CHAPTER II

THE WHITE DEVIL

The White Devil is the first specimen of tragical satire written by John Webster in 1612. Thematically, structurally, stylistically, as well as from the point of view of the vision of life, The White Devil stands out as a tragedy distinct from the Shakespearean models. The source of the play like that of The Duchess of Malfi is historical.¹ It is a well known fact that both the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers were fascinated by the contemporary events in Italy and by its past history which served as a rich reservoir for dramatic material. A detailed study on the historical source of The White Devil has been done by G. Boklund, who has pointed out the extent to which Webster has adhered to the actual historical events contained in the play.² He has also worked out the deviations from and additions to the historical data which enabled Webster to achieve his dramatic end. The purpose of the present study is not to work out the historical authenticity or otherwise of the source of the play. What we are concerned with is its relevance to the immediate milieu of England. An alien story, purporting to present the Anglo-Saxon ethos of England, acts as a distancing device against an instant

2. Ibid.
involvement of the audience in their own perceptible and identifiable issues of life. Marlowe, whose pioneering contribution to the genre of tragical satire has already been mentioned, has used a German scholar and a Maltese businessman as his protagonists and has set his *The Massacre at Paris* in France. Tamburlaine, too, is not of the English soil. By presenting such alien stories the dramatist better exploits the audience's response for satiric purposes. This is so because the audience, caught in the current of the dramatic events uncritically, places himself at a distance, thinking that these events are not taking place in his own milieu.

The dramatic world of *The White Devil* is the world of all pervasive rottenness, resulting from the topsy-turvical values operating at all levels - social, religious, political, familial, etc. It shows hypocrisy, crookedness, despicable self-centredness, and beastly instincts as the controlling forces of life.

The play deals with the devilish infidelity involved in the institution of marriage, where Vittoria, the protagonist of the play, deceives her husband to be able to become the bed partner of the rich and influential Bracciano. The latter, too, deceives his wife to be able to follow his lustful path which he buys with the promises of preferment.
to Vittoria as well as to her pandering brother. Bracciano's and Vittoria's adulterous involvement entails a series of disastrous events and brings suffering even to some of the virtuous characters. The action of the play is set at different places to underscore the widespread vista of evil and corruption. The play opens with a shocked surprise at the banishment of Lodovico who was the earlier lover of Isabella, the wife of Bracciano. Lodovico's banishment could have been repealed if Vittoria had spoken to Bracciano to do so. The opening scene of a formal ceremony introduces an important thematic strand. This, by a flash back, hints in a suspenseful manner at Lodovico's past which has a bearing on his present predicament. Both of these, developed later, have a significant role to play in the main action. The opening scene also introduces the main theme which is Vittoria - Bracciano affair. The scene is in the nature of conventional exposition and is largely devoted to the minor strand of the plot related to the main theme. But the dramatist exploits expository narrative to draw a picture of the corrupt society where reward and punishment depend upon prejudice, whims, and such non-judicious factors. The role of fate, "Fortune's a right whore," has been hinted at in the very opening of the play.\(^3\)

However, the role of the Fate has been underplayed to highlight man-made factors in human catastrophes. Like a typical tragical satire, the play does not use any supernatural agency or any transcendental power as an influencing agent of human destiny.

The responsibility for human catastrophe squarely falls upon the beast in man whose exterior hides his inner rottenness - "your wolf no longer seems to be a wolf/Than when she's hungry." The wolfish nature of man which is concealed by his hypocritical exterior of virtuosity is the main thematic burden of the play and is worked out in the subsequent scenes. Antonelli and Gasparo, friends of Lodovico, while consoling the latter on his banishment, act as satiric commentators. They draw a mirror to Lodovico in which he could see his past behaviour and activities. While their commentary concerns Lodovico directly, it also states truths of general application and relevance. Gasparo blames Lodovico for his prodigality and for his being surrounded by his psychophantastic followers who have now left him when bad days have befallen him. The following lines of Gasparo sum up Lodovico's present condition, the lesson of which is intended for all:

Your followers
Have swallow'd you like mummia, and being sick
With such unnatural and horrid physic
Vomit you up i' th' kennel.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Ibid., p.11.
\(^5\) Ibid.
The first movement of the opening situation concludes with Gasparo's reference to justice which alone can regulate a society. Lodovico acts partly as a commentator and partly as a participant in the dramatic action when he asserts that people in position and power escape being punished even when they commit greater crimes than the one he himself has committed. To support this he gives the example of Bracciano who "By close panderism seeks to prostitute/The honour of Vittoria," and who "might have got my pardon/For one kiss to the duke." Thus Lodovico bears a grudge against both Bracciano and Vittoria. Antonelli's attempt to comfort him through the "sweet uses of adversity" is in the nature of a homily. Webster throughout his two plays shows his predilection for such a style of using proverbs and general statements, which brings in the structural weakness of halting the movement of the plot. But the dramatic advantage of such a style is that it contributes to ironic detachment and satiric commentary which keeps the audience's moral perspective clear from the beginning of the play.

Thus even the very brief opening situation establishes Webster's technique of a tragical satire where characters

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
act as commentators as well as participants in the action; where the rottenness of the society and its inhabitants is brought out through the choric narratives; where the phrases and images concern decay, rottenness, disease, destruction cruelty, hypocrisy etc. The conventional dramatic device of exposition, through flashback narratives and commentary on the probable future course of action, has been used. The element of suspense has been introduced in the arousal of our interest in Bracciano-Vittoria affair. This affair, as mentioned in the opening scene, acts as a figure-in-action in the following scene. This characteristic device of Webster is discernible throughout the play.

The second situation of Act I opens with Bracciano and Flamineo, conspiring to put Camillo, Vittoria's husband, out of Bracciano's way to Vittoria's bed. Flamineo tells Camillo that he would work out a compromise between the latter and Vittoria who have had estranged relationship for sometime. Camillo clarifies the reason of the ruptured relationship with his wife:

The duke your master visits me; I thank him,  
And I perceive how like an earnest bowler,  
He very passionately leans that way  
He should have his bowl run.  

...'Faith, his cheek
Hath a most excellent bias; it would fain
Jump with my mistress.¹⁰

But Flamineo in a hypocritical manner pretends to be Camillo's friend and asks the latter to be watchful of his wife so that she could not indulge in lustful activities with Bracciano. Flamineo gives an impression as if he is unaware of Vittoria's relations with Bracciano and the intrigues conspired against Camillo. But Camillo unconsciously hints at it "Come you know not where my night cap wrings me." The future course of the action is foretold by Flamineo in his use of low mundane images of 'cuckold', 'coxcomb', 'provocative electuaries', etc., for Camillo. These images in conjunction with the images from bowling sports, contained in the above two quotes, ominously hint at Camillo's present predicament and future lot.

Flamineo successfully tries to keep Camillo away from Vittoria's bed and convinces him that his "suspicion is nothing but "jealousy" which has "put him into a horrible causeless fury". Meanwhile Vittoria is presented on the scene and Flamineo whispers to her of Camillo's suspicious nature. Using his characteristic device of Machiavellian

¹⁰. Ibid.
tricks, Webster presents Flamineo as an intriguer, who is trying to convince Camillo with an argument enwrapped in ambiguous ominousness:

Thou shalt lie in a bed stuff'd with turtles'feathers, swoon in perfum'd linen like the fellow was smother'd in roses; so perfect shall be thy happiness, that as men at sea think land and trees and ships go that way they go, so both heaven and earth shall seem to go your voyage. Shalt meet him,'tis fix'd, with nails of diamonds to inevitable necessity.\textsuperscript{11}

We see that Flamineo is using the various images which ironically throw light on his own evil nature and on the worthlessness, stupidity, and impotence of Camillo. Flamineo plays here both as a satiric commentator as well as a participant in the action. He gulls Camillo in a most qualitative manner and shuts him close into a room to avoid any chance of his intruding upon Bracciano's "amorous progress."

