, for she discarded it with as much cool disdain as her farewell to Antonio.

The stage direction that Bosola should enter "*with a guard with vizards*" (95) was not as much ignored as subverted. The "troop of armèd men" (94) described by Cariola marched on from SR, dressed as Bosola had been, in forage-caps and greatcoats, but Bosola was not among them. They distributed themselves around the

stage to block all means of escape and stood at ease and, suddenly, Bosola's commanding voice came from offstage, physically and emotionally distanced until:

DUCHESS: ...Come, to what prison?

BOSOLA: To none.

DUCHESS: Whither, then?

(106-7)

Bosola entered CSR and stood before her. The whole troop of soldiers together stood sharply to attention.

BOSOLA: To your palace at Malfi¹

(107)

Bosola and the soldiers maintained these positions to the end of the scene, while the Duchess was free to move among them, still casually smoking. But the shift of power had been powerfully signalled from the moment of his entry. Bosola had no need of a 'vizard', since his role as soldier was mask enough. That his words promised re-assurance was a reminder of the ambiguity in his role as a servant. The Duchess also seemed to now acknowledge the masks they all were wearing and were forced to wear, and the military precision employed by the soldiers in the scene reminded us of the fateful metaphor of the chequerboard. All of these elements combined together, as at the end of the scene, the company conspired with the Duchess, to each play out their part. Re-energised, she delivered the last two lines² once more in the grand manner. In unison, the company of soldiers executed a smart turn with a click of heels. Bosola made a deep bow to the Duchess, turned and marched off. After a long pause, the Duchess walked over to the luggage and sat on a trunk to finish her cigarette, as the curtain slowly fell for the interval.

¹ Interpolations underlined.

² Bent to all sways of the oppressor's will:
There's no deep valley but near some great hill. (142-3)

Act Four

This act is crucial, not only in the climactic enactment of the Duchess's murder, but also for the consequent transformations of Ferdinand and Bosola. Unsurprisingly, this production was replete with psychological detail in its presentation.

In 4.1., the Duchess paced frenetically around the space, once again smoking and repeatedly refilling her scotch glass from a decanter on the table. Following the previously established convention, Bosola followed her, as if invisible, closely pointing out aspects of her behaviour to Ferdinand. After Ferdinand's exit, a lighting change from green to candle half-light signified Bosola's entry into the Duchess's time and space. For Ferdinand's unlit visit the stage was plunged into a dark blue, as a convention for pitch black. This meant the audience could see what the characters could not; significantly, that Bosola was actually still present and complicit in the action. It was he who handed Ferdinand the "dead man's hand" to present to the Duchess.

As Ferdinand hurriedly exited, Bosola relit the candle in anticipation of the Duchess's screams. These were surprisingly brief and quickly changed to knowing laughter as she recognised the 'schoolboy' trick. She gingerly picked up the hand in a handkerchief and plopped it into a wastepaper basket. But, Bosola did not permit the mood to lighten. He swiftly took her hand, sympathetically gesturing for them both to kneel and pray to steel themselves for the next horror: an upstage traverse drew back revealing "*the artificial figures of Antonio*" (55) and a baby child hanging from nooses. A long silence followed, in which the Duchess, schooled in patrician

stoicism, stifled her emotions. Patting Bosola on the chest to reassure him of her mental stability, she stood and chuckled. But her restraint could not disguise the depth of her emotional trauma and, significantly, it was this failure that began to undermine Bosola's own self control. His short interjections became incrementally more emotional as if to compensate for the lack of hers. At the same time he seemed to recognize his own inadequacy to truly assist her or prevent her persecution; and, given his religious sensibilities, seemed to sense that the Christian fortitude he urged offered hollow comfort.

During this sequence, the extremity of Bosola's anguish was mostly conveyed through body language. He followed her every move as she crossed towards her desk, picking up a small object (possibly a ring) from it, then looked away as his words failed to convince. When she asked directly whose role it was to kill her, he was overwhelmed and declared his intention to intervene. Kneeling to her, he flashed a cautionary glance over his shoulder, before cautiously uttering the words which signaled his change of resolution:

BOSOLA: Come, be of comfort; I will save your life (86)

In Anton's interpretation, one felt that his expressions of pity were absolutely genuine, leading one to speculate on what ruse he might have employed to carry out this pledge if the Duchess had responded positively to his offer of rescue. Instead she was dismissive and his despair accumulated:

DUCHESS: Indeed, I have not leisure to tend so small a
business.

BOSOLA: Now, by my life, I pity you.

DUCHESS: Thou art a fool, then,
To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched
As cannot pity itself. (87-90)

Unable to bear this any longer, Bosola suddenly made a dash stage right, as if about to exit, but stopped as he realized the Duchess was quietly sobbing, ran back and desperately hugged her. This was sufficient to open the emotional floodgates and she burst into choking tears. Throughout all of this, Cariola (still at prayer in a trance-like state) seemed oblivious of everything.

With the Duchess and Bosola locked together, this seemed a point at which the action might have changed significantly. It presented a reading of what is quite inexplicable in some performances (and therefore frequently cut): Webster, at this moment, brings in a servant, whose entrance appears to have no obviously practical function and who speaks only one line. Here, the entrance (made by one of Bosola's soldiers) served to break the spell. Both the Duchess and Bosola realized, not only that they were both being watched (presumably by Ferdinand), but also that there were expectations from the watcher about both their roles. The two instantly separated and the metaphorical masks went back in place, but not before an ambiguous action on the Duchess's part. As she pulled herself together with the words,

Puff! Let me blow these vapours from me. (91)

she appeared to place the ring that she had previously picked up into Bosola's hand before turning to address the soldier. Was this a signal that she believed Bosola's offer of help and was inclined to accept it? If so it came too late to be of use. Bosola moved extreme stage right and watched.

DUCHESS: What are you?

SERVANT: One that wishes you long life. (92)

The soldier's extended vowel sound on the word "long" took on a sinister knowing

resonance in the context of the Duchess's previously expressed desire to leave the world's "tedious theatre"; and, consistent with this metaphor, her response to him was aired with faux melodramatic theatricality.

DUCHESS: I would thou wert hanged for the horrible curse
Thou hast given me. [Exit Servant.] (93-4)

As she declared her intention to "go pray", Bosola sprang into action, as if responding to a long awaited cue. He grabbed the Duchess and (the still praying) Cariola with her crucifix, and joined them both, kneeling in prayer and making a sign of the cross. A long pause ensued, then the Duchess suddenly sprang to her feet and completed the unfinished sentence she had previously uttered, with the words, "no/ I'll go curse" (95-6) before launching into a semi-hysterical tirade. Bosola attempted once again to calm her with a restraining embrace but she retained sufficient authority to push him back and dismiss him with a gesture.

A return to the opening full green light accompanied Ferdinand's re-entry, applauding with the cry "Excellent..." (111), illustrating the effectiveness of his ploy by throwing the waxwork baby at Bosola. The change also signalled Bosola's return to the role of observer of the Duchess. In response to Ferdinand's idea of bringing her "to despair," Bosola's injunction that he should instead furnish her with "beads, and prayer books" (118-19) gained power by the failure that we had just witnessed of his attempt to support the Duchess in prayer. Clearly shaken by the Duchess's responses and prompted by the strength of his own religious convictions, Bosola was desperately striving to mitigate the intensity of Ferdinand's tyranny, but he was self-evidently still in thrall to his master. His refusal to see her again was quickly qualified,

BOSOLA: Never.
FERDINAND: You must
BOSOLA: Never in my own shape
(133-4)

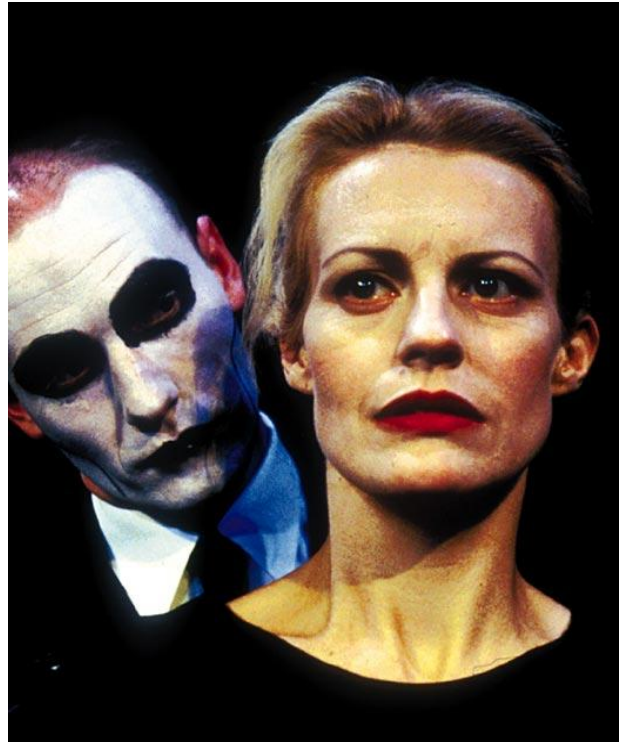
and he diluted his defiance by accompanying these words with hand on breast and head bowed as if craving Ferdinand's indulgence. As Bosola left to prepare his disguise, the action moved seamlessly into the scene of the Duchess's and Cariola's deaths (4.2.).

Any production of this play, at this point, invites speculation on Bosola's state of mind. That is especially true of this production which was so predicated upon a psychological approach to characterisation. With Anton, Bosola's manifest desperation to help the Duchess in the previous scene had clearly been suppressed by his default role as servant. His deferential intercession on her behalf was the weakest attempt at resistance and doomed to failure.¹ This Bosola had worn a series of metaphorical masks from the start, principally soldier/ servant/ intelligencer; each one serving as a defensive survival mechanism in a dangerous world. But the masks also served to excuse the Bosola who was on a quest to "be honest" from the consequences of his actions; the perennial excuse of 'only obeying orders'. In such a reading, the transformation into the tomb maker and executioner that followed seemed plausible evidence of a psychic split in the character,² which remained unhealed until after the Duchess's death.

¹ Once again other dramatic figures come to mind, not just Büchner's Woyzeck, but also Strindberg's valet, Jean, from *Miss Julie*, reduced to impotent inaction at just the sight of his master's boots.

² This idea was developed further in the Red Shift production (1982/3), where two actors took on Bosola's role at this point (McCluskie 60).

After the departure of Ferdinand's 'masque of madmen',¹ Bosola's reappearance as tombmaker/bellman made no attempt to represent him according to stage directions as "*an old man*" (113), but was characterized by a striking theatricality. Dressed in a black three-piece suit and tie, wearing white face-paint with black-shadowed eye sockets, black lips and bright orange hair, this was a figure that might have served as Death in a modern dress performance of *Everyman*.



Bosola & the Duchess (4.2.)

The image triggered a range of associations: undertaker; clown; death's head; and was chillingly effective. Whether or not this was another costume decision down to George Anton, within the play it seemed to come from a place beyond even Ferdinand's imagination as costumier for his murderous anti-masque.

The Duchess seemed at first to greet this macabre visitor and his words with equanimity, although her chain smoking and frequent refills from the scotch bottle suggested this was superficial. Cariola was more obviously frightened, clutching a crucifix and nervously nodding. During his "wormseed" speech (123-32), Bosola stretched out a sinister black leather-gloved hand and let fall open a tape measure with which he proceeded to measure her for her coffin. As so often before, the

¹ This was re-devised by Donnellan as a mime sequence by the madmen, telling the story of the Duchess's marriage and the birth of a child. The Duchess was calmly involved, later taking and wearing a property coronet left behind by the performers.

Duchess responded to the performativity of this gesture with a gesture of her own. Picking up a property coronet left by the madmen she placed it on her head and giggling uttered the words, "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (139) only a second later to fling it down angrily in response to Bosola's, "That makes thy sleep so broken" (140). Later, when Bosola described "Princes' images on their tombs" (154) as



*The 'performative'
Duchess (4.2.)*

...bent upon the world the selfsame way they seem
to turn their faces

(159-61)

her response was to fling her scotch into his face, before walking away calmly to refill her glass. When he announced a present from her brothers, he knelt to indicate the black draped bench before turning and sitting in a chair SR. The Duchess, took the drape and pulled it back to reveal a black coffin with brass handles, which had been in the room from the start. Cariola was by now so distressed only stuttered speech emerged.

The executioners, dressed as soldiers, entered (176) and collectively muttered the bellman speech (177-194) while clearing space by moving the furniture to the edges. They then stood in a wide arc across the back of the stage with Bosola in the centre. The Duchess tried to calm Cariola with childcare instructions, setting the crucifix on the ground so her servant could look at that rather than the execution. When she asked about the manner of her death, a soldier let drop the cord in a manner reminiscent of Bosola with the tape measure. As the Duchess trod out her cigarette to speak her last words for her brothers, Bosola – the diligent servant to the

last – took out a pencil and pad to make a note! Four soldiers, masking the Duchess throughout, conducted her execution in silence, justifying Ferdinand's later comment, "Strangling is a very quiet death" (5.4.34). Cariola began a *Hail Mary* but was unable to pronounce the words "now and at the hour of our



The Duchess and executioners (4.2.)

death". The remaining deaths were conducted with brisk efficiency in spite of Cariola's resistance. Bosola took the crucifix and held it throughout. At the end the bodies of the Duchess and Cariola lay, their heads facing USC and DSC respectively. Ferdinand re-entered as the soldiers, making the sign of the cross, laid the bodies of the babies in a line USR to DSR. Bosola knelt by them to pray, berating Ferdinand without looking at him with the line

Alas! How have these offended? (257)

The dialogue that followed, in which Ferdinand repented and Bosola recognised his betrayal, was played at a low volume suggesting a suppression of the emotion that both men felt. However, the tension between the two was reflected in a progressive acceleration in pace which culminated in lines being overlapped. Both were drawn to the body of the Duchess, Bosola covering and uncovering her face with his handkerchief when requested. As Ferdinand's distraction and Bosola's anger mounted the volume increased, with Bosola nodding his head as if Ferdinand's words merely confirmed behaviour he had long anticipated. Eventually, on the lines

And though I loathed the evil, yet I loved
You that did counsel it... (330-1)

Bosola's patience broke and he laid hands on his master, shoving him violently back. Given the suggestion of hint of a sexual relationship between the two men, Bosola's violent physical reaction on the word "loved", here suggested another level of betrayal by Ferdinand. Ferdinand, however, was beyond noticing this assault as, with a rising yell and arched back, he fell to on all fours and crawled to an exit as his 'lycanthropic' transformation began.

Bosola also underwent a transformation. He made the line "Off, my painted honour" (335) literal, as he wiped off the white face-paint he had worn throughout. Then, on the last word of

I would not change my peace of conscience
For all the wealth of Europe (339-40)

the soldiers who surrounded him executed a simultaneous military half-turn that transformed them once more into pieces on the chequerboard, and Bosola was truly alone with body of the Duchess. Initially frozen in inaction at her apparent revival, as soon as she spoke, he was as frantic as he had been earlier when resolved to save her life. Lost again, his tears were accompanied by the *Kyrie eleison* sung by the company.

Focussing exclusively on the role of Bosola, in a way that one normally would not in performance, it is possible to see the extraordinary demands made on the actor by the emotional switches in this extended scene. Additionally, since Anton's interpretation stressed throughout qualities of vulnerability and underlying sincerity, it was even harder to reconcile this with the cold efficiency with which he executed the murders. One was left to speculate simply on the possibility of a mind split by conflicting pressures, but the recurring ideas and images in this

production said something else. The ongoing stress on performativity; the idea of characters wearing metaphorical masks (made literal in Bosola's white face-paint); and the chequerboard figures moving like automata suggested, as they had throughout, a world in which personal freedom for action was severely curtailed. Consistent with this, the last 12 lines (wherein Bosola speaks of his decision to "speedily enact" the events that will bring the play to its climax) were cut. The scene ended with the words,



Bosola and the dying Duchess (4.2.)

My estate is sunk
Below the degree of fear

(362-3)

spoken as he slowly wiped away the tears he had dropped onto the Duchess's cheeks.

Act Five

In an uncut performance, it is in this act that Bosola progressively takes centre-stage as protagonist in bringing the tragedy to its conclusion. Here the production had not only to contend with massive cuts, but Donnellan had made the (not unique¹) decision to keep the Duchess as a ghostly presence (thankfully no longer smoking!) on stage to the end. It is true that this device acknowledges the undoubted manner in which she haunts the text in this act. However, with the cuts

¹ Philip Prowse and Phyllida Lloyd used the same device in RNT productions in 1985 and 2003, respectively.

and the ensemble staging decisions that Donnellan made, it meant that Anton's Bosola stood no chance of making a significant or memorable impact, save in one curious and wrong-headed piece of business in his scene with Julia. In spite of this, by continuing to focus on Bosola, it is still possible to trace the *through-line* that Anton had developed for the character from the start and throughout this act.

Scene 1 was cut completely. Understandably, the dialogue between Pescara and Delio over the award of Antonio's forfeited land to Julia had little relevance here. Less understandable was the loss of the lines (5.1.62-74) in which Antonio explains to Delio that he intends that night to enter the Cardinal's chambers and throw himself on his mercy. This - and other cuts to which I shall refer - seemed deliberately designed to dislocate the action of the final scene in both time and place.

After the mad Ferdinand ran amok (5.2.), in the presence of the Cardinal - and not just one doctor but a whole medical team! - Bosola entered late (108) and bowed to the Cardinal, who responded with an interpolated, "You!" With Bosola seated in a chair, the Cardinal paced behind, nervously interrogating him. At "Why do you look so wildly?"(111), he grabbed Bosola by the lapels and heaved him up, then checked himself, patronisingly patting Bosola's shoulders before giving him the order to seek out and kill Antonio.

Julia entered DSL, made her appreciative aside noting Bosola's physique (121), then exited USR. Her upstage re-entry was observed by the Duchess, who sat USC. The scene that followed took as precedent its treatment of the sexual interaction between Julia and Bosola from the previous cold and abusive interplay between her and the Cardinal (2.4.). There, the physical contact had been aggressive,

with much twisting of breasts and fetishised licking,¹ inducing audible revulsion in the audience, and suggesting a Julia brutalised into a well-developed sado-masochistic appetite. Here, her arrival, advancing on Bosola while menacingly talking of locked doors and confessions, alarmed him even before she produced her pistol. This appeared (tellingly draped in a

rosary) as she declared her intention "to kill (her) longing" (160), scarcely giving time for Bosola to react. Conventionally, at this point, Bosola accompanies his ironic dismissal of her weapon as containing only perfume, with a stealthy approach to disarm her, offering to "arm her" instead with his embrace. Anton's Bosola,



Julia (Nicola Redmond) (5.2.)

however, seemed still unnerved which perhaps explains his bizarre response. Keeping his distance, he offered to "arm her" (165) instead by undoing his fly button and dropping his trousers. Julia replied by instantly discharging her gun into the air, successfully terrifying not just Bosola but the audience as well! Having so evidently gained the upper hand, she advanced on him, reducing him to desperate measures. The sense of his lines took on very different meanings from the literal; everything from "Know you me, I am a blunt soldier" (172) - pleading mistaken identity - to, "You are very fair" (176) - craven flattery. All this was to no avail; she grabbed his chest and twisted, forcing his retreat to the chair DSC where, after thrusting her hand into his underpants bent him forward and anally raped him with the barrel of the gun! Bosola's, "O you are an excellent lady" (197) carried, in consequence - far from

¹ Cleverly setting up the ruse which leads to Julia's demise, where she is easily induced, not just to kiss, but lick the poisoned bible!

pleasure - an expression of pained irony, but it did, at least, have the effect of stopping her. Backing off, then kneeling to him, she slid the gun across the floor to him, with the words,

Bid me to do somewhat for you presently
To express I love you. (198-9)

before herself bending over the chair unambiguously implying it was now her turn! Bosola, barely catching up with the speed of this sudden power shift, was just able to make suitable overtures to Julia to ensure her complicity against the Cardinal, when they heard him returning.

The directorial licence that Donnellan exercised in the action of this scene may have been consistent with his vision of a brutal and loveless world, but in performance it produced a shocking jolt to the progression of the drama. Where the momentum of the play gains energy from Bosola's transformation into revenger, the action here temporarily derailed this process by once again presenting him as victim. Perhaps Donnellan was attempting to apply to Bosola, his previously quoted statement,

The play is about humiliation we must welcome into our lives if we're to discover who we really are (Nightingale, "*Duchess of Malfi*" in *Permanent Rehearsal Arrives*”).

But if that is so, it makes an unwelcome statement about Bosola's quintessential victimhood at the very moment that he is beginning to redefine himself as something else. Even if that is a legitimate reading of the role, one might argue it could be seen to play out that way anyway by the end - and without Donnellan's baroque intervention in this scene.

After the Cardinal's confession and Julia's subsequent murder, Bosola re-

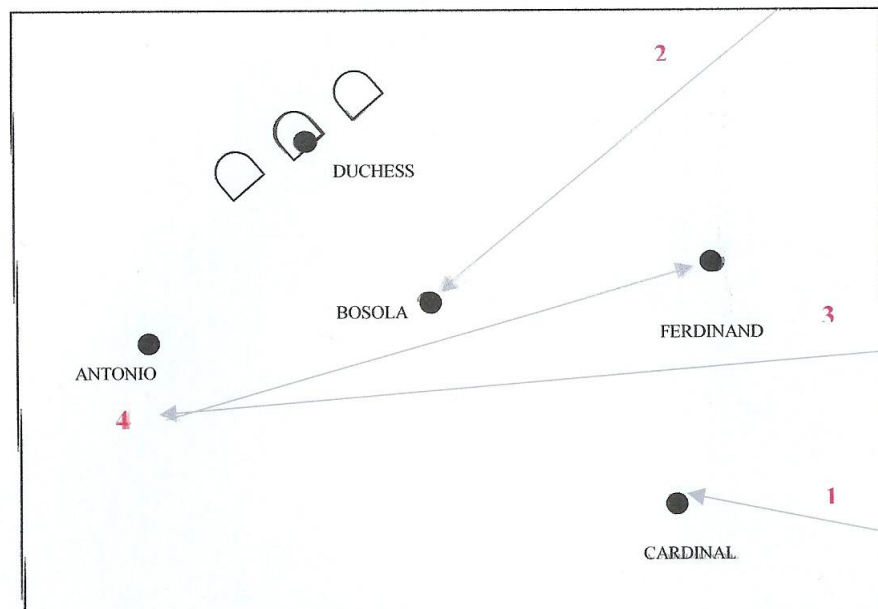
entered and made to menace the Cardinal with Julia's gun; to no effect since the Cardinal pre-occupied himself arranging her body and seeming to pray over it. When the Cardinal eventually slapped the barrel away DS, Bosola responded by flinging the weapon away US. Having reassured himself of Bosola's capacity for Antonio's murder, the Cardinal departed. All reference to a later meeting at night to remove Julia's body, and the presentation of Bosola with the master-key to his lodgings was cut, as was most of Bosola's concluding soliloquy, in which we should have learned of his plan to save Antonio. All that remained of the speech were images of danger and insecurity, "slippery ice pavements" (332) and "the suburbs of hell" (336). As usual, the final sententious couplet, with its image of optimistic transformation,¹ was dropped.

The echo scene (5.3.) was played almost in its entirety and concluded with Delio's offer to "second" Antonio. Before exiting, Delio made an interpolated reference to the Cardinal, which triggered his entrance and introduced a (considerably reduced) conflation of the final two scenes. The courtiers attending the Cardinal were cut, which reduced the numbers just to the principal players and, as I have indicated, there seemed a deliberate attempt to dislocate the time and place of the final bloodletting. Antonio, remained in position CSR from the echo scene. Then, beginning with the entrance DSL of the Cardinal with the words, "O, my conscience!" (5.4.26.) each of the players subsequently entered to take up positions which largely remained unaltered until the end.

The sense of dislocation was reinforced by a directorial conceit that stylised their movement into a totally non-naturalistic spatial relationship. Each character was

¹ O Penitence, let me truly taste thy cup,
That throws men down, only to raise them up! (347-8)

positioned at a distance from the others and faced away from them, whether addressing or attacking them. There was no physical contact at all between the participants so that, for each stabbing blow into empty air, there was a pained reaction by the victim on the other side of the stage.¹ In a sense, the device was a logical extension of the ones that Donnellan had employed throughout; the mechanised figures of the checkerboard; characters discussed and indicated by others in their presence, but without their awareness; the overlapping of scenes; the playing of simultaneous but separate action; and finally, the presence of the dead Duchess seated as witness to the end. What these all had in common was the tendency to objectify and isolate each of the characters, a statement of existential loneliness which, surprisingly, received its one challenge in the brief - and easily missed – piece of action which followed:



Stage positions (5.5.)

¹ The staging would have vindicated Bosola's later comment about the events taking place "in a mist" if only those words had not also been cut!

As the Cardinal entered (1) the *Kyrie* began again and accompanied the action to the end of the play. Bosola ran on, knife in hand from USL to CS (2) in time to hear the Cardinal speaking of his death (29-31) and stood on guard one way, only to turn again as Ferdinand (USL) in full uniform with sabre drawn, ran past him (3) to DSL, close to Antonio. Ferdinand spoke of murder in the dark (37-9) then ran back USR (4). As Antonio spoke of the Cardinal, prayer and pardon (14-5), Bosola responded with text interpolated from later,

I have this Cardinal in the forge already,
Now I'll bring him to the hammer.
(79-80)

Kneeling, he made a sudden upward knife thrust, to which Antonio (some distance away facing off right) reacted. The two played the subsequently heavily cut dialogue leading to Antonio's death, facing away from each other. However, on his last line,

...let my son fly the courts of princes. (72)

Antonio did not die but remained writhing in his death throes.

The action moved seamlessly into Scene 5 with the Cardinal's musings on hell and conscience (1-7), before he turned to face Bosola, as if the latter was approaching from DSL. Bosola, himself still SC, turned as if the Cardinal was DSR and attacked him accordingly. Ferdinand, intervening, ran wildly right then left, eventually turning DSL to stab his brother and Bosola, and being stabbed in turn by Bosola. All were dead by the time Delio re-entered, baby in arms, to conclude the play. As the resurrected company gathered around the seated Duchess, as if for a family photograph, Delio spoke his dismal epitaph, then left a final statement hanging in the air,

These wretched eminent things
Leave no more fame behind 'em than should one
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow;
As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts,
Both form, and matter.- I have ever thought
Nature doth nothing so great, for great men,
As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth... (113-19)

None of Bosola's final speeches remained to afford any justification for his actions, nor was any apotheosis rendered by the final sententious couplet¹, which vanished in the edit.