"The close panderism to prostitute the honour of Vittoria" presented in the previous situation in figure-in-speech is now presented in figure-in-action as Bracciano pays a pre-planned visit to Vittoria's bed chamber. Flamineo welcomes Bracciano. But inspite of his warm

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.20.
reception offered by Flamineo, Bracciano remains sceptical of the possibility of the fulfilment of his lustful dream. Some sort of uncertainty and fear haunts Bracciano as he wonders "Are we so happy?" Though the context is lustful, the sweep and flavour of the situation is ironically erotic and highly romantic. But in this world of disruption Webster does not allow any meaningful emotional satisfaction to the participants in their sensual encounter. The way to satisfaction and fulfilment is checkered with the fear born out of an awareness of the guilty basis of the whole affair. A similar situation is discernible in the romantic meeting between the Duchess and Antonio in The Duchess of Malfi, where the passionate satisfaction of the romantic encounter is brutally undercut by an undefined sense of fear. However, Bracciano's doubts are cleared by Flamineo's explaining Vittoria's "coyness" as the "superficies of lust." He goes to argue that women know by policy that "our desire is increased by the difficulty of enjoying." Nevertheless, Bracciano remains fearful of Vittoria's jealous husband. To prove his argument Flamineo gives several examples and even appears as an experienced instructor to Bracciano. Flamineo's following commentary in the context of the lustful drama throws light on Vittoria's character, though it has been given a wider dimension:
....'Tis just like a summer bird cage in garden; the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out.  

As we know that Camillo has already been locked into a closet, the stage eventually is left open for the two "amorous actors." Bracciano is sent by Flamineo to Vittoria who has been waiting for the arrival of the former all alone in her bed chamber. He "vows" and "supplicates" to Vittoria in the manner of a romantic lover, and promises never to forsake her. This amorous encounter has a characteristic Marlovian echo:

....I could wish time would stand still  
And never end this interview, this hour,  
But all delight doth itself soon'st devour.  

This reminds us of Faustus who ironically expresses "immortal joy" in his act of demoniality with Helen and then later frantically supplicates to cosmic powers to arrest the course of nature. Dido's lustful involvement with Aeneas in the cave scene in Dido the Queene of Carthage has a similar erotic dissimulation. In his effort to trap Camillo into his conspiracy, Flamineo talks of morals and sexual virtues which is ironically paradoxical in the context of his own being an instrument in demolishing them.

12. Ibid., p.15.  
13. Ibid., p.21.
Bracciano plays cuckold to Camillo and the whole situation is prophetically commented upon by Cornelia thus:

My son the pander: now I find our house
Sinking to ruin. Earthquakes leave behind
Where they have tyranniz'd iron, or lead, or stone.
But, woe to ruin! violent lust leaves none. 14.

Thus before the 'happy union' of Bracciano and Vittoria fructifies into physical satisfaction, Cornelia's stormy foreboding propels the movement of the action into a disastrous direction. To pass the time, during the lustful course, Vittoria suggests the destruction of the two possible hinderances in the course of her lustful journey, through a concocted dream story. The dream narrative serves as a device of distancing which is used by Webster often before a violent event because it makes the destructive happening maximally effective. Vittoria's dream narration is full of both good and bad images. While the 'yew tree' stands for good and virtue, the 'churchyard', 'grave', 'pick-axe', and the 'rusty spade' stand for destruction. Besides, the images of 'withered black thorn' and 'mildew on a flower' used by the two lovers, are full of dramatic irony, because they denote destruction of the very things these lustful lovers plan to have. Vittoria, though a devil incarnate,

through her romantic protestations to hide her lustful inclinations for preferment, is presented in such a light that the audience's moral perspective is likely to be vitiated by its tendency to endorse her conspiracy suggested in her narrative of the dream. But Flamineo's frequent use of the term devil for Vittoria is intended to steady the moral perspective of the audience.

Bracciano's promises of love, protection, delight, and frustration in the manner of a romantic lover are immediately crossed by Cornelia, who like a 'lightning' in the otherwise quiet atmosphere, shoots on the stage and pronounces curses of doom on the two adulterous lovers: "Woe to light hearts they still forerun our fall." Frightened, Flamineo tries to control Cornelia but she does not stop and almost unnerves Bracciano by the information that Isabella, his wife, is come to Rome; she reminds him of his duties as a duke:

The lives of princes should like dials move,
Whose regular example is so strong,
They make the times by them go right or wrong. 15

Cornelia's reprimand to the Duke in a proverbial language seems to be in the nature of stalling the pace of the action. But it serves one useful function of a tragical

15. Ibid., p.24.
satire which is to lash at the prevalent contemporary vice. The first Act ends with an altercation between Flamineo and Cornelia. Flamineo breaks into a revelation as to why he has been playing the pander. His bold and candid explanation of his present role makes even Cornelia's protestations of morality, human dignity, and other social and ethical values, look very shaky:

Pray what means have you
To keep me from the galleys, or the gallows?
My father prov'd himself a gentleman,
Sold all's land, and like a fortunate fellow,
Died ere the money was spent. You brought me up,
At Padua I confess, where I protest,
For want of means (the university judge me)
I have been fain to heel my tutor's stockings
At least seven years; conspiring with a beard
Made me a graduate; then to this duke's service.
I visited the court, whence I return'd
More courteous, more lecherous by far,
But not a suit the richer. And shall I,
Having a path so open and so free
To my preferment still retain your milk
In my pale forehead?16

Flamineo's eloquence in the defense of evil is so logical, persuasive, and convincing that it can well entice the reader's endorsement. Webster presents the picture of

evil in such likeable terms that an unawary reader may sometime get away with the impression that like Milton in his *Paradise Lost*, he belongs to 'the devil's party.' But his subsequent exposing of the pleasantly shaped devil in Flamineo proves the impression to be otherwise. The facade of amorous drama which hides sinful involvement of the lovers is in the typical ironic mode which forms the fulcrum of the tragical satire. The course of the action in the first Act amply establishes the dramaturgical strategies of Webster. Corruption, despicable materialism, and violation of relational values are presented in starkly realistic terms. A brother is determined to pander the honour of his sister for material gain which will install him in social esteem through money. Money is the ruling deity of the society which can corrupt virtue into evil. A wife is more than a villain to gull her husband to dishonour her nuptial bed for preferment. The end has to justify the means. Hence Vittoria does not hesitate to suggest in her dream narrative the destruction of Bracciano's wife and her own husband. Flamineo uses all the wits at his command to gull Camillo so that he is away for the night to allow free time for Bracciano to be with Vittoria. A seeming ambivalence in manipulating the reader's response to evil has been used, in the manner of the Marlovian dramaturgy, in the opening Act. Structurally the Act follows a conventional methodology of
exposition through developing complication gradually. The complication comprises Camillo as a hinderance, Cornelia as a difficult overseer and the reported arrival of Isabella. Webster has used the device of underscoring vignettes which contribute to dramatic effect. There are three vignettes in the first Act: the scene in which Flamineo gulls Camillo into going away from Vittoria's proximity; the amorous encounter between Vittoria and Bracciano being violently concluded by the lightning entry of Cornelia, and Flamineo's strong defense of his panderism, ending in Cornelia's being left shocked and speechless. Flamineo's concluding speech suggests the course of action of the following Act:

The Duchess comes to court? I like not that; We are engag'd to mischief and must on. As rivers to find out the ocean Flow with crook bendings beneath forced banks, Or as we see, to aspire some mountain's top The way ascends not straight but imitates The subtle foldings of a winter's snake, So who knows policy and her true aspect, Shall find her ways winding and indirect.17

Hypocrisy, crookedness, and Machiavellian machinations, which were presented in the last Act under the cover of a superficial facade of agreeableness, appear in the second Act in their nakedness. Bracciano's hypocrisy which remained

17. Ibid., pp.26-27.
enwrapped in amorousness in the previous Act, appears in a repulsive form when he puts the blame of his violent rupture of his relationship with his wife upon the latter and seals her mouth with a promise extorted from her that she will never let the truth be disclosed. Flamineo's half-digested plan of getting rid of Camillo is to materialize into a murderous strategy that Isabella should also be done in. In the midst of moves and countermoves of the schemers, the presence of Giovanni and his talk of a precocious child acts as a diluting factor. But at the same time it intensifies the gloom by contrast, which has threatened to engulf almost all the characters of the play. There are five clearly delineated movements in the first scene of the second Act. They are the encounter between Francisco and Bracciano, Isabella's confession to her brother that she has vowed to separate herself from her husband; Francisco-Camillo-Flamineo conspiracy; and the Doctor's arrival before the scene ends.

We had seen in the previous Act that Isabella's coming to Rome was a threatening hinderance in Flamineo's plan relating to Bracciano-Vittoria affair. We see with the opening of the second Act that it gives a new turn to the movement of the action. The first movement of the action begins as Francisco gets acquainted with Bracciano's lustful
affairs with Vittoria, told to him by his sister Isabella. He becomes infuriated and is determined to teach Bracciano a lesson for this. On the other hand, Isabella, still hoping that Bracciano will respond to her charms, asks Francisco not to deal roughly with him. But before Isabella could do so, Monticelso, a Cardinal and kinsman to Bracciano reminds and warns his master of his duties through a homily:

\[
\text{....should (you) in your prime age} \\
\text{Neglect your awful throne for the soft down} \\
\text{Of an insatiate bed. O my lord,} \\
\text{The drunkard after all his lavish cups} \\
\text{Is dry, and then is sober, so at length} \\
\text{When you awake from this lascivious dream,} \\
\text{Repentance then will follow, like the sting} \\
\text{Plac'd in the adder's tail.}^{18}
\]

The above homily serves to provide a rapid flow to the movement of the action. Besides, the images drawn here from 'drinking', 'adder's tail', and 'destruction' are functional as they predict the future course of the action. Francisco accuses Bracciano for his lustful indulgence with Vittoria. He presents it in a satiric speech which is full of images of preying and cunning sports:

\[
\text{I'll answer you in your own hawking phrase} \\
\text{Some eagles that should gaze upon the sun}
\]

18. Ibid., p.28.
Seldom soar high, but take their lustful ease,
Since they from dunghill birds their prey can seize. 19

Francisco reminds Bracciano of the moment when he was married to Isabella. Bracciano-Francisco's mutual accusations, altercation, and defiance of each other, though ending in a seeming compromise, foretells their destructive future. In the midst of all this Giovanni's entrance and his child-like talkativeness brings a temporary relief to the poisonous and destructive atmosphere. But very soon Giovanni's peaceful intrusion and humorous talk, totally unconnected with the present acrimonious situation, is contrasted with the tense situation of Bracciano-Isabella meeting. Giovanni's entrance seems to have only one dramatic function and that is to show the existence of innocence and virtue in the midst of rottenness so that towards the end of the play the dramatist may use him as a device for the restoration of normalcy after the havoc of evil, in the conventional manner of a typical tragedy.

Bracciano, himself an adulterer, ironically questions Isabella: "what amorous whirlwind hurried you to Rome?" Here the behaviours of Isabella and Bracciano are contrasted. Isabella's protestations of love, loyalty, and her politeness

19. Ibid., p.29.
are confronted with Bracciano's unmanly and bitter retort: "accursed be the priest/That sang the wedding mass, and even my issue." This is certainly Bracciano's despicable affrontery. The virtuous Isabella suffers on account of the tyranny of her husband who, rejecting her protestations of love and fidelity, forces divorce on her. The helpless Isabella suffers and endures all this with superb restraint. Even when condemned, she remains faithful to Bracciano and tells Francisco that it is no fault of Bracciano but hers. She takes on herself the whole charge:

I do beseech you
Entreat him mildly, let not your rough tongue
Set us at louder variance; all my wrongs
Are freely pardon'd, and I do not doubt,
As men to try the precious unicorn's horn
Make of the powder a preservative circle
And in it put a spider, so these arms
Shall charm his poison, force it to be obeying
And keep him chaste from an infected straying.20

.... I will make
Myself the author of your cursed vow;
I have some cause to do it, you have none,
Conceal it I beseech you, for the weal
Of both your dukedoms, that you wrought the means
Of such a separation; let the fault
Remain with my supposed jealousy,

And think with what a piteous and rent heart
I shall perform this sad ensuing part.\textsuperscript{21}

She charges Vittoria as the root cause of all her tragedy. After this she determines to leave the palace for Padua.

The fourth movement of the action takes place immediately after Isabella’s exit to Padua. We see two camps of conspirators distinctly governed by Francisco-Monticelso, and Flamineo-Bracciano. While the former group plans to get Camillo away, the latter camp is busy with conspiring how to get Isabella done in through deception and treachery with the assistance of Dr. Julio. It is relevant to look at the perverted values being followed by the religious and medical professionals. The Cardinal, ignoring his religious duties, does not hesitate to misuse his office for deceitful activities whereas the doctor is better specialized in murder than in treatment. Flamineo's role as a satirical commentator is better seen here at this juncture as he comments on the above mentioned two persons:

He will shoot pills into a man's guts, shall make them have more ventages than a cornet or a lamprey; he will poison a kiss, and was once minded, for his masterpiece, because Ireland breeds no poison, to have prepared a

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.35.
deadly vapour in a Spaniard's fart that should have poison'd all Dublin.22

O thou curs'd antipathy to nature! Look, his eye's bloodshed like a needle a Chirugeon stitcheth a wound with. Let me embrace thee, toad, and love thee, O thou abominable loathsome gargarism, that will fetch up lungs, lights, heart, and liver by scruples.23

Bracciano's ironically calling Julio the 'honest doctor' is only a scathing satire on the latter's character. Before leaving the stage to meet Camillo and Francisco, Flamineo presents himself as a commentator on his own evil nature:

.... when Knaves come to preferment they rise as gallowes are raised i' th' Low countries, one upon another's shoulders.24

Webster brings in his characteristic device of distancing through Francisco's narration of the supposed story of the sun, the god of light. It serves two purposes, first it diverts our attention from the conspirators and secondly it throws light on Camillo's cuckoldry. The narration is full of images of murder, lust, deception, on the one hand, while on the other, we have images from Ovid's

22. Ibid., p.38.
24. Ibid.
Metamorphoses ('abundance has made me destitude') and Virgil's Aeneid ('it shall be treasured up in the depths of my mind'). The conjunction of these two groups of opposing images reinforces the idea of perverted values, and confusion of norms, controlling the life of people in the world of The White Devil.