Only one brief and possibly significant moment of muted warmth had come earlier, just before the deaths of all the principals, which (given Antonio's prolonged expiry) was arranged to be simultaneous. As Bosola announced his "weary soul...ready to part" (74-5), his legs buckled and he collapsed. Like the others, who addressed their final remarks to the void in keeping with the established spatial convention, he addressed the Cardinal without looking at him:

I do glory
That thou, which stood like a huge pyramid
Begun upon a large and ample base,
Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing. (76-9)

But then - in a moment that gained weight because it defied the established convention – both he and Antonio turned simultaneously towards each other, and held hands as they died. Albeit brief, a gesture of affection seemed to crown their ends. How far Donnellan intended this gesture to mark the culmination of Bosola's quest is open to speculation. It was not obvious in performance and, given the "permanent rehearsal" ethos of the company, may even have been a piece of business introduced by the actors that mushroomed and then vanished during the course of the

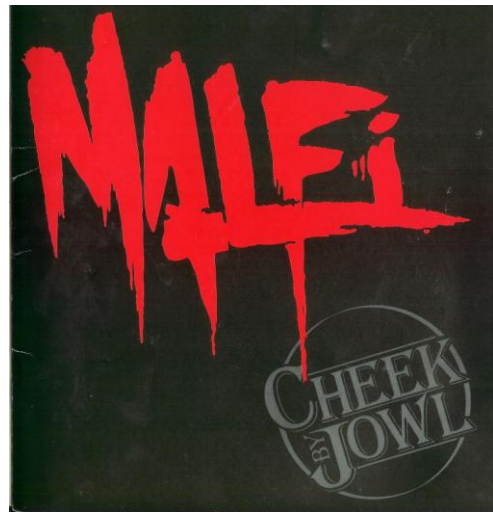
¹ Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
Which nobly beyond death, shall crown the end. (120-1)

run. It is however clearly discernible in the video-recording and, because it in some way brought the *through-line* of Bosola's journey to an end, seemed satisfactory - unlike some other elements of this production.

In his 2002 book, *The Actor and The Target*, Donnellan includes a section on verse speaking. It is illuminating because it provides a workable analogy for his whole approach to the performance of a classical text like this one.

Verse works a little like jazz. In jazz there is a sense of what is regular, say 4/4 time; then this is the beat that is 'square'. Jazz is not as independent of beat as it sometimes sounds. Jazz musicians know they depend on a highly disciplined beat that they can then disobey. And this disobedience releases energy.

This is illuminating because it provides a workable analogy for his whole approach to the performance of a classical text like this - and a more honest one than that of "picture restorer". Donnellan's treatment seemed to have the quality of a jazz version of a standard classic. Even the play's title was abbreviated on the front of the programme, suggesting the 'hip' arrangement of an original so well known as to be recognisable in one word. Not everyone likes jazz; purists may condemn the licence taken with the original, or the way in which some see it foregrounding the performer above the work. But, in its reliance on improvisation and spontaneity, it is capable of an energy, originality and insight that can illuminate and cause a reassessment of the familiar.



Programme Cover

And, so with Anton's Bosola, which sadly worked less well in performance than it deserved. Anton is clearly an intelligent and receptive actor, but he and the play were ultimately constrained by the ruthlessness of Donnellan's edit. Nevertheless, it is evident that this well thought-through interpretation of a Bosola, not permeated with cynicism but driven by an urgent spirituality, was strikingly original. It would be interesting to see if such an interpretation could be sustained or even extended by an actor working with a fuller text.

CHAPTER EIGHT: IMAGE & EFFECT

Royal Shakespeare Company 2000

Royal National Theatre 2003

There has been one production by each of the two most prestigious national theatre companies since the millennium. Both were both high concept, predominately visual, hi-tech affairs. The RSC production utilised a fairly 'standard' edit of the text, whereas the RNT employed a textual advisor who cut and re-ordered large segments. I saw both productions on stage and re-visited them several times on video.

8.1.Royal Shakespeare Company 2000

The Duchess: Aisling O'Sullivan

Bosola: Tom Mannion

Directed by Gale Edwards

Gale Edwards, the director of the Royal Shakespeare Company's millennial production of the play, made strikingly different decisions to those of her RSC predecessor, Bill Alexander in 1989. Unlike Alexander's, this was not a historicized production rooted in a definite time and place, but one that took a somewhat nebulous approach to both. Interviewed before the opening, Edwards spoke of her fondness for Greek drama, and the play did seem to be set in the sort of non-specific environment in which Greek drama is sometimes played to suggest universal or archetypal significance. Yet, despite their themes, most Greek dramas employ a conventional reticence in the depiction of onstage violence and, if a Greek model was in mind, Edward's second sentence reveals why the approach may have failed.

I have what is probably a rather gruesome obsession with Greek tragedies which put humanity in extremis. And I find myself engaged

by the challenge of presenting violence on the stage in the television era... (Christiansen).

Dominic Cavendish suggested the challenge was unrealisable for a different reason:

To a modern audience such overt nastiness is no longer shocking. It is the stuff of Tarantino and a hundred horror movies. A film can not only do gore better, it is better able to build suspense. Webster, born four centuries too early, lacks close-ups and jump-cuts ("Better do it by the book").¹

In 1996, Ian Samson had drawn similar cinematic parallels, with the *Cheek By Jowl* production:

Webster's playwriting has much in common with current trends in film-making: his plots are episodic, his action improbable, his violence childish and excessive, and his abrupt, allusive language finds an echo in the modern filmic language of clichés, guns and gangs.

The significant point here seems to be the focus on Webster's "abrupt, allusive language" as well as plot, action and violence, and a comparable point was made by Charles Spencer writing about the 2003 RNT production:

The Duchess of Malfi is the Jacobean equivalent of a schlock slasher movie, in which a helpless heroine is subjected to hideous torture before getting her climactic quietus. What lifts it beyond the ruck of revenge drama, though, is Webster's gift for sudden dazzling poetry. The effect is like finding diamonds on an abattoir floor ("Very Rocky Horror Show").

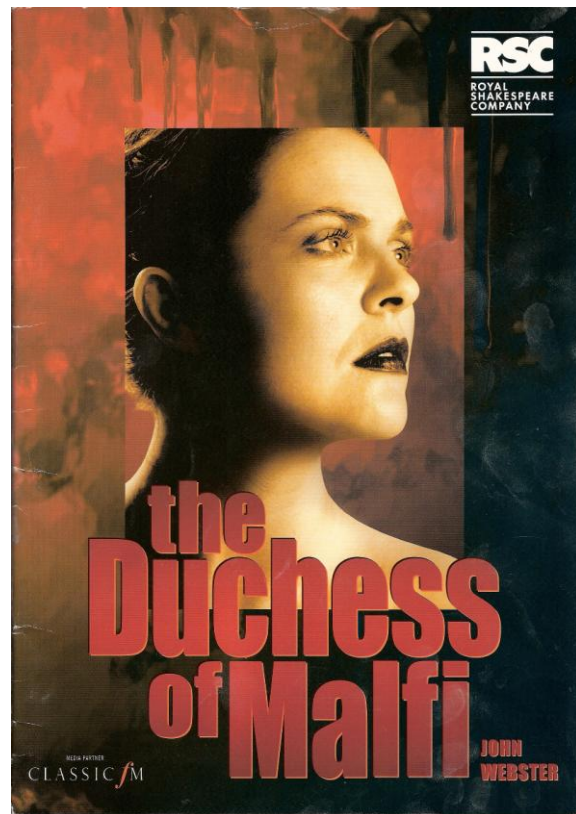
Gale Edwards' production seemed less concerned with "finding diamonds" than giving us the "abattoir floor" (at one point literally). Nicholas de Jongh was outraged:

An act of gross theatrical indecency has been perpetrated. The Royal Shakespeare Company converts John Webster's tremendous Jacobean Revenge drama into the stage equivalent of a Hammer horror movie, with a touch of Rocky Horror chucked in ("Strangled by Hammer Horror").

¹ To my mind Webster's technique seems almost anachronistically filmic at times. The way he presents his audience with sudden shifts of dramatic perspective can seem precisely the emotional - if not the visual - equivalent of cinematic montage with jump-cut, long shot and close-up.

While apparently striving to dislocate the action of the play from a specific locus, her consciousness of presenting a play "on stage in the television era" ensured that the production referenced a diverse range of images that, by connotation, seemed to work against, or distract from, the meaning of the play.¹

The programme notes for the 2000 Barbican performances parallel this. They convey what seems, at first, a refreshing eclecticism, but this soon becomes simply eccentric and confusing. In five A4 pages entitled "The Duchess of Malfi A-Z", 26 alphabetically-listed articles (one for each letter) are presented in a totally arbitrary fashion. Included are comments on words historically relevant to the plot or performance ("Amalfi", "Jacobean Court", "King's Men", "Naples") and glossaries, explaining and expounding on words that appear in the play ("Bellman", "Lycanthropy", "Malcontent", "Quietus", "Zodiac"). Sometimes these are not explanations but quotations from other texts by



Programme Cover

Webster and his contemporaries that also use these words. The contrived A-Z

¹ Ironically, the production made almost no use of the technology of the television era, unlike the Phyllida Lloyd RNT production, which used television monitors to suggest ideas of surveillance and evoked a performative Aragonian aristocracy permanently in the public gaze.

continues with paragraphs on a range of literary influences on *The Duchess of Malfi* ("Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*", "Sidney's *Arcadia*", Donne's *Anniversaries* bizarrely captioned "Xstasies" and Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* captioned "Our Religion"), as well as responses to the play by subsequent writers such as Theobald, Lamb, Eliot and Tynan. Thematic issues are explored under the captions "Characters", "Insanity", "Remorse", "Twins", and "Weddings", and stylistic issues in a lengthy quote from Kathleen McLuskie entitled "Visual Image, Verbal Image". Finally, articles explore the play's 1623 commendatory verse by Middleton ("Under a bleeding eye"), its dedication to Baron Berkeley ("Your Lordship") and the small quantity of Webster's dramatic output ("Goose-quill").

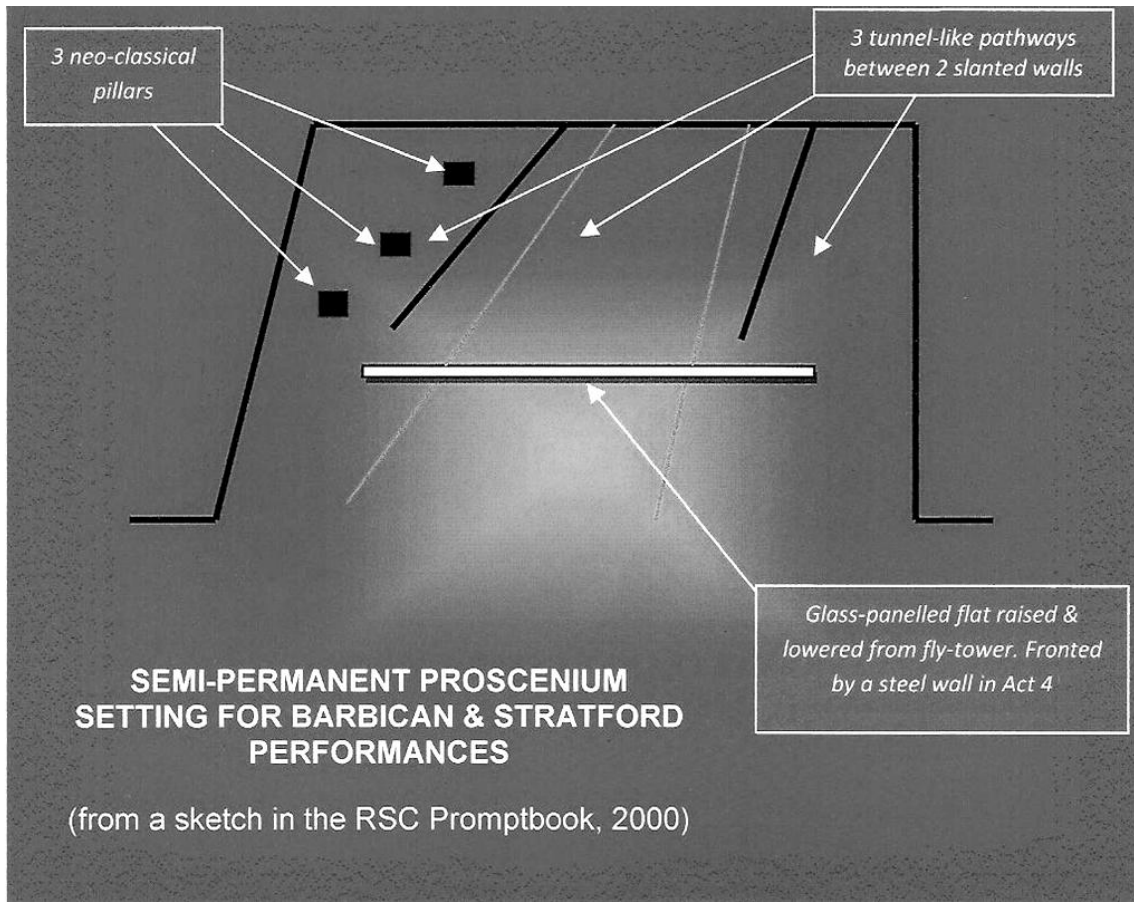
In this scattergun approach, one might welcome the refreshing lack of a directorial line on the play were it not for two articles which then take up four of the subsequent pages of the programme. By their length, these articles seem to be pointers to the director's reading of the text. The first of these by Amina Alyal, entitled "Saint or Merry Widow?" explores the responses of different centuries to the morality and political decorum of the Duchess's secret marriage to her servant. It seems to support a reading of the Duchess in Webster's presentation as "a Protestant martyr assailed by wicked papistry" and continues "Historically, this has subliminally affected the reaction of English audiences: Victorian prudes and Renaissance patriarchs alike find her moving, not offensive." The essay would not have been out of place next to Lisa Jardine's article, "Marriage and English Protestantism", which appeared in the programme for the 1989 RSC production. There it would have sat happily with, and informed Bill Alexander's historicized production. I am hard pressed to see how it had any real bearing on anything seen or heard on stage in the production by Gale Edwards.

The subject of the second essay by Vera Rule appears, however, - somewhat curiously - to be central to Edwards' vision. Quoting Bosola, it is entitled "A Monstrous Desire to see the Glass-house" and focuses on an alleged fascination by Webster for blown glass. Certainly images of glass occur frequently in the play and eight references, including the essay's title, are quoted, together with two more from *The White Devil* and *A Monumental Column*, respectively. The essay expounds in some detail the development of Venetian glass from Murano, and the versatility of the product. It observes that by the seventeenth century its scientific and medical uses extended to the production of spectacles, telescopes, lenses to focus the sun's rays for ignition, cupping glasses for holding specimens of blood or urine, hour glasses, spheres (or crystal balls) and mirrors for divination. It also notes - after the award of a patent in 1606 - the proximity of a glass factory in Blackfriars, close to the play's first performance venue.

The play's frequent recourse to imagery involving glass has been better explored by other critics (not quoted in the programme) who have afforded some rationale for its use. Eloisa Paganelli, for example, has informatively explored it in the context of Webster's pre-occupation with vision and perspective, in both physical and metaphysical senses.

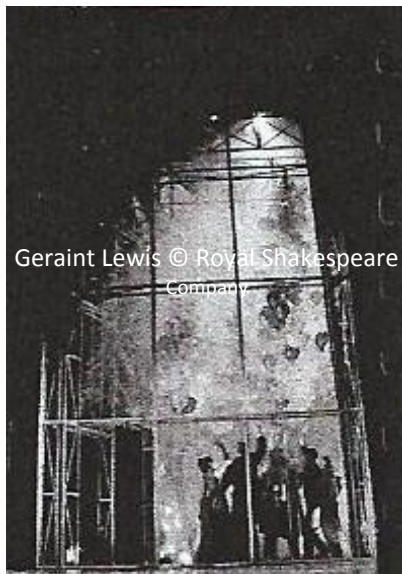
Webster's world is obsessed with problems of sight, not only because sight is subject to deception, but especially because sight itself is intrinsically relative (149).

"The Duchess of Malfi" (is) a play focussing on problems of sight and...abounding in references to optical instruments, optical devices, shadows, mirrors and reflections of all sorts, all of which tamper with ordinary human sight but, from particular angles, reverberate fragments and flashes of truth (151).



Within the proscenium frame, Davison structured a “deep pit of darkness” in which two “dead (ie. unbroken) walls”, on a diagonal from USL to DSC, channelled all movement into three tunnel-like pathways. The predominance of shadow in these, and their convergence into one downstage space, allowed for the numerous episodes of surveillance in the play, and facilitated the murderously mistaken encounters of the last act. The SR tunnel suggested the monumental quality of the environment with three only partly visible neo-classical columns, diagonally echoing the line of the walls. The SL tunnel was generally left open, save during 2.4., where a giant metal cross, leaning against the SL edge of the stage, provided sacrilegious support to a sado-masochistic sexual encounter between the Cardinal and Julia. The central

tunnel was fronted at various points by a large curtain for the Duchess's bedroom (3.2.); by a red door flat, upon which footlights cast melodramatically tall shadows for Ferdinand's raging (2.5.); and a steel-panelled wall for the Duchess's imprisonment (4.1.). But, for most of the time it presented the central image of "the glass-house", a large flat of Perspex panels, through which a variety of spectacles could be viewed:



The Court (1.1.)

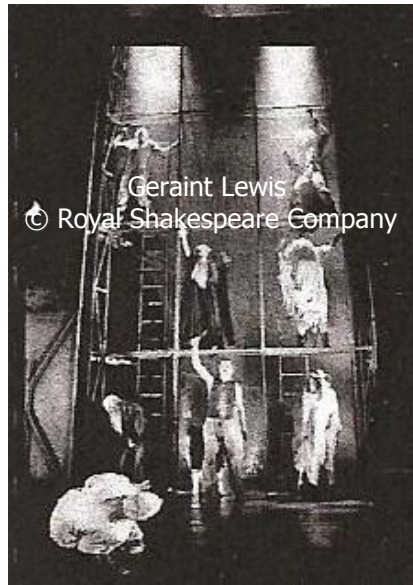
In Act 1, the balloons and ball gowns of the Amalfi court;¹



Waxworks (4.2.)

...in Act 4, the nightmare vision of an abattoir containing the waxwork bodies of Antonio and his son;

¹ All the low resolution photographs in this chapter were taken from a photocopied contact sheet in the RSC Archive in the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford Upon Avon.



...and the spectacle of the madhouse.

Madmen (4.2.)

The visions could be seen as a correlative of Bosola's evocation of the "black register wherein is writ/ All our good deeds and bad, a perspective/ That shows us hell!" (4.2.356-8).

The whole design package was critically not well received. At worst this was the view of a number of critics:

...the designs...not only wrench the play out of its context; but also create the impression that Edwards doesn't greatly care for it, that she thinks it needs jazzing up (Gross, "Theatre" 2000)

Peter J. Davison's set...has a shadowy noirish appeal, but it does little to bring you in, or suggest where you are... (Cavendish, "Better to do it by the book").

... (the) palace...is an abominable mess...Perhaps relocated in the Duchy of Makeshift, it looks like a low-budget airport (steel scaffolding and sheet plastic panes) with one rogue neo-classical column nicked from a Victorian train station (Bassett).

Part of the problem lies in Peter J Davison's design, dominated by a towering, glass-walled rectangular cage. It's fine for spectacular inserts such as the masque of madmen or an abattoir-like exhibition of human carcasses. But it cramps the action and its inner depths remain hidden from the side stalls (Billington, "The Duchess of Mali" 2000).

The set seemed characterised by elements of the 'new brutalism' sometimes associated with 1980's architecture, a style consistent with the costuming decisions.

With the costumes, Sue Wilmington created a world of apparent affluence, with a hint of the 1980s - although de Jongh saw it as "a clichéd 1960s Dolce Vita Italy" ("Strangled by Hammer horror"). This could have provided a post-modern take on the drama, but too often the result appeared like fancy dress. Her designs simultaneously referenced a range of period genres from nineteenth century aristocratic to futuristic science fiction; the courtiers in suits and frock coats; the women in ball-gowns; soldiers in long leather coats with glass-visor helmets with built in laser sights; automatic weapons carried side by side with swords.

These unfocused designs may have been an attempt to respond to Gale Edwards's stated aim of depicting a generalised and timeless "humanity *in extremis*", but too often they confused and muddied what should have been sharp and clear. Where de Jongh felt the use of "Black leather drearily serves as an emblem of kinky wickedness" and Cavendish simply felt the costumes were "very *Star Wars*", Billington observed that the design choices worked against the meaning of the play:

Wilmington's costumes also obscure the play's crucial differences of rank. It's the Duchess's passion for her steward that precipitates events but here the sharp suited Antonio seems as fashion-conscious as his silk-gowned employer. Even the surly spy, Bosola, appears to buy his black-leather macs at the same emporium as the crazily incestuous Duke Ferdinand.

In a production so dominated by design, there seemed little room for anything else original in Edwards's treatment of the text and the design concept seemed so wrongheaded it even turned some critics against the play as a viable piece of theatre:

...Gale Edwards's uninspiring attempts at Webster's greatest play has confirmed my suspicion that his beautifully fervid writing is best appreciated in book format (Cavendish 'Better to do it by the book').

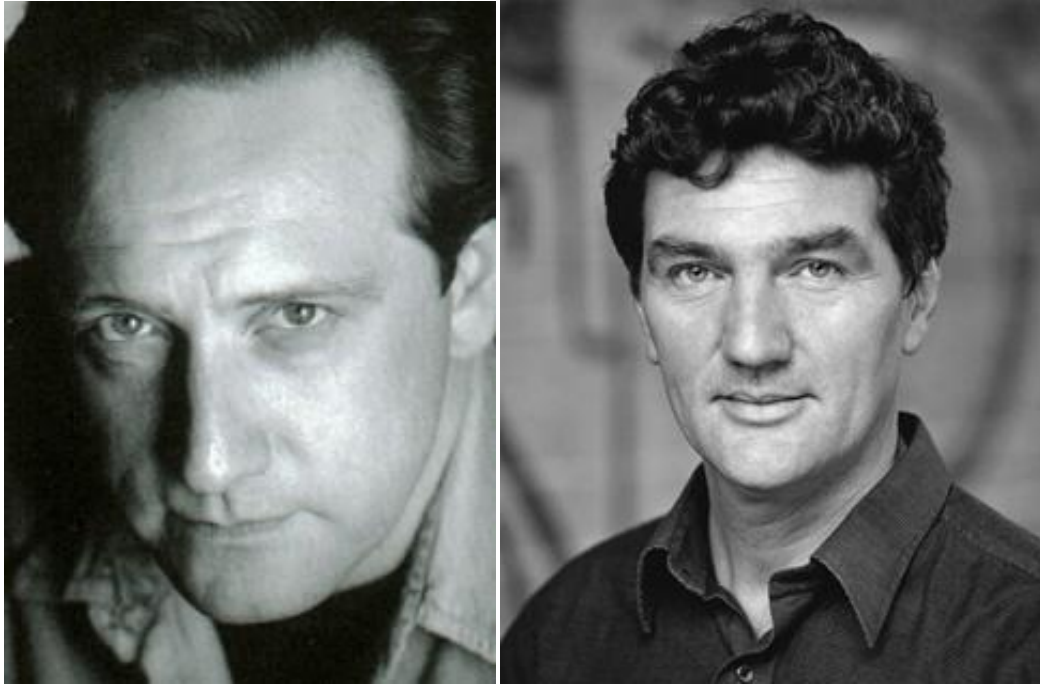
... another classic which is arguably more satisfying to read than to see on stage. It is poorly constructed; even its finest scenes, if they are not properly handled, can seem absurd. What sustains it, on the other hand, is the magnificence of its language: its wit, its eloquence, its daring images, its constant surprises (Gross "Theatre" 2000).

The last writer went on to itemise some of the "exquisite lines" symptomatically excised for Edwards's production.¹ In fairness these amounted to far less than the cuts and re-edits for other more favourably-received productions yet, when coupled with the design choices as presented, Gross found the result "depressing". Despite this, he felt "to some extent decent performances and the text itself get the better of misdirection." Interestingly, he "was particularly taken with Tom Mannion as the hired killer, Bosola."

Mannion's performance received a less negative critical reception than the rest of the cast (and, indeed, some praise), but it is worth noting that he was not the first choice for this role. The actor Neil Dudgeon was originally cast, but withdrew due to ill-health, causing the first night at the Barbican to be twice postponed. Whatever qualities Edwards sought in her Bosola, both actors have similarly respectable theatrical pedigrees; Dudgeon performed leading roles at the Royal Court and RNT, predominantly in contemporary serious drama. Mannion - although he has matched and sometimes echoed Dudgeon's contemporary roles² - has leaned more towards the classical repertoire with stints at The RSC, RNT, Manchester Royal Exchange, and many other venues.

¹ Although cuts in themselves may be no indicator of a cavalier attitude to the text, it is perhaps symptomatic that, in the Stratford 2000 prompt book, some verse passages are rendered as prose.

² For example, both men subsequently played the same role in the West End transfer of the RNT's production of Patrick Marber's *Closer* at the Lyric Theatre.



Neil Dudgeon

Tom Mannion

Both are also familiar faces from the popular television round of soap operas, sitcoms and crime dramas. Both are experienced in comedy roles and can convey an avuncular quality, ambiguously combining steeliness with an underlying vulnerability.¹ However, that the Yorkshire born Dudgeon might have presented a *Bosola* with the same forceful Glaswegian persona incarnated by Mannion seems somehow unlikely. Mannion's brutalised creation, for better or worse, seemed perfectly in tune with the brutal imagery of the design concept for this production. This was an individual, at first sight, like the First Murderer in *Macbeth*, who describes himself as one

Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Hath so incens'd, that I am reckless what
I do, to spite the world. (3.1.109-11)

¹ Mannion amply displayed these qualities in his later Claudius for Trevor Nunn's 2004 *Hamlet* at The Old Vic.



Tom Mannion as Bosola

Other actors have been drawn to make a Scottish association with the role:

Are there modern equivalents for Bosola? Ian McKellen; who played the role in a recent National Theatre production, saw him, in part, as ‘some drunk in a Glasgow street, haranguing the audience’ (Kott).

None of this was in evidence in McKellen’s 1985 performance.¹ However, such thoughts may have had some impact on recent casting decisions. The Scottish actor, Ewan Stewart, played Bosola for the Bristol Old Vic in 1994, and George Anton

¹ In spite of his Scottish surname, McKellen was born in Lancashire.

played him as a Scot for *Cheek By Jowl* in 1996, while Lorcan Cranitch, for the RNT in 2003, retained some elements of the alcoholic haranguer, but directed the Celtic tendency in accent towards his native Irish.

One critic found Mannion's Scottish Bosola totally clichéd:

There should be a fine for directors who use Scottish accents to denote rough, acidly cynical rogues... (Cavendish "Better to do it by the book").

In each of these productions, this decision rendered Bosola aurally a regional outsider to the received pronunciation of the other courtiers, thereby presenting him as psychologically and dramatically 'semi-detached' from the court.¹ This was noted by several critics, even some for whom it had less appropriate associations:

Mannion's west coast Scots accent sounds at points like Billy Connolly, a regional accent supposing him to be lower class (Loveridge).

Mannion ... uses his Scottish accent to suggest an aggrieved outsider at a corrupt court (Billington).

But whether Scottish or not, Mannion's use of accent seemed somehow integral to his performance:

a sense of danger never left his performance, whether he was raging at his masters in his native Scots or disguised as the killer monster in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, telling Aisling O'Sullivan's Duchess in a sinister English accent, to ready herself for garrotting (Nightingale "Don't suffer in silence").