In the next situation, the two murders of Camillo and Isabella are shown through dumb shows. Isabella, who was habitual of kissing her husband's portrait before going to bed, dies of kissing it because it has now been secretly poisoned by Dr. Julio. And Camillo is finished by Flamineo through the game of 'vaulting a horse.' This seems to make Bracciano's path to pursue Vittoria clear because the two apparent potent hurdles in his way are removed. Through the dumb shows the action of the play is economized. Besides, it not only increases the tempo of performance by telescoping the plot but also subdues the effect of horror. The Act ends with yet another satiric speech, this time made by the conjurer:

Both flowers and weeds spring when the sun is warm
As great men do great good, or else great harm.\(^{25}\)

Eliot and Bradbrooke have objected to Webster's use of

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p.45.
different dramatic conventions which result in confusion. This is so because both the critics have been looking for consistencies and homogeneity of dramatic conventions in Webster's plays. This has certainly been disrupted by bringing in the ill-fitting convention of a dumb show. But Webster's intention has been to present the horrific aspect of an event along with the conventional movement of the play. Hence the two dumb shows, rather than dramatic narration, are in place in the context of the dramatist's intention of presenting evil in its physically horrific manifestation.

By the end of the second Act we see that the motives of the two camps of intriguers are quite clear. Bracciano's murderous intention is motivated by his relationship with Vittoria; Francisco's sending Camillo away is a means to avenge on Bracciano who has done wrong to Isabella. But as the text shows, Francisco is a kinsman to Bracciano, the former's motif creates a little confusion, though it has been defined by Monticelso:

It may be objected I am dishonourable,
To play thus with my kinsman; but I answer,
For my revenge I'd stake a brother's life
That being wrong'd durst not avenge himself. 27

27. See The White Devil, quoted earlier, p.42.
It again creates a confusion because the context of the motif has been left undefined and it comes as a sudden surprise, arousing suspicion which is not dramatic.

The third Act deals mainly with the trial of Vittoria where almost all the major characters appear in their true devilish shapes. The trial is arranged by Monticelso and Francisco who plan to expose Bracciano's adultery and thus to defame him publicly. So far as Vittoria is concerned, Monticelso and Francisco have nothing "but circumstances/ to charge her with, about her husband's death." But the witness of the Leiger Ambassadors "to the proofs/of her black lust, shall make her infamous/to all our neighbouring kingdoms." The motives, moods, and tone of the action is hinted at in the very beginning of the Act, in references to lust, whore master, cuckold, etc. Flamineo's intention to "put on this feigned garb of Mirth/ To gull suspicion," throws further light on his villainous nature. This opening situation brings out the character's Machiavellian machinations. The conversation between Flamineo and the lawyer and again between Flamineo and Marcello, his own brother, is a commentary upon the rottenness of the contemporary social milieu. This commentary, befittingly contained in images of deception and destruction, has

28. Ibid., p.
extended significance because it dilates upon the predicament of even honest workers in the service of unscrupulous masters:

Hum! thou art a soldier,
Followest the great duke, feedest his victories
And witches do their serviceable spirits,
Even with thy prodigal blood; what has got?
But like the wealth of captains, a poor handful,
Which in thy palm thou bear'st: as men hold water
Seeking to gripe it fast, the frail reward
Steals through thy fingers.\(^\text{29}\)

Hear me -
And thus when we have even pour'd ourselves
Into great fights, for their ambition
Or idle spleen, how shall we find reward?
But as we seldom find the mistletoe,
Sacred to physic, on the builder oak
Without a mandrake by it, so in our quest of gain
Alas, the poorest of their forc'd dislikes:
This is lamented doctrine.\(^\text{30}\)

In this situation Flamineo is simultaneously both a satiric commentator and a participant in the action. Flamineo's detached commentary in his remarks upon the Ambassadors is significant:

29. Ibid., p.47.
I saw him at last tilting: he show'd like a pewter candlestick fashion'd like a man in armour holding a tilting staff in his hand, little bigger than a candle of twelve i' th' pound.31

He carries his face in's ruff, as I have seen a serving-man carry glasses in a cypress hat bound, monstrous steady for fear of breaking. He looks like the claw of a blackbird, first salted and then broil'd in a candle.32

Before the trial begins, Flamineo's discourse with Marcello discloses his evil intent for Machiavellian preferment. It is confirmed by his reply to Marcello who charges him with being the "stalking horse" of Bracciano to undo Vittoria. To this Flamineo replies, "I made a kind path / To her and mine own preferment." To support his argument Flamineo gives several reasons to Marcello.33 Marcello's suggestion for love, respect, honesty, and virtue are contrasted with Flamineo's Machiavellian principles. Ironically it seems as if Marcello's homily on virtuous and good conduct is not a topic even worth discussion as the intrusion of the Ambassadors makes it negligible. Marcello's protestations of morality, loyalty, and ethical values,

31. Ibid., p.48.
32. Ibid., p.49.
33. Ibid., pp.47-48.
ironically sounds insipid when juxtaposed by Flamineo's eulogy of evil as a potent means of preferment in a corrupt world in which their lot has been cast. Of course, Flamineo's argument may sound convincing because by now we have a good inkling into the evil world of these inhabitants. But in a subtle, satirical manner Webster manipulates our alienation from Flamineo's stand which has only a relative validity in the context of his selfish games.

Webster provides an opportunity to look at the corrupt judicial system through the trial-scene, where the accused are lesser criminals than the prosecutors themselves. Flamineo's brief comments on the French and the Spanish Ambassadors acquaint us with the wide-spread corruption in the alien dukedoms and duchies. It is relevant here to comment on Flamineo's sparing the English Ambassador from his satiric whipping. In fact the Elizabethans were very much fond of seeing foreign rulers and characters ridiculed on the stage as contrasted with the English who were assumed to be judicious and relatively morally upright. However, the English Ambassador's attitude to the whole drama of trial is quite fair and judicious.

Throughout the trial scene Vittoria defends herself with "innocence resembling boldness." The trial begins with
the Lawyer, charging Vittoria in Latin, at which she protests defiantly:

I will not have my accusation clouded
In a strange tongue: all this assembly
Shall hear what you can charge me with.  

The Lawyer's ignorance, prejudice, incompetence, and hollowness of mind are not pointed out by Vittoria alone, but are also seen clearly by Francisco who asked him to "put up your paper in your fustian bag, and cry mercy." The Lawyer is dismissed and, Monticelso, the corrupt Cardinal himself takes over as a prosecutor and opens the suit. It is strongly objected to by Vittoria: "It doth not suit a reverend Cardinal/To play the Lawyer thus." But for want of any proof, Monticelso could not charge Vittoria. He calls her a whore merely on the basis of her remaining unmournful on her husband's death and her entrapping the Duke Bracciano into her lustful charms. But she faces all the accusations boldly with superb mental resourcefulness, argumentative skill and undauntable courage. Her protestations and arguments earn the praise of the English Ambassador who exclaims "She hath a brave spirit." Vittoria's boldness and resourcefulness of mind are clearly discernible in her assertion:

34. Ibid., p.50.
For know that all your strict combined heads
Which strike against this mine of diamonds
Shall prove but glassen hammers, they shall break;
These are but feigned shadows of my evils.
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils,
I am past such needless palsy; for your names
Of whore and murd'ress, they proceed from you.
As if a man should spit against the wind;
The filth returns in 's face. 35

Vittoria's courageous defence makes Monticelso almost
nervous. Disappointed, he sticks to one instance and charges
her with the guilt of incontinence:

Pray you mistress, satisfy me one question:
Who lodg'd beneath your roof that fatal night
Your husband brake his neck. 36

This at once brings Bracciano into action because he fears
that Vittoria may not be able to defend herself on this
account. He replies:

.... I came to comfort her
And make some course for setting her estate,
Because I heard her husband was in debt
To you, my lord. 37

35. Ibid., p.55.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
Monticelso admits this. But Bracciano's exposing himself could not bring any additional defence to Vittoria's suit. However it disclosed Monticelso's Jewish mentality which is in contrast with his role of a religious pillar. However, Vittoria once again proves competent enough to defend herself alone and this frustrates Monticelso's designs:

Condemn you me for that the duke did love me.  
So may you blame some fair and crystal river  
For that some melancholic distracted man,  
Hath drown'd himself in 't.  