What also struck Benedict Nightingale (and other critics) most forcefully was this Bosola's corrosive rage, which was palpable from his first entrance:

When he strode onstage in tatters, his eyes had the mad, silvery glint yours and mine might also have had if we'd just been freed after

¹ Although there is not the slightest evidence to indicate that he might have done so, it is fascinating to imagine the effect on a seventeenth century audience, if Lowin's Bosola had also employed a Scottish accent. Given the play's contemporary allusions, and the influx of Scots to the English court of James I, it might have created some interesting resonances.

serving seven years in the galleys for doing a corrupt cleric's murder for him. As much as his mouth, they spat daggers.

His position as an outsider was immediately signalled, as Antonio's description of Bosola as one who "rails at those things he wants", was accompanied by the wide-eyed Bosola staring through the window of the glasshouse at the ball-gowns and balloons of the partying Amalfi court. His sense of injustice was writ large, both vocally and physically, as first he knelt, in a sarcastic gesture of respect to the Cardinal's "divinity", and then ostentatiously crawled on all fours after the exiting cleric, as if to demonstrate theatrically his enforced degradation. The exclamation, "Slighted thus!" was accompanied by a self-inflicted blow to his own breast - an oft repeated gesture.¹ When he turned his address to the watching Antonio and Delio, his venom seemed as much addressed at them as courtiers, as to the masters of whom he spoke. Nowhere was this more explicit than, when making to leave (1.1.65), Delio inadvertently laughed at the extravagant stranger. Bosola turned ferociously upon him with an almost screamed threat, "...And yet do not you scorn us..." before spelling out, precisely and menacingly with his hospital analogy, his perception of Delio's position in the court hierarchy, accompanied by placing one hand beneath the other, repeatedly "lower and lower", all the way to the ground. At this point, Delio's sudden recognition of Bosola as the perpetrator of "a notorious murder" chimed perfectly with the perception the audience now had of him as an extremely volatile and dangerous individual.

The sense of danger was also present during his interview with Ferdinand (beginning 231), in which sarcasm and an undisguised contempt permeated his snarling responses. Initially facing each other across the whole width of the stage,

¹ The gesture was probably ironical, although a more recent interpretation (Sebastian Harcombe at West Yorkshire Playhouse 2006) advanced the idea of Bosola as a self-harmer.

Bosola stood unmoving as Ferdinand strolled about and casually assessed his potential employee. Throwing a moneybag to Bosola, he dismissed the sardonic reply, "Whose throat must I cut?" (249), taking Bosola's apparent retention of the gold as consent. This provoked a ferocious response from Bosola, who screamed at him to take the money back. When he spoke of Ferdinand's gift taking him to hell, it seemed almost as tangible a physical destination as the galleys to which his last contract had taken him. Undaunted, Ferdinand urged him to keep his "old garb of melancholy"; on this occasion clearly referring as much to the man's outward display of temperament as his clothing¹ (albeit this Bosola was more inclined towards the choleric than the melancholic). The two men had this in common; Ferdinand's apparent calm control during the whole exchange was a mask, and he was temperamentally kin to his "familiar", as was amply demonstrated by subsequent events.² After Ferdinand's exit, Bosola turned his anger on the audience and, as if pre-empting any criticism from that quarter, ostentatiously pocketed the gold after spitting out the words,

Let good men, for good deeds, covet good fame,
Since place and riches oft are bribes of shame –
Sometimes the devil doth preach. (289-91)

Potential physical violence was also present in Bosola's Act Two encounters. The opening of 2.1 saw both the Castruchio dialogue and character cut. The Old Lady was retained but made much younger, thus enabling her exchanges with Bosola

¹ Bosola's coat was given quasi-symbolic status in some of the later stage action.

² Although Ferdinand conventionally displays a choleric personality type much later in the play, here it appeared almost immediately. When the Duchess's defended those who chose to remarry, with the words, "Diamonds are of most value / They say that have passed through most jewellers' hands"(1.1.299-300), he suddenly lost control, screaming "Whores, by that rule, are precious" (301), threatening a blow from his raised hand.

to take on a flirtatious element, on a par with his later encounter with Julia. The scene now began with Bosola's remark about her make-up, "You come from painting now" (24). The reference to the "deep ruts and foul sloughs" (28) in her face was cut, so his tale of the lady with smallpox played less personally and was received by her, as well as the audience, with mild amusement. However, the coquetry and implied *double-entendre* of her line, "It seems you are well acquainted with my closet" (37) seriously misfired, since Bosola fell upon her in the manner of a manic Scots preacher. The vitriolic misogyny of his description of her closet's contents (38-40) was accompanied by a sudden and prolonged physical assault; grabbing her by the hair, he forced her onto the ground where, while lying on her back, he stood astride her and directed his next remarks to the audience:

Observe my meditation now:
What thing is in this outward form of man
To be beloved?
(47-9)

As he expounded on decay and mortality, he seemed to use her prostrate form as his exemplar for the human body, only finally acknowledging her as an actual person when (by now kneeling upon her, one leg each side her waist) he spoke these last words menacingly to her,

All our fear –
Nay, all our terror-is lest our physician
Should put us in the ground, to be made sweet.
(61-3)

Dismissing her with an interpolated, "Get you gone", he continued his direct audience address, warming to his theme with a litany of observed symptoms of pregnancy in the Duchess. Engaging the audience, he concluded with a long pause followed by a perfectly timed, "there's somewhat in't" (71), which sounded so like a Billy Connolly 'one-liner', that it provoked loud laughter. This was more than just nervous laughter, and it was a measure of the skill of the actor that he was able to win

the audience with this humour, so close to his previous displays of dangerous and violent unpredictability.

He positioned himself by a downstage pillar to eavesdrop upon Antonio and Delio, but they noticed him, and their subsequent exchanges (79-99) reprised their earlier verbal aggression. Bosola's lines from Montaigne about "the souls of princes" (100-111) - encapsulating philosophical arguments about equality and the motivations of nobility and commoner - were cut. The effect was to simplify Bosola's attack. The ruminative scholar and "speculative man" suggested by this passage clearly did not sit well with the angry sociopath so far presented by Mannion, so it was dropped. All that remained was a sarcastic exchange in which Antonio implied Bosola's hypocrisy ("...you would not seem to appear to the world puffed up with your preferment" [88-9]), and Bosola inferred Antonio's ambition ("I look no higher than I can reach" [92-3]). This was cut short by the entry of the Duchess and the court.

The general air of friction and tetchiness continued into this scene with an extremely dyspeptic Duchess lashing out at all around her, including Antonio. Only Bosola seemed capable of arresting this mood with the extent of his candour. When ordering from him a litter, "like one the Duchess of Florence rode in" (115), his response that, "The Duchess used one when she was great with child" (116) stopped her in her tracks with the sheer audacity of his remark. The fact that the Duchess's pregnancy appeared physically obvious in this production¹ may have had something to do with this; as though Bosola was the only honest one present in acknowledging the elephant in the room! In the event, the Duchess's response, after the pause of her

¹ This was in itself an anomaly. As one critic pointed out, "What's the point of the celebrated scene in which Bosola gives Malfi a pregnancy test by studying her reaction to apricots if her tummy already sticks out so far you expect her to give birth onstage?" (Nightingale, "Don't suffer in silence").

initial shock, was nervous girlish laughter. This was also her response to Bosola's comment about the apricots being ripened in horse dung. Staring amazed at him with her mouth full, she sought his deadpan face for corroboration that this was indeed a joke. He remained expressionless until her nervous laughter triggered a wry smile, which in turn released loud laughter all round.

The Duchess's subsequent sickness was characteristically loud, and the ensuing court panic, was greeted by Bosola with jubilant asides (2.2.1-3). This mood extended into his immediate next meeting with the (Old) Lady, which took on a suggestively playful turn by comparison with their last encounter. Bosola spotted the large midwife's basin concealed behind her back and grabbed her, holding her from behind with the basin in front of her stomach, to complement his lines about swelling a woman's belly. He released her as Antonio entered with the officers to make emergency security announcements. Bosola stood apart as the instructions were issued that each officer should be locked in his room, but stepped forward momentarily after their dismissal to cast a suspicious look directly into Antonio's face, before turning and leaving.

A change of one word made it the shriek of "a baby" rather than "a woman" (2.3.1.) that drew Bosola out at night in defiance of orders. There was predictable animosity but less overt aggression than before in his encounter with Antonio. I missed the subtleties that other productions (such as Donnellan's) had given to the developing relationship between the two men in this scene. The possibility of physical violence was forestalled by Antonio's sudden nosebleed (without any scuffle, but accompanied by portentous music) and his dropping of the horoscope before exiting. Bosola's soliloquy as he read the horoscope was marked by the

dynamics of its delivery, as he virtually whooped for joy at each revelation. The predictions of the horoscope were edited, but factual information relating to the time and place of the child's delivery remained, as Bosola delightedly announced the year 1504, reading anachronistically by the light of his battery torch!

The next scene, in which Bosola reports to Ferdinand, contains the significant moment (3.1. 82-93) where the Duke's hubristic balloon is pricked in one sentence by the spy, who is then – unexpectedly – thanked for his honesty. It worked extremely well here; Ferdinand asserting with considerable self-assurance

He that can compass me, and know my drifts,
May say he hath put a girdle 'bout the world
And sounded all her quicksands. (3.1. 84-6)

He turned to walk away, as if the audience were at an end, only to be stopped by the effrontery of Bosola's emphatic,

Think so. I do not (86-7)

Ferdinand listened quietly to the accusation of gross self-flattery then, after an extremely long pause - in which he appeared to make an uncharacteristically detached calculation - he stepped forward and shook Bosola's hand to thank him.

It is interesting to consider why this moment worked so well. A quality that Mannion's Bosola displayed here (and seemed to possess from the start of the play) was, in addition to his corrosive anger, an apparent absolute candour. Perhaps it was precisely because his anger was so incontinently and undiplomatically expressed, that his words appeared to come from the heart. This is what the Duchess seemed to have recognised during the apricot scene and it foreshadowed her disastrous decision to

confide in Bosola after her discovery by Ferdinand. The prompt copy shows that the sententious couplet with which Ferdinand concludes 3.1.,

That friend a great man's ruin strongly checks
Who rails into his belief all his defects. (92-3)

was initially cut. Perhaps, because this moment proved so effective in performance, a decision was made; a handwritten entry restored it in the prompt copy, and it is spoken on the recording.

In the light of Bosola's seeming honesty so far, it was ironical that in the crucial bedchamber scene (3.2.) - where he both wins and betrays the Duchess's confidence - his dishonesty should have been so palpable. The Duchess's revelation that Antonio is her husband has been a transformational moment for Bosola in several productions, especially where a strong class-based reading is in evidence.¹ Where a latent sense of identification between the two men has already been established, it becomes perhaps the first moment of real conflict for Bosola. In this production, where nothing had been done to develop Bosola's relationship with Antonio beyond initial hostility, there was no ambiguity in Bosola's response to the news. In fact, his expressed surprise sounded false.

As previously noted, Michael Billington commented that the costuming decisions tended to "obscure the play's crucial differences of rank" adding, by way of illustration, "the sharp-suited Antonio seems as fashion-conscious as his silk-gowned employer" ("The Duchess of Malfi" 2000). Yet, this really only applied to distinctions between ambitious courtiers and aristocrats. Mannion's Bosola did not enhance his status, after his Act One promotion, with a change of costume as in some

¹ Most memorably with Bob Hoskins (Manchester Royal Exchange 1980/1) where he seemed genuinely amazed at the revelation.

productions.¹ Perhaps it was appropriate for his job as the Provisor of Horse that he should have continued to wear his distressed leathers, as Ferdinand advised, but its main achievement was to draw a distinction between him and the other courtiers, especially Antonio. In an earlier scene, this physical distinction was especially noticeable between the two, as an accompaniment to their mutual recriminations over ambition and hypocrisy. Now, in this scene, where he observed not just Antonio's fall, but the abuse of the disgraced steward by four hypocritical officers (dressed here in the uniforms of nineteenth century hussars), this Bosola was distanced from them all as much by appearance as accent (both indicators of his emotional and spiritual isolation). There was never any uncertainty that this Bosola would betray the Duchess and Antonio because, at this stage, he had no point of identification with either. This was confirmed by his jubilation in his final soliloquy as he realised that by this act he was "certain to be raised" (333).

Predictably, the Rome scene (3.3.) was severely truncated. In productions like this, which de-historicize the play, courtiers discussing the fortifications at Naples are irrelevant and their gossip and character assassinations would have put a brake on the rapidly accelerating plot. Likewise, the text's focus on Bosola's introspective academic provenance (41-7) would not have chimed with the loud and abrasive creation presented so far by Mannion. Assuming that Bosola had presented his discovery offstage, the scene began with his entry accompanying Ferdinand and the Cardinal (60) and proceeded with minor cuts swiftly to the end (76) and the interval.

Cutting the Cardinal's investiture as a soldier, the second half began with the Duchess's recognition of banishment at the start of 3.5. Played atmospherically with

¹ Notably Michael Bryant in the 1971 production for BBC TV.

umbrellas against a background of thunder and rain, the action presented no surprises. Bosola presented Ferdinand's letter of feigned reconciliation and was peremptorily dismissed. When he returned, however, accompanied by visor-helmeted soldiers carrying automatic weapons with flashlights, he had undergone a transformation. The stage direction, "*Enter Bosola with a guard with vizards*" is ambiguous and is sometimes interpreted – as here – as meaning that Bosola should mask his identity. Here, for added measure, Bosola was not only himself 'vizarded' but also switched his accent to 'Received Pronunciation' English. The unambiguous brutality of the Duchess's situation was clear when, responding to his assertion that, "Your brothers mean you safety and pity." (110) she repeated the word "Pity!" laced with irony, and took one step towards Bosola; four guns were instantly pointed at her. When he in turn asked, "These are your children?" (114) and stepped towards them, she screamed desperately and was restrained by the guards. So hasty was her arrest that even her tale of the salmon and the dogfish was sacrificed to a hurried exit.

A steel wall descended from the flies to establish the Duchess's prison for 4.1.¹ Bosola removed his 'vizard' and returned to his native Scots dialect to describe to Ferdinand how the Duchess "doth bear herself/ In her imprisonment?" (1-2). He appeared a calmer and more reflective individual who now had time and opportunity to interact with the Duchess in a more sympathetic manner. Never, during the torturing of the Duchess, with the "dead man's hand" and the sight of the apparent corpses of her husband and son, did he raise his voice excessively, even when her hysterics led her to shout and throw herself against the steel wall. This was a significant alteration and all the more remarkable given his fondness for vociferous

¹ Like most productions, this one ignored the sense of 3.5.106-7 and placed the Duchess in a prison-like space rather than to house-arrest in her palace as the text implies.

and even violent self-expression in the first half of the play. Now it seemed that, with his primary task accomplished, the rage had burnt out of him and he was able to view the suffering of the Duchess with a modicum of sympathy. His natural frankness was now employed to question the worst of Ferdinand's sadism; although in practice, he was still its principal agent. So it was that, in this scene, his movements often echoed those of the Duchess: for example, kneeling beside her, as weakness made her drop to her own knees; or reminding her of her Christian faith, and taking her hand with a promise to save her life. When she dropped his hand and stood to speed the passage of her curse (101-3), he remained on his knees, apparently genuinely affected, because he maintained this position even after her exit. Still on his knees when Ferdinand re-entered, he stretched out his hands in intercession with the words, "Why do you do this?" (116). His penitential body language echoed exactly the course that he advised that Ferdinand should permit the Duchess, but to no avail. Describing his plan to unleash the madmen upon her, Ferdinand stood behind the kneeling Bosola and pushed him roughly to the floor. With a sudden realisation of the implication underlying Ferdinand's plan, Bosola jumped to his feet and exclaimed in amazement, "Must I see her again?" (133) The tone revived his former combative voice and this extended into his refusal to see the Duchess again in his "own shape" (134). Sensing resistance, Ferdinand confronted him aggressively, implying he would be used shortly against Antonio in Milan, grabbing Bosola by the lapels as he exclaimed,

Intemperate agues make physicians cruel. (142.)

The steel walls slid open revealing the madmen swinging from bars, replacing the waxworks abattoir. At conclusion of the severely truncated 'masque', a deep bell sounded and the steel wall slid back. Bosola appeared - vizarded once more - to

present his "tomb-maker" interlude. He had returned to the efficiently detached *alter-ego* of the well-spoken English arresting officer. Announcing that he had come to make her tomb, he slowly approached and knelt alongside her. In his "own shape" as Bosola, he had previously knelt with her in her distress, a gesture expressing warmth and sympathy; on this occasion, it embodied the cold formality of a funeral rite. Accused of bluntness, he rose swiftly and moved away from her, declaring his trade was "to flatter the dead, not the living" (4.2.146.). She rose and faced him and the steel wall ascended revealing four executioners carrying a coffin - the present from her brothers - which they set down centre. The Duchess approached it and sat upon it and Cariola knelt by her. Then, realising the implication of Bosola's announcement that he was in fact "the common bellman",¹ Cariola suddenly attacked the executioners, slapping impotently at them, until they forced her out of the room. Undermining the dignity of her last words, the strangling of the Duchess was an undignified affair involving a protracted struggle on the ground. Bosola immediately returned to his brutal Scottish voice to oversee Cariola's death, which was swifter.

Ferdinand re-entered as executioners removed Cariola's body and others brought in the bodies of the children, laying them on the ground. Bosola stood, hands behind back, staring at the floor until instructed to cover the Duchess's face, whereupon he removed his leather coat and laid it across the corpse. This was the beginning of a sequence of actions in which Bosola's coat began to take on a quasi-metaphysical significance, a reminder of Ferdinand's attribution to it of Bosola's "old garb of melancholy" (1.1.278). Bosola moved, leaning against a wall SL. and looking away from the corpse as Ferdinand approached it. He threw Bosola's coat aside and looked at the Duchess again, asking "Why didst thou not pity

¹ In spite of the omission of the bellman speech.

her?"(4.2.272). Stunned, Bosola turned and stared at him. Evidently, Ferdinand's mental instability was increasing with the volume of his voice. Bosola attempted to check him, reminding Ferdinand of his presence then - with the sudden and very formal gesture of the supplicant - kneeling and stretching out his hands to request the reward due to his service. With both men kneeling, an increasingly disturbed Ferdinand vilified Bosola for the murder. At the end of the tirade, Ferdinand's downward emotional trajectory became physical as he threw himself on the Duchess's body. Bosola's trajectory was the other way; pouring out his contempt for the Arragonian brothers, he grabbed back his coat and rose to his feet, exclaiming,

I stand like one
That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream:
I am angry with myself, now that I wake.

(322-4)

He stressed the word "angry" so that it gave a violent jolt to the verse; a swift reminder of his dangerous volatility. Then he checked himself and put his coat back on, kneeling again to beg Ferdinand's understanding of the full implication of his commitment to his service:

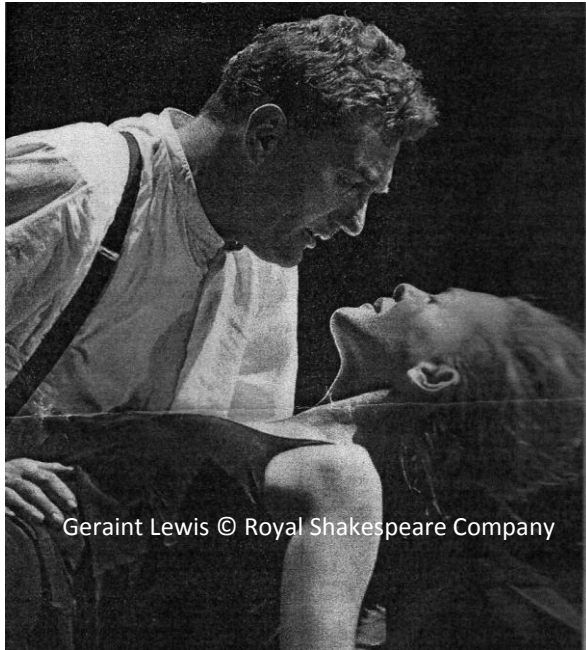
Let me know
Wherefore I should be thus neglected. Sir,
I served your tyranny, and rather strove
To satisfy yourself than all the world;
And, though I loathed the evil, yet I loved
You that did counsel it, and rather sought
To appear a true servant than an honest man.

(326-32)

On the last line, he held open his coat in both hands and shook the leather, as if this - the melancholic livery imposed upon him by Ferdinand - was a metonym of the "true servant" and that beneath it lay the "honest man". In this vein, after Ferdinand's exit, it was consistent that he once again tried to remove the coat, as he spoke the words,

"Off, my painted honour!" (135). But indecision left him in suspension between two choices and the coat remained half-on/half-off as he described his condition thus,

While with vain hopes our faculties we tire,
We seem to sweat in ice and freeze in fire. (336-7)



Bosola and the dying Duchess (4.2.)

But even as he speculated on an alternative outcome (if he had chosen differently for his "peace of conscience" [399]), his indecision was instantly resolved when the Duchess appeared to revive. Pulling off his coat completely, he ran to her side to hold her. As the text implies, he kissed her in his attempt revive her, and hugged her desperately when it became clear her revival was only temporary.

Laying her down again, his anguish was loud and vocal, until burning itself out into what seemed at first a quiet a statement of resolve:

...I'll post to Milan,
Where somewhat I will speedily enact
Worth my dejection. (372-4)

But, with a twist in the tail, the last three words became a bloodcurdling shout, a re-assertion of his former self, turning a mere implication into an unequivocal threat of vengeance. At this point, a directorial decision eloquently completed the sequence of actions involving Bosola's leather coat. After his last words, Bosola froze and a quiet plaintive melody was heard. Slowly the dead Duchess rose to her feet and picked the coat from the ground. Holding it out, she helped to robe him with it and, when complete, took his hand. Together, hand in hand, the Duchess and Bosola walked upstage into the darkness. The effect was profoundly moving; Bosola had once more donned "his old garb of melancholy", but the livery he now wore made him, once and for all time, the Duchess's agent.



The dead Duchess robes Bosola (4.2.)

Act Five moved at a rapid pace¹, with Bosola watching the scene of the insane Ferdinand's encounter with the doctor from the shadows, before directly confronting the Cardinal with an interpolated, "Stop!" (substituted for the more deferential, "Sir" at 5.2.101.) His aggressive certainty was briefly undermined by the Cardinal's feigned ignorance of the Duchess's fate and he turned away, provoking the Cardinal's response, "Why do you look so wildly?"(111), appropriately describing Bosola's demeanour.

¹ The Antonio, Delio, Pescara, Julia sequence (5.1.) was cut.

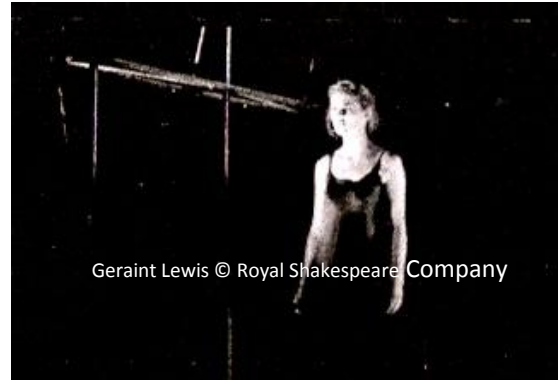
Julia's rough wooing of Bosola (150-222) held no real surprises in this production, but it did serve as an interesting reverse-mirror image of his misogynistic treatment of the (Old) Lady in 2.1. That this, arguably, suggested something of the transformation that the Duchess's death had wrought in him, might be seen in the directorial decision to have Julia straddle him in much the same manner as he had straddled the Lady in the earlier scene.

After her death and the Cardinal's acknowledgement of involvement in the Duchess's murder, Bosola's soliloquy (329-48) was delivered with pace and volume. In spite of his awareness of the need for caution because of the surrounding danger, and given the precedent of Julia's death, he declared his resolve to help Antonio. Remarkably, he spoke the line,

It may be
I'll join with thee in a most just revenge.
(341-2)

with such an emphasis on the last word, that it seemed an idea that had only just entered his mind. At this point, augmented by a steady pulse, the previously-heard melancholy theme was reprised, and the dead Duchess entered behind him upstage, in time for Bosola's allusion to her haunting him. He looked up to heaven and begged for "Penitence".

The Duchess remained onstage for the 'echo' scene (5.3.) and then vanished again as the dénouement of the tragedy began. For this, the three tunnels, created by the two "dead walls", assisted the first fatal error in Bosola's revenge.



The dead Duchess (4.2.)



Antonio's death (5.4.)

Entering through the tunnel USR, he overheard the Cardinal plotting his death but did not see him exit SL. Moving left - sword drawn - towards the voice, he stopped on the inside of the wall SR, hearing now Ferdinand's voice USC. Antonio and the servant entered talking, down the tunnel USR (as Bosola had previously). Fearing an ambush, Bosola struck and fatally wounded Antonio. After Antonio's death, Bosola's dialogue with the servant was cut, leaving just his bald statement of intent

O my fate moves swift!
I have this Cardinal in the forge already;
Now I'll bring him to th' hammer.

(5.4.78-80)

The Cardinal re-entered DSL airing his “guilty conscience”, and as he spoke of the threat from “a thing, armed with a rake” (5.5.6), Bosola approached him from behind with his sword drawn. The lines of the lords, listening beyond the door, were cut, but as the Cardinal raised the alarm, Antonio’s servant attacked Bosola and was killed by him. Bosola then stabbed the Cardinal who, resisting, scuffled with him against the wall SL, Ferdinand entered USL, sword drawn and confronted the Cardinal who stood pinioned from behind by Bosola. When thrusting his sword through his brother,

Ferdinand also unwittingly skewered Bosola.¹ Both men collapsed and Bosola crawled upstage, turning back to confront the distracted Ferdinand, lifting him to his feet and



Bosola kills Ferdinand (5.5.)

stabbing him in the back. He administered the final *coup-de-grâce* by cutting Ferdinand’s throat, before the lords entered USL.

As Bosola began his account of his revenge, the Duchess re-entered to her melancholy theme and stood looking down on him. There was still considerable anger in his delivery and the most emphatic word in the entire speech was his description of himself as “Neglected” (87). His final words, including the sententious couplet (103-5) were retained, but considerably understated. As he died the Duchess moved away from him towards her young son, putting a protective arm around the child as the lights faded.

¹ The prompt book uses the colourful term “kebabbed!”

Ultimately, this was a seriously flawed production in which design issues seemed to warrant more attention than textual interpretation. The fault was compounded by a misconceived attempt to de-historicize the play with unfocused post-modern settings and costumes; presenting its themes as somehow universal. Ironically, if this was an attempt to be radical, it failed because - although its press reception may have suggested otherwise - this was an extremely conservative reading. The text was not as radically edited as that of the 2003 RNT production and, although the 1996 Cheek By Jowl production made similar cuts, that production made a feature of subversively re-interpreting the principal characters to the point of contrariness. In both of these productions (especially the latter), a tendency to wilful wrong-headedness was offset by the occasional flash of illumination. This was not the case here although, in one respect, the production was not entirely without merit: because Edwards produced a fairly unsubtle reading of the principal characters, it brought a certain clarity to the proceedings. In the case of Tom Mannion's *Bosola*, the loss of complexity gave an absolutely clear *through-line* to his motivation. His depiction of corrosive anger at his neglect played like an *idée-fixe*, and at times lent a manic energy to the performance. For once, there seemed no ambiguity to his earlier animosity to Antonio, no lack of plausibility to the Duchess's belief in his sincerity, nor in his willingness to betray her. His transformation, when it came, was also believable, as at least one critic acknowledged.¹ It was as if the fire of his anger was genuinely quenched in pity for the Duchess, only to be rekindled by the reprise of his former neglect by yet another Arragonian brother.

¹ "Mannion...even makes the character's fits of conscience convincing." (Billington, "The Duchess of Malfi" 2000).

Finally, on a positive note, the production also had an instinct for what is not always recognised, but which I feel to be crucial to an understanding of the final act. Many recent productions have, like this one, brought back the dead Duchess as observer of the tragic denouement, as if compensating for what may be felt the structural anomaly of her Act Four demise. If the play is seen as Bosola's tragedy as much as hers,¹ then a crucial bond is formed between their fates after her failed revival. In no recent production more than this one, has this bond been so clearly presented, as in her robing of him as her agent for the nemesis of the final act. For me, it was the single most moving moment in an otherwise disappointing production, and one which confirmed my belief that the play seeks to represent their dual tragedy.

¹ As we have seen, how this plays in the theatre depends crucially on how, and to what extent, Bosola's role is cut in performance.

8.2. Royal National Theatre 2003

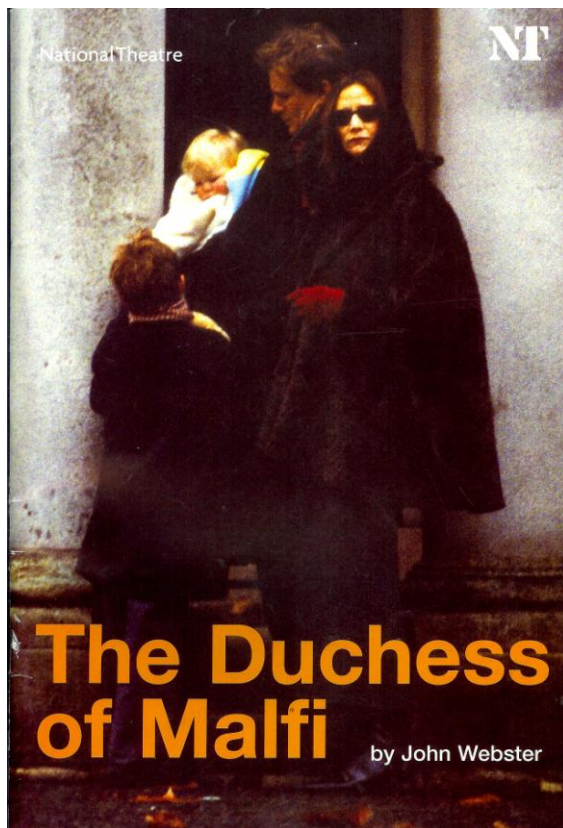
The Duchess: Janet McTeer

Bosola: Lorcan Cranitch

Directed by Phyllida Lloyd

There is a telling paragraph, quoting director Phyllida Lloyd, in the National Theatre's Education Work-pack of this production:

I've loved the play since I was at school. We all had a very strong sense of what I heard a student say in the lift on his way in to see the show – 'Oh, the Duchess, she's really cool.' (C. Miller "National Theatre Education").



Programme Cover

Although evidently targeted at a school-age audience, the remark might play into the hands of critics seeking evidence of a predilection for fashionable chic in Lloyd's work. If so, this would be unfair; Lloyd is, in fact, a pretty eclectic practitioner, with a range of directing work under her belt in both the classical and contemporary repertoire. She is also a highly respected international opera director who, undaunted by any

charge of populism, also directed the commercially and critically successful West End musical, *Mamma Mia* and took Act Three of her production of the English National Opera's *The Valkyrie* to the 2004 Glastonbury Rock Festival. She has always struck me – commendably - as a director unafraid to take risks, and who has

consequently tended to polarise critical opinion.¹ This was however less true of the critical response to this production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, which was almost universally hostile. For most it was the decision to update the setting, accompanied by a fairly drastic textual edit, which raised collective hackles. Of the London press,² only Paul Taylor for *The Independent*, offered qualified praise:

The updating in Lloyd’s production renovates our sense of the seriously repulsive and psychologically warped nature of the torments the heroine is forced to endure...

...True, the contemporary relocation makes plot devices such as the poisoned prayer book look a bit silly. But, in general, it works well (“McTeer makes magnificent return in updated *Duchess*”).

In itself, there was nothing too radical or original in the updating of the play, and the idea has been used on occasions both before and after this production.³

I described the opening quotation as “telling”, not because it suggests a self-conscious search for the fashionable in performance, nor even an attempt to court controversy for its own sake. Rather, it suggests that Lloyd’s fixation solely with the character of the Duchess narrowed the focus of her approach.⁴ This fixation is reflected in the introduction to the play in the workpack:

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster is one of the best-known tragedies from the early 17th-century English theatre – and

¹ For example, her production of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* for English National Opera (2002-2004) received a critical mauling from some and considerable praise from others. I personally found it one of the most original and intelligent readings of that vast work since Patrice Chereau’s in 1970s, and one which provided several of the most exciting evenings of music theatre I have experienced in the past decade.

² The production subsequently toured the UK.

³ Notably, both Jonathan Holloway’s 1982 production for Red Shift, and Philip Franks’ production for the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2006 set the play in a fashionable 1950/60s Italian world as popularised by films such as *La Dolce Vita* and *The Godfather*.

⁴ In an internet interview, she describes it as one of the “ ‘great plays for girls’....she is constantly searching for such plays, as well as those conventionally seen as unperformable, or as someone once described “The Duchess of Malfi” to her, “a director’s graveyard” (Spiller).

one of the few plays from the period which has a woman as its central character...

...Few plays from the Elizabethan and Jacobean period have women at their centre. This reflects the fact that women were prevented by law, religion and custom from active participation in many areas. One of these was the stage, where women’s roles were played by adolescent boys. This may also have affected the scale of roles which were written for female characters.

Both of John Webster’s best known plays have a single woman at their centre, however: Vittoria Corombona (*The White Devil*) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (sic). The Duchess is not the largest role in the play – **both Bosola and Ferdinand have more lines – but ever since the play’s first performances, she has stolen the show...** (C. Miller, “National Theatre Education” 2).¹

Carl Miller, who wrote the education work-pack and adapted the text, also contributed towards the programme a detailed evaluation of alterations to the text in performances over the past 400 years. It was offered, in part perhaps, as an apologia for his own adaptation. Under the title, “Webster Our Contemporary”, his programme article begins with the assertion, “It has taken us a long time to catch up John Webster.” He goes on correctly to argue that eighteenth and nineteenth century ‘moral guardians’ provoked a plethora of *Malfi* adaptations and re-writes in horrified response to the play’s depiction of violent slaughter, questionable *double-entendres* and implicit themes of incestuous sexual obsession. The play’s adapters made extensive changes to both language and plot that had a consequent impact upon its representation in staging.²

The twentieth century, familiar with horrors of its own, was more receptive to performing Webster’s own text, but Miller points out that this is still problematic,

¹ Text in bold reflects my emphasis.

² He cites as examples, with the advent of spectacular stage scenery, Horne’s 1850 use of “Italian vistas, spooky groves and lavish costume...” and Emma Waller’s *Duchess*, “splendidly rising to heaven at the end of each performance in a cloud of white muslin.”

because of uncertainty about what constitutes an accurate original performing edition:

One thing we can be certain about: the version of the play printed in 1623 is not exactly what was performed at the play's premiere a decade earlier ("Webster Our Contemporary").

He refers to Webster's marginal disavowal of the song accompanying the ceremonial 'Arming' of the Cardinal, "The Author disclaims this Ditty to be his" (3.4.8-22) as (presumably) an example of the text's unreliability as a representation of the first performance.¹ Miller also suggests that Webster's inclusion of a cast list (the first of its kind) in the published edition implies that he was far from dissatisfied with the first performances, but that the omission of significant speaking roles from that list might point to the cuts in performance. Furthermore, the existence of two performance venues, outdoors at the Globe and indoors at Blackfriars, implies potential differences in the performing versions. He suggests that Webster justified his restoration of the cuts in publication in his words on the title page of the edition.² It is simply a marketing exercise or, as Miller puts it, "the Jacobean equivalent of a CD bonus track."

Miller concludes his article with references to two major twentieth century playwrights attracted to the text. Bertolt Brecht worked on a significantly altered adaptation in exile during the Second World War; while Harold Pinter has spoken of his adolescent introduction to the text by a teacher, and his love of its language.³

¹ One could of course argue the opposite, that lines other than Webster's were included precisely because they *had* been used in the first performance.

² "The perfect and exact copy, with diverse things printed, that the length of the play would not bear in the presentment."

³ An excerpt from Pinter's speech on receiving the David Cohen British Literature Prize for 1995, published by Faber & Faber, is also included in the programme under the title *Meeting John Webster*.

Miller suggests that Webster's use of "Subtext powered by the danger in sexual desire and political power" uncannily prefigures that of Pinter, concluding "Maybe we've caught up with Webster at last."

It is ironical that having so strongly argued for the power of Webster's language, Miller found himself in the position of having to cut so much of it for this production; a fact that several critics found very hard to forgive.¹ Yet, it was not so much a poetic as a thematic loss that I felt characterised this production. Lloyd's narrow focus on the Duchess, and the consequent brief for Miller's edit, shrunk the play to such an extent that figures such as Bosola were reduced to ciphers. This seriously altered the structure of the play.

Miller could certainly justify cutting the play because of uncertainties about the precise content of Webster's published text, and he was certainly not as culpable as editors of previous centuries who rewrote vast tracts of the play due to moral qualms. He was on shakier ground when it came to re-ordering and restructuring. There is surely a contradiction in hailing the playwright, "Webster Our Contemporary" while simultaneously changing the rhythm and focus of the play with cuts and re-arrangements worthy of any of his historical predecessors. The first Act of the production illustrates this point. In addition to cuts, there are no fewer than eleven substantial re-orderings of units of text, taken from the Act's two scenes. These are outlined in a chart in Appendix 4.

It describes the youthful Pinter's joy in declaiming chunks of Webster's verse to presumably bemused passersby in the East End and his indebtedness to his teacher, Joseph Brierly, for the introduction to Webster that so fired his imagination.

¹ "Lloyd has cut some of the play's greatest lines, or they pass for nothing...Harold Pinter has spoken of how branded he was at school by the language of Webster's plays. But does anyone come out of this *Duchess* still savouring its *lines*?" (Macauley) "I waited patiently for a favourite couplet: 'Their life a general mist of error, their death a hideous storm of terror.' It never came." (Gore-Langton).

In the original text, the opening two scenes of Act One introduce us to the world of the court, contextualised by an opening discussion between Antonio and Delio on the dangers of court corruption. The Miller version instead begins with a sequence of dialogue some 85 lines on (in the process re-allocating a line from Silvio to the Duchess) before jumping some further 50 lines further forward to allow Ferdinand to turn his address to Antonio, immediately after the Duchess has introduced him

FERDINAND: Who took the ring off'nest?

(DUCHESS:) Antonio Bologna, my lord.

FERDINAND: Our sister Duchess' great master of her household?
Give him the jewel... (1.1.87-90)

...You are a good horseman, Antonio; ...what do you think of
good horsemanship?

ANTONIO: ...my lord...out of brave horsemanship, arise the first
sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind to noble action.

FERDINAND: You have bespoke it worthily. (1.1.140-7)

We now begin with an image of the triangular relationship between the Duchess, Ferdinand and Antonio, which is presented as the principal engine of the plot. The production made a further point by making this a very public moment, with Ferdinand carrying a microphone in the manner of a talk-show host. The whole conversation was amplified to the loud responses of a court, which now behaved like a modern TV studio audience.

Phillida Lloyd was at pains to deny any specific parallels in her decision to update the play,

It's not about connecting it with current affairs or current events, but
trying to strip away the things which might stop the audience

recognising that these characters are from their own world (Miller, "National Theatre Education" 4).

A photograph in the programme, depicting the late Princess of Wales presenting a riding trophy to James Hewitt pointed the theatre audience towards a real life



Major Hewitt and Princess Diana.

correlative to this action of this opening scene. It is unlikely that the audience was thereby expected to entertain connections between the murder of the Duchess and any of the tabloid conspiracy theories concerning the death of Diana. More likely, it was intended to introduce themes of celebrity, privacy, surveillance and public exposure amongst the aristocracy; as Miller puts it, "The sense of a world in which privacy is impossible informs many aspects of this performance" (Miller, "National Theatre Education" 4).

The new opening was significant and set the tone effectively according to the production's brief of a focus on this chosen theme and on the character of the

Duchess. Clearly the first lines of an edited text can be a strong indicator of the emphasis a director wishes to place in the rest of a production. In this context, the 1972 BBC TV production, which was edited to 123 minutes, gave considerably more weight to the role of Bosola, as both central character and commentator, and chose to begin the play with his first line, "I do haunt you still" (1.1.29). That production - which also ended with Bosola's death - clearly treated him as both a protagonist and as a frame for the action. In Lloyd's production, the framing device was Delio, who was reinvented as a photo-journalist (even conducting a shoot of the Duchess during the apricot scene). This is, of course, legitimate, given Delio's appearance at the start of Acts One, Three, and Five and his sententious coda at the end of the play.¹ However, it was performed not as a complement to but a substitute for the subversive commentary and more intimate relationship provided between Bosola and the audience in the uncut text.

The sequences of action in Act One function in a very specific way in the original text. After the conventionally employed device of a conversation between two courtiers, Delio and Antonio, as our introduction to the court, Webster presents a series of encounters between its members. Some are open, some confidential, but an atmosphere of backbiting gossip and rumour seem to predominate in them all. At the court (where fortunes are made or lost) characters are sometimes performative, sometimes conspiratorial, and sometimes both simultaneously. The apparently random nature of these encounters, as the characters enter, exit and re-enter, while variously engaging in gossip, repartee and conspiratorial exchanges, conveys an edgy sense of insecurity and a dangerous unpredictability to the scenes. Miller's adaptation re-orders and regularises these interactions in a way that simplifies the narrative but

¹ Also perhaps by reference to Webster's original source Matteo Bandello, who was also known as "Delio".

sacrifices that sense of danger. If one compares the narrative sequence of both versions in the diagram below, this becomes obvious.

Re-ordered Action in Act 1 Scenes 1 & 2	
Webster's Text	Miller's Adaptation
1. Delio and Antonio alone discuss the Court and corruption.	1. Ferdinand publicly awards a prize to Antonio then interviews him in the presence of the Duchess and Court.
2. Bosola makes suit to the Cardinal but is ignored – Delio & Antonio (listening?) in background.	2. Ferdinand publicly makes fun of the First Lord (Castruchio).
3. Delio and Antonio discuss Bosola	3. Bosola makes suit to the Cardinal but is ignored – Delio & Antonio (listening?) in background.
4. Delio and Antonio observing as "the presence 'gins to fill".	4. Delio, Antonio and Bosola, alone, discuss the Cardinal
5. Court banter between Ferdinand & courtiers (Silvio, Rodrigo, Grisolan, Castruchio and Antonio). Antonio receives a jewel as a prize and Castruchio is mocked. Observed by Delio.	5. Delio and Antonio discuss Bosola.
6. The Court joined by the Duchess, Cardinal, Cariola and (possibly) Julia. The whole company observed and commented on by Antonio & Delio.	6. Cardinal privately urges Ferdinand to employ Bosola as a spy.

Webster's Text	Miller's Adaptation
7. Cariola privately summons Antonio to a meeting with the Duchess	7. Ferdinand interviews then employs Bosola
8. Ferdinand makes his suit to the Duchess on behalf of Bosola.	8. Ferdinand makes his suit to the Duchess on behalf of Bosola.
9. The Court leaves. Cardinal privately urges Ferdinand to employ Bosola as a spy.	
10. Ferdinand interviews then employs Bosola	
11. Ferdinand and the Cardinal caution the Duchess. Cariola in attendance?	9. Ferdinand and the Cardinal caution the Duchess. Cariola in attendance?
12. Duchess woos Antonio. Cariola witnesses this behind the arras then openly.	10. Duchess woos Antonio. Cariola witnesses this behind the arras then openly.
13. Cariola soliloquises briefly on the Duchess	11. Cariola soliloquises briefly on the Duchess

Where the Duchess is the principal focus of the narrative (for example, in the last three units of action towards the end of the Act, (marked in blue), Miller has retained Webster's sequencing intact; elsewhere it has been radically altered. This is especially true of Bosola's involvement (marked in red). In Webster's text, Bosola presents us with the first action of the play (after the conventional induction) with his apparently fruitless pursuit of the Cardinal. This, and what follows: his malcontented exchanges with Delio and Antonio; their private assessment of him; his further peregrinations around the court, culminating in his presentation to the Duchess by

Ferdinand and, ultimately, his interview and employment by Ferdinand - all of this action is condensed by Miller into one reduced and re-ordered sequence. Webster's text divides this action into two segments with a lengthy central section in which Bosola is either offstage or hovering on the margins of the court. Although the focus shifts during his absence, the conversations about him remind us of his liminal presence, lurking like a maggot in the rotten cheese of the court. His description of himself as haunting the Cardinal is apposite, because he is very much the 'spectre at the feast', a potential threat, who metaphorically - and probably literally - knows where the bodies are buried. Miller's version simplifies the arrival of Bosola and the interaction between him and the court in this act, reducing it to just one more event in an already crowded agenda. Bosola's character was similarly simplified, as we shall see.

Lorcan Cranitch seemed at first a curious casting choice for Bosola and some critics, notably de Jongh ("Thrills but no chills"), felt he was miscast. As an Irish actor, the use of his own accent for the role brought a distinctive quality that separated him from the other characters.¹ Cranitch himself discussed, in the Education Guide, finding some interesting connections:

It's a tricky one, because he does a lot of killing - I didn't want to go down that route, But the fact that he's an outsider in this world - I'm trying to use a natural music in the delivery of the lines. He uses the word 'sure' - 'Sure he was too honest'. [Act Three] There's something different in the Jacobean 'sure' and the Irish 'sure' but they're both emphatic (C.Miller 7).

Although an experienced stage actor with time at the RSC, Cranitch is probably better known for numerous supporting roles in television and film; a factor that may be significant in his choice for this role. One television role in particular

¹ In the same way, a Scottish accent isolated Bosola in both 1996 Cheek by Jowl and 2000 RSC productions.

was responsible for impressing him upon the consciousness of the general public; that of the disturbed police detective, Jimmy Beck, in the successful TV series, *Cracker* (McGovern),¹ created by writer Jimmy McGovern. There are enough superficial points of similarity between this role and that of Bosola, for possible connections to have been made when casting decisions were made. Beck was a key antagonist to the series' protagonist, "Fitz" (played by Robbie Coltrane). Fitz, a psychologist employed by the police to profile crime suspects, falls out with the unimaginative and violent Beck over a number of cases. Suppressing guilty feelings over his responsibility for the death of a fellow police officer, Beck becomes increasingly disturbed, eventually raping a female colleague. Finally in an attempt to atone, he apologises to the woman before killing himself, attempting to redeem himself by leaping to his death from a building while handcuffed to a suspected murderer who might have escaped 'justice'.

One critic crudely took superficial parallels between Beck and Bosola further, and commented unfavourably on the perceived connection:

Bosola, the baddie in this, is the typecast Lorcan Cranitch – the racist copper from the TV series *Cracker*. Here he wears the same sort of clothes and has the same nasty look in his eye. Nothing he does comes as a surprise (Gore-Langton).



Cranitch as Beck...

This is however a lazy and inaccurate assessment; the only physical similarity between Cranitch's moustachioed Beck and his clean-shaven Bosola was



... and as Bosola

that both men wore suits! Psychologically, the dull and

¹ Cranitch appeared in seven episodes between 1993-5.

unimaginative Beck displayed a rigidly conservative mind-set, which cracked under pressure of guilt into full-blown psychosis. Cranitch's Bosola may have displayed neurotic responses but, unlike Beck, he was essentially a man whose intelligence and sensitivity made his work unacceptable to himself. Cranitch's Beck seemed amazed at the nasty trick life had played on him; his Bosola, despite his resistance, seemed to expect nothing better.

Within the play as presented, this Bosola was also exactly what one might expect and, if anything characterised this production, it was a tendency to produce stereotypes of the genre within which the play had been contextualised. Not every critic found this context helpful:

The whole thing has the air of a pretentious television thriller where you can't quite work out what is going on (Gross, *Sunday Telegraph* 2003).

For Paul Taylor, however, it brought the characters to believable life by making them recognisable contemporary figures, while Bosola cut a figure familiar from much twentieth century crime and espionage literature and cinema:

It releases the characters from the stock types of Jacobean Central Casting into a freshly creepy reality. As played by Lorcan Cranitch, Bosola, the intelligencer, appears a seedy nonentity who would not feel out of place in a book by Graham Greene (Taylor, "The Duchess of Malfi").

Robert Gore-Langton's assessment was therefore correct in one respect; there was nothing surprising about this Bosola. Because of the edited text and consequent marginalisation of the character, the production was compelled to fall back on the familiar. Indeed, for all its innovation in terms of *mise-en-scène* - and its interesting treatment of other characters such as Ferdinand - with Bosola, there was an overwhelming experience of cliché. The result was a performance that was not well received by the majority of the critics:

As Bosola, Lorcan Cranitch seems unfocussed, unreflective, feckless (Macauley).

Lorcan Cranitch also squanders the role of the creepily serviceable malcontent Bosola, seeming ridiculously bluff and wholesome when he ought to be snide and sinister... (Spencer, "Very rocky horror show").

...the hired killer, Bosola (potentially a great part) seems to spend most of his time at a loose end. All in all, a dismal demonstration of how not to do it (Gross).

Even those who expressed some admiration for the actor, felt the role misjudged:

...Bosola, originally a disillusioned Jacobean malcontent, seems to have no clear place, in spite of the fervour of Lorcan Cranitch's performance (Billington, "Malfi, madness and melancholy").

Some found bizarre comparisons to explain the effect of the interpretation:

"Look you the stars shine still," shouts Bosola (Lorcan Cranitch) as if he were an impatient second officer on a Greek ferry (Peter).

Lorcan Cranitch makes a bland, glaringly miscast Bosola. He dispatches the theatrical shafts and sneers of this angry young malcontent, with the ardour of a tired barman collecting the glasses at 11pm. He throws away Webster's great lines – and too many have been edited out of this production – as if they were theatrical refuse. When subjecting the Duchess to psychological torture and a death-process that parodies a marriage masque, he chills no blood (Jongh).

But blame was laid, ultimately, at the context for the production chosen by the director:

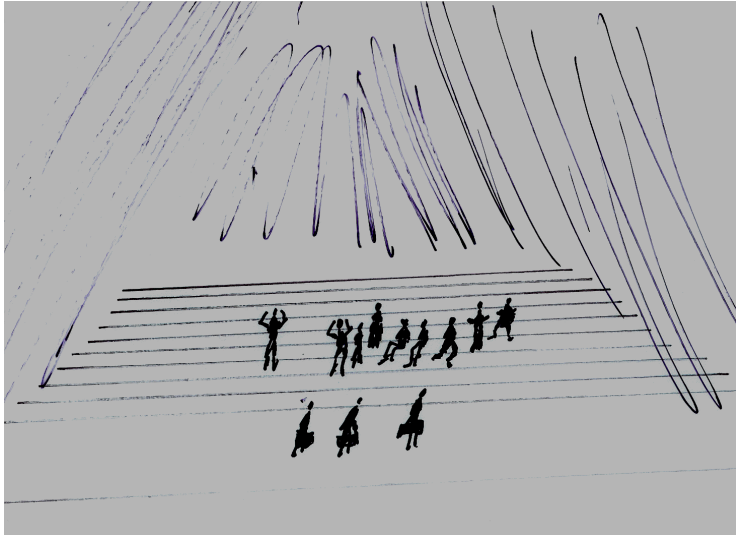
Could not...Cranitch's Bosola (be) less ordinary? Here's a period malcontent torn between self-interest and decency, good and evil. But we never feel his melancholy, let alone his inner turbulence. Would this gentleman garrotte the Duchess at all, let alone so unsweatily? As spies go, this normally fine actor is more cool Philby or bland Blunt than Jacobean killer. See what I mean by the ill effects of updating? (Nightingale, "Tragedy falls foul of updating game").

A brief examination of Bosola as presented within the production may help to explain why so many critics were disappointed.

Played on the end stage of the Lyttleton, the space seemed singularly inappropriate for the brief set by the director.

The big danger of the space is that the audience feel safely over the other side of the proscenium and are not implicated. We wanted to explore the Lyttelton auditorium and stage as one room, crossing the fourth wall (C Miller, "National Theatre Education" 7).

The constant setting was a narrow red platform, which ran the whole length of



Opening (1.1.)

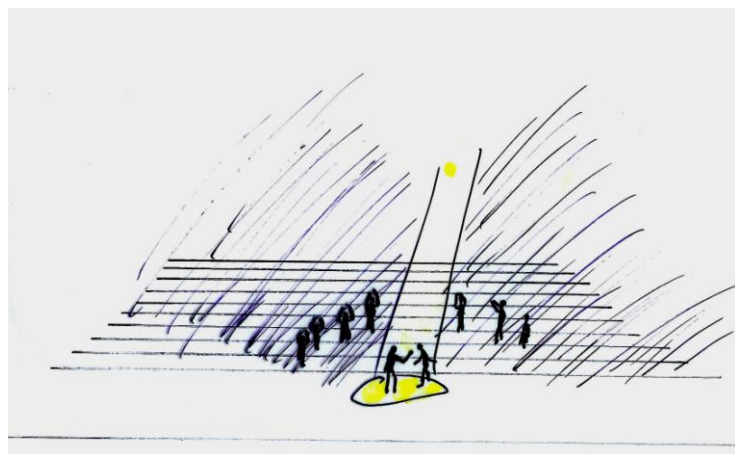
Figures with suitcases cross on the narrow platform. The ensemble seated or standing on bleachers behind

and often sat on them, facing out and responding to the action played out in front.

Phyllida Lloyd described the thinking behind this design:

The simple black steps at the back are in some way a mirror of the audience in the auditorium. They serve as a reminder that these characters are actually never in private. Even when they think they are alone, they are not. There's only one point in the play when they're not being overlooked – when we turn the lights out (C Miller, "National Theatre Education" 4).

In one striking convention, employed towards the end, as characters died, their final lines were delivered coldly *post-*



Ferdinand with microphone interviews Antonio in manner of a chat-show host: "Who took the ring off'nest?"

mortem by the actors (as a kind of subversion of the *sententiae*), before they joined the ranks of their fellow dead, sitting on the bleachers.

One other feature of the design was a movable toughened-glass screen, which



ran on wheels between the bleachers and the front platform. This served a variety of purposes. It was used as an arras for the numerous scenes involving concealment where witnesses overhear onstage

The Duchess 'reflects' in front of the glass screen

conversations. The advantage here was it permitted the audience full view of the hidden character's reactions. The screen had two other functions: firstly, as a practical mirror for use by characters to either preen themselves or self-reflectively to contemplate their situation. Secondly, it was employed as a projection screen either to amplify visually the onstage action, as in the opening 'TV studio' sequence where it acted like a monitor, or in the use of pre-recorded video images, such as in the madmen's scene (4.2.).