Sum up my faults I pray, and you shall find  
That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,  
And a good stomach to a feast, are all  
All the poor crimes that you can charge me with.

Though Vittoria plays the white devil, her bold and courageous protestations are so subtle and to the point that they bring all the machinery of the judicial administration in ridicule. Vittoria challenges the Cardinal:

.... If you be my accuser  
Pray cease to be my judge, come from the bench,  
Give in your evidence against me, and let these  
Be moderators.

38. Ibid., p.57.  
39. Ibid.  
40. Ibid., p.58.
But the judicial system is so perverted and bent upon roping in Vittoria that her defence is completely ignored and she is declared a "most notorious strumpet." Finally, the judgement is announced and Vittoria is ordered to be "lodged into a house of convertites," meant specially for "penitent whores." But it does not make Vittoria nervous and she boldly, but with scathing irony, retorts: "Do the nobleman in Rome/Erect it for their wives?" The corrupt court system is again brought into a bold relief when Vittoria vehemently protests: "A rape, a rape .... you have ravished justice/Forc'd her to do your pleasure." The Cardinal simulates and calls Vittoria mad, equating her to a 'Fury.' The reference to the 'Fury' is also ironic. The 'Fury' in Greek tragedies pursued the guilty and was itself an instrument of divine justice. In the present context Vittoria is herself a devilish character. What distinguishes her from other devilish characters of the play is her candidness, courage, and guts to say the truth. In fact she emerges as a heroic character towards the end of the trial scene when she refuses to yield to the verdict of the combined forces of religion and civil administration. It is because of this that the audience tends to be drawn

41. Ibid., p.59.
42. Ibid., p.60.
towards her and feel like sympathising with her. Before leaving the assembly of the crooked, she announces her heroic manifesto:

.... I will not weep.
No I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice; bear me hence,
Unto this house....

It shall not be a house of convertites;
My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace and more peaceable
Then thy soul, though thou art a Cardinal
Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spite,
Through darkness diamonds spread their richest light.

Webster's use of contrasting images - dimonds through darkness, friend's grave-heightens the power of his poetic language. Moreover, the destructive images of madness, fury, rape, revenge, curse, forebode the future course of the action. The second scene of the third Act ends with the discovery of Isabella's death at which Francisco and Giovanni grieve. Giovanni's expression of grief (I have often heard her say she gave me suck) tends to make the mood of the situation rather sentimental. But it serves to humanise the otherwise devilish milieu presented so far.

43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
The next situation is the discovery of Isabella's death. As we have seen that till this point her death was not discovered and hence Vittoria was spared this charge. Now Bracciano, to gull suspicion, offers a friendly relationship with Francisco who is determined to destroy Vittoria. Francisco is puzzled by this sudden offer of friendship from Bracciano. Flamineo, playing continuously the Machiavellian villain, pretends to be a politic madman to "escape suspicion" because of his role in Isabella's murder. The situation ends in a mood which is contrasted with that of the opening scene. Webster does this through Francisco's expression of profound grief at his sister's death and his nephew's childlike talks about the state in which the dead are. Even at this juncture, Webster does not spare his satiric sting as the comments on Isabella's death are meant to echo Vittoria's reaction to her husband's death in the early part of the scene to underscore the hollowness of the Cardinal's charity and morality:

Monticelso: Blessed lady, thou art now above thy woes, will't please your lordships to withdraw a little?45

Vittoria: O he 's a happy husband
Now he owes Nature nothing.46

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 54.
The second scene of the third Act, containing various moods, and movements, is a great creation of Webster. In this scene Vittoria appears as a diamond, though a white devil she is; here Flamineo's guilt is neglected and he is declared innocent; here Francisco's threats and moves are worked out; here Vittoria's 'Fury' is worked out; and here Lodovico swears to avenge the death of his former flame. Lodovico, who had been a looker on only, now after getting his banishment pardoned, determines to play a significant role in the movement of the play.

In the next situation, Lodovico tries to understand Flamineo's feigned madness and his being declared innocent by the court judgement. But Flamineo is clever enough and makes friendship with Lodovico, intending to sabotage the latter's evil machinations. Flamineo's distracted manner gives Webster an opportunity to run a satiric commentary on the evil and corrupt ones. The Savoy Ambassador tries to console the distracted Flamineo to which the latter retorts satirically:

Your comfortable words are like honey. They relish well in your mouth that's whole; but in mine that's wounded they go down as if the sting of the bee were in them. 0, they have wrought their purpose cunningly, as if they would not seem to do it of malice. In this a politician
imitates the devil as the devil imitates a canon whereas-ever he comes to do mischief, he comes with his backside towards you. 47

Flamineo's reply to the French Ambassador gives an opportunity to look at the corrupt court judgements that are announced under the heavy pressure of money:

.... O gold, what a god art thou! and O man, what devil are thou to be tempted by that cursed mineral! Knaves turn informers as maggots turn to fields; you may catch gudgeons with cither. A Cardinal-I would he would hear me - there's nothing so holy but money will corrupt and putrify it, like victual under the live. 48

Seeing the English Ambassador Flamineo does not stop his satiric sting and continues:

.... you are happy in England, my Lord; here they sell justice with those weights they presse men to death with. 49

Flamineo satirizes the Cardinal as a religious pillar:

Religion 0 how it is commedled with policy! The first bloodshed in the world happened about religion. Would I were a Jew.

47. Ibid., p.63.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
... For if there were Jews enough, so many Christians would not turn usurers, if priests enough, one should not have six benefices, and if gentleman enough, so many early mushrooms, whose best growth sprang from dunghill, should not aspire to gentility. 50

The third Act ends with four movements, foreboding the future course of the fourth Act. The first is the Lodovico-Flamineo covenant to live as friends, which is only a hypocritical pretension to deceive and gull each other. It shows that even the agents of evil from the two groups can come close together in their destructive plans which we have seen in the famous Vittoria trial-scene. Secondly Lodovico, revealing his past love for Isabella, would like to avenge her murder. Thirdly, Bracciano plans to retrieve Vittoria from the house of convertites when the administration remains busy in the 'Papal Election.' And fourthly, Francisco, who had not made his intention for revenge clear, is now up in arms to have it, and conspires to get both Bracciano and Vittoria done in. Hence all these anticipated movements, which emerge as powerful guiding sources, prepare the outline of the next situation.