The combination of this setting and these staging devices made for a certain cold detachment in the presentation, which was well identified by Michael Billington:

Lloyd's interval free, modern-dress production often seems more like a dissection of this grisly masterpiece than a full blown realisation...
...because so much action is confined to a forestage, I often felt I was watching a demonstration of Webster's themes. Although actors as spectators reinforces the self-referential theatrical imagery, it adds to

the sense of an illustrated lecture ((Billington, "Malfi, madness and melancholy").

Perhaps it is in this context that what so many critics saw as a bland quality in Cranitch's Bosola should be judged. For myself, I found his performance less under-energised than simply monotone; presenting a one-note portrayal of frustration at the hand life had dealt him. This frustration intensified as the plot progressed but did not fundamentally alter until his death. It was there from his first entrance along the narrow front platform, as he stood solidly, hands thrust deep into the pockets of a dark overcoat and, with barely suppressed anger in his voice, berated the Cardinal, who studiously ignored him, preening himself in the upstage glass screen. A bemused Delio and Antonio watched all this with interest. When the Cardinal slighted him and exited, Bosola followed as far as centre stage before pulling a hip flask from his pocket, taking a large swig and redirecting his remarks to Antonio and Delio. At Bosola's dyspeptic line, "I pray leave me" (1.1.53.), they took him at his word, crossing left as if to exit, only to stop once again as Bosola continued his rant in the manner of the pub bore. His reference to court hierarchy, "*this* man's head at *that* man's foot" was made pointedly to refer to his two listeners. The hip flask, suggesting alcoholic dependency, and a signifier of Bosola's emotional stress, would occur with greater frequency as the play progressed.

Bosola exited briefly, before the Cardinal returned, placing a briefcase downstage. Then, after commending Bosola's usefulness to Ferdinand, he hid behind the glass screen to overhear the subsequent interview. Bosola barely concealed his contempt for the new role forced on him, declaring the injustice of his treatment by the Cardinal. When Ferdinand wagged a cautionary finger, Bosola advanced menacingly, but was deflected as Ferdinand pointed to the briefcase with the words,

"There's gold." (167). He knelt to open the case and examine the contents, while Ferdinand hovered behind him. Bosola closed the case and adopted a formal military stance, hands clasped behind his back, as if trying to retain some vestige of personal dignity in the face of the financial assault. The proffered position of "provisorship o'the horse" (269) was symbolised by some (car?) keys, which Ferdinand held up. In an apparent self-conscious expression of inferiority, Bosola nervously wiped his hands¹ before taking then returning them almost immediately. Ferdinand placed them in Bosola's pocket and, assuming mastery, began to groom him, dusting down his overcoat, Bosola's "old garb of melancholy" (278), before his presentation to the Duchess. Accepted as her employee, Bosola took her proffered hand and performed a curt formal nod, stepping back to await orders. The reassembled court began to disperse but Bosola and Antonio remained behind (as did Cariola) to witness her brothers warn the Duchess about the perils of remarriage (292-328). Occasionally, Antonio cast an anxious glance in Bosola's direction as if questioning the wisdom of this new appointment. Bosola's expression remained inscrutable to the end of the scene.

Predictably, Bosola's interaction with Castruchio and the Old Lady (2.1.) was cut. All that remained was Bosola's "meditation" on the "outward form of man", now presented as a continuous soliloquy, which proceeded seamlessly into his speculation on the Duchess's pregnancy and his plan to discover it (47-74). Bosola stood in his vest, dressing himself with shirt, tie and jacket draped over a chair. The convention of direct audience address was employed, but mediated via the conceit of Bosola looking at himself in an imaginary mirror DSL, then sharing his thoughts with the

¹ Nervous sweating was a mannerism that Cranitch employed repeatedly as a characteristic of this Bosola.

audience. Although this action was actually reflected in the movable glass screen behind him, Bosola did not employ it as a practical mirror as this would have implied a totally naturalistic approach, undermining the audience address which Phyllida Lloyd stated she employed as a means of breaching the Lyttleton's "fourth wall" (C.Miller, "National Theatre Education" 3). Cranitch's delivery of this soliloquy also had an emphatic and somewhat declamatory feel, which added to the distancing quality, previously commented on.

In spite of the retention of this one element of Bosola's relationship with the audience, the overall losses outweighed the gains. Gone with Castruchio and the Old Lady was the sense of Bosola's sharp intellect, ironical humour or scathing wit. Gone also was his bitter misogyny which - although a conventional malcontent attribute - informs and is ultimately undermined by his relationship with the Duchess. The largest loss, however, was the ambivalence that these scenes can create in the minds of the audience, which may find itself laughing, - even empathising - with a figure of uncertain past and a morally questionable future.

Something in the staging reminded me of the moment in Büchner's *Danton's Death* (Büchner, 2.1.) where Danton, overcome with world weariness and *nausea-vitae*, deplores the effort of getting dressed to face another day. Because in this production, Bosola's "meditation" appeared self-reflective - "the outward form of man" (48) for which he expressed contempt was his own mirrored image - it merely reinforced his sense of melancholy introspection and cynicism. Since these were qualities which did not seem particularly new to the character, there were no real surprises.

Now dressed, Bosola sat centre on the chair as Antonio and Delio entered (74), respectively carrying gown and camera case for a photo-shoot with the Duchess. Setting up either side of him, the ensuing banter between the three on the nature of ambition was accompanied by strained laughter and polite animosity. Eventually, Bosola surrendered his chair to Antonio, who draped the Duchess's gown around it. Bosola gestured to this as the Duchess *in-absentia*, for his next remarks. However, all that remained of his levelling speech, was the following,

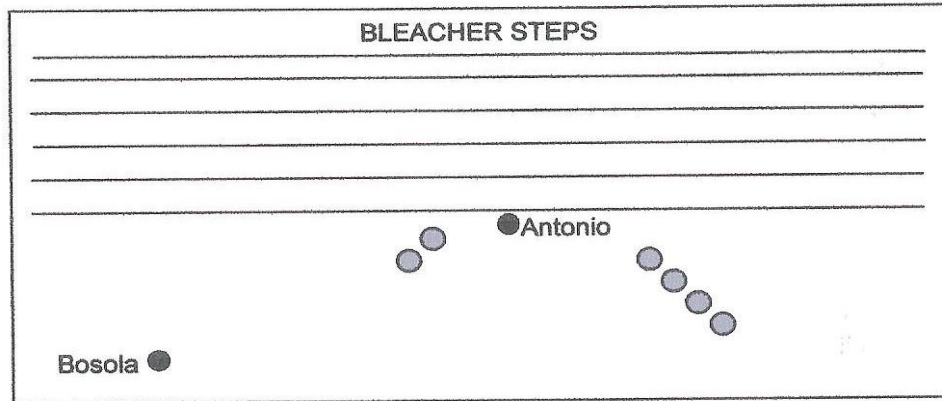
Search the heads of the greatest rivers and you shall find them but
bubbles of water. Some would say the souls of princes were brought
forth by some more weighty cause, than those of meaner persons:
they are deceiv'd, there's the same hand to them: the like passions
sway them.

(103-8)

None of his amusing illustrative imagery about "King Pippin", "vicars" and "tithe pigs" survived. As too often, this adaptation conveyed the essential meaning of Bosola's comments but without the wry and even slightly surreal tone.

The presence chamber filled rapidly and Bosola moved to the extreme downstage margins, leaving Antonio, Delio, Cariola and some female attendants to fuss around the Duchess for the photo-shoot. His marginal position equated with the status of the two black-suited security officers who now flanked the back of the narrow platform, although his stance was more casual than theirs. Suddenly announcing a gift for the Duchess, all heads turned in his direction as he produced the apricots from behind his back, and moved centre to present them with a flourish. Resuming his marginal position, he responded to the collective audible disgust at the gardener's perceived horticultural excess (142-4) with a helpless shrug which raised laughter. His asides to the audience were interestingly unconventional. He stood with his back to the court half-facing out towards the audience, and only momentarily

turning his head towards the Duchess to observe her responses. Her nervous laughter at the first signs of discomfort was rapidly followed by total collapse and she was



Bosola repeatedly positioned as an outsider to the court

rushed off. Bosola followed but remained on the margins, as the rest of the 'guard' assembled opposite in military line-up to receive Antonio's orders. Bosola's position both here and in the previous scene suggested emotional detachment from the court, whatever his formal status within its pecking order. The scene concluded with a general dispersal to chambers, leaving Antonio and Delio their brief exchange before exiting.

The night scene (2.3.) followed seamlessly. Bosola entered with a battery torch; Antonio a few seconds later from the same side with a brief case, which he set down. Bosola turned to confront him, shining the torch in his face. The ensuing verbal sparring was speedy and unexceptional and ended, not with Antonio's nosebleed, but his tripping in the dark over his briefcase and dropping the horoscope for Bosola to find. Much of the horoscope's contents (including the date) were cut. Instead, an interpolated, "Now I have it to my wish", preceded his declared intention to inform Ferdinand of its contents in Rome.

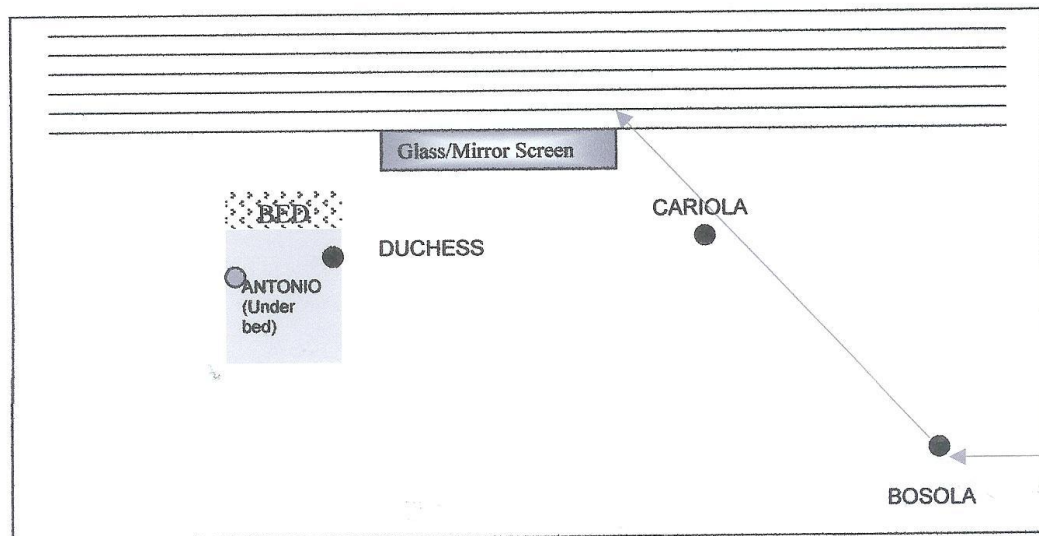
A massive chandelier, suspended from the flies, dominated the Rome encounters (2.4.) between the Cardinal and Julia, Julia and Delio (surprisingly retained), and Ferdinand and the Cardinal (2.5.). It descended, following the reunion of Antonio and Delio (3.1.), to convey the passage of time and the birth of the Duchess's two other children. In the darkness, the Duchess played with her two eldest children before striking a match to light the candles on the chandelier. From the shadows on either side of this tableau, spotlights picked out Ferdinand and Bosola respectively on extreme opposite sides of the narrow front platform. Ferdinand, in classic Italian aristocratic style wore an overcoat draped over his shoulders; Bosola also wore an overcoat, but unlike the adopted stance when he previously wore it –hands in pockets – he stood instead coat unbuttoned, hands on hips. This suggested a newly- found confidence, reflected in the assertive manner in which he then verbally pricked the balloon of Ferdinand's inflated ego. On the lines,

...you
Are your own chronicle too much: and grossly
Flatter yourself" (87-9)

he stepped calmly forward towards his employer and stared him in the face. Ferdinand's reaction was less surprised than one might have expected. He followed the textually implied handshake, however, with a formal kiss of gratitude on both of Bosola's cheeks, in a manner worthy of any cinematic mafia don.¹

¹ *The Godfather* film trilogy was also cited as a stylistic influence (Miller, *National Theatre Education* 4, 12). Ferdinand's formal kiss in this production contrasted strongly with the homoerotic one given by Scott Handy's Cheek By Jowl Ferdinand .

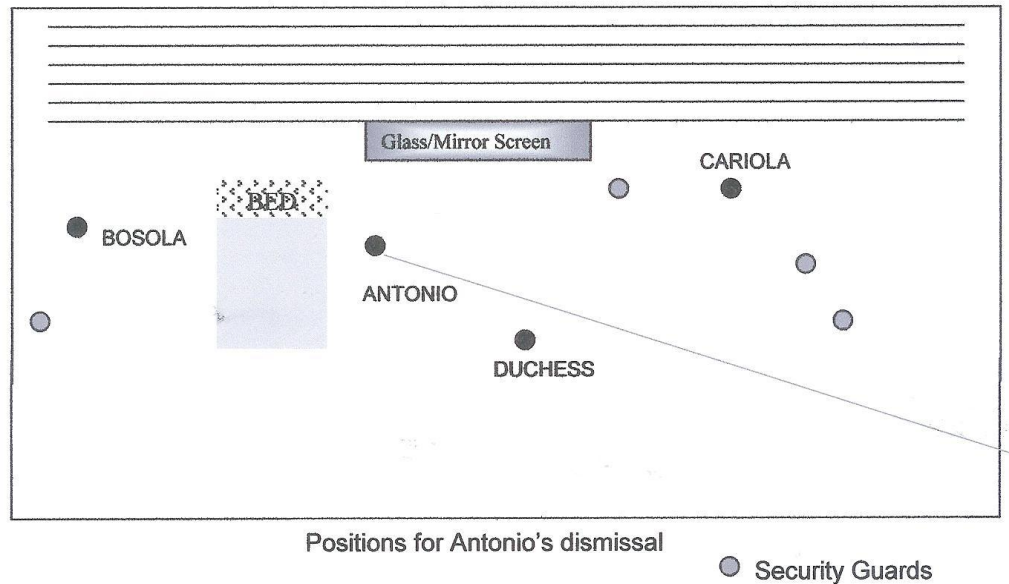
After Ferdinand's invasion of the Duchess's bedroom and subsequent departure (3.2.62-141), Bosola arrived knocking at the door (154). He maintained a discreet distance between himself and the Duchess, who sat upon the bed. Curiously, his subsequent exit was not the way he had come, but behind the glass screen, by which Ferdinand had previously made his surreptitious entrance with the "false key".



Bosola's first entrance then exit in 3.2.

For that reason, the director had presumably eliminated it as a potential hiding place for Antonio, who was instead secreted beneath the bed. However, it raised a massive question as to why Bosola should exit via a device, up till now used exclusively for characters to hide or spy upon others. Bosola was clearly visible behind the screen, although he appeared not to be aware of the subsequent action, as Antonio re-emerged from beneath the bed and plotted his escape with the Duchess. It presumably could not have been intended that Bosola should be aware of these plans, since that would beg the question why the Duchess should allow him to exit via the very route by which she had just been entrapped by her brother. All in all, this made for a curious anomaly in the logic of the staging.

As the assembled black-suited security officers arrived to witness Antonio's dismissal, Bosola now took up a position SR of the bed. The officers distributed



themselves around the space adopting the characteristic formal stance of men on duty, legs apart, and hands clasped in front. By contrast, although dressed identically, Bosola appeared physically uncomfortable. During the Duchess's denouncement and dismissal of Antonio, he stood initially with hands on hips, much as he had when previously challenging Ferdinand's vanity. But any assertive self-confidence in the stance was undermined by the nervous manner in which he continually raised a hand to wipe his face and neck, suggesting the deep insecurity of a man emotionally conflicted by the sudden developments.

After the officers' sycophantic trashing of the departed Antonio's reputation, the Duchess dismissed them, but kept Bosola behind to test his opinion. Affecting an unconcerned air, she sat to arrange her hair (presumably in preparation for her



Bosola wins the Duchess's confidence (3.2.)

imminent departure), leaving Bosola to protest her action over Antonio. As so often in this scene, it was impossible to judge the sincerity of Bosola's intent through his arguments, but his ample hand gestures seemed to convey a vehemence previously absent from his interactions with the Duchess. At the point at which he exclaimed a rhetorical farewell to Antonio (273), he loosened his tie; a small gesture, but one which tellingly connected with the physical and psychological discomfort evident in his earlier body language. More significantly, it suggested his rejection of the thankless role he had undertaken; a rejection of the constricting neck-ware of his black suited 'livery'. It returned us briefly to the earlier moment in Act Two where he had donned these clothes, while meditating on the frailty and corruption of the human body. Perhaps it was a cynical contrivance to win the Duchess's confidence with a display of feelings breaching the protocol of court dress. Conversely, perhaps

it was rooted in an honestly felt conviction - based on his own experience - of the ingratitude of aristocratic masters. Honest or not, his words proved prescient in the light of Ferdinand's subsequent behaviour in Act Four. For the present, they succeeded in winning the Duchess's confidence. Leaving her hairdressing, she stepped before the mirrored screen and confessed the whole truth of her secret marriage to Antonio. The fulsome praise Bosola then lavished on her was (surprisingly) delivered virtually uncut (283-301) so that, in a contemporary context, his excessive allusions to the hopes of virgins and the Christian conversion of "Turks and Moors" (292) rang hollow. Her slightly hysterical laughter at this point registered her sense of this excess, as much as her relief at finding this unlikely saviour. She took his hand, presenting him with a ring giving him authority to act on her behalf. After her departure - as he declared his intention to "reveal/All to my lord" (329-330) - his own laughter echoed hers, affirming his self-contempt for accepting the rewards of a world so unjust.

Only a fragment of 3.3. was retained (71-6); the court gossip concerning Bosola's university background had no relevance to this interpretation. The Cardinal and Ferdinand - now fully apprised by Bosola of the situation regarding the Duchess and Antonio - entered on top of the bleachers, to give vent to their feelings. At the end of the brief scene, Bosola, still at the foot of the bleachers, received Ferdinand's curiously anachronistic instruction to

Go, go, presently
Draw me out an hundred and fifty of our horse,
And meet me at the fort-bridge.

(3.3.74-6)

He was about to exit, when the text suddenly lurched to 5.2.150. and Julia entered carrying a pistol. The decision to introduce her seduction of Bosola at this point

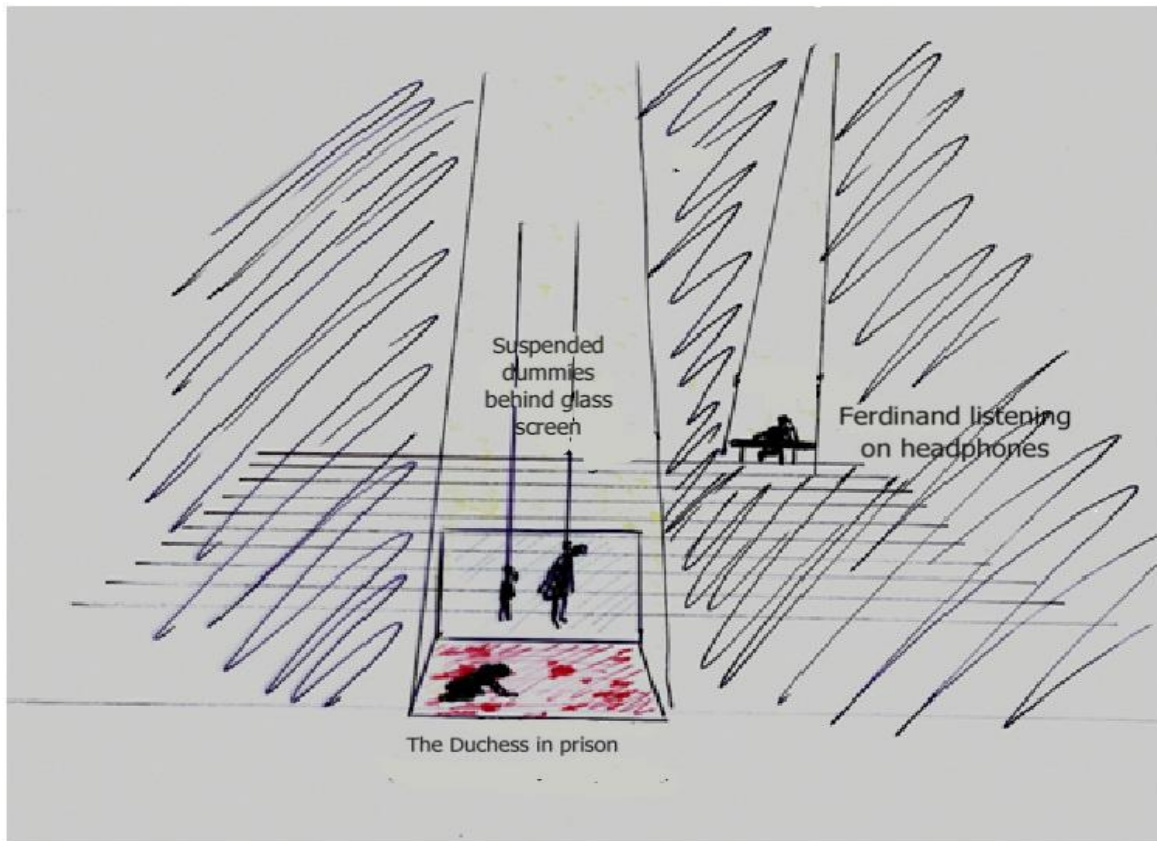
seemed calculated to add plausibility to what can be seen, in its original context, as an exceedingly contrived moment. However, if dislodged from its context in its entirety, it would not have made sense in purely plot terms. The solution arrived at was to split the scene into two, stopping this present one at line 182. This had the advantage of suggesting a more developed, - and possibly consummated - relationship between Julia and Bosola in the time between the two segments. Also, since the second half involved the potentially horrific element of Julia's poisoning, it may have been intended to separate it from the more comedic action of the first part, thereby avoiding what is sometimes treated as laughter-inducing *Grand Guignol*. The comedy of Julia's incongruous entrance was here fully exploited, with Bosola responding to her accusation of slipping her "love powder" (155), with a dumbfounded look towards the audience, who predictably exploded with laughter. As she cocked her gun on her declared intention to "kill my longing" (160), he advanced on her and placed his head against the barrel, before deftly disarming her with a sideswipe and moving to the exit.

The treatment of the Bosola/Julia scenes appeared one of the more effective editorial decisions, and made considerable dramatic sense, at least within the context of this production. Julia's armed entrance in the midst of catastrophe - although shifted to a new context - retained the bizarre timing and comedic impact of the original. Its inclusion at this point also served to replace the Loretto scene (3.4.), which was totally cut, and it enabled some sense of time to pass before 3.5., where we encountered the banished Duchess and her meagre train on the road.

A recurring image motif of refugee figures carrying suitcases across the front platform had been employed at the start of the play; the image was now reprised for this scene. Bosola entered in his overcoat with the proffered letter of supposed safe

conduct for Antonio. He adopted a deferential stance, with hands clasped in front. When the letter was rejected, he nodded formally and returned the way he came. As soon as he left, Antonio also prepared to depart. Wearing a jacket and distinctive striped 'football' scarf, he devised a ruse, changing garments with Delio (whose presence is unspecified by the text) to effect his escape. Bosola's return was prefigured by the sudden arrival, over the top of the bleachers, of a row of guards wearing helmets and visors and carrying batons like riot-police. In this context, Bosola resembled a police DCI coming to make the arrest. With hands in the pockets of his overcoat, he slowly sauntered on, eyes searching left and right in anticipation of some trick. Suddenly lurching at the disguised Delio, he immediately discovered the ruse that had allowed Antonio to escape. During the Duchess's tale of the salmon and the dogfish he stood discomfited, seemingly unable to decide between a formal stance and a casual one. As the guards closed on the Duchess to make the final arrest, his hands once again nervously wiped his face.

The convention in recent years of an interval between Acts Three and Four was rejected for this production. Consequently, the arresting guards descending on the Duchess from the bleachers now dispersed to reveal her in a prison cell, defined by rectangular red brickwork markings on the floor at the centre of the front platform. The glass screen was now placed directly behind her, providing an observation point for Bosola. Continuing the theme of surveillance, Ferdinand was ensconced at a desk at the top of the bleachers, wearing headphones to listen in on the Duchess's conversations with Bosola and Cariola.



Waxworks (4.1.)

After his preliminary interrogation of Bosola, Ferdinand did not actually enter the Duchess's cell for the 'dead man's hand' sequence. Instead his voice was amplified, and all actions were conducted by proxy, possibly by Bosola.¹ When the lights returned, waxwork bodies were hanging behind the screen – not visible until directly illuminated. 'Antonio' was identifiable by the football scarf.² McTeer's Duchess appeared very vulnerable during these scenes with a voice weakened by extended bouts of hysteria. Bosola continued to convey a mixture of discomfort and boredom – a man who had seen it all before and wished it to end. However, in spite

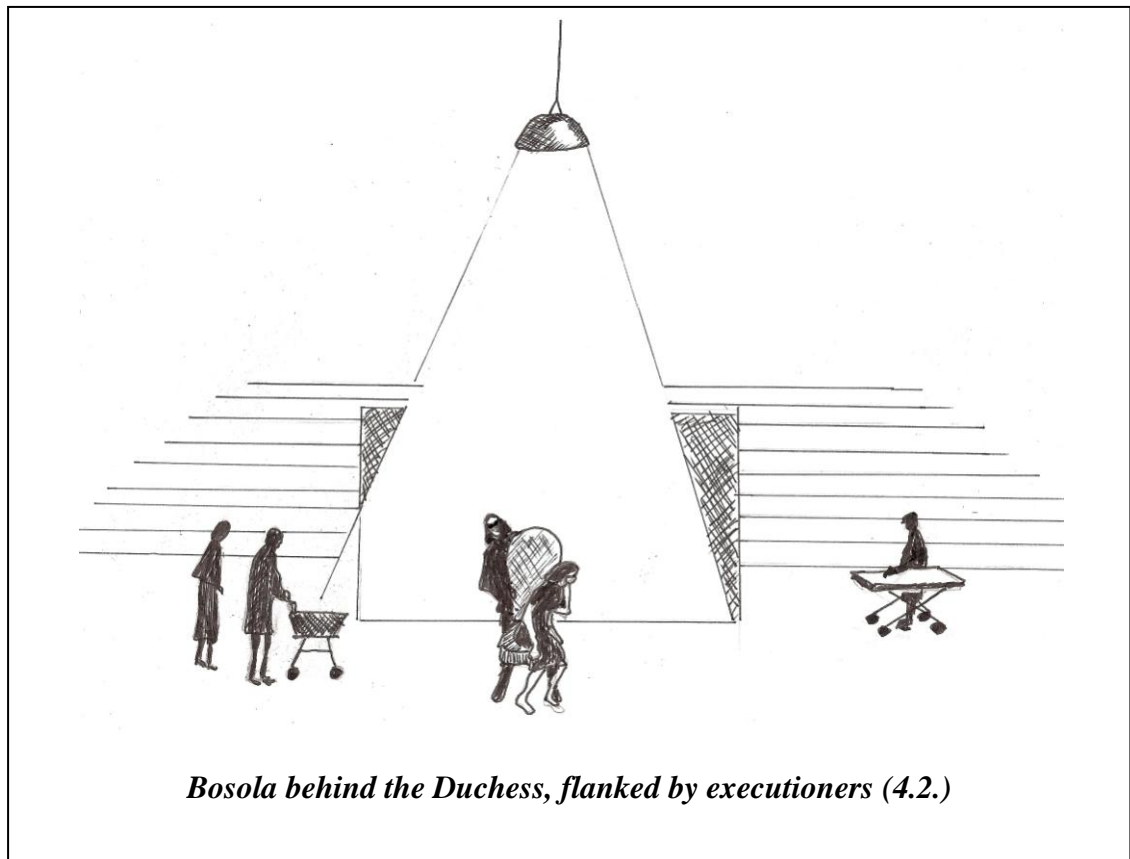
¹ This is uncertain as the scene was played in pitch black. A note in the production manual mentions, under risk assessment, the attempt at total blackout for 90 seconds during this sequence, extending as far as the temporary extinguishing of all auditorium exit signs.

² Another anomaly, as the Duchess saw him give this to Delio to wear at the end of Act Three.

of this, there was also a contradictory sense in which he seemed genuinely surprised by some of her responses and was perhaps curious to see how she might continue to react. When she pleaded for death, he knelt to her at "remember/ you are a Christian" (4.1.74-5), and there was a distinctive return to his repeated gesture of nervously wiping his face and neck with his hand, as he declared his pity for her (88). At her line, "I'll go curse." (96), he made the sign of the cross. His subsequent dialogue with Ferdinand (111-42) was characterised by considerable aggression, especially in his refusal to see the Duchess again in his "own shape" (134).

The madmen's text in 4.2. was cut and replaced by a *Clockwork Orange* style film sequence, which depicted a montage of the story so far, but including the apparent murder of Antonio and son. It suggested a drug-induced dream by the Duchess, as she was injected before it began. The company rushed on like a cinema audience of 'madmen', sitting on the steps facing out to the auditorium, reacting frenetically to the film and, finally, descending on the Duchess like wild animals before dispersing as a claxon sounded. At this point Bosola, as the tombmaker, suddenly appeared from behind the Duchess's high backed chair with the words "I am come to make thy tomb" (115). Cranitch wore a shoulder length wig; dark glasses, vicar's dog collar & frock coat. The most striking thing about his appearance was the theatricality of this garb which, given the quotidian nature of all the other costumes, tended to draw attention to itself. It was hard to imagine that this Bosola would have been instrumental in selecting such a costume; perhaps we were supposed to assume it was the product of Ferdinand's fevered imagination. Cranitch also seemed to accentuate his Irish accent for the role with more emphatic enunciation, making use of florid gesture and a 'creepy' style of movement.

During his “mortification” dialogue with the Duchess (115-190), he was intensely tactile with her in a way that not only contrasted with his former deference as an employee/servant but also tended to objectify and dehumanise her. So, as he described the body as a “contemptible” prison “to preserve earthworms”(127), he kissed her hand; then pointed directly at her head at “for riot begins to sit on thy forehead, clad in grey hairs...” (134-5) before reaching out and touching first her hair and then her mouth (“...a little infant, that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out...” [138-9]). Faced with such direct insolence, the Duchess was able to growl out, “I am Duchess of Malfi still” as a menacing threat, to which his response was a gentle laugh. Sombre organ music accompanied the entry of the executioners, (164) accoutred like surgeons with black masks and aprons and pushing a trolley and hospital gurney in lieu of a coffin. An operating theatre lamp descending from the flies completed the image.



Contrary to the original text, Cariola was significantly absent during these preliminaries. Instead she entered, screaming hysterically, immediately after Bosola's "bellman" speech (195). From this point Bosola began taking copious swigs from his hip flask, steeling himself for what was to come. The Duchess prepared herself for the rope by raising her hair in a moving reprise of her hair dressing in the bedroom scene. An executioner (a solo garrotter behind her) cut off her final word. Bosola signalled to two others to grab her flailing arms, which they did, but incompetently. With a sudden rush, Bosola pushed them aside and took over the throttling himself, but by now her hands were free again. In an effective, but somewhat contrived piece of business, as she died she reached up and pulled his wig off, unmasking him. This somewhat self-conscious piece of direction did, however, have an element of consistency; a continuous pattern of action having been established from the start regarding Bosola's dressing and undressing. As a metaphor for his complicity in the crimes of the court, we saw him dressing for his work in Act Two, uncomfortably playing with his tie in Act Three, and now, in Act Four, his attempted disguise unmasked by the Duchess, leading progressively to a voluntary shedding of the rest of his costume. Firstly, he used his frockcoat to cover the Duchess's face. After his betrayal by Ferdinand, he also stripped off the dog collar and hurled it to the ground. He had finally lost the constricting neck-ware, which ironically tied him to his role as the Duchess's strangler; henceforth he would remain open-necked till his death. After some tearful yelps, his final speech (353-74) projected a quiet determination.

At the end of the scene, the 'dead' bodies of Duchess & Cariola arose and sat on the bleacher steps, she (in accordance with the convention of last words, delivered *post-mortem*) speaking the word "mercy", now transposed from her failed

restoration, as a moving coda to the act. They would be joined by each of the others who died before the end of the play. This came remarkably soon.

In Miller's edition, the action of Act Five flowed rapidly, with the re-ordering and merging of scenes executed in such a way that time and space appeared continuous and non-specific. Antonio's declaration (5.1) to Delio that he would seek reconciliation with the Duchess's brothers, merged seamlessly into their encounter with the Duchess's echo in the ruins (5.3).¹ Ferdinand's lycanthropic episode with the doctor and Cardinal (5.2.) followed, eventually leaving the latter alone onstage with Bosola to urge the assassination of Antonio. The second half of Bosola's interlude with Julia picked up again with his line, "I have it, I will work upon this creature..." (5.2.183.), culminating in her death at the hands of the Cardinal and his poisoned book. Once again, the centrally positioned glass screen became Bosola's hiding place. Julia joined the seated ranks of the dead on the bleacher steps and, after the Cardinal's exit, Bosola was left alone to soliloquise his plan to help Antonio. From this point to the end of the play, he never really left the stage. I include a selection of the text from Miller's adaptation to show the extent to which Webster's text was re-arranged to accommodate this; the line references demonstrate how the re-arranged text jumps backwards and forwards through the last four scenes.

From his position at the foot of the bleachers, Bosola listened, as the Cardinal, Ferdinand and a number of priests entered above. These left after receiving instructions not to watch over Ferdinand. Before the Cardinal and Ferdinand also left, the Cardinal commented (in a re-arranged line), "When² Bosola hath served my turn

¹ Delio's petitioning of Pescara (5.1.) was totally cut.

² All underlined words indicate an interpolation by Miller.

he dies" (edited from 5.4.30-31) allowing Bosola to respond, in another re-arrangement:

My death is plotted;
(5.4.39)

I must look to my footing;
In such slippery ice-pavements, men had need
To be frost-nailed well; they may break their necks else
(5.2.331-3)

Still methinks the Duchess
Haunts me. There, there: 'tis nothing but my melancholy.
(5.2.344-5)

Listen

At this point, drawing a gun, Bosola ran to hide in the wings DSR. Delio and Antonio entered DSL. The dead Duchess sitting C. turned to look at Antonio.

DELIO: I'll fetch your eldest son, and second you.
It may be that the sight of his own blood
Spread in so sweet a figure may beget
The more compassion in the Cardinal.
(5.3.52-5)

ANTONIO: Farewell.

Delio exited DSL

Could I find¹ him
At his prayers, there were hope of pardon.
(5.4.44-5)

A gunshot rang out and Antonio fell.

O, I am gone. Thou hast ended a long suit
In a minute
(5.4.47-8)

Bosola ran on, gun in hand and recognised his error. Antonio died and joining the ranks on the bleachers after a *post-mortem* delivery:

And let my son fly the courts of princes.
(5.4.71)

Anticipating his next move, Bosola soliloquised,

My fate moves swift.
I have this Cardinal in the forge already;
Now I'll bring him to th' hammer.
(5.4.77-9)

¹ Substituted for "take".

The textual leapfrogging backwards and forwards continued as the Cardinal entered with the words,

O, my conscience
I would pray now, but the devil takes away my heart
For having any confidence in prayer. (5.4.26-8)

Then spotting Bosola,

Thou look'st ghastly;
There sits in thy face some great determination,
Mixed with some fear.

BOSOLA: Thus it lightens into action:
I am come to kill thee. (5.5.8-11)

Firing one shot, he wounded the Cardinal who, jumped at Bosola and wrestled him for possession of the gun. Ferdinand entered DSR, in white vest and underpants, with a knife, and inflicted multiple stab wounds on Bosola, before turning his attention on his brother and also stabbing him. From his position lying DSR, Bosola was now able to point the gun at Ferdinand who stood C. in front of the glass screen, firing on the line, "Now my revenge is perfect" (5.5.63.) Ferdinand collapsed as a spectacular jet of blood spattered the screen.¹ Dying first, Ferdinand, delivered his final sententious couplet (72-3) *post-mortem*, leaving time for a brief exchange between the Cardinal and Bosola lying on opposite sides of the front platform.

CARDINAL: Thou hast thy payment too.

BOSOLA: Yes, I hold my weary soul in my teeth;
'Tis ready to part from me. – I do glory
That thou, which stood'st like a huge pyramid
Begun upon a large and ample base,
Shalt end in a little point, a kind of nothing. (74-9)

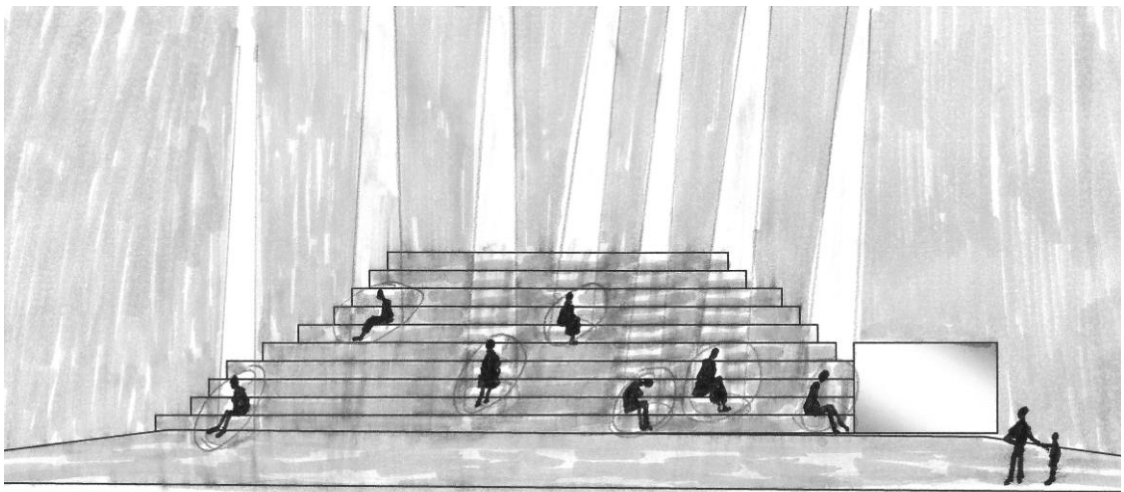
Bosola then dispatched the Cardinal with a final shot. His *post-mortem* words were the request to "Be laid by, and never thought of" (89-90).

¹ The production manual indicates a secreted pressurised blood canister was triggered at the base of the screen.

The production allowed the dying Bosola, the luxury of an almost uncut delivery of his final speeches (81-105). For the benefit of the now assembled company of priests, he itemised the individuals on whose behalf he had enacted his revenge, swiftly moving to his melancholy appraisal of the estate of mankind:

In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live? (103-4)

Here he died, delivering *post-mortem* his final words, "Mine is another voyage" (105). At the conclusion of Delio's summative remarks (109-21), he and Antonio's son concluded the play by turning to stare at the assembly of the dead, seated on the bleachers, each isolated in his or her own spotlight. The lights rose in intensity and then faded.



Assembly of the Dead (5.5.)

***The Dead (left to right): Bosola, Julia, Duchess, Cardinal, Ferdinand, Cariola, Antonio.
The Living (extreme right): Delio, and Antonio's son***

Miller denied Bosola his penultimate sententious couplet,

Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
To suffer death or shame for what is just... (103-4)

It seemed the Bosola shown us here, even if he felt a sense of vindication, was too full of self-contempt to moralise at the end. Perhaps the missing words - reflecting conventional Jacobean sentiments - would have sat uncomfortably in the mouth of such a character. The cut, along with others, reflected a tendency in the production to reduce and simplify the complex or the ambiguous. The production was the lesser for it. Cranitch's Bosola showed us the alcoholic depressive familiar from the twentieth century spy novel, but little else of the character's complexity.

I have cited some examples of how the text was altered to streamline the plot; I will cite one more to demonstrate an example of how this streamlining - while efficiently managed - shrank the potential of the character. I place side by side a segment of dialogue from Act One in Webster and in Miller's adaptation:

<u>Webster</u>	<u>Adapted by Miller</u>
<p>BOSOLA: There are rewards for hawks, and dogs, when they have done us service; but for a soldier, that hazards his limbs in a battle, nothing but a kind of geometry is his last supportation:</p> <p>DELIO: Geometry?</p> <p>BOSOLA: Ay, to hang in a fair pair of slings, take his latter swing in the world, upon an honourable pair of crutches, from hospital to hospital: fare ye well sir. And yet do not you scorn us, for places in the court are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower.</p> <p>(1.1.58-68)</p>	<p>BOSOLA: There are rewards for hawks, and dogs, when they have done us service; but for a soldier, that hazards his limbs in a battle...nothing!</p> <p>And yet do not you scorn us, for places in the court are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower.</p>

One cannot help but admire the ruthless efficiency that Miller has here applied to the text. He has succeeded in speeding up the play, kept a sense of Bosola's corrosive cynicism and even retained his hospital/court hierarchy metaphor, with its underlying associations of disease. What he has, lost, however, is the sheer surprise of Bosola's imagery; a surprise which, for example, makes us join with Delio in questioning his use of the word, "Geometry". Its use is both unpredictable and disturbing and we cannot at first understand its context. But, as Bosola explains the context, he introduces a metaphor in imagery that is comic and almost surreal, yet which seems to hold a kernel of truth, as both Antonio and Delio will come to learn. What we see, for a moment is a glimpse of Bosola's extraordinary mind, a reflection of the "fantastical scholar" (41), as Delio calls him in the cut scene (3.3.). It is a mind that is both agile and witty, but also unpredictable and dangerous, as much to Bosola himself as to others.

Curiously, the radical changes to the text that Miller undertook produced little that was radical in outcome. The focus on the Duchess gave little sense of her as an individual¹, as for example was achieved in the 1996 *Cheek By Jowl* production, with some - although perhaps less drastic - editing. It was significant that *that* production also presented a wholly original, yet valid reading of Bosola's victimhood, even though his part was as reduced in length as in this production.

If any character emerged as a memorable creation in this production (although he was not to everyone's taste) it was Will Keen's extraordinarily disturbed Ferdinand. Physically dwarfed by Janet McTeer's tall Duchess, he

¹ A statement in Spiller's interview with Phyllida Lloyd suggests this may have been intentional: "The void at the centre of the Duchess' characterisation, and her ability to reflect the personalities of others in her presence, was one of the primary attractions that drew Phyllida close to the play, specifically to its heroine." (Spiller).

gradually degenerated into a quivering mass of neurosis that elicited pity as well as terror. If something comparable (in impact, if not in complexity) had been achieved with both the Duchess and with Bosola, this production - even by its own lights - might well have succeeded better in telling a clearer and more powerful story.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

9.1. Past & Present

It is natural and healthy that each age should revisit the drama of the past, re-presenting it in ways that enable it to speak clearly to the present; the changes such processes bring about are to some extent inevitable. What emerges with *The Duchess of Malfi* is a play that has been periodically valued for the boldness of its themes and the beauty of its language while never quite seeming to fit the generally accepted template of a well-constructed theatre piece. At the extremes different centuries have judged the play as either irrelevant or strikingly pertinent to contemporary concerns. The only constant in its performance history has been the desire to tidy the play up; sometimes censoriously, to remove what is deemed in bad taste or, more often, to fine tune what is seen as relevant but unclear. All we can say with any certainty is that the play can be edited to support a variety of readings but, to my mind, a performance with a fuller text which permits ambiguity, recognizes the importance of Bosola and the complexity of his relationship with the audience inevitably provides a more rewarding, nuanced experience. Without making unreasonable assumptions about Webster's intentions, this inevitably brings us back to our starting point and the circumstances of the creation of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Webster would have found in the story of Giovanna D'Aragona an effective vehicle for his lengthy meditation on the theme of degree. But his experience with the reception of *The White Devil* taught him the importance of selecting the right audience and – more importantly - structuring his material to steer them in a desired direction. To this end, I believe, he deliberately created the multi-faceted role of Bosola to serve his purpose. The role's purpose was

determined partly in response to the structural discontinuity imposed upon the play by the physical realities of staging it within the Blackfriars' auditorium - although Webster probably welcomed this anyway, given his own predilection towards the use of the kind of 'functional ambiguity' which, Yachnin suggests, many playwrights adopted as insurance against prosecution.

But Webster also needed an agent to serve the plot's development and, in creating the *role* of Bosola, he also invented a *character* developed far beyond the material of his sources. This development suggests he was fascinated by the complex moral choices to which his theme exposed his characters. Using his earlier creation, Flamineo, as a prototype, Webster set about creating a role that would be capable of working the audience in a complex and subversive manner to draw out the maximum relevance from the social satire. Simultaneously, this role was also a character, as trapped as any other in the play by the consequences of his own moral choices.

To maximize his chances of success, Webster made use of a popular and experienced actor with a track record for engaging and controlling an audience. Lowin may have achieved this easily, operating initially as a sardonic commentator on the fringes of the action in the old-fashioned convention of the stage malcontent. But, after winning easy laughs and sympathy, he probably confounded the audience by becoming more and more deeply involved in the action in a profoundly unsettling manner, as his treacherous and ultimately murderous actions started to repel.

Although the play's status as a tragedy would lead the first audiences to expect some deaths, one must not underestimate the tension generated by their

probable uncertainty about the plot's outcome. Although Bosola is established as morally conflicted before the murder of the Duchess and her children, after their murder the audience would clearly have cast him as a villain, despite his expressions of conscience. It is possible that some in the Blackfriars' audience - unfamiliar with the source - might have looked to Antonio as a potential rescuer or avenger. Others, noting Bosola's Act Four pleas for restraint from Ferdinand, might even have anticipated a change of heart leading to his rescue of the Duchess¹; a device given advanced mileage by the false dawn of Duchess's temporary *post-mortem* revival. But it is unlikely that, after his elimination of the play's main protagonist, many would guess at Bosola's complete *volte face* by taking on that role for himself. And even here, Webster refuses to allow the audience to sympathize completely with a Bosola now reborn as the Duchess's avenger. It is – significantly - only after Ferdinand has denied him his blood money that the transformation occurs; the suspicion of self-interest remains with him to the end.

Webster consistently refuses to make easy work for his audience. If one compares his deployment of Bosola with - for example - that of Shakespeare's Iago or Richard of Gloster – two unredeemed villains who, from the start, engage with the audience in a similarly direct but morally ambivalent relationship – it is notable that Shakespeare distances his characters from the audience as the plays progress. Bosola follows a different trajectory: by Act Two, he is established as the chief mediator between the events of the play and the audience, his distinctively cynical and moralizing voice tending to work against the sympathy generated for the Duchess. Between here and the end of

¹ This was, after all, the major plot alteration effected by Theobald for "The Fatal Secret."

the play, his moral sensibilities undergo a profound change; he increasingly reflects upon his own actions and condition and, despite the shift of loyalties - and his responsibility (directly and indirectly) for the death of every other character in the play!), maintains his closeness to the audience. Significantly, Webster more and more uses him as a framing device; he opens four scenes, one on his own, but - more significantly - ends five scenes alone.

I believe Webster's extraordinarily ambitious aim may have been to manipulate the audience into continually re-evaluating the easy emotional alliances they make with *any* character in the course of a play, before arriving at a personal moral position on what they have seen. As an aim, if it was not doomed to outright failure, it was certainly destined for misunderstanding. In the performance history of *The Duchess of Malfi*, such misunderstandings have not always been kind to Bosola.

9.2. The Proliferation of Productions

The productions and performances explored in previous chapters have not been the only ones of note in the past forty years. To the Bosolas I have analysed might be added, for example, that of Victor Henry¹ who, in one description "was cast as the modern figure of the angry young man who has the measure of the aristocratic parasites who surround him." (McLuskie 52); or, more recently, that of Sebastian Harcombe,² who employed a current mental-health talking-point as a device to express the character's self-loathing. He appeared "as a brooding, film-noirish figure

¹ Royal Court Theatre 1971 directed by Peter Gill.

² West Yorkshire Playhouse 2006 directed by Philip Franks.

in a mac, who indulges in acts of self-harm when left alone." (Cavendish *Daily Telegraph* 2006).

In these examples, interpretation relies upon the discovery or creation of a point of resonance with which an audience can make a contemporary connection. This is now commonplace in revivals of classic drama, and innovative takes by directors are almost expected by audiences. But, such inventive re-interpretations of Bosola are invariably accompanied by textual cuts and amendments. Of the Victor Henry performance, for example (which emerged from the backdrop of Peter Gill's stylised, somewhat Brechtian staging), we learn that

In his self-revealing speech at the end of Act III, he sat casually on a table, drawing the audience into his view of the action. But, his cynical detachment was quite unmitigated by any admiration for the Duchess. His praise of the Duchess' courage in marrying Antonio was accordingly cut, denying the irony and ambiguity in his position.

(McLuskie 52)

Sometimes innovation springs from changes in theatrical fashion. For example, one current device is to allow several actors to share one role; a reversal of the conventional practice of doubling. Traditionally, for smaller companies tackling large cast plays, doubling can make a virtue of necessity by revealing connections between disparate characters. With its reversal - a device now frequently used by fringe companies¹ - non-naturalistically sharing the same part may reveal different roles within one character. Sometimes it adds more, as in this multiply-enacted Bosola from Jonathan Holloway's Red Shift production in 1983:

The malcontent was separated from the politic villain, the Duchess' champion, genuinely astonished by her gracious patronage of Antonio, from the 'devil's quilted anvil'. In this style of production, however, where actors and roles switched according to the rhythms of

¹ I last saw it used by Apricot Theatre at the Greenwich Playhouse in 2004. The company not only shared the role of Bosola but also used puppets to play some characters.

the scenes, this division of Bosola's roles created a sense of all enveloping corruption, an unnerving uncertainty about allegiances and identity; it seems to have created the opposite effect from the more rigidly moralised division of Bosola's character effected by Theobald in *The Fatal Secret*. (McCluskie 60)

Although McCluskie and Uglow are at pains to distinguish the effect of Holloway’s device from Theobald’s, it is clear that both versions represent a theatrical response to the problematic ambiguity of Webster’s *Bosola*. But the response highlights another creative imperative:

Theobald and Jonathan Holloway were both engaged in the same creative activity of using Webster's play to create a new theatrical experience out of the images and preoccupations of their own time. (McCluskie 60)

Perhaps because *The Duchess of Malfi* has long provided rich material for this kind of creative activity, adaptations and re-workings have proliferated as the play has grown in popularity. It is now probably the most frequently performed of early modern non-Shakespearian tragedies. It continues to be included on the examination syllabus in the UK and has been cited as the inspiration behind various recent literary endeavours¹. Its canonical status is indisputable.

Yet, even by this yardstick, there has been a significant growth of interest, in the UK, over the past decade. This was acknowledged in a recent article in the *Guardian Theatre Blog* entitled “What’s with all the Duchess of Malfis?” (Gardner). The UK Theatre Web Archive lists an extraordinary 51 professional productions of the play between the start of 1998 and the end of 2010 (Archive Listings: *The Duchess of Malfi*).² The diversity of these projects across a range of media is as remarkable as the quantity. In addition to the ubiquitous fringe, there have been

¹ Possibly the most bizarre being J.R.Dunn’s 1998 science-fiction reworking, *The Full Tide of Night*, in which Bosola’s role is partly replaced by an ‘Artificial Intelligence’ version of Cariola.

² See Appendix 5.

numerous major regional/touring productions (one recently accompanied by the release of a commercial DVD), the announcement of a feature film in pre-production and – most unusual of all – the performance of a newly commissioned opera as a collaborative venture between English National Opera and Punchdrunk, a company specialising in immersive site-specific theatre. Today the internet is dense with Malfi related websites; the 1972 BBC TV production is widely available (segmented, but in its entirety) on You Tube; and, until very recently, a short film adaptation shot on high-definition video, entitled *Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi*, has been available for download on Facebook. My impression is that, despite the diversity - or perhaps because of it - the role of Bosola continues to be diminished in complexity and ambiguity in the majority of contemporary performances. Similarly, the pressure on directors and designers to take a new line on the play is considerable.

This sudden upsurge of interest has, however, provided an opportunity to test some of my research findings against new performances. I have attended several recent productions where I have been able to question theatrical practitioners involved in the creative process. I wanted to discover what they saw as the main challenges of the play; how and why they have edited or rewritten the text; and how they treated Bosola, particularly in relation to the audience. I have interviewed three directors of recent productions; two actors playing Bosola and one author who has had a rewritten version performed. I have had an email conversation with another who has rewritten the work as a screenplay for a feature film, currently in pre-production. A brief report on these dialogues follows.

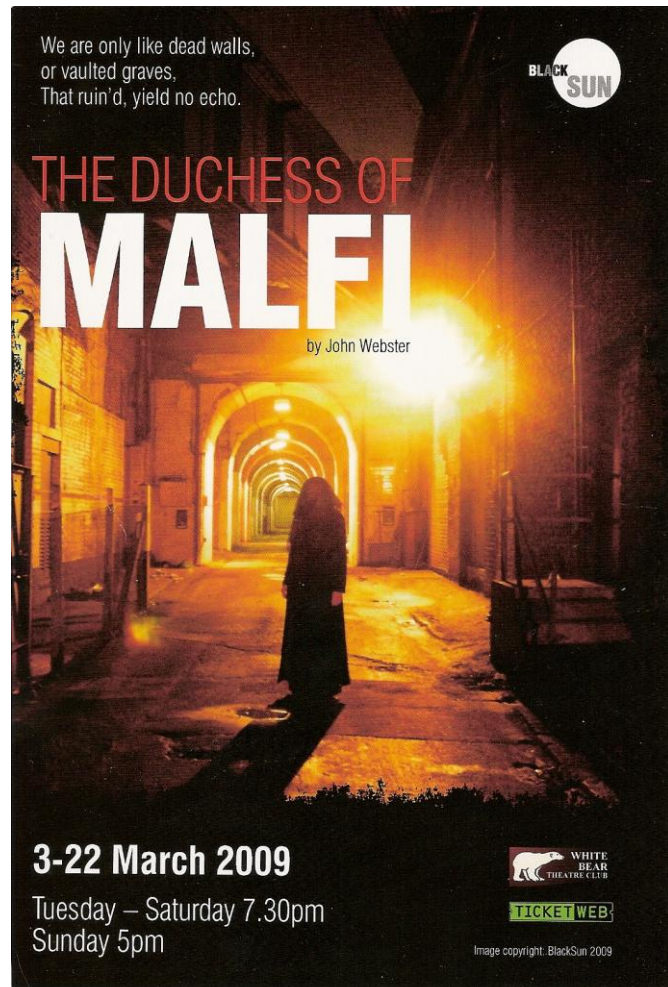
1. **Black Sun Theatre Company at the White Bear Theatre Club, Kennington**
(3-22 March 2009)

Director: Jemma Gross
Bosola: James Rose

Black Sun's director, Jemma Gross had never seen the play staged.¹ She produced an effectively swift modern dress production and James Rose gave a straightforward Bosola, employing his native accent to add another to the roll call of Scottish representations of the character.