The fourth Act takes up all these threads of the plot and develop them to a greater complexity. We see in the very opening that Monticelso instigates Francisco who quits

50. Ibid., p.64.
the scene apparently to prove his intention of taking a revenge for his sister's murder. Monticelso's earlier exhortations to Francisco are full of the image of deception and destruction, foreboding the future course of the action:

.... Undermining more prevails
Than doth the canon: bear your wrongs conceal'd,
And, patient as the tortoise, let this camel
Stalk o'er your back unbruised! Sleep with the lion,
And let this brood of secure foolish mice
Play with your nostrils, till the time be ripe
For the bloody audit, and the fatal gripe;
Aim like a cunning fowler, close one eye,
That you the better may your game espy.\(^{51}\)

Francisco's use of the images of lechery, treachery, thunder, treason, spiders etc. is soon followed by figures-in-action as we see Monticelso, to support his instigation, provides a 'black book' wherein he keeps "the names of all the notorious offenders/ Lurking about the city." Though Francisco needs the services of the criminals to destroy Bracciano, he does not want Monticelso to know his evil nature. Francisco-Monticelso machinations to avenge the death of Isabella provide us an opportunity to look at the civil and religious pillars who can stoop to such an abysmal low and yet keep up the facade of virtuosity that we can

\(^{51}\) Ibid., pp.68-69.
call them also "the white devils." Francisco's ironic commentary on Monticelso's maintaining the list of criminals for devilish uses is tinged with satire:

You are a worthy member of the state,
And have done infinite good in your discovery
Of these offenders.  

At this juncture the ghost of Isabella appears. But it neither instigates Francisco to avenge her murder nor does it purport to evoke any supernatural horror. Francisco, now fully determined to undermine Bracciano, longs to have "some idle mirth in his tragedy." For this he follows the Machiavellian policy of pretending to be in love with Vittoria. He writes her a letter which he would send to her in the presence of Bracciano or his friends so that he should come to know Vittoria's love with others and hence get infuriated against her. To be assisted in his plot he wants to use Lodovico whom he has pardoned a short while ago. He wants this because Lodovico, too, is armed against Bracciano and Vittoria. Francisco would follow the characteristic device of bribery because "'Tis gold must such an instrument procure,/With empty fist no man doth falcons love." We see here that mutual distrust between apparently friendly contrivers, Machiavellian conspiracy,

52. Ibid., p.70.
buying services of notorious criminals for selfish ends and prostitution of religious norms for personal, vindictive purposes, present a picture of gloom which has engulfed the world of The White Devil. Reliance on or support of the supernatural or divine norms has completely been set aside. It is the beastly human agents who have completely taken over the responsibility of controlling human destiny. In such a situation, naturally, sufferings and deaths do not produce tragic emotions where the reader's involvement and empathy may come out involuntarily. The reader on the contrary shudders at the prospect of the hellish course of actions and remains detached to view the whole panorama of devilish moves and countermoves in an ironic perspective.

The images mentioned in the previous scene are followed in action in the following situation where the preplanned love letter of Francisco, which is full of amorous promises, is delivered to Vittoria. As Francisco would have wished it, by chance both Flamineo and Bracciano are present at this time. Flamineo at once takes up the sent letter which Bracciano reads. The content of the letter infuriates Bracciano who accuses Vittoria in a more detestable manner than she was condemned in the trial scene. Vittoria's protestations of innocence are of no avail. They only add fuel to the fire of Bracciano's heated
Flamineo would not let them become separated, and intervenes, because it will jeopardise his own prospects of advancement. In his effort to work out a compromise between Bracciano and Vittoria, he is abused and reprimanded by both. Vittoria exchanges heated arguments with Bracciano. Her accusations which seem to have a strong logic almost draw sympathy from the audience. The following lines portray Vittoria as not only courageous and bold but also as superbly eloquent and mentally agile and resourceful:

What have I gain'd by thee but infamy?
Thou hast stain'd the spotless honour of my house,
And frighted thence noble society!
Like those, which sick o' th' palsy and retain
Ill scenting foxes 'bout them, are still shunn'd
By those of choicer nostrils. What do you call this house?

Is this your palace? Did not the judge style it
A house of penitent whores? Who sent me to it?
Who hath the honour to advance Vittoria
To this incontinent College? Is 't not you?
Is't not your high preferment? Go, go brag
How many ladies you have undone, like me.
Fare you well Sir; let me hear no more of you.
I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,
But I have cut it off: and now I'll go
Weeping to heaven on crutches....

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p.78.
However, Flamineo does not give in and contrives with his argument and supplication to both to patch up their differences resulting from misunderstanding. He does it not so much for the peace between the two adulterous lovers as for his own future prospects which precariously hinge on their continuing relationship. Flamineo succeeds to an extent as the heated altercations and accusations between Bracciano and Vittoria are brought to a smooth conclusion through Flamineo's cunning and manipulated double dealing. Bracciano declares that he is charmed and surrenders to Vittoria:

Once to be jealous of thee is t' express
That I will love thee everlastingly,
And never more be jealous. 55

Flamineo, playing the satiric commentator as well as a participant in the action does not spare even this compromising situation uncommented. He harps on women:

Best natures do commit the grossest faults
When they're giv'n o'er to jealousy; as best wine,
Dying, makes strongest vinegar. I'll tell you:
The sea's more rough and raging than calm-rivers,
But nor so sweet nor wholesome. A quiet woman
Is a still water under a great bridge!
A man may shoot her safely. 56

55. Ibid., p.79.
56. Ibid., pp.80-81.
Vittoria accepts Bracciano's request for pardon to ignore his suspicion resulting from a misunderstanding, but cunningly reminds him of his promise of preferment to her. Flamineo is only too prompt to chime in with her: "My lord supply your promises with deeds./ You know that painted meat no hunger feeds." Bracciano, well caught in the trap, cannot but accept these reminders of preferment. He plans to arrange Vittoria's escape from the house of convertites as "The Pope being dead; and all the Cardinals entered/The conclave for th' electing a new Pope/The city in a great confusion," will help him to carry out his plan. Bracciano reiterates his promise of the title of Duchess to Vittoria, and a corresponding material advancement for her. Flamineo exploits this situation in reminding Bracciano of his own role and the promise made to him through the anecdote of the crocodile and the wren. It also foretells a warning to Bracciano against the consequences in case promises of reward to Flamineo are not fulfilled. The anecdotal device is a characteristic quality of Webster to ease a tense situation. It also functions as a distancing device. The anecdote is in character and dramatically effective because it also points to the direction the main plot is going to take.

The next situation opens with Francisco whose plot to poison the fame of Bracciano seems succeeding as Monticelso
is elected Pope. Monticelso, with the newly vested authority, speaks in a different tongue. It is needful here to comment on the wide-spread corruption which does not leave even the religious institution untouched. We see that the Cardinal, Monticelso, who is as white a devil as Vittoria, is elected Pope, and hence is assigned the most holy duty of the religious and social institution. The report that both Bracciano and Vittoria have fled, is sent to Monticelso, who with the newly vested authority, announces excommunication on both, without holding a trial. Besides, all the property belonging to Vittoria and Bracciano has been confiscated. This act of excommunication by Monticelso is a miniature repetition of Vittoria's trial scene. The only difference is that the facade of the judicial procedure is maintained in the trial scene whereas it has been thrown overboard in the present situation of Monticelso's arrogant authoritarianism.