The edited text surprisingly retained some

elements that often vanish in modern productions,² but inevitably, much of Bosola's part was cut. The chief casualty here was his relationship with the audience, as his soliloquies were internalised rather than directed to the audience. But, there were also some interesting directorial innovations, not least in Act Five, where the Cardinal,



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¹ I interviewed her and James Rose, who played Bosola on 14th March 2009, midway through the run.

² Notably the courtiers' dialogue in 3.3. which covers Bosola's delivery of the news of the identity of the Duchess's husband to Ferdinand, and the dialogue in 5.1. where Pescara gives Antonio's forfeited lands to Julia not Delio.

initially drew a knife against Bosola, and then laid it down again in an apparently suicidal act of remorse.

I asked the director about another surprising innovation: she retained Antonio's servant in 5.5., but, not only did she permit him to survive the action, but she also had him weigh in to assist Bosola against Ferdinand in the final fight. Why? The answer was simple: in a fringe production with actors playing 'multiples', and a fight director only briefly available, she had offered



James Rose as Bosola

the actor playing the servant a chance to decide the character's course of action, and this had been his choice. A simple pragmatic decision (and a Stanislavskian imperative on motivation) had been allowed to overturn Webster's text. In fairness to the director, she had chosen to include a character invariably cut in similar productions, and recognising that Webster makes it tricky at this point, she freely admitted she had taken the easier way out!

Remarkably, during Black Sun's run in Kennington, a second fringe production opened about a mile away.¹ Here, the directorial line seemed a paradigm of all the wilful wrongheadedness that has beset the play historically:

Large amounts of text have been cut, including the whole of the last act, bringing it down from marathon to sprint proportions, and the action has been re-set in 1940s London...
(Georgetti)

The production, which made use of physical theatre techniques, appears to have focussed on the Duchess/Antonio relationship to the exclusion of other considerations. So jaundiced was this reviewer by the experience that it seems to have put her completely off Webster:

...it really isn't terribly clear why the Second World War is a good setting for this story. But then the question must be begged of when would make a good setting for this incredibly dated and seemingly redundant text, which seems to speak of nothing modern at all. Imaginatively staged physical theatre or not, why put this play on today?
(Georgetti)

Rhetorical or not, the question received an answer a few months later, the play received its third London fringe outing that year.

**2. Have Your Cake Theatre Company at the King's Head Theatre, Islington
(2nd – 27th September 2009)**

Writer: Bryony Markwick
Director: Imogen Russell Williams
Bosola: Alan J. Mirren

On their website, "Have Your Cake Theatre Company" set out their mission statement as "an attempt to shed fresh light on underperformed (sic)" classical and Renaissance plays "to demonstrate that the big themes have never gone away" To achieve this they have set out to completely rewrite these plays, stating that,

¹ By Lazarus Theatre Company at the Blue Elephant Theatre, Camberwell. (17th March – 4th April 2009)

We want to come up with work which prompts us and our audience to return to the parent texts and see them in a new light, and which also entertains and engages in its own right.

Consequently, this *Duchess* could be regarded as a brave or foolhardy departure from other recent productions, albeit nothing new in the performance history of the play.

The reworking located the drama in 1981, evoking the fate of Princess Diana, and Katherine Gwen Pons' tall, elegant yet vulnerable Duchess was deliberately dressed and styled to make the connection..

As in the Webster, the transgressive class theme was explored by the Duchess's marrying 'beneath her', and in Bosola's action in turning on his employer. Only the role of the media did not feature in the original, as in this version.



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Writer Bryony Markwick explained¹ that she felt that including the role of the media reflected the way Webster employs the Court in the original: it is decadent and embodies extremes of adulation and condemnation of the Duchess. In this sense, she said, “the context is more important than any specific reference to Diana. It’s more

¹ I interviewed her on 16th September 2009.

the period in which Diana was alive. It was the last time the media had any respect or love for royalty.”

Markwick also set the tone of a stifling court atmosphere by creating two well-choreographed sinister but silent servants. Bosola, who often seemed in contention with them, was in one sense made redundant by this addition, since they also seemed to operate as spies and assassins for Ferdinand. Played powerfully (again as a Scot) by Alan Mirren, this Bosola was possibly too



Alan J Mirren as Bosola

much of a roughneck to pass plausibly as the Duchess's butler and, initially, I expected his role would have less weight than in the original. Markwick, however maintained a belief in the centrality of the figure:

He distils the ambivalence of the play...He messes things up...but forces the audience to think about things they don't want to...all his talk of degeneration; I think it's interesting that it's directly addressed to the audience...

Not only did she include a good deal of Bosola's morose musings, but crucially retained them in the soliloquy form,

Big, impressive, civilised man. Just a bag of bones that's degenerating. And all you do and all you are will amount to nothing more than your rotting cage, which you're trapped in. We all know this really. It's why happiness never sticks for very long.

But why does misery you ask? Easy peasy. For the sheer stupidity of it. Why do we cause woe to fellow sacks of meat? You might as well laugh at the stupidity of your own suffering. (Markwick)

Part of Bosola's fascination is that he maintains an ongoing dialogue with the audience and effectively demonstrates the story's moral complexity through his choices and changes. Markwick's script clearly understood this, and the production recognised the performative nature of his role when, after betraying the Duchess, Mirren's Bosola turned to the audience and growled "Don't look at me like that!"

The necessity of a rewrite remains questionable; after all, enough recent productions manage to elicit contemporary resonances while still employing the original text. Markwick felt that the chief loss in her reworking was Webster's distinctive language. However, too close adherence to the template of the original plot proved something of a strait-jacket. Since she expressed admiration for the work of Sarah Kane, I would have preferred to see her take a more tangential approach to the plot while exploring some of the themes and mood of the original.

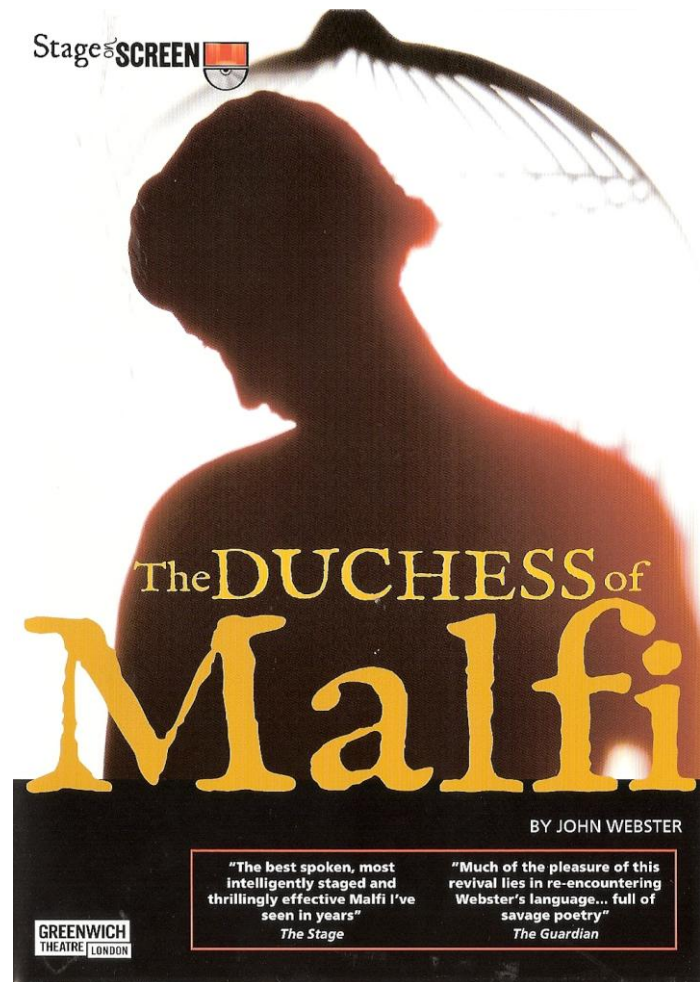
Stage on Screen at Greenwich Theatre (23rd March – 10th April 2010)

Director: Elizabeth Freestone
Bosola: Tim Treloar

Stage on Screen's strategy is to film, edit and release commercial DVD recordings of their own live performances of classic plays. Besides the general theatre-going public, their target audience is the educational market for examination set texts. To date, *The Duchess of Malfi* is one of four plays that they have performed and recorded at Greenwich Theatre, signifying its renaissance as a producing house. It is also the first *Malfi* at that theatre since Philip Franks' in 1995 with Juliet Stevenson. It was directed by Elizabeth Freestone, a young director with a

background in both the RSC and RNT. Interestingly, in seeking to meet a very specific commercial brief for this new business, she fashioned a far more satisfying production than either of those two major companies have produced in the past two decades.

Like Jemma Gross, Freestone had never seen the play staged, but claimed, "It has always been big in my imagination"¹ She took personal responsibility for editing the text, even confessing to inventing one additional line, adding "I only did the adaptation after we'd worked through the whole play."² The reduction to an efficient running time of two hours forty minutes (bisected exactly into two eighty minute halves), was achieved without significant loss of scenes frequently cut in recent adaptations. For example, Bosola's exchanges with Castruchio and the Old Lady (2.1) survived, as did Pescara's rejection of Delio's intercession on behalf of



DVD Cover

¹ I interviewed her shortly after the run on 30th April 2010.

² The text of Freestone's adaptation appears on the company website

Antonio (5.1.).

This fuller adaptation undoubtedly stemmed from the wish to produce a performing version suitable for study purposes and, like the other productions I have judged most successful, Freestone's was also historicised.

EF: I'm a great believer in a world context and atmosphere. I need to know about a character's background, so you're not just looking for a study of human beings out of context. You're saying within these corridors... these conditions...this is what happens. It's very clear to me that with Bosola, his character is formed by his experiences as an army man. It raises the question of what happens to soldiers when they leave the army and are on the streets. How do their brains cope? That's really the big starting point for Bosola's character.

However, unlike Noble or Alexander, her production rejected a Jacobean or Renaissance context. Instead, like Donellan, she chose the early twentieth century, between the two World Wars.



The Court (1.1.)

EF: Setting it in the sixteenth or seventeenth century lets the audience off. They think, oh that's just the way they behaved then. I'm not sure the audience really engage with the problems of a woman (or a poor soldier) in that society. I wanted to find a more recent patriarchal period to realise these two big ideas. The one that seemed to make sense was a fascist regime in the build up to the Second World War, although I wasn't interested in the iconography of fascism.

Both the fuller text and the context allowed for a reading which permitted many of the ambiguities of characterisation.

EF: Ambiguity was something we struggled with quite a lot in rehearsals until we had this breakthrough day, when we said, "Hang on, let's not try to make everything add up...let's embrace these multi-faceted characters... after all, we all act out of character at times."

Freestone also granted that audience response may well have been different in Webster's day and agreed that Bosola has a crucial role in shaping this:

EF: An audience of Webster's time may have partly condemned the Duchess, whereas a contemporary one says, "Good for you!" It's interesting that Bosola negotiates between these two positions... He guides the audience through that moral dilemma.

We discussed the arguments over the relative status of the Duchess and Bosola as tragic protagonists, and the often expressed opinion that Act Five was "broken-backed". Did she agree?

EF: I'm fascinated by that position...with most of these plays the 'hero' figure has Act Four off then appears in Act Five to have their showdown. I think it was an amazing decision of Webster's to handle this play as he does. The business in Act Four goes so quickly and then we lose the Duchess. The audience really misses her...at least, a modern audience. You're haunted by that absence in Act Five, and then the figure of Bosola rises up to fill that absence and transcend it. Act Five is certainly the tragedy of Bosola.

I felt that the chief losses in this production (as in most recent productions) were the performative elements in Bosola's relationship with the audience. This was largely due to the end-stage arrangement at the Greenwich theatre. Freestone agreed,

claiming this was due to a planning fault. The set was originally designed with side doors which gave closer access to the audience.

EF: We had originally hoped Bosola would have been able to occupy these spaces, where he could establish a close relationship with the audience. Unfortunately, the Greenwich layout didn't permit this. It was a pity ... there's an inherent self-conscious theatricality in his writing.

Despite this loss, the production boasted a Bosola of considerable power and presence; critically well received, as in this Time Out review:

... a superb Bosola. Tim Treloar may not quite carry off the murderous henchman's moral conflict, but the granite-hewn Welshman blasts presence from every pore, terrifyingly magnetic and magnetically terrifying.



Tim Treloar as Bosola (5.5.)

Freestone spoke highly of Treloar's performance: "...Tim's Bosola was sharp and witty... at first dangerous and unpredictable and finally deeply moving." At times, I was reminded of Bob Hoskins' 1981 performance. Possessed of an angry gallows humour rather than Hoskins' hilarious sense of the absurd in the early

scenes, for all it lacked in performativity, Treloar's performance compensated with an extraordinary emotional intensity. I had not till now seen a Bosola who was as



Bosola's grief (4.2.)

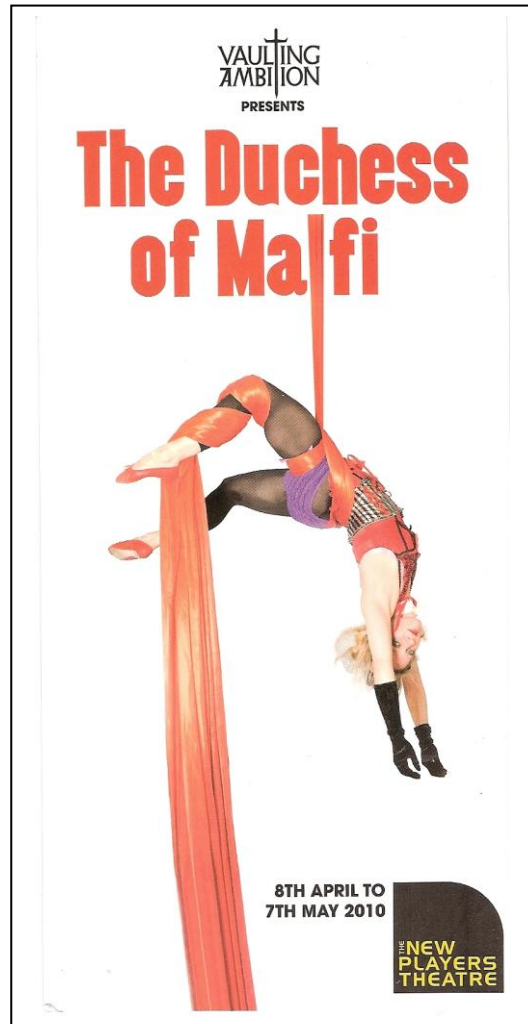
devastated as Hoskins by his failure to revive the dying Duchess.

Yet, impressive and satisfying as this performance was, it only told part of the story. Two days before this production closed, another one opened which - despite a very restrictive brief - partly sought to address what this one missed.

3. Vaulting Ambition at The New Players Theatre (8th April – 7th May 2010)

Director: Dan Horrigan
Bosola: James Sobol Kelly

Hearing about my research before the start of rehearsals, director Dan Horrigan initially approached me to discuss his approach to the play. I had already learned of his decision to set the play in a 1930s travelling circus; an idea I viewed with some trepidation. He offered two reasons for such a limiting frame: firstly the venue (the New Players Theatre at Charing Cross) was originally a vaudeville theatre dating from the 1930s; secondly, when seeking the job, he had pragmatically pitched the novelty of a performance punctuated by circus routines, and it had been well-received. I assumed such a precisely defined environment would prompt a performance style leaning toward



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the metaphorical. I agreed that such a world need not be too distant from that evoked by Webster, but I asked how he might see the metaphor working.

DH: Escape and confinement is crucial to circus and much of the play can be read in the same way. But it's also the physical act...performing in a circus is not like acting. It's not about psychological motivation; it's all about effect. One of the things I like about the Webster is that at some moments of acute psychological tension you get a tableau – a representation that doesn't come from an individual psychological plane...it's almost archetypal...

I commented that Harriet Walter had referred to Bosola as “a kind of Everyman”¹ hinting at an archetypal figure, and suggested the circus idea might allow performative elements in the role to be accentuated in a way not usually seen. He agreed, and I showed him the picture of George Anton’s white-faced Bosola from Donnellan’s 1995 production,² which simultaneously suggested both clown and death’s-head.

I saw the new production mid-way through the run (17th April) and afterwards spoke to both director and Bosola (James Sobol Kelly). While it contained nothing approaching the emotional power of the Greenwich version, Horrigan’s production was both visually and intellectually stimulating and created a striking new context for the play. With reservations, the circus metaphor worked well, perhaps because as one reviewer wrote,



James Sobol Kelly

There is a duality about the topsy-turvy theatre of circus - for children, a place of mystery and wonder; for adults, often, evoking an uncanny sense of the grotesque. (Butler)

Horrigan spoke again of how he saw it working:

...liberating the unhinged chaotic aspects of our inner personalities and allowing them to run riot is what circus is about...and making it as performative as possible.

In the process, something novel had happened to Bosola:

¹ See page 181.

² See photograph on page 246

James Sobol Kelly plays Bosola in striped shirt, short trousers, bowler hat and white, skeletal face paint, imagine Tom Waits. Kelly's performance is brilliant, acting in a role similar to a Shakesperean fool, able to get away with plenty as people underestimate him. (Buxton)



James Sobol Kelly as Bosola

...the Iago-inspired Bosola is rendered vividly by the compelling stage presence of James Sobol Kelly. After agreeing to be the brothers' spy, Kelly returns as a clown, his maquillage suggesting a deviousness and inscrutability that works as well now as it would have in Jacobean London, where face paint could suggest the evil of artifice. (Butler)

He had been re-imagined as amalgam of both Shakesperian Fool and Beckettian clown, giving something of the archetypal element that Horrigan had sought. This was well caught in the image of Bosola's roadside appearance (3.5.) to Antonio and the Duchess, dressed as a tramp, complete with shattered umbrella.



Bosola as Beckettian clown (right)

Kelly's approach as an actor was intuitive rather than intellectual (he noted early on that his own middle name was part anagram of the name Bosola and he was inspired by its denotation as "compass"):

Setting it in the circus gave me a whole bunch of images, but playing a role like this one always comes back to what is written...the incongruities and inconsistencies...you have to embrace those. The thing that everyone says is the great difficulty about playing Bosola I've found is also the most helpful; characters who are more symmetrical and don't have these jagged edges don't take you as far... ..the biggest challenge is the duty thing...throughout the play he's very aware...consciousness of heaven and hell, right and wrong, love and mercy, and yet... he does what he does.

To my mind these contradictions were encapsulated in a single highly performative moment at the end of 3.2. Left alone after having successfully duped the Duchess into confessing the name of her husband, Bosola slowly made the sign of the cross then, turning his white clown face to the audience, opened his mouth in a monstrous silent laugh which imperceptibly changed into a soundless scream of metaphysical terror. It was a chillingly gestic moment, in keeping I suggested with

what Horrigan had said about Webster's use of tableaux at moments of extreme psychological tension.

DH: Yes, when you showed me the Cheek By Jowl photograph, it really shocked me because I'd had this image in my head for a long time.¹ I realised, if he was going to be a clown, he ought to make a face for himself and that face ought to ...capture the dynamic of the man who serves his masters, but who loathes the evil he's involved in.

However powerful these moments, the play's chosen context caused one significant loss. The circus setting imposed a pattern of relations upon the characters, radically different from Webster's, especially in terms of their social hierarchy. The noble/commoner distinction, so fundamental to the plot, was lost and, although the circus served as an effective analogy for the hermetically sealed world of a renaissance court, Bosola as a clown ceased to operate as an outsider to that world. In a sense, they were all outsiders from the real world.

I noted that Horrigan had effectively historicised the play by setting it in the 1930s, yet had not sought to exploit the class tensions of the period.

DH: The political context screams at you from the first scene of the play. I had wanted to give the impression of a society going through a very deep depression. It's a world seeking regeneration, new life, when it's been brought down through greed, avarice corruption....One of the disappointments was that we weren't able to realise that idea.

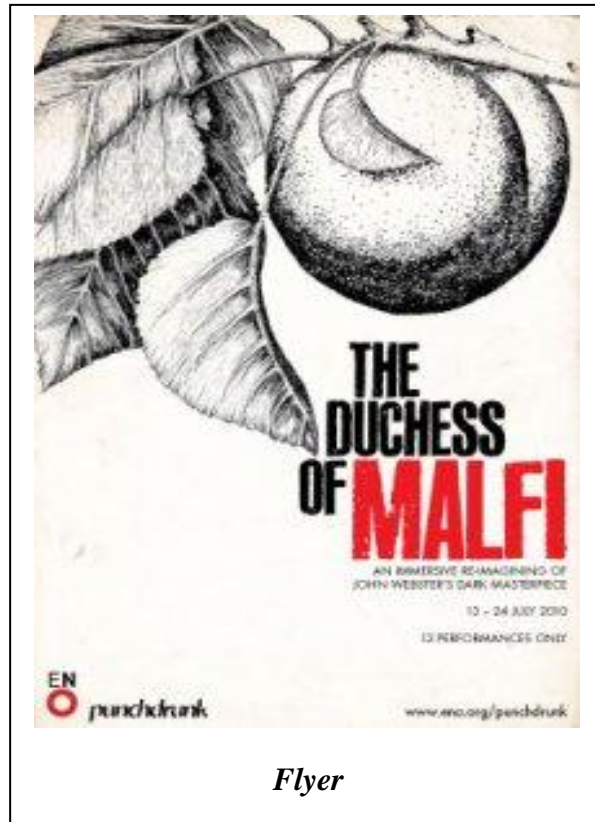
This admitted failure, in an otherwise successful production, points once again to the difficulty of capturing the totality of Webster's vision; in this case, an inability to reconcile elements of the naturalistic with the metaphorical.

¹ He remembered he had seen the Donnellan production in 1995.

4. Other Projects

a). English National Opera/ Punchdrunk (13th-24th July 2010)

Composer: Torsten Rasch
Director: Felix Barrett
Bosola: Richard Burkhard



This was effectively a piece of performance art responding to Webster's play rather than a conventional theatrical interpretation. By my own defined parameters, it should really fall outside the remit of this research. However, I have briefly included a mention, since it is hard to ignore the phenomenon in 2010 of a two week run of *The Duchess of Malfi* selling out within six hours and crashing the company's website with demand for tickets!

Torsten Rasch's is not the first operatic treatment of the play,¹ but its popularity and its non-linear presentation probably owed more to Punchdrunk, whose post-modern deconstructions of classic texts have recently developed a widespread popular following. Performed immersively over three floors of a massive vacant docklands office complex, the audience, wearing masks wandered at liberty, encountering environments, objects and individuals thematically related to the world of Webster's play. By definition this fragmentation impedes any analysis beyond a subjective phenomenological impression, since it is unlikely that any two audience members underwent the same sequence of experiences.

Punchdrunk's work is predicated upon this subjective response, and I have attended and enjoyed their other productions for this very reason. But, on this occasion, I felt the operatic structure worked against the intended non-linearity of the work. Rasch had composed eight scenes adapted from the play, which were presented twice during each performance in a non-chronological sequence. However, this attempt at fragmentation failed because the audience inevitably regarded these scenes as the dramatic core of the experience, and ceased their meanderings to assemble wherever the peripatetic orchestra congregated for a new scene.

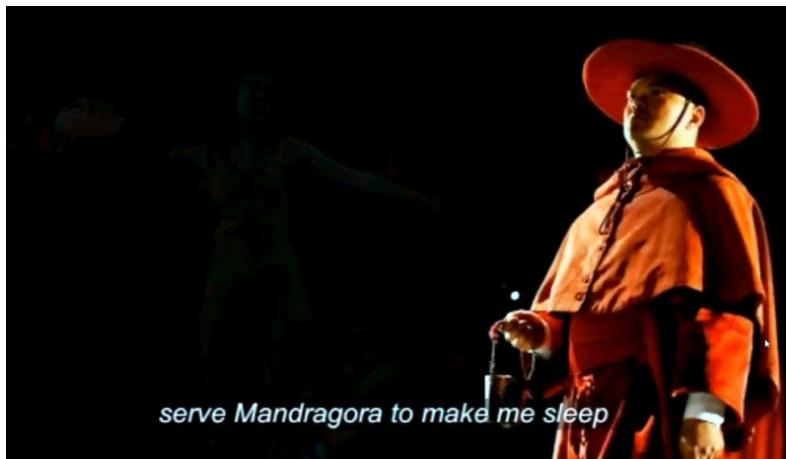
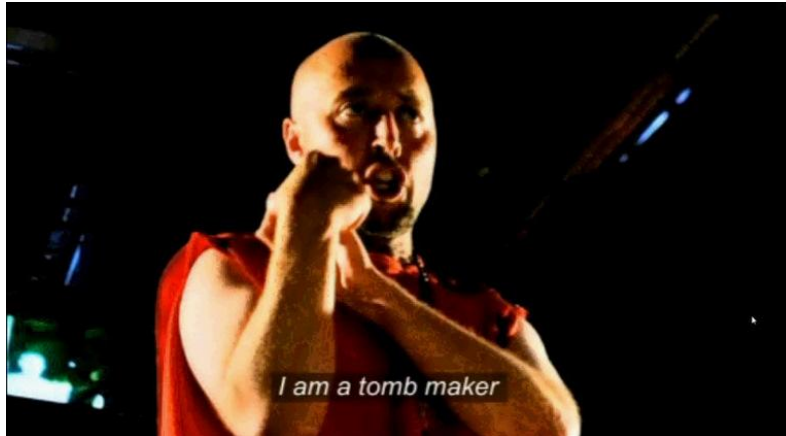
Given my own agenda, I had initially planned to follow Richard Burkhard's *Bosola* from scene to scene, but was forced to abandon this in the melee and darkness. However, it soon emerged that the priorities of the creative team had anyway relegated *Bosola* to the relatively limited roles of spy and assassin. Moral complexity was abandoned and straightforward sensationalism filled the void. Ferdinand's lycanthropy and the Cardinal's predilection for mistresses and poisoned bibles were much to the fore, to the extent that one critic described it as 'S&M sex mixed with Catholic kitsch' (Morrison).

¹ The late Stephen Oliver wrote and sang *Bosola* in a version performed at the Oxford Playhouse in 1971. There is a recording the British Library. It was professionally performed by Santa Fe Opera in 1978. Another version by Stephen Douglas Burton was performed in the same year at Wolf Trap, Washington DC. (Ranald 48).

The show's priorities became clear as the company assembled the whole audience in a massive curtained space (the size of an aircraft hanger) for the climax. This turned out to be a powerful and highly ritualised enactment of the Duchess's death. There was no Cariola, but a group of red robed acolytes who carried in the Duchess on a throne. Bosola (dressed like the acolytes in the Cardinal's red) conducted affairs; but the Cardinal - upstaging Ferdinand - entered to give the Duchess a drugged drink and anoint her forehead. She was then suspended by her feet and her throat cut. In a final *coup-de-théâtre*, the surrounding curtains were withdrawn to reveal scores of similarly suspended corpses; presumably, an intimation of the catastrophic *dénouement* of Act Five. I have assembled this series of still images¹ to convey an impression of this sequence.



¹ video-grabbed from the More 4 documentary "The Making of *The Duchess of Malfi*"





Eight images from *The Making of the Duchess of Malfi*. documentary

b. Film Projects

Apart from the 1972 BBC TV production, there have been no screen adaptations until now.¹

There is now news of a production which was scheduled to commence filming in Luxembourg in September 2010,



directed by Nicholas

La Duchesse de Malfi (2010) de Nicholas Steil

Steil from a screenplay by Alice de Sousa. Advance publicity for the project from the Iris Group refers to the screen Duchess as the daughter of a recently-deceased “media-mogul” (suggesting an updated reworking). The following description of the proposed ending suggests some extensive reworking; we may also expect yet another new take on the role of Bosola: display

...the film concludes as intriguingly as it commenced; with the audience left wondering whether the recently repentant Bosola will continue his journey into the unknown with only his tortured guilty thoughts for company or whether he will actually fulfil his original mission and kill the Duchess’ and Antonio’s child.

(The Duchess of Malfi by Nicholas Steil) ,....

In the meantime, a group of University of Toronto students have placed in the public domain (via Facebook) a short ten minute film version shot in high-

¹ The BFI website mentions an intriguing “Unrealised project set for production in 1995” to be directed by David Mamet with Bob Hoskins in the cast. Mike Figgis’s 2001 film *Hotel* has a film crew shooting a version of the play in a Venetian hotel staffed by cannibals and vampires. The excerpts from the play employed rewritten text. I have also long felt that – unintentionally or not - Sam Peckinpah’s 1974 film, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* echoes several of the play’s themes and even plot details, with Warren Oates’ character, Bennie, displaying many of Bosola’s qualities, and even sharing a comparable fate.

definition video, entitled *Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi*. According to the producers (McDonald 04/02/11), it has been submitted for entry to the Sundance, Super Shorts, CFC Short Film Festivals, and the VIE network digital short film Festival in New York.

The film references contemporary crime drama, interestingly placing Bosola (played by director/producer Kyle McDonald) at the heart of the narrative. In the convention of film-noir, it uses flashback to tell the story up to and beyond the murder of the Duchess and ends at the moment where Bosola, haunted by her image, arms himself for revenge.



The Duchess (Irena Kuljak) haunts Bosola (Kyle McDonald)

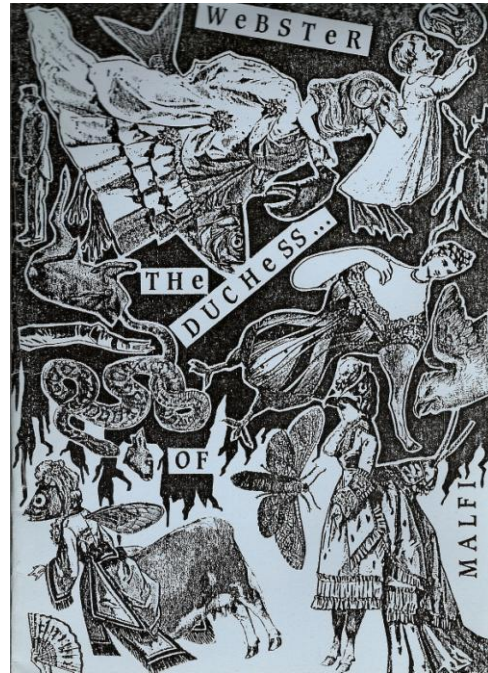
The examples I have cited there reflect the practical compromises rightly or wrongly involved in any production when a text is turned into performance; whether it is a director framing the drama to a novel concept to win the job (Dan Horrigan), or altering the outcome of a stage fight to meet the capacities of the actors (Jemma Gross). Just as Webster found at the Red Bull, these examples demonstrate how the

limitations of the performing space can affect the outcome of a performance (Greenwich). They also show how two actors playing Bosola (Tim Treloar and James Sobol Kelly) can achieve powerful but radically dissimilar performances with different approaches to performativity; highlighting the tension between role and character, with neither excellent actor telling the whole tale. They extend the centuries-old story of how writers and theatre practitioners have redrafted Webster's narrative to serve their purposes; whether to draw out a contemporary resonance (Briony Markwick) or to suit the ambitious demands of some grandiose project (ENO/Punchdrunk). Finally, they reveal the extraordinary resilience of *The Duchess of Malfi*, which continues to inspire artists in new media, and thankfully seems to survive whatever they do to it.

APPENDIX 1:
A production of *The Duchess of Malfi* revisited

The Duchess: Kate Garman
Bosola: David Lewsey
Director: John Buckingham

I directed this production for an amateur company¹ in 1986. Recorded at the time on VHS video tape, it is something I find hard to watch today, since it seems to embody a combination of arrogance and naiveté on my part as director. However, I revisited the production in 2002 as an exercise during the writing of a component of my M.A., "The Director: Theories of Practice."



Programme Cover

At the time, I had written about the production to illustrate what was basically a Stanislavskian approach to the text. But, looking at the video and other material again, I was now struck by another key element in my directorial style. This is the extent to which, at the time, I emphasised the visual and aural above the textual. I remember having wanted to disconnect the play from what I then felt to be the conventional trappings of Jacobean revenge tragedy and, at the same time, to find a period and place that exploited some of the play's persistent imagery in a way that made some more recent connections. I had initially considered relocating the play to a contemporary setting but finally settled on a generalised nineteenth century. I felt

¹ Teddington Theatre Club performed at Hampton Court House. All production photographs were taken by Martin Stonelake, who also designed the set.

that a 'Gothic' style was appropriate to the horrors of the play and allowed a correlative to - among other things - its persistent medical imagery where, for example,

...places in the court are but like beds in the hospital,
where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower.

(1.1.66-8)

If there was any overwhelming textual influence at all, it was in the search for a visual correlative for

Bosola's "gloomy world" (5.5.100). For this I had found initial inspiration in

Böcklin's nineteenth century painting, *The*



The Isle of the Dead

Isle of the Dead, (and the set - although in no way exact rendering of the painting, drew upon some of its atmosphere. Böcklin produced numerous versions of the same painting between 1880 and 1886 and, under its influence, Rachmaninov composed an orchestral tone poem with the same title in 1908. In the same obsessive spirit, I employed this piece to provide a highly charged, if somewhat melodramatic, soundtrack. It was the only music used, and I very much envisaged its recurrence throughout the play as not only an atmospheric correlative to the set but the equivalent of an aural *through-line* to the play.

While seeking a design that afforded flexibility within a single structure, echoing something of the stage of an Elizabethan/Jacobean playhouse, I still required a 'Gothic' feel. Böcklin's painting was a major stimulus, and what eventually

emerged was a three-levelled structure of intersecting lozenges, backed by stone grey flats in which three doors suggested more than just a means of entrance and exit:

1 know death hath ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits...

(4.2.218 –19)



Set Design

Above the doors, three stained-glass windows embodied the aspirational nobility of a world “beyond death.” In the first half of the play, warm lighting revealed tapestries and colourful costumes. For the second, cold lighting showed the walls were bare and cracking; white dust sheets like shrouds predominated.



The Court (1.1.)



The Duchess and executioners (4.2.)

The costume designers, Irene Palko and Andrew Wale, produced a sumptuous period look and I took great pains over the atmospherics which transformed the warmth of the Duchess's palace in the first three acts to the charnel house of the final two.



The Duchess at court (2.1.)



...and as prisoner (4.1.).

The text was played with very few cuts; the most significant being 3.4., losing the two Loretto pilgrims and the dumb show of the Cardinal's military instalment.¹ I also made virtually no minor cuts within scenes, either to assist comprehension by a modern audience or to reduce the running time - which emerged as 95 minutes for Part 1 (Acts 1 - 3) and 72 minutes for Part 2 (Acts 4 & 5). I remember resisting pressure from the theatre management to reduce the play's length, although my

¹ Instead the Duchess's banishment was represented by her arrival at the shrine where she was met by cowed monks bearing lighted candles. These they inverted and extinguished on the floor in the manner of the medieval ritual of excommunication.

response in this was instinctive rather than intellectual; I simply felt that there was something to be gained by 'allowing the play to breathe'. Although, I can honestly say that I could not justify this decision by the scant amount of detailed attention I gave the text in rehearsal, I believe it was crucial to the weight that I gave to the role of Bosola.

I wrote at the time of being moved by the theme of nobility in the drama. I meant 'nobility' in the sense which defies the literal social status of the three principal characters: the Duchess, the Cardinal and Ferdinand; two of whom fall short of the spiritual qualities by which such nobility can be defined. It was in recognition of this that I deliberately copied the practice of the 1980/1 Manchester Royal Exchange production's programme and listed the cast under their social ranking as "The House of Aragon", "The Court" and "The Professional Classes." As a definition of true nobility I took Delio's sententious couplet, which ends the play, as key:

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

(5.5.120-1)

I felt that the play outlined a quest for this true nobility - a stoical dignity and integrity in the face of the worst that life and death can throw at you. It was in the varying degrees to which the characters succeeded or failed in this quest that I had perceived the play's *Supertask*.¹ Bosola, I felt, principally embodied this quest, as he was the one character above all, significantly morally transformed by the events of the play; the key moment in that transformation being the Act 4 murder of the Duchess.

¹ At the time, I used this term for the Stanislavskian concept more commonly known as the *Super-Objective* since it was preferred by my MA supervisor, Jean Benedetti. He also preferred the terms *Bits* and *Tasks* to his previously employed *Units* and *Objectives*.

For the role of Bosola, I chose David Lewsey, a good-looking and intelligent actor in his late twenties. With the Duchess, Ferdinand and even the Cardinal as comparatively youthful figures, I had initially intended counterpointing these with an older Bosola – possibly in his forties. I had already cast an older Antonio, seeing him as almost a father-figure for the Duchess, and felt that Bosola should in some respects mirror him. In the end, however I chose David; I had cast him in leading roles on several occasions previously - notably as the unfortunate hitch-hiking teacher,



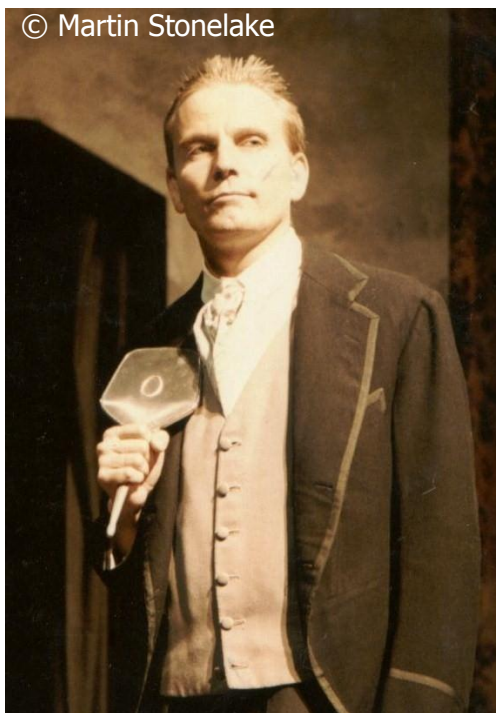
Bosola as Provisor of the Horse (2.2).

Nick, in Stephen Poliakoff's *Strawberry Fields* – and knew him to be capable of meeting the considerable demands made by the role of Bosola, even if he was slightly younger than I had envisaged.

My chief concern was still that he might appear too much the ‘juvenile lead.’¹ However, since his teens in youth theatre, David had acquired a gravitas in performance through the experience of playing leading roles such as Grandier in Whiting's *The Devils* and John Proctor in Miller's *The Crucible*. I also knew – crucially - that he was capable of both winning an audience with a charming and

¹ In fact, his age proved less of a problem than the undermining of some audience's other more conventional expectations. For example, one critic friend commented sardonically that with the costuming decisions I had made, David looked less Jacobean malcontent than Buttons on loan from *Cinderella*!

disarming manner, yet could equally well project a powerful sense of menace when necessary. To undermine any danger of the 'matinee idol' image, I insisted that this Bosola should sport a vicious scar upon his cheek as a souvenir of his earlier nefarious activities on the part of the Cardinal, and, as a reminder of the student "who hath studied himself half blear-eyed", should wear spectacles for his Act Two "meditations". Both ideas, that I thought so innovatory at the time, I now know to be something of performance clichés among Bosolas.



Bosola with scar and...



...spectacles

David's Bosola was a cold creature; difficult to like in spite of his evident wit and intelligence. He seemed possessed of an arrogance which enabled him to greet calmly the betrayals of both the Cardinal and Ferdinand with knowing nods, as if they simply confirmed his low expectations of the world. Yet his experience of the death of the Duchess caused a seismic emotional shift. It unleashed a ferocious anger in the final two acts and in his dying moments, he punched the air as he proclaimed the success of his "Revenge, for the Duchess of Malfi..."

APPENDIX 2

Large blocks of text often cut in modern performances of *The Duchess of Malji*

No.	Act	Scene	lines	Description	Comment
1.	Act 1	Sc 1	1-22	Antonio & Delio discuss the French court	<i>Possibly added after 1617 (see Sturgess, 104.)</i>
2.			90-139	Ferdinand & the courtiers discuss the war & indulge in banter.	<i>Links two otherwise separate sections in which Ferdinand discusses horsemanship with Antonio, after the latter's prize win. Eliminates specific historical context of the war with France.</i>
3.	Act 2	Sc.1	1-65	Bosola instructs Castruchio on fashion, then taunts the Old Lady with his "meditation" on make-up & mortality	<i>Very much period-specific social satire plus the conventional melancholy & misogyny of the stage malcontent.</i>
4.		Sc. 2	4-28	Bosola & the Old Lady	
5.			36-49 64-67	The Officers & the Switzer plot.	
6.		Sc. 4	41-83	Delio woos Julia	<i>Almost sub-sub-plot.</i>
7.	Act 3	Sc. 3	1-71	The courtiers slander Malateste while (unheard) Bosola names Antonio to Ferdinand as the Duchess's husband.	<i>Eliminates example of court rivalry & specific historical context of war with France. Last five lines of the scene are usually retained in isolation, to show Ferdinand's reaction to Bosola's news.</i>
8.		Sc. 4	1-44	Dialogue of two Pilgrims, the dumb show of the Cardinal's instalment as soldier, & the Duchess's banishment.	

9.		Sc.5	123-41	Parable of the Salmon & the Dogfish.	
10.	Act 4	Sc.2	36-113	Masque of madmen.	<i>Rarely cut entirely. Often a generalised dumb show is substituted for the song & dialogue.</i>
11.				177-94	Bosola's Bellman dirge.
12.	Act 5	Sc.1	5-60	Pescara rejects Delio's suit & bestows Antonio's forfeited land on Julia.	
13.		Sc.2	1-103	Doctor and Ferdinand.	
14.		Sc.3	1-47	Echo scene.	<i>Usually enough of this scene is retained to establish that Antonio is about to enter the Cardinal's domain, & that Delio is leaving him to fetch his son.</i>
15.		Sc.4	1-25	The Cardinal dismisses the courtiers and warns them off intervening in the event of disturbances	
16.				42-3 73-8 83-4	Antonio's accompanying servant
17.		Sc. 5	19-36	The listening courtiers decide to force the doors. Bosola kills Antonio's servant.	

APPENDIX 3

RSC 1989/90 Discrepancies between Prompt Book & Performance

This chart lists the proposed cuts, as they appear in both prompt books and compares it with the ones that were made in performance:

No.	Reference	Roles Affected	Text	Prompt Books	Performance
1	1.1.9-10	Antonio	<i>...which he sweetly terms His master's masterpiece, the work of heaven.</i>	cut	cut
2	1.1.55-7	Bosola	<i>What creature ever fed worse than hoping Tantalus? Nor ever died more fearfully than he that hoped for a pardon.</i>	cut	restored
3	2.1.6-7	Bosola	<i>I would have you learn to twirl the strings of your band with a good grace...</i>	cut	restored
4	2.1.47-63	Bosola	<i>Observe my meditation now: What thing is in this outward form of man To be beloved? We account it ominous If nature do produce a colt, or lamb, A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling A man, and fly from 't as a prodigy. Man stands amazed to see his deformity In any other creature but himself. But in our own flesh, though we bear diseases Which have their true names ta'en from beasts As the most ulcerous wolf and swinish measles, Though we are eaten up with lice and worms, And though continually we bear about us A rotten and dead body, we delight To hide it in rich tissue. All our fear – Nay, all our terror – is lest our physician Should put us in the ground to be made sweet. -</i>	cut	restored
5	2.2.14-25	Bosola & Old Lady	<i>BOSOLA: The orange tree bears ripe and green fruit and blossoms altogether; and some of you give entertainment for pure love, but more for more precious reward. The lusty spring smells well, but drooping autumn tastes well. If we have the same golden showers that rained in the time of Jupiter the Thunderer, you have the same Danaës still, to hold up their laps to receive them. – Didst thou never study mathematics? OLD LADY: What's that, sir? BOSOLA: Why, to know the trick how to make a many lines meet in one centre.</i>	cut	restored
6	2.3.53-4	Bosola	<i>Antonio hereabout did drop a paper. Some of your help, false friend. - O, here it is!</i>	cut	cut

7	2.4.65-6	Julia	<i>though some fond doctors Persuade us to seethe it in cullises.</i>	cut	cut
8	3.2.25-33	Antonio	<i>We read how Daphne, for her peevish flight, Became a fruitless bay tree, Syrimx turned To the pale empty reed, Anaxarete Was frozen into marble; whereas those Which married, or proved kind unto their friends, Were by a gracious influence transshaped Into the olive, pomegranate, mulberry; Became flow'rs. Precious stones, or eminent stars. CARIOLA: This is vain poetry.</i>	cut	restored
9	3.2.40-2	Antonio	<i>'Twas a motion Were able to benight the apprehension Of the severest counsellor of Europe.</i>	cut	cut
10	3.2.179-80	Duchess	<i>... as Tasso calls Magnanima menzogna...</i>	cut	cut
11	3.2.239-40	Bosola	<i>He hath left a sort of flatt'ring rogues behind him: Their doom must follow.</i>	cut	restored
12	3.2.245-50	Bosola	<i>Pluto, the god of riches, When he's sent by Jupiter to any man He goes limping, to signify that wealth That comes on God's name comes slowly: but when he's sent on the devil's errand, he rides post and comes in by scuttles.</i>	cut	restored
13	3.4.1-44	Two Pilgrims & dumb show characters	Whole Scene	cut	restored
14	4.1.72-4	Duchess	<i>Portia, I'll new-kindle thy coals again, And revive the rare and almost dead example Of a loving wife</i>	cut	restored
15	4.2. 55-6	Servant	<i>A farmer, too, an excellent knave in grain, Mad 'cause he was hindered transportation.</i>	cut	cut
16	4.2.365-7	Bosola	<i>Here is a sight As direful to my soul as is the sword Unto a wretch hath slain his father.</i>	cut	restored
17	5.1.5-60	Delio, Antonio, Pescara, Julia	The whole of the episode in which Delio entreats Pescara for "banished Bologna's" land, Pescara gives it instead to Julia, then explains his reasons.	cut	restored

APPENDIX 4				
Carl Miller's adaptation for RNT 2003				
Segments of dialogue given a new running order in Act 1				
<i>Webster's sequence</i>	<i>Original Text order</i>	<i>Miller's sequence</i>	<i>Re-ordered Text</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	<p>Lines 1-15</p> <p><i>You are welcome to your country, dear Antonio...</i></p> <p><i>...Death and diseases through the whole land spread.</i></p>	4	<p>Lines 87-90</p> <p><i>Who took the ring oft'n est...</i></p> <p><i>...Give him the jewel.</i></p>	Castruchio renamed as First Lord and re-allocated Silvio's line.
2	<p>Lines 29-76</p> <p><i>I do haunt you still...</i></p> <p><i>...Will poison all his goodness.</i></p>	7	<p>Lines 140-7</p> <p><i>You are a good horseman Antonio...</i></p> <p><i>...You have bespoke it worthily.</i></p>	
3	<p>Lines 82-3</p> <p><i>You promis'd me...</i></p> <p><i>...Of some of great courtiers</i></p>	5	<p>Lines 90-110</p> <p><i>When shall we leave this sportive action...</i></p> <p><i>...to lie, like the children of Ishmael all in tents.</i></p>	
4	<p>Lines 87-90</p> <p><i>Who took the ring oft'nest...</i></p> <p><i>...Give him the jewel</i></p>	6	<p>Lines 121-6</p> <p><i>Ha, Ha, Ha!</i></p> <p><i>Why do you laugh?...</i></p> <p><i>...True my lord.</i></p>	

5	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 90-110</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>When shall we leave this sportive action...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...to lie, like the children of Ishmael all in tents.</i></p>	1	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 1-15</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>You are welcome to your country, gentle Delio*...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...Death and diseases through the whole land spread.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Antonio & Delio's lines transposed to suggest Delio, not Antonio, has returned from France</p>
6	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 121-6</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ha, Ha, Ha!</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Why do you laugh? ...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...True my lord.</i></p>	3	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 82-3</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>But you promis'd me...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...Of some of great courtiers</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">One word interpolated</p>
7	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 140-7</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>You are a good horseman Antonio...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...You have bespoke it worthily.</i></p>	8	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 152-204</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...what's that Cardinal...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...lights the time to come.</i></p>	
8	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 152-204</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...what's that Cardinal...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...lights the time to come.</i></p>	2	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 29-76</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I do haunt you still...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...Will poison all his goodness.</i></p>	
9	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 213-18</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sister, I have a suit to you..</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...Commends him and prefers him.</i></p>	10	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 224-87</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Be sure you entertain that Bosola...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...I am your creature.</i></p>	
10	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 224-87</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Be sure you entertain that Bosola...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...I am your creature.</i></p>	9	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 213-18</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sister, I have a suit to you..</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...Commends him and prefers him.</i></p>	
11	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 292-506</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We are to part from you...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...I owe her much of pity.</i></p>	11	<p style="text-align: center;">Lines 292-506</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We are to part from you...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>...I owe her much of pity.</i></p>	

APPENDIX 5: Professional Productions of *The Duchess of Malfi* performed in the UK between 1998 and 2011. Source: UK Theatre Web - NewsOnStage – ScriptCircle - Copyright. UKTW. UK. 1995-2011

Archive Listings

24 Nov 10 to 27 Nov 10	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	ARC, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland
15 Oct 10 to 30 Oct 10	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Royal & Derngate, Northampton, Northamptonshire
8 Apr 10 to 7 May 10	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	New Players Theatre (formerly the Players Theatre), Inner London, Greater London
23 Mar 10 to 10 Apr 10	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Greenwich Theatre, Outer London, Greater London
2 Sep 09 to 27 Sep 09	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The King's Head Theatre, Inner London, Greater London
17 Mar 09 to 4 Apr 09	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Blue Elephant Theatre, Inner London, Greater London
3 Mar 09 to 22 Mar 09	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	White Bear, Inner London, Greater London
14 Nov 07 to 17 Nov 07	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Playhouse, Oxford, Oxfordshire
5 Sep 07 to 8 Sep 07	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Trinity Theatre and Arts Centre, Tunbridge Wells, Kent
21 Oct 06 to 11 Nov 06	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, West Yorkshire
13 Apr 05 to 16 Apr 05	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Electric Theatre, Guildford, Surrey
21 Mar 05 to 24 Mar 05	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Cochrane Theatre, Inner London, Greater London
19 Oct 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Grand Theatre, Swansea, Glamorgan
7 Oct 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Hafren, Newtown, Powys
10 Aug 04 to 30 Aug 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Fringe, Edinburgh, Edinburgh
3 Aug 04 to 8 Aug 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Greenwich Playhouse, Outer London, Greater London
29 Jul 04 to 31 Jul 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Space, Outer London, Greater London
22 Jul 04 to 25 Jul 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Etcetera Theatre, Inner London, Greater London
14 Jul 04 to 17 Jul 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	General, York, North Yorkshire
1 Jul 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	General, York, North Yorkshire
16 Mar 04 to 18 Mar 04	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Grand Theatre, Swansea, Glamorgan
1 Jul 03 to 5 Jul 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire
10 Jun 03 to 14 Jun 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Royal, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire
3 Jun 03 to 7 Jun 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Royal, Plymouth, Devon
1 Apr 03 to 5 Apr 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	King's Theatre, Edinburgh, Edinburgh
25 Mar 03 to 29 Mar 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Malvern Theatres, Malvern, Hereford and Worcester
18 Mar 03 to 22 Mar 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Lowry, Salford, Greater Manchester
18 Jan 03 to 27 May 03	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Lyttelton (National Theatre), West End, Greater London
25 Oct 02 to 16 Nov 02	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire
5 Oct 02 to 26 Oct 02	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Dundee Repertory Theatre, Dundee, Dundee
15 Mar 02 to 6 Apr 02	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Playhouse, Salisbury, Wiltshire
24 Sep 01 to 28 Oct 01	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Jermyn Street Theatre, Inner London, Greater London
6 Feb 01 to 3 Mar 01	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Warwickshire
30 Jan 01 to 3 Feb 01	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	New Victoria Theatre, Woking, Surrey
23 Jan 01 to 27 Jan 01	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield, South Yorkshire
16 Jan 01 to 20 Jan 01	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Royal, Glasgow, Glasgow
12 Dec 00 to 16 Dec 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Royal, Norwich, Norfolk
5 Dec 00 to 9 Dec 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Theatre Royal, Bath, Bath & North East Somerset
28 Nov 00 to 2 Dec 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire
21 Nov 00 to 25 Nov 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Alhambra Theatre, Bradford, West Yorkshire
31 Oct 00 to 4 Nov 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Burton Taylor Theatre, Oxford, Oxfordshire
21 Oct 00 to 18 Nov 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Barbican Centre, West End, Greater London
14 Jun 00 to 17 Jun 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Gardner Arts Centre, Brighton, East Sussex
30 Mar 00 to 15 Apr 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Mercury Theatre, Colchester, Essex
4 Jan 00 to 29 Jan 00	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Starting Gate, Outer London, Greater London
26 Nov 99 to 27 Nov 99	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	The Firestation (previously known as the Arts Centre), Windsor, Berkshire
23 Nov 98 to 28 Nov 98	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Stantonbury Campus Theatre, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
26 May 98 to 30 May 98	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	OFS Studio (previously known as Old Fire Station Theatre), Oxford, Oxfordshire
16 Feb 98 to 14 Mar 98	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Tristan Bates Theatre (TBT), Inner London, Greater London
3 Feb 98 to 15 Feb 98	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Greenwich Studio, Outer London, Greater London
to 25 Jan 98	The Duchess of Malfi (Play)	Barons Court Theatre, Inner London, Greater London

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