As we have mentioned earlier, Monticelso and Francisco distrusted each other. Now Monticelso makes queries about Lodovico's release. Monticelso asks Lodovico about the machinations of Francisco. But Lodovico, as clever enough he is, does not reveal the secret of the plot because he, too, is a participant in it. Monticelso and Francisco though appearing mutually friendly, and trustful,
try their best to outwit each other in their manoeuvres. Fearful of Monticelso, lest he should be excommunicated, Lodovico almost changes his mind not to participate in the evil plot of Francisco. But soon to guile Lodovico, Monticelso sends a reward of a thousand ducats, symbolizing a green signal to his projected path of destruction. The sending of this reward to Lodovico is meant to serve two purposes. First, it will enable Lodovico to assist Francisco unhesitatingly, and secondly Monticelso's image in Francisco's mind will faint as Lodovico comments:

... He rail'd upon me;
And yet these crowns were told out and laid ready,
Before he knew my voyage. O the art,
The modest form of greatness! that do sit
Like bridges at wedding dinners, with their looks turn'd.
From the least wanton jests, their puling stomach
Sick of the modesty, when their thoughts are loose. 57

Thus the plot of destroying each other moves pretty fast and our suspense is correspondingly intensified in the manner of a conventionally well built up structure of a play of intrigue.

The final Act is a continuation of the preceding Act in as much as it further develops the destructive strategies

57. Ibid., pp.88-89.
hatched earlier. The very opening speech of Flamineo, after Bracciano's reconciliation with Vittoria, shows his complacent optimism: "This marriage confirms me happy." But his optimism is ironical as his judgement of the character of the Moor is misplaced:

I have not seen a goodlier personage,
Nor ever talk'd with man better experienc'd
In state affairs or rudiments of war.\(^{58}\)

The idea of pleasing appearance hiding inner rottenness is made clear again. Even the most cunning Flamineo does not recognize Francisco who has come in disguise of a Moor to serve Bracciano. Zanche falls in love with the Moor because of her strong sexual attraction towards him, the dramatic function of which is made clear later. There is a devastating irony in Bracciano's welcoming the Moor as the Trojans did the Grecian Horse and requesting his presence at the festivity to mark Bracciano's union with Vittoria and to witness a "fight at barriers."

Bracciano's arrangement for the "fight at barriers" as a kind of sport is followed ironically by the entry of Carlo, one of Francisco's train, who welcomes Bracciano to his own ruin. Lodovico suggests this:

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., p.89.
T' have poison'd his prayer book, or a pair of beads,  
The pommel of his saddle, his looking-glass,  
Or th' handle of his racket. 59

Before the fight begins Marcello meets Flamineo with Zanche. Marcello does not like her amorous talks with Flamineo and opposes it, but Flamineo would not rebuke Zanche and will continue to love her because it has been for a politic reason and not for any genuine, lustful, or matrimonial concern. He clarifies it as follows:

.... I do love that Moor, that witch, very constrainedly: she knows some of my villainy. I do love her, just as a man holds a wolf by the ears: but for fear of turning upon me and pulling out my throat, I would let her go to the devil. 60

'Faith, I made to her some such dark promise, and in seeking to fly from 't I run on, like a frightened dog with a bottle at's tail, that fain would bite it off and yet dares not look behind him. 61

The theme of deceitful promise and reward is well defined by Flamineo himself, who is the greatest agent of evil in the play. He frankly reveals it to the foolish Zanche:

59. Ibid., p.92.  
60. Ibid., p.95.  
61. Ibid.
Lovers' oaths are like mariners' prayers, uttered in extremity; but when the tempest is o'er, and that the vessel leaves tumbling they fall from protesting to drinking.  

But Marcello is not satisfied with these clarifications and even challenges Flamineo to fight. The object of quarrel now shifts ironically from Zanche to the disguised Moore, with whom the former had fallen in love earlier in the scene. Cornelia, who had been listening to all these amorous promises, could not keep her silence and breaks out and strikes Zanche. Marcello joins hands with Cornelia. This makes Flamineo angry and he swears to fight him with sword. The scene ends with a destructive and lustful foreboding as Zanche, who was kicked a little earlier by Cornelia for her lustful affairs with Flamineo, now tries to trap in the disguised Moor, who, too, is not a sincere lover; but he wants to exploit her lustful inclinations for his ulterior strategies again: "Of all intelligence this may prove the best/ Sure I shall draw strange fowl, from this foul nest."

The next situation opens with Cornelia who has heard about whispering of Marcello's fight with Flamineo. Marcello pretends and tries to satisfy her by telling some events.
of his childhood. His mentioning the images of the 'crucifix' is soon followed by action as Flamineo runs him through with his sword. Marcello's last utterance before death seems to envision some vague higher power but it is deliberately overshadowed by his sublunary perception expressed proverbially:

There are some sins which heaven doth duly punish
In a whole family. This it is to rise
By all dishonest means. Let all men know,
That tree shall long time keep a steady foot
Whose branches spread no wider than the root. 63

Bracciano comes to know of Marcello's murder by Flamineo and charges him with homicide. At this juncture he gets the right opportunity to get rid of Flamineo because the latter along with Vittoria had threatened him in the house of convertites. We notice here Cornelia's maternal love for her children even when one has murdered the other. She lies to Bracciano when she says that Marcello is not killed by Flamineo. She does this because "One arrow's graz'd already, it were vain/ T' lose this, for that will never be found again." However, Bracciano would not let Flamineo be at large to remain as a potent threat to him:

63. Ibid., p.99.
Hark you, I will not grant you pardon....
.... only a lease of your life. And that shall last
But for one day. Thou shalt be forc'd each evening
To renew it, or be hang'd.64

The images of poison, intrigue, and destruction, mentioned
above are followed by treacherous action as Lodovico has
already poisoned Bracciano's helmet. Before the "fight at
barriers" begins, Bracciano falls into pain due to the
poisoning of his helmet. Physicians are called but their
treatment is of no avail and this makes Bracciano foresee
his doom:

0, I am gone already: the infection
Flies to the brain and heart. 0 thou strong heart!
There's such a covenant 'tween the world and it,
They're loth to break.65

Flamineo's earlier narrated anecdote about the barber
surgeon is concretised and prophetically realised here.
Towards the end of his life, Bracciano comes to know the
futility of the worldly authority:

Most corrupted politic hangman!
You kill without book; but your art to save
Fails you as great men's needy friends,

64. Ibid., p.101.
65. Ibid., p.102.
I that have given life to offending slaves,
And wretched murderers, have I not power,
To lengthen mine own a twelve month?66

Though Bracciano knows well that "there are some
great ones that have hand in this," and "this unction is
sent from the Duke of Florence," but near his end, he is not
able to answer to the enemy. The images of the 'hoarse
wolf' "the dull owl" and the 'rough beared comet' does point
out Bracciano's vision of life at his death. Unlike a
tragic hero, Bracciano fears death. His last speeches and
feelings enable us to look at the life he has been leading.
His distracted behaviours - and in this his commenting
truly on the evil characters - sum up his own career. His
comments, in his distraction, on Flamineo and the Lawyer are
subtly ironical and keep him firmly tied down to the lower
realities of life:

See, see, Flamineo that kill'd his brother
Is dancing on the ropes there: and he carries
A money-bag in each hand, to keep him even
For fear of breaking's neck. And there's a lawyer
In a gown whipt with velvet, stares and gapes
When the money will fall. How the rogue cuts capers.67

He ridicules Vittoria also:

66. Ibid., p.103.
67. Ibid., p.106.
.... Her hair is sprinkled with arras powder, 
That makes her look as if she had sinn'd in the pastry. 68

Bracciano continues his satiric commentary on every part of the society before he dies. The corrupt religious persons who do not hesitate even in murdering both innocents and criminals are envisioned as "gray rats that have lost their tails, and crawl up the pillow." It is immediately followed by Lodovico and Gasparo, disguised as Capuchins, who, when seeing the effect of poison somewhat weak, strangle Bracciano to ensure his end with a "true love knot." Before Bracciano dies, Flamineo comments satirically as if in a distracted manner:

.... What solitariness is about dying princes. As heretofore they have unpeopled towns, divorce'd friends, and made great houses unhospitable: so now, O justice! where are their flatterers now? Flatterers are but the shadows of princes' bodies, the least thick cloud makes them invisible. 69

It is needful here to comment on the various moves that surrounded Bracciano's horrible death. First of all Flamineo's sharing hands with Mulinassar (whose identity is still uncertain) and his drifting away from Bracciano with

satirical commentaries is a kind of exposition of the socially, ethically, and morally corrupt world. Secondly, the horrible murder of Bracciano by Lodovico and Gasparo (disguised as religious persons) and their mocking at this juncture in a foreign tongue pretended to console the departing soul, is a gross prostitution of religion. Finally, the true nature of the world of *The White Devil* is summed up by Vittoria's exclamatory speech "O me this place is hell."

A fresh regrouping of the main characters, after Bracciano's death, is visible here. Flamieno, who was with Vittoria, now joins Francisco with his beloved Zanche, whom he keeps with himself only to manipulate situations in his favour. Webster presents here Flamieno as a participant in the action as well as a satiric commentator as he dotes upon women for their fickleness, change of emotions, and lack of loyalty and ironically comments on this in general:

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Had women navigable rivers in their eyes
They would dispense them all; surely I wonder
Why we should wish more rivers to the city,
When they sell water so good cheap, I'll tell thee,
These are but moonish shades of grief or fears,
There's nothing sooner dry than women's tears.
Why here's an end of all my harvest, he has given me nothing.
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Court promises: Let wise men count them curst,
For while you live he that scores best pays worst.  

Webster manipulates a distancing effect by Flamineo's long explication of women's inner rottenness before the next shipwreck occurs. The same device is again brought in by Zanche who talks lasciviously and in a flirting manner to Mulinassar (disguised Francisco). To impress upon and tempt Francisco, she discloses the secret of Isabella's murder and Camillo's death. It gives a new turn to the action of the play which is hinted at by Lodovico. "The bed of snakes is broke." Before the situation follows the new move, Zanche reveals her own evil nature to avenge on the two murders. She would like to rob Vittoria of her valuables which the latter received from Bracciano.

The next situation opens with Flamineo who, after Bracciano's death has simulated melancholy. In fact, Bracciano's death has brought a shipwreck on him and he feels himself somewhat despaired because his hope for reward has almost been smashed. His habit of melancholy is darkened by Giovanni who starts hating Flamineo and the latter knows it well. Giovanni bans Flamineo's entry into his presence chamber. The latter's cruel nature and hardship is juxtaposed as we meet Cornelia who is prophetically mourning over the dead body of Marcello. In

70. Ibid., p.110.
fact, Cornellia's mourning is pitiable. At her pathetic mourning it seems as if a pricking of the conscience is taking place inside Flamineo's soul. He says,

I have a strange thing in me, to the which I cannot give a name, without it be Compassion. 71

But this qualm of conscience is rather shaky and too feeble to work out any development in Flamineo's character because he does not learn anything from the pricking of his conscience. As he is meditating over Marcello's death there appears the ghost of Bracciano which makes him frightened. The ghost's showing Flamineo the skull foretells his doomed future. Even here Flamineo dares defy the higher perception:

.... I do dare my fate
To do its worst. Now to my sister's lodging,
And sum up all these horrors: the disgrace,
The prince threw on me; next the piteous sight
Of my dead brother; and my mother's dotage;
And last this terrible vision. All these
Shall with Vittoria's bounty turn to good,
Or I will drown this weapon in her blood. 72

In a brief scene Lodovico takes responsibility and tells

71. Ibid., p. 117.
72. Ibid., p. 119.
Francisco that he would alone finish Flamineo, Vittoria, and
the flirt Zanche.

In the final situation Flamineo tries his last hope
to get a reward from Vittoria because she is Bracciano's
"executrix." But Vittoria would not do so. She says, "I
give that portion to thee, and no other which Cain groan'd
under having slain his brother." This makes Flamineo lose
the last hope and he threatens to ruin her. She, in turn,
does the same. Their plan to destroy each other appears
less convincing and unimpressive. Flamineo’s pretending to
be wounded near his death does not have much dramatic value,
but it brings out women’s ingratitude which Flamineo
satirizes:

.... O Men
That lie upon your death-beds and are haunted
With howling wives, ne'er trust them: they'll remarry
Ere the worm pierce your winding sheet.73

Vittoria cries for help and before any harm could be done,
Lodovico overtakes them. Lodovico enters Vittoria’s room
with the help of a false key. The Flamineo - Vittoria
tragic horse-play is stopped by Gasparo and Lodovico, who
throw their disguise and stand in their true forms. Vittoria

73. Ibid., p. 126.
foresees her doom and cries, "we are lost." Before his death Flamineo, too, comes to realize the true role of Fate:

.... Fate's a spaniel,
We cannot beat it from us. What remains now?
Let all that do ill take this precedent;
Many may his fate foresee, but not prevent,
And of all anxioms this shall win the prize;
'Tis better to be fortunate than wise.  

Though Flamineo accepts death as a "long-silence" yet his perception is neither clear nor does it sound valid:

Let all that belong to great men remember th' old
Wives' tradition, to be like the lions I' th' Tower on
Candlemas day; to mourn if the sun shine, for fear of
the pitiful remainder of winter to come.

Nevertheless, Flamineo dies with a courageous spirit as is seen clearly from his dying speeches. But Vittoria's facing death shines more brightly. She calls her murderers "You my deathsman! / Me thinks thou dost not look horried enough,
Thou hast too good a face to be a hangman." Though she faces all the shipwrecks and bears earthquakes, she never loses her balance of mind as is shown by the Duchess of Malfi. But like the latter, Vittoria is not allowed to have a higher perception:

74. Ibid., p. 127.
75. Ibid., p. 130.
O my greatest sin lay in my blood,
Now my blood pays for't. 76

My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
Is driven I know not whither. 77

Thus we see that the play, as a tragical satire, ends with all the evil characters dying without having any higher perception. It confirms the dramatist's unhindered presentation of the operation of evil in the world of his play. Giovanni appears at the end as a restoring factor and he tries to wipe away the evil completely, yet it cannot be said that the evil will be wiped away because Giovanni himself belongs to the same evil and corrupt family of Bracciano, the foul Duke and above all the same milieu.

Though Lodovico and Gasparo are not killed but are punished severely, Monticelso, a very strong element in destructive plans remains alive. It confirms that Webster's aim is not to point out the complete wiping out of evil. In Shakespeare both evil and good are destroyed, and particularly evil is destroyed completely in his tragedies. But in Webster's play, evil remains alive to raise its head once again when the opportunity falls. At least in The Duchess of Malfi, Webster could realise his fault of his first tragedy, and wiped away evil completely.

76. Ibid., p. 129.
77. Ibid